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Silk and
Globalisation in
Eighteenth-Century
London:
Commodities,
People and
Connections
c.1720-1800

William Farrell

Thesis submitted for the
degree of PhD,
Historical Research,
Birkbeck, University of
London

Abstract

The eighteenth century was the golden age of silk weaving in London. This thesis shows that the expansion and success of the silk industry was dependent upon connections with other regions around the world. Supplies of raw materials and labour came into London from Europe, the Levant and India. London silk weavers faced competition from silk fabrics produced overseas. The capital also sent its silk out into the world where it found a ready market in North America and the West Indies. These connections are mapped and compared to those produced for other global luxury commodities. A different picture of early globalisation emerges here, in terms of geography and chronology. Europe and the Mediterranean were as important as the North Atlantic and South Asia. Both imperial and non-imperial connections were important, whilst state and market activities reinforced each other. Far from being a gradual long-term process, early globalisation was disruptive and required management. Finally, labour is given far more prominence than is usual. Skilled workers were as mobile and dynamic as the flows of exotic commodities. They also played an important role in constructing the regulatory framework that oversaw the globalisation of London silk.

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and has not been previously published.

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GLOSSARY

Alamode – Name derived from the French ‘a la mode’. A light, glossy silk sometimes woven in black.

Bandanna- Indian handkerchiefs. Cloth dyed and usually of red or yellow background with spotted designs.

Brocade – Fabric woven with raised patterns, often using gold or silver thread.

Figured silk – Silk fabric woven with patterns or design, in contrast to plain silks.

Flowered silk –Silk fabric woven with patterns representing foliage.

Gauze – A thin, transparent fabric, sometime made of silk.

Lustring – Glossy silk fabric.

Mantua – Plain weave silk.

Organzine – Strong silk yarn of Italian origin. Made by twisting threads together twice over.

Paduasoy – Derived from the French ‘poult-de-soie’. A strong silk fabric, sometimes embossed or corded.

Peeling – Chinese satin silk.

Persian – A thin plain silk, often used for linings.

Plain silk - Both the simplest type of weave, and a fabric of a single colour without design or ornamentation.

Raw silk – unprocessed silk fibres.

Satin – Smooth silk, made with fine yarn.

Sericulture – Cultivation of silk worms and their food source -mulberry plants - in order to produce raw silk.

Taffeta – A light, bright silk. A plain weave with extra weft threads.

Thrown silk – Silk fibres twisted into a thread.

Tobine – fabric of silk or silk and worsted with patterns of small flowers or stripes and dots.

Wrought silk –silk that has been manufactured in some way, in contrast to raw silk.

Introduction

'A New Invention of Modern Times'

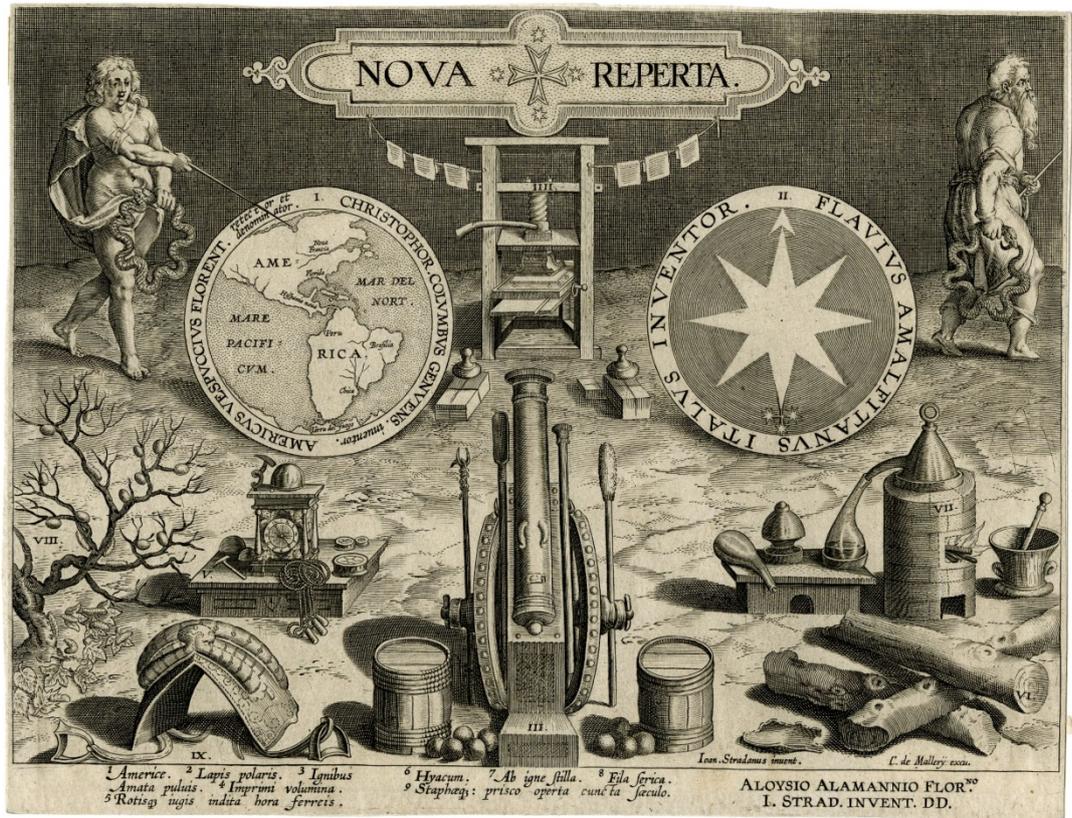


Image 1. Jan van der Straet *Nova Reperta*, title page (1591). Museum number: 1895,1031.148, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1613970&partId=1&searchText=Nova+Reperta+&page=1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

In his frontispiece of *Nova Reperta* ('New Inventions of Modern Times') published in 1591, Jan van der Straet collected in a single frame the inventions he thought represented the great achievements of his era. In the top left of the print, the young woman holds a serpent eating its tail, a symbol for time, making her 'new time'. She points to the map of America thereby dating modern times to Columbus' voyages to the Americas. In the top right the old man (he is 'old time'), also holding a serpent, is exiting the picture.¹ Some of the discoveries in the print are what a contemporary viewer would choose: Columbus, the printing press, the mechanical clock. Others seem slightly odd. In the bottom left hand corner, van der Straet has placed a mulberry tree bearing cocoons and hatched silk worms, to represent sericulture. The idea that the cultivation of silk was a great achievement of civilization is not one that seems obvious at first sight today. However, historians

¹ E.H. Gombrich, 'Eastern Inventions and Western Response'. *Daedalus*, 127, 1 (1998): 196.

of world history have often followed van der Straet's example. The silk industry has been employed as an index of economic development or as a creator of connections between different regions. The project started by Joseph Needham used silk production to understand the trajectory of Chinese science and technology, compared to Western Europe.² For Jack Goody, silk is an example of the influence of China, India and the Middle East on Europe. When the Han dynasty (c.202 BCE-220 CE) began trading with people outside of China, silk cloth and the means to manufacture it became highly sought after. Silk spread slowly out of China moving into South Asia, the Middle East and, finally, Europe. The consumption of silk travelled the furthest, followed by silk weaving, and then, in a more limited way, sericulture.³

By the late seventeenth century, silk throwing, dyeing and weaving had spread as far west within Eurasia as it would ever travel. Centres of production were established in the south-east of England and Dublin.⁴ The largest site of silk weaving in those two places was London, and it retained that position within the Anglo-phone world through the eighteenth century. This thesis is a study of silk in London between c.1720 and c.1800 and its connections – economic, cultural, and political - with other parts of the world. The eighteenth century was the golden age of silk production in London. During a period of historic globalisation, it was formed by a distinctive transnational make up. Silk in London had many connections with places beyond Britain and at several points within its life cycle, as the thread of the silk worm was turned into silk fabric, these had important influences on how it was produced and consumed.

This thesis has three central aims. The first is to show what the global connections needed by the silk industry were. Silk weavers in London were a long way from the main centres of raw silk production in Italy, Persia, Bengal and China. Consumers of silk, both in London and the main export markets, could choose between French, Italian, Indian and Chinese fabrics as well as English ones. Silk weavers sold their

² Dieter Kuhn, *Science and Civilisation in China. Vol. 5, Part 9. Textile Technology: Spinning and Reeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³ Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.85-91, 114-115, 122-127; *idem*, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.111-114.

⁴ The Spanish had taken silk weaving across the Atlantic to Mexico in the late 1500s. However, the Spanish crown ended silk production in the mid-1600s. See Woodrow Wilson Borah, *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1943).

products in overseas markets in northern Europe and North America. What effect did these transnational links have on how silk was made, designed and sold? Furthermore, what would such a map tell historians about the networks that made up 'globalisation' during the eighteenth century? These linkages with the world economy brought opportunities, making London silk internationally competitive, but it also brought problems.

The second aim is to emphasise historic globalisation as a process, which did not always run a smooth course. Global connections needed to be shaped, where possible, through intervention. For the silk industry in London to be viable people had to maintain existing links or cultivate new ones. They often had to respond to the movements of international markets, which might cause sharp downturns in trade. Threats could emerge from the access to raw materials being disrupted or from rival imports of finished silks entering into Britain. As the silk industry in London was large and successful, profits were at stake and a sizeable labour force was liable to be thrown out of work. Therefore, policy responses were often required in several spheres: from the guild that represented the silk weavers, from organisations with interests in overseas trade, and from the British state with its control of war and taxation. What then was the role of institutions within this period of globalisation and what was their success in re-directing or re-shaping currents within the silk industry?

Thirdly, this thesis aims to emphasise the role of labour in this period of global interactions. Most working people in the eighteenth century were employed in agriculture or domestic service. They were certainly not 'static' villagers but did tend to move within local regions. The most prominent people within early periods of globalisation were elite groups such as merchants or missionaries who ran commercial and intellectual networks. They travelled a great deal and were at the forefront of opening up new connections. However, the goods that merchants traded were manufactured by artisans who were well aware of the destinations their products would end up in. They consciously catered their designs for overseas consumers, or copied techniques from other foreign craftsmen. Skilled urban craft workers, such as silk weavers, may have been a minority but they played a significant role in forging global connections. Global histories will be incomplete if they do not include the people who created some of its central

drivers. The weavers were vocal, sometimes violent, in demanding action in times of crisis. How far did they understand their place within these fluctuations? Silk weavers were not sea captains or missionaries, and neither were they involved in mass resettlement as an occupational group. However, they lived in a major port city and were often subject to periods of unemployment. Did they use the international connections of their industry and city to their own advantage and move out into the world?

As the title and the preceding paragraphs indicate 'globalisation' is the overarching concern of this study. Without direct and consistent commercial links with overseas markets there could not have been a viable silk industry in Britain. Any serious study of its long run development must then be set within a global context. 'Global contexts' are not a given however, but are created by historical processes. The lens of 'globalisation' is therefore used here to understand the processes that made a silk industry in London possible and how those processes changed over the eighteenth century. This thesis takes A.G. Hopkins definition of globalisation as its point of departure: "the extension, intensification and quickening velocity of flows of people, products and ideas that shaped the world. It [globalisation] interrogates regions and continents; it compresses time and space; it prompts imitation and resistance."⁵ The concept of globalisation is useful in capturing both the dynamic quality of global history and its multi-faceted nature including not only the economy, but culture and politics too. The term itself is of recent origin and was initially used to describe developments in the world economy and geo-politics since the late 1970s. For some it remains a controversial, even ideological term, associated with policies of international bodies such as the IMF, or the overconfidence of the post-Cold War world.⁶

In the hands of historians though, 'globalisation' has been taken away from these contemporary debates. For sure, those who are wary of grand narratives have expressed a preference for a more modest transnational history instead.⁷ Transnational history is taken here to mean, "the ways in which past lives and

⁵ A. G. Hopkins, 'Introduction: Interactions Between the Universal and the Local', in A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Global history: interactions between the universal and the local* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2006) p.2.

⁶ Frederick Cooper, 'What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective', *African Affairs*, 100 (2001): 189-213.

⁷ See the debates in C. A. Bayly *et al.* "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1441-1464.

events have been shaped by processes and relationships that have transcended the borders of nation states.”⁸ The concept does not hold that such flows add up to a system or are universal. Historians who have used the concept of globalisation, however, have at least shown that global interconnections have been a much older phenomenon. Flynn and Giraldez, for example, date it as far back as the ‘silver loop’ of the sixteenth century, when silver mined in Spanish America was exported and used to pay for goods in China that were then exported to Europe. In this way, three continents were linked together through related economic transactions.⁹ Viewed in this way, the concept of globalisation bares clear similarities with older or overlapping models in world history that stress long run patterns of interaction such as world-systems analysis, or the ‘human-web’ model of the McNeills.¹⁰

Historians have contributed to the understanding and refining of the concept in two areas. Firstly, they have stressed the importance of states and empires in promoting integration on a world scale, and how that integration shaped states and empires in turn.¹¹ Secondly, they have also been keen to develop periodisation.¹² The so-called early modern period from 1500 to 1800 is often presented as the first period of historic globalisation. Indeed, historians have combined the two interests in the imperial-global link and in delineating periods or phases. Euro-Asian and Euro-Americas trade was promoted by the expansion of European states overseas. Rivalry and conflict between these states was not confined to Europe but was also taking place in the Americas, Africa and Asia. States fought for the control of resources and trade routes in order to build up

⁸ ‘Introduction’ in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake eds., *Connected worlds: history in transnational perspective* (ANU Press: Canberra, 2005) p. 5. See the essays in that volume for examples of historians using ‘transnational’ as an organising concept.

⁹ Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, “Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century.” *Journal of World History* 13, no. 2 (2002): 391–427. Also Samir Amin, *Global History: A View from the South* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011), pp. 82-86.

¹⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System vol.1 Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); idem, *The Modern World-System vol.2: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); idem. *The Modern World-System vol.3: Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s-1840s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); John R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird’s-Eye View of World History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.)

¹¹ A.G. Hopkins, ‘Introduction: Globalization - An Agenda for Historians’, in A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history* (Pimlico: London, 2002), pp.1-10; Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P Petersson, *Globalization: a short history*, tran. Dona Geyer (Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J., 2005), pp.14-20; 31-48; 69-75.

¹² E.g. C.A. Bayly, “‘Archaic’ and ‘Modern’ Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c.1750 - 1850” in *Globalization in World History*, ed. A.G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 47-73.

their domestic economies.¹³ Such an arrangement is often labelled ‘mercantilism’ – defined by Donald Coleman (glossing Adam Smith) as the doctrine, “that gold and silver constituted wealth and a favourable balance of trade was the national means to acquire that wealth. The historical agents responsible for this principle were businessmen in pursuit of monopoly”.¹⁴ ‘Mercantilists’ were also concerned with the place of populations, poverty and resources within the economy in what they saw as a competitive, ‘zero-sum’ world. Flourishing manufacturing would create employment and the development of colonies would allow a space for excess population to be exported. Overseas territories were finite resources that states needed to take control over before a rival did, and domestic populations needed protection from external competition.¹⁵ This is why for Braudel mercantilist policy was “above all a means of self-defence.”¹⁶

Mercantilism is a controversial term for historians. The word itself was not used by economic writers or politicians in the early modern period. Adam Smith, often said to be mercantilism’s most famous critic, used ‘mercantile system’ in the *Wealth of Nations*.¹⁷ Some historians, such as Donald Coleman, recommended that the term be abandoned.¹⁸ More recent work has kept the term, but placed it within political and intellectual debates, stressing the role of political factions and interest groups in promoting mercantile doctrines at particular times.¹⁹ Historians interested in the role of European states in world trade and in global history have also used the term, particularly those who want to stress the importance of geo-politics to the economy. The attempts of states to shape international trade in their favour could open up, or shut down, pathways within the world economy. The strength or weaknesses of ‘mercantilism’ framed the possibility of success for particular

¹³ C.A. Bayly, “‘Archaic’ and ‘Modern’ Globalization; Amin, *Global History*. Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ D. C. Coleman, ‘Mercantilism Revisited’. *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980): 775.

¹⁵ Craig Muldrew, “Afterword: Mercantilism to Macroeconomics” in *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire*, eds. Philip J Stern and Carl Wennerlind (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 371–384.

¹⁶ Fernand Braudel, *The perspective of the world: civilization and capitalism vol.3*, tran. Sian Reynolds, (Collins: London, 1984), p.53.

¹⁷ Coleman, ‘Mercantilism Revisited’: 775; Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations, vol.3* (Whitestone, Chamberlaine, W. Watson, Potts, S. Watson: Dublin, 1776). pp. 2, 40, 299, 300, 379.

¹⁸ See the essays in D. C. Coleman ed., *Revisions in mercantilism* (Methuen: London, 1969); Coleman, ‘Mercantilism Revisited’.

¹⁹ Steven Pincus, ‘Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’. *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2012): 3–34; Stern and Wennerlind eds. *Mercantilism reimagined*.

industries.²⁰ Both the role of the state in the economy and the extent of global interconnections in the early modern period form the overarching concern of this thesis. Together they constitute the framework within which the silk industry in London operated: the resources available to it, the degree of protection from rivals afforded to it, and the political support for a silk industry in London. Did this framework change over eighty years covered here and, so with it, the place of the silk industry within 'globalisation'? Did it become more or less globalised over the eighteenth century?

The silk industry in London during the eighteenth century

Silk had been woven in England since the late Middle Ages and in London from at least 1551.²¹ The industry expanded significantly in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. At the same time Canterbury also became a centre of silk manufacture. Always smaller and less specialised, it peaked in the 1690s and many silk weavers and their families left for London around 1700.²² The level of activity was such that production moved outside the walls of City of London and into the suburbs to the east. London weavers produced silk for clothing and accessories; they did not make silks for furnishings. The industry expanded again in the first half of the eighteenth century. All raw silk used by the industry was imported, and there was a significant import trade in thrown silk. These materials were purchased by British merchants in foreign ports and shipped to London; almost all raw and thrown silk entered Britain via the capital. Bales of raw and thrown silks were then sold either at the regular markets, or on a piecemeal basis, for domestic production or the re-export trade. Both the raw silk trade and manufacturing

²⁰ E.g. volume two of Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* covering the period 1600-1750 is subtitled *Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy*; Prasannan Parthasarathi, 'The Great Divergence'. *Past & Present* (August 2002): 290-293; Patrick O'Brien, 'The geopolitics of a global industry: Eurasian Divergence and the Mechanization of Cotton Textile Production in England' in Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi, eds., *The spinning world: a global history of cotton textiles, 1200-1850* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009), pp. 351-366; Stern and Wennerlind eds., *Mercantilism reimagined*.

²¹ Francis Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company from the Twelfth Century to the close of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p.128; Natalie Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century: In the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p.18.

²² Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.19.

operated on long credit lines; the merchant Bosanquet thought it took four years to see a return on original investment.²³

Silk weaving was organised around small workshops, headed by a master weaver. The very smallest perhaps had only a master and an apprentice, larger workshops had several journeymen, and some masters may have 'put out' work to journeymen working outside the home. The master bought the silk thread and decided the pattern to be woven. There were a few specialists pattern drawers, including the well-known Anna Maria Garthwaite. There was a clear divide between weaving and retail. Customers placed their order through a silk mercer, rather than directly with a weaver. Consumers then took their purchases to a mantua maker, tailor or seamstress to have the fabric run up into clothing. Unlike the rest of the silk industry, silk mercers remained in the City of London or in Westminster, closer to where their fashionable clientele lived. Mercers ordered silks from pattern books and samples, sometimes requesting changes to suit their customers taste. Only the larger merchants warehoused silks, and the majority of dress silks were produced in small runs.²⁴ Spitalfields produced a large and diverse product range: flowered and figured silks, brocades, lustrings, satins, velvets and damasks were intended for use in dresses and men's suits. Silk and worsted mixes were woven until the 1720s.²⁵ The best quality silks were produced for a metropolitan fashion market, with a seasonal turn over and regular stylistic changes. Here pattern, colour and finishing were very important. The finest and most elaborate silks made for those attending court, although styles become ossified as the century wore on. Lower quality and plainer silks had a market among the middling sort. Although examples have not survived as well fashion silks, the accessories market was as important. Here Spitalfields produced ribbons, linings, trimmings, braiding, gauzes and handkerchiefs; it also made specialist black silks intended for use as fabrics to make up mourning clothes.

Silk was expensive, so weavers usually worked to specific orders rather than producing for a mercer's stock.²⁶ Producing the order was a slow process. A complicated pattern could take up to five weeks to set up on a loom before

²³ N.A.K. Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66' (MA Thesis: London, 1961), p.230.

²⁴ Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.22.

²⁵ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', p.44.

²⁶ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.23.

weaving could begin. Masters might attempt to pre-empt this by keeping a few looms prepared, for example, by having a loom ready for damask silk. The weaving itself was also slow. Although there were some engine looms for producing ribbons, most weaving was done on draw looms and a yard of woven fabric a day was considered 'good progress'.²⁷ Most pattern effects were produced on the loom by the weaver, although embroidery and calendaring were carried out elsewhere. The complications of production, the diverse product lines and the expense of material encouraged subdivision within the trade. A clear divide existed between weavers, merchants, throwsters, dyers and retailers. But within weaving workshops specialised in different fabrics: flowered silks, velvets, mourning silks, gauze, handkerchief, ribbon, or half-silks.²⁸ Some sub-branch clustered around particular districts. Ribbon weavers were found in Cheapside, gauze and handkerchiefs workshops in St Botolph's, half-silks out on the fringes of Spitalfields.²⁹ This diversity of silks was a great strength of Spitalfields as an industrial centre. It meant its fortune was not tied to the production of a specific good and allowed its workshops to adapt to changes in fashion and dress. For example, from the 1790s onwards when designs became plainer and lighter, accessories such as ribbons became more important as the expression of pattern and colour.³⁰

Spitalfields' silks were sold to an international export market. In both cases the trade was controlled by merchants rather than weavers. In European markets, British silks faced direct competition from other countries, particularly France. Battles were fought over quality, reputation and price.³¹ Weavers did not market their wares directly to export markets, but took commission from merchants operating there.³² British silks did noticeably well in periods of warfare that disrupted France's ability to produce for European markets. The War of the

²⁷ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.28.

²⁸ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.11. Also Alain Cottureau, 'The Fate of Fabriques Collectives in the Industrial World: The Silk Industries of Lyon and London, 1800-1850' in *World of possibilities: flexibility and mass production in western industrialization*, eds. Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 96-98.

²⁹ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London', p.67.

³⁰ Rothstein, 'Fashion, Silk and the Worshipful Company of Weavers' in *La Seta in Europa Sec. XIII-XX: Atti Della 'Ventiquattresima Settimana Di Studi', 4-9 Maggio 1992*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi. (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1993), p.480.

³¹ Carlo Poni, 'Fashion as Flexible Production: The Strategies of the Lyon Silk Merchants in the Eighteenth Century' in *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization*, eds. Sabel and Zeitlin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 37-74.

³² Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', p.232.

Spanish Succession, the Seven Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars were all good times for British silk weavers. Early in the eighteenth century the War of the Spanish Succession hit silk manufacturers in Lyon hard and London emerged as a leading competitor.³³ This position was maintained following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 which gave London manufacturers favourable trading terms to the detriment of the French. England became the main source of silk exported to the West Indies and had a virtual monopoly on the American colonies, now its main export market.³⁴ This boom continued until 1764-6 when the industry entered a downturn that lasted into the early 1770s.³⁵

Officially, because of a ban on the import of foreign silk textiles there was no direct competition from foreign producers within Britain. Despite this, smuggling was widely complained about it and evidence in chapter four suggests that this was a significant trade. That viable silk manufacturing continued up to the lowering of tariffs in the 1820s suggests that the contraband trade did not overwhelm the British silk industry. Smuggling saw competition on particular types of silk and at certain times, rather than a constant war across all product lines and styles. There were important items such as silk stockings, or black silks for mourning, that do not feature heavily in the smuggling evidence. The organised contraband trade was mainly run by merchants; foreign silk mercers were not able to operate freely in Britain until the 1820s. Whilst the smugglers were able to bring in popular silks, they did not provide the same service as a silk mercer. By contrast, in the early Free Trade era French merchants proved to be very skilful in selling their wares direct to customers in London, as well as shaping taste. It was the superiority of French direct marketing, according to Alain Cottureau that really undermined Spitalfields in the 1830s and 1840s.³⁶

Journeymen did not have to work exclusively for one master, but they did specialize in one branch of the trade. They began their training as apprentices at around 14 or 15 years old, first learning how to set up a loom, and then learning how to weave plain silks, before progressing onto the more complicated patterned silks. Most did not become master weavers, but remained journeymen or worked

³³ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', p.407.

³⁴ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', pp.436-9.

³⁵ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', p.441.

³⁶ Cottureau, 'The Fate of Fabriques Collectives in the Industrial World' in *World of Possibilities*, pp.75-152.

as a foreman for a master weaver. As in other textile trades they were overwhelming male, with women doing the job of silk winding. Like artisans across Europe, London silk weavers had a corporate body to regulate work and apprenticeships and to represent their interests in civic life. Across Europe such organisations were known as guilds, but in the City of London they were known as livery companies. Although it was not one of the so-called 'Twelve Great Companies' the Worshipful Company of Weavers had existed since the 12th century, and had been granted a royal charter by Henry II.³⁷ The Company was for weavers of all textiles, but during the seventeenth century there was a shift away from worsteds and towards silk, both within the London economy and the membership of the Company.³⁸ According to its statutes, all those who practised weaving in the City of London, Southwark and within 10 miles of the city walls had to be members of the Company. As in the other Livery Companies, apprentice weavers were supposed to be formally bound to their masters at the Company's Hall. The officers of the Company had the right to search workshops to enforce these laws. How widely these rules were obeyed and enforced is unclear. Certainly there were illegal weavers working in London during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and searches were not carried out with great frequency.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century the membership was still a healthy 5919, but it dipped below 5000 to 3731 in the 1740s, and ended the century at 1157.³⁹ The Company also lost authority to other bodies, for example, from 1773 it was local magistrates who were given the power to regulate wages rather than the Company.⁴⁰ Unlike some other guilds, such as the Goldsmiths Company or the Stationers, the Company was not involved in assessing the quality of work produced by its members. Where the Company was active was in lobbying Parliament for legislation to protect the industry and it had many successes throughout the eighteenth century. It won a ban on imported printed cottons in 1721 and one the following year on foreign wrought silks in 1722. The Company

³⁷ Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company*, p.15.

³⁸ Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company*, pp.8-10.

³⁹ See Table 8.1 in Natalie Rothstein, 'Huguenots in the English Silk Industry in the Eighteenth Century' in *Huguenots in Britain and their French background, 1550-1800: contributions to the Historical Conference of the Huguenot Society of London, 24-25 September 1985*, ed. Irene Scouloudi (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p.125.

⁴⁰ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, pp.24-25.

successfully opposed the re-introduction of sumptuary legislation in 1743.⁴¹ The Board of Trade consulted with the Company over Free Trade Treaty with France; both nations' silk guilds objected to the others' products being allowed into the country and silks were removed from the treaty.⁴²

London was not the only centre of silk production in Britain. Macclesfield, for example, had been producing silk buttons from at least the 1570s. This trade was organised by mercers and chapmen, well connected to London and provincial towns, who sold a luxury or demi-luxury product to the fashion market. With the growing popularity of metal buttons in the 1700s, the market for silk buttons was greatly reduced. In response, the silk trade successfully moved into the weaving of plain silks, aimed at a less aristocratic audience than those of Spitalfields, or of the kind used as linings.⁴³ Other towns in the north west of England such as Congleton also produced plain silks. The Midlands was the home of non-dress silks, such as silk stockings in Nottingham and silk ribbons in Coventry.⁴⁴ All these areas relied, like Spitalfields, on imported raw silk. However, the throwing of silk did develop as a sub-sector. Although this trade was being carried out in London in the early 1700s, it received a great boost in Derby, where the Lombes located their new throwing mill in 1721. New mills along the lines of the one in Derby opened in Macclesfield 1744 and in Congleton in 1753; by 1765 seven mills had been built in imitation of those in Derby.⁴⁵ Connections with London were still important. Some of the new enterprises in Macclesfield had been established by London merchants, and other merchants in the capital used Macclesfield masters to undertake work for them. Raw silk was sent up north with instruction on its dyeing, weaving etc. These orders were then shipped back to London where they were then marketed.⁴⁶ London also remained the centre of importing and distributing raw silk. A division of labour emerged with the capital's silk industry concentrating on quality and fashion dress silks, and the new silk towns concentrating on products

⁴¹ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.24.

⁴² Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.25.

⁴³ Paul Knight, 'Early Modern Macclesfield: Market Town to Proto-Industrial Hub, 1600-1740' (PhD thesis: Liverpool, 2003) especially chap. 6; idem, 'The Macclesfield Silk Button Industry: The Probate Evidence'. *Textile History*, 35 (2004): 157-177.

⁴⁴ Natalie Rothstein, 'Silk: The Industrial Revolution and After', in D Jenkins, ed., *The Cambridge history of western textiles*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), pp.792-793.

⁴⁵ Anthony Calladine, 'Lombe's Mill: An Exercise in Reconstruction'. *Industrial Archaeology Review*, 16 (1993): 96.

⁴⁶ Gail Malmgreen, *Silk Town: industry and culture in Macclesfield, 1750-1835* (Hull University Press: Hull, 1985), pp.24-25.

that were simpler in design, for a middling customer base and where the benefits of larger units of production could be exploited.

Historiography of the silk industry and the guilds

The existing historiography of silk in London has concentrated on design and fashion, industry development and the social history of Spitalfields.⁴⁷ The late Natalie Rothstein, chief curator of textiles at the V & A, made a major contribution to all three areas. Given her museum background, the main focus on her work was in cataloguing the large collection of English silks held by the V & A. The bulk of the collection is from the eighteenth century, with most of this being from London. One result of this work was the proper attribution of silk textiles to particular workshops and designers, such as Anna Maria Garthwaite. But Rothstein was also able to identify ten different stylistic periods and so re-construct the fashion cycle through material evidence. Her work suggests a long run trend from the highly decorative and heavy fabrics to plainer and lighter designs.⁴⁸ This was in line with the same trend within European dress silks, summarised by Peter Thornton as the 'bizarre style' c.1695-1729; the development of 'naturalism' or rococo styles c.1720-1740 based around botanical designs; and the 'retreat from naturalism' c.1740-1770.⁴⁹ Rothstein also published on the economic and social history of the silk industry, laying out the basic structures of the industry, the nature of work and the workforce, the role of technology (especially the slow take up of the jacquard loom in the England), and the contribution of Huguenot refugees to design and to the Weavers' Company.⁵⁰

Others have carried on this work with studies of the integration and contribution of the Huguenots, the place of the silk industry within the general context of

⁴⁷ The earliest twentieth century study was Sir Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Drane's, 1921).

⁴⁸ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.37; Rothstein, 'Fashion, Silk and the Worshipful Company of Weavers' in *La seta in Europa*.

⁴⁹ Peter Thornton, *Baroque and Rococo Silks* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), pp. 95-134.

⁵⁰ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66'; Rothstein, 'Silks Imported into America in the eighteenth Century, An Historical Survey' in *Imported and domestic textiles in eighteenth century America.*, ed. Patricia L. Fiske (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1976); Rothstein, 'The Introduction of the Jacquard Loom to Great Britain' in *Studies in textile history*; Rothstein, 'Huguenots in the English Silk Industry in the Eighteenth Century' in *Huguenots in Britain and their French background, 1550-1800*; Rothstein, 'Huguenot master weavers: exemplary Englishmen, 1700-c.1750' in *From strangers to citizens: the integration of immigrant communities in Britain, Ireland, and colonial America, 1550-1750*, ed. Randolph Vigne (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), pp.160-174.

London's economic history, and even the contribution of weavers' houses to the architecture of London.⁵¹ There has also been a long standing interest in the role of journeymen weavers in popular protest and industrial relations. The mid-1760s saw a long running and violent dispute over wages that eventually lead to the establishment of the Spitalfields Acts in 1773. Journeymen weavers were also forming combinations by the 1770s. These deteriorating industrial relations have been understood in the context in the growth of sub-contracting and the move towards a nineteenth century style 'sweated industry'.⁵² Spitalfields weavers have been seen as supporters of radical politics from John Wilkes, to the Gordon Riots in 1780, to the London Corresponding Society in 1790s, to the campaigns for extension of the franchise in the 1820s.⁵³

Work on the Weavers' Company has taken the form of two official histories. The first, by Francis Consitt charted its course from the twelfth to the sixteenth century; the second by Alfred Plummer dealt with the period from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth, although it concentrated mainly on the period from 1600 to 1800.⁵⁴ These were institutional histories, which focused on changes in statutes, membership and finance, participation in the politics of the City of London, and the administration of charity. But they also placed these themes within the broader history of textile weaving in London. Their work should be placed within the reassessment of London livery companies, and of European guilds in the early modern period. A long standing view of the guilds, dating back to Adam Smith,

⁵¹ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925); H.W. Sheppard, 'The Huguenots in Spitalfields and Soho'. *Huguenot Society Proceedings XXI* (1965-1970); T Molleson et al., *The Spitalfields Project volume 2: The anthropology - the middling sort.*, (York: British Council for Archaeology, 1993); Robin D Gwynn, *Huguenot heritage*, 2nd ed. (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001); Liên Luu, *Immigrants and the industries of London, 1500-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Peter Guillery, *The small house in eighteenth-century London: a social and architectural history*, 1st ed. (New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press in association with English Heritage, 2004), pp79-115.

⁵² W.M. Jordan, 'The silk industry in London, 1760-1830: with special reference to the condition of the wage-earners and the policy of the Spitalfields Acts' (MA Thesis: London, 1931); L.D. Schwartz, *London in the age of industrialisation: entrepreneurs, labour force, and living conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.179-208; L. Catherine Swindlehurst, 'Trade Expansion, Social Conflict and Popular Politics in the Spitalfields Silkweaving Community, C.1670-1770' (PhD Thesis: Cambridge, 1999); Jerry White, *London in the Eighteenth Century: A Great and Monstrous Thing* (London: Vintage, 2013), pp. 239-246.

⁵³ George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty: A social study of 1763 to 1774* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Rudé, *The crowd in history: a study of popular disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (London: Serif, 2005. First Published 1964), p.51, p.54, p.67-77; E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London: Penguin, 1991. First published 1963), e.g. p.170-2, p.294, p.524, p.692-4.

⁵⁴ Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company*; Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company*.

argued that they were uncompetitive monopolies that had held back innovation in craft industries, and deserved to have their privileges swept away in the nineteenth century. In the case of the livery companies, the standard view was that their power to regulate their trades had begun to decline well before their continental counterparts, somewhere around the 1680s.⁵⁵

Recent work has seriously revised these views. European guilds were initially reappraised as important civic institutions that gave their members a strong occupational identity, organised their participation in local and national politics and performed important social functions as providers of welfare for their members.⁵⁶ Later and more boldly, S.R. Epstein challenged the Smithian accusation that guilds were economically inefficient. He argued that guilds had been the key institutional mechanism for transferring and developing craft skills, and that they had often promoted, not retarded, changes in technology and organisation.⁵⁷ As Kaplan emphasised, it was the masters who controlled the key positions within guilds and had the political links with city corporations; if they wanted a new tool introduced or immigrant workers in their workshops they had the power to make it happen.⁵⁸ For the livery companies, a consensus is now forming that there never was a golden age of the companies in late Medieval and Tudor London. Instead powers of search had always been negotiable, sometimes resulting in prosecutions, sometimes in defiance, more often in compromise. Whilst many companies never performed annual inspections, some began to assess the quality of products on a

⁵⁵ J. R. Kellett, 'The Breakdown of Gild and Corporation Control over the Handicraft and Retail Trade in London'. *The Economic History Review*, 10, 3 (January 1958): 381-394.

⁵⁶ E.g. Steven L Kaplan, 'The Character and Implications of Strife among the Masters inside the Guilds of Eighteenth-Century Paris'. *Journal of Social History*, 19, 4 (1986): 631-647.

⁵⁷ S. R. Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe'. *The Journal of Economic History*, 58, 3 (September 1998): 684-713; Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis, eds., *Guilds and association in Europe, 900-1900* (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, University of London, 2006); Jan Lucassen, Tine De Moor, and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, eds., *The return of the guilds: towards a global history of the guilds in pre-industrial times*, vol. 16, International Review of Social History Supplements (Cambridge: Published for the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis Amsterdam by Cambridge University Press, 2008); S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, 'Introduction' in *Guilds, innovation and the European economy, 1400-1800*, eds. Epstein & Prak, Repr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-24. Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, 'Inventing in a world of guilds: silk fabrics in eighteenth-century Lyon' in *Guilds, innovation and the European economy*, pp.232-265; Ulrich Pfister, 'Craft guilds and technological change: the engine loom in the European silk ribbon industry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' in *Guilds, innovation and the European economy, 1400-1800*, pp.25-51.

⁵⁸ It was not a coincidence that some of Epstein's examples here were drawn for the London silk industry. He highlighted the role of the Weavers' Company in allowing the introduction engine looms in the 1680s and the employment of Huguenot weavers, favouring the wishes of masters over journeymen. Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change': 696, 702.

national basis. Livery companies should be viewed within the context of their trade, rather than against a general model of 'rise and fall'.⁵⁹

This thesis draws a great deal from these works. There is a tendency in some of Rothstein's discussions of the Weavers' Company to see its proactive interventions as exceptional. However, compared with a Company like the Cordwainers, who continued to actively prosecute illegal shoemakers into the 1770s, it was not so unusual. Epstein's idea of guilds as a 'recession cartels' that enforced their statutes most heavily during downturns in trade, may be useful to understanding the fluctuations in the Weavers' Company's interest in illegal workers and in securing favourable legislation.⁶⁰ This thesis also re-orientates some of these themes away from endogenous explanations. Much of the work on artisans and guilds has tended to focus on internal changes within industries and the city corporations in explaining, for example, the adoption of a new technology. Wider views have focused on comparisons between different guilds, in order to explain success or failure. Here the emphasis falls on interactions between different silk industries and the effects this had the activities of the guild.

Luxury goods and global history in the eighteenth century

Silk, in both the past and present, is a luxury good. Arguments that luxury commodities produced important changes in the early modern period go back to Werner Sombart's *Luxury and Capitalism*, which described capitalism as 'The Child of Luxury'.⁶¹ Sombart argued that the concentration of the European royalty, clergy, gentry and merchants in cities created hotspots of affluent consumers, and a culture of refinement and 'sensuousness'. In a period where demand for basic goods was static, the production and retail of luxury items had the most potential

⁵⁹ Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis, 'Introduction' in *Guilds, society & economy in London 1450-1800*, eds. Patrick Wallis and Ian Anders Gadd (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research in association with Guildhall Library, 2002); Giorgio Riello, 'The Shaping of a Family Trade: The Cordwainers' Company in Eighteenth-Century London' in *Guilds, society & economy in London 1450-1800*, pp.141-159.; Patrick Wallis, 'Controlling Commodities: Search and Reconciliation in the Early Modern Livery Companies' in *Guilds, society & economy in London 1450-1800*; Gadd & Wallis, 'Reaching beyond the city wall: London guilds and national regulation, 1500-1700' in *Guilds, innovation and the European economy, 1400-1800*, pp.288-315; Michael Berlin, 'Guilds in decline? London livery companies and the rise of a liberal economy, 1600 - 1800' in *Guilds, innovation and the European economy, 1400-1800*, pp.316-342.

⁶⁰ Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change': 696-697.

⁶¹ Luxury is often defined as 'expenditure beyond the necessary'. In the early modern period, luxury goods included craft manufactured products, rare or 'exotic' food and drink stuffs, art objects, precious stones and metals. In this thesis discussion will be mainly confined to luxury manufactured goods, for the sake of meaningful comparison.

for profit making. Producers of expensive items such as clothing, furniture and carriages flourished, and retailers emerged as a separate occupation to serve this market. Sombart also noted that that European trade with the East concentrated on luxury commodities, such as silk and spices.⁶² More recently, Maxine Berg and others have argued that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a new range of consumer goods appear that were valued for their novelty, design and quality. Unlike Sombart, historians now see these goods as being affordable to middling people as well as elites. Within intellectual debate, suspicion of conspicuous display and indulgent leisure began to weaken, and political economy began to see luxury goods as economically beneficial. Within design and marketing 'exoticism' was important to creating notions of desirability. This was linked to specialised finishing techniques used in manufacture, such as dyeing, printing, or lacquering. For European consumers, many Chinese and Indian goods possessed these qualities, where rival domestic goods did not. A demand emerged in Europe for imported porcelains, silk and cottons. Eventually, European manufacturers began to copy these Asian imports and, in doing so, sought innovations in production techniques. By the mid-eighteenth century these attempts had succeeded and it was now English manufacturers such as Josiah Wedgwood and Matthew Bolton who lead the field in luxury consumer goods.⁶³

These studies understand luxury goods as being created through transnational exchange and influences. Historians interested in global history have gone further, and argued that the circulation of goods created important systems or networks.

⁶² Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967. First published 1913). pp.24, 60, 118-121, 127.

⁶³ Robert Finlay, 'The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History'. *Journal of World History*, 9 (1998), 141-187; Berg & Clifford, eds., *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Berg and Eger, eds. *Luxury in the eighteenth century: debates, desires and delectable goods* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Maxine Berg, 'From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain'. *The Economic History Review*, 55, 1, (2002): 1-30; idem, 'In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century'. *Past & Present*, 182 (2004): 85-142; idem, *Luxury and pleasure in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Robert Batchelor, 'On the Movement of Porcelains: Rethinking the Birth of the Consumer Society as Interactions of Exchange Networks, China and Britain, 1600-1750' in *Consuming cultures, global perspectives: historical trajectories, transnational exchanges*, eds. John Brewer and Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 95-122; Berg, 'Quality, Cotton and the Global Luxury Trade' in *How India clothed the world: the world of South Asian textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 391-414; Frank Trentmann, 'Crossing Divides: Consumption and Globalization in History'. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 9, 2 (2009): 187-220; Stacey Pierson, 'The Movement of Chinese Ceramics: Appropriation in Global History'. *Journal of World History*, 23 (2012): 9-39.

The two most well studied are the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. In the Atlantic, consumer goods were exchanged for slaves and plantation groceries, leading to further integration of the imperial economies in the region.⁶⁴ A vibrant trading world in South and Southeast Asia eventually drew in European merchants during the sixteenth century. In one of the boldest versions of this view, Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giráldez argue globalisation began in the sixteenth century when the Spanish exchanged silver, from their mines in the Americas, for Chinese goods.⁶⁵ Consumer goods also played their part in key turning points or reconfigurations. C.A. Bayly sees the creation of plantations in the Americas as a re-distribution of, “what had been geographically specific commodity production and labour while maintaining reputation and cultural specificity of consumption.”⁶⁶ John Darwin suggests that the British used textile exports to force their way into overseas economies during the early nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Luxury goods have also been important in comparative world history. The production and consumption of luxuries has been used by both Kenneth Pomeranz and Prasannan Parthasarathi to assess the divergence of the economies of China and India from north Western Europe during the late eighteenth century.⁶⁸

A significant body of research has focused these themes around cotton textiles, and has placed silk in a subordinate status within the narrative. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the cotton historiography at some length and to suggest how a study of silk can reveal a different perspective to existing understandings of luxury goods. In a series of publications, Giorgio Riello and his collaborators have used the history of cotton “as a lens through which to read other global phenomena”.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Carole Shammas, ‘The Revolutionary Impact of European Demand for Tropical Goods’ in *The early modern Atlantic economy*, eds. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 163–185.

⁶⁵ Flynn and Giraldez, ‘Cycles of Silver’: 391–427.

⁶⁶ Bayly, “‘Archaic’ and ‘Modern’ Globalization”, p.58; see also Anne E. C. McCants, ‘Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking About Globalization in the Early Modern World’. *Journal of World History*, 18 (2007): 433–462.

⁶⁷ John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p.260.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapter three; Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter four.

⁶⁹ Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*, Kindle file, location 454. This began as a project of the LSE Global Economic History Network in 2003, producing two major edited collections: *The spinning world: a global history of cotton textiles, 1200-1850*, eds. Riello and Parthasarathi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and *How India clothed the world: the world of South Asian textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Riello and Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Working from the premise that cotton was the most globally traded commodity, Riello uses it as a test case of changes in the world economy, above all the fall of the Indian economy during the eighteenth century. Riello turns the question 'why was the Lancashire cotton industry the leading sector the Industrial Revolution?' into 'why did India lose its dominance in cotton production?'⁷⁰ He argues that a global system of cotton production and exchange flourished between 1400 and 1750 with India as its core. Indian cottons were prized for their strong colours and patterns around the Indian Ocean, and Indian merchants were adept at satisfying demand.

This system was slowly unpicked by Europeans, who had started on its periphery in the late medieval period. The first printed cottons arrived in Europe during the 1540s via the Portuguese trade with India.⁷¹ Although silk was the more important textile to begin with, printed Indian cottons found a place in the emerging 'fashion system' in Europe. Indeed Riello and Beverley Lemire have argued that cotton was the key textile that expanded the audience for fashion in the late seventeenth century and eighteenth centuries. Consumers responded enthusiastically to the bold, printed floral patterns, the lightness the fabric, and the competitive pricing. Under pressure from woollen and silk manufacturers, Indian cottons were initially banned from domestic sale and use in several European countries. However, Lemire has argued that the bans were widely flouted and cotton was an increasingly popular item of consumption by the late eighteenth century.⁷² Unable to match the quality and finish of Indian cottons, European manufacturers were spurred into action and began experimenting with spinning, printing and dyeing techniques. By the 1730 they had begun to catch up technologically, by 1800 they had overtaken Indian producers.⁷³ The cotton 'world' shifted from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. Cotton found new consumers in West Africa and North America; raw cotton found a new home in the southern United States. This second

⁷⁰ Riello, 'The Globalization of Cotton Textiles: Indian Cottons, Europe, and the Atlantic World, 1600-1850' in *The spinning world*, pp.261-262.

⁷¹ Serge Chassagne, 'Calico Printing in Europe Before 1780' in *The Cambridge history of western textiles*, vol. 1, p.513; Beverly Lemire, 'India, Europe, and the Cotton Trade' in *The spinning world*, p.212.

⁷² Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's favourite: the cotton trade and the consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Pasold Research Fund; Oxford University Press, 1991); Daniel Roche has argued an even stronger case for France, *The culture of clothing: dress and fashion in the "ancien régime"* trans. Jean Birrell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁷³ Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello, 'East & West: Textiles and Fashion in Early Modern Europe'. *Journal of Social History*, 41, 4 (2008): 888-903.

system was more integrated, with the European core having more control over resources and profits.

This narrative is powerful and has substantial research behind it, but it is not without its critics. Jan De Vries - following Immanuel Wallerstein, Kevin O'Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson - is sceptical about the economic importance of Euro-Asian trade in general. Asian imports made up a small percentage of the consumer goods on sale in Western Europe; the rewards flowing from them stayed with those involved in trading companies.⁷⁴ John Styles has presented evidence suggesting a much later uptake of cotton by ordinary people in England.⁷⁵ Styles is also sceptical about the influence of Indian textiles on European design and production. The emergence of fashion, he argues, owes more to European mercantilism and the refusal to allow another state a lead in the production of luxury goods.⁷⁶ On a broader scale, Parthasarathi has highlighted the role of institutions in economic divergence, and Bayly has argued that national organisations were both actors in, and products of, transnational interactions.⁷⁷ However, historians of luxury goods have focused more on exchange, consumption, design and craft techniques. The very open markets in early modern India, and the failure of European states to control printed cottons, have encouraged the role of politics and the state to be downplayed. How raw materials and labour shaped, and were shaped by, transnational exchange has also been relatively ignored.⁷⁸

The implication that cotton left silk behind can be questioned. Technologically, the cotton industries were stagnant from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, whilst silk, especially in throwing machinery, was not.⁷⁹ In Euro-Asian

⁷⁴ Jan De Vries, 'The limits of globalization in the early modern world'. *The Economic History Review*, 63, 3 (2009): 710-733. Also Kevin H O'Rourke and Jeffrey G Williamson, 'When Did Globalization Begin?' *European Review of Economic History*, 6, 1 (2002): 23-50.

⁷⁵ John Styles, *The dress of the people: everyday fashion in eighteenth-century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Table 15-16, pp.344-345.

⁷⁶ John Styles, 'Indian Cottons and European Fashion, 1400-1800' in *Global Design History* eds. Glenn Adamson et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.37-46.

⁷⁷ C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell., 2004), pp. 59-63, 100-105; Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*, chapter 3. Interest in the role of institutions in economic change goes back to Douglass C. North and Barry R. Weingast, 'Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutional Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England'. *The Journal of Economic History*, 49, 4 (1989): 803-832.

⁷⁸ Although see now chapters three, seven and nine in Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*. That study still leaves out labour however.

⁷⁹ Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi, 'Introduction: Cotton Textiles and Global History' in *The spinning world*, p.8.

trade, cottons were transported alongside silks, as were cottons imported via the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰ European silk designs were also influenced by Asian products between 1670s and 1730s, although from China rather than India.⁸¹ Silk continued to be important within elite fashion: Paris and London, with their large aristocratic populations, remained the leaders of trends in female and male fashion respectively. Aileen Ribeiro identifies the main development within elite European fashion as the movement towards lighter and plainer silks, rather than towards different fabrics.⁸² In both countries, the main silk manufacturing centres, Lyon and Spitalfields, were well integrated into serving the tastes of this patrician market. Carlo Poni has reconstructed the sophisticated processes of seasonal product differentiation and marketing developed by Lyonnais merchants.⁸³ Across Europe the silk industries expanded throughout the eighteenth century and some remained strong in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

Silk has a good claim to have been as 'global' as cotton. It was produced and consumed on the same number of continents as cotton has been. However, it often followed a different trajectory from cotton: Asian silks appeared in European wardrobes several centuries before cotton did, for example. In the eighteenth century, technological transfer and experimentation was concentrated much more in the cultivation of raw silk, than in the finishing process as with cotton. Studying the silk industry also reveals different geographies. As the outline of the London silk industry suggests, links with Italy and the Ottoman Empire were more important than those with the Coromondeal Coast or West Africa. For a British workshop, France may have been a more intense source of competition, due to the importance of Lyon and Paris, than the wares carried by the East India Company. Therefore the first question of this thesis is: what were these different connections that made up the silk industry, and what do they reveal about the dynamics of early globalisation? Although the bans on cottons were ignored, silk producers lobbied for and won other legislation from Parliament. Given the continuing

⁸⁰ Riello, 'The Globalization of Cotton Textiles', pp.262, 264.

⁸¹ See the essays in Anna Jolly, ed., *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth-century Silk Designs* (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2007).

⁸² Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in eighteenth-century Europe, 1715-1789*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.11.

⁸³ Carlo Poni, 'Fashion as Flexible Production' in *World of possibilities*, pp. 37-74.

⁸⁴ Rothstein, 'Silk in the Early Modern Period, c.1500-1780' in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles Vol. 1*. ed. D Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.), p.556.

participation of weavers in the livery company, ignoring the institutional side of the story may be a mistake. The second question of this thesis is therefore: what was the role of institutions within early globalisation? The silk industry in London with its cosmopolitan and vocal workforce can make the labour history side of the story clearer, or at least easier to capture. The third question of the thesis is: what was the place of silk workers within web of international connections that made up the industry? Studies of cotton and porcelains have accomplished a great deal within global history. However, constructing models from one or two commodities risks creating an unbalanced approach. A study of silk in London would be a good place therefore, to test the arguments around luxury commodities and global history. It would also enrich the study of luxury and global history in the eighteenth century by emphasising new areas of enquiry.

Approaches to global history

The key texts of global history have been syntheses using secondary literature, and have taken long time frames.⁸⁵ Obviously much has been gained through using this model, particularly the non-Eurocentric comparative history it has encouraged. Historians writing more focused studies on a single commodity have also followed this approach, as with recent writing on cotton and diamonds.⁸⁶ However, this is an inappropriate approach for a doctoral thesis in history, which must be based on original archival research. The long time frames taken in global history syntheses can encourage a glacial depiction of change. The experience and reaction of individuals, as over a generation or life-cycle, to historic globalisation is often lost. To correct this, Miles Ogborn has used the life histories of forty individuals to explore changing global relations in the early modern period.⁸⁷ It is doubtful whether there is enough material on individual silk merchants or weavers to sustain such a study here. Even if there were a good archive on a business family, it would tend to lead the study away from mid-range explanations and down an

⁸⁵ E.g. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*; C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*; Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*.

⁸⁶ Karin Hofmeester, 'Working for Diamonds from the 16th to the 20th Century' in *Working on Labor: essays in honor of Jan Lucassen*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 19-46; Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*.

⁸⁷ Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Ogborn makes the methodological argument for this approach in 'Historical Geographies of Globalisation, c.1500-1800' in *Modern Historical Geographies*, eds. Brian Graham & Catherine Nash (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), pp. 43-68.

idiosyncratic path. An often advocated alternative method, especially by the world-systems school, is the commodity chains approach.⁸⁸ However, this has not been widely taken up by historians as it sets up a potentially infinite series of connections to pin down.⁸⁹ This thesis also does not follow the biographical approach to commodities advocated by Igor Kopytoff. This is because it is not centrally concerned with commodification or value, but with globalisation.⁹⁰

Instead, this study follows the recommendation of Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann to focus on 'critical conjunctions' where many networks meet in the same place. In the early modern period, most trade and migration passed through ports and cities at some point. Governments, trading companies, and guilds were organisation with vested interests in monitoring imports and exports, comers and goers. The volume of documentation allows the historian to 'capture' a network at a significant point. But the fact of documenting also points to another important point – that early modern political authorities were often threatened by flows of goods and people. They responded with new forms of control such as taxation, regulation, and attacks on competitors. Early modern globalisation was not just a process of overlapping paths of exchange, but an active process.⁹¹ This study extends the Middell and Naumann approach by recognising that these responses were not just local ones, such as raising import duties. They also extended to other parts of the world, often through trading companies or colonial policy. This is why a study of the silk industry in London has much to offer the study of historic globalisation and global commodities. It was probably the most 'global' of the British textile industries, at least before Lancashire cottons took off at the end of the eighteenth century. It drew raw materials, people, design and technology from outside Britain. Several times it found itself in direct competition with producers in other countries. The city was both a consumer of imported raw materials and producer of cloth for export; a port through which silk and its workers passed in

⁸⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence K. Hopkins, 'Commodity Chains in the World Economy Prior to 1800' in *The essential Wallerstein* (New York: New Press, 2000), pp. 221–233.

⁸⁹ Riello, for example, rejects this method for his study of cotton on these grounds. Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*, location 698.

⁹⁰ Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process' in *The Social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.64-94.

⁹¹ Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, 'Global history and the spatial turn: from the impact of area studies to the study of critical junctures of globalization'. *Journal of Global History*, 5, 1 (2010): 164-165.

and out; and a political and administrative centre. The Weavers' Company, Parliament, the Custom and Excise and the East India Company were all called upon to manage these flows in various ways.

They therefore provide excellent sources for five areas, all of which can illustrate the global networks in play, experiences and responses, the role of people and labour. These five areas are: raw silk and sericulture, silk weavers and migration, the politics and regulation of silk, the smuggling of silk into London, exporting English silk. For reason of space, a well studied topic like global design and technology will not be fully considered although they will be touched on. Necessarily, this study uses several different national or regional historiographies (Britain, colonial America, Bengal, France, Italy) as well as sub-disciplinary ones (history of consumption, history of migration).

Chapter Structure

Sericulture

Disruptions to the supply of raw and thrown silk were a constant problem for the industry. Supplies from the Ottoman Empire went into a long term decline and others, such as those from Bengal, had a reputation for uneven quality. Piedmont was regarded as producing the best raw and thrown silk, but one that was vulnerable to interference. This chapter examines the various attempts that were launched to create new or better supplies of raw silk under British control. These were encouraged by representatives of the silk industry, and the first section of the chapter examines their lobbying of Parliament and the East India Company. This lobbying was successful and two regions became the focus of attention: British America (specifically South Carolina and Georgia) and the East India Company's territories in India. The rest of the chapter examines the institutional and financial support for these projects. It uses sources from the Colonial Office and Treasury Papers in The National Archives for the American half of the story, and, for the Indian half, records from Bengal Publications and Madras Revenue Proceedings in the India Office Records. Important to all these schemes was the use of experts and sericulture techniques from Italy. The chapter compares the success of importing these outside influences into new environments. The roles of intellectual networks, climate and labour force are all assessed to compare success and failure. Finally,

the chapter connects all these developments with wider efforts to establish British self-sufficiency in other raw materials such as indigo and cotton. Whilst the production of some notable raw material shifted to the Atlantic, raw silk followed a different geographical path.

Migrations

This chapter examines the movements of people and technology in and out of London. It looks at immigration of Huguenot and Irish weavers, arguing that they shared a common network or overlapping network with London as a 'node'. Next, the emigration of silk weavers mainly through military and naval service is examined. This section relies on reconstructing biographies of weavers, using the Old Bailey and newspaper records, as well as the Weavers' Company records. A database was constructed from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey and the Ordinary of Newgate's Account, in their digitised form <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>. These records were used to construct a database of 400 people who worked in the silk industry from 1700 to 1800. They were found by searching under 'occupation' and using a series of keywords: 'silk weaver' 'silk throwster' 'silk winder' 'silk dyer' 'silk manufacturer'. Names, dates of trial, age and address (if given), offence being tried and role in the trial (accused, prosecutor or witness) were all recorded. Then summaries of important details were recorded e.g. what goods they stole, outline of life history. The focus was on recording details about migration and the life course, and about material culture. People who appear in criminal trials are an obviously distorted sample of any population. These were not verbatim accounts of what actually happened and more sensational cases received longer coverage than more mundane crimes.⁹² Nevertheless, read against the grain and on a large enough scale, they provide the kind of rich evidence of daily life that the apprenticeship records of the Weavers' Company, for all their other value, do not. The chapter then goes on to argue that the Weavers' Company did little to regulate the movement of people, although it did have a role in the integration of Huguenot and Irish weavers. Its most important efforts were attempts to stop weaving tools leaving London for Europe and to 'capture' French designs.

⁹² Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, 'The Value of the Proceedings as a Historical Source' *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 01/11/ 2011).

The politics of silk

The silk industry successfully lobbied Parliament and other bodies for policies to protect its interests. As well as creating raw silk plantations, or guarding design and technology, the silk interest also secured regulation of competing foreign textiles. The most well-known example of this are the Calico Acts passed in 1700 and 1721. However, over the next several decades campaigns for further tariffs or prohibition continued. The third chapter explains why these campaigns continued by drawing out the wider political and social context of these campaigns. It argues that a key part of the argument for protectionism were concerns about the living standard of the large workforce. Visual representations of silk weavers' dress from satirical and political prints are used to track increasing concern with poverty in Spitalfields. Institutional records from the Weavers' Company and French Protestant Hospital show the charitable concern to provision poor families connected in the silk industry, particularly their clothing. Evidence from the Old Bailey relating to thefts from workshops and the use of pawnbrokers shows how weavers used textiles as part of the 'economy of makeshifts' to sustain themselves in hard times. This also led to conflicts between master and journeymen, raising tensions within the industry. The chapter then moves on to explore why silk weavers' complaints against calicos declined after 1720s, and the campaigns became directed against foreign silks instead. This section makes use of pamphlets, newspapers in the Burney Collection and records of the Weavers' Company. Both the formal lobbying of Parliament and popular protest argued that further prohibition would secure employment for journeymen and their families. They also pointed to European examples where regulation had protected other silk industries.

Smuggling

Passing legislation is not the same as enforcing it, of course. As protectionist measures were extended so too did complaints that foreign silk were still entering the country, through the contraband trade. This chapter examines the reality and implications of smuggling silks into Britain. By using newspaper reports and records from the Customs and Excise, it moves beyond complaints about 'foreign silks' to show the reality of the contraband trade. Seizure records are used not in an attempt to calculate the real amount of smuggling, but to find out the most

popular types of smuggled silks and who the 'smugglers' were. Contemporaries often blamed the East India Company for evading duties, and the Customs evidence suggests the most popular contraband silks did come from India. As the Company's main docks and warehouses were in London, foreign silks could easily filter out into the capital's black economy. However, flouting of the law on a smaller scale could be just as problematic for the silk industry. For workshops producing the finest silks, their greatest threat was from individual travellers to continental Europe returning with new gowns or suit from France or Italy. Diplomats and young men on the Grand Tour are examined here for their role as unwitting 'smugglers'. The role of their political and social status in protecting them from prosecution is examined. Finally, the status of contraband silks in Britain is considered. The competition between different centres of silk weaving encouraged imitation of rival products. Contemporaries often found it hard to tell different textiles apart. This encouraged fraud and counterfeiting, and also made things difficult for Customs officers. Members of the silk industry helped the authorities by lending their expertise in difficult cases.

Export Trade

The final chapter examines exports of English silks. Studies of other luxury goods have painted a picture of quite sophisticated marketing operations, including in overseas markets. The 'exoticism' of consumer goods is considered to have been important. The chapter asks how true this was for Spitalfields by focusing on how the products of Spitalfields were marketed to consumers outside of Britain, and whether silk were designed to suit different markets. It uses a case study approach by concentrating on English silk in Virginia, North America being one of the main export markets for English silks. The chapter combines material culture evidence with business records. Colours and designs of English silks in the collections of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation are compared with those in the Victoria & Albert Museum to see if there was an 'American' taste. This is supplemented with evidence from orders placed with the merchants John Norton and Sons. In this way bias in the type of silks that survive and are collected are accounted for. The chapter then moves on to look at how the demand for English silks was met. Here the Norton letters are used to examine the relationship between producers, distributors, and customers. Where particular silks pushed onto the

American market by silk merchants and middlemen or did consumers exercise a degree of choice? Did consumers of silks need to be told what was fashionable or did they have their own means of accessing that knowledge?

Chapter 1: Raw silk and sericulture

For a few years in the 1780s an Italian called Salvatore Bertezen lived in Kennington Lane on the outskirts of London. Bertezen had moved to England in order to drum up support for a scheme to establish sericulture (the raising of silk worms and the production of raw silk from their cocoons) there. In Kennington he grew mulberry trees, hatched and fed silk worms, collected their cocoons and reeled silk thread from them. He issued a pamphlet encouraging others to follow his example and provided practical information on the care of silk worms.¹ Although this project now has the flavour of the eccentric about it², Bertezen was taken seriously: the British Library's copy of his pamphlet comes from the collection of Sir Joseph Banks. His scheme was discussed at the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and they awarded Bertezen's silk a gold medal in 1783.³ In fact, the Italian's efforts were part of a longer running interest within the Society about the possibilities of cultivating raw silk in England. The Society had instituted a gold medal for silk in 1768 as well as other premiums offered to those raising mulberries and silk worms.⁴ Bertezen was also not the first foreigner to correspond with the Society. Mr Sievers wrote from Livonia with encouragement for the Society's silk enthusiasts. He gave evidence that mulberries and silk worms could be grown in northern Europe, using examples of a plantation near the Baltic coast and another further east in Russia.⁵ After leaving England, Salvatore Bertezen also published his ideas in Paris, where they were debated.⁶

¹ Salvatore Bertezen, *Thoughts on the Different Kinds of Food given to Young Silk Worms, and the possibility of their being brought to perfection in the climate of England, founded on experiments made near the Metropolis*. (London, 1789).

² There were also several experiments in the eighteenth century to spin spider silk on a viable basis. See Eleanor Morgan, 'A Short History of Spiders' Silk Spinning Machines'. *Antenna: Magazine of the Royal Entomological Society* (2010).

³ *Transactions of the society, instituted at London, for the encouragement of arts, manufactures, and commerce*. Vol. 8 (1790), Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), accessed 19/9/2012. ESTC Number P003191, pp.164-165.

⁴ *Premiums offered by the Society, instituted at London, for the encouragement of arts, manufactures, and commerce*, (1768), ECCO, accessed 20/09/12. ESTC Number: T062324, pp.17-18.

⁵ *Transactions of the society, instituted at London, for the encouragement of arts, manufactures, and commerce*. Vol. 16 (1798), ECCO, accessed 20/09/12, ESTC Number: P003191, pp.340-360.

⁶ Salvatore Bertezen, *Réflexions sur les moyens d'améliorer la culture de la soie en France, etc.* (Paris, 1792.) *Rapport sur une nouvelle culture de la soie, par le procédé de feu Berthezen et de la Cⁿe Laplasse*. (Paris, 1794.)

Another Italian in London, Joseph Briganti, had published advice to the East India Company on how to improve its own trade in raw silk from Bengal.⁷

The demand for raw silk on the London market, both from Spitalfields and for re-export to Europe, attracted serious investors. Problems with the existing sources of raw silk encouraged grand designs for new sites of sericulture and improved techniques. Like cotton printing, silk weaving in London relied solely on foreign imports for its raw materials. At the start of the eighteenth century the two main markets were northern Italy and the Levant. This chapter explores how changes in these markets and in access to them caused disruption in London and inspired new plantation schemes in other places. These can be seen as attempts to change the geography of sericulture in favour of British manufacturing interests. Mulberry plants and silk worms were, of course, only part of a much wider range of flora and fauna studied by early modern science. Of particular importance for many historians has been the knowledge of the natural world formed during European interaction with other parts of the world, whether through commerce or colonialism. This in turn has been part of the wider interest in the overlap of imperial, commercial and intellectual networks and the role of things in creating knowledge and sustaining connections.⁸ For example, the Portuguese and Dutch involvement in trading Asian spices encouraged the collecting of exotic plants and this has been linked to development of medicinal knowledge.⁹

For eighteenth century scientists such as Sir Joseph Banks collecting specimens was not an end in itself but had practical implications too. Banks hoped that transfers of plants like breadfruit from the Pacific to the Caribbean would provide new food sources for the British West Indies. He outlined plans to turn the East India Company's possessions in India into an agrarian colony and investigated the possibility of growing tea within the Company's territories.¹⁰ His collection of pamphlets on mulberries and silk worms suggest he viewed sericulture in the same light. Richard Drayton has argued that the botanical interest of men like

⁷ Joseph Briganti, *An Essay on the Method of Carrying to Perfection the East-India Raw Silk* (London, 1779).

⁸ Natasha Glaisyer, 'Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth Century British Empire'. *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004): 451–476.

⁹ For the Dutch case Harold J. Cook, *Matters of exchange: commerce, medicine, and science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Richard Drayton, *Nature's government: science, imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.104, pp. 113-120.

Banks should be understood as a part of European colonialism. In the metropole and the colony, collecting specimens and the plans for how they could be used was a wider project of improvement in India or the Caribbean. This became especially urgent after the experience of the American Revolutionary war when the West Indian planters found themselves cut off from basic food supplies.¹¹

Lying behind this investment in botany was the knowledge that transfers of plants from the Mediterranean and West Africa to the Americas had been economic success stories. Sugar in the seventeenth century, followed by rice and coffee in the mid-eighteenth century had made plantations owners and merchants very wealthy. Europeans had also successfully turned indigenous plants, like tobacco, into cash crops. The New World plantations are now seen as a key dynamic in changing global connections in the early modern period.¹² Pomeranz, in particular, sees them as one of the main advantages that Western Europe had over the most advanced regions of Asia.¹³ Inspired by these success stories other projects grew up to create new plantations. Government and institutional support was often important in the launching and direction of the schemes. Merchants also made their own schemes for economic improvements.¹⁴ As Joan Thirsk has shown for seventeenth century England, many economic projects of this kind can be linked to the development of consumer goods.¹⁵ Maxine Berg has argued that silk was one of many 'Asian' raw materials that British merchants hoped to cultivate in the Americas in order to supply luxury trades at home. There were plans for the cultivation of dyestuffs, iron, potash, sulphuric acid, flax and cotton. The Society for the Arts attempted to direct these efforts under one its standing committee for 'British Colonies and Trade'. A similar society existed in Barbados with plans to weaken the island's dependence on sugar.¹⁶

Previous studies of raw silk have also placed it within international contexts. K.N. Chaudhuri in his classic study analysed the organisation of the East India

¹¹ Drayton, *Nature's government*, chaps. 3 & 4.

¹² Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780-1914*, pp.50-52.

¹³ Pomeranz, *The great divergence*, pp.264-269.

¹⁴ David Hancock, *Citizens of the world: London merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapters 9 to 10.

¹⁵ Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: the Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

¹⁶ Berg, 'In Pursuit of Luxury': 132-137.

Companies trade in raw silk.¹⁷ Matthee has looked at the importance of raw silk for the revenue and politics of the Safavid Empire; McCabe has explored the role of Armenian and Jewish merchants within the Persian silk trade.¹⁸ Roberto Davini has shown the influence of Italian sericulture technology on raw silk production in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengal. Indrajit Ray has placed changes in the raw silk trade in Bengal within the wider context of the early colonial economy.¹⁹ In this chapter the raw silk trade is used to examine the place of London's silk industry within early globalisation. Its vulnerability to external forces and its ability to act in response, are used to calibrate Spitalfields' power, or lack of it, within international markets. London was not a centre of raw silk production, but it was a place where connections – economic, institutional, and intellectual – created or used by the raw silk trade met. The central questions of this chapter are: how did the silk interest use the knowledge of sericulture, that people like Bertezen brought to England, to try and create alternative sources of supply for itself? How successful were these projects and what does the geography of sericulture suggest about wider changes in global connections in the eighteenth century? Methodologically, London is used here as hub linking the Mediterranean, Bengal and the American colonies. This allows the chapter to follow the effects of raw silk or technical knowledge coming into London, and trace the schemes and resources sent out. As a centre of silk manufacturing the capital was a place both at the mercy of outside events in the raw silk trade and a driver of international projects to change the trade. It was as a source of demand for the product; a place where encouragement and advice were sent out to those working in the field; and a centre of finance for the plantations. Via institutions such as the Treasury and the East India Company, London promoted transfers of machinery, silk worms and mulberry plants to places that had not previously been used. These materials emerge as of great importance here. Not only were things the object of the

¹⁷ K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 343-358.

¹⁸ Ina McCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver: The Eurasian Trade of the Julfa Armenians in Safavid Iran and India 1530-1750* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); Rudolph Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver, 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Roberto Davini, 'Bengali Raw Silk, the East India Company and the European Global Market, 1770-1833'. *Journal of Global History* 4, 1, (March 2009): 57-79; Indrajit Ray, *Bengal Industries and the British Industrial Revolution 1757-1857* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.88-132.

schemes, but they were also the means by which information was passed and networks were constituted.

Sericulture in the eighteenth century

The production of silk begins with sericulture: the raising of silk worms and the processing of their cocoons into 'raw silk'. Silkworms are the larvae of the *Bombyx mori* moth. As the larva changes into a moth it excretes silk fibres to build a cocoon around it, as well as a gum coating that is made of the protein sericin. A larva can take around a month to spin a full cocoon. A cocoon can potentially provide up to 1,000 yards of silk yarn. It is possible to have so-called 'wild' or 'tussah' silk where the cultivator waits for moths to leave their cocoons and pick the cocoons left behind. Silk that derives from this method is more textured than cultivated silk. In cultivated silk the worms are carefully monitored. They are kept in trays in a temperature controlled building and fed the leaves of mulberry trees (they do not live on the trees directly). The cultivator will have a plantation of mulberry trees, which also has to be monitored to ensure a steady supply of food. Although some moths will be kept for breeding, most worms never make it to this stage and are killed by the heat. The cocoons are then soaked in warm water: this separates out the silk fibres, which float to the top, and it removes the sericin from the fibres. The fibres are then reeled into a yarn, with four cocoons making up one yarn. Finally, the yarns are 'thrown' or twisted together to make a stronger thread.²⁰ As is clear from this description sericulture is a complicated process. It involves the separate cultivation of two different organisms, both of which are sensitive to climatic conditions and to diseases. Although mulberry trees can be grown in the northern hemisphere, large scale cultivation of the worms has only occurred within temperate zones.

By the eighteenth century the main focuses for improving the whole process were the cultivation of mulberries and changes to reeling and throwing machinery. The Italian sericulture expert Joseph Briganti thought that the leaves of the white mulberry trees were better than those from black mulberries. Black mulberries took too long to grow – nearly ten years - from their first planting until they were producing enough leaves to be harvested. They also had sparser leaf coverage than

²⁰ 'Silk' in *Encyclopaedia of clothing and fashion*, vol. 3, Valerie Steele ed., (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005).

white mulberry trees. Perhaps most importantly worms feed on white mulberries produced more and better quality silk than those feed on black mulberries.²¹ The soil mulberries grew in could also affect production and quality of silk; Briganti recommended “light and rather sandy” soil rather than “moist and damp” conditions.²² It was no accident that Briganti was an Italian. Piedmont had become the leading centre in Europe for the production of raw and thrown silk. This followed a longer pattern of development during which northern Italy became the main European region for the production of raw silk, and an area renowned for its advanced technology.

In the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Italy had originally excelled in silk weaving. This was urbanised production, located in the major cities including Venice, Florence, Genoa and Milan. Raw silk was imported from Sicily, southern Italy and the Levant. However, this changed in the sixteenth century and northern Italian states began to develop sericulture and silk thread production in the countryside. This followed a more general process where new crops, such as flax, hemp and woad, were introduced to supply industrial raw materials. Previously uncultivated land was brought into use and cheaper labour and the lack of guild restrictions encouraged investment. Some of this land was used for the cultivation of mulberry trees intended to provide feed for silk worms, as well as rearing silk cocoons and producing silk thread. There were also important technological changes. From the fourteenth century, producers in Bologna had used water powered mills to drive mechanical silk throwing machinery. These technologies were spread to other Italian regions and towns such as Modena, Faenza and Reggio Emilia in the sixteenth century and Padua, Treviso, Feltre Mantua, Pescia in the seventeenth century. The mills were large, two or three story high buildings, and their size increased over time.²³

By the end of the seventeenth century some mills in Piedmont employed 300 workers and processed 26,000 lbs of silk thread a year. Piedmont also developed

²¹ Briganti, *An Essay on the Method*, pp.7-9.

²² Briganti, *An Essay on the Method*, pp.2-3.

²³ Carlo Poni, and Giorgio Mori, ‘Italy in the Longue Duré: The Return of an Old First Comer’, in *The industrial revolution in national context: Europe and the USA*, eds. Teich and Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 149–183; Carlo Marco Belfanti, ‘Rural Manufactures and Rural Proto-Industries in the “Italy of the Cities” from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Century’, *Continuity and Change*, 8 (2008), 253-280.

the hand powered silk reeling machines used to extract a basic thread from silk cocoons. Each machine required two workers to operate and allowed a much more even thickness of thread to be drawn from the cocoons. Piedmontese reeling machine used two artisans, one 'reeler' who manned the cocoons in the basin and a turner who turned the wheel and monitored the thread. The reeler kept the number of cocoons constant, and would have two threads going at the same time. Piedmontese machines used less cocoons and produced finer thread than others then available.²⁴ Raw and thrown silk production went into decline in southern Italy, as did silk weaving in northern Italy. Silk production in the northern states re-orientated itself towards supplying weaving in western and northern Europe, including in Lyon, Amsterdam and London.²⁵ From the 1680s the Piedmontese government and merchants had taken control over the direction of the whole production process. The supply of cocoons to peasant cultivators and the prices they received were determined by merchants. The best cocoons were reserved for export, and lesser quality ones were only allowed for local production.

Legislation had standardised the reeling technology being used and there were regular inspections of filatures and mills. Under this regime Piedmont producers had developed what were regarded as the best reeling techniques available. The throwing mills attracted the interest of outside observers, most famously the Lombe brothers from Derby. The water powered mills built from the 1670s "housed from ten to twelve machines (each one eight to ten meters high) employing over three hundred full-time workers per mill."²⁶ The Lombes copied the mills and throwing machines they saw in Piedmont for their mill in Derby. They also brought some Italian workmen to Derby to help build and install machinery. The Lombes did not, however, try to transplant mulberry cultivation, cocoons or reeling to Britain.²⁷ It was these areas that British interests sought to develop overseas. Conversely, the British run schemes discussed in this chapter did not plan to build throwing mills. This would have resulted in competition with the new British throwing mills.

²⁴ Zanier, *Where the roads met*, pp.31-36; Roberto Davini, 'Bengali raw silk': 59-61.

²⁵ Poni and Mori, 'Italy in the Longue Duré', pp.155-156.

²⁶ Zanier, *Where the roads Met*, p.32.

²⁷ Calladine, 'Lombe's Mill': 82-99.

Raw or thrown silk was expensive. As well as being complicated to produce, there was also significant wastage in the processing of raw silk.²⁸ Of twenty four ounces of raw silk, four might be lost in winding, five in boiling, and two in manufacture. For sixteen ounces of thrown silk, four were lost by boiling, and two in manufacture. In 1765 the average price of raw silk was twenty seven shillings per pound and the average price of thrown silk, thirty two shillings per pound.²⁹ On the renewal of the patent on Lombe's throwing machine the silk weaver Daniel Booth reported that he paid twenty shillings a pound, the new technology having lowered the price by five shillings.³⁰ It is difficult to make direct comparisons with other textiles, partly because of the different types of yarn being used. No good price series for the purchase cost of yarns for manufactures exists. However, it is worth making some comparison with cotton printing, as this also used an imported raw material. Knick Harley records a price of cotton yarn at two and three quarter shillings per pound in 1768.³¹ Wadsworth and Mann have a lower price of eight to twelve pence per pound.³² During the calico crisis Parliament was told that foreign materials took up three fifths of a value of a piece of wrought silk, in contrast to domestic calico printing where imported cotton made up one sixth of the value.³³

Decline of the Levant trade and problems in London

In 1700 raw and thrown silk were 6.3% of total imports into England by value.³⁴ At the start of eighteenth century English silk weavers relied on two main supplies of raw silk. One was from northern Italy. Italian silk was considered to be best and strongest silk and used for the warp threads. Warp threads had to be strong as they were held under tension on the loom. Italian silk was either bought ready thrown and was known as 'organzine' or bought raw and thrown in England. A second source often called 'Turkey silk' or 'sherbasse silk' was from the Ottoman

²⁸ However, K.N. Chaudhuri pointed out that Europeans had mastered the process of making quality silk yarn much earlier than they did for cotton yarn. *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, p.343.

²⁹ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry' in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 30, (1765): 208.

³⁰ '11 February 1731' in *Journal of House of Commons*, (1732):795.

³¹ C. Knick Harley, 'Cotton Textile Prices and the Industrial Revolution'. *The Economic History Review*, 51, 1 (1998), Table 3, 55.

³² Alfred Wadsworth and Julia de Lacy Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), Appendix H, p.522.

³³ "The Humble Address of the Right Honourable ... May 1720" in *A Collection of Papers for and Against a Bill to Prohibit the Wear and Use of Dyed, Printed & Painted Calicoes in the Year 1720 & 1721 (GL.)*, f.9.

³⁴ Schumpeter, *English overseas trade statistics*, p.11.

Empire. It was actually from Persia and bought by European merchants in Aleppo or Smyrna.³⁵ Persian silk was considered to be of lower quality and was used for weft threads, which could be less strong. Smaller supplies from Bengal or China supplemented Italian and Persian raw silk, although these were thought to be of low quality.³⁶ Such was organzine's reputation that in 1788 an official at the Board of Customs, William Heathfield, reported that Bengali silk was being imported via Italy and relabelled as 'Italian silk'.³⁷

The supply of silk from Persia was the first to come under strain. The trade between Turkey and London was controlled by the Levant Company. Although they held a monopoly on routes back to London, in the Levant it was a competitive and sometimes difficult market to operate in. There were other European merchants buying raw silk as well as Ottoman merchants looking to supply the silk weaving centre of Bursa in Turkey. English merchants monitored their competitors closely and the likely effect that international events might have on prices. When the Company's headquarters in Aleppo received news that the French had captured a convoy of East India Company ships, they prepared for raw silk prices to rise.³⁸ Conversely, when a large supply of Chinese silk was reported they planned for Syrian merchants to lower their prices.³⁹ Not only fluctuating prices but variable quality was a challenge. In the 1700s and again in the 1720s the Company's officials in London complained about the quality of the silk and its price. These problems were compounded by the fact that the Company's buyers in the Levant bought silk bales in Aleppo or Smyrna a long way from the centres of production. The Court of Directors in London issued orders instructing buyers to carry out more thorough searches of the bales. The court reported that they had seen "many instances" of fake packets of raw silk.⁴⁰ All packets were to be opened and inspected by the factors in order "to make the Persian merchants sensible, of

³⁵ Attempts to open a direct route via the Persian Gulf had failed by the end of the 1600s. Willem Floor, 'The Dutch and the Persian Silk Trade' in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. C. P Melville, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996.), p.343.

³⁶ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', pp.122-125.

³⁷ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), Worshipful Company of Weavers, 'Court minute books', 1700-1825, CLC/L/WC/B/001/MS04655/018, ff.86b-87. [Hereafter: LMA MS04655/OXX.]

³⁸ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire square: English traders in the Levant in the eighteenth century*, Repr. of the 1967 ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), p.137.

³⁹ Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire square*, p.137.

⁴⁰ The National Archives (TNA) State Papers (SP) 105/332, f.115.

this evils that will attend the badness of their silk.”⁴¹ Buyers were not to purchase raw silk until it had been inspected by an official committee to determine its quality; the committee was to inspect new consignments of silk within five days of their arrival.⁴² Before its dispatch to London, the silk was to be sorted into three grades of quality and re-packaged so that “that at end of each bale, the true Quality of the silk may be seen”.⁴³

Despite these official procedures, silk quality remained a recurring problem. In 1727 the committee for inspecting silk in Symrna found it to be either “inferior” or “very ordinary”.⁴⁴ The Persian silk it inspected in 1729 was judged “very ordinary”.⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly the Court of Directors repeated its complaints and found the systems of grading quality was not being observed, “We have examined the musters of silk sent us from your place and find them of so ordinary a quality, that the first sorts ought to be deemed only as seconds the seconds for thirds and the thirds are so very bad, they ought not to be sent home under the denomination of sherbasse.”⁴⁶ There were also concerns that they were being obstructed from gaining access to the market. In 1735 Ottoman merchants refused to allow English factors to inspect their silk bales: they wanted buyers who would purchase both sherbasse and organzine silk. An agent reported:

“They said ye Sherbasse was bought purpossly for the English that if they did not buy it one year they would ye next but that if French & Dutch & Moors bought great quantities of ardasins [organzine] – beside ye vast consumption there was in ye Country and that further they were very apprehensive that should they permit ye English to visit in the same manner as the Sherbasses, & afterwards they should not buy it, it would very much deprseiate its value ... for which reason they could not comply with their desirs but whenever they plasi’d to visit Sherbasses they should be very welcome”.⁴⁷

At other times they were simply too slow in getting to new silk before it was sold off to rival buyers.⁴⁸ As a consequence of these obstructions, factors were told not to buy silk via “a Frank” as they traded at “advanced prices”.⁴⁹ On another

⁴¹ TNA SP 105/332, f.115.

⁴² TNA SP 105/332, f.131.

⁴³ TNA SP 105/332, f.131.

⁴⁴ TNA SP 105/335, ff. 225, 226, 233.

⁴⁵ TNA SP 105/335, 237.

⁴⁶ TNA SP 105/332, f.136.

⁴⁷ TNA SP 105/335, f.41.

⁴⁸ TNA SP 105/335, f. 98.

⁴⁹ TNA SP 105/333. f.8.

occasion, the Customs authorities also refused to release 36 bales of Cypriot silk, despite the duties having been paid, demanding more money. The British consul appealed directly to Constantinople for the release of the silk, but to no avail.⁵⁰ Against this background it was no surprise that English trade in Ottoman silk began to decline. Raw silk imports from the Levant halved between 1720 and 1756, whilst those from Italy and Asia increased.⁵¹ Ralph Davis argued that the expansion of Turkish silk manufacture in the mid-eighteenth century also served to push up raw silk prices in the region.⁵²

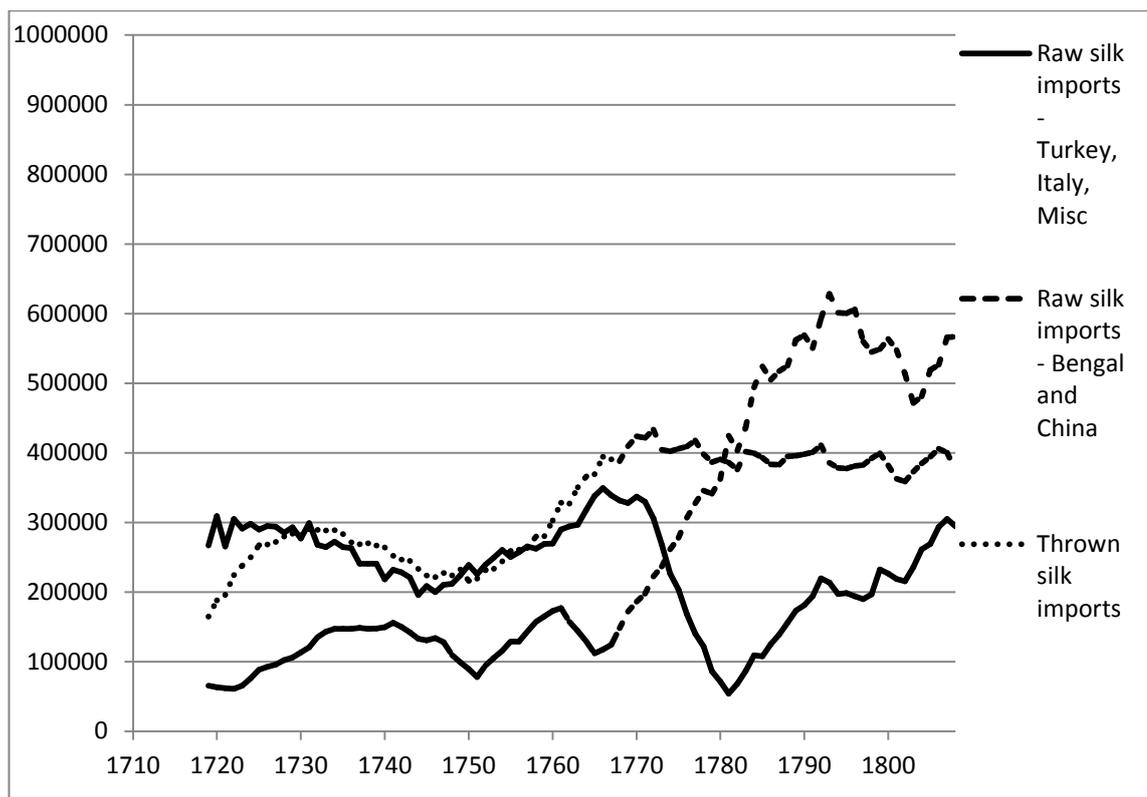


Figure 1. Raw and thrown silk imports – the Mediterranean and Asia Compared, 1710 to 1808 (lbs). Ten year moving averages. Figures from Schumpeter, *English overseas trade statistics*, Table XVI pp.52-55.

The Mediterranean was a regular theatre of naval warfare, and the blockading of ports and harassment of commercial shipping were common tactics. This made the London market vulnerable to scarcity and sudden price rises. It could also threaten

⁵⁰ TNA SP 105/335, f.74.

⁵¹ Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire square*, p.138. Imports to France fell less slowly however. Davis, 'English Imports from the Middle East' in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, (ed.) M.A. Cook, (Oxford: OUP, 1970.), pp.202-204.

⁵² Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire square*, p.139. See also Murat Çizakça, 'A Short History of the Bursa Silk Industry (1500-1900)'. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 23, 1 (1980): 142-152.

export successes on the Continent and in the Caribbean and Thirteen Colonies.⁵³ In 1750 Lewis Chauvet blamed a shortage of raw silk and the increased price on his decision to lay off a third of his workforce.⁵⁴ A shortage of organzine was reported in 1757, a year into the Seven Years' War. The Weavers' Company established a committee to lobby parliament, 'for admitting the bringing of Organized Silk only, over land or in neutral Bottoms'.⁵⁵ A shortage of Italian silk occurred again in 1778, after France's entry into the American Revolutionary War. The Weavers' Company received a letter from several silk merchants and manufacturers complaining of "the Scarcity of organzined Thrown Silk usually imported from Italy by Sea in times of peace".⁵⁶ Alternative solutions were sought. When the price of raw silk shot up in 1750 the Russia Company lobbied Parliament to be allowed to import Persian silk via an overland route, avoiding the Levant sea route. The Russia Company asked the Weavers' Company to support them with the petition, which argued that the British silk industry was at a disadvantage compared to its European rivals by not having access to this source. Both companies were successful in securing the Act they wanted.⁵⁷ Using Schumpeter's figures reproduced in figure 1, on average 259, 739 lbs of raw silk were imported from Italy, Turkey and elsewhere, and 238, 554 lbs of thrown silk mainly from Italy, into England per annum between 1710 and 1740. The alternative source then in existence was from Bengal and China, with average imports of 107, 186 lbs per annum. If the Asian sources were to replace Italy and Turkey, imports would have to more than double to meet the demand.⁵⁸

In 1740 year the silk interest also lobbied for an Act to reduce the duties on Chinese raw silk to the same level as those on Italian raw silk; it was passed in the same year. In 1757 Italian organzine was allowed to be imported; in 1765 duties were lowered again on all raw silk imports.⁵⁹ During the American war, silk

⁵³ Evidence of Lewis Chauvet and James Crockat 'Growth of Silk in America' in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 25, (1750): 996.

⁵⁴ 'Growth of Silk in America': 997.

⁵⁵ LMA MS04655/016, f.167b-168.

⁵⁶ LMA MS04655/017 (II), f.308.

⁵⁷ LMA MS04655/015, f 344; Raymond L. Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination: Parliament's Consistent Pattern of Mercantilist Regulation of the English Textile Trade, 1660-1800'. *Parliamentary History*, 19, 2 (2008): 226.

⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Schumpeter's figures lump Italy and Turkey together, and China and Bengal together, so it has not been possible to track the trends in raw silk within Europe or Asia.

⁵⁹ LMA MS04655/015, f. 340, f.349b. Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination': 226.

merchants wanted an Act of Parliament “in permitting the Importation [of organzine] thereof from any ports or places for a limited time”.⁶⁰ This demand was met by allowing thrown silk from central Europe into Britain at duties lower than those on Italian organize.⁶¹ Britain’s dependence on Italian and French silk was again debated during the Napoleonic Wars. At a meeting of the silk manufacturers at the Weavers’ Hall in 1808 it was resolved to lobby the EIC to improve the quality and quantity of Bengal silk that reached London.⁶² The silk trader J. Thorp argued for the duties on thrown and un-thrown silk from India to be levelled to encourage the East India Company to develop serious organzine production. This would shift the market towards a British controlled supply. India silk was also, he thought, cheaper due to lower labour costs.⁶³ These shortages often benefited the EIC in the short term. In 1788 the Directors reported that the failure of the last season of raw silk production in Italy had “very considerably enhanced” prices at their last two sales.⁶⁴ The Court of Directors was happy to agree to these calls for the increase in its market share. “Our wish, at every hazard, to rescue the body of British manufactures from a precious dependence on the capricious commercial policy of the enemy.”⁶⁵

North America

An obvious response to these problems was to have a source of raw silk that would allow the British greater control over quality and give more reliable access to the market. Plans initially focused on North America, before moving to Bengal after 1765. Projects designed for America were perhaps the most ambitious. Unlike India, America did not have a pre-existing sericulture, but conditions were thought to be favourable to establishing one. Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Georgia were all said to have the right soils and climate for growing mulberries and silk

⁶⁰ LMA MS04655/17 (II), f.308.

⁶¹ Sickinger, ‘Regulation or Ruination’: 226.

⁶² Appendix C No. 3. *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company, Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company in regard to the culture and manufacture of cotton-wool, raw silk and indigo in India* (London, 1836), India Office Records (IOR) V/27/630/1, pp.14-15.

⁶³ J. Thorp, ‘Considerations on the Present State of the Cotton and Silk Manufactories of Great Britain; and the Political Impropriety of Continuing to Draw ...’ (London: Lane, Darling and Co, 1807.) *The Making of the Modern World. Gale 2010*. Pp.17-19.

⁶⁴ Sinh, ed., *Fort William India House correspondence and other contemporary papers relating thereto. Vol.10, (Public series) 1786-88* (Delhi: Controller of Publications, Government of India, for the National Archives of India, 1972), p.353.

⁶⁵ Appendix D No. 1, *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, p.29.

worms.⁶⁶ Indeed plans to cultivate silk in North America pre-dated those of the early eighteenth century. At the founding of Jamestown in 1607 the colonists noticed that mulberry trees (red rather than white mulberries) grew naturally in Virginia. As James I was then encouraging sericulture in England, Virginians were keen to follow his lead and requested that silkworm eggs were sent out to them.⁶⁷ Houses were built to raise the worms in, and winding equipment introduced. There followed several schemes to produce silk on a large scale, without success, the last one ending in the early 1670s.⁶⁸

There does not seem to have been any connection in terms of materials or personnel between the seventeenth century experiments and eighteenth century ones. Whilst there had been some attempts to establish sericulture in South Carolina, the largest efforts concentrated on Georgia, the last of the thirteen colonies to be founded in 1732. The colony was the initiative of a group of philanthropic trustees, led by the soldier and MP James Oglethorpe. Strategically, it was intended to become a buffer zone between South Carolina and the Spanish in north Florida. But the trustees had more ambitious plans. Oglethorpe wanted Georgia to operate without slave labour and land was distributed in return for military service, on pseudo-feudalist lines. The trustees were to run the colony on a not-for-profit basis, handing it over to the Crown after twenty one years. The early settlers included debtors who had been released from prison, Protestant refugees from Salzburg, and Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. By hard work people would be able to improve their lives and start a fresh in the New World. Parliament supported it with a grant of £130, 000 and more money was raised from public subscription.⁶⁹

From the beginning it was planned that Georgia would grow silk and vines. These were very different crops from those grown in the Carolinas and Virginia, such as rice and tobacco. Partly this may have resulted from the desire not to use slave labour in Georgia: using new crops would guard against this. Some land was distributed to early settlers on the understanding that they would cultivate silk on

⁶⁶ TNA Colonial Office (CO) 5/5. ff. 102–122.

⁶⁷ Charles E. Hatch Jr., 'Mulberry Trees and Silkworms: Sericulture in Early Virginia'. *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 65, 1 (1957): 3–5.

⁶⁸ Hatch Jr., 'Mulberry Trees and Silkworms': 61.

⁶⁹ Richard R. Johnson, 'British North America, 1690-1748' in *The Oxford history of the British Empire. Vol. 2, The eighteenth century*, eds. Marshall and Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.282.

it. James Lacy, a London merchant, paid for 500 acres in 1732 on condition that he and four servants cleared 300 acres of wood land within 20 years and plant “1000 white mulberry trees per 100 acres of land so cleared.”⁷⁰ Land was also given to the London merchants Roger Lacy, Joseph Hetherington, Theophilus Hetherington and Philip Bishop on the same basis.⁷¹ When Georgia reverted to crown control in 1752 Parliament gave it an annual subsidy of around £3,980. From 1759 to 1772 £1000 a year of the grant was earmarked to support sericulture.⁷² The money was mainly to be spent on buying cocoons from the existing growers to encourage the expansion of mulberry plantations in the colony. Funds were also used to buy reeled silk “proportioning at the same time the prices to be paid for the cocoons, and for the silk, according to the value of them.”⁷³ South Carolina’s failure to establish sericulture had been blamed on the governors’ inability to provide financial incentives for those taking up silk culture.⁷⁴

The main source of the knowledge and technology of sericulture used in Georgia was from Italy, but it was also hoped that local knowledge and expertise would be quickly built up. Some people did learn without formal instruction from foreign experts. In Georgia, the secretary of the trustees recorded that two or three women had been “learning the art of reeling from some printed books” in the early 1740s.⁷⁵ The Irish clergyman Samuel Pullen wrote an instructional pamphlet for the use of silk cultivators in America.⁷⁶ However, the main impetus was experts and equipment from Italy. Georgia employed Italian silk winders to work and instruct in the filatures [a building for reeling raw silk]; in 1737 the colony paid £78 19s 11d to employ Italian silk winders.⁷⁷ Carolina had also looked abroad. The assembly at Charleston agreed to pay a Piedmontese expert and his wife £100 a year to teach the “manufacture of silk in all its branches” and to take on apprentices.⁷⁸ The filature established in Savannah was well equipped with Italian

⁷⁰ TNA C.O. 5/670, f. 56.

⁷¹ TNA C.O. 5/670, f. 56.

⁷² TNA Treasury Papers (T) 1/452, f.279; T 1/491/197-198.

⁷³ TNA T 1/348/128.

⁷⁴ TNA CO 5/363, ff. 195—203.

⁷⁵ TNA T 1/348/128.

⁷⁶ Samuel Pullein [sic], *The Culture of Silk, or, An Essay on its Rational Practice and Improvement For the use of the American colonies.* (London, 1758). *The Making Of The Modern World.* 18 Sept. 2012. Gale Document Number: U101084760.

⁷⁷ TNA CO 5/667, ff. 26d-34.

⁷⁸ TNA CO 5/640, ff.111-114.

machinery. The main focus of policy was to use the filatures as public sites of instruction in the techniques of reeling.

Furthermore, the filature would not only create technical knowledge but also interest in the whole enterprise - "hence it became the general attention of the inhabitants" - with Georgia's grant allowing it to provide a financial incentive to stick with silk.⁷⁹ Two more filatures were then built⁸⁰ and there were six reellers working in the filature in Savannah by 1752.⁸¹ Practical knowledge was being built up among the colonists. When "three coppers and a box full of glass utensils for winding of silk" were lost after being imported into Charleston the family that imported them were able to construct a winding machine to their own specification and this was operating in Georgia by 1739.⁸² The houses for breeding and hatching the silkworms also served a similar function in encouraging interest in sericulture. The hatching house in Savannah attracted people by its "regular disposition and manner of working drew many to see them who looked upon the whole as a matter worthy of admiration."⁸³ This included the Chickasaw Native Americans, allies of the British, who expressed interest in cultivating silk in their own territories around the lower-Mississippi valley.⁸⁴

As the importance placed on the hatching house indicates, the trustees of Georgia were concerned about worms and mulberries as well as machinery. This reflected their wider interest in cultivating new crops. The year the colony was founded a Dr Houston was employed by the trustees and on his journey from London was instructed to undertake a plant collecting trip in Madeira and the Caribbean in 1732. Houston was to gather information on vine growing and wine making in Portugal. In Jamaica he was to take cuttings and collect seeds of vines, cinnamon trees or "any other useful plants" and send them to South Carolina. He was then to go to the Spanish settlements at Puerto Bello, and Panama and collect "ipecacuana, jallap, contrayerva, sarsaparilla, and Jesuites bark ... the cochineel plant with the animals upon it." However, when it came to silk he was merely to brush up his knowledge of the cultivation of white mulberries, rather than to collect New World

⁷⁹ TNA T 1/348/128.

⁸⁰ TNA T 1/348/128.

⁸¹ TNA T 1/348/128.

⁸² TNA CO/5/640, ff. 281-282.

⁸³ TNA CO/5/640, f. 42.

⁸⁴ TNA CO/5/640, f. 42.

varieties.⁸⁵ Some initial experiments had involved using wild native mulberries, but growers soon turned to Italian or white mulberries. Governor Gabriel Johnston of Carolina recorded that he had switched from wild mulberries to Italian and had several hundred for feeding silk worms by 1737.⁸⁶ Worms were being reared in the following way: “They hatched in March when the mulberry trees had been about three weeks in leaf; they were kept in a house 24 foot long wherein were five tables of the full length and width of the house. These tables were wholly covered with the worms as was likewise the upper floor.”⁸⁷ The families involved in cultivating mulberries wanted mulberry seeds rather than wild plants. Existing plants did not survive re-planting well, whereas seeds “when removed into a tolerable soil seldom fails to thrive apace.”⁸⁸

Opinion in London was favourable to the American experiments. A Parliamentary Committee held on raw and thrown silk in 1750 weavers came forward to praise the new colonial product. John Batchelor had used raw silk from Carolina and Georgia, thrown in England, and thought favourably of it. Thomas Mason had used Georgia raw silk, and thought “That it worked as well as any Piedmont or Bolonia thrown silk; and that the same would have taken any Colour.”⁸⁹ Several other weavers had come to the same conclusion and found that it “made rather less waste.”⁹⁰ A variety of silks had been woven with the new raw material. Lewis Chauvet had woven black taffety and handkerchiefs, both in an Indian style, from Carolina raw silk; others had produced scarlet damask, flowered velvet and light-brown Velluret. Despite favourable duties⁹¹ not enough silk was being exported on a meaningful scale. The early efforts in Georgia produced small returns despite the investment in machinery and experts. Only 4lbs of fine silk was made in 1738.

This was blamed squarely on the lack of mulberry leaves to feed the worms.⁹² Worms grew faster than the mulberries to feed them. Weather also affected crops: an “unkind March” was blamed for killing off early mulberry leaves with frost,

⁸⁵ TNA CO 5/670. ff. 2,-3.

⁸⁶ TNA CO/5/363. ff. 195—203; TNA CO/5/295, ff.105–107.

⁸⁷ TNA CO/5/640, f. 42.

⁸⁸ TNA CO/5/640, ff. 281–282.

⁸⁹ ‘Growth of Silk in America’ in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 25, (1750): 997.

⁹⁰ ‘Growth of Silk in America’: 997.

⁹¹ In 1750 American raw silk was allowed to be imported duty free. Sickinger, ‘Regulation or Ruination’: 226.

⁹² TNA CO/5/640, ff. 281–282.

several years running. Vines also suffered from this early frost.⁹³ Hugh Anderson thought that the physical effort required to clear woodland combined with the heat and risk of disease was too much for British servants to make much head way.⁹⁴ By 1766, production was higher. 20, 000 cocoons were delivered to the filature. But in the previous year only 712 lb 8oz of silk had been reeled.⁹⁵ The weather was still being blamed as the major determinant of a successful season: "... an early spring and afterwards any cold or raw wet weather, the worms sicken and die by bushels, and consequently there will be a less quantity of cocoons raised and not so good quantity."⁹⁶

The Governor James Wright also blamed the cost of labour. The introduction of slaves, forced on the governors by landholders, meant that more money was to be made in running rice plantations; raising cocoons was now only pursued by the poorest white families. Labour in the filature was also expensive relative to other work done in the colony.⁹⁷ By the early 1770s the colony stopped receiving money from Britain for the payment of cocoon growers.⁹⁸ By contrast indigo cultivation, like raw silk geared for supplying European textile producers, did take off in South Carolina. Indigo was used as one of the main textile dyes by European manufacturers. From small beginnings in the early eighteenth century, indigo exported from South Carolina seized 25% of the export market to Britain between 1745 and 1755, and after this successfully competed with Spanish and French colony supplies.⁹⁹ Nash argues that Carolina indigo took off as it was able to utilise the slave labour system that had been established for rice production. Labour productivity gains made it cheaper, even if the quality of the indigo was lower than other sources.¹⁰⁰ The success of indigo in Carolina suggests a combination of environmental conditions and lack of workers held back raw silk in North America. Indigo was already a proven commodity on the continent, and there appears to have been little experimentation with planting techniques or concerns about the climate. It was also much simpler and cheaper to cultivate and process. Parts of the

⁹³ TNA C.O/5/640, ff. 111–114; ff. 317–320.

⁹⁴ TNA CO/5/640, ff. 287–290.

⁹⁵ 'Growth of Silk in America': 997.

⁹⁶ TNA T/1/452, f.120.

⁹⁷ TNA T/1/452, f.120.

⁹⁸ TNA T/1/491, ff.197-198.

⁹⁹ R. C. Nash, 'South Carolina Indigo, European Textiles, and the British Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century'. *The Economic History Review*, 63, 2 (2010): 363.

¹⁰⁰ Nash, 'South Carolina Indigo': 364.

sericulture process such as growing mulberries, feeding worms and harvesting cocoons were considered simple enough that women and children could carry out the tasks. Planters were reluctant to allocate more skilled work in reeling to anyone other than white males.

Bengal & Madras

The East India Company's trade in raw silk was modest until the mid-eighteenth century. Its brief attempts to buy in bulk from Persia had ended by the 1640s.¹⁰¹ In India, the Company had initially resisted expanding sericulture due to the perceived failure of the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC). The VOC had employed 700 to 800 Bengalis in raw silk production in the mid seventeenth century, but the final product was of uneven quality.¹⁰² Most of the EIC silk it traded came from Bengal, although some was bought from China via the Company's agents in Canton. The majority of the Bengali silk was so called 'country wound' or *Putney*. It was produced by independent Bengalis, although the Company had a small number of filatures. Bengali silk was reeled by soaking cocoons in a basin, shaking off the gum and then attaching the filaments to a simple reel, and winding off the silk. It was purchased on the open market or through Indian dealers. The 'country wound' silk was felt to be of poor quality, suitable only for "sewing-silks, buttons, and other small articles of haberdashery".¹⁰³ Its main fault was "inequality in the same skein [thread wound around a reel]" with different lengths and thicknesses on the same reel.¹⁰⁴

One obvious way of improving Bengali silk was to introduce new reeling techniques. Roberto Davini has detailed the transfer of Italian technology and practices to Bengal. The Italian machines used less cocoons than the Bengali method and produced finer thread.¹⁰⁵ However, another important part of these attempts to improve sericulture was to focus on the worms and mulberries. Some officials believed they could improve output by introducing worms that would produce cocoons more regularly or that produced a finer thread than Bengali worms. More nutritious species of mulberry trees could give better food for the

¹⁰¹ Floor, 'The Dutch and the Persian Silk Trade': 343.

¹⁰² Desmond, *The European discovery of the Indian flora*, p.207.

¹⁰³ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, iii.

¹⁰⁴ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, iv.

¹⁰⁵ Davini, 'Bengali raw silk': 60-61.

worms to feed on. Setting up sericulture in a new region such as the Coromondeal coast might even evade the problems in Bengal. These projects carried out by the East India Company were part of the debates that interested Salvatore Bertezen and Joseph Briganti. The greatest efforts to improve sericulture took place in 1780s and 1790s when the connections with botanical science were strongest. Indeed transfers of worms, plants and machines were important not just for physically relocating production, but to transmit new knowledge so that others could learn or be inspired by the projects.

One of the first attempts at improving the EIC's product was actually made with Chinese raw silk. In the 1730s and 1740s the Company wanted to obtain a better quality of raw silk in Canton. The aim was to provide a replacement for Italian raw silk in London. They would not be trying to compete with Persian silk, as this would interfere with the monopoly of the Levant Company. Indeed, one early batch of silk sent to London was criticised on the grounds that it could "only or chiefly be employ'd to answer the purposes of Sherbasse or Persian silk, and so far may be said to interfere with the Turkey Trade".¹⁰⁶ Consequently, the agents on the ground were told to buy the best quality raw silk and to trust a high price as an indicator of quality. The demand in London was for quality and this could work in the Company's favour, "the best will certainly sell here much more above the inferior sorts, than the difference in the cost in China, and promote a much greater Consumption thereof".¹⁰⁷ To assist them the buyers were sent several letters containing samples of raw silk to help inform their purchases. This was both to provide a guide to the kind of quality the Company wanted, but also to try and influence Chinese producers to make Italian style silk. In one letter three samples of Italian raw silk were attached. The first sample was a very fine thread made from four cocoons, which the writer believed could not be made in China. A second sample was made of five cocoons, another method that was believed not to be used in China. The third sample was two skeins of the five cocoon silk, "to show them the Italian way of reeling and making it up for sale, which is much preferable to their practice (especially in making less and softer gums), but very easy for them

¹⁰⁶ IOR/E/3/106, ff.53-54.

¹⁰⁷ IOR/E/3/102, f.56.

it imitate”.¹⁰⁸ Buyers were also given long descriptions of how Italian reeling worked:

“The Drawers therefore first throw a quantity of Cods [i.e. the cocoons] into a basen of water standing over a gentle fire, and then unite such a number of single threads as will make the size of the thread they want, after which they draw it on a reel, a person twisting the several threads together whilst the wheel is turning in the same manner we see the yarn drawn in a thread from the wool.”¹⁰⁹

The coarseness of the raw silk coming back, with both fine and rough silk on a skein, was a result either from “carelessness of drawers in not observing the number of cods of which they compare their thread be always the same, or from their covetousness in adding more threads than they ought, to make their work rid the faster.”¹¹⁰ Chinese merchants were supposed to improve the quality simply by looking at the samples and being told about new reeling techniques; they were not given new machines or experts. Indeed the agents in Canton were instructed only to show the sample to their Chinese counterparts “but not deliver it to them”.¹¹¹ Despite the samples, complaints about quality continued throughout the 1740s. Improvement through second hand information had not worked.

Grander plans for improvement were executed in India from the 1750s. Experts began to be sent out to Bengal to suggest changes to local sericulture. Richard Wilder arrived in Calcutta in 1757 and produced a report just before his death in 1761. He was followed by a merchant, Joseph Pouchon, in 1765. Pouchon had a filature constructed in Bengal and introduced new reels, which were cheap and easy to use. The silk produced by Pouchon was judged to be as good as Italian silk and he remained in the Company’s employment for some time. However, very little silk produced by his method was exported from Bengal.¹¹² Following the Company’s military successes in Bengal and Bihar, it was awarded the *diwani* – the right to collect tax revenue in those areas, and looked forward to a more stable and profitable future. The Court of Directors backed a plan to extend silk production across Bengal and encourage the *zamindars* (landholders) to grow mulberry plants. They also wanted producers of wrought silks to switch to raw silk. The

¹⁰⁸ IOR/E/3/102, f.56.

¹⁰⁹ IOR/E/3/106 ff.53-54.

¹¹⁰ IOR/E/3/106, ff. 53-54.

¹¹¹ IOR/E/3/108, f.29.

¹¹² *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, v-vi.

Court told its agents in Calcutta that raw silk was to be the main source “of bringing home their surplus revenue, the importation being a national benefit, and the consumption being far less limited than that of manufactured goods.”¹¹³

This justification in terms of national benefit continued for all subsequent schemes. There were inducements on offer to those who planted new mulberry plants. They would have rents reduced and silk winders would receive wage increases. The plan partly succeeded – exports rose – but there were still complaints about quality in London. The Company Directors remained keen to “displace a portion of the silks of Italy, Turkey, Spain” and London merchants advised them that if they could produce raw silk of the same quality as the Italians then they would be selling 500 bales rather 30 in London and “at an advance of twenty five to thirty per cent”.¹¹⁴ So, in 1769 Italian experts were recruited and sent out to Bengal to introduce the most advanced reeling techniques; they worked on this throughout the 1770s.¹¹⁵ Several new filatures were established along these lines. Importantly, it was suggested that the filatures should be built east of the Padma River (the main river of the Ganges) “for should Bengal be invaded by the Mahrattas or other native powers, it was not possible that the enemy could cross that great river.”¹¹⁶

For some officials importing machinery was not enough, all aspects of production would have to be changed. Under the direction of Lord Cornwallis, the new Governor General of Bengal in the 1780s, Chinese white silk worms and mulberries were introduced, as it was believed these gave better quality silk. The project in Bengal was designed to “exonerating Great Britain from part of the great drain of bullion sent annually to China for the Purchase of this very article [silk].”¹¹⁷ A previous scheme twelve years before had failed because the wrong species of tree had been brought over, which had then “degenerated” in Bengal.¹¹⁸ There had also been allegations of fraud against the officials running sericulture in Bengal, and

¹¹³ Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company, vi-vii; see also H. V. Bowen, *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics, 1757-1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.106-107.

¹¹⁴ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, ix-x.

¹¹⁵ Davini, ‘Bengali raw silk’: 57-79.

¹¹⁶ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, xvi.

¹¹⁷ IOR/P/3/54, f.118.

¹¹⁸ IOR/P/3/32 f.484.

profits had declined. It was felt a new direction was needed.¹¹⁹ The Company's men in Canton were asked to renew contact with Chinese cultivators and buy "some of the best plants and one or two native skills in the rearing of manufacture of this important article". Eggs and mulberry leaves were to be sent annually. They were told not to recruit Chinese experts, but instead to buy water colours and drawings "of the blossoms and fruit of such trees".¹²⁰

At first many of the Chinese worms were dying in transit before they reached Calcutta. The worms were "very small and weak, many dying before they could be removed from the paper" because of the "heat or damp" in the ships that took them to Bengal. Initially silk was not reeled from the first batch of cocoons but allowed to hatch and breed. Soon worms were being bred that were "much larger than the original ones and very strong and healthy".¹²¹ There were also teething problems with the trees. Not enough Chinese mulberries had reached Calcutta, so the new white worms were fed on both Chinese and Bengali mulberries, and the silk reeled from each compared. Those in charge of the experiments asked the Court of Directors to stick with Chinese mulberries as they believed that the leaves were "many times larger, thicker and more succulent" than Bengali ones.¹²² The first silk reeled from these experiments was sent to a silk broker in London who pronounced it "excellent and well reeled."¹²³

At the same time James Anderson, a doctor in the Company's employment in Madras, argued that it would be feasible to import silk worms from Bengal to the Coromandel Coast and set up entirely new silk cultivation there. This was an ambitious project. It had to be in Anderson's view, as the failure to establish sericulture in England had resulted from "parsimony and ignorance". No one at home had been prepared to plant mulberries on a large enough scale to have an adequate supply of food for the worms.¹²⁴ It would also avoid some of the problems in Bengal. Madras had a better climate "in the ratio of three to two, on account of the four months cold weather when the eggs cannot be hatched

¹¹⁹ Raghbir Singh, ed., *Fort William India House correspondence and other contemporary papers relating thereto. Vol.10, (Public series) 1786-88*, (Delhi: Controller of Publications, Government of India, for the National Archives of India, 1972), p.13, p.18.

¹²⁰ IOR/P/3/32, ff.488-489.

¹²¹ IOR/P/3/50, ff.263-264.

¹²² IOR/P/3/50, ff.264 -265.

¹²³ IOR/P/3/54, f.55.

¹²⁴ IOR/P/274/69, ff.1284-5.

there”.¹²⁵ The region of the Northern Circars looked particularly promising due to cheap labour and “distance from the seat of war”.¹²⁶ Anderson began by growing white mulberry trees in his own garden and building a filature for silk worms, which he had imported. After finding interested parties he then passed on cuttings and worms from his own supplies, or arranged the Company to send them from other sources.

Developing both at the same time was important because “it will be difficult to fix the attention of the people to the proper care of a plant, without likewise seeing the use to which it was applied.”¹²⁷ Instructions were drawn for the cultivation of waste ground into mulberry plantations and for the construction of filatures, copied from common practice in Bengal. Plantations were to be on high ground, to prevent flooding. It was thought that mulberries, like vines, would thrive on lighter, more gravelly soil.¹²⁸ Anderson planned to build sixteen mulberry plantations and houses for the worms.¹²⁹

There was plenty of scope for adaptation in these transfers. Indeed Anderson did not want to introduce the “Sardinian regime” to regulate sericulture as this “might serve here to terrify more than instruct the People here, nor do I think that the delicate texture of the Indians would require a six years apprenticeship as in Italy.”¹³⁰ Indians working in filatures were simply told the number of times the threads crossed each other on the machine.¹³¹ Some actual reeling machines from Bengal were distributed, although the technical experience of the officers in charge varied. Nathaniel Webb wanted reeling machines and instructions on how to use them suitable for a novice.¹³² But others were capable of building their own from plans. One of the men who was setting up a plantation asked Anderson for the “model of a reel” rather than an actual one.¹³³ A reel was also kept in the Secretary’s Office in Madras so that authorized visitors could view it.¹³⁴ Several Company officials made their own changes to the technology. Mr Molesworth’s

¹²⁵ IOR/P/274/59, ff.709-10.

¹²⁶ IOR/P/274/59, f.914.

¹²⁷ IOR/P/274/59, f.714.

¹²⁸ IOR/274/59, f.921.

¹²⁹ IOR/P/274/63, f. 902. A *pagoda* was the equivalent to eight shillings.

¹³⁰ IOR/P/274/59, f.881.

¹³¹ IOR/P/274/59, f.881.

¹³² IOR/P/274/60, ff.1350-1351.

¹³³ IOR/P/274/60, f.1363.

¹³⁴ IOR/ P/275/2, f.1865.

“improved structure of the Piedmontese Reel” suggested detailed alterations to the angle that the threads entered the hooks of the machines as well as to wheels and axel. It was sent to the Madras Revenue Board with recommendations that it be copied and distributed to the new plantations.¹³⁵ Anderson commented that, “Perhaps the Fears of disobeying his Sardinian majesty’s orders has hindered the Italians from seeing these defects in their Reel”.¹³⁶

The Italian reeling machines as used in Bengal were criticised because “no attention is paid to the proportions of the wheels of the reel us’d in our Factories, as appears by some drawings sent here by a tolerable artists.”¹³⁷ Further improvements to the reeling machine included attaching a nut to the handle of the reel, allowing one turn of the handle to produce three turns of the reel allowing more equal and easier turning. The difficulty of procuring brass lead to a change in the parts that facilitated double crossing of threads by turning brass wheels and frames into “a plain Ring, supported on Rollers in a grooved segment of a Circle”.¹³⁸ Elsewhere in the filature, Bengali nets that were used to the hold the worms during spinning were altered to give more equal space to the worms.¹³⁹ Anderson had experimented with using tepid water rather than boiling the cocoons. This he thought would save fuel and “avoid revolting the mind of Bramins and teachers of Transmigration” as the moths would not be killed in the process.¹⁴⁰

People, networks & knowledge

As these examples suggest, the Company’s own officials often showed great confidence in their understanding of sericulture. They did not feel the need of the Italian experts employed by the Company elsewhere. For some officials experiments in mulberries and worms were part of their own wider involvement with botanical science. The driver behind this interest was the hope of developing new cash crops in India. Robert Kyd was an officer in the Bengal Engineers when he established the first botanical garden in Calcutta in 1786. The garden had 4, 000 plants by 1790 and Kyd envisaged the garden primarily as a nursery for the

¹³⁵ IOR/P/274/59, f.690.

¹³⁶ IOR/P/274/59, f.692.

¹³⁷ IOR/P/274/59, f.881.

¹³⁸ IOR/P/274/67, ff.92-93.

¹³⁹ IOR/P/274/67, f.91.

¹⁴⁰ IOR/P/274/59, f.964.

development of new commercial plants.¹⁴¹ It was William Roxburgh, who took over the running of the botanical garden in Calcutta after Kyd's death, who had first suggested cultivating silk worms on Coromandel Coast. Roxburgh had studied botany and medicine at Edinburgh before becoming a surgeon with the Company. Prior to his appointment in Calcutta, he had run his own private garden where he planted 40, 000 pepper plants, as well as coffee, sugar cane and bread fruit.¹⁴² In the official botanical garden he grew coffee, tobacco, and hemp before sending out samples across India. James Anderson, who had studied medicine at Edinburgh University (as had many of the Company's doctors¹⁴³), eventually became surgeon-general in Madras.

There he had established his own private botanical garden in the city with its own superintendent.¹⁴⁴ In the 1770s, years before he launched his scheme in Madras, Anderson had planted 5, 000 white mulberries (*Morus alba*) and had developed his own reeling machine.¹⁴⁵ He also introduced apple trees, cotton, sugar cane and coffee to his garden, and attempted to produce cochineal, used to make fabric dyes. For their devisors the sericulture projects were also part of intellectual debates. James Anderson published the findings of his research in Madras.¹⁴⁶ A correspondent sent him a book by "an Italian in France, who lately obtained the prize for Silk in England" who presumably was Salvatore Bertezen.¹⁴⁷ Roxburgh corresponded with Sir Joseph Banks, and sent him a series of 500 botanical drawings. He was also in contact with the botanist Johann Koenig, a naturalist in the service of the Nawab of Arcot. Atkinson's letters on raw silk in Bengal contain instructions on other plant experiments, as well as those on silk worms. He told one correspondent that the Java indigo plant was better than the Bengali one although its introduction "may probably be equal to that of the China Mulberry Plant".¹⁴⁸ He thanked another of his correspondent for sending a 'Treatise on the Culture of the Coffee and Cinnamon plants' and already has some cinnamon

¹⁴¹ Ray Desmond, 'Kyd, Robert (1746–1793)'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15814>.

¹⁴² Desmond, 'Roxburgh, William (1751–1815)'. *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24233>.

¹⁴³ Desmond, *The European discovery of the Indian flora*, vi.

¹⁴⁴ Desmond, 'Anderson, James (1738–1809)'. *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/476>.

¹⁴⁵ Desmond, *The European discovery of the Indian flora*, pp.207-208.

¹⁴⁶ Desmond, 'Anderson, James (1738–1809)'.

¹⁴⁷ IOR/ P/274/67, f.97.

¹⁴⁸ IOR/P/3/50, f.267.

plants.¹⁴⁹ This scientific correspondence was important for establishing the legitimacy of the project. In his letters with the Board of Revenue Anderson refers to entries in the *Encyclopédie*, and had Sir William Jones, the Orientalist scholar and jurist, write letters in support of the scheme.¹⁵⁰ Of course, commercial authority was also important. Anderson sent a sample of silk to the London brokers who thought his silk better than Bengal silk.¹⁵¹

By gaining support from governing bodies, the sericulture projects could then use the bureaucratic connections within the East India Company. Indeed it was crucial to draw in as many people as possible, Anderson argued, because success depended on the “number and extent of the works” so that if one stock failed it could be replaced with worms and mulberries from other sources.¹⁵² At the core were the revenue collectors, but military officers, doctors and some clients of the Company all became involved. Anderson encouraged them to begin a garden, often in their own house, and then encourage more in local villages. Ultimately he hoped to establish central training of people in his technique of winding off silk then sent out to the other plantations.¹⁵³ The Madras Revenue Board helped Anderson by giving instructions to its revenue collectors “to allot ground, and to apply from him [Anderson] for cuttings for the Mulberry Plantations, as also to consult his opinion with respect to their culture and the care and increase of the Silk Worms”.¹⁵⁴ Soon there were mulberries in the gardens at the collector’s house in Viyagapatane and at the paymaster’s garden at Augole. Mr Leighton who was raising mulberries at Nellore, wrote answering for worms to be sent to him.¹⁵⁵ Captain Mackay sent a letter to Anderson detailing his 400 trees in his own garden at Arnee, and his plans to expand in ‘neighbouring villages’ and look after worms.¹⁵⁶ Anderson also acted as a talent spotter recommending those that claimed to have useful skills to be taken into regular employment by the Company. He asked for a Captain Towns “whose practical ability in adapting soils to the culture of various plants is inferior

¹⁴⁹ IOR/P/3/50, f.272.

¹⁵⁰ IOR/P/274/59, f.692; ff. 910-932.

¹⁵¹ IOR/P/274/63 ff. 952-954; IOR/P/274/66, ff. 2300-2302.

¹⁵² IOR/P/274/59, f. 689.

¹⁵³ IOR/P/274/59, f.931.

¹⁵⁴ IOR/P/274/59, f.719.

¹⁵⁵ IOR/P/274/59, f.713-714.

¹⁵⁶ IOR/P/274/59, f.712.

to none” to given a post in so he could establish a plantation.¹⁵⁷ Mr Corbet who had travelled to “some of the principal Silk Counties in Europe” should be allowed to take over care of watering and care of leaves if he was given “some slender appointment” in the Company.¹⁵⁸

The Company men were expected to use their positions to attract local labour to the schemes and employ them in clearing ground for mulberries, planting and tending trees, constructing filatures, looking after worms and reeling silk. However, it was hard graft rather than expertise that was wanted. Even in Bengal, which had a longstanding raw silk industry, locals were rarely consulted on sericulture practices. Looking back on the failure of a previous scheme in 1776, the agents in Canton warned that they had failed to get Chinese sericulture experts to travel to Bengal alongside the worms and mulberry cutting, “few of the natives can be induced to quit their country except Seafaring men ... those employed in the management of Teas and silks, and the manufacture of porcelain are inhabitants of very distant provinces entirely unknown to and unconnected with Europeans”.¹⁵⁹ No attempt was made to use Chinese experts in the schemes of the 1780s and 90s. Some officers were actively suspicious of the Indian workers they had to use. Atkinson used Bengali labourers to look after the worms, but would not let the worms or cocoons out of the house “so that they were still under my immediate inspection”.¹⁶⁰ He argued that Bengali *ryots* (peasants) were holding back innovation, “I have at all times observed the natives of Bengal, to be utterly averse to any innovation let its advantages be even so apparent Indolent and Superstitious they pursue the methods handed down from their forefathers never presuming to doubt their superiority”.¹⁶¹ Specifically, he blamed hereditary possession of land for their conservatism in cultivation. He suggested allowing Europeans to be able to cultivate waste land, and being “peopled” with landless people presently reduced to ‘theft and robbery’, they would be given the right tools, and no rent for two or three years. He wanted worm breeding done by servants rather than *ryots*. This would give work to women and children “and break the natives of some parts of their methods, equally unnecessary and

¹⁵⁷ IOR/P/274/59, f.916.

¹⁵⁸ IOR/ P/274/59, f.710, 727.

¹⁵⁹ IOR/P/3/32, f.479-480.

¹⁶⁰ IOR/P/3/50, f. 264.

¹⁶¹ IOR/P/3/50, f. 262.

hurtful".¹⁶² In Coromandel, some of those in Anderson's scheme wanted to use Lascars to plant mulberries, suggesting that they found it hard to recruit local cultivators.¹⁶³

Slow improvements in Bengal, failure in Madras

The sericulture experiments met with mixed success. As figure 1 shows, the Company did increase the amount of raw silk it exported to London. From 1770 to 1800, an average of 490,367 lbs of raw silk a year was taken to London. This was over four times as much as had been imported in the period 1710 to 1740. The Company's relative share of the market also improved: three or four times as much Asian raw silk was now imported, compared to raw silk coming from Italy and Turkey. However, if Italian and Turkish raw silk is combined with thrown silk (almost all from Italy), then the Mediterranean's performance as a region looks much better. Indeed, the Directors and committees of the EIC were dissatisfied with the performance of their raw silk. The company often failed to meet its own targets for silk production and export.¹⁶⁴ The comparison of imports by value in figure 2 suggests another reason why the Directors were unhappy. Asian raw silk was worth much less than Italian and Turkish raw silk. It was also worth less than thrown silk, a market the Company never properly broke into. Some throwing was undertaken for the Company in England, but not in Bengal, and was an opportunistic response to a shortage of Piedmontese organzine.¹⁶⁵

The low value of Asian raw silk suggests that Bengali silk continued to have a reputation for poor quality. The continuing strong performance of thrown silk imports, despite an expansion of domestic silk throwing, also points to the importance of quality for British weavers. Davini has shown that Italian reeling machines were not widely taken up in Bengal until the 1830s some sixty years after they had first been introduced. Whilst the EIC had the monopoly on raw silk exported to London (allowing for some private trade) it did not control production. Davini's analysis suggests that both merchants and peasants thwarted attempts to

¹⁶² IOR/P/3/50, f. 267-268.

¹⁶³ IOR/P/274/59, f. 801.

¹⁶⁴ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, xxii, xxxvi.

¹⁶⁵ E.g. in 1807 the Company had 40,620 lbs of raw silk thrown into organzine compared to the 346,144 lbs imported from Italy. See Appendix B 'Quantities of Raw Silk thrown into Organize on account of the East India Company, from 1794 to 1815 inclusive' in *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, p.7 & xxvi.

export more silk to Europe. Indian merchants could ‘game the system’ by selling, or threatening to sell, to other regions such as the Punjab. Despite attempts to bypass Indian traders or to regulate the quality of silk they could buy, the EIC found it could not do without them. What power the Company did have, came from “its financial capacity, which gave its servants the possibility of buying up the cocoon harvest by paying higher prices”.¹⁶⁶ Peasants too had alternatives. Cultivating silk was labour intensive, requiring the whole family, and was all year round. Alternative cash crops such as mango, were less labour intensive so were often more attractive. Falling population in Bengal put peasants in a strong bargaining position – flight from the land when faced with coercion was common. Cultivators were reluctant to hand over cocoons for use in the Company’s filatures, and continued to trade in country-wound silk which they could sell for more money than the cocoons. The Company suspected that the best cocoons were being held back for the country silk.¹⁶⁷

	1772	1782	1792	1802
Raw silk imports - Bengal and China	173885	55328	193421	68686
Raw silk imports - Turkey, Italy, Misc.	230020	122389	229517	211059
Thrown silk imports	523524	398022	524087	475453

Figure 2. Raw and thrown silk imports compared by value (£s), selected years. Figures from Schumpeter, *English overseas trade statistics*, Table XVI pp.52-55.

Just as reeling technology was not widely taken up, so too was the adoption of new silk worms and mulberries a drawn out affair. Bengali worms were also not widely replaced until the 1830s. It was with Italian worms and mulberries however, not Chinese ones.¹⁶⁸ The explanations given by Davini seem to hold here too, especially considering the complaints about peasants and evidences of labour shortage. Also important were environmental and institutional factors. Although James Anderson’s correspondence suggests a man full of energy and optimism there are signs of problems. Quite early on he feared that he did not have enough mulberry leaves to feed the worms that were now hatching.¹⁶⁹ Unexpected drought held up new plantations being laid out.¹⁷⁰ Others in the scheme also faced setbacks. James

¹⁶⁶ Davini, ‘Bengali Raw Silk’: 66.

¹⁶⁷ Davini, ‘Bengali Raw Silk’: 67-70.

¹⁶⁸ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, xxxix.

¹⁶⁹ IOR/ P/274/59, f.709.

¹⁷⁰ IOR/P/274/68, f. 673-674.

Frushard had been sent eggs but they hatched before they reached him. Landholders valued 'waste ground' quite highly and officials were finding it hard to get enough land released for the project, or labour to work it.¹⁷¹ In some senses the project was too experimental for its own good, and its networks too dispersed. After his disappointment, Frushard wrote to Anderson suggesting they try yet more types of silk worm: either the worms that were used in Persia or the 'annual worm' used in Bengal. What they needed was a worm that would hatch from its cocoon in the correct season, avoiding times of drought or "hot winds".¹⁷² J.R. Skardon disagreed with Anderson's information on the hatching of silk worms, claiming that he had observed the principal season for hatching to be in the winter months.¹⁷³

By 1795, the Revenue Board became sceptical of the scheme's chance of success: "The Board thinks that it necessary to observe that it is yet a matter of considerable doubt whether the climate or genius of the people upon the Coast is better adapted than in any other part of the world to the cultivation of silk."¹⁷⁴ Anderson's plans to use waste ground to grow mulberry trees on was considered unrealistic.¹⁷⁵ They began to refuse to pay allowance to those Anderson was recommending to them as growers of mulberries or worms.¹⁷⁶ Within a year the scheme was petering out. The Revenue Board in Madras withheld further funds until the Court of Directors was satisfied that progress had been made.¹⁷⁷ The Board of Trade wanted sample costs estimates sent to them. Whilst both projects had the initial backing of the respective local governments, it was much harder to receive the full attention of the Court of Directors in London. This was crucial to securing a financial commitment to the schemes. The final say on the quality of raw silk being produced also came from London.

Although the East India Company was consistent in its belief that sericulture could be improved and greater profits made, its many commitments meant that proper resources could not be devoted to this. In early 1781 investment in filatures sericulture had to be cut back due to military commitments. The Bengal

¹⁷¹ IOR/ P/275/4, 3171.

¹⁷² IOR/ P/275/4, 3184-3187.

¹⁷³ IOR/ P/274/60, f.1113.

¹⁷⁴ IOR/ P/275/4, f.3175.

¹⁷⁵ IOR, P/275/4, f.172.

¹⁷⁶ IOR/ P/275/4, f. 3176.

¹⁷⁷ IOR/P/274/60, ff. 1657-1658.

Government was forced to open up the silk trade to private merchants on a temporary basis until 1785.¹⁷⁸ Five years later in Calcutta, Robert Kyd found attracting the interest of London was difficult. He had sent them a specimen of silk reeled from the new Chinese worms. They, in turn, had passed it onto a silk broker for comment. In Kyd's opinion, if his raw silk could be made from six to eight cocoons it would be fine enough to replace 'real' Chinese Silk in Europe.¹⁷⁹ However, the Court of Directors had said that "... that it may [be] seen how much it is worth the Culture" and had wanted more information. Kyd wrote not happy at the procrastination, "I am utterly at a loss to comprehend the Nature of the 'specific propositions' required of me". He protested that previous samples had already "been pronounced equal to every purposes required".¹⁸⁰ The Governor-General was also not concentrating on sericulture as he resented someone else's project being fostered onto him.¹⁸¹

Conclusions

Fernand Braudel thought that the geography of textile raw materials could be understood as a dynamic of mobility and immobility. There were some 'static zones' where one type of fibre was constantly produced. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the centres of flax, hemp and raw wool production hardly changed; it would be later in the 1800s that "[w]ool found its promised land in Australia".¹⁸² Silk and cotton were on the move though. From long standing homes in India, the Middle East and China new supplies of cotton appeared in Brazil; in Barbados where Sea Island cotton was produced from 1650s; and in South Carolina and Georgia in 1780s. Silk continued its long journey westwards through Sicily, then Piedmont, finally stopping in Savoy.¹⁸³ Braudel also argued that raw materials had a strong effect on other textile processes, regularly producing crises when yarn and weaving manufacturers faced moments of scarcity. Developing a similar insight, David Washbrook has argued that long distances between raw materials and manufacturers could have positive effects. The high costs of cotton

¹⁷⁸ *Reports and documents connected with the proceedings of the East-India Company*, xix-xx.

¹⁷⁹ IOR/P/3/54, f.55.

¹⁸⁰ IOR/P/3/54, ff. 117-118.

¹⁸¹ IOR/ P/3/54, ff. 56-57.

¹⁸² Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: the Limits of the Possible*. trans. Sian Reynolds (London: Collins, 1981. Originally published as *Les Structures du quotidien: le possible et l'impossible*, 1979), pp.325-326.

¹⁸³ Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, p.326.

yarn for British manufacturers in the first half of the eighteenth century, for example, led them to look for productivity gains through improved machinery in spinning and weaving.¹⁸⁴ For Patrick O'Brien, the success of Lancashire cottons was dependent upon Britain's sea power and mercantile system. These gave the cotton industry crucial access to 'cheap natural resources and quasi-coerced markets'.¹⁸⁵

The evidence in this chapter suggests that this is a partial view of the relationship between raw materials, manufacturing and policy. The silk industry in England did not develop in the same way as cotton did, despite a similar distance from the source of raw material. The Lombe's throwing mill did improve the production of silk yarn, but was mainly based on Italian designs.¹⁸⁶ Imports of Italian thrown silk remained healthy, even after Derby had established itself as a centre of thrown silk; Spitalfields continued to regard Piedmontese yarn as the best quality. Instead, as this chapter has shown, great effort went into establishing new or improved sources of raw silk that British commerce would have more secure access to. Certainly, there were similarities between the sericulture experiments in America and India, even though there were no direct links between the two. However, the schemes in South Carolina and Georgia were failures. Mulberries and silk worms did not take well to local conditions. White farmers were reluctant to divert their own labour and that of their slaves to a difficult process, when simpler cash crops were available. In contrast to the American schemes, East India Company officials were more confident in suggesting changes to machinery or practices of cultivation. These men, like Joseph Banks, had wide scientific interests and significant resources to draw on. However, James Anderson's scheme launched from Madras also failed, the Directors pulling their financial backing fairly quickly. The signs were already there of environmental problems and a failure to redirect labour to the plantations. Bengal had mixed success. The EIC did increase its share of the London raw silk market. Sericulture was already established in Bengal: local conditions were not a problem and there was an experienced workforce. What the Company could not do was to convince Bengali cultivators to adopt Italian

¹⁸⁴ David Washbrook, 'From Comparative Sociology to Global History: Britain and India in the Pre-History of Modernity'. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 40, 1 (1997): 420.

¹⁸⁵ O'Brien, 'The geopolitics of a global industry' in Riello & Prasannan eds., *The spinning world*, pp.352-364.

¹⁸⁶ R.B. Prosser and Susan Christian, 'Lombe, Sir Thomas (1685-1739)'. *ODNB*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16956>.

practices. Neither could it enforce a monopoly on internal silk production and trade.

As other historians have emphasised there was considerable overlap between imperial, commercial and scientific connections. Pre-existing material networks had a strong effect on how the forms the schemes took and how they played out.¹⁸⁷ London acted as a loose coordinating centre of all these activities. All the organisers of sericulture projects hoped to produce for the London market, some justifying their ambition in mercantilist terms. Those working in the silk industry had lobbied for new sources of raw silk and offered advice and support. This consultancy role fostered on all the schemes the idea that producing quality silk was important. London was also the source of finance for all the projects, either via the Treasury or the East India Company. Many of the ideas and technology used in Georgia or Madras were also circulating in the Society for Arts and in London print shops. However, people and resources outside the 'British world' were crucial to the implantation of new sericulture projects, whether Italian experts or Chinese worms. The projects used global rather than simply colonial knowledge and technology. Within India, Calcutta acted as a hub for bringing in worms from East Asia and sending materials on to Madras. Officials on the ground made their own changes to reeling machinery – their familiarity with cutting edge of Italian sericulture gave them the confidence to make their own changes to it.¹⁸⁸ Overall, changes in the geography of raw silk production did not always work in London's favour, despite growing British power in this period. In contrast to the period after 1850, regions that produced raw or thrown silk did not become dependent upon manufacturing in Britain. Indeed, in the Ottoman Empire and in Bengal there is good evidence that British traders were excluded from the best quality supplies of raw silk. In contrast to a picture of a world economy shifting towards the North Atlantic or a British empire consolidating around India, in raw and thrown silk markets the Mediterranean remained the leading centre. Whilst British contact

¹⁸⁷ As argued by Drayton for the eighteenth century generally, 'Maritime networks and the making of knowledge' in *Empire, the sea and global history: Britain's maritime world, c. 1760-c. 1840*, ed. David Cannadine (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 72–82.

¹⁸⁸ Kumar finds a similar mix of European, Asian, colonial and non-colonial knowledge in the Company's indigo plantations around the same time. Prakash Kumar, 'Planters and Naturalists: Transnational Knowledge on Colonial Indigo Plantations in South Asia'. *Modern Asian Studies*, 2013: 1–34.

with the Levant trade declined, Italy continued to supply London silk weavers and to be an external source of disruption.

Chapter 2: Silk and migrations

In December 1751 James Briseau, a Huguenot weaver, was accused of murdering Daniel Cuttin, a watchman, in Wheeler Street, Spitalfields. Briseau had only escaped persecution in France the year before, but once in London found himself ostracised for a second time. A group of journeymen had marked him out as an illegal weaver and had brought a prosecution against him. Clearly fearing for his safety, perhaps alone and paranoid, he fled to Ireland. After a while Briseau returned to London. If he expected his problems to be over he was wrong. A crowd had got wind of his return, and broke into his room with Cuttin at its head. Cornered and desperate Briseau struck out at Cuttin, stabbing him twice “with a Hanger [a type of sword]”. Briseau was over powered by the crowd and taken to Newgate Prison.¹ Reading the accounts of this event the insecurity of a recent refugee comes across powerfully. There is considerable discrepancy between newspaper reports and the journeymen’s beliefs about Briseau on the one hand, and the facts of his life on the other. The Weavers’ Company was concerned enough to ask for corrections to be reprinted, and it turned out that Briseau was not weaving unlawfully at all. The Company had admitted him as a freeman the previous year, noting that he had been “bred into” the trade in his native country.² He had even married a local woman. What is also striking is the transitory nature of Briseau’s world, the speed at which he moved when under pressure. He did not escape to another English town but to another country. And then came back again in a remarkably short time.

Briseau’s movements were responses to extreme situations. Compared to other Huguenots he seems to have been unusually isolated in London; indeed he might well have expected more support from them. But the paths he followed from Northern France to London, from London to Dublin, were well established by others. Indeed, his movements could be said to have been determined by such networks. It was not just French protestant weavers travelling along these routes either. Irish weavers, particularly from Dublin, were moving in and out of London. Like the French, they were mainly moving for ‘push’ reasons, in their case because

¹ *General Evening Post*, December 17 1751, All newspapers were accessed through the Gale Burney Collection

<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn/dispatchBasicSearch.do?prodId=BBN&userGroupName=birkb>.

² LMA MS04655/016, f.38b; *General Evening Post*, December 21 1751.

of lack of work. Both groups followed families and friends. There was no inducement at the other end, but no attempts at prevention either. Once there they both found institutions willing to help them: the churches and the Dublin and London guilds. Both guilds, keen to display their protestantism on occasion, were accommodating hosts.

If anyone knows anything about the silk industry in London it is of the role played by Huguenot refugees in establishing the industry. Whilst it is a myth that they introduced silk weaving to London, their presence was clearly important both in the silk industry and in Spitalfields. What has been less well understood are the histories of other immigrants to the silk industry and the emigration of English silk workers. The narrative around the Huguenots is one of fleeing persecution and contributing to the new host country. A study of other migrations would reveal not just different directions of travel, but different reasons for moving and different outcomes. A few silk weavers had as dramatic stories as James Briseau, but most moved for more banal reasons, such as to find work in times of unemployment. Some followed similar routes to Briseau, moving between northern European ports, London and Dublin. Others ended up much further away in the Caribbean or India. However, the speed with which all these people moved, once they decided they had to go is very similar to the Briseau case. Migration was considered normal and there were few formal restrictions to stop it; a silk weavers' 'career path' was flexible enough to allow them to leave the industry for several years.

The aim of this chapter is to map these different migration routes that silks weavers took in or out of London. Then it looks at reasons why people moved, whether that was to escape persecution, to find employment, or because of domestic pressures. How they moved was also important too. For French and Irish weavers, family and kinship formed an important network facilitating migration. The role of institutions, especially the Weavers' Company, the East India Company, and the British state in providing employment or allowing weavers to leave or to settle was central for many. Finally, the chapter links the movement of weavers with the movement of silk itself. The chronology of these migrations is linked with fluctuations in the silk trade, which created unemployment and therefore the 'push' factor in making many weavers leave London. These migrations of weavers are compared with the movement of tools and silk designs, which suggests that

regulation of the textile industries allowed free movement of labour whilst restricting the movement of goods and technology.

Migration in the eighteenth century

The focus of this thesis is on a thing - silk - in order to analysis the connections between London and other parts of the world in the eighteenth century. This has been in line with recent work in global history which has seen the flow of commodities as a driver of proto-globalisation. Of course, studies based on such an approach are intended to illustrate human history; they are not actually interested solely in, say, techniques of glazing porcelain. But what often does seem to have been missed is the circulation of people in this period, and its links with the circulation of commodities. There is one great exception here which is the work on slavery. This does see a very strong connection between commodities and people, the 'sugar and slaves' approach.³ Otherwise most of the studies of migration are heavily focused on the peopling of the American colonies. Here the movement is largely one way - Old World to New World - and not directly linked to consumer goods.⁴ Indeed the relationship between land and migration is seen as more important. Kenneth Pomeranz has argued that the ability of Western European states to export their surplus populations to the New World was a key part of explaining their breakaway from East and South Asia c. 1800, as it removed population pressure on land.⁵ Similarly, James Belich sees population movements as almost the sole driver to explaining what he calls the 'Anglo-Divergence' between the English-speaking countries and the rest of the world over the long nineteenth century. But he focuses on permanent settlement rather than mobility, and like Pomeranz emphasizes the export of surplus populations and role of newly settled lands as new sources of food production.⁶

The lack of focus is somewhat 'over-determined'. Firstly, because the migration to the Americas has been treated as of world historical importance, it has shifted

³ E.g. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and power: the place of sugar in modern history* (New York: Viking, 1985).

⁴ Alison Games, 'Migration' in *The British Atlantic world, 1500-1800*, eds. David Armitage and Michael J Braddick, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.33-52; Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the west: emigration from Britain to America on the eve of the Revolution* (London: Tauris, 1987).

⁵ Pomeranz, *The great divergence*, p.13.

⁶ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: the settler revolution and the rise of the angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.4-9, pp.556-557.

attention away from other circulations. Secondly, movements of Europeans to East and South Asia were small in number and confined to specialised groups – mainly merchants and East India Company Officials. There were movements of Asians back to Western Europe, most famously ‘lascar’ sailors, but also servants and intellectuals.⁷ Thirdly, this period is seen as the beginning of an international division of labour, taking the New World slave plantation as being paradigmatic. Producers and consumers have been treated as geographically separate, even static: it is the commodities that are seen as moving, linking people together.⁸

In fact, workers in luxury trades were highly mobile. Although silk weavers did not travel as far as silk, they moved far more easily, with very little restriction on their movement. It has been well established now that European artisans did move between countries and that this was important for developing skilled workforces in key sectors. In particular, European states welcomed ‘windfalls’ of refugee artisans carrying with them new skills or technology. In the 1680s calico printing was spread by Huguenots to Berlin, Bremen, Frankfurt, Lausanne and Geneva.⁹ A few cities, such as Leiden, also encouraged long distance migration in order to recruit workers for their new textile workshops.¹⁰ Even a famously strong guild like the *Grand Fabrique* in Lyon encouraged innovation in the silk industry by welcoming outside influences. Hilaire-Pérez has presented artisanal skill in the French silk industry as an ‘open technique’ able to incorporate innovation from migrants and scientists, under the protection of institutions¹¹ However, there is not much work placing it within wider developments. Berg has suggested that state competition and warfare could be one way of connecting up the histories of

⁷ Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to colonialism: Indian travellers and settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, (Delhi: Permanent Black; Distributed by Orient Longman, 2006).

⁸ Richard Drayton, “The Collaboration of Labour: Slaves, Empires, and Globalizations in the Atlantic World, c. 1600-1850” in *Globalization in World History*, pp.98-114. The exception is the work on sailors as a mobile and cosmopolitan workforce e.g. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁹ Lemire, ‘Fashioning Cottons’ in *The Cambridge History of Western Textile Vol 1*, ed. Jenkins, p.504.

¹⁰ Roberta Marx Delson, ‘How Will We Get Our Workers? Ethnicity and Migration of Global Textile Workers’ in *The Ashgate companion to the history of textile workers, 1650-2000*, eds. Lex Heerma van Voss et al. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), p.652.

¹¹ Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, ‘Technology as a Public Culture in the Eighteenth Century: The Artisans’ Legacy’. *History of Science*, 45 (2007), 135–153; *idem*, ‘Inventing in a World of Guilds’ in *Guilds, innovation and the European economy*, eds. Epstein and Prak, pp.232-263.

different industries. Warfare created a market for military knowledge and forced minority groups to leave and seek work elsewhere.¹²

Both Pomeranz and Belich argue that it was in the nineteenth century that migration became a force in world history. But this downplays the extent of migration in the early modern period. Indeed, Jan Lucassen argues that a preceding regime of free movement of labour was necessary for the rise of mass migration in the nineteenth century.¹³ Migration in the second half of the nineteenth century was vastly bigger than anything that had gone before – an estimated 100 million Europeans migrated, for example. But the numbers moving in the eighteenth century were still significant – about 20 million Europeans 1700-1750 and 26 million 1750-1800.¹⁴ Adjusted for population size, migration rates over the two centuries are closer together: 17.6% 1700-1750, 17.3% 1751-1800, 22.7% 1800-1850 and 30.8% 1851-1900.¹⁵ To be more geographically specific, migration to British America and the Caribbean increased over the eighteenth century: 69, 000 Europeans and 304, 000 Africans between 1701 and 1725; 137, 500 Europeans and 438, 900 Africans between 1726 and 1750; 227, 600 Europeans and 752, 850 Africans and 1751 and 1775; 252, 300 Europeans and 588, 300 Africans between 1776 and 1800.¹⁶ Bailyn's study of British emigration to the thirteen colonies found that most were from south-east of England, and 76% came from a craft background.¹⁷ The significant change in the nineteenth century was in the types of migration taking place. It was big increases in emigration out of Europe and in migration to cities that caused the leap in the nineteenth century.

By contrast, in the early modern period the largest type of migration was of soldiers and sailors.¹⁸ London itself was a centre of early modern migration. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century a large proportion of London's population was made up of medium and long distance migrants from within the British Isles. They were adolescents or in their early 20s, the majority were female,

¹² Maxine Berg, 'The Genesis of "Useful Knowledge"'. *History of Science*, 45 (2007): 128-130.

¹³ Jan Lucassen, *Migrant labour in Europe, 1600-1900: the drift to the North Sea* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p.128.

¹⁴ See Table 9.2, Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, 'The mobility transition in Europe revisited, 1500 - 1900', IISH Research Papers (Amsterdam: IISH, 2010), <http://www.iisg.nl/publications/respap46.pdf>: 105.

¹⁵ Table 9.2, Lucassen and Lucassen, 'The mobility transition in Europe revisited': 105.

¹⁶ Table 2.1 Games, 'Migration', p.43.

¹⁷ Bailyn, *Voyagers to the west*.

¹⁸ Table 9.2, Lucassen and Lucassen, 'The mobility transition in Europe revisited': 105.

and most were coming to work in domestic service or casual labouring. A smaller but significant group of young males were coming to take up apprenticeships. For both groups London wages were higher than in the rest of the country, and a temporary residence in the city rather than a permanent relocation was normal.¹⁹ The city, thanks to the position of its port within European and Atlantic trade routes, also had more cosmopolitan immigrants, with many Irish and northern Europeans as well as Americans and Africans. Peter Earle suggests there were 20,000 sailors in London living in east or south London, over 25% of whom had been born outside of England and Wales.²⁰

Silk weavers were absolutely part of these movements. Several different 'circuits' can be identified. One, that James Briseau was representative of, involved movements from northern France and Dublin into London. A second, saw weavers move out of London to Glasgow and Copenhagen. In a third, weavers went to the Americas, the Caribbean and India. Unsurprisingly, the majority of weavers moved for money, having found themselves either unemployed or were being offered higher wages. Moving to maximise income is, of course, a central driver of labour migration.²¹ However there were other factors: Huguenots also moved to escape persecution, some people left to escape the pressures of families and masters, those who were found guilty of crimes were transported. In circuits one and two, these movements were made possible by networks of family and kin, as well as commercial connections. Circuit three was made possible by the British state and the East India Company, as weavers became recruits in the army or navy or were transported.

Underlying these movements were the fluctuations of the silk industry and London's economy. Leonard Schwarz has argued that the capital's trades were affected by a combination of business cycles, seasonal fluctuations and population growth. For the silk industry, like other luxury trades, 'seasonality' meant 'the Season' of fashionable society, lasting from Christmas to June. The arrival of summer saw the drying up of demand. As this was a regular cycle a master weaver could always plan ahead, and journeymen knew that they could be laid off. The real

¹⁹ Peter Earle, *A city full of people: men and women of London, 1650 - 1750* (London: Methuen, 1994), pp. 40-51; E.A. Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750'. *Past & Present*, 37, 1 (1967): 44-70.

²⁰ Earle, *A city full of people*, pp.74-75.

²¹ Lucassen, *Migrant labour in Europe*, p.5.

problem was external shocks that could not be anticipated, often caused by outbreak of war or financial crisis, or a conjuncture of both. At least three times in the eighteenth century a major financial crisis combined with the outbreak of war: at the beginning of the War of Austrian Succession in 1739-40, in 1778 when France entered the American Revolutionary War, and in 1793 with the beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars.²² Conversely, recovery could be quick and there were several war-time booms. Wars were unpredictable and could not be factored in to any business strategy. Moreover, exactly what the effects of war would be were unpredictable – especially how much disruption to trade there would be, which foreign ports would remain open – as this depended on who coalition partners would be and the balance of naval power.

The silk industry was particularly vulnerable to disruption to trade. All the raw silk used was imported by ship. This supply was vulnerable at several stages from the point of cultivation to its arrival in the Port of London. Sericulture is ecologically sensitive; both silk worms and mulberry trees are vulnerable to diseases that can wipe out a seasons' crop. Several of the ports supplying raw silk, Genoa and Constantinople being the main two, were outside British political and military control. Internal upheavals could shut down trade, or the ports could be blockaded by enemy fleets. Ships could be attacked by hostile navies: an estimated 3, 238 British ships were captured during the War of the Austrian Succession.²³ The navy organised convoys to protect merchant shipping from attack, but these could take up to a year to put together. When a convoy did arrive it could release a large quantity of a commodity onto the market. Rapid shifts from scarcity to abundance could cause large price movements.²⁴ Although there is no reliable data for the value of output, productivity and wages for either the industry as a whole, or individual businesses, we do have data for the silk trade (see Figure 1, Chapter 1.)

In-Migration

Families & friends

The main wave of Huguenots arrived in England between the late 1670s and 1680s, although smaller numbers had been arriving throughout the seventeenth century. England received around 40-50,000, the second highest number after the

²² Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation*, pp.105-106, p.76, p.92.

²³ M. Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748* (London: Longman, 1995), p.190.

²⁴ Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession*, p.191.

Dutch Republic. A further 10, 000 went to Ireland.²⁵ Precise numbers of Huguenot settlement in East London are unclear, however there were 900 officially registered aliens working in the London silk industry from 1610 to 1694. 252 were masters and 437 were journeymen.²⁶ As that breakdown suggests there was a bias toward richer and more successful artisans, reflecting the social composition of the Huguenot refugees generally.²⁷ By the mid-eighteenth century the master weavers were concentrated within a few streets in Spitalfields, first generation Huguenots living next door to each other.²⁸ In Dublin, the settlement of Huguenots and the arrival the silk industry was more circumstantial. Most of those who took up weaving had originally come to the city as part of William III's army, having been recruited in the Netherlands. Demobbed after the victory over James II, they stayed and picked up the trade. As with London this was a pre-existing trade that they helped expand.²⁹

It is a commonplace of migration studies that people tend to move to where friends or families have already settled. By the final wave of Huguenot refugees in the 1740s and 1750s there was already well established communities to go to in London and Dublin. Lewis Gasquet fled from Nimes in 1752 "to avoid the Prosecution" there and followed a similar path to Huguenot refugees in the 1680s. After going to Lausanne he ended up in Holland. There he decided to go Dublin and "took the oaths and made the Declaration appointed by the Statute of King William for Encouraging French Protestants to settle in Ireland". He later came to London and became a freeman of the Weavers' Company.³⁰ The time between these movements was relatively short: people felt they had to leave quickly. There was no process of chain migration whereby those who had already settled sponsored family members to join them.³¹ Neither is there evidence that Huguenots from the last wave had an active role in bringing a new generation across the Channel. The knowledge that there was an established community in London, in an officially protestant country, easily reachable by sea was enough to draw people to London. However, there is some evidence of links between Huguenot communities in

²⁵ See Map 1 'Destinations of refugees from Louis XIV's France' in Gwynn, *Huguenot heritage*, p.31.

²⁶ Luu, *Immigrants and the industries of London*, p.196.

²⁷ Gwynn, *Huguenot heritage*, p.34.

²⁸ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66', p.66.

²⁹ Kathleen Breathnach, 'The Last of the Dublin Silk Weavers'. *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1990): 134.

³⁰ LMA MS04655/016, f.301b.

³¹ Luu, *Immigrants and the industries of London, 1500-1700*, p.33.

London and France that were maintained even during periods without significant migration. Peter Merche was brought up by French parents and became a journeymen weaver in Spitalfields, although not a successful one. When work was scarce he went to France “to visit his Relations, and to seek for better Business; but met with nothing but Disappointments, and was oblig'd to return as poor and miserable as he went”.³²

Rothstein's research showed most of the wave of the 1740s-1750s came from Pays de Caux, the region in Normandy containing Dieppe and Le Havre.³³ As with their predecessors many French born weavers established themselves fairly quickly in the trade. John Caron was still serving his apprenticeship in Normandy in 1748, but four years later was being admitted to the freedom of the Weavers' Company in London. Caron would have found it easier to move to London as he came over at the same time as several friends and family members. When he applied at the Company's Court for his freedom, initially he was challenged by another weaver who claimed Caron had been a farmer in Normandy. If this had been true he would have been prevented from being admitted. However, Caron was able to produce three witnesses, all weavers now living in London who had known him during his apprenticeship. One was a relative of his father.³⁴ John Meff had been born in London to Huguenot parents, who had left France after the Revocation of Edict of Nantes. He had been apprenticed to a weaver, but as a journeyman had found the trade was not “a Maintenance for himself, and his first Wife and Children”. So he left them for Amsterdam, where his father was now living. He remarried and his second wife had wanted him to move to Ireland where it was hoped that he could “lead a regular and sober Life”.³⁵

Irish migration followed similar patterns.³⁶ In 1751, Andrew Fleming an engine weaver, asked to be admitted to the freedom the Weavers' Company. He had been apprenticed to his father in Dublin, and then had worked there for eight years, coming to London in 1750. His brother Thomas Fleming, who had been working in

³² *Old Bailey Proceedings Online (OBP)*, (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 20/02/2010), *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* (OA), 9 July 1734, OA17340709; OBP, 24 April 1734, Trial of Peter Merche, t17340424-43.

³³ Rothstein, 'Huguenots in the English Silk Industry in the Eighteenth Century' in *Huguenots in Britain and their French background, 1550-1800*, p.133.

³⁴ LMA MS04655/016, f.61.

³⁵ OBP, OA, 11 September 1721, OA17210911.

³⁶ Weaving was seen as a hereditary trade generally. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, p.189.

London since 1736, gave evidence that he had seen Andrew “weave in the Loom when he was about 12 years of age”. Daniel Convy, who had worked as a journeyman for Andrew’s father and then with Andrew himself, also gave evidence to this effect.³⁷ Others did not find their feet so well. John Singleton was born in the North to a father who was a weaver and trained his son to follow the trade. He then came to London where “he pretended to come hither to follow his Trade of a Weaver, but that he had no Mind to, for he associated with Whores and Thieves”.³⁸ Richard Quail, John Burnham and Dennis Brenan all left Ireland to join their weaver parents who were already established in London; Burnham married a local woman.³⁹ When Brenan was being held in Newgate prison the Ordinary’s Account noted that his parents were well respected in Spitalfields and several people came to visit him.⁴⁰ As with French weavers, it was push factors that made them move to London. It was economic downturn rather than religious persecution, however. Richard Quail said that he had practiced the trade in Ireland, “when he got any Thing to do; but that Trade failing at Ireland, he came to London”.⁴¹ All of the Irish weavers who appear in the records of the Old Bailey date from between 1740-50, as does the case of Andrew Fleming in the Weavers’ Company records.

The migration of Huguenot and Irish weavers in the 1740s and 1750s can be seen as part of a conjuncture, fused by geo-politics. The War of the Austrian Succession re-awoke anti-Protestant feelings within France and many families felt they had to leave. The war also disrupted supplies of raw silk. Imports from Asia fell by 147, 245 lbs. in two years between 1746 and 1748 and did not surpass the 1746 level for another four years (see Figure 1). Following the Austrian capture of Genoa and the revolt of its citizens, imports of raw silk from Italy and Turkey were nearly halved between 1745 and 1746 (Figure 1). Both the London and Dublin silk industries felt this contraction, but it was much more acute in the smaller Irish centre. The number of working looms in the city fell from 300 in 1730 to only 50 by 1763.⁴² Weavers began to leave, and London, the closet and most accessible silk centre, was an obvious destination.

³⁷ LMA MS04655/016, f.19b, f.21b.

³⁸ *OBP, OA*, 7 May 1740, OA17400507.

³⁹ *OBP, OA*, 18 March 1741, OA17410318; 12 July 1742, OA17420712; 7 February 1750 OA17500207.

⁴⁰ *OBP, OA*, 7 February 1750, OA17500207.

⁴¹ *OBP, OA*, 18 March 1741, OA17410318.

⁴² Kathleen Breathnach, “The Last of the Dublin Silk Weavers’: 135.

Institutions & Protestantism

None of this was encouraged by the government, Parliament or the livery companies. There was no active sponsorship or promotion of immigration in either the first or second waves. However, they did little to discourage it and government and Parliament had little interest in interfering in the lives of migrants once they had settled in London. There was legislative and financial support for the Huguenots once they had arrived in Britain. In the 1680s the government ordered a 'mass grant of denization' (similar to naturalization) to French Protestants so that they could have a safer legal status than 'alien'. Substantial amounts of money were raised to aid the new arrivals. William and Mary gave £39,000 from the Civil List between 1689 and 1693. Parish collections raised a further £90,000 between 1681 and 1694. The Weavers' Company lobbied for the extension of its privileges to allow aliens to be absorbed into the industry. Masters were permitted to employ an extra loom and take on an extra employee.⁴³ In the eighteenth century neither Government nor the Company made such big gestures again. This was partly because the arrivals of the 1740s and 1750s were smaller. But it was also because the institutions of civil society were strong enough to deal with immigrant communities on their own.

The Weavers' Company had to its own satisfaction (if not to all of its journeymen's) successfully managed and absorbed the Huguenots into the industry and the workings of the Company. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards it had upheld the right, often in the face of opposition from English weavers that 'foreign brothers' could practise the trade in London. Thirteen years before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes the Company had already had the oath of admission translated into French.⁴⁴ By the 1730s it had dropped the distinction between 'aliens' and 'foreigners' in official proceedings and documents. At the beginning of the century Huguenots were already 17% of all the weavers in the Company. This held up well until the 1790s when it dropped to under 10%.⁴⁵ Perhaps more importantly, from 1740 Huguenots began to occupy a greater proportion of the Livery and then of the assistants and officers in the Company.⁴⁶ Huguenots now

⁴³ Gwynn, *Huguenot heritage*, pp.71-72.

⁴⁴ Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company*, p.155.

⁴⁵ See Table 8.1 in Rothstein, 'Huguenots in the English Silk Industry in the Eighteenth Century', p.125.

⁴⁶ Rothstein, 'Huguenots in the English Silk Industry in the Eighteenth Century', p.125.

began to take up official positions with enthusiasm, so that by December 1749 seven of the ten new members of the Livery were French.⁴⁷

The Huguenots had a variety of churches and charities, already established since the 1680s, to provide support, both spiritual and financial. These included the French Church of La Patente, Spitalfields and La Providence, the French Protestant Hospital in Old Street. Three-fifths of those recorded in the registers of La Patente were involved in textiles, and four-fifths of those in the register of the French Church, Soho.⁴⁸ The French Protestant Hospital was established in 1718 with a bequest of £1000, housing 80 inmates of “the poorest sort of their nation”. These were mainly elderly people, but the disabled and mentally ill patients were also admitted. It expanded in size after further bequests and by 1760s had around 230 inmates and its own physician and surgeon.⁴⁹ The hospital continued taking large numbers of patients into the 1820s, when bequests began to dry up. It also administered external poor relief to refuge families who could not enter the Hospital. Although La Providence and the churches had no direct financial or administrative link with the Weavers’ Company, they did ‘intervene’ in the silk industry. 48% of the total applicants to La Providence were employed in textile manufacture.⁵⁰ The main form of intervention was the placing of children of refugees as apprentices. In 1735 Marie Barbon was apprenticed to Elizabeth Gaulhier, ‘plain workewomen att Spittlefields’ by the treasurer of the Hospital Paul Dufour.⁵¹ The following year the Hospital placed Eleanor Ducasse, aged 15, with “Mrs Dalton a mantea maker in Taverstock Street Covent Garden”.⁵² The French Church in Soho also arranged for a 13 year old boy to be bound as an apprentice with Philip Jackson, a freeman of the Weavers’ Company.⁵³

For the Irish, at least the poor ones, the early poor relief organisations or criminal justice system may have been their primary point of contact with institutions.

⁴⁷ Plummer, *The London Weavers’ Company*, p.158.

⁴⁸ Gwynn, *Huguenot heritage*, p.87

⁴⁹ Irvine Gray, *Huguenot manuscripts: a descriptive catalogue of the remaining manuscripts in the Huguenot Library*, Huguenot Society of London quarto series vol. 56 (London: Huguenot Society of London, 1983), pp.2-4.

⁵⁰ Charles F.A Marmoy, ed., *The French Protestant Hospital: extracts from the archives of ‘La Providence’ relating to inmates and applications for admission, 1718-1957, and to recipients of and applicants for the Coqueau charity, 1745-1901*, 2 vols., Huguenot Society of London Quarto series vols. 52-53 (London: Huguenot Society of London, 1977), see Table II, vol.2, pp.64-5.

⁵¹ Huguenot Library UCL (HL) H/H1/2.

⁵² HL H/H/1/3.

⁵³ LMA MS04655/015, f.150.

Whilst the guilds in both London and Dublin may not have played a role in actively settling immigrants, they did provide a space for integration. New arrivals were often keen to join the Weavers' Company. Andrew Fleming had been a member of the Corporation of Weavers in Dublin. Within a year of his arrival he applied for freedom of the Weavers' Company in London.⁵⁴ Walter Welch, whose late father was from Dublin, came to London in 1739 and was bound as apprentice to the weaver Thomas Bell at the Weavers' Company Court.⁵⁵ However, there was no obvious Irish grouping within the Company. The number of Irish weavers who appear as defendants in the Old Bailey Proceedings is much greater than the number of Huguenots, suggesting that they were poorer than many Huguenots. Peter Kelly, alias Owen, came to work as a weaver in London. He became, "very Profligate in his Life, Whoring, Drinking, and idling away his Time, and neglecting his Business, so that his Wife and Children were forc'd to go a begging, while he went about from House to House, playing upon his two Jews-Harps at once".⁵⁶ John Cannon was described by the Ordinary as speaking, "very bad English, and was always ready to tell some out of the way Story, and nothing to the Purpose ... He own'd, that he had been a debauch'd Fellow among notorious Women, and that he sometimes drank too much, and lost or squander'd away his Money foolishly".⁵⁷ Richard Quail turned to petty thieving to support his family, and was indicted for robbing a boy for the two bundles of clothes he was carrying.⁵⁸ Denis Brenan and William Purcel, both weavers and friends, went on a robbing spree to raise money for drink. They assaulted Thomas Whiffin, also a weaver, in Shoreditch, knocking him to the ground and stealing a hat and peruke from him.⁵⁹ Patrick Roney, an apprentice silk weaver in Dublin, had only been in London for a week before he was arrested after robbing a servant near the Strand for the clothes he was carrying.⁶⁰

There were some direct links between the two guilds. Simon Mestayer, began his life in Dublin, where he was apprenticed to the silk weaver, Francis Ozier in

⁵⁴ LMA MS04655/016, f.19.

⁵⁵ LMA MS04655/015, f.55.

⁵⁶ *OBP, OA*, 24 March 1729, OA17290324.

⁵⁷ *OBP, OA*, 6 October 1733, OA17331006.

⁵⁸ *OBP, OA*, 18 March 1741, OA17410318. *OBP*, 4 December 1740, t17401204-13.

⁵⁹ *OBP, OA*, 7 February 1750, OA17500207. *OBP*, 17 January 1750, t17500117-17.

⁶⁰ *OBP, OA*, 26 March 1750, OA17500326.

1753.⁶¹ He moved to London and became the bookkeeper of the French Protestant Hospital and later an inmate, dying there in 1810. Protestantism was very important to both guilds. In Dublin there was a Loyal Society of Silk Weavers that celebrated the Battle of the Boyne with a dinner, a toast to the Royal Family and a firework display.⁶² The Society for the Relief of Foreign Protestants took it upon itself to distribute recently arrived French weavers to parts of the country where they were needed.⁶³ Weaving in London was also involved in patriotic religion. During the Jacobite rising in 1745 silk weavers in Spitalfields announced their readiness to fight for George II. 133 firms or workshops offered 2, 919 men as volunteer troops. 2, 056 of them were employed by 96 master weavers of Huguenot origin. This over representation reflects the continuation of a 'Protestant International' into the mid-century. Those who had fled catholic intolerance obviously wanted to defeat the Stuart threat.⁶⁴ The French Protestant Hospital admitted ex-servicemen, from both the army and navy.⁶⁵ The Weavers' Company also sponsored a lecture series at Christ Church Spitalfields, thanks to an endowment. A stipend was provided for a clergyman to preach in the evenings for three years. They even took an interest in maintaining the fabric of the Church, paying for gas lights to be installed.⁶⁶ More seriously, during the French Revolutionary Wars the Company was active in supporting patriotic causes. They declared their loyalty to the King and the Constitution, and determination to maintain public order. The statement was published in several newspapers and 2,000 copies were printed and distributed in Spitalfields.⁶⁷ The Company also contributed to the fund of Reverend Moore for the "defence of the Country in the present Critical Situation of public Affairs".⁶⁸

There were critical commentators suspicious of the loyalty and reliability of silk workers. They were thought to be supporters of Wilkes and the later radical movements. During the 1790s the London Corresponding Society had as many

⁶¹ HL H/J 57/1.

⁶² *Daily Journal*, July 11 1732.

⁶³ *London Daily Advertiser*, September 22 1752.

⁶⁴ Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company*, p. 159.

⁶⁵ T. V. Murdoch and Randolph Vigne, *The French Hospital in England: Its Huguenot History and Collections* (Cambridge: John Adamson, 2009), pp.21-22.

⁶⁶ LMA MS04655/019, f.482, f.488.

⁶⁷ LMA MS04655/018, f.230; *Morning Chronicle*, December 20 1792.

⁶⁸ LMA MS04655/018, f.345.

members in Spitalfields and Moorfields “as the other divisions put together”.⁶⁹ Radical pamphlets produced in Spitalfields could still be protestant - God had supported the French Revolution to rid Europe of popery and all kings “that worshiped the beast” – and still be republican and pacifist.⁷⁰ That said for most of the period the journeymen used the language of loyalism, even if they were too unruly for patrician tastes. In demonstrations and petitions it was common to present themselves as loyal subjects, deserving of protection from King and Parliament (this will be explored more fully in the next chapter). As will be seen below, many English weavers had good claims to be patriots, as they had served in the armed forces. This included Huguenots as well: John Rupier, born abroad, did not finish his full term of apprenticeship, as he had spent four years in the army.⁷¹

Out-migration

Glasgow & Copenhagen

In the Huguenot and Irish networks there was a much smaller reciprocal movement by English weavers. The smaller and more vulnerable Dublin silk industry could not have taken new men on. Periodic persecution in France would have put some off, but more likely the tight labour regulations in Lyon deterred them from trying. James Lawrence had worked in Paris in the 1760s, although he did not say in what capacity. Other European countries were more welcoming. Philip Riley had worked in velvet manufacturing in Genoa.⁷² In a more organised fashion English weavers were actively recruited to work in new workshops in Scotland and Copenhagen where higher wages were offered. The first exodus of weavers came in 1765. Several crises rocked the industry: there was a general trade slump at the start of Seven Years War, the fierce wages disputes in Spitalfields began, and the gauze branch saw its product become unfashionable.⁷³ Men from the handkerchief and gauze branches of the trade left for Flanders and Scotland and silk stocking weavers went to Copenhagen where 53 new looms had been established.⁷⁴ In 1767, 38 journeymen left for Scotland where they were

⁶⁹ Quoted in E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.132.

⁷⁰ *The Curses and Causes of War, pointed out; and the approaching cessation of both determined* (1795).

⁷¹ LMA MS04655/012, ff.2-3.

⁷² ‘Report of Committee on the Silk Industry’, (1765): 209.

⁷³ Natalie Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.24.

⁷⁴ “Report of Committee on the Silk Industry”, 1765, p.208; *Public Advertiser*, December 10 1765.

being offered work for three years.⁷⁵ More weavers again left for Copenhagen in 1773 and in the following year for Scotland too. There they had been promised work “for two Years certain, at very good Wages”.⁷⁶ As with the movement of Huguenot and Irish weavers, this suggests that people were following a precedent and moving along an established route. Northern Europe was also the main continental market for English silk exports, and the ships carrying the silks followed the Baltic Sea timber trade routes.⁷⁷ It is worth stressing here that the Weavers’ Company did not try to stop these movements. The only intervention they make in this area is in skills and tools (discussed below) never man power. They obviously did not fear the loss of people, as there were so many in London to replace them.

Even more common was temporary movement out of the industry. This was particularly the case for two groups. One was journeymen with families to support, the other was young weavers at the end of their apprenticeship or early in their careers as journeymen. Of the 14 cases of migrant weavers in Old Bailey Proceedings where ages are given, only 2 were over 30, the rest between 18 and 25. Earle’s biographical evidence suggests that, with the decline in formal apprenticeships from the 1660s, temporary experience of a trade at a young age was very common experience across many London occupations.⁷⁸ Minns and Wallis have also highlighted the flexible nature of English apprenticeships. Their analysis suggests it was extremely common for apprentices to take their skills wherever there was demand, even if it meant leaving their master for several years.⁷⁹ For French and German artisans this was a semi-formalised process, the ‘tour de France’ or the ‘Wanderjahr’, and it was expected that young journeymen would look for work somewhere other than the place they had been apprenticed.⁸⁰

The British ‘tramping’ system of the early nineteenth century functioned more as a way of providing temporary seasonal work for artisans, rather than as a stage in their ‘lifecycle’. These systems operated within state boundaries for the most part

⁷⁵ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, March 27 1767.

⁷⁶ *Public Advertiser*, November 6 1773; *Public Advertiser*, June 21 1774.

⁷⁷ Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.24.

⁷⁸ Earle, *A city full of people*, pp.60-62.

⁷⁹ Chris Minns and Patrick Wallis, ‘Rules and Reality: Quantifying the Practice of Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe’, *LSE Working Papers No. 118* (London: LSE Dept of Economic History, 2009), p.34. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/economicHistory/pdf/WP118.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Geoffrey Crossick, ‘Past Masters: in search of the artisan in European history’ in Crossick ed., *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900*, (Scholar: Aldershot, 1997), p.6.

(although there were tramping arrangements between London and Dublin by the 1820s.⁸¹) The system with the largest geographical coverage was probably the Austrian, which allowed artisan migration across the Empire. Artisans heading to Vienna came from anywhere along the 700km of the Danube.⁸² London silk weavers were travelling much further to find employment, some of them ending up as far away as India. There was no system to help weavers move around as would develop later with the tramping system; instead weavers were using the states' need for soldiers and sailors for their own ends. This was not an expected part of artisan training and could mean dropping out of the trade altogether for a few years. For many it was a response to un- or underemployment. But it could also be a way of escaping from the social pressures of overbearing masters or interfering neighbours.

Army & navy

Most weavers were clear about the reason they went to sea or joined the army: lack of work at home. Henry Cockale told the Ordinary of Newgate that "wanting Work, [he] went to sea".⁸³ Thomas Bonney enlisted on board *The Lyon* "when Business was a little dull".⁸⁴ Military or naval service provided an insecure weaver with guaranteed pay for a set time period. There were also inducements on offer that would be paid upfront – a valuable lifeline for anyone who needed cash fast. In the middle of the Seven Years War, for example, the government faced a shortage of soldiers and Parliament prevented Pitt from using impressment. It was decided to pay bounties to recruits into the militia in order to free up regular troops. These would be paid for by private institutions - the City of London raised £1000 - and those recruited into the militia at Guildhall in 1759 received a bounty of 5 guineas.⁸⁵ Schwarz estimated that a semi-skilled worker in East London earned a weekly wage of between 15 to 20 shillings, and this was not a consistent level of

⁸¹ Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Tramping Artisan' in *Labouring Men* (Weidenfeld: London, 1968), p.36.

⁸² Josef Ehmer, 'Worlds of mobility: migration patterns of Viennese artisans in the eighteenth century' in *The Artisan and the European Town 1500-1900*, p.180.

⁸³ *OBP, OA*, 22 June 1715, OA17150622.

⁸⁴ *OBP, OA*, 5 October 1744, OA17441005.

⁸⁵ Arthur N Gilbert, 'An analysis of some eighteenth century army recruiting records'. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 54, 38 (1976): 39-40.

income throughout the year.⁸⁶ For a weaver earning 20 shillings a week this was worth at least 5 weeks wages and clearly a considerable one off sum.

Of the 1,100 men enlisted between September and November that year, weavers made up the largest occupational group in the militia, around 20%. 45% of the men recruited were aged 30-39, suggesting the bounty was particularly attractive to men with families to support.⁸⁷ The difficulties faced by Pitt's government in the late 1750s repeated themselves during subsequent conflicts. The size of the armed forces was set by Parliament, and the army & navy usually failed to recruit enough to meet the quota. The unemployed were believed to be reluctant to join up and often failed to meet the minimum standards of height and health required of new recruits.⁸⁸ So bounties were regular tools of recruitment drives. In 1787, the Guildhall offered naval recruits a bounty of "forty shillings for every able seaman and twenty shillings for every ordinary seaman" in addition to the bounty paid by the navy itself.⁸⁹ The militia bounties offered in London in 1796 were as high as £21, perhaps two month's wages or more for a silk weaver.⁹⁰

The detailed defence at the Old Bailey of Robert Campbell, who described himself as "a weaver, and sometimes a seaman", provides a snapshot of how a weaver might have gone about being taken onto a ship, and the pressures that led him to do so. On the morning of April 16 1771 he went to Mr Wilkinson's warehouse, in Friday Street near Cheapside, where he stayed until two o'clock hoping to find work. Then he went to an alehouse and was told by some of the drinkers to go to another warehouse on Milk Street where he might be more successful. There he found the foreman and someone vouched for Campbell's past saying that "I was a good workman in the black branch" (i.e. in the weaving of black silks.) The foreman had no work going however, "I wish I could relieve every one that comes, for plenty are out of work; I have got nothing, I assure you". Dejected, Campbell went

⁸⁶ Schwarz, 'Occupations and Income in Late Eighteenth-Century East London', Table A, 96. Evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee in 1765 suggested that a good weaver earned between 12 to 15 shillings a week, and a very good one 20 shillings. 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry' in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 30, (1765): 208.

⁸⁷ Gilbert, 'An analysis of some eighteenth century army recruiting records': 41. Lucassen suggests this was a general trend in early modern households. Children created more consumers than producers in a household, and therefore more money was needed. J. Lucassen, *Migrant labour in Europe*, p.99.

⁸⁸ Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation*, pp.95-96.

⁸⁹ 'Bounty to seamen' (1787), LMA COL/CHD/MN/01/013.

⁹⁰ Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation*, p.100.

back to the alehouse where he informed his companions of his plan to go to sea. Once he had finished drinking he planned to go down to East India House as, “I have sold and pawned everything I can do, and it will not do or [*sic*] me to stand here; I will therefore go to the East or West Indies, if I can find a good captain of a West India ship; I was once steward of a West Indiaman, if that ship is come home I will go on board her in the same station.”⁹¹

A couple of days later he was drinking in the White Swan on Leadenhall Street, near to headquarters of the East India Company, when he met another sailor, Mr Touchit, who said he would have word with a captain he knew and secure Campbell a place on the crew. They were to meet the next day in the Blacksmith's Arms. Interestingly, both men agreed that it would be better to sail to the West Indies rather than the East Indies. Campbell's friends were still enquiring after warehouse jobs on his behalf, but he rejected the offers, “I don't intend to look out for any more now; my intention is solely to go to sea; I will go and be impressed on board, if I can't get a bondsman; I said, when I came home, I could do better at sea than as at present, getting sometimes a shilling a day, and sometimes nothing”. Perhaps bored of waiting for Mr Tocuhit he decided to go to Gravesend directly “and receive the bounty and impress money at once on board the ship”. To announce his intentions he put on his sailor's frock, which several witnesses saw him wearing.⁹²

Campbell was caught up in a riot before he could make it to Gravesend and never put to sea. Many others did put to sea and might have ended up in the Caribbean, the Baltic, the Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean. Abraham Ward, who went to sea three times, was “in that memorable Expedition, when the English Fleet went up the Mediterranean, to establish Don Carlos in the Kingdoms of Italy, and the Two Sicilies.”⁹³ John Thomson served in Queen Anne's navy and fought the Swedish in the Baltic where he was wounded. He later found himself serving on a ship cruising the Mediterranean where they engaged Spanish and French vessels capturing nineteen ships in one year (he claimed) and took a merchant ship with a cargo of

⁹¹ *OBP*, 3 July 1771, t17710703-59.

⁹² *OBP*, 3 July 1771, t17710703-59.

⁹³ *OBP*, *OA*, 12 February 1753, OA17530212. Peter Linebaugh discusses some of these cases in *The London hanged: crime and civil society in the eighteenth century*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2003), pp.256-287.

“more than a 100000l. the Coffee, Tea, Indigo China Wares”.⁹⁴ William Bolingbroke had also sailed on several naval ships “and been in many Parts of the World; viz. New York, the Baltick [sic], Holland, Flanders, France, &c”.⁹⁵ As with Huguenot and Irish migrations, family and kin could be important. William Dawson Pilkington was described by a character witness as a weaver who she had known for “17 years, I know him to follow the seas, he fail'd with a brother of mine.”⁹⁶ The female weaver Ann Clark, was born in Spitalfields to a father she described as “a Seafaring Man”.⁹⁷



Image 2. After Robert Wilson, *Bethnal-Green Company of Irish Impresst Volunteers* (London, 1777-1779). Museum number: 2000,0521.33. © The Trustees of the British Museum. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=693426&partId=1&searchText=Bethnal-Green+Company+of+Irish+Impresst+Volunteers+&page=1.

This satirical print, produced during the American Revolutionary War, presents an imaginary volunteer regiment made up of Irishmen from Bethnal Green. The fourth soldier from the left carries a pike with shuttles hanging on it, identifying the men with weaving. The officer with the dog is a real person: Sir John Eardley Wilmot, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. He had put down rioting by silk weavers in 1771 and his house was attacked during the Gordon Riots.

⁹⁴ *OBP, OA*, 4 May 1722, OA17220504.
⁹⁵ *OBP, OA*, 22 December 1738, OA17381222.
⁹⁶ *OBP, OA*, t17600910-33.
⁹⁷ *OBP, OA*, 7 December 1737, OA17380118.

Quantifying such recruitment or discerning long run trends is hard. Potential weavers could have gone into the regular army, the militia, the navy and the merchant fleet, all with different recruitment practices and documentation. For example, some records such as the City of London's recruitment of sailors in 1787 do not give details of the recruits' occupations, making them useless for this purpose.⁹⁸ However, a smaller sample like the recruitment for the East India Company Army, which runs from 1718 to 1757 is suggestive. The Company had been allowed to "raise, train and muster" its own troops from 1698, and by 1749 it had about 3,000 soldiers in its service.⁹⁹ The Company recruited men from all over Britain and Ireland, as well as from Hanover. Although the men came from a variety of trades, after the catch-all category of 'labourer', textile workers are the most numerous.¹⁰⁰ Silk weavers were not unique among textile workers in seeking recruitment and similar pressures were felt in the woollen industry. On the *King William*, which sailed from England in 1718, weavers were 15.4% of the detachment of soldiers on board (see Figure 3); the next highest occupation were those listed as professional soldiers who were 9.6% of the total. In addition, London weavers were half of all the weaver-recruits on board.¹⁰¹ On the *Heathcote*, which sailed to Bombay in 1739, London weavers were 36.8% of the soldiers on board (see Figure 3). On the *Scarborough's* voyage of 1741, London weavers were 20% of the total recruits on board (see Figure 3) and were 71.4% of all the weaver-recruits. Only labourers were a bigger proportion of recruits at 29.4%.¹⁰²

Overall, given that the East India Company was not involved in major wars at this time and, therefore, not recruiting heavily (as it would have to do during the Seven Years War and after¹⁰³) the proportion of London weavers is fairly impressive. Given the proximity of the silk industry to East India House, the Company's

⁹⁸ 'Bounty to seamen' COL/CHD/MN/01/013 only records names and parishes of the recruits.

⁹⁹ Huw V. Bowen, 'The East India Company and Military Recruitment in Britain, 1763-71'. *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 59, 139 (1986): 78, n3 78.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Brumwell's analysis of the 58th Regiment of Foot, raised to fight in the Seven Year War came to similar conclusions. Of the 569 men recorded as being in Regiment for Christmas Eve 1759 35% were labourers/husbandmen, 17% weavers, 7% shoemakers/cordwainers; 5% tailors. Stephen Brumwell, 'Rank and file: a profile of one of Wolfe's regiments'. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 79, 317 (2001): 13.

¹⁰¹ See 'A List of Soulders [sic] Ship'd on board the Ship King William for Dieu island', *Records of Fort St George: Despatches from England 1717-21*, vols.22-23, (Madras, The Superintendent Government Press, 1927) pp.70-71. Those with no given occupation made up 9.6%.

¹⁰² See 'A List of 34 soldiers on board the *Scarborough*', *Records of Fort St George: Despatches from England 1740-1743*, vols.45-47, (Madras: The Superintendent Government Press, 1931) pp.30-31.

¹⁰³ Bowen, 'The East India Company and Military Recruitment in Britain, 1763-71': 78.

headquarters, and to the Company's ships at Blackwall, it must have been an obvious route to go down. There are three peaks of recruitment – the Calico Crisis of 1718-21, 1739-41 and 1752-55 (see Figure 4). During the 'Calico Crisis' at least 24 textile workers enlisted in the East India Company Army, sailing on troop ships out of the port of London. Over the period 1717-54 the majority of weaver-recruits were between 17 and 25, confirming the suggestion from the Old Bailey biographies that army service was a way out for insecure young men (see figure 5).

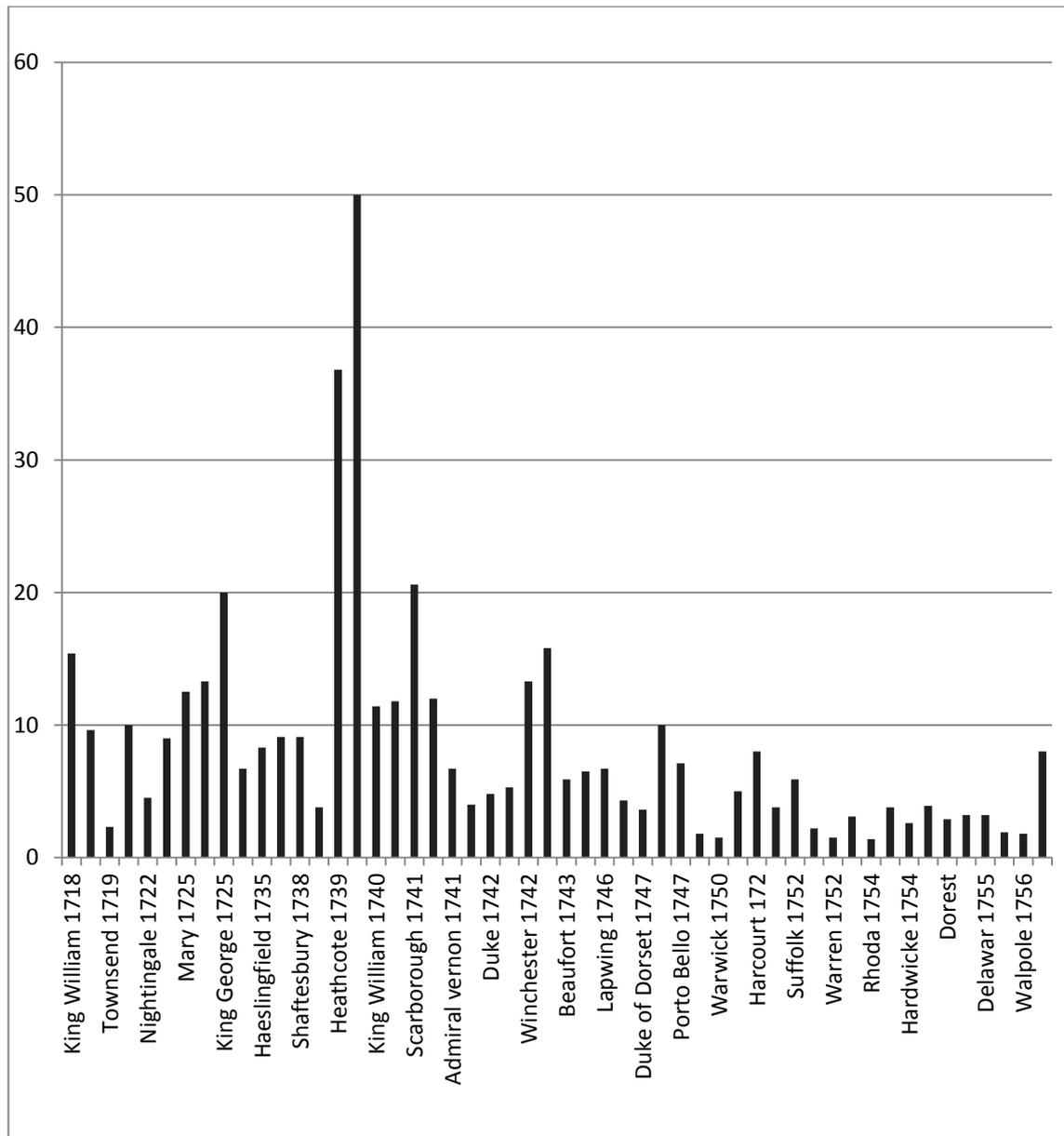


Figure 3: London weavers as % of total soldiers on board, 1718 to 1757, by Ship. Sources: *Records of Fort St. George: Dispatches from England, 1718-57 Vols. 22- 60*, (Madras: 1927-71).

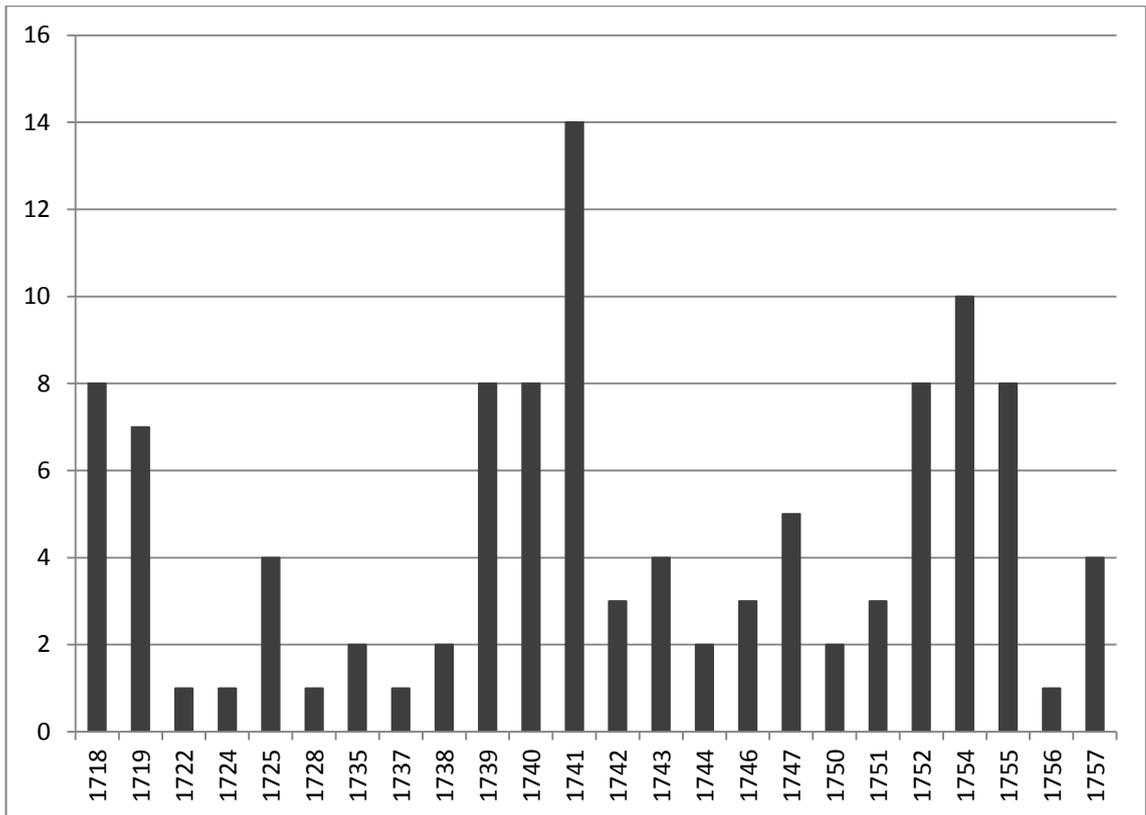


Figure 4. Numbers of London weavers enlisting in the East India Company Army by Year, 1718 to 1757. Sources: *Records of Fort St. George: Dispatches from England, 1718-57 Vols. 22- 60*, (Madras: 1927-71).

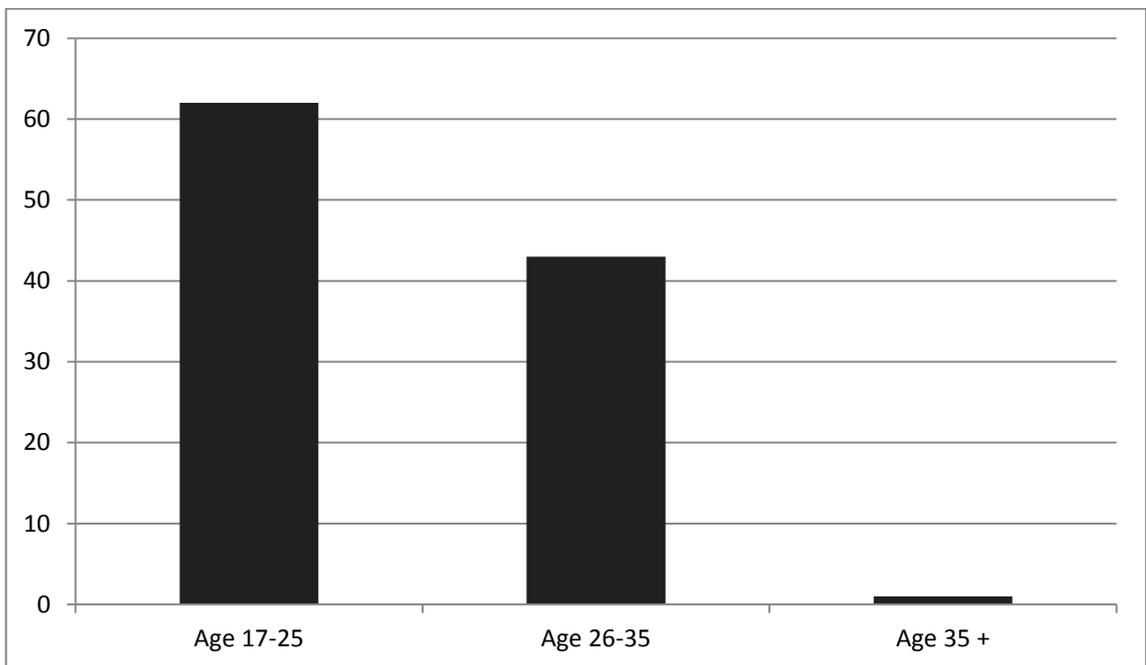


Figure 5. Ages of soldiers enlisting in East India Company Army, 1718 to 1757. Sources: *Records of Fort St. George: Dispatches from England, 1718-57 Vols. 22- 60*, (Madras: 1927-71).

Those who became sailors could also find that life outside weaving was not to their taste. Stephen Gardiner apprenticed to a weaver in Moorgate “play'd some Tricks, not pleasing to the Neighbourhood, or to his Master” and ran away to join a corn ship sailing between London, France and Holland. He never found his sea legs however and “could not bear the rude Behaviour of the Sailors; their swearing, quarrelling, fighting, &c. made him believe he should, in a little Time, be murder'd among them; as he was very young, and neither strong nor robust enough to encounter them.”¹⁰⁴ Image 3 suggests something of his predicament.



Image 3. Isaac Cruickshank, *Nautical comfort!* (London, 1800-1810). Museum number: 1872,1012.5017. © The Trustees of the British Museum. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1670110&partId=1&searchText=Nautical+comfort&page=1.

The man on the left is a weaver who finds himself on a naval vessel and is asking the sailor "My dear Friend - I understand you are Captain of this here ship - and they says a how the Enemy, is in sight - now could not you put the ship a little on one side, and not be too ventersome - its the best way to be a little cautious - I am but a poor weaver - but however life is sweet." The captain replies "Why you paltry Land Lubber do you want me to run away? - but however I never bear malice so I'll give you a little Comfort - before I would strike to an Enemy d'ye see - I would blow the vessel up in the air - So before you could turn a chaw of tobacco you would be out of your misery."

Returning to the case of Thomas Bonney, what is striking in the Ordinary's Account is the casual way his return to weaving is described: "when the Expedition was at

¹⁰⁴ OBP, OA, 3 February 1724, OA17240203.

an End he came Home, and work'd again at his Trade"¹⁰⁵. This is repeated in many of the other case histories and the instrumental nature of this relationship is often clear. John Fosset alias Powell, apprenticed to a weaver, was described as having "used the Sea for three or four Years".¹⁰⁶ William Bolingbroke had been a sailor for several years but 'when at Home, he sometimes followed his own Business of a Weaver, so he had several Ways of providing for his Family'.¹⁰⁷ Silk weavers were following a path well-trodden by other workers, and some conform to the pattern observed by Minns and Wallis of non-completion of apprenticeships.¹⁰⁸ William Johnson had only served two and a half years as an apprentice before he went to sea. He later returned and became a journeyman with a different master.¹⁰⁹ John Hamilton was apprenticed to a silk weaver but left to join the army at the age of fifteen, eventually joining the Guards where he served for seven years.¹¹⁰ Joseph Baily also left his apprenticeship before his time was up, went to sea and then returned to London to become a pickpocket and house-breaker.¹¹¹

Other people left not to avoid poverty but to escape social pressures, particularly conflicts with masters or families, which were common within the confined space and restrictive rules of the master's house.¹¹² This was the experience of Tom Idle, the 'idle apprentice' in Hograth's *Industry and Idleness* (1747), which is partly set in Spitalfields. A real apprentice such as Michael Grant followed a similar path as Tom Idle. Grant was brought up by his grandparents who were both weavers; his father was a soldier serving abroad. He learnt the trade there but fell out with them over wages and tried to escape by going to sea with a friend.¹¹³ James Cropp who was a silk dyer like his parents and after practising the trade for a while he "got bored of business" and fell in with a crowd of girls "who led him into all Manner of Extravagancies". His relatives sent him to sea and gave him clothes and necessaries. Cropp "served some days with it" but got bored of this occupation too and returned without telling his family.¹¹⁴ On his return from sea William Johnson, looking to settle old scores, had broken into the house of his old master Jacob

¹⁰⁵ *OBP, OA*, 5 October 1744, OA17441005.

¹⁰⁶ *OBP, OA*, 8 November 1738, OA17381108.

¹⁰⁷ *OBP, OA*, 22 December 1738, OA17381222.

¹⁰⁸ Earle, *A city full of people*, p.72, p.77; Minns and Wallis, 'Rules and Reality': 34.

¹⁰⁹ *OBP, OA*, 22 July 1719, OA17190722.

¹¹⁰ *OBP, OA*, 10 December 1753, OA17531210.

¹¹¹ *OBP, OA*, 29 Jan 1714, OA17140129.

¹¹² Earle, *A city full of people*, p.65.

¹¹³ *OBP, OA*, 12 July 1742, OA17420712.

¹¹⁴ *OBP, OA*, 18 May 1743, OA17430518.

Pullein and stole a silver cup and 2 silver spoons.¹¹⁵ Joseph Smith a weaver, left his wife and children behind to go sea, before returning and became a thief when he robbed a synagogue and a line draper's.¹¹⁶

Of course, several of these pressures could bear down on one person. James Hayler had been "bred a weaver" and served for the normal seven year apprenticeship and then as a journeyman. However, both the mental and material combined to drive him to sea "By a Disorder in his Head he was rendered incapable of sticking close to Business, or he might have lived very well. In the hard Winter some Years since, he had some very fine Work put into his Hands, but the Severity of the Weather, he says, hindered him from going on with it, and he chose rather to enter himself on board an East-India Ship, in which he went abroad, and was a Soldier in the Service of the Company for five Years". The extended leave did him good and on his return to London took up weaving again as "he has been much better in his Mind".¹¹⁷

Some weavers led a permanently itinerant lifestyle, and a few even enjoyed it. The Irish weaver, John Burnham, was described as "loving roving better than working" and had moved several times between London and Dublin.¹¹⁸ Nathaniel Jackson had been apprenticed to a silk weaver but "finding that too uneasy, and too great a Check, for his wild Inclinations, after serving 3 Years he ran from his Master." Then against his friends' advice he joined the army and spent four years in Ireland. As a trooper he was thrown out for fighting a duel with another soldier and returned to London.¹¹⁹ Christopher Freeman was a weaver in Spitalfields "but weary of close Application to Business, he commonly went to Sea, and served on board Ships of War and Merchant-Men".¹²⁰ After each of Abraham Ward's three sea voyages he returned to work as journeyman weaver in St Leonard, Shoreditch. Originally he was apprenticed to a weaver and practised as a journeyman for four years. Then he "changed his mind ... and took to the Seas". He returned, took up weaving again and married. On the outbreak of the War of Austrian Succession he seized the opportunity to escape domestic life, and "left his Wife and Family, and went up the

¹¹⁵ *OBP, OA*, 22 July 1719, OA17190722.

¹¹⁶ *OBP, OA*, 13 April 1720, OA17200413.

¹¹⁷ *OBP, OA*, 29 October 1753, OA17531029.

¹¹⁸ *OBP, OA*, 12 July 1742, OA17420712.

¹¹⁹ *OBP, OA*, 18 July 1722, OA17220718.

¹²⁰ *OBP, OA*, 24 May 1736, OA17360524.

Streights [*sic*] with Admiral Haddock.” When the Admiral’s fleet was called back to Plymouth he “was there paid off, and came to London again, and went to work once more at his Trade: But not being very fond of Work, he says he embarked once more at Sea”.¹²¹ John Thomson’s life followed a similar course. He first joined the navy having “never work’d much for his Master”. He returned to London and took up weaving and started a family, but found this was not to “his Ease and Happiness encreased [*sic*] in that State of Life”. As he talked to the Ordinary of Newgate, he reflected on his former captain, now a JP, who had retired to the country with a fortune of “1600l. a Year to subsist upon”. Thomson, disowned by his family, faced the death penalty having been found guilty of assault and theft.¹²²

Transportation

Some weavers did not leave voluntarily and were removed from London by the state. At least eight weavers were transported after being found guilty at the Old Bailey; all were thieves. John Meff had been convicted of housebreaking on his return to London and was transported to America to work on the plantations. In a colourful account, he claimed that the ship had been captured by pirates and then marooned on a desert island, that he had then been rescued by Indians and before becoming a sailor in the Caribbean. Eventually he had wanted to see his family and made the mistake of returning to London. He was caught and convicted of returning without lawful cause.¹²³ Meff was an early victim of the 1718 Transportation Act, but the bulk of the weavers were transported much later from 1764 to 1774, although they would also have been sent to America. Frederick Usop, convicted after the sending of convicts had been suspended during the American Revolutionary War but before Australia was chosen as a new destination, would have served his sentence on a hulk in the Thames.¹²⁴ This places their thieving within the crisis period of 1764-71, and tellingly they stole low value items, mainly textiles, which could have been easily pawned or sold on at the rag market in Rosemary Lane near Tower Hill.¹²⁵ Hester Rose, a silk winder, was found guilty of

¹²¹ *OBP, OA*, 12 February 1753, OA17530212.

¹²² *OBP, OA*, 4 May 1722, OA17220504.

¹²³ *OBP, OA*, 11 September 1721, OA17210911.

¹²⁴ *OBP*, 15 September 1784, t17840915-38. Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, ‘Punishments at the Old Bailey: Transportation’, *OBP*, version 6.0, 01/11/ 2011).

¹²⁵ Beverly Lemire, ‘The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in early modern England’. *Journal of Social History*, 24, 2 (1990): 258; Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, ‘Material London: What people stole’, *OBP*, version 6.0, 01/11/ 2011).

stealing seven ounces of silk, value 4 s; Ann Larner had stolen a piece of six yards of check, value 5s.¹²⁶ Two were pickpockets: George Reading, a draw boy to a weaver, was transported for stealing a linen handkerchief, as was Isaac Loach.¹²⁷ Isaac Darby was convicted for the theft of “stealing three glass globe lamps with tin rims fixed to them and tin burners, value 4d”.¹²⁸ Both Hester Rose and Ann Larner had stolen the cloth from their masters. Thomas Linsey had stolen 4s from his own master: he was caught by his mistress who hid in a cupboard to catch him in the act.¹²⁹

The Weavers' Company and regulation of labour mobility

James Walker, a weaver, also went to America but under more paternalist conditions. The Weavers' Company helped him to emigrate in 1797 by paying him £10 for his passages because of “his present distress” to go to America. This was a one off event; usually money for poor weaver was paid out in the form of poor relief. For example, the Company gave £100 in poor relief to unemployed weavers in 1793.¹³⁰ A more usual practice was the admittance of soldiers and sailors to the Company, following state policy. Under George II legislation had been passed allowing ex-servicemen who had taken up a trade to be admitted to the freedom of the respective livery companies, without having to have served an apprenticeship. The company admitted several weaver ex-servicemen under this legislation.¹³¹ Similarly, William Dupree, after being an apprentice to his father, then became a sailor, then returned and was a journeyman for 12 years. John Hesten, originally apprenticed in Somerset, served as a soldier in the Old Buffs for four years, before taking up the trade in Spitalfields. Both these men came forward to take their freedom after the Company had agreed to halve the fees. This had been to encourage poorer weavers to join the Company and suggests that this life history was typical of many journeymen.¹³²

¹²⁶ *OBP*, 7 June 1764, t17640607-10; *OBP*, 13 April 1774, t17740413-80.

¹²⁷ *OBP*, 18 May 1768, t17680518-16; *OBP*, 22 February 1769, t17690222-8.

¹²⁸ *OBP*, 6 July 1768, t17680706-10.

¹²⁹ *OBP*, 21 February 1770, t17700221-28.

¹³⁰ LMA MS04655/018 f.323, f.251b. The son of the weaver Samuel Sholl emigrated to America. See Sholl, *A Short Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture in England*, (London, 1811).

¹³¹ See the cases of Joseph Banks, ex-marine, and Joseph File, ex-sailor, LMA MS04655/016, ff.1-2, f.63.

¹³² LMA MS04655/016, f.276.

Theoretically, of course, the Company was supposed to regulate the workforce heavily in London, including the large number of ‘unlawful’ or ‘foreign’ weavers and the non-completion of apprenticeships. In practice, like most livery companies it did not systematically carry out its duties. Still every so often it did become an issue, which the Company had to deal with. It certainly felt it needed to give justifications for its weakness over regulation. The Company blamed a vicious circle, where it was unable to police the industry because of its lack of cash, and its lack of cash was the result of its inability to collect the fines owed to it. Periodically, the Company would go on the attack. For example in 1738, noting that “the great Arrears of Quateridge [*sic*] due” it instructed the bailiffs to sue members in arrears.¹³³ But this and similar attempts were always futile. Lacking a permanently large number of bailiffs the Company lacked the information to carry out effective prosecutions. It is clear, for instance, that it did not keep an up-to-date record of all the master weavers in London.¹³⁴ People were only coming forward to bind apprentices or take up their freedom on a voluntary basis. Some even openly challenged the Company’s authority. Ephraim Flamar was summoned to the Company Court but refused to take up his freedom, “insisting that he was duly bought up to the Weaving Trade which he had exercised many years and that he did not know it would be of any use to him to be admitted”.¹³⁵ In 1786 the Company even had to have its right to regulate the industry upheld in court, after “an eminent Silk weaver” challenged its authority to do so.¹³⁶

Despite this weakness weavers still looked to the company to enforce the regulations, especially of so-called ‘unlawful workers’. These often occurred during trade downturns, and blaming unlawful weavers for lack of work was an easy scapegoat. Throughout the century there are regular periods of lobbying followed by a flurry of prosecutions, real or threatened. In December 1722, towards the end of the Calico Crisis, the masters pressed the court to prosecute unlawful weavers and by February the next year the court was suing John Mazzy of Brick Lane.¹³⁷ Similar waves occurred in 1730, 1740, 1744, 1748 and 1752. Bringing a

¹³³ LMA MS04655/015, f.30.

¹³⁴ See LMA MS04655/015, f.67. The beadles were asked to search Spitalfields and collect this information. ‘Non-persons’ could turn up after such a search. Peter Furquand was supposedly a liveryman, but the beadles could not find anyone answering to that name. So the election was declared “vacated & annulled”. LMA MS04655/015 f.92.

¹³⁵ LMA MS04655/015, f.305.

¹³⁶ *London Chronicle*, December 14 1786.

¹³⁷ LMA MS04655/012, f.32, f.34.

prosecution was expensive – the company owed £116 in 1787 for a court case against two weavers – so was used sparingly.¹³⁸ The lobbying itself was sporadic and was not always followed up by prosecutions. Journeymen could use ‘unlawful’ weavers as a default mode of complaint when times were bad. The court was careful to demand names and evidence from those complaining, and would dismiss complaints where no evidence had been brought before it. On one occasion it sent a group of journeymen away by pointing out that they too were unlawful workers, and did not, therefore, have much of a case.¹³⁹ By requiring people to give names, the Company was encouraging informing. In most cases weavers passed on a couple of names to the court, rather than a long list; there is a suggestion that old scores were being settled. During the wage disputes of the 1760s two master weavers gave evidence against three unlawful masters, whom they also blamed for lowering wages and provoking the journeymen.¹⁴⁰

Was this concern about unlawful workers really a fear about foreigner-born weavers? The terms were often used interchangeably, but in legal terms ‘foreign’ meant workers from outside the boundaries overseen by the Weavers’ Company. So, a weaver from, say, Somerset was a foreign weaver just as much as one from Normandy.¹⁴¹ Some complaints did single out “Unlawful Workers and Foreigners, Employed among the French Masters, who encouraged said Unlawful Workers, to the great Damage of the Freemen... that many Foreigners were privately Instructed in the Art of Weaving by many of these Unlawful Workers”.¹⁴² But this also implies that a distinction could be made between unlawful workers generally and foreign born ones. For its part, the Company consistently upheld the right of weavers born in different countries to become freemen. It admitted John Baptist Caron, whose names had turned up in one of the trawls of unlawful workers, after he produced a certificate showing that he had “been bred a Weaver” in Normandy.¹⁴³ Despite these tensions there was no rioting against French weavers, as there had been in the late seventeenth century. There was rioting in 1736 against Irish workers said to be undercutting wages in Spitalfields, although this dispute began in the

¹³⁸ LMA MS04655/018, f.68b.

¹³⁹ LMA MS04655/016, f.325.

¹⁴⁰ LMA MS04655/017, ff.66-67.

¹⁴¹ Rothstein, ‘The Silk Industry in London, 1702-66’, p.75.

¹⁴² LMA MS04655/016, f.74.

¹⁴³ LMA MS04665/016 f.60.

building trades before moving to weaving.¹⁴⁴ If French and Irish workers came over to join family and friends then it is likely that they worked and lived with each other. Rothstein showed this was true of the French silk masters.¹⁴⁵ It may be then that the Company's modicum of protection and the integration of the previous wave of Huguenots into the industry allowed a degree of toleration. In which case, James Briseau was an unusual, and unlucky, person.

The Company's one area of intolerance was over Jewish weavers. In 1762 journeymen complained about unlawful workers and Jewish weavers. But "not prepared with Evidence to support any of their Facts" they were told to return with some next week. They did not do so. Then there were complaints directly against two more Jewish weavers. The men, from Amsterdam and Frankfurt, were summoned to the court where they said they wanted to submit to the bye-laws of the Company.¹⁴⁶ Their names do not appear again and it could be doubtful whether they would have been admitted to the freedom of the Company. In another case, a Jewish weaver, Lunel Lemon, was refused admittance because he was unable to swear an oath on the New Testament.¹⁴⁷ The Company actually allowed Quakers to take an alternative oath, but no such accommodation was forthcoming for Lemon.

There is a comparison to be made with the campaigns against foreign imports. The Company was regularly being lobbied by weavers to take action against foreign silks and cottons. The Company's response was more effective there, as it was able to secure legalisation from Parliament to protect the silk industry, although how effective the government was in preventing foreign silks and calicos entering the country are another matter. The costs of regulating against foreign imports could be borne by the State and partly via one of its newest arms, the revenue service. The costs of regulating the workforce fell solely on the Company and given the size of the workforce and levels of mobility it could not afford to do so.

Knowledge and tools

If there was little attempt to control the movement of people, there were concerted efforts to control knowledge and tools. Both individual freemen and the Weavers' Company spent considerable time and money trying to stop weaving technology

¹⁴⁴ Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.115-116.

¹⁴⁵ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London', p.66.

¹⁴⁶ LMA MS04655/016, ff.303-304.

¹⁴⁷ LMA MS04655/019, f.381.

leaving London on the one hand and to capture French designs on the other. Silk weavers, like other workers in the luxury trades, were members of a craft - "a body of producers tied together by a set of techniques and knowledge" - that was the core of occupational identity. Skills were seen as a property possessed by the worker, marking them apart from casual labourers.¹⁴⁸ But the evidence here suggests that weaving skills were very adaptable, both between branches of the trade and between countries. Artisanal knowledge was 'tacit' rather than codified and dependent upon performance and 'know-how'.¹⁴⁹ It could therefore be adapted in new contexts fairly easily. It was because skills and technology might be easily transferable from one city to another that made it so important to control them. Knowledge of design patterns was central to winning the battle against rival centres of production. The competition was fought not over price, but over product differentiation and quality. The Italian Antonio Zanon observed, "The English and French genii battle even over the invention of new designs. And armies will perhaps decide the fate of the fashions."¹⁵⁰

At the beginning of the century, English silks were taking the 'fag-end' of the market with imitative designs. The *Grand Fabrique* in Lyon was much more powerful than the Weavers' Company, directing the training of designers and protecting industrial secrets. The French had a superior information network connecting it to the tastes of consumers. The London industry did not have formal training of designers or copyright and regulations on designs.¹⁵¹ Without a strong institutional advantage, the industry had to be opportunistic, a pirate in foreign markets. There were two key periods. The first was the arrival of the Huguenot refugees of 1680s, who brought brocaded and flowered designs and the use of engine looms. This allowed England to become 'number two'. Second, the period from the 1740s to the 1760s saw more proactive efforts to poach from abroad in order to improve the quality of its own work. Peter Chevenex thought it totally counterproductive to try to copy French designs, particularly as it would harm the export trade: why would someone buy a second-hand design when they could buy

¹⁴⁸ James R. Farr, 'Cultural Analysis and early modern artisans' in *The Artisan and the European Town*, p.64.

¹⁴⁹ Luu, *Immigrants and the industries of London, 1500-1700*, pp.6-7.

¹⁵⁰ Antonio Zanon *Dell'agricoltura*, Vol. II (Venice, 1763), pp.123-4 quoted in Poni 'Fashion as flexible production', n.18 p.44.

¹⁵¹ Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London', p.76.

the original? ¹⁵² However, in practice many weavers did want foreign silks for design inspiration.

In 1764 Mr Trott, one of the Excise men who consulted with the Company over smuggling, told them that he had seized a pattern book of French silks “of all sorts” from some French agents. This book would have been used by the agents to advertise the design and craftsmanship of Lyon weavers and to win orders. The book contained “several thousand” examples in it, “consisting of Gold and Silver Brocades, Silver Tissues, Flowered Velvets, Brocades, Peruvians, Lutestrings, Clouded and Plain, of all Sorts and Colours, Grogarns, Serges, Tissues, painted sarsenrs and Sattins etc.” The individual silks in it were worth from 3s to £5, and given the total value this is presumably why it had been seized by Customs.¹⁵³ Otherwise, it would have been a rather technical breach of the laws against foreign silks, which were designed to prevent silks which could be made up into clothing or linings coming into the country. The Company was determined to get the book and paid the Customs £50 for it. It then drew up a detailed set of rules, as to who would be allowed access to it. The patterns could be inspected on Wednesday and Thursday, from 10am to 1 pm. A Committee of twelve liverymen had to be present and only six people or less could view the patterns at a time. These people had to be freemen and were required to send a note to the Clerk “who would allocate times according to their Seniority of standing on the Livery”.¹⁵⁴ The Wire drawers’ Company was also instructed by Customs to have a member attend Customs House every Tuesday and Friday to inspect the gold and silver lace in the book. The weavers were told to do the same for gold and silver brocades “at the same times”.¹⁵⁵

Silk weavers attempted to stop skills leaving the country too. Of particular concern were movements to Spain. In 1749 the Company was informed that people were going to Spain with looms and tools “in order to Set up and exercise the Said manufacture”.¹⁵⁶ As good mercantilists they condemned it as damaging both to the Company and the country. They attempted to get information on the agents organising the move and stop it. Several weavers were arrested and the Company

¹⁵² Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.62.

¹⁵³ LMA MS04655/016, ff.339-340.

¹⁵⁴ LMA MS04655/016, f.347.

¹⁵⁵ LMA MS04655/016, f.356.

¹⁵⁶ LMA MS04655/015, f.327.

agreed to pay for the costs of prosecution.¹⁵⁷ Alarmed by this episode, the Company pressed for the updating of legislation to prevent 'seducing' weavers and tools into leaving the country. If convicted the punishments were set at £500 and one year's imprisonment for a first offence, and £1000 and two years' imprisonment for a second offence.¹⁵⁸ Master weavers now took it upon themselves to police the act. John Peters was reimbursed five guineas for attempting to stop a group of foreigners buying weaving tools and sending them abroad. He chased them all the way to Gravesend but the ship had sailed before he could arrest them.¹⁵⁹ A Company official interviewed a Leeds broadcloth weaver who had just returned from Spain, who confirmed that weaving tools were being sent from England and Ireland to Spain. The Company passed this information onto the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Earl of Holderness.¹⁶⁰

Although the amended Act referred to woollen and silk manufacture, all these episodes concerned wool only. The transferable nature of weaving tools and skills seems to have been the issue here. There were no complaints about weavers going to Copenhagen. There they were simply being recruited as labour and the looms were already set up for them. The weavers going to Spain were being recruited with tools and equipment that obviously did not exist in Spain. This also points to the adaptability of weaving skills from one textile sector to the other. This is what allowed weavers to move from France to Ireland to England and find work quickly. Many of the French weavers had not been trained in silk, but in thread or cotton.¹⁶¹ Abraham Levesque had been a worsted weaver in Normandy; John Lardant, also from Normandy, had been a linen weaver.¹⁶² This was also true within the British textile industries. A manufacturer in Manchester reported that weavers worked between the silk and cotton trades there depending on the wages on offer.¹⁶³ The ex-servicemen who were admitted to the Company had almost no previous experience of weaving but picked up remarkably quickly. Joseph Banks was granted his right to practise weaving after only two years of receiving

¹⁵⁷ LMA MS04655/015, f.330.

¹⁵⁸ LMA MS04655/015, ff.349-350.

¹⁵⁹ LMA MS04665/016, ff.13-14.

¹⁶⁰ LMA MS04665/016, f.26.

¹⁶¹ E.g. John Caron LMA MS04665/016, f.60.

¹⁶² LMA MS04665/016, f.72, f.77.

¹⁶³ Evidence of John Middlehurst, 'Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade', House of Commons Papers: Reports of Committees (1831-32): 829.

instruction.¹⁶⁴ In this period some master weavers had worked in the centres of French and Italian industries, and acquired new skills. John Jacques Bougeac had worked for eleven years in Nimes and Lyon, presumably beginning his working life there before coming to London. English weavers spent shorter periods of time abroad - Philip Riley worked in Genoa in 1760; James Lawrence had worked in Paris in 1763.¹⁶⁵ These efforts certainly paid off in design terms. By the 1770s observers thought that the quality of Lyon silks had declined and English silks were superior: "Les manufactures angloises sont trop étoffées, trop riches ... durent trop long temps".¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that silk weavers were a highly mobile group of workers. Most moved to find work during a period when there was a downturn within the silk trade. Huguenots migrated to London for a different reason – to escape religious persecution. There were several 'circuits' in operation, for some people these were overlapping. One consisted of people moving between northern France, London and Dublin. Some weavers had been to all three, like James Briseau, others made only one move into London where they permanently settled. A second circuit saw weavers from London moving to Glasgow and Copenhagen after having been offered better employment there. A third, was made up of weavers taking short term employment in the army and navy, during period of economic distress or to escape domestic troubles. Weavers who took this route were dispersed far more widely around the world. From their own accounts, this was considered normal and these institutions of state were viewed instrumentally as a source of quick cash.

Another institution, the Weavers' Company, did not help weavers migrate, but it did provide some framework for integration of new arrivals to London and did not seek to stop the movement of labour. The Lucassens' work on migration is confirmed here in several areas.¹⁶⁷ The silk industry was part of 'the move to the North Sea'. There was a significant level of migration before the mid-nineteenth century and soldiers were a large category of migrants. However, the silk weavers

¹⁶⁴ LMA MS04665/016, ff.1-2.

¹⁶⁵ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry' (1765): 209.

¹⁶⁶ Isaac De Pinto, *Traité de la circulation et du credit* (Amsterdam, 1771), p.26 quoted in Poni 'Fashion as flexible production', p.62.

¹⁶⁷ Lucassen and Lucassen, 'The mobility transition in Europe revisited'.

studied here show that occupational categories in migration history can be fluid terms that may not always capture the full picture. It may be a passing phase in the life-course, and may not simply be the result of state mobilisation of resources. Migration between places outside of Europe was not considered by the Lucassens. Looked at from the point of view of an industry, rather than a macro-level, the division between European and extra-European migration may not be so clear cut. These networks stand in contrast to those which moved raw and finished silk cloth in and out of London, and the movement of weaving tools and silk designs. Not only were these geographically different but movement was more restricted, with the state legislating against foreign silk imports and weaving tools leaving Britain.

Chapter 3: The politics of silk

By the *East* we're oppress'd,
By the South we're distress'd,
Tho' at peace with our neighb'ring nations,
Yet if Steps be not made,
To recover our Trade,
It will wear out each Sufferer's Patience,
For both Sinners and Saints
Are so full of Complaints
Of the Tricks that have lately been plaid 'em,
That they cause the *South Sea*
O'er their Coffee and tea,
For not drowning each Callico Madam.¹

This ballad was printed in support of Spitalfields weavers during the so-called 'Calico Craze'. It blames the lack of the work in the textile industries on overseas trade and the female consumers who bought one of the period's infamous imports: Indian cottons. In the 1680s the East India Company began aggressive marketing of the Indian cottons it was importing into Europe and released large quantities of them, competitively priced, onto the London market.² In response the domestic textile industries, including silk manufacturers, began complaining that these fabrics were eroding their market. This became known as the 'Calico Craze' in the belief that printed cottons and muslins had been enthusiastically embraced by consumers, who were abandoning the other textiles fibres. In addition to Indian textiles, domestic calico printing had emerged to serve this demand. In response, weavers and their guilds in the silk, woollen and worsted industries campaigned for Parliament to ban both Asian and domestic printed cottons from being sold and worn in Britain. Three decades of petitioning, pamphleteering and demonstrating followed until a total ban of calicos was won in 1721.³ The legislation actually unfolded in several stages. In 1690 Parliament imposed duties of £20 for every £100 of calicos imported from Persia, China and the East Indies. At the same time, duties of £20 per £100 were placed on wrought silks from India, China and Persia.

¹ *The Spitalfields Ballad: Or the Weavers Complaints against the Calicoe Madams* (1721).

² Lemire, 'Fashioning Cottons: Asian Trade, Domestic Industry and Consumer Demand, 1660-1780' in *The Cambridge history of western textiles, vol. 1*, ed. Jenkins, p. 497.

³ Tim Keirn, 'Parliament, Legislation and the Regulation of English Textile Industries, 1689-1714' in *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*, eds. Lee Davison et al, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp.1-24.

In 1700 duties of £15 per £100 were placed on all East Indian muslins, and the use of painted, dyed, printed or stained calicos from the East Indies was prohibited. In the same year, duties were raised further on East India silks, adding an extra £15 per £100. In 1704 £15 per £100 duty was placed on all 'white callicoes [sic]'. In 1721 Parliament prohibited the wearing of all printed, painted, stained, or dyed calicos, as well as their use in furnishings. Anyone caught wearing calico could be fined £5 and anyone caught 'using' calico could be fined £20. Cotton printing for export was not banned, however, and neither was linen or fustian printing.⁴

The campaigns leading up to the Act of 1721 have attracted special attention, because of their disorderly character and the arguments used in support of a total ban on wearing calicos. Weavers in Spitalfields were involved in some of the more violent episodes of the campaign. As *The Spitalfields Ballard* makes plain, they saw 'Calico Madams' as being responsible for problems in their industry. The anti-calico campaigns argued that the popularity of these new textiles would damage the sales of the staple industries. In 1720 women wearing calicos in London were attacked by weavers and their gowns were torn off them. Pamphlets and petitions posed useful male producers against decadent female consumers. Patriotic appeals were made for women to put aside their Asian gowns and buy British fabrics.⁵ Historians have seen the Calico Acts as a kind of last ditch defence against the long march of cottons into the factories and wardrobes of Europeans. By the 1740s, the legislation against printed cottons imports was being eroded or ignored.⁶ Political campaigning over textiles, more generally, is seen as being concentrated in the years 1670s to 1730s with little important activity in the rest of the century.⁷

The Calico Acts should in fact be seen as the beginning of a pattern of campaigning and legislation to protect the British silk industry from international competition.

⁴ P. O'Brien, T Griffiths, and P Hunt, 'Political Components of the Industrial Revolution: Parliament and the English Textile Industry, 1660 - 1774'. *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991): 395-405; Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination': 225, 228-229.

⁵ Rothstein, 'The Calico Campaign of 1719-21'. *East London Papers*, 7, 1 (1964): 3-21; Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company*, pp. 292-314. C.W. Smith, "'Callico Madams': Servants, Consumption, and the Calico Crisis". *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 31, 2 (2007): 29-55. See also the Old Bailey trial of the weaver Peter Cornelius, convicted of assaulting a woman wearing a cotton gown, *OBP*, 12 July 1720, t17200712-28.

⁶ Lemire, *Fashion's favourite*; Lemire and Riello, 'East & West: Textiles and Fashion in Early Modern Europe'; Chassagne, 'Calico Printing in Europe Before 1780'.

⁷ In the three volume document collection *The British cotton trade, 1660-1815*, the second volume is entitled *International Trade and the Politics of Consumption 1690s-1730*, the third volume *Establishing a British Cotton Trade, c1730-1815* is mainly domestic in focus.

Sickinger has argued that Parliament passed a consistent series of 'mercantilist' laws to protect and encourage woollens, silks, linens and cottons. Legislation concerning all these industries was passed in the belief that importing foreign goods or exporting raw material drained the resources of the state. Parliament was a flexible body, able to respond to new challenges. Over time domestic trade became freer, but foreign trade remained fairly tightly controlled. There was also an overriding concern to provide full employment for the national good.⁸ For example, duties on linen imports rose during every war in the eighteenth century with clear damage being done to the French linen trade as a result.⁹ Gauci's wider focus on Parliament and the economy sees little direct control of industry, as there was a reluctance to finance supervisory bodies. Instead, tariffs and bounties were the preferred form of economic regulation by the British state. Economic interest groups related to industry outside Parliament lobbied hard in periods when they faced increased competition, producing flurries of Bills and Acts. Members of Parliament for areas with significant textile interests felt pressure from outside to legislate in the 'right' way.¹⁰

Explaining why there was further legislation favouring the silk industry requires turning to the intensity of the campaigning and their 'framing' in geographic and policy terms. A policy of protecting employment in the silk industry and a nationalistic approach to the international silk trade would fit within Steven Pincus' thesis that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 saw the triumph of certain Whig ideas about economic policy. An intellectual focus on labour and trade, rather than on land, is taken by Pincus to be the hallmark of the new Whig approach to the economy.¹¹ Jonathan Eacott has looked again at the Calico Acts from an imperial perspective. He has stressed the importance of the decision to place consumers in the Thirteen Colonies and the West Indies outside of the legislation; the East India Company began to think about colonial consumers for the first

⁸ Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination': 212, 230-232.

⁹ N.B. Harte, 'Protection and the English Linen Trade' in *Textile History and Economic History; Essays in Honour of Miss Julia de Lacy Mann*, eds. N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973.), pp.78-79.

¹⁰ Perry Gauci, 'Introduction' in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, ed. Gauci, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp.8-12; O'Brien *et al.* 'Political Components of the Industrial Revolution': 397-398.

¹¹ Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. chapter 12.

time.¹² Popular politics more generally has been shown to have been engaged with imperial and military events. Linda Colley and Kathleen Wilson have argued this popular imperialism was reactionary and nationalistic. The eighteenth century saw the creation of a strong British identity that was supported by Protestantism and anti-French sentiments. This represented a turning away from constructive engagement with continental Europe.¹³ However, as Stephen Conway has argued even if there was a growth in 'Britishness', it does not mean British people lived lives solely constrained by national boundaries or imperial frameworks. Furthermore, debates over foreign and economic policy were often conceived in European terms and not only in a simple anti-French or anti-Catholic strategy.¹⁴ Campaigns launched by silk weavers did continue to frame their arguments in international terms as in the *The Spitalfields Ballard*, but often in more positive ways. After all, this was an industry with a European workforce. It also looked to Lyon and Piedmont sometimes with envy and, at others, as examples of 'best practice' in weaving and throwing.

Other sources of mobilization and argument lay within the silk industry. Gauci sees a trend away from controlling products to regulating labour, particularly wages, in the last quarter of the century.¹⁵ The silk industry in London is offered up as an example in support of this case. The Spitalfields Acts passed in 1773 ended a long running wage dispute by giving magistrates the power to set piece rates in silk weaving, and this arrangement stayed in place until 1824.¹⁶ However, legislation to regulate wages and to keep out imports overlapped chronologically. So too did the support and justifications for both policies. In both cases, one of the main concerns was to prevent poverty in East London. Neither journeymen nor masters (many of whom were in charge of charity in the livery company or poor relief in the parish) wanted poverty and a reduced market for silks. Undoubtedly, silk

¹² Jonathan P. Eacott, 'Making an Imperial Compromise: The Calico Acts, the Atlantic Colonies, and the Structure of the British Empire'. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, 4 (October 2012): 748–750; 756; O'Brien *et al.* 'Political Components of the Industrial Revolution': 417.

¹³ Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.); Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture, and imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Wilson, *The island race: Englishness, empire, and gender in the eighteenth century* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁴ Stephen Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe in the eighteenth century: similarities, connections, identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.48-108.

¹⁵ Gauci, 'Introduction', in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, p.20.

¹⁶ Joanna Innes, 'Regulating Wages in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England: Arguments in Context' in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, pp.202-203.

weavers felt resentful towards women parading their calicos around Spitalfields; seeing the protests in terms of a politics of consumption is clearly important. However, to understand why the campaigning continued after calicos were banned requires a fuller understanding of the 'politics of silk'. There has been research on the role of objects, including clothing and banners, in radical political symbolism.¹⁷ However, this work frames uses of material culture within a closed semiotics, without much overlap with everyday life.

With the exception of Riello's study of the shoe trade in London, it has been historians of occupations in France who have connected work, consumption and social relations.¹⁸ In studies of furniture makers, bakers and seamstresses the organisation of trades or the importance of their products for particular groups had political consequences, within guilds, cities or even the nation. For Leora Auslander monarchical patronage of furniture workshops helped to constitute the power of the *ancien reigme*. Within a thick description of the world of Parisian bakers, Steve Kaplan has shown how conflicts between master and journeymen, and the demands of consumers for 'fair' bread prices played out. Crowston's study of seamstresses argues that plebeian and elite consumers collaborated in the emergence of the mantua as a new form of female dress.¹⁹ Caroline Weber has explored the politicisation of the dress of Marie-Antoinette. The French Queen found herself caught between two stools, facing acquisitions of obscene extravagance for dressing too well, or being an un-patriotic (Austrian) monarch for not wearing fabrics made in Lyon.²⁰ In Spitalfields, the raw material weavers used could become a source of cash in hard times by stealing it from workshops, and silk on the loom was attacked during industrial disturbances. A sparse material culture explains something of their readiness to mobilise over political issues. The figure, visual and rhetorical, of the badly clothed weaver was important in the campaigns of the silk lobby.

¹⁷ E.g., James Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty'. *Past & Present*, 122 (1989): 75-118.; Katrina Navickas, "'That Sash Will Hang You": Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780-1840'. *Journal of British Studies*, 49, 3 (July 2010): 540-565.

¹⁸ Riello, *A Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP & Pasold Research Fund, 2006), pp.130-220.

¹⁹ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1996); Steven L. Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

²⁰ Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

'Politics' is used here to mean the public debates and campaigning that lobbied for regulations favourable to the silk industry. Campaigns in this period drew on the broadly 'mercantile' framework of the time. The demands for increased tariffs and prohibitions, justifications in terms for protecting national industry and the labour force against international competition all had their counterparts in other industries. These were well understood arguments not just among policy makers but among a wider public. However, it was strongly felt by contemporaries that these regulations needed to be maintained by public pressure or updated to meet new threats – they were not given automatically by the state. Spitalfields found itself competing for attention with other interest groups – the East India Company in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, then other textile sectors and industrial regions in the mid- and late century. Within the industry there was belief that a 'united front' was necessary for effective lobbying. Successful lobbying depended, not only in deploying the right arguments, but demonstrating that the silk industry was a worthy recipient of the state's attention. With the protection of the workforce being such a central argument, the behaviour of silk workers became an object of attention and played an important role in the different campaigns.

Ordinary silk workers understood this very well: they were keen to take to the streets to express their grievances and used the language of protectionism. Master weavers and the Weavers' Company expressed concern at times that disorderly behaviour might undermine their case with parliamentarians and the Royal Family. They were keen to encourage respectable, sober demonstrations. Here they were able to draw on charitable efforts within the silk industry and the Huguenot community that looked after weavers who had fallen on hard times. As good paternalists they felt they were owed some reciprocal good behaviour by their workforce. In turn, this attention to the needs of ordinary silk workers encouraged their belief that weavers and their families deserved protection. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two. The first half looks at concerns over poverty in the workforce, as expressed through dress. The perceptions of their dress and endeavours to clothe them by the silk industry are examined. The second half of the chapter examines the legacies of this attention to 'the poor weavers' in campaigns to extend and maintain protectionism.

Silk workers and textiles

Over the last two decades, historians have been interested in the clothing of the eighteenth century labouring poor: what they owned, how they acquired garments and used them, and what meanings they may have had. Partly, this research was prompted by the desire to find out how widely new textiles, such as printed cottons, spread among consumers in the eighteenth century. Historians have also been interested in how important the clothes of poor were to other aspects of everyday life. Both plebeians and patricians used clothing as an immediate gauge of wealth and poverty, regional origin and reputability.²¹ Looking 'respectable' to potential employers was an important part of securing work. This was especially so in a society where large numbers workers - domestic servants, apprentices and journeymen - lived in the household of their master or mistress. According to Styles most labouring people owned two sets of clothes and linen: one to wear and another to be washed and mended, in order to keep up appearances.²² Clothing was a part of the 'economy of makeshifts' with people acquiring their clothes through second hand markets, gifts or thefts and pawning them in hard times.²³ Historians of the institutions responsible for providing poor relief have shown that the clothing of the poor was an increasing concern by the late eighteenth century. After food and fuel, providing clothing was the most common item requested by paupers and provided by the authorities. Steve King has even concluded that the English poor were 'well clothed' thanks to these efforts.²⁴

One form of evidence that can be used to see how the clothing of silk weavers was understood is print. Pictorial depictions of weavers are not used here as evidence of how 'they really dressed'. Instead images are used to track how changing representations of the dress of silk workers was connected to political and social

²¹ Styles, *The dress of the people*, p.83.

²² Styles, *The dress of the people*, pp.82-84.

²³ E.g. Beverly Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England'. *Journal of Social History*, 24, 2 (1990): 255-276.

²⁴ Steven King, 'Reclothing the English Poor, 1750-1840'. *Textile History*, 33, 1 (2002): 37-47; Peter D. Jones, 'Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth-Century England'. *Textile History*, 37, 1 (2006): 17-37; Vivienne Richmond, "'Indiscriminate Liberality Subverts the Morals and Depraves the Habits of the Poor": A Contribution to the Debate on the Poor Law, Parish Clothing Relief and Clothing Societies in Early Nineteenth-Century England'. *Textile History*, 40, 1 (May 2009): 51-69. There is a parallel set of research on the clothing of slaves and indentured servants in North America in the same period. E.g. Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (Williamsburg, Va: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in association with Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002), pp.132-139.

concerns. These images used here are popular satirical prints, intended for middling consumers. Following one group of people through a specific genre of visual art avoids the sometimes indiscriminate way historians use images to look at an undifferentiated 'poor'.²⁵

Textile workers, including silk workers, did not wear much in the way of occupational clothing. Male weavers often wore aprons when at the loom, but otherwise were dressed in the standard male wardrobe of the time: shoes, stockings, breeches, a shirt, and a jacket or coat.²⁶ In the print *Saint Monday in the Afternoon, or All Nine and Swallow the Bowl* (image 4) nine tradesmen are shown playing skittles, on the traditional artisans' holiday. The bald male at the front is a weaver, being scalded by his wife. He is wearing an apron, although this does not seem enough to identify his occupation without the help of the text. The other men carry tools of the trade to identify them as a particular artisan. The man on the far right has a trowel tucked into his apron to identify him as a builder; the tall man holding a tankard at the back has a pair of scissors and thread in his pocket to show he is a tailor. Plate 1 of Hogarth's morality tale of two apprentices *Industry and Idleness* (1747) and the study for plate 4 (see images 5 and 6) show men in workshops in Spitalfields, wearing the 'outfit' of an artisan. The images suggest a division of status between masters who wore hats in the workshop, and apprentices and journeymen who did not wear them when working at the loom.²⁷

Image 7 printed during the disturbances of the mid-1760s, twenty years after Hogarth, shows similar kinds of clothing being worn. There is a distinction in this print between the orderly demonstrators in front of the Royal carriage and the mob stoning a house. The mob is not ragged as such, but their dress is disorderly. The figure facing towards the viewer has an un-tucked shirt and a short jacket; his hat is beaten about. Those near him have coats that are too big for them. By contrast those near to the King wear well-fitting coats, with prominent buttons and hats. One figure links the two groups together. Standing at the back of the sober

²⁵ Rachel Worth, 'Developing a Method for the Study of the Clothing of the "Poor": Some Themes in the Visual Representation of Rural Working-Class Dress, 1850-1900'. *Textile History*, 40, 1 (2009): 71-72.

²⁶ Phillis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, *Occupational costume in England, from the eleventh century to 1914 ... With chapters by Alan Mansfield, etc.* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967), pp.105-108.

²⁷ Foreign observers regarded this relative lack of difference as distinctive of English dress. See Styles, *Dress of the People*, pp.19-20.

group is a man whose coat is ill-fitting and a misshapen hat. He is not threatening violence, but tagging along, perhaps helping to demonstrate the poverty of the weavers to the King. The visual linkage between weavers and politics continued into the 1770s and 1780s. In the Westminster election of 1784 it was alleged that weavers from Spitalfields had been hired to vote for Fox. In the *Force of Friendship* (1784, see image 10) the Duchess of Devonshire carries a bundle of weavers to a vote in Westminster. In *Doctor Barnacle driving a load of Spitalfields Weavers to poll for Westminster* (image 11) the weavers are being driven in a cart to the election. Some are hatless and wigless to indicate their status, and carry a flag with the slogan 'Fox and the Loom holders for ever.'



Image 4. Published by Richard Marshall, “Saint Monday in the Afternoon, or All Nine and Swallow the Bowl”(London, c.1770s). Based, on a painting by Francis Hayman of the early 1740s. Museum number: 2001,1125.51.
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=686434&partId=1&searchText=saint+monday&page=1.



Image 5. William Hogarth, Plate 1 of *Industry and Idleness*, "The fellow 'prentices at their looms". (London, 1747). Museum number: 1896,0710.2 © The Trustees of the British Museum. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=752999&partId=1&searchText=Pl+1+of+%22Industry+and+Idleness%22&page=1.



Image 6. William Hogarth, Finished drawing for Plate 4 of *Industry and Idleness* "The industrious 'prentice a favourite and entrusted by his master" (London, 1747). Museum number: 1896,0710.10. © The Trustees of the British Museum. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=752990&partId=1&searchText=The+industrious+%27prentice+a+favourite+and+entrusted+by+his+master&page=1.

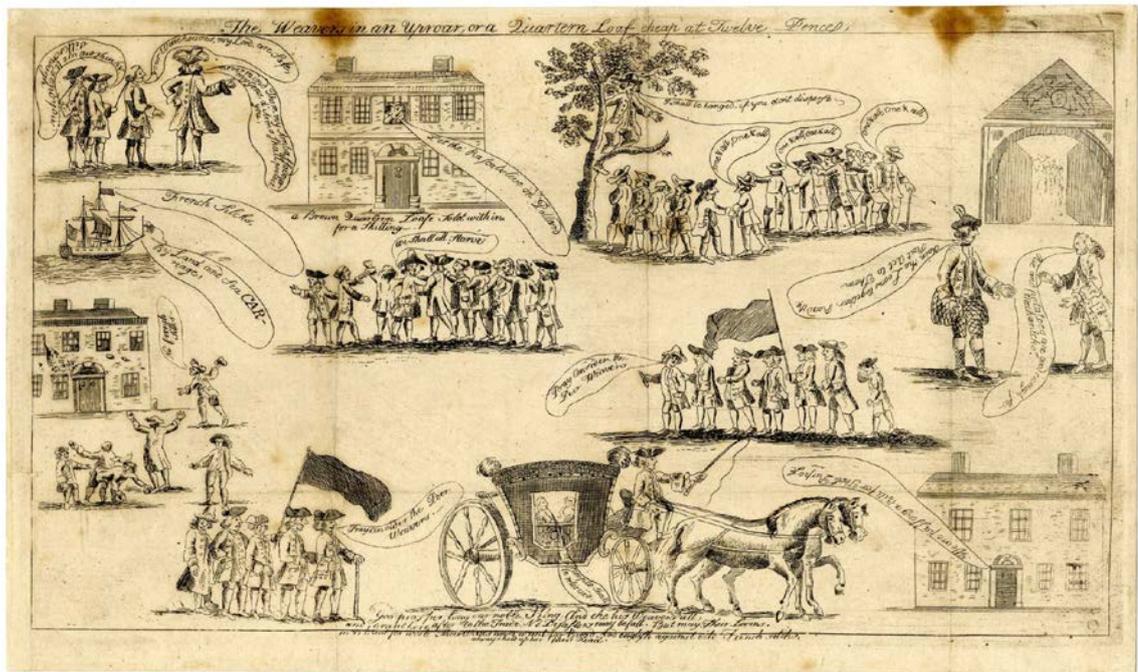


Image 7. Anonymous, 'The Weavers in an Uproar, or a Quartern Loaf cheap at Twelve Pence' (c.1765). Museum number: 1859,0514.204. © The Trustees of the British Museum. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3078387&partId=1&searchText=The+Weavers+in+an+Uproar&page=1.

Inscription reads: "God prosper long our noble King, And ike [sic] his Weavers all and grant here after to the Trade, No Disasters may befall. But may their Looms, ne'er want for work Their Wives never want for Bread And english against vile French silks, always hold up their Head".

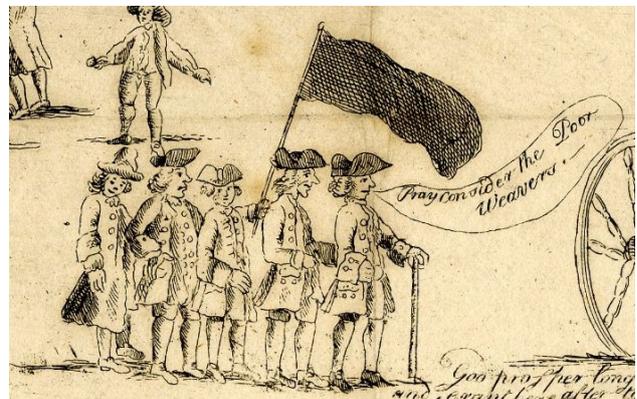
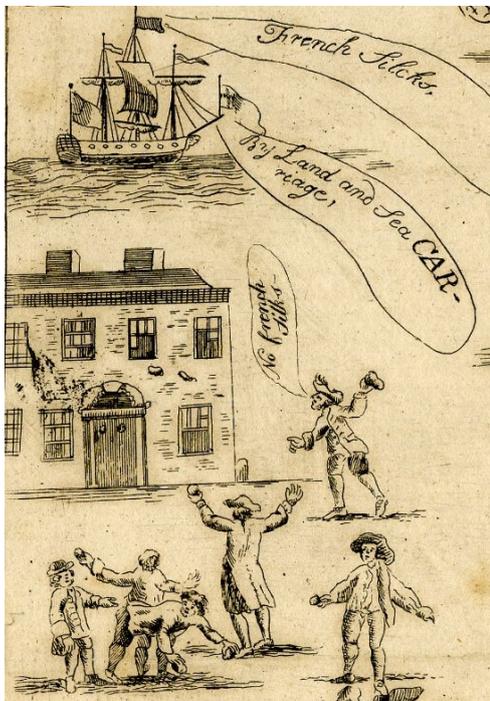


Image 8 (left) & 9 (above) details from, *The Weavers in an Uproar...*



Image 10. William Dent, *The Force of Friendship* (1784). Museum number: 1868,0808.5304. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1634276&partId=1&searchText=force+of+friendship&page=1



Image 11. William Dent, *Doctor Barnacle driving a load of Spitalfields Weavers to poll for Westminster* (1784). Museum number: 1868,0808.5291. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1634169&partId=1&searchText=Doctor+Barnacle+driving+a+load+of+Spitalfields+Weavers+to+poll+for+Westminster&page=1

From the late 1760s a section of writers on political economy became pessimistic about the living standards of the labouring poor. They argued for interventions in the market to protect labouring households.¹ Similar concerns were found in the visual field from the 1770s. The figure of the 'distressed weaver' began to appear in pamphlets and newspapers describing social consequence of depressions in the textile industries.² In this period images of northern industrial workers appear in prints, often showing them in Herculean poses.³ 'Distressed weavers' suggests something rather different, rendering them as either a comic shambles or people to be pitied. In the latter case, the term linked the physical conditions of weavers and their families – especially appearance and hunger – with the problems of poverty more generally. The anti-recruiting satires produced in 1778-1779 use the idea of the distressed or ragged weaver to mock the effectiveness of Britain's army. The *Bethnal-Green Company of Irish Impresst Volunteers* (image 2 in chapter 2) presents the new recruits from Bethnal Green as a motley crew of badly dressed, infirm weavers. Another print shows recruits in Manchester as an even more hopeless, 'distressed' band of weavers.⁴

More sympathetic to the plight of textile workers was Isaac Cruikshank's *A general fast in consequence of the war!!*, printed in 1794 (Image 12). It contrasts a poor family in Spitalfields with a well feed clergyman in Lambeth. Inside a bare, cold room the weaver sits in his once good set of clothes turned threadbare. He also has no hat or wig. The clothes of his wife and children are also in a poor state, and his son is without shoes. By the 1820s and *The national pop-shop in Threadneedle Street* (Images 13 and 14) the silk weaver's dress has kept up with changes in men's clothes – he wears trousers and a top hat – but all are in a poor state and he

¹ Jonathan White, 'The Laboring-Class Domestic Sphere in Eighteenth-Century British Social Thought' in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, eds. John Styles and Amanda Vickery, (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art & Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2006.), pp.257-260.

² A keyword search of the Burney Collection records the first appearance of the phrase "distressed weavers" in 1773. It turns up 359 results from 1773 to 1850. Search: 10/03/2011.

³ Sam Smiles, 'Defying Comprehension: Resistance to Uniform Appearance in Depicting the Poor, 1770s to 1830s'. *Textile History*, 33 (2002): 22-23.

⁴ Anon, *An exact representation of the Manchester recruits (alias poor distress'd weavers) before their equipment à la militaire*, (1778). British Museum Registration Number: 1868,0808.4563. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectId=1448554&partId=1.

has bare feet. By the 1840s and the decay of the industry one weaver and his son were described as sitting before, “two looms in the apartment, at one end of which is seated the father, a jaded man in a worsted nightcap and a pair of grey stocking sleeves. At the other loom is employed a sickly boy of ten years of age, clad in a calico nightshirt and a pair of corduroy trousers suspended by a piece of list running transversely over his shoulders.”⁵



Image 12. Isaac Cruikshank, *A general fast in consequence of the war!!*, (London, 1794). Museum number: 1935,0522.8.95. © The Trustees of the British Museum. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3017094&partId=1&searchText=A+general+fast+in+consequence+of+the+war&page=1.

This print contrast two London interiors in the winter of 1794. On the left we are shown a clergymen in Lambeth dining with two ladies: all well fed and dressed and the room is well furnished. In addition to the dishes already on the table, a roast bird is being brought out. The women on the left is full however, and asks for no more. On the right is a bare room in Spitalfields where a poor weaver and his family sit. They have no food, wear old clothes and the small fire is going out. Above the weaver’s head there are two lists on the wall one for “Subscition for Family in Distress in Consequence of the War” which has only one signature, and “A List of Subscrition[s] for Emigrant Clergy” which has 10, 000. A print showing an armed street robbery is pinned between the two lists. Outside the window stand an empty ‘Manufactory’.

⁵ Quoted in Cunnington and Lucas, *Occupational costume in England*, p.111.

What was the reality of weavers' dress and were the institutions of the silk industry concerned about it? Lesley Miller has looked at the clothes of pattern drawers in Lyon and found that they dressed well but soberly; certainly not wearing the patterns they designed.⁶ Here inventories produced at the time of death of 48 silk workers between 1771 and 1812 are used. These silk workers were all inmates at La Providence, known in English as the French Protestant Hospital, in Old Street, London. La Providence had been founded in 1718 as a hospital for the care of poor Huguenots. Originally housing 80 inmates most of them old, but some younger disabled people and mental patients, it was expanded in size in 1760 to accommodate 230 people.⁷ Of the 1, 193 applicants whose occupation is given 48.8% worked in cloth making and allied trades.⁸ Inventories taken at the time of death of the inmates survive between 1770 and 1817. There are ten women (all apart from one were silk winders) and thirty eight male weavers. The vast majority of their possessions are textiles. The silk workers in these inventories had at least a change of clothes of basic items: two pairs of stockings, breeches, shirts, shoes and coats for men. The average person from this sample owned 14.7 items.

This finding is in line with the argument of John Styles about the clothing of the English poor in the eighteenth century.⁹ However as can be seen from figure 6 there were significant variations between individuals. Those who owned more items than average had many small, affordable items. The most popular items recorded were handkerchiefs (92) ahead of a basic piece of clothing like stockings (67), there were also 54 cravattes (see figure 7). These could be evidence of some inmates keeping up an interest in fashion in difficult circumstances, but they may also be evidence of people working in the hospital, perhaps through repairing or embroidering handkerchiefs. Those at the lower end had significantly bare

⁶ Lesley Ellis Miller, 'Dressing Down in Eighteenth-Century Lyon: The Clothing of Silk Designers from their Inventories'. *Costume*, 12 (1994): 25-39.

⁷ Irvine Gray, *Huguenot Manuscripts: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Remaining Manuscripts in the Huguenot Library, Vol. 56*, Huguenot Society of London Quarto Series (London: Huguenot Society of London, 1983), pp.2-3.

⁸ Charles F.A Marmoy, ed., *The French Protestant Hospital: extracts from the archives of 'La Providence' relating to inmates and applications for admission, 1718-1957, and to recipients of and applicants for the Coqueau charity, 1745-1901, vol.2*, Quarto series/Huguenot Society of London 52-53 (London: Huguenot Society of London, 1977), Table II, pp.64-65.

⁹ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, pp. 82-84.

wardrobes. Joseph Croixman had only a shirt, a coat, a pair of breeches and a pair of shoes: lacking stockings, this was below the minimum number of items needed to maintain a normal appearance. These missing necessities could be supplemented by the provision of the Hospital itself. Inmates were issued with shoes, stockings and shirts, as well as flannel and linen cloth, once a year in December. The records for this distribution that survive are for the years 1796 to 1810. One hundred and twenty four shoes were given out in 1796, along with forty two pairs of stockings (for women only), one hundred and fifty nine shirts, two hundred and sixty five yards of flannel and thirty yards of linen. From 1804 shirts were no longer issued and in 1807 no stockings were issued.¹⁰ Extra items were also provided beyond the standard issue: Joshua L'homeaux was given a coat as well as a pair of shoes, a shirt and two yards of flannels. The silk weaver Jean Le Ballif (or Jane Le Baillif or Jeanne Le Bailly) was given breeches in 1804 and 1806 and a flannel waistcoat in 1806.¹¹

¹⁰ HL H/C2/5 *Liste Alphabetiques pour la distribution des hardes.*

¹¹ HL H/C2/5 *Liste Alphabetiques pour la distribution des hardes.*

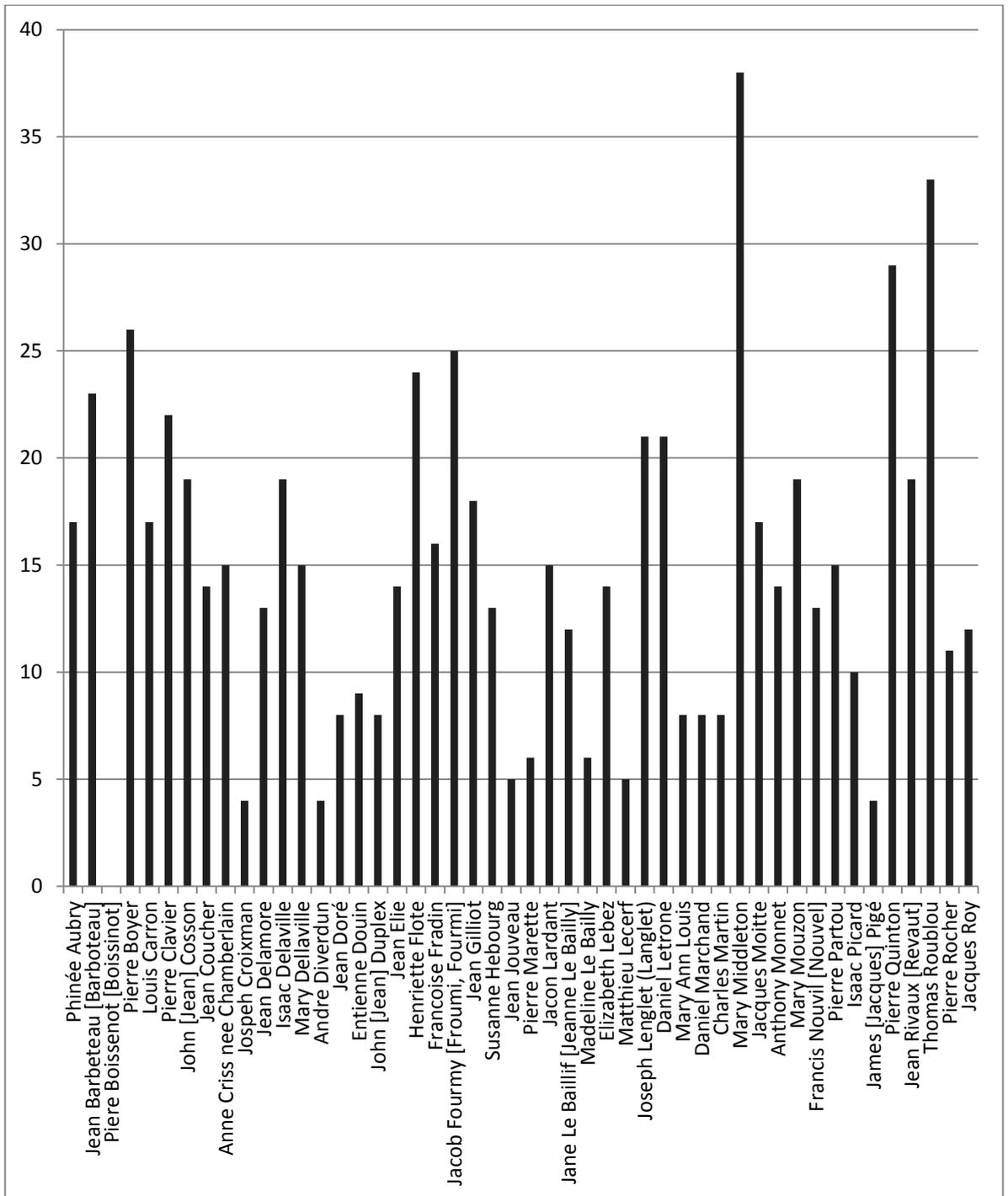


Figure 6. Silk workers' total possessions recorded in inventories at the French Protestant Hospital, 1771 and 1812 (number of pieces). Compiled from HL C 1/3.

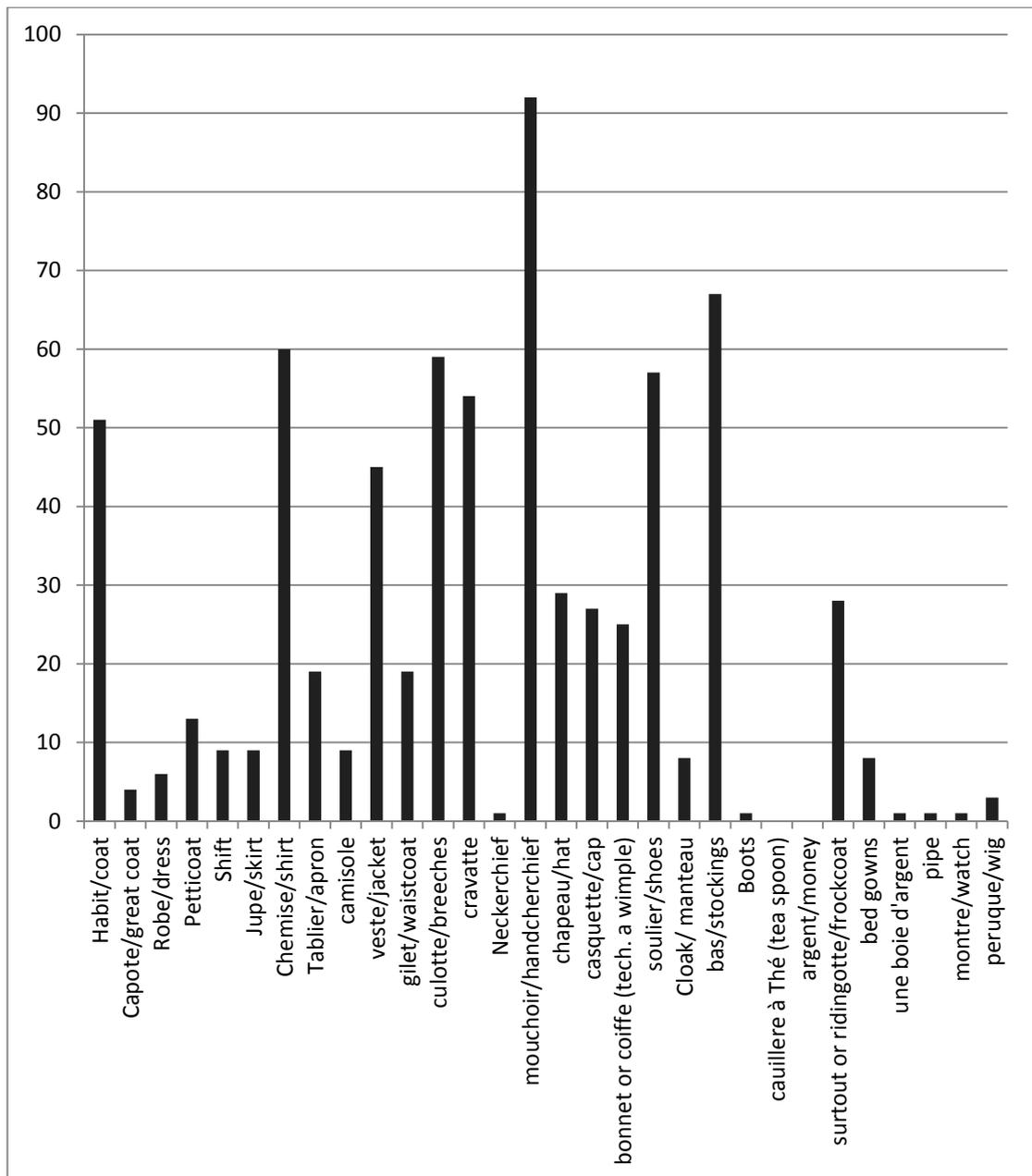


Figure 7. Types of possessions recorded in inventories of silk workers at French Protestant Hospital, 1771 and 1812 (number of pieces). Compiled from Huguenot Library (HL) C 1/3.

The Weavers' Company also gave clothing assistance to poor weavers. It had several regular bequests which it distributed to poor weavers and their families several times a year. Some bequests gave out money or fuel, but several gave out stockings and shoes. 'Saunder's Gift' paid out eight pounds of clothing a year to eight poor freemen over the age of 50 and three poor widows; each was to have "a Coat or Gown of Cloth of a Brown Colour of the value of 18s and a pair of Shoes and Stockings of 6s in price and 2s and eight pence in money." 'Sathwell's gift' paid for

shoes and stockings to eight freemen or widows a year.¹² In 1730 the Company resolved to spend equal amounts on men and women's clothing.¹³ Other charities concerned with the poor in Spitalfields also saw the provision of clothing as important. £20, 000 was distributed in the area in 1800 allowing "innumerable articles of apparel" to be retrieved "from the pawn-brokers' shop and restored to the naked poor."¹⁴ The founders of a soup kitchen in Spitalfields decided only to provide meat soup, rather than clothing or food to cook at home, in order to stop people pawning the items.¹⁵

As well as maintaining people's appearances, provision of clothing also maintained the connections of family and friendship that were so important in working life. The suspicious death of Joshua Crickett, a silk weaver who lived in one of the almshouses, is suggestive here. Spire Holloway, silk weaver and parish overseer for Mile End gave evidence he had been "in the habit of going to him at the Weavers alms-houses about two years and a half, to carry him weekly payments, sometimes twelve shillings, sometimes eight shillings, and latterly four, from Mr. John Holloway of the bank."¹⁶ Crickett's linen was washed regularly by Catherine Eagle; one of his neighbours in almshouses Sarah Sanders said she had known him for four years, her husband for forty years. His nephew Thomas Holloway visited him regularly, and Holloway's daughter Sophia Boosey said that she had known him "from my infancy".¹⁷ Once dead the clothing and the body of an ex-silk worker like Crickett parted company. According to the rules in the French Hospital all clothes, linen and apparel bought into the hospital by inmates belonged to the institution at death. Hospital commissioners were given the power to distribute items to the deceased relatives as they saw fit.¹⁸ Finally, the dead body needed re-clothing for burial. Like most friendly societies, when the Benevolent Society of

¹² Plummer, *The Weavers' Company*, p. 258, p.260.

¹³ LMA MS04655/013, f.33.

¹⁴ William Hale, *A Letter to Samuel Whitbread, Esq, MP, Containing Observations on the Distresses Peculiar to the Poor of Spitalfields* (3rd ed. London, 1816), p.19.

¹⁵ *The Economy of an Institution Established in Spitalfields, London, for Supplying the Poor with a Good Meat Soup, at One Penny Per Quart Principally Extracted from the Papers of the Society and Published with a View to the Establishment of Similar Institutions in Towns, Villages, and Populous Neighbourhoods* (London: W. Phillips, 1799), p.4-5.

¹⁶ OBP, 20th February 1811, t18110220-28.

¹⁷ OBP, 20th February 1811, t18110220-28.

¹⁸ *Orders and rules for the corporation of the governors and directors of the hospital for poor French protestants, and their descendents, residing in Britain* (1723).

United Weavers was formed it planned to care for the elderly and pay for burials.¹⁹ The Hospital paid for the funerals of all inmates, except in cases where the person had put aside money or family and friends came forward to bear the cost. Funerals were provided by undertakers such as Ayscough & Sons and undertakers' bills survive for 1736 to 1789. The undertakers provided a coffin, a shroud either of wool or crape, coffin bearers and paid the fees owed to the parish authorities to have someone buried. The Hospital was charged either 14s 4d or 15s 4d depending upon whether the deceased had a wool or crape shroud. Some people were buried without shrouds, although this becomes uncommon from 1765.²⁰ Burials paid for by friends, or in the case of Andrew Salmon 'by his club' become less common after 1770.²¹

Many weavers could not or did not seek charitable help, and fell outside these communitarian relationships. Those who fell on hard times may have resorted to theft, not to get a set of clothes to wear, but to steal something of cash value which could be sold on. It was common to steal raw silk, cloth being worked on the loom or finished items from the workshop: these were after all the textiles that weavers had most access to. Spitalfields was very close to the notorious Rag Fair market in Rosemary Lane, which had a reputation as a thieves market; there were also many pawnbrokers and clothes dealers who would take stolen goods.²² The seven yards of camlet (silk and wool mix) stolen from the weaver James Farnham was, he said, recovered from the pawnbroker's shop of Elizabeth Brown on Brick Lane within a day of it going missing.²³ The turnaround time for an item was quick and the margins were good: two pieces of figured velvet for a waistcoat (one twelve yards, the other nine) was sold by a thief at four pounds eighteen shillings. The shop keeper then sold a yard and a half of each piece for a guinea to a customer on the

¹⁹ Sholl, *A Short Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture*, p.9.

²⁰ e.g. Bill for John Thomas, October 1778; Bill to Peter Ball Jan- March 1759, Bill to William Gibson Jan to Feb 1756. H/B11/34 -Undertakers Bills 1739-1789.

²¹ Bill to Mary Ball 1762, H/B11/34 -Undertakers Bills 1739-1789.

²² Anne Wilson sold a coat stolen from the weaver Peter Tearney at Rag Fair for 2 s. OBP, 19 February 1766, t17660219-62. See for a general discussion of clothing thefts Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England'. *Journal of Social History*, 24, 2 (1990): 255-276.

²³ OBP, 2 May 1764, t17640502-20.

same day.²⁴ One silk weaver William Clarke even moved from his original trade into second hand clothes dealing.²⁵ James Gill, a journeymen weaver, was found guilty of stealing camlet and worsted warp from the warehouse of his masters, Edward Allen and Thomas Eades.²⁶ Thomas Addis was indicted for breaking into the house of his master Thomas Pike and “taking thence 26 Yards of Camblet, Value 30 s”.²⁷ Joseph Rice had been employed to work some silk, but he then “cut it out of the Loom, and sold it”.²⁸ John Roff, apprentice orrice weaver (i.e. in gold or silver trimming), pleaded guilty to stealing forty ounces of silver thread from his master and selling them to a silversmiths shop in Covent Garden.²⁹

This constant threat of theft raised tensions in the workshops. A silk winder Elizabeth Lewis unsuccessfully tried to prosecute her assistant Ann Diggins for stealing three ounces of silk, valued at 6s. Lewis had been checking a chest of draws that Diggins used, waiting until she had gone out to use the privy, and said that she had found pieces of silk in there. However, no evidence could be produced that these had been sold on or left the house.³⁰ Charles Shute lost five ounces of white silk out of his workshop and became suspicious of a new women working for him. He was obviously monitoring her when “as I sat at work I saw the prisoner slip some silk out of the runners, and put it into her pocket, and then she went away like a whirlwind, and I had not power to stop her; I immediately weighed the parcel, and found two ounces wanting.”³¹ John Fletcher, the master who prosecuted the apprentice John Roff, had notice missing silver thread and had become suspicious. After hearing from a servant that “that the Prisoner had risen in the Night, and gone to the Work-room, and wound Silver-thread off from the Bobbins, he search'd his Pockets, and found there an Ounce and half a Quarter”.³² At least one weaver claimed that taking the odd bobbin of silk was a common practice that was not seen as a theft. The criminalisation of such theft suggest

²⁴ City of London Sessions: Sessions Papers - Justices' Working Documents, 26 June 1780 - 8 December 1781, *London Lives, 1690-1800* (LL) (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 11 May 2012), LL ref: MSLPS150920261 - LL ref: LMSLPS150920262,

²⁵ *OBP*, 13 January 1790, t17781021-41.

²⁶ *OBP*, 7 December 1715, t17151207-17.

²⁷ *OBP*, 16 January 1730, t17300116-38.

²⁸ *OBP*, 28 February 1730, t17300228-33.

²⁹ *OBP*, 4 July 1730, t17300704-25.

³⁰ *OBP*, 27 October 1802, t18021027-140.

³¹ *OBP*, 15 July 1772, t17720715-30.

³² *OBP*, 4 July 1730, t17300704-25.

otherwise.³³ Concern over the level of these thefts was such that masters planned an organised campaign against the practice in 1792, by punishing severely those who were caught.³⁴ The Company decided against a prosecution of a thief it had information on, as the case might not succeed. Masters were left to prosecute offenders on their own.

Workers, especially those who lived in the same house as their employees, could steal personal items too and further violate bonds of trust. Peter Tearney gave evidence against Anne Wilson for stealing a coat from him, "I hired the prisoner to wind quills for me. I went to bed; she put the coat over me, and when I got up, the coat and she were missing. I caught her the same day, and she owned she had taken it. I told her if she would tell me where it was, so that I could get it again, I would forgive her".³⁵ These tensions around material items and workshops spilt over into wage disputes in the industry, particularly during the 1760s. The conflict was material as much as it was monetary. At the height of the dispute, masked gangs forced their way into workshops at night and destroyed work on the loom. Peter Perrin was accused along with Thomas Bowles and Andrew Rogan of the breaking into the house of William Bailey "at about two in the night, and stealing 100 pieces of ribbon, each piece containing 36 yards, value 70 l. thirteen guineas, and 17 s. in money."³⁶ In court Perrin's appearance at the time of his arrest was commented upon: he had been wearing a red waistcoat and a pair of nankeen (i.e. cotton, probably yellow) breeches. His brother-in-law gave evidence that Perrin had bought the breeches from him and the waistcoat in the Rag Fair. Highlighting this was obviously supposed to discredit Perrin and suggest that he had gone on a spending spree after the theft. It also suggests that wearing a bright colour or cotton was unusual for a journeyman and made him stand out. He was indicted again a year later for leading a gang to destroy four looms (there was no work on the looms) in the workshop of John Clare, a fancy weaver.³⁷ The 'distressed weaver' was a subject of concern. For the charitably minded he was an example of shabby poverty and needed re-clothing; to others he was a threat to industry and

³³ See the evidence of John Hailey *OBP*, 30 May 1759, t17590530-7.

³⁴ LMA MS04655/018, f.195.

³⁵ *OBP*, 19 February 1766, t17660219-62.

³⁶ *OBP*, 18 May 1768, t17680518-49.

³⁷ *OBP*, 18 October 1769, t17691018-31.

order. Both these impulses were constituted through the use and meanings of silk and clothing.

From calicos to foreign silks

After the passing of the Calico Act in 1721, the Weavers' Company continued to monitor legislation in Parliament affecting the silk industry, and to propose Bills of its own in response to new developments. As was discussed in chapter one, some of this legislation concerned the raw silk market: either lowering duties on imports or promoting a new supply. Wrought silks were also of concern. In 1729 the Company lobbied Parliament against a Bill proposing to have English silk exports stamped.³⁸ In 1736 a copy of what they called the 'Manchester Bill' was brought to the Company's court and a petition drafted against it.³⁹ The Bill had been lobbied for by woollen, cotton and linen yarn manufacturers in Lancashire and proposed allowing English made linen yarns and fustians.⁴⁰ The Company could also oppose sumptuary-type legislation as well as being an advocate of it. In 1731 it opposed a Bill going before the Irish Parliament planning to ban the use gold and silver thread. In 1742 the liverymen demanded a petition opposing a similar Bill that would have prohibited the wearing of lace thread or wire.⁴¹ 'Wire' was gold or silver thread used for decoration on silk designs, and a ban would have restricted silk weavers' products. The Bill was not passed.

In 1749 the Company become involved in sponsoring and drafting parts of a Bill proposed by the MP Horatio (Horace) Walpole, who represented Norwich and regularly spoke on behalf of the woollen interest there.⁴² Although the minutes are unclear, this was presumably the *Act to prevent the Exportation of Utensils made use of in the Woollen and Silk Manufactures from Great Britain or Ireland* (Act 1749 22 G.II, c.27). Forty three pounds was put up to help pay for the Bill, and a committee was formed to suggest clauses favourable to the silk industry. The committee wanted a reduction in duties on Chinese raw silk to the same level as

³⁸ LMA MS04655/012, ff.221-222.

³⁹ LMA MS04655/013, f.201.

⁴⁰ Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination': 229.

⁴¹ LMA MS04655/015, f.153.

⁴² Romney Sedgwick, *The House of Commons 1715-1754. II Members E - Y. Vol. 2* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1970), pp. 509-510.

Italian, and the ability to import Persian raw silk via Russia.⁴³ They also asked for duties to be imposed on foreign velvets, wrought silk and silk mix imports, and eventually in 1753 these measure were included in the *Act for encouraging the Silk Manufactures* (Act 1753 26 G.II c. 21).⁴⁴ At the same time, the Company was also working with Walpole in response to the duties the King of Prussia had placed on foreign silks consumed in Silesia. Earlier in his political career, Walpole had been British ambassador in Paris, and he used his diplomatic experience to good effect helping to arrange a meeting with the Prussian ambassador, where the concerns of the silk industry were expressed.⁴⁵

Attention to export markets was uneven however. Especially striking is the relative lack of concern about the North American market, which was in at least two periods the largest export market. Americans organising the non-importation agreements in opposition to the Stamp Acts expected a response from silk industry. The vigorous campaigning of the weavers was well known and reported in the newspapers. The drop in exports caused by the Stamp Act, it was argued, had led to thousands being made unemployed in England who were now “ripe for tumult and confusion.—The Spitalfield weavers are a recent instance thereof.”⁴⁶ If Parliament would not listen to the colonists cause, then they could rely on “that respectable body the people; they will appear in our behalf (or rather their own) for if the trifling offence of wearing a piece of French silk can raise so large a body as one hundred thousand Spitalfield weavers, that would attack the very parliament, what will be the consequence, when a very great part of the manufactures of Great Britain have nothing to do?”⁴⁷ It was reported in April 1766 that ‘a great number of Spitalfields weavers’ had emigrated to America or enlisted in the East India Company army to escape unemployment in London.⁴⁸ When the Stamp Act was repealed there was “great rejoicings in Spitalfields”.⁴⁹ Again in 1770 when there was renewed opposition to tea duties it was said that weavers from

⁴³ LMA MS04655/015, ff.349-350.

⁴⁴ LMA MS04655/016, f.71, 80.

⁴⁵ LMA MS04655/015, ff.317-319.

⁴⁶ *The South-Carolina Gazette*, December 31, 1765.

⁴⁷ *The South-Carolina Gazette*, January 14, 1766.

⁴⁸ *Virginia Gazette*, April 18, 1766.

⁴⁹ *The South-Carolina Gazette*, May 13, 1766.

Spitalfields leaving to settle in the colonies.⁵⁰ There was even rumour that some weavers would fight for the American cause in the Revolutionary War. A hundred men in Spitalfields were being drilled in the winter of 1775-76 and 'have been heard to say publicly, that they never intend to fight against America, but aim at another mark'.⁵¹ Corresponding reports are hard to find in London newspapers, and it seems like wishful thinking on the part of American patriots.

Instead, the Weavers' Company sought legislative remedies elsewhere, during the prolonged crisis of the mid-1760s.⁵² The Company focused on French silk imports as the main problem. As with the Calico Acts colonial consumers would be not be included in the framework.⁵³ In October 1764, the Court noted that members of Parliament had given "intimation of such their good disposition for legislation in the weavers favour".⁵⁴ The Company resolved to apply for legislation in the next session of Parliament with the central aim of banning French wrought silk imports as the "only Effectual means to give Relief and Encouragement to our own Silk manufactures".⁵⁵ Initially they proposed additional duties on French brocaded and flowered silks and velvets and a separate set of duties on other foreign wrought silks.⁵⁶

In proposing new protections the examples of other European countries were drawn on. Indeed, during the Calico Crisis it was noted that a ban on wearing calicos was already in force in France. Where once the French "groan'd and languish'd under the Misfortune of Wearing printed Calicoes" they now were free of them and textile producers were flourishing.⁵⁷ Critics of the silk industry thought that poverty experienced by many weavers resulted from over-manning, drunkenness and spendthrift lifestyle preventing people from saving for old age

⁵⁰ *The South-Carolina Gazette*, May 10, 1770.

⁵¹ *Virginia Gazette*, January 5, 1776.

⁵² Gauci sees the middle of the eighteenth century as a period of general greater concern about enforcement of regulations, paltry as a result of imperial expansion. Gauci, 'Introduction' in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, p.20.

⁵³ Although duties of 2s 6d were placed on re-exports of Indian printed and painted cottons to the American colonies. In 1765 and 1766 a duty of 12d for every 2s of calicos exported was introduced. Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination'. 228.

⁵⁴ LMA MS04655/016, f.353.

⁵⁵ LMA MS04655/016, f.353.

⁵⁶ LMA MS04655/017, (I), f.1.

⁵⁷ Edward Johnson, *The Weavers Case* (London, 1719).

“when the Eyes and Hands become useless”.⁵⁸ Employing too many weavers and paying high wages, made Spitalfields uncompetitive compared to foreign imports.⁵⁹ The parliamentary committees in 1765 and 1766 gathered comparative evidence on the wages of silk weavers in England, France and Italy. Philip Riley, who had worked in Genoa, told them that a yard of velvet would receive 5s in London, but only 3s and 4d in Italy. James Lawrence who had worked in France and England, said that for the same work he could earn 7s in Lyon and 12s in London, with a lower cost of living in France.⁶⁰ In other areas, competitors did pay higher wages. It was felt that Lyon held pattern drawers in much higher regard, reflected in their better pay. This explained, according to William Pickard, why it would not be possible to seduce French designers to Britain.⁶¹ High artisans pay remained a concern into the 1820s when it became a justification for removing the Spitalfields Acts, in order to allow employers the same flexibility that cotton manufacturers had in setting wages. This it was hoped would allow the silk industry to be more competitive against ‘international rivals’, in reality mainly the French.⁶²

Lowering wages by statute was not an attractive option for MPs. More helpful to them were the activities of the state of Tuscany. There imports of some woollens had been banned, as had the exportation of raw silk grown in the state. Translations of these statutes were attached as appendices to the parliamentary report to inform policy making. Arguments were being voiced in the hearings that further raising the duty on foreign silks would not work, as there were too many examples of fraud. The mercer Robert Fletwood thought that importers would pay the full duty on a few silks, and then smuggle the rest of their cargo. Many were calling for a full ban and Tuscany was a recent example of a state that had taken

⁵⁸ *Serious advice to the silk manufacturers; in a letter to the master and wardens of the weavers* (London, 1751). Pp.6-7.

⁵⁹ Ironically there is a line of argument that explains British industrialization, most recently associated with R.C. Allen, in term of high wages and cheap energy encouraging investment in labour saving technology. R. C. Allen, ‘Why the Industrial Revolution Was British: Commerce, Induced Invention, and the Scientific Revolution’. *The Economic History Review*, 64 (2011): 357–384.

⁶⁰ “Report of Committee on the Silk Industry”, 1765, 209.

⁶¹ “Report of Committee on the Silk Industry”, 1765, 211.

⁶² Innes, ‘Regulating Wages in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century England’, p.214. The same concern was expressed about high wages in the London shoe trade compared to those in Paris. Riello, *A Foot in the Past*, pp.210-213.

this action.⁶³ Prussia had also prohibited foreign silk imports, and two master weavers reported that no more orders had been received since the ban. In a more positive vein, the master weaver Mr. Triquet recalled that in Berlin, the King of Prussia had rented two large building to weavers for free, in order to encourage silk manufacturing. The King also paid annual subsidies on draw looms and apprentices employed by a manufacturer, and provided interest free loans.⁶⁴

The Company did not automatically get its way on the new duties and had to re-draft the Bill several times, before it was passed. By the next year their energy was driven into a Bill banning all foreign made silk stockings, mitts and gloves and a Bill prohibiting all foreign wrought silks and velvets.⁶⁵ The latter Act was regularly renewed for the rest of the century and up until 1820s when it was repealed.⁶⁶ It did need defending at times. In 1803 to 1805 a committee of weavers was formed to oppose a change in the legislation, which planned to reduce the many laws regarding silk imports into one Act. The weavers feared that this 'slimming down' would let in an amendment allowing Indian bandanas into Britain.⁶⁷ The Weavers' Company was also consulted by the Board of Trade about the treaty with France in 1786, when both Spitalfields and Lyon objected to the removal of tariffs on silk imports.⁶⁸ However, from 1780s onwards most of its practical assistance focused on poor relief.⁶⁹ The chairman of the committee that monitored silk legislation in Parliament donated twenty five pounds for poor members of the Company in 1815.⁷⁰

With exception of the 'Manchester Bill' the silk interest saw the threats facing it as emanating from outside Britain. The industry needed cheaper imports of raw silk, access to European export markets, and the exclusion of imported competing textiles from the domestic market. After the Calico Acts, French, Italian and Indian silks became more important than printed and painted cottons as the objects of

⁶³ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1766): 726, Appendix No. 3, 727-729.

⁶⁴ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1766): 727.

⁶⁵ Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination': 227.

⁶⁶ The Company applied to renew the Act in 1776, 1789, 1795, 1802. See LMA MS04655/017, (II), f. 266; LMA MS04655/018, f. 121, f. 280; LMA MS04655/019, f. 88.

⁶⁷ Sholl, *A Short Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁸ Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.25.

⁶⁹ LMA MS04655/018, f.241, f.250. The Company paid out £100 to poor weavers "and others out of Employment" in 1793. LMA MS04655/018, f.251.

⁷⁰ LMA MS04655/019, f.357.

prohibition. Strikingly there was little concern for the growth of domestic cotton manufacture or the new centre of silk production such as in Macclesfield.⁷¹ Historians see cottons becoming an alternative to silks, especially in lighter, plainer fabrics for gowns, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.⁷² Of course, for several decades domestic printed cottons were officially for export only, but from 1777 cottons were open competitors with silk. The committee members of the Parliamentary enquiries in the 1820s and 1830s were puzzled that the new factory production of silk was performing poorly against French imports. In fact, Lyon's manufacturers did well in Britain, Cottereau argues, because of their orientation to the fashion cycle, by investing in design, quality control and marketing. These were qualities that not been sufficiently developed in Macclesfield.⁷³ The London silk industry's focus on international rivals and problems was entirely justified. Domestic silk and cotton manufacturers did not produce for the high quality fashion market and were not competitors.

Enforcing prohibition

The Weavers' Company not only took an interest in legislation, but also in its enforcement. Members of the Company kept the Court informed of breaches of the rules on the wearing and use of foreign textiles, as well as working with Customs and Excise officers on these matters. In 1701, for example, the Court was informed that retailers of East India goods were storing textiles in two warehouses without the knowledge of the Commissioner of Customs.⁷⁴ Soon after the passing of the Calico Acts, master weavers asked the Company for advice on how best to enforce the clauses prohibiting the use of Indian silks for apparel furnishings.⁷⁵ Anxiety about enforcement did not just come from weavers. Customs officers too found the Calico Acts hard to enforce and William Huskins, a Customs officer, consulted the Company on how to prosecute offenders. As well as gathering or sharing

⁷¹ However, when the Coachmakers Hall Debating Society debated the state of silk manufacturer, several speakers, "ably pointed out the mischievous consequences that would probably follow to the Cotton Manufacture, by the proposed encouragement of the Silk Weaving Business". 'London debates: 1785', *London debating societies 1776-1799* (1994), pp. 164-176. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=38849&strquery=weavers> Date accessed: 13 June 2013.

⁷² Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.37.

⁷³ Cottereau, 'The Fate of Fabriques Collectives in the Industrial World', pp. 79, 90-91, 98-110.

⁷⁴ LMA MS04655/011, f.7.

⁷⁵ LMA MS04655/012, f.32.

information, the Weavers' Company took practical steps. It placed adverts in newspapers to publicise the clauses in the Acts prohibiting the wearing East India silks, chintz and calicos and appealed for informers to come forward: "Every person's house, on Information, is liable to be searched, and such goods seized as prohibited goods."⁷⁶ Informers would receive half or a third of the penalty paid by the guilty party. The Company also offered to enforce refunds for people who had bought printed calicos gowns in the preceding six months, in exchange for the return of the items to the drapers.⁷⁷ These measures did not inspire a wave of prosecutions. However, the Company did prosecute some individuals at its own expense. It took two years to bring the cases to trial and ended with stale mate in the courts. Lawyers advised the company to accept an offer from the defendants to drop the charges with no cost to either side.⁷⁸

During the crisis years of the 1760s the Company again began to prosecute offenders. Now the focus was on French silk and adverts were once placed in newspapers "to Encourage Seizures of French Wrought Silk Clandestinely Imported and to offer a Reward of Five Guineas to be paid on Conviction of the Offenders and Condemnation of the Goods".⁷⁹ Enforcement focused on smuggling of silks rather than on those buying or wearing silks. However, at the same time James Johnson was instructed, "to take into Consideration the Vast increase in the public Use and Wear of Chintz and Printed Callicos and India Silks plain painted figures & flowered; and to put the Laws enforce against all such Transgressors". Again informers were requested to come forward. This was something of a stopgap: only one person was prosecuted. Robert Phippe, an auctioneer, was sued for twenty pounds for "for selling a Chintz Bed and Furniture at a Sale of the late Godard Hunger's Effects". Phippe won the case, after it became clear that the bed was not made of chintz.⁸⁰ In 1777 the Company received information that "some Foreign Wrought Silk had been imported" and appointed a committee to enforce the Act once again. This time, however, the committee was instructed that it was

⁷⁶ *Daily Advertiser*, 31 July 1745, Issue 4557.

⁷⁷ *Daily Advertiser*, 31 July 1745, Issue 4557.

⁷⁸ LMA MS04655/015, f.272.

⁷⁹ LMA MS04655/016, ff.339-340.

⁸⁰ LMA MS04655/017 (I), f.62.66.

not to put the Company at any expense, and this may have been a sign that poor finances began to hold back attempts at serious enforcement.⁸¹

'Consider the poor weavers'

The Weavers' Company felt pressure from its own members and from journeymen to enforce prohibitions. Master weavers were often in agreement with the demands of the workforce, but were mindful that large and disorderly protest could be turned against their own authority. These were uneasy alliances. During the Calico Crisis journeymen had attacked master weavers who allowed their wives to wear printed cottons and blamed the disorder on the fact that "the poor working People have certainly been much exasperated to see such an evil Example among Master-Weavers, Throwsters, Silkmen, Dyers and mercers."⁸² Within seven years of the Calico Acts journeymen weavers were complaining about the use and wear of printed cottons at a time of bad trade.⁸³ In 1745 journeymen presented a petition to the Weavers' Company complaining that:

"Having for a considerable time past laboured under great Difficulties and distress for want of sufficient Employment in their Business and Weaving, And that your Petitioners are very much persuaded that the Decay of their Business is Occasional by the great Increase of late Years in the Using and Wear of printed Callicos, Chints and prohibited East Indian Silks ... And your Petitioners being Reduced to the Utmost Poverty and Distress and in danger of Starving Unless some stop be speedily, part to the Selling using and Wear or printed Callicos, Chints and Prohibited East India Silk"⁸⁴

The Company resolved to enforce the Calico Act but asked the weavers "to behave themselves quietly and not Commit any Violence which might tend to break the peace". The crowd was told that any information which they might have should be passed on to the Company's Clerk.⁸⁵ In 1764, a petition of "a Great number of Journeymen" was presented to the Company. The weavers "were Assembled in the Hall in a very great number and in the street about the Hall Gate" and demanded the Company make an application to Parliament "to Hinder the Exorbitant Increase

⁸¹ LMA MS04655/017 (II), f.284.

⁸² *The Journeymen Weavers Answer to their Masters Advice*, appendix to Claudius Rey, *The Weaver's True Case*, p.48.

⁸³ LMA MS04655/012, f.186.

⁸⁴ LMA MS04655/015, f.226.

⁸⁵ LMA MS04655/015, f.226.

and Wear of Foreign Wrought Silks”.⁸⁶ The journeymen offered to put up £100 towards the cost of a Bill. The Company agreed to seek favourable legislation but warned a delegation of the men that

“by their Disorderly and Riotous Behaviour in many late Instance of Cutting and Destroying Looms and Works, and other Outrageous Conduct, in Breach of the Peace, had rendered themselves very offensive, and to be looked upon as a very disorderly and turbulent set of people, and unless some Effectual Means were used to prevent all such Misbehaviour for the time to come, they would certainly prevent any relief being granted to their Complaints – since it could only be from peaceable and orderly Behaviour, and Obedience to the laws, they could hope to be looked upon, and expert Relief, as Good Subjects”.⁸⁷

The delegation of six or eight journeymen promised that the crowd would return peacefully back to Spitalfields and that “The Deputys promised to Engage as much as they could a quiet behaviour in future”.⁸⁸ Some journeymen did take up the demand from the Company for information on people breaking the statutes. Five guineas was paid to Thomas Jones, journeymen, in 1768 “for his Service in procuring a Seizure of a Foreign Coat and Waistcoat” in Grosvenor Sq.⁸⁹ The following year three guineas was paid to James King for information on Indian silks which had been seized by customs officials; thirty guineas was paid to William Ward and twenty guineas to John Peck for “giving Information against and procuring Several Persons to be Convicted of Wearing Printed, painted Stained or Dyed Callicos”.⁹⁰ A ‘great number’ of weavers were reported at the trial of three mercers who were found guilty of importing French silks in 1767.⁹¹ Some could be too zealous in their desire to help. It was wrongly reported in Spitalfields that Daniel Alavoin and Co. were dealing in India Goods clandestinely; the weavers who made the allegation, Thomas Prigg, had to retract it publicly.⁹²

The warnings of great poverty and hunger by the journeymen were reflected in the more formal petitioning and lobbying. One constant refrain of the silk lobby was

⁸⁶ LMA MS04655/016, ff.336-337.

⁸⁷ LMA MS04655/016, ff.336-337.

⁸⁸ LMA MS04655/016, ff.336-337.

⁸⁹ LMA MS04655/017, f.83.

⁹⁰ LMA MS04655/017, ff.102-103.

⁹¹ *London Evening Post*, 2 – 5 May 1767, Issue 6165.

⁹² See document 56 in *A Collection of Papers for and against a Bill to Prohibit the Wear and Use of Dyed, Printed & painted Callicoes in the Year 1720 & 1721*, A.1.3. No 64. (GL).

that it should be protected in order to secure employment for weavers and their families. The figure of the 'distressed weaver' seen in popular prints was given numerical backing. Large numbers were claimed to represent the scale of unemployment, existing or potential. During the Calico Crisis a figure of 16, 000 weavers and 8, 000 throwsters and dyers were said to be at risk.⁹³ Thousands were also claimed for demonstrations of journeymen before Parliament. The *Political Register* reported that, during the Calico Crisis three thousand weavers and their families "Crowded the passages to the House of Lords of whom they demanded Justice as they pass'd by."⁹⁴ Silk should be favoured over calicos, it was argued, because printing on cotton employed fewer people than the various stages of throwing, dyeing and weaving silk.⁹⁵ Calico printing employed only 800 people, compared to the 16, 000 weaving looms estimated in London and the 3212 apprentices bound in the city during the 1710s.⁹⁶ A draft petition by the Weavers' Company in 1742 against a Bill to prohibit wearing of lace thread or wire argued that if it was passed "not only great Numbers of your Petitioners but many thousand Family who are intirely (sic) Dependent there on will be deprived of the means of getting their Bread & reduced to the greatest Necessity and must become Burdensome to their respective parishes".⁹⁷

It was not just the images of mass unemployment that was used, or the threat of large numbers of desperate men to the east of the city. Weavers also represented a source of the country's prosperity and a body of patriots who deserved some recognition for their past loyalty. In 1719 it was argued that failure to act would mean the loss of weavers from the industry "The more ingenious are going into foreign Countries; others into the King's Service, both by Sea and Land".⁹⁸ And general loss of labour "what loss the nation hath sustained in the labour ONLY of

⁹³ Claudius Rey, *The Weaver's True Case; or, the Wearing of Printed Calicoes and Linnen Destructive to the Woollen and Silk Manufacturies. Wherein All the material Objections against the Weavers are fairly stated, consider'd and answer'd* (2nd ed. London, 1719), pp. 6-7.

⁹⁴ *The Political State*, vol. XIX (1720), pp.532-533.

⁹⁵ *The Weavers reply to the linen-drapers, and other dealers in printed calicoes and linens* (London, 1720), p.7.

⁹⁶ "The Humble Address of the Right Honourable the Lords Spiritual and Temporal ... 1720" in *A Collection of Papers for and against a Bill to Prohibit the Wear and Use of Dyed, Printed & painted Calicoes in the Year 1720 & 1721*, A.1.3. No 64. (GL), 5.

⁹⁷ LMA MS04655/015, ff.154.

⁹⁸ Claudius Rey, *The Weaver's True Case*, p.7.

these Poor, besides the Loss of our own Product, and the Trader's Profit."⁹⁹ In 1766 in a draft petition it was again stressed that the silk industry had "given Employment to many Thousands of his Majesty's faithful Subjects" but that if they did not get the additional duties on foreign silks they needed "the Silk Manufacture will fall to decay & in consequence the Distresses of the many Poor may be Employed there in be severely felt".¹⁰⁰ In the final version that was actually sent to Parliament they introduced an extension of this line warning that weavers may be "driven abroad to seek Employment to the Detriment of the Public and Loss of Revenue".¹⁰¹

One way of demonstrating loyalty was to appeal to the Royal Family. The court was a major customer of Spitalfields and a potential political supporter. Journeymen appearing at Weavers' Hall in 1719 said that they expected redress for their problems to come from the King "universally renowned for Wisdom, Goodness, and Clemency".¹⁰² Journeymen presented themselves as ex-servicemen of recent wars, doubly deserving of sympathy.¹⁰³ When journeymen and their families marched from Spitalfields to Queen's the Palace, St James Park they presented a petition to the King, detailing their complaints. He was reported as assuring them that "they might depend on his care and protection."¹⁰⁴ Later, the Weavers' Company drafted an address to the King and Queen thanking them "for the distinguished preference they give to the Wrought Silks of the Kingdom"¹⁰⁵. Samuel Sholl, who worked in Spitalfields from 1776, remembered that weavers created a "National Flag" to show off their work by displaying a detailed piece of silk in a public place. It was particularly meant to convince the "nobility and gentry" that luxury goods made in Britain were of equal quality to those made on the Continent. The flag was a piece of crimson silk, two yard wide, with brocade on each side (a piece of technical showmanship.) The brocading showed a female figure "lamenting the neglected state of her favourite art, with some of the

⁹⁹ Claudius Rey, *The Weaver's True Case*, p.7.

¹⁰⁰ LMA MS04655/017(I), ff.18-19.

¹⁰¹ LMA MS04655/017(I), ff.20-26.

¹⁰² *The Journeymen Weavers Answer to their Masters Advice*, appendix to Claudius Rey, *The Weaver's True Case*, p.48.

¹⁰³ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 6 April 1764, Issue 1052.

¹⁰⁴ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 6 April 1764, Issue 1052.

¹⁰⁵ LMA MS004655/017, ff.71-72.

implements of her trade lying by her.”¹⁰⁶ It was put on display in 1811 at a ticketed exhibition, after three years of work. Two engravings of the flag were sent to the Queen and Princess Elizabeth. For Sholl this would have given the winners the satisfaction “that they had contributed, in no small degree, to the credit, riches and welfare of the country to which they belong, and thereby prove to the world the injustice of the aspersions thrown against them.”¹⁰⁷

Sholl’s comment of showing ‘to the world’ suggests another side to the promotion of Spitalfields as a national asset. The court did not just provide patronage for workshops but provided a showcase for Spitalfields to an elite European audience. After a visit to London from the Princess of Brunswick, the Duke of York gave her a present of “several pieces of rich silk, of an entire new pattern, and manufactured in Spitalfields”.¹⁰⁸ At a ball held in 1765 at court it was reported that no noblemen appeared except in suits made in Great Britain and Ireland. Most importantly, the Duke of York and the Prince of Brunswick were both in Spitalfields’ velvets, “the first gold velvet shapes ever made in England”. These velvets, made by the firm of Harris, King and Thompson, were being considered for a premium awarded by the Society of Arts and Sciences.¹⁰⁹ At another ball at St James Palace in 1773 it was considered encouraging news that “scarcely any but the Foreigners appeared dressed in foreign Fabrications ... owing to repeated Declarations made by their Majesties.” At the same time Princess Amelia gave £500 for the relief of the poor weavers.¹¹⁰

Within this framework opponents of the silk industry could be attacked for disloyalty. During the calico crisis, the pro-silk pamphleteer Claudius Rey (a pseudonym of Daniel Defoe) accused those who argued against a Calico Act as being Jacobites who “act consistently with their Principle, in making the Badness of Trade a Party Cause”. Therefore, protectionism would undermine the Jacobite cause and win the weavers over to being supporters of the nation “then, they will be Partakers of the Fruits of our excellent Constitution and happy Government, and

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Sholl, *A Short Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture in England, from Its Introduction down to the Present Time* (London, 1811). pp.9-10, 15-16, 21-22.

¹⁰⁷ Sholl, *A Short Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture*, pp.6-7.

¹⁰⁸ *Owen's Weekly Chronicle and Westminster Journal*, June 8 - 15 1765; Issue 378.

¹⁰⁹ *London Evening Post*, February 20 - 22 1766; Issue 5970.

¹¹⁰ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, January 20 1773; Issue 13696.

consequently zealous Defenders of it.”¹¹¹ The Weavers’ Company claimed that most calico printers were “French Roman Catholics who settled the Trade here after it was prohibited in France.”¹¹² These arguments were used most pointedly against aristocratic transgressors. When Lord Villiers was tried before the Lord Chief Justice for importing foreign embroideries the prosecution concluded by “hoping his Lordship would consider the many poor wretches starving merely by the Nobility and gentry of this kingdom importing foreign commodities as their wearing apparel”.¹¹³ The nobility were blamed for becoming smugglers, even though, a sarcastic newspaper noted, it was supposedly beneath them to engage in trade.¹¹⁴ When contraband was seized at the house of “a certain great earl” the double standard were noted of the small time smuggler who was hanged, whilst the latter “dares to insult those who have done their Duty.”¹¹⁵

The behaviour of very prominent peers also exacerbated feelings during the attempts to pass the bill to raise duties on Italian silk in 1765. The Duke of Bedford had spoken out against the Bill in the House of Lords and it had not passed. It had been reported that the Duke had said if he had been born Spitalfields he could have lived off 10d a week.¹¹⁶ The next day a large group of weavers and their supporters had marched to see the King at Richmond, where he assured them that he supported their cause. They then marched back into London and gathered outside the House of Lords. On seeing the Duke of Bedford arrived “they hissed and pelted him; and one of the mob taking up a large stone for the new pavement, dashed it into the chariot: the Duke broke the force of the blow by holding up his arm”. The crowd followed Bedford to his house where “with great temper he admitted two of the ringleaders to a parley, and they went away seemingly appeased.” The next evening the Riot Act had to be read to prevent the Duke’s

¹¹¹ Claudius Rey, *The Weaver’s True Case*, iv-viii.

¹¹² See document “the Humble Address of the Right Honourable the Lords Spiritual and Temporal ... 1720” in *A Collection of Papers for and against a Bill to Prohibit the Wear and Use of Dyed, Printed & painted Callicoës in the Year 1720 & 1721*, A.1.3. No 64. (GL), 5.

¹¹³ TNA CUST 41/7, ff.45-46.

¹¹⁴ *Public Advertiser*, August 23 1764; Issue 9305.

¹¹⁵ *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, July 26 July 28 1764; Issue 530.

¹¹⁶ White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*, p.247.

house being stormed by the mob.¹¹⁷ Weavers also suspected Lord Hillsborough of undermining their cause in Parliament and confronted him in public.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

The campaigns and legislation against calicos at the turn of the eighteenth century were not a last ditch attempt to defend the silk industry, but were instead the beginning of a series of protectionist measures. The silk lobby continued to focus on the dangers posed by foreign competitors, and called for appropriate legislation in response. Over time, printed cottons were replaced by imported silks as the main culprit. The policy of controlling silk imports was part of a wider pattern of Parliamentary legislation designed to protect domestic textile producers. It also complimented the lobbying and regulations directed towards raw materials, design and technology within the silk industry. As Chapter Two argued, whilst the industry sought to control useful technology and objects, the movement of silk workers was relatively free. However, as this chapter has shown the two were not divorced from each other. An important argument for restricting competing textiles from the domestic market was that it would keep people in work. This was informed by a wider concern about poverty among journeymen and their families, caused by un- or underemployment. This was exacerbated by conflict between masters and journeymen over wages. Both concern and conflict often found their expression through clothing and textiles. Charitable provision for poor weavers included clothes; raw silk or silk on the loom became a target of theft and sabotage. Outsiders judged the poverty of weavers through their clothes, as seen in the political and satirical prints. Weavers from Spitalfields were increasingly presented as roughly or raggedly dressed. The figure of the 'poor weaver' was used in petitions, pamphlets and by journeymen calling for protection of the silk industry. It was particularly effective when used in contrast to the well-dressed aristocrats who unpatriotically choose to buy their silks from France.

The success of the campaigns against imports stands in contrast to the campaigns across the textile trades against machinery. Randall has noted the limits of the pre-

¹¹⁷ Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George III Vol. 4.* ed. Derek Jarrett. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp.142-143.

¹¹⁸ Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George III Vol. 4*, p.156.

Luddite machine breaking in the woollen industries. Protests against machinery usually divided industries, as workers targeted their employers. Merchants could plausibly argue that if they were not allowed to improve productivity, then production would relocate to another region within England. Such an argument drew support from local government and MPs who wanted to protect their town or county's prosperity.¹¹⁹ Campaigns against imports were always on a better footing because they could unite workers and masters in a common cause. Moreover, they could present their particular problem as a national one. This was strengthened through practical work between the silk industry and the Customs, the great state bureaucracy of the time. Even so, the policy debate was not simply nationalistic. Whilst campaigns against foreign textiles were 'negative' and protectionist, they were framed in an international context that was outward looking. Some in the silk lobby looked to successful foreign examples of protectionism, including France, Piedmont and Prussia. International competition was blamed as one of the causes of trade downturns and increasing poverty in Spitalfields. Local conditions and conflicts were channelled towards a national body, which found a solution in raising barriers against the goods of other countries. This chapter suggest that the Calico Acts should not simply be seen as a reaction to the take up by European consumers of an Asian product; neither can they be only understood in a short period of time. They were part a longer history of the European mercantile system and its broad focus of attention.¹²⁰ This history highlights not the special role of a particular fabric, but the great importance placed on all the textile sectors by early modern states.

¹¹⁹ Adrian Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.249-250.

¹²⁰ Riello, *Cotton*, loc. 2626.

Chapter 4: Silk and smuggling

By 1782 Parliament had prohibited the distribution and use of over 20 types of imported silks and silk mixes in Britain. Prohibition extended from East India painted silks and French brocades to silk stockings, ribbons, laces, gloves and braiding.¹ What had begun in 1690 with new duties on Asian and other silks imports had developed over the eighteenth century to an outright ban on almost all types of imported silks. In 1700 Parliament moved against wrought silks and stuffs mixed with Asian silks; in 1706 it banned French *alamodes*, lustrings, ribbons and laces. All foreign gold and silver lace had been prohibited by 1749. All foreign wrought silks and velvets were outlawed in 1765, as well as ready-made silk garments and accessories. Punishments also changed: those found guilty of illegally importing silks could be fined £100 and have all apparel seized.² The previous chapter examined the support for this pattern of legislation at all levels in the silk industry and the arguments they used to secure it. One of the assumptions underpinning each new piece of legislation was that the previously established duties or prohibitions were being flouted by distributors, retailers and consumers.

Therefore, new legislation was needed reaffirming the commitment of Parliament to the protection of English manufacturers and to cast the net wider to catch new threats from foreign producers. In addition to this, silk weavers also worked with the Customs and Excise to enforce legislation by providing information on people importing large quantities of foreign silks. The prohibitions on foreign silks targeted several groups along the supply chain, with elite consumption of foreign silks being the most politicised. That the sumptuary law aspects of the regulations were broken would not surprise historians. The reissuing of laws controlling dress in Europe is now seen as evidence of how widely they were ignored, as authorities tried to re-assert their power against the market. It is also an assumption of the scholarship on Indian cottons that the ban on calicos was widely broken after 1721. Of course, for consumers to break the law on foreign silks they needed suppliers, which meant smugglers. If some global connections were necessary for

¹ See the list in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11*, (1783 & 1784), Appendix No.1:292.

² Sickinger, 'Regulation or Ruination': 225, 227.

the silk industry to function, as with raw materials, and some provided opportunities, as with migration, then smuggling is an example of a global connection that was a threat or challenge to Spitalfields.

Smuggling grew in eighteenth century Britain, as taxation shifted from direct taxes on wealth to indirect taxes on consumable goods. The staples of the contraband trade were high value, bulk imports such as tea, brandy and tobacco. High duties (those on tea doubled its legal price) combined with strong consumer demand, which was not satisfied by a domestic alternative, led many to look to avoid tax. The contraband staples were only a small proportion of the goods drawn into indirect taxation, and Britain was not the only country where smuggling was a problem. Other states that imposed restrictions on the trading of goods also saw the growth of smuggling, such as Portugal following its introduction of monopoly contracts on diamonds trading in Brazil.³ The early historians of eighteenth century smuggling disagreed quite sharply in how they viewed the phenomenon. Although they argued over chronology, W.A. Cole and Mui and Mui saw the long distance commodity trade as the driver of smuggling, particularly in tea. In this view the East India Companies were central to smuggling and not just the English organisation. The Scandinavian Companies, for example, were believed to have been created largely to provide an alternative supply of tea to British consumers. In contrast, Cal Winslow saw smuggling as an example of social crime that flourished in coastal areas where the authority of the state was weak.⁴

Later historians, mindful of the difficulties of direct reconstruction of smugglers' activities, focused instead on the expansion of the Custom and Excise or the commodity trades more generally. John Brewer and William Ashworth have argued that however large the black economy grew, the revenue service was successful in collecting more and more tax for the state. The majority of its work was in Excise rather than Customs and it was in many ways a well-run and

³ See Tijn Vanneste, *Global trade and commercial networks: eighteenth-century diamond merchants* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

⁴ W. A. Cole, 'Trends in Eighteenth-Century Smuggling'. *The Economic History Review*, 10 (1958): 395-410;

Hoh-Cheung and Lorna H. Mui, "'Trends in Eighteenth-Century Smuggling" Reconsidered'. *The Economic History Review*, 28 (1975): 28-43; Cal Winslow, 'Sussex Smugglers' in *Albion's fatal tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England*, eds. Douglas Hay *et al*, revised edition. First published 1975. (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 119-166.

pioneering bureaucracy.⁵ L.M. Cullen has shown how smuggling overlapped with the legitimate brandy trade between France, Britain and Ireland. He drew out the close integration of French producers, Atlantic traders and British consumers, as revealed by location of so many distilleries on the French coast in order to supply the British Isles.⁶ Something of a synthesis of the Cole and Winslow approaches has been constructed by Paul Muskett and Gavin Daly. Both see supplying the demand for the exotic consumer imports as central to the phenomenon, but note how much smuggling was carried out by fisherman and small time traders. There was considerable overlap between large commercial operations and 'free traders'. Specialists in long distance trade carried tea from China or tobacco from the Americas. The goods were then warehoused in France or the Low Countries and carried into England by 'smugglers'. These were local sailors, English and French, who regularly crossed back and forth across the Channel, often evading one state authority with the connivance of the other.⁷

How far did the smuggling of silk follow these patterns? Unlike tea or brandy, which had high taxes on them, foreign silks ended up being banned outright. The illegal trade in silk went on much longer than that of tea, which fell away after Pitt lowered tea duties in 1784. The prohibitions on French silks also remained even after import duties were lowered on manufactured goods from France when the Eden Treaty was signed in 1786.⁸ In fact, silk smuggling continued right up to the repeal of Spitalfields Acts in 1826, and was still being complained about in the early 1830s.⁹ It also diverged from the black economy in groceries in its geographic origins. Whilst tea came from China and nowhere else or brandy from France, silks came from China, India, France and Italy. This suggests that the East

⁵ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Hutchinson, 1988). William Ashworth, *Customs and Excise: Trade, Production, and Consumption in England, 1640-1845* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶ L. M. Cullen, *The Brandy Trade Under the Ancien Régime: Regional Specialisation in the Charente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁷ Paul Muskett, 'English Smuggling in the Eighteenth Century' (PhD thesis: Open University, 1996); Gavin Daly, 'Napoleon and the "city of smugglers", 1810-1814', *The Historical Journal*, 50 (2007): 333-352; *Idem*, 'English Smugglers, the Channel, and the Napoleonic Wars, 1800-1814', *The Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2012): 30-46.

⁸ Susan North, 'The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction: A Pair of 1750s Waistcoat Shapes', *Textile History*, 39 (2008): 101.

⁹ E.g. 'Select Committee on the Silk Trade', *House of Commons Papers: reports of committees* (1831-32): 77-79, 137-144.

India Companies were only one source of the illegal trade. Silks were smuggled into Britain from several directions and not just by the bulk carriers from Asia. Textiles and clothing also lent themselves to forms of smuggling other than landing big cargos. From an economic point of view, as the market for the more elaborate silks was small and prices high, you did not need to transport that many garments to make a profit. Pieces of cloth and garments could be folded up and hidden inside other boxes and packages.¹⁰ Individual travellers, therefore, could make ideal smugglers. It was common to travel on a long journey with a trunk of clothes that could be used to hide items in. More brazenly garments could be worn across borders. Previous chapters have seen how the Weavers' Company assisted customs officers by reporting on the activities of importers and retailers. However, many people travelled between Britain and other countries, who were not directly involved in commerce, but who might still have had an interest in carrying contraband across borders. How important was this more diverse 'smuggling' and how was it dealt with by the authorities?

If the smuggling of a commodity was 'incentivised' by the high duties on it, then blanket prohibition could have created a black market for a variety of silks. The political campaigns focused on painted and brocaded silks, of the kind that would have been worn as gowns or waistcoats. These were particularly visible to the public and associated with high fashion and its aristocratic and royal consumers. However, extending prohibition to all silks suggests that a broader range of goods were also part of the black market. Establishing the composition of the smugglers' wares is important because it reveals the kind of competition that Spitalfields faced from other centres of silk production. As has been outlined in the introduction, the silk industry in London grew by expanding its product range and increasing specialisation. This allowed it to respond to the changing tastes of its customers quickly and to ensure good quality, which was key for the fashion market. Against its competitors, did it endure a war on all fronts or attacks at particular weak points? The silk industry had to respond to competition, beyond simply helping customs officers with their work. When an imported silk or a new design did catch the eye of Londoners, weavers in Spitalfields needed to produce a

¹⁰ In a similar way those qualities also made clothing an ideal object for thieves. Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism': 258.

new product to satisfy the demand. Broadly speaking, the two biggest external influences were painted Chinese silks from 1670 to 1700, and then French silks for the rest the century. However, if Asian silks did keep coming into the Britain during the eighteenth century did they really have no influence on Spitalfields? The surviving pattern books and silks are skewed towards dress silks and looking at other evidence may reveal different influences.

The logic of the import-substitution model revolved around producers making imitations of foreign goods, whilst raising barriers against them. Early modern ideas of originality were less rigid than modern ones and competition between rivals often bred similarity in product design.¹¹ There was also no branding or copyrighting in textiles in this period and nomenclature was used loosely: 'Indian' could mean all textiles imported by the East India Company *and* European designs produced in the style of Asian ones. European textile producers often suggested their products had exotic provenances when they did not: English printed cottons were sold in France as 'Indian'.¹² During the chinoiserie period, Dutch silk manufacturers produced 'Chinese' silks for the French market after France had banned imports of Chinese silks.¹³ Although they used European dyes and weaving techniques, these silks also had features to suggest they were authentic oriental textiles. Chinese weavers used wider looms than their counterparts in Europe, and the Dutch chinoiserie silks were woven to this unusual width. They were also 'signed' with faux-oriental characters, woven into the edge of each piece.¹⁴

Whilst there is no evidence of Spitalfields producing 'fakes' as such, its reputation rested on producing textiles that were as good as (and therefore indistinguishable) from rival, popular silks. The official wage agreements in 1769 record piece rates for "Italian Handkerchiefs" and flowered silks "shot in Italian manner".¹⁵ A manufacturer of ladies silk shoes advertised for journeymen who could produce

¹¹ John Styles, 'Product Innovation in Early Modern London'. *Past & Present*, 168 (2000): 130; Berg, 'From Imitation to Invention': 2-3.

¹² Riello, 'The Globalization of Cotton Textiles', pp. 276-278.

¹³ Anna Jolly, 'A Group of *Chinoiserie* Silks with Woven Inscriptions', pp.115-126 & Sjoukje Colenbrander and Clare Browne, '*Indiennes*: Chinoiserie Silks Woven in Amsterdam' both in *A taste for the exotic*, pp.127-128.

¹⁴ Colenbrander and Browne, '*Indiennes*: Chinoiserie Silks Woven in Amsterdam', p.129.

¹⁵ Middlesex Sessions: Sessions Papers - Justices' Working Documents, 1769, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, LL ref: LMSMPS507070024; LMSMPS507070041, (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 14 April 2012).

“in the French way” and could produce a pattern to prove their skills.¹⁶ This deliberate blurring of definitions could pose problems both for consumers looking for an authentic piece of foreign silk and those trying to enforce prohibitions. Ashworth has argued that as indirect taxation grew, Customs and Excise increased the amount of assessment that it had to undertake and this encouraged national standardisation of weights, dimensions and containers. This was led mainly by the Excise service, however, which also became responsible for regulating the quality of some goods and trying to stamp out adulteration.¹⁷ In textiles, the drives for standardisation were mainly for the benefit of producers, such as the regulation of yarn counts.¹⁸ The final part of this chapter will examine how consumers and Customs were able to identify English and ‘foreign’ silks in the midst of deliberate imitation and deception.

What silks were smuggled?

The attempt to draw out some patterns in the smuggling of silks starts with quantitative evidence. This is not intended to show the real volume of silk smuggled into Britain. Instead the following charts are used to compare silks with cottons, and show the types of silks run into the country along with their geographical origins. Infamously, statistics of recorded crime by the authorities do not give a true picture of the amount of crime actually committed - the so-called ‘dark figure’. However, bearing this problem in mind, historians of crime and smuggling have used statistical evidence to shed light on patterns and trends.¹⁹ The first set of figures used here come from the “Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue,” prepared for the House of Commons in 1784. It was thought best to use records specifically related to smuggling rather than looking for ‘foreign’ silks in a search of court or newspaper records. Seizure reports positively identify a textile type with having been imported into Britain. ‘India silk’ or ‘calico’ in an advert or trial can be an ambiguous term. The Parliamentary reports collected figures on seizures made by

¹⁶ *Morning Herald*, March 10 1788.

¹⁷ Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*, pp.261-316.

¹⁸ Styles, ‘Product Innovation in Early Modern London’: 159.

¹⁹ Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*. 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996.), p.24, pp.30-32.

the Revenue Service for the years 1769-1773 and 1778-1782. As this is a discontinuous series, and the aim was not to arrive at a 'true picture' of smuggling, two sample years are used: 1770 and 1780. The report records a whole range of contraband goods including tea, brandy, wine and tobacco, as well as textiles. The figures for all goods are only given in different kinds of quantities (pounds for tea, pieces for textiles) rather than by value, so comparing between all the commodities would have been difficult. It seems very likely though that the volume of silks seized was much smaller than that of tea, brandy or tobacco. In the case of silks, measuring by pieces does avoid the problem of comparing cloths that may be the same size but have had different weights. The report makes a distinction between seizures in the Port of London and the Out Ports i.e. the non-London ports. The report's categories and distinctions have been kept for Figures 8 to 11 and then conflated slightly for figures 12 to 13 to give an overview.

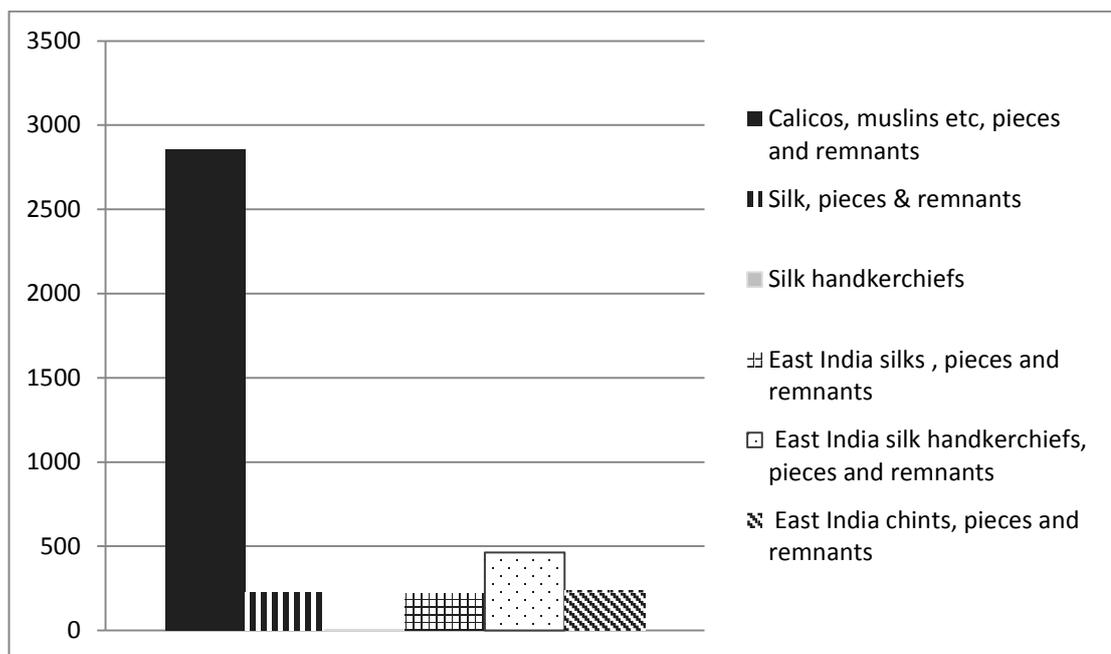


Figure 8. Seizures of cottons and silks in the Port of London, 1770 (number of pieces).

Figures from *Port of London, Account of seizures made 1769-1773, 1778-1782*, in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11* (1783 & 1784), App. 4: 240-241.

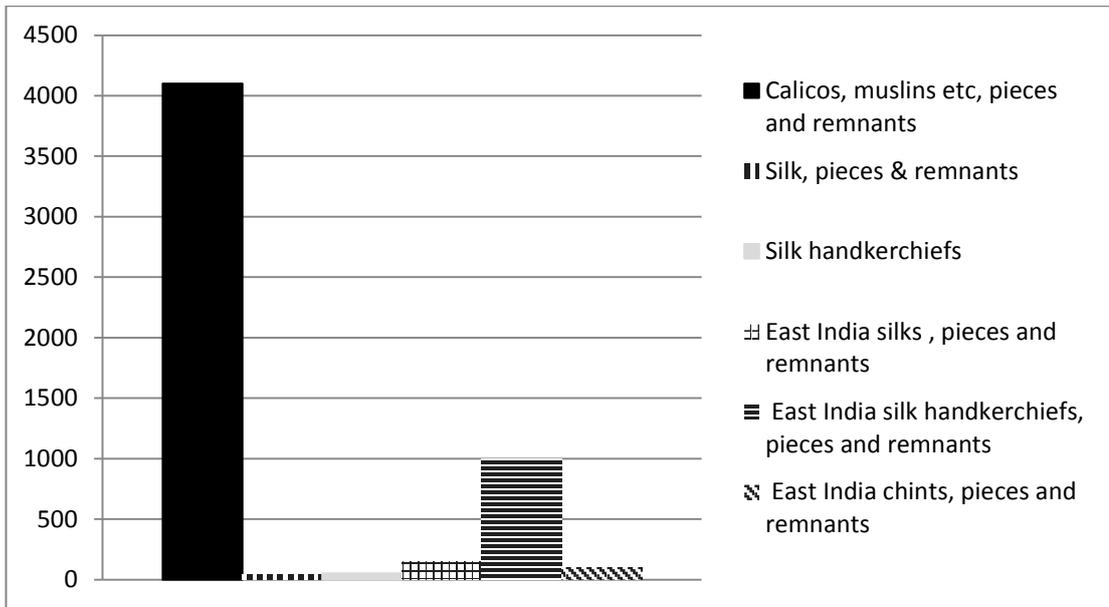


Figure 9. Seizures of cottons and silks in Port of London, 1780 (number of pieces).

Figures from *Port of London, Account of seizures made 1769-1773, 1778-1782*, in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11* (1783 & 1784), App. 4: 240-241.

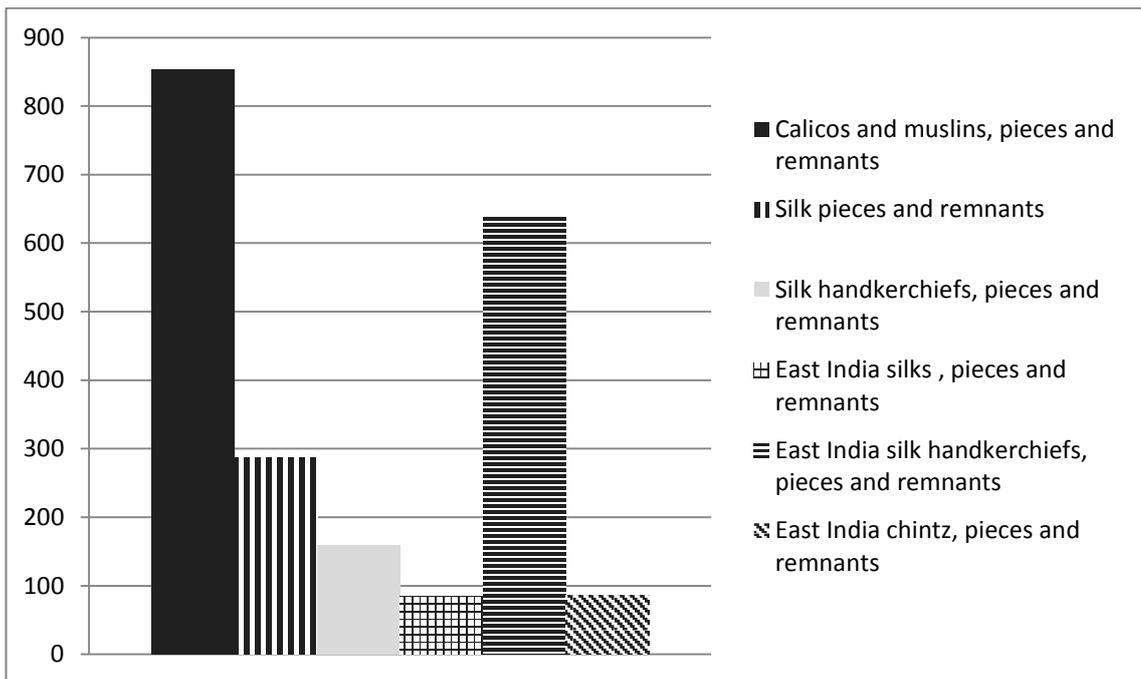


Figure 10. Seizures of cottons and silks in the Out Ports, 1770 (number of pieces).

Figures from *Port of London, Account of seizures made 1769-1773, 1778-1782*, in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11* (1783 & 1784), App. 4: 240-241.

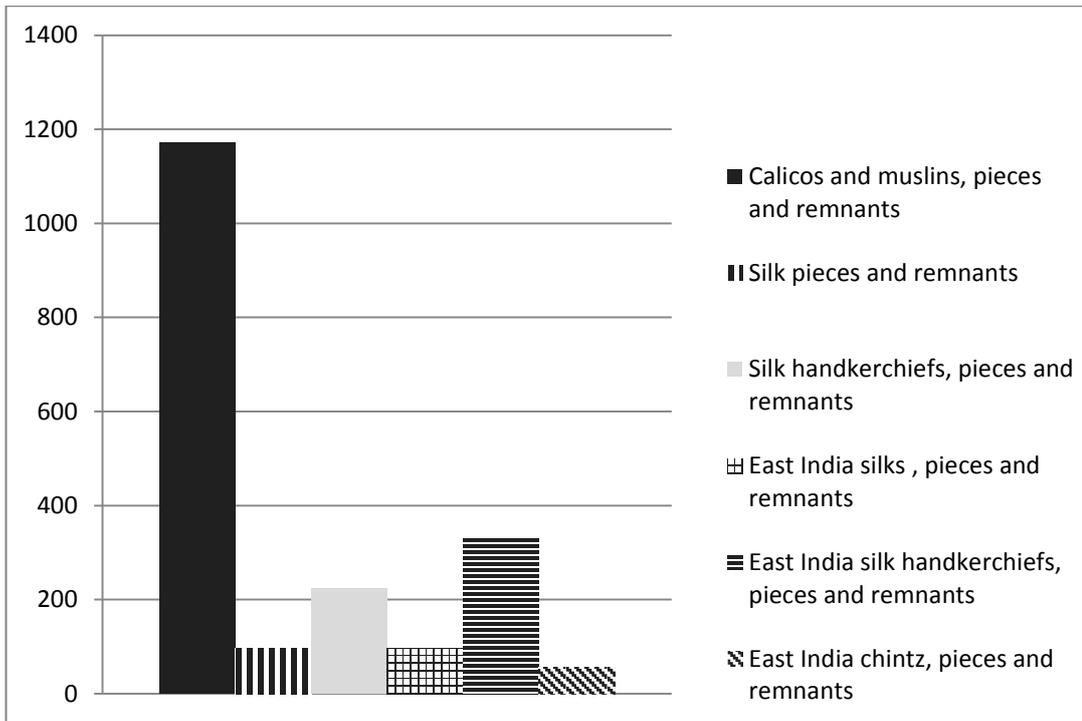


Figure 11. Seizures of cottons and silks in the Out Ports, 1780 (number of pieces).

Figures from *Account of seizures made at the Out Ports, by Officers of the Customs, 1769-1773, 1778-1782*, in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11* (1783 & 1784), App. 4: 240-241.

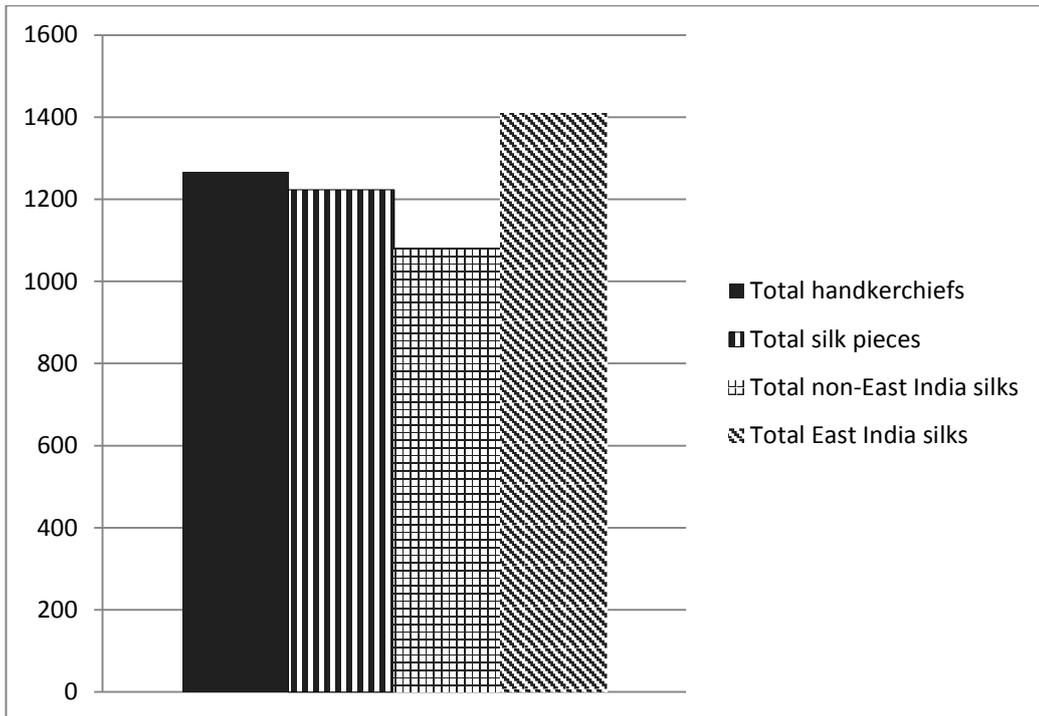


Figure 12. Customs seizures of silks in London and Out Ports, 1770. Handkerchiefs vs pieces; non-East India vs East India (number of pieces).

Figures from *Account of seizures made at the Out Ports, by Officers of the Customs, 1769-1773, 1778-1782*, in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11* (1783 & 1784), App. 4: 240-241.

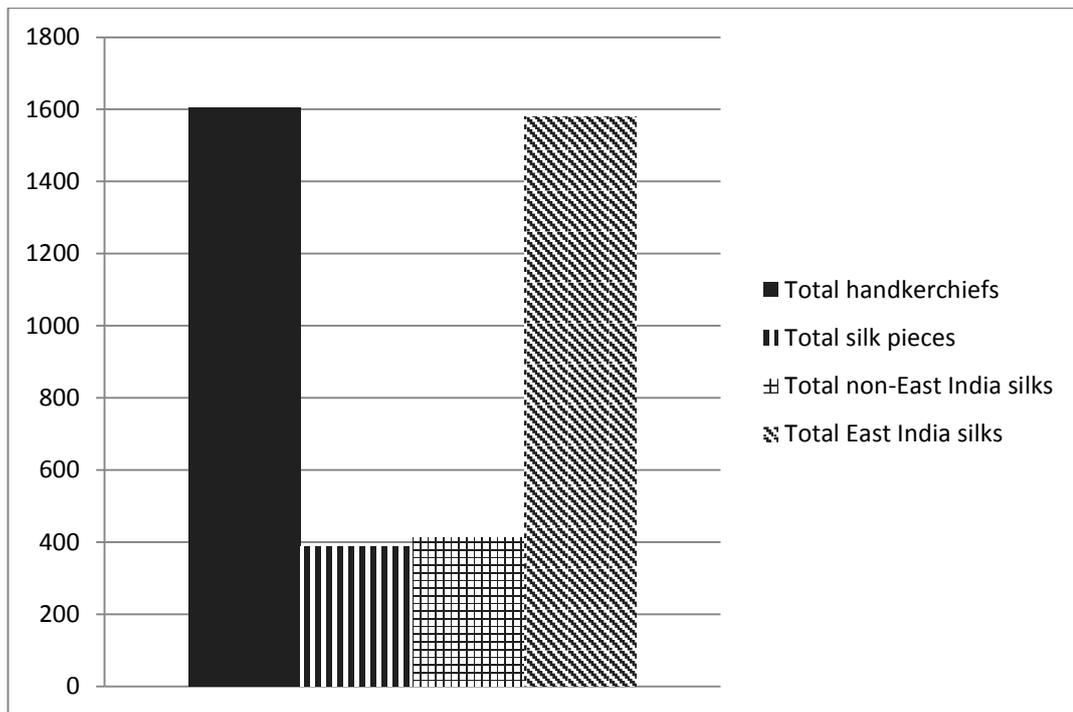


Figure 13. Customs seizures of silks in London and Out Ports, 1780. Handkerchiefs vs pieces; non-East India vs East India (number of pieces).

Figures from, *Account of seizures made at the Out Ports, by Officers of the Customs, 1769-1773, 1778-1782*, in 'Reports from the committee on illicit practices used in defrauding the revenue', *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons vol. 11* (1783 & 1784), App. 4: 240-241.

In figures 8 to 11 the seizures of calicos and muslins are significantly higher than the seizures of silks. In both London and the Outports the most common type of silks seized were East India silk handkerchiefs. More handkerchiefs wherever they were from were seized, than silk pieces and remnants (the leftover end piece of a cloth); more East India silks were seized than non-East India ones. Seizures in the Port of London were a large proportion of all silks seized. In 1770 they were 45% of the total; in 1780 they were 59%. This reflects London's size and importance as an international port, trading not just with the continent (as some of the Outports did), but directly with Asia too. It was, of course, home to the East India Company's dock and warehouse. Furthermore, it was also the most important centre for fashion and retail in Britain so it was the obvious destination for contraband silks to go to. The pattern of seizures for all goods across the country confirms this, showing that most seizures at the Outports were for tea and in London most were for textiles.²⁰ However, it is possible that the Port of London's closeness to the

²⁰ H.V. Bowen, "So Alarming An Evil", *Smuggling, Pilfering and the East India Company, 1750-1810*. *International Journal of Maritime History*, 14 (2002): 18.

centre of criminal justice and Customs and Excise headquarters made it more likely that contraband would be detected there.

That one type of silks – handkerchiefs - was more commonly seized than all the other types of silks (velvets, flowered, stockings etc.) put together is striking. This suggests that much of the market for smuggled silks was made up of smaller, lower value items and this was supplied by the trade with Asia. This trend is in line with changing fashions. Handkerchiefs made of silk or cotton began to be worn in England from the 1730s. Although these items were known as handkerchiefs in Britain, in India they were made to be worn as sarongs or bandanas; their use changing within a different context. They were worn by both men and women, but particularly popular with men, including plebeians and countrymen. Some commentators on the consumption of the poor, such as Sir William Eden, put handkerchiefs in the basic clothing expenditure of labourers. The clothing inventories from the French Protestant Hospital, discussed in the previous chapter, showed handkerchiefs to be the most popular item owned by the silk workers there. Travelling salesmen, such as Mr Aldridge who hawked his wares in the Norfolk countryside, sold East India and Spitalfields handkerchiefs alongside each other. On men, the handkerchief was worn around the neck and was an alternative to stiffer white cravats. A man's neck was an important marker of respectability, and became a place to display the fineness of one's linen in contrast to a practical, sturdy jacket. Women wore them tied around the head or draped across the shoulders and tied in front. Handkerchiefs were a more colourful, even flashy, alternative and were often kept for Sunday best.²¹ Image 9 is an example of one made in Orissa in eastern India. It is a dark red with a repeated floral pattern which has been printed on the cloth; spots and stripes were also common motifs.

The size of the cotton seizures indicates that they did indeed enter into the home market in large numbers even after the Calico Acts. This could also be read as further evidence that printed cottons were taking the market for decorative dress textiles beyond that occupied by silks, which would be in line with some of the literature. Combined with the evidence that East India handkerchiefs were the

²¹ Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1979), p.138, 154, 179.

most common type of contraband silk, this suggests a demand for Asian textiles continued through the eighteenth century, at least in some items. Judging cause and effect (i.e. whether smugglers were encouraging a fashion in handkerchiefs) is of course more difficult. East India Company ships were a major source of contraband silks: it was vessels of the trading companies that bought the most popular contraband silks into British waters. The fall in the amount of non-East India silks in 1780 may reflect the impact on trade of the American Revolutionary wars, once France and the Netherlands had entered on the colonialists' side against Britain. However there is also a fall in Asian textiles imported into Britain at the same time (see figure 14.) Perhaps the disruption was even greater in the northern Atlantic or maybe demand of silk handkerchiefs held up better than French piece goods in such circumstances.

These findings also shed light on the East India Company's textile imports to Europe. Existing work has played down the importance of silks from India and the popularity of handkerchiefs. Indeed, the term 'India silk' is seen by Rothstein as a generic term for all silks marketed by the East India Company, with most textiles described as such being from China.²² Chaudhuri's analysis of the Company's trade in Asia up to 1760 assume that textiles fell into a simple division of Indian cottons (the vast majority of all textile imports) and Chinese silks; H.V. Bowen's work on the period after 1760 makes the same assumption. Lee-Whitman examined the Company's trade in silks using accounts of the trade with Canton, ignoring India altogether. Chinese silks were a very small proportion of the imports until the 1790s (as can be seen in figure 14), and Lee-Whitman's analysis did not show handkerchiefs to be an important category in Canton.²³ Given the complexity of textile nomenclature, Chaudhuri and Bowen refrained from providing statistical breakdowns of the kinds of textiles traded by the Company, instead breaking down the trends by region.²⁴ Yet, Chaudhuri's own glossary of 'cotton textiles' contains several silks and silk mixes all of them produced in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (i.e. Eastern India). By contrast, there are no silk or silk mixes listed in the western or

²² Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.289.

²³ Leanna Lee-Whitman, 'The Silk Trade: Chinese Silks and the British East India Company'. *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17, 1 (1982): 21-41.

²⁴ See comments of Bowen that there are over 100 types of textile listed in the sources, 'User Guide', *SN 5690 - The East India Company: Trade and Domestic Financial Statistics, 1755-1838*, p.11.

southern Indian sections of the glossary. These silks from Eastern India included *badannoos* or thread-dyed silk handkerchiefs, cotton and silk mix handkerchiefs, silk *lunges* used as sarongs, silk taffetas, a type of silk brocade known as *jamwars*, and twelve types of cotton-silk mixes made for export.²⁵ From the information available on occupations in India it is known that there were silk weavers in areas such as Kasimbazar in Bengal and Benares.²⁶ Within the trade in Indian textiles after the late 1720s Bengal became much more important, and the trade with Bombay, near to the great cotton weaving centre of Gujarat, less so (see figure 15). This suggests that as Bengal took up a greater share of East India Company's trade with Europe, silks from Eastern India rose within that. 'Indian handkerchiefs' were indeed from India.²⁷



Image 15. Printed silk square worn as a cravat, made 1820s-1830s in Berhampur, Orissa. Museum number: T.1738-1913. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O139761/cravat-unknown/>. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

²⁵ Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, App. 4, pp.500-505.

²⁶ See the map in Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, p.244.

²⁷ Susan Bean found that handkerchiefs were the second most popular type of textile exported from India to post-Independence America. Susan S. Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), p.77.

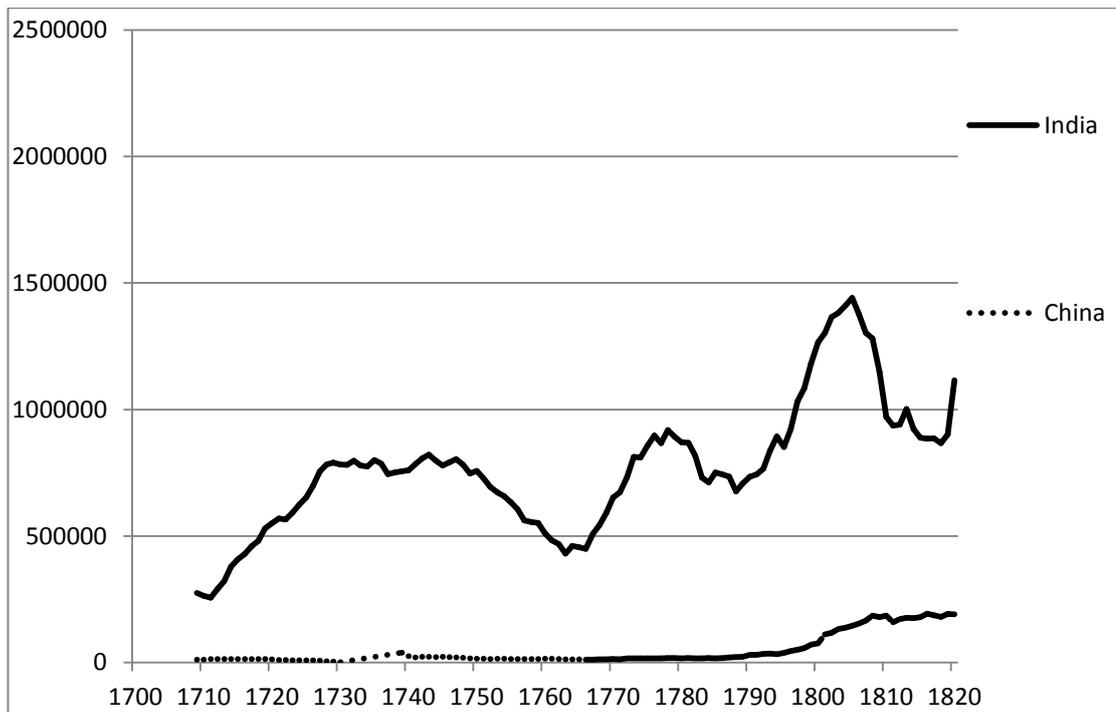


Figure 14. Indian and Chinese textile pieces imported by the East India Company into London, 1700-1820. Ten year moving averages.

Figures for 1700-1760 from Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, Table c.24, pp.547-548 and for 1761-1820 from H.V. Bowen, 'imports_textiles' computer file, *The East India Company: Trade and Domestic Financial Statistics, 1755-1838* (2007) <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5690-1>.

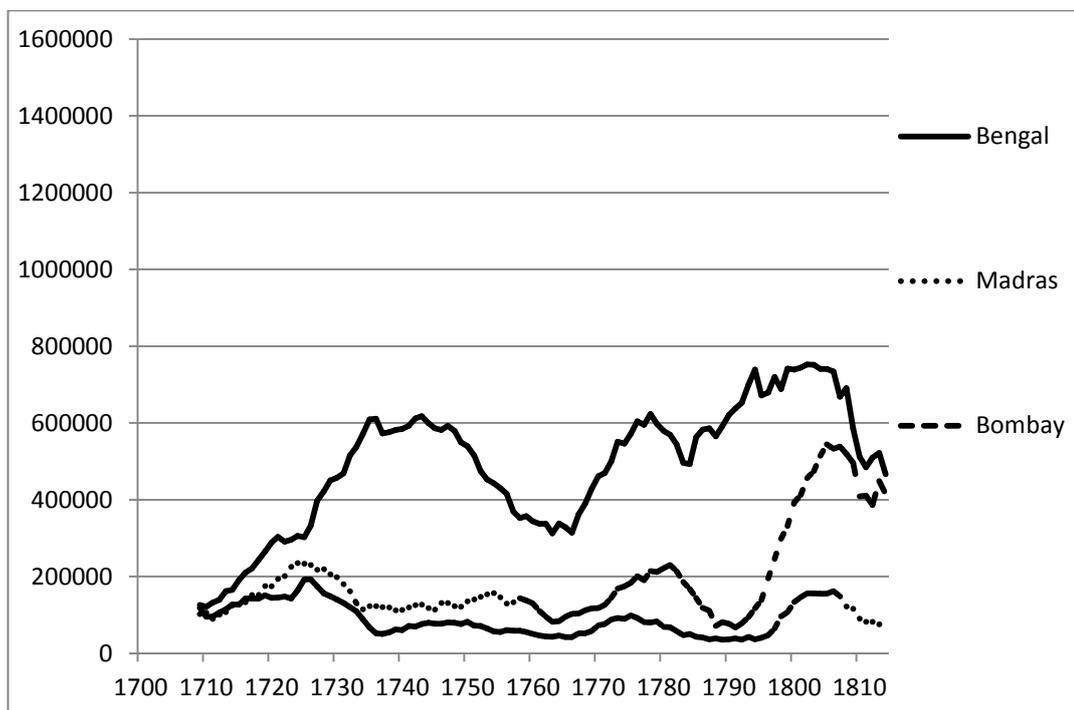


Figure 15. Indian textile pieces imported by the East India Company into London, by region, 1700-1810. Ten year moving averages.

Figures for 1700-1760 from Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, Table C.22 pp.544-545, Table C.21 pp/542-543, Table C.20 pp.540-541, Table C.23 p.546. For 1761-1820 from H.V. Bowen, 'imports_textiles' computer file, *The East India Company: Trade and Domestic Financial Statistics, 1755-1838* (2007). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5690-1>.

A second series of evidence is newspapers adverts in the Burney Collection for seized Customs goods sold at public actions. Seized contraband was not necessarily destroyed or dumped by Customs officials. Instead they sold some goods – including textiles, brandy, tea, tobacco - at public auctions. Silks were sold on condition that they were exported out of Britain, but other goods were allowed to be sold to the domestic market. For example, the public sale at the Customs house at Hastings in 1770 was offering 446 pieces of Indian silk handkerchiefs and four packets of cards, for exportation. 94 pieces of muslin handkerchiefs and 65 pieces of nankeen, brandy, rum, green tea, coffee were on sale for home consumption.²⁸ Public auctions of this kind were not uncommon: the cargos of enemy ships captured at sea were also sold in this way. These included a wide variety of goods, but silk and other textiles often featured. As with the Customs sales, these auctions were advertised in the newspapers.²⁹ For example, in March 1748 goods landed in Portsmouth from two captured French men of war the *Thetis* and the *Dartmouth* included 113 silk handkerchiefs amongst muslins, check linens, thread stockings and so on.³⁰ Despite the assurance that silks bought at these sales would be exported, some smugglers used them as a means of acquiring silks at a cheap price. They then took the goods over to Ostend or Calais, re-packaged them and brought them back into England.³¹

The earliest advertised sale of silks organised by Customs and Excise that I have found was in 1768 and I have followed the sales until 1800. The majority of the sales were on the south coast - Hampshire, Sussex and Kent - although there was one in Newcastle. The sales have been broken down into three charts: one for silks (figure 16), one for cottons (figure 17), and for accessories (figure 18). The adverts are useful as they have more specific categories than in the tables in the Parliamentary Papers. Indian silk handkerchiefs remain the largest type of contraband silk, and, in fact, are much larger than either muslin handkerchiefs or all cotton pieces combined. As with the Parliamentary evidence, handkerchiefs

²⁸ *Public Advertiser*, July 31 1770.

²⁹ Jon Stobart has noted the importance of these sales as a way for retailers to buy tea outside of the EIC's official auction in London. Stobart, *Sugar and Spice: Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.72.

³⁰ *General Advertiser*, March 17 1748.

³¹ See evidence of Richard Bottrell, 'Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade', (1831): 7757-7758.

wherever they were from are the most common type of silk and silks from 'India' outnumber silks from elsewhere. The auction categories also allow us to see (where geographical descriptions are given) that non-Asian silks are largely French or handkerchiefs from Barcelona. Silk stockings emerge as the second biggest category after handkerchiefs, showing the importance of ready-to-wear silk garments. The weighting of silk piece goods towards handkerchiefs is clear when compared to the figures for cottons, which show a more balanced variety of fabrics. Riello has pointed out how most of the Indian cottons imported into Europe were white, indicating that they were for printing on.³² However, smuggled cottons were more likely to be pre-printed and decorated in the styles that made them famous.

An important difference with cottons is the amount of silk accessories including silk laces, edgings and ribbons that appear in the Customs sales. The importance of laces and ribbons confirms the importance of French silks to the non-Asian contraband. It also suggests why there was a continuing demand for French silks among consumers in London. At the Parliamentary hearings weavers and mercers defended the quality of English silks and thought that there was little to choose between English silks and Italian ones. Some thought that English brocades on white grounds were better than rival French ones, but many agreed that it was against silks where the influence of French taste was strongest, in the high-end fashion silks, that were they suffered most.³³ From the 1730s flowered silks had developed the application of raised decorative work, to emphasise the intricate nature of foliage and achieve three dimensional effects. Brocading, a technique applied by the weavers on the loom, was one way of achieving this and was used in Spitalfields and Lyon. From the 1750s this use of extra decorations with thread and other materials moved from the main body of garments to the edges. Trimmings, such as gold braiding, increased in importance in fashion and in the dressmaking trades. Embroidery on waistcoats, aprons and handkerchiefs also became popular between the 1750s and 1780s. Many French silks were bought with embroidery or

³² Riello, 'The Indian Apprenticeship: The Trade in Indian Textiles and the Making of European Cottons' in *How India clothed the world*, pp. 332-334.

³³ Evidence of Ashburner, Cheveny and Pritchard, 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1765): 210-212.

lacing, but there was also a market for materials to make up garments in this style. Images 10 and 11 show an example of French silk embroidery seized by the Customs in 1750s. Embroidery and trimming work was not done by weavers, but either by craftswomen working for retailers or the work was done by relatives of the consumer.³⁴ When revenue officers made seizures from several tailors in 1748, they found four bundles of foreign embroideries and thread “gold and silver spun upon silk which was afterwards worked or embroidered with a needle upon woven foreign silks in order to make many waistcoats of”.³⁵

Figures 19 and 20 record a large number of silks and cottons seized from “a Person of great Quality” in London in 1766 and show the importance of French embroidery and trimmings. A variety of foreign textiles were in the person’s possession: muslins, chintz, grogram (a coarse, stiffened wool or wool and silk mix), painted ‘India silks’, Barcelona handkerchiefs and Italian silks sacks. The fabrics had already been made up into gowns and suits and there were also silk stockings, handkerchiefs, caps and bags. Of the silks, six types listed were embroidered with gold and silver, brocaded or stitched with thread. Five more were trimmed or worked with lace. In addition there were 101 ells of French silk trimming. The unnamed patrician also saw his servants’ clothes seized at the same time. Amongst these were blond lace ruffles, French sacks and petticoats embroidered with gold and silver, French cloaks with blond lace and 18 yards of blond lace edging and 30 ells of French silk trimming. This explains the importance the Weavers’ Company and the Wire Drawers’ (makers of gold and silver thread) attached to the sample books seized in 1764 by the Customs as discussed in chapter two. The descriptions of the book and the rules for viewing both emphasises the gold and silver brocade designs it contained.

The timing of concerns about French silks in the 1760s with the end of the Seven Years War suggests that Spitalfields had been isolated from improving French techniques in this area.³⁶ Not only did the restoration of trade with France lead to more silk coming onto London (legally or not) but the silk trade there had made a

³⁴ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England*, p.181.

³⁵ TNA CUST 41/4, f.31.

³⁶ John Sabatier said that during the Seven Years War that trade had been ‘very brisk’ but French imports had increased once it had ended, ‘Report of Committee on the Silk Industry’, (1766): 724.

leap forward in the intervening years. Some of the products such as silk lace were also a regional speciality of producers in Belgium. The embroidery in images 16 and 17 clearly shows the fineness of the work being done in France in the 1750s. Internal factors also led some to look to France. During that period the retailing of the high quality silks had changed in London. Mercers wanted pattern drawer who designed for brocaded silks to work for them only, and then produce only limited runs. Customers did not want designs that were widely available, and competition over brocades built up. The mercer Mr Lovie claimed that he had to resort to importing French brocades because he could not get any pattern drawers in Spitalfields to work for him, as they had all been signed up by his rivals.³⁷

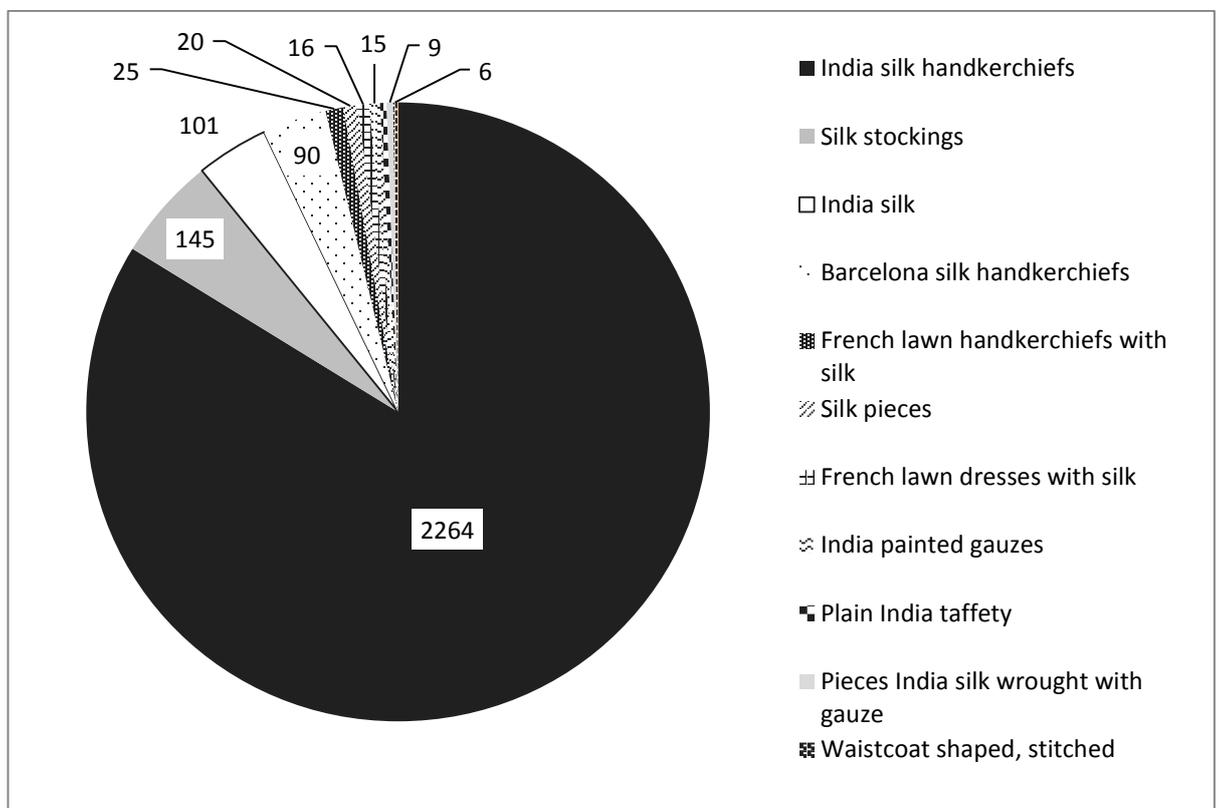


Figure 16. Silk or silk mix pieces sold at Customs auctions 1768 to 1800. Compiled from the Burney Collection.

³⁷ Evidence of John Peregal, Mr Ashburner & Lovie in 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1765): 209, 210.

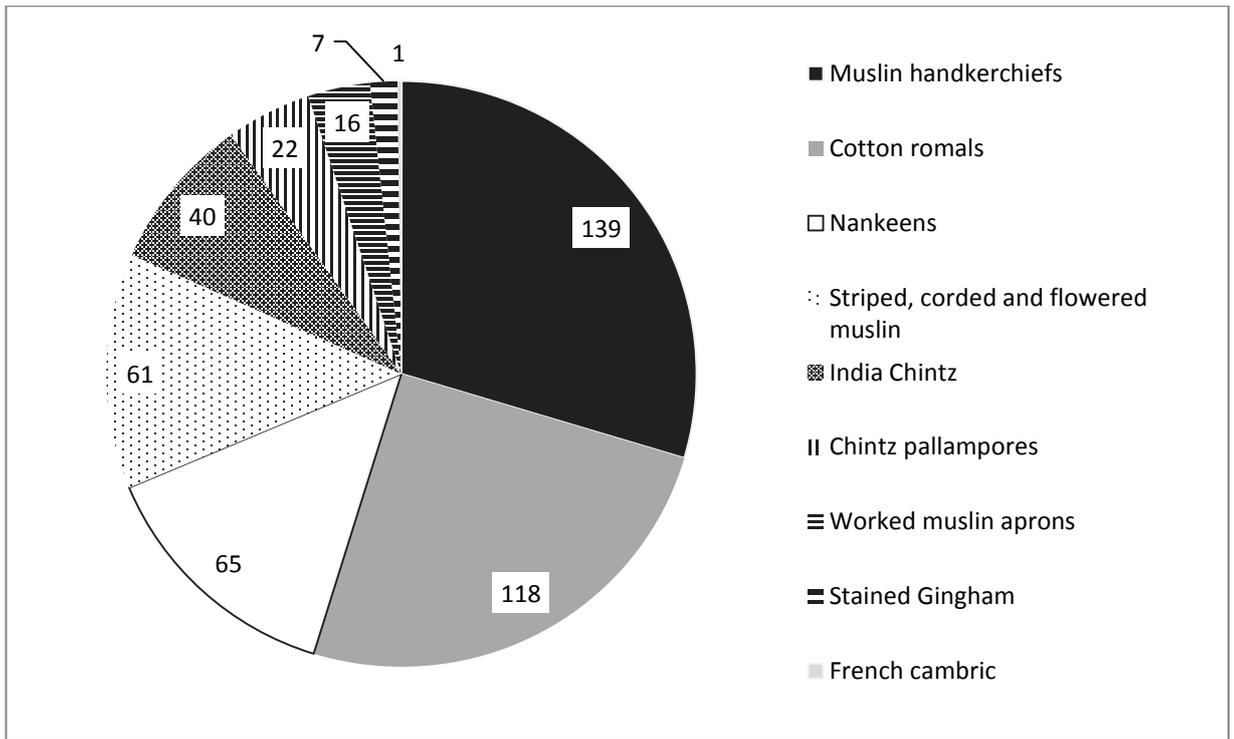


Figure 17. Cotton pieces sold at Customs auctions 1768 to 1800. Compiled from the Burney Collection.

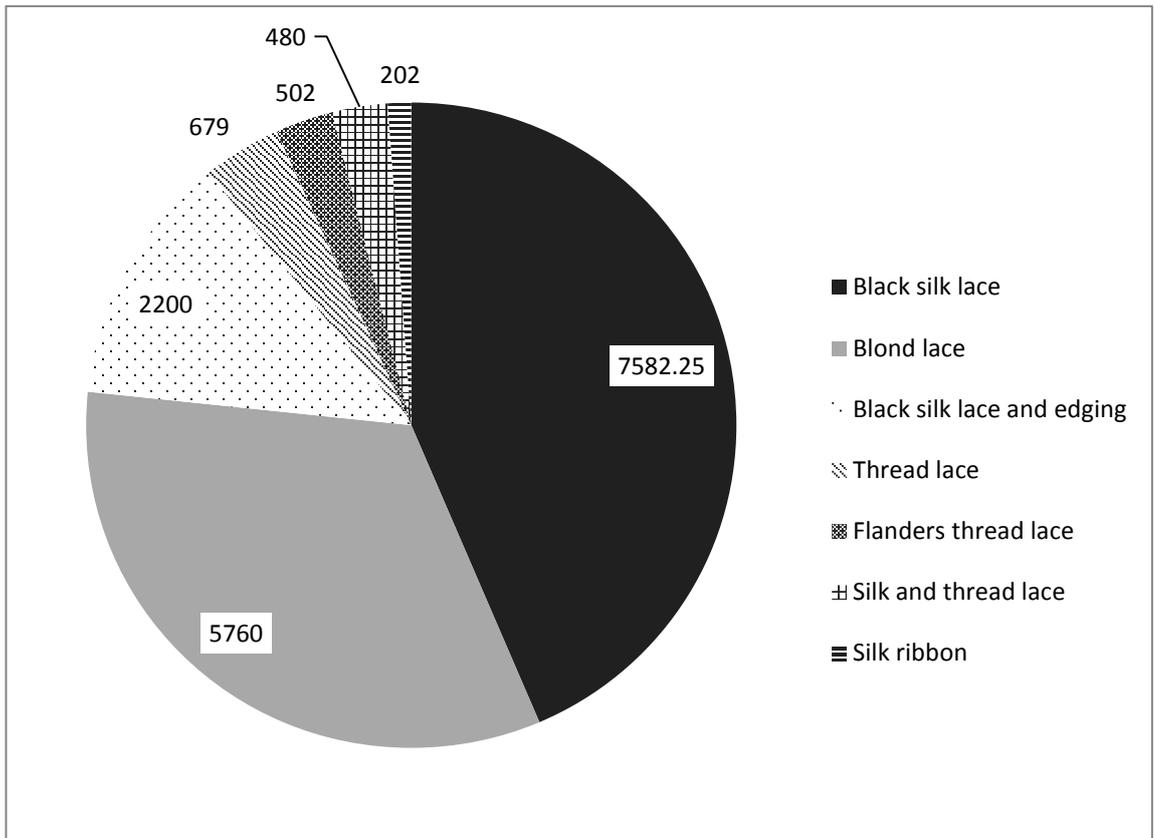


Figure 18. Lace, thread and ribbons sold at Customs auctions 1768 to 1800 (yards). Compiled from the Burney Collection.



Images 16 and 17. Above: corner of embroidered French waistcoat shape, showing Customs' stamp. Made c.1750-1759, Silk, hand woven and hand embroidered, Museum number: T.12&A-1981. Stamp reads 'Custom House / SEIZED DOVER / GR II'. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O117866/pair-of-waistcoat-unknown/>. Below: reverse showing embroidery technique used – tambouring – a form of chain stitch which uses a hook rather than a needle. It was a type of stitching associated with Indian textiles, and taken up in Europe in the eighteenth century.³⁸



³⁸ North, 'The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction': 92-104.

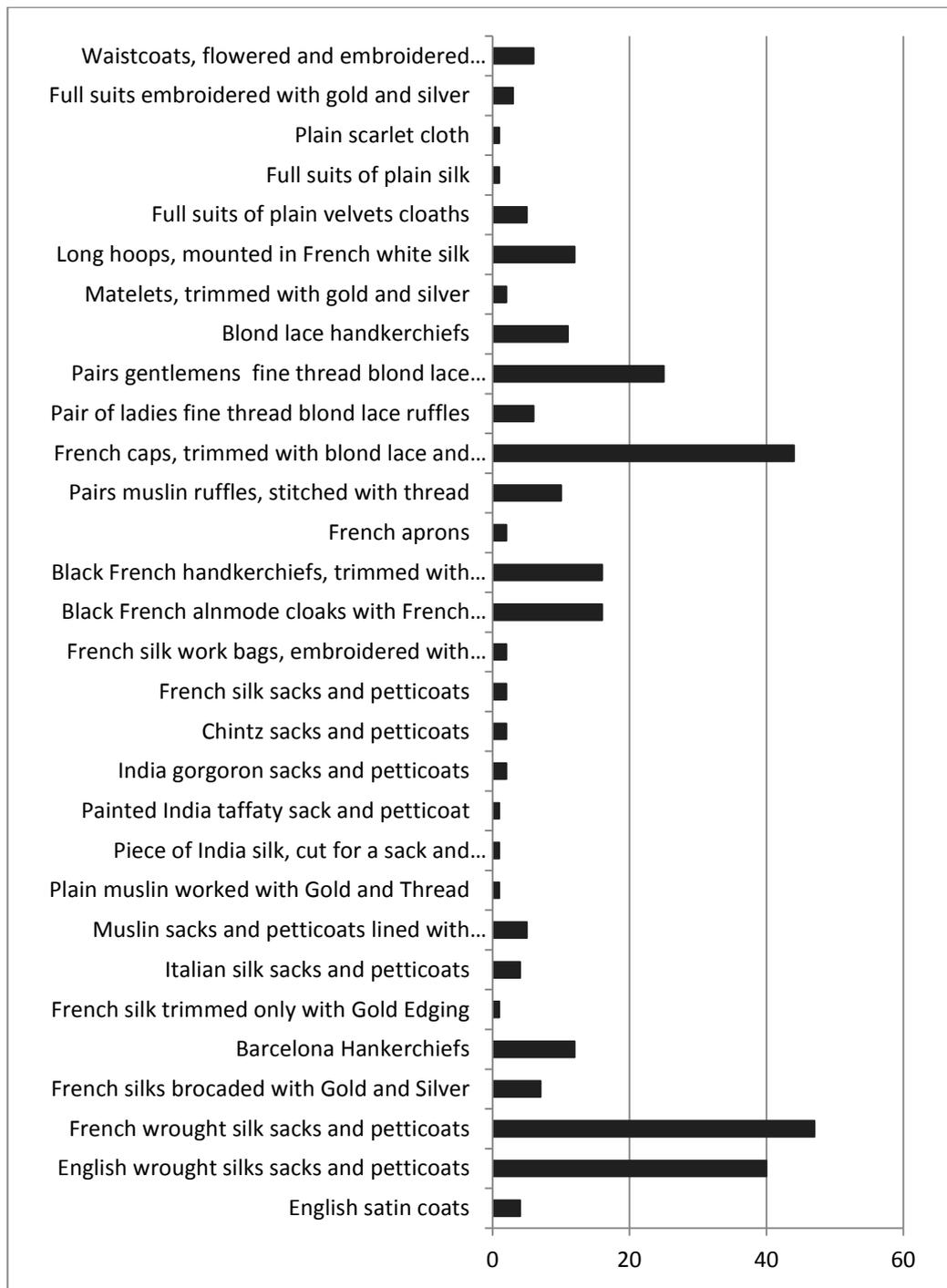


Figure 19. Textile pieces seized from a gentleman in London, 1764. Compiled from “An accurate list of the seizure lately made at the Custom-house, belonging to a Person of great Quality” in *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, August 4-7 1764.

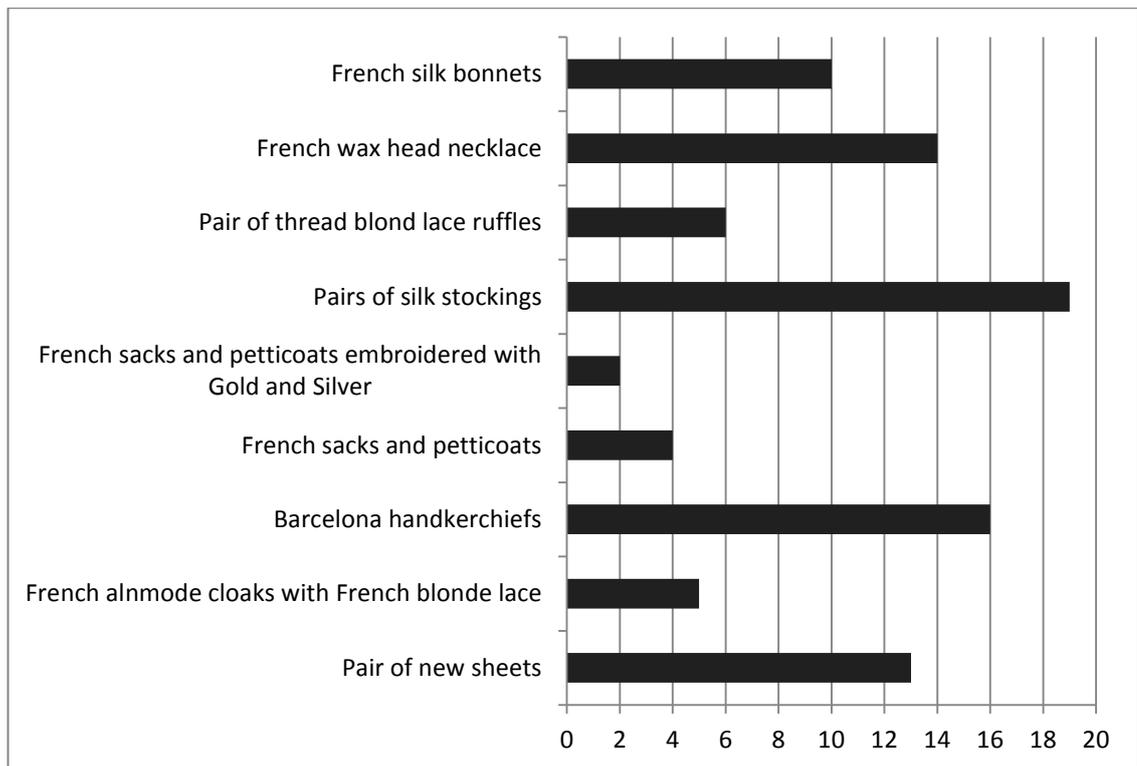


Figure 20. Textile pieces seized from a servant in London, 1764. Compiled from “An accurate list of the seizure lately made at the Custom-house, belonging to a Person of great Quality” in *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, August 4-7 1764.

Who smuggled and how?

The long distance trade

The importance of India silk handkerchiefs within the Customs seizures clearly points towards the East India Company as the largest source of contraband silks. This was not, of course, an official policy of the Directors. They sought to comply with Parliamentary legislation and their official trade in Asian textiles was geared to supply the re-export market. However, their whole transport and distribution operation, from loading ships in Indian ports to warehousing goods in London, leaked goods along the way. Huw Bowen’s work places the privileges of private trade, granted to some of the Company’s employees, at the centre of bringing contraband goods from India and China into the British Isles. Opportunities for private and illicit trade increased over the eighteenth century. The Company’s trading fleet expanded after 1756 from 20 ships sailing a season to 50 by 1800; the size of ships also increased from 499 tons to 800-1200 tons. Particularly important were the commanders of the ships. Their official pay from the Company was not

large at around £120 a year, and they turned to financial opportunity elsewhere. The ships were owned by investors who leased them to the Company, and they and the commanders shared the profits of private trade.³⁹ For example, the commander Philip Lawson had investments worth £30, 000 in private trade in the mid-1770s. On each ship there was a hierarchy of space available for the storage of private trade. On a 775 ton vessel 80 tons was allotted for storage of private commodities: the commander took 56 tons of the space, midshipmen and assistant surgeon ten feet each. On return journeys to Britain these allowances were lowered to give space for the most profitable official commodities. All private trade goods coming to England were supposed to be sold at the official Company sale in London and duties and handling charges had to be paid for. Between 1793 and 1810, 12.4% of all goods sold by the East India Company in London were private trade goods, valued at an average of £751, 410 a year. 60% of the goods sold through private trade were Indian, with the rest being Chinese. The types of goods sold became more diverse, moving away from Chinaware to include tea, piece goods, drugs, sugar and indigo.⁴⁰

To avoid the restrictions on the amount of private trade goods, some officers and passengers made false declarations about the cargo when loading up the ships in India or hide items within the ship. Commanders were also known to overload ships to carry extra consignments of tea and textiles. As ships drew nearer to home waters, the means of landing contraband in Britain began to multiple. Before sailing into the English Channel, ships might stop off at continental ports, or in the Isle of Man and Ireland selling goods to local dealers who would then run them into England. In the Channel and at Gravesend, passengers could disembark taking items with them before Customs officers came aboard. East Indiamen could not go any further up the river Thames than Deptford and the cargo was unloaded onto smaller boats at that point, and taken to the East India Warf next to London Bridge. The cargo was then taken to the Customs House to be recorded and from there to the Company's warehouse.⁴¹ It took several weeks to unload an East Indiaman in

³⁹ H.V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit: The Commanders of East Indiamen as Private Traders, Entrepreneurs, and Smugglers, 1760-1813'. *International Journal of Maritime History*, 19 (2007): 43-46.

⁴⁰ Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit': 50-81.

⁴¹ Bowen, "So Alarming An Evil": 1-31.

Deptford. The number of people going on and off board ship not only increased the number of people handling the cargo, but also obstructed Customs officers from carrying out their tasks. Here tide surveyors were supposed to go on board and search the ships. They were instructed by Customs and Excise to ensure that “no silk, or others goods be put up, or made into wearing apparel or the Captain will be prosecuted”.⁴² All baggage and small parcels found in cabins had to be landed and inspected in the warehouse.⁴³ Captains and officers were allowed to land linen and apparel (“not prohibited”) so that it could be washed and returned.⁴⁴

Many people working around the Thames were involved in the black economy and they helped move silks off the ships and on to retailers, legitimate and illegitimate, in the city. Patrick Colquhoun, who lobbied for a police presence on the Thames, placed those connected with the docks and the river at the heart of his taxonomy of London’s criminals. He blamed “river pilferers” including bogus lumbermen, mud larks, lighter men, and dock labourers for theft, fraud and handling stolen goods. “Inferior Officers to the Customs and Excise” who defrauded or stole from the Revenue service were also singled out. These people lay at the beginning of a chain that spread to receivers of stolen goods and hawkers, and then to publicans and shopkeepers where the goods were stored and then sold.⁴⁵ One Customs officer followed Thomas Wetherby, a porter, having seen him leave St Katherine’s Dock with a small box labelled *Tobacco* “in large letters”. Wetherby was observed “to look back frequently” and left the Dock, entering the City of London and walking as far as Ludgate Hill. Unable to lose his tail, Wetherby gave himself up and tried to bluff his way out by claiming the box only contained a few pounds of tea. However, he was forced to open the box which, instead of tobacco, contained £41 of silk mittens and £160 garnets (a crystal used in jewellery and mined in western India.) The criminal prosecution of Wetherby had to be abandoned as the witnesses to the crime, including two dock clerks, would not give evidence in court.⁴⁶

⁴² TNA CUST 29/1 A-M, ‘East India Goods’ March 22 1720.

⁴³ TNA CUST 29/4, f.75.

⁴⁴ TNA CUST 29/6, ff.127-128.

⁴⁵ *Telegraph*, September 24 1796.

⁴⁶ TNA CUST 41/5, ff. 313-317.

In 1766 a Customs officer overseeing the unloading of the *Admiral Stevens* forced the lascars who comprised the ship's crew to remove their turbans, believing that the lascars had "used excessive lengths of muslin in their turbans and had concealed piece goods about their person and clothing."⁴⁷ Corruption was also a potential problem with some officials. The crews of the vessels that carried officers to search ships were accused of embezzling seized goods. All officials involved in searches were supposed to record their names and there were punishments for not carrying out seizures.⁴⁸ The 'land-waiter' or 'searcher' oversaw the landings of imported goods and compiled the account of the goods that the collector used to calculate duties. This gave them the power to fiddle the records to the merchant's advantage. The tidesmen who went to a ship when it arrived on port could also be bribed.⁴⁹ More simply, private traders could unload in port and fail to declare their goods or not put them into the official sale and hope no one noticed. Bowen notes that the most concerted anti-smuggling action that the EIC undertook was concentrated in London. Rather than focus on the illegal importing via northern Europe or Ireland, the Company instead focused on building the new East India Company dock which was to be bigger and more secure than the existing one.⁵⁰

Once they had been successfully unloaded silks then moved into the possession of mercers and tailors. Many handkerchiefs became part of the moveable stock of hawkers, and Lemire found that second hand clothing dealers were "concentrated in London and the major ports."⁵¹ The attention of the authorities fell more on shopkeepers. In respectable shops contraband silks were not displayed openly but kept under the counter and sold by pattern.⁵² The risk of prosecution that shop owners feared was real. In 1766 'Davidson of Fleet Street' was fined £200 for having cambricks and India silk handkerchiefs in his possession.⁵³ David Weir was prosecuted for "Two pieces of Clouded Gingham ... 122 Pieces of India Silk

⁴⁷ Bowen, "So Alarming An Evil": 18.

⁴⁸ TNA CUST 29/5, ff.463-465.

⁴⁹ Arthur Lyon Cross, ed. *Eighteenth Century Documents Relating to the Royal Forests, the Sheriffs and Smuggling Selected from the Shelburne Manuscripts in the William L Clements Library* (New York: Macmillan, 1928.), pp.252-254.

⁵⁰ Bowen, "So Alarming An Evil": 4-6.

⁵¹ Lemire, "Peddling Fashion": Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Taylors, Thieves and the Second-hand Clothes Trade in England, c. 1700-1800'. *Textile History*, 22, 1: 68, Table 1, 71.

⁵² 'Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade', (1831): 7783-7784.

⁵³ TNA CUST 28/2, ff.51-52.

handkerchiefs ... and 25 pieces of India striped Taffaty, which came to his hands without payment of duties". Thomas Collingwood was found to have "44 pieces of India silk handkerchiefs & 25 pieces of India stripped taffaty." Peter Broquer and his wife had 44 pieces of India Silk handkerchiefs, and 25 pieces of India stripped taffeta; Theophilus Bell and his wife had 36 pieces of India Silk Handkerchiefs.⁵⁴

Under the direction of Thomas Metcalf prosecutions began against William Martin, John Smith, John Simpson, James Kent, William Cochlewere for possession of India Satin, plain, striped and chequered Muslin, Muslin wrought with thread and handkerchiefs "which came into their hands without Payment of duties".⁵⁵ James Poole who lived on Ratcliff Highway, the road that ran above St Catherine's Dock and had many warehouses and mercers shops, had his house rummaged by two Customs officials who took 13 pieces of muslin from him. Poole asked for them back arguing that he intended to re-export them. However the board wanted him prosecuted as he had more prohibited items in his possession. Charles Rooke was taken to court for having without paying duty, muslin handkerchiefs, India silk damask, satins, painted and brocaded taffatas, gauzes, plain and flowered gozgzoon, velvet and flowered pelongs "being goods of the manufacture of Persia, China, or the East Indies".⁵⁶ Hugh Douglas had his house rummaged by two officers who had seized 8 sozee handkerchiefs and some muslins. He wanted the muslins back as they had been acquired "in a fair way of Trade". The officers maintained that his goods had come from an East Indiaman – the *Norfolk* – the night before the raid.⁵⁷

Even if French silks were a smaller proportion of the contraband trade, some were brought into London in similar ways to East India textiles. French silks also came into London on trading vessels. A "large seizure" was made by Customs in 1766 from a ship lying below London Bridge carrying French silks and brocades.⁵⁸ Three silk mercers were tried before the Lord Chief Justice "for importing a large quantity of French Silks contrary to the Statute". A waterman testified that he had

⁵⁴ TNA CUST 28/2, ff.258-259.

⁵⁵ TNA CUST 28/2, f.391.

⁵⁶ TNA CUST 28/2 f.410, f.415.

⁵⁷ TNA CUST 28/2, f.423.

⁵⁸ *St. James's Chronicle*, December 3-5 1761.

collected the goods on a ship in from Boulogne, and then he carried the items to warehouse used by one of the mercers. The warehouse was said to contain “a Place for Concealments of this Kind; so that it should seem this has been the stated or frequent Practice of their House”. The mercers were found guilty and fined £547 10s plus costs, said to be equal to the value of the contraband silks.⁵⁹ Deceptions similar to those in the East India Trade were obviously being practised, with silk being sent to other foreign ports before being taken to England or being hidden about the ship. 1000lbs of French silk were seized in the Thames on board a Dutch ship in 1761.⁶⁰ In another seizure, parcels of French silk thread and mittens were found concealed on casks of madder, on a ship arrived from Rotterdam.⁶¹

George Tomlyn of Rochester ‘master and mariner’, Roger Bridges and Francis Douglas of Rochester, mariners alongside Bartholomew Garman of Dunkirk were all prosecuted for “unshipping without payment of Duties” plain and flowered muslin, India silk handkerchiefs, French lawns, cambricks and wrought silks.’⁶² In 1780 it was reported there was a new smuggling route by British ships from the Netherlands.⁶³ Another route by which foreign silks entered Britain was via the Isle of Man. In 1766 Charles Lutwidge Receiver General of the Isle of Man reported that 447 Barcelona silk handkerchiefs had arrived from Dunkirk and were intended for re-export to Britain and Ireland. Three months later 3450 Barcelona handkerchiefs had arrived in Douglas. The *Wolf* arrived in April that year from Barcelona and Malaga carried wine, food, and 25 boxes of twelve dozen small handkerchiefs, 3 boxes of 150 dozen large ones, and 2 boxes of 100 dozen small handkerchiefs. On all occasions the merchants (who were all British) paid the duties due to the revenue, but were open about their intention to take the goods into Britain.⁶⁴ The Isle of Man’s legal status left Lutwidge powerless to make a seizure: the island collected and retained its own duties, which were lower than

⁵⁹ *London Evening Post*, May 2-5 1767; Issue 6165; *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, June 4-6, 1767.

⁶⁰ *St. James's Chronicle*, August 27-29, 1761.

⁶¹ *St. James's Chronicle*, December 3-5, 1761.

⁶² TNA CUST 28/2, ff.51-52.

⁶³ TNA CUST 29/5, f489.

⁶⁴ TNA T 1/449/112-113; 110-111; T 1/454/190-192.

those in Britain. Although Customs officials were stationed on the island they were powerless to make arrests.⁶⁵

Diplomatic baggage

Foreign silks did not have to enter the country solely via 'smugglers'. A variety of people, who were not traders, crossed borders with foreign made silks in their possession. Some did sell on the silks they brought with them, but many more had the silks for their own wardrobes or for friends and relatives. Whilst they may seem insignificant when compared to the East India trade, the relative high status of these people was important in contributing to the fashionability of foreign silks, especially those from France and Italy. Undoubtedly Indian and Chinese silks did come back to Britain from people returning from service in the East India Company.⁶⁶ Warren Hasting's wife Marian, for example, became well known in London society for her Indian gowns.⁶⁷ However, many of the surviving Chinese silks in English country house collections were used as wallpaper or furnishings rather than as clothing. Such goods were not, therefore, direct competitors with those made by silk weavers in London. Furthermore, in the Customs records it is the baggage of those coming from the continent that attracts greatest attention. The Customs paid close attention to the baggage of people coming into the country, whether they were British people returning from travel or work abroad or foreigners arriving in Britain.

Large groups, such as troops, were potentially carrying enough goods to stock a warehouse. The baggage of Dutch soldiers was searched in 1743 and 1744, as were Hanoverian and Hessian soldiers in 1756.⁶⁸ People with entourages and followers also fell under suspicion. An 'extraordinary guard' was sent to meet ships accompanying George I home from the Netherlands and stop them from unloading contraband.⁶⁹ Particular concern developed about the activities of foreign ministers in London. Ambassadors, their family and staff were the kind of people

⁶⁵ Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*, pp.198-199.

⁶⁶ Margot Finn has explored the role of gift giving within Anglo-Indian families, 'Colonial Gifts: Family Politics and the Exchange of Goods in British India, c. 1780-1820'. *Modern Asian Studies*, 40 (2006): 203-231.

⁶⁷ White, *London in the Eighteenth Century*, p.108.

⁶⁸ TNA CUST 29/1, 'Baggage', March 17 1743, May 15 1756.

⁶⁹ TNA CUST 29/1, 'Baggage', December 7 1725.

likely to own French or Italian silks. Indeed, wives of French Ambassadors were seen as fashion leaders by London society.⁷⁰ A house sale following the death of “a foreign lady of distinction” auctioned off a large quantity of furniture, tableware and “some rich embroidered French silk gowns”.⁷¹ The lodgings of a group of French hairdressers in the Strand was raided and found to contain a large amount of French “Gold and Silver Lace, Trimmings and Embroidery”. They were reported to be hairdressers to “Persons of Distinction” and were accused of acting in an impudent manner by trying to pass off the goods as being the property of their distinguished clients.⁷²

Diplomats also had diplomatic immunity from prosecution and this posed a problem for Customs. Officials did have the power to search baggage belonging to foreign officials as it came into the country. So, for example, in 1701 the Venetian ambassador had to provide a schedule of when his baggage would be landed and certify that the goods were ‘for his own use’.⁷³ News of a later Venetian ambassador’s journey to London travelled ahead of him in 1768. Officers of the river were given plenty of time to prepare to board the *Henrietta* when it arrived from Calais and take the ambassador’s baggage on shore for inspection.⁷⁴ Whether embassies could be searched was more contentious. Several officers who were keen to pursue offenders tried to inspect the residences of ambassadors. One officer, Mr Tankard, succeeded in gaining entry to the French embassy and searched underneath the staircase for smuggled goods. He found nothing illegal there, however, and a complaint was made against his action by embassy staff. Legal advice taken by Customs and Excise was cautious about any systematic action along these lines as the legality of searching embassies “appears to us to have been rather studiously avoided by the writers upon the law of nations”.⁷⁵

Searching the luggage of ministers and aristocrats was a delicate business; the revenue service did not want to give offence to political influential people. The Spanish foreign minister formally complained that he had been harassed by riding

⁷⁰ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England*, p. 34.

⁷¹ *True Briton*, March 1 1796.

⁷² *Public Advertiser*, August 23 1764.

⁷³ TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Baggage’, October 20 1710.

⁷⁴ TNA CUST 28/2, f.455.

⁷⁵ TNA CUST 41/10, ff.235-240.

officers at Dartford in 1785.⁷⁶ One solution was to search their baggage in private rather than on the quay side. The Duchesses of Portland and Kendal and the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland all had their possession searched in their own houses.⁷⁷ The King and his ministers had theirs taken to Whitehall where a search was performed.⁷⁸ Officers on the waterfront had to be reminded to treat individuals with respect when performing their duties. The French Ambassador le Comte de Chatelet and his baggage were to be treated with “all the Civility and respect, that is usually shown to all persons of his Rank and Character”.⁷⁹ The Treasury requested that the men searching a packet ordered by Baron Discow should behave with “all Civility” when opening it. Even so, as it contained a set of embroidered cloth for making up into a suit a prosecution was still ordered to go ahead.⁸⁰ Some foreign ministers were engaged in commerce during their time in London. Count Stauenbueng was allowed to import Chinese and Japanese porcelain, on condition that it was re-exported.⁸¹

Not surprisingly, suspicion built up that some foreign ministers were engaging in smuggling. The out ports were instructed to open packets being sent “to private persons ... under colour of their being dispatches for the secretaries of state or foreign ministers”.⁸² In 1737 officers were sent a note confirming that no East India silks should be delivered to residences of ambassadors, but should stay in port to be exported.⁸³ Two men in particular, Count Kinski and the Bavarian Ambassador Count Haslang, were widely believed to be smugglers who used their embassies as warehouses. The Treasury ordered duties to be paid on “one piece of French brocaded silk with silver, weighing nine pounds, one remnant of plain silk for the lining, weighing one pound, and one short silk apron workt with silver and silk” imported for Kinski.⁸⁴ Count Haslang refused all requests to let revenue officers inspect his house.⁸⁵ During the Gordon Riots in 1780 his house was

⁷⁶ TNA CUST 28/2, f.432.

⁷⁷ TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Baggage’, July 4 & 24 1727.

⁷⁸ TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Baggage’, April 16 1715 & July 19 1716.

⁷⁹ TNA CUST 28/2, f.175.

⁸⁰ TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Foreign Ministers’, February 25 1720.

⁸¹ TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Baggage’, April 4 1724, May 7 1724.

⁸² TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Baggage’, December 13 1718.

⁸³ TNA CUST 29/1, ‘Baggage’, July 14 1737.

⁸⁴ TNA T 29/27, f.402.

⁸⁵ Cross, ed. *Eighteenth Century Documents*, p. 243.

attacked and looted as the crowd searched for contraband. After his death, his secretary Mr Killinhoff was arrested and prosecuted for smuggling offences.⁸⁶

British diplomats in Europe also purchased and distributed foreign silks. Horace Mann, the British representative to Tuscany, used silks as a diplomatic gift in the course of his duties. When he heard that Mahmud I, the Ottoman sultan, had signed a trade treaty with Tuscany he decided to send him a present worth £5, 000 made up of silks, watches and snuff boxes.⁸⁷ Diplomats, like Mann, were part of a wider world of Britons travelling or living on the continent. This gave many people access to textiles prohibited at home, as well as reasons for purchasing them. Some sent silks home as presents to friends and relatives. Horace Walpole, for example, sent silk from Paris to Lady Ossory in England, items he had acquired from a French diplomat who had recently returned home to France.⁸⁸

For anyone staying in a city for some time, having a silk suit or gown made up was a common purchase. Frederick Robinson had a spring suit made up for him in Paris in 1778 after travelling there from Spain. His tailor, le Duc, had sent patterns for a striped silk with a white embroidered waistcoat to Lord Grantham in Spain the year before.⁸⁹ For Robert Adam, who bought velvet and satin suits in Paris and gold and embroidered waistcoats in Lyon, it was also an economical decision. He found the garments to be a third of the price of similar products in London.⁹⁰ The Grand Tour, in particular, encouraged many young British male to take up French and Italian fashions. Paris, the first stop for many tourists, was the preeminent centre for acquiring silks. Although visiting the royal family at Versailles was a common excursion, the Court did not dominate Parisian social life and it was possible for tourists to enjoy the capital's social life. Popular leisure activities such as the theatre and opera provided plenty of opportunities for display and parading. Some male tourists were also sexually interested in Parisian women, commentating on their well (or over-dressed) appearance. There were, therefore,

⁸⁶ TNA CUST 29/5, f.293

⁸⁷ W.S. Lewis & Warren Hunting-Smith, eds. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence. Vol. 31* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p.437.

⁸⁸ W.S. Lewis, ed. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence. Vol. 17* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), pp.53-54.

⁸⁹ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England*, p.34.

⁹⁰ North, 'The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction': 94-95.

good reasons to dress well and fit in, and that meant purchasing clothes locally. British visitors found that tailors and barbers beat a path to their door, in the hope of selling their services. In 1749 Sir John Swinburne ran up a tailor's bill of £1, 367 in Paris and purchased a waistcoat of "rich Lyon stuff", "a lined crimson velvet coat and breeches" and had a suit embroidered in gold.⁹¹

Richard Pococke who travelled to France in 1733 and 1734 sent many letters back to his mother and sister describing Paris fashions. At the theatre and dances he found the ladies dress to be 'very agreeable'; he notes their use of makeup, the 'monstrous hoops' under their gowns, and their powdered wigs. He thought male dress to be similar to that in England with the exception that they wore more padding under their shirts and coats.⁹² Women also wore slippers and showed more petticoat when getting into coaches than a women would do in England.⁹³ A visit to Versailles allowed him to observe the King and Queen whilst they dined and attended Mass. The variety of materials, embroidery and accessories clearly caught his eye. The Queen wore:

"a black silk flower'd gown in small lozenges, her tail pinn'd after the English manner; cherry colour'd shoes & petticoat under a border of silver embroider'd in a half lozenge; she had on a blue & silver mantel all of open work, another time a scarlet one with silk fringe, a gauze flower'd back head dress 4 lappels behind, & a hood the same over it, white gloves, ribands at top, & bracelets of pearls about her arms I saw when her gloves were off, an oval black patch from the corner of her"⁹⁴

At Fontainebleau the King wore, "a plain light-coloured cloth, but before a rich stuff, the ground [background] yellow, but almost all cover'd with small silver flowers which I believe were the [...] de luces [sequins], the sleeve embroidered round, his fine black hair in a bag without a solitaire [black ribbon]".⁹⁵ After leaving Paris, visiting towns with famous manufacturing was a common tourist destination. Lyon was well liked as it was cheaper than Paris, and thought to be less Catholic. Visiting silk or wire drawing workshops was a common activity, and

⁹¹ Jeremy Black, *France and the Grand Tour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.18-19, pp.122-126.

⁹² Rachel Finnegan, ed. *Letters from abroad: the grand tour correspondence of Richard Pococke and Jeremiah Milles. Volume 1, Letters from the continent 1733-34* (Piltown: Pococke, 2011), p.81.

⁹³ Finnegan, ed. *Letters from abroad*, p.92.

⁹⁴ Finnegan, ed. *Letters from abroad*, p.89.

⁹⁵ Finnegan, ed. *Letters from abroad*, p.90.

people were generally impressed with the high standards of craftsmanship.⁹⁶ Pococke went to Lyon and Nimes, and thought that their best products were silks stockings at ten shillings a pair.⁹⁷ Those on more intellectual or practical visits also stopped at these places. Arthur Young visited several silk and textile towns in France and recorded differences in price between English and French silks. The ribbons made in Tours were more expensive than those from Coventry, but the velvets woven in Rouen were cheaper.⁹⁸ Although Pococke and Young did not make any purchases, they were both communicating information about French textiles and fashion to their respective audiences, one private and the other public, back in Britain.

For longer trips down to southern France, Germany and Italy the need to replace clothes also became important. In Italy, some found that they had more access to high society in Turin or Florence than many Italians. Joshua Pickersgill noted that he was able to dance with noblewomen at the Turin carnival ball in 1761, which many locals were not allowed to do.⁹⁹ This was another encouragement to dress up and dress well. Edward Thomas found that in Turin he was invited to dine with the British ambassador and therefore “was obliged to be a little more expensive in dress than I intended”. When he reached Florence he dined with Horace Mann and recorded his wardrobe options for the evening. He had picked up items made in several different cities along the way “a light coloured rich silk, figured, and what they call a Lyons Drugget ... this my bad wig, Dresden ruffles and white silk stockings ... I have also a suit of black silk for a change” as well as a winter suit of black velvet that had been made in Genoa.¹⁰⁰ Although the material culture of the Grand Tour has become associated with collecting arts and antiques, there were connections with fashion and clothing. The taste for Roman antiquities has been

⁹⁶ Black, *France and the Grand Tour*, pp.32-33.

⁹⁷ Finnegan, ed. *Letters from abroad*, p.100.

⁹⁸ Arthur Young, *Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788 & 1789*. First published 1792. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p.306, p.308.

⁹⁹ Black, *Italy and the grand tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p.98.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Black, *Italy and the grand tour*, p.98.

linked to the emergence of the neo-classicism that influenced Wedgwood and the Adam brothers.¹⁰¹

The cargo on the *Westmoreland*, a ship loaded with paintings and sculptures destined for English country houses, also included five crates of Bologna black silks and 129 lbs of raw silk from the Levant.¹⁰² Pompeo Batoni, the painter, produced several paintings that were on the *Westmoreland* and his work serves as a record of the fashions of 18th century Rome. Although Batoni worked in several genres and for different clients a great deal of his work was portraiture for British patrons. Of the 225 of his sitters that have been identified 175 were British. Half were peers or men who would assume a peerage later in life, although he also painted fashionable people such as David Garrick.¹⁰³ Batoni's great strength was his ability to capture a likeness, but he was also well regarded for his array of painterly affects evoking different materials. Above all Batoni was admired for his skill in painting costume details, such as lace and fur: his portrait of John Scott (image 20) is fine example of this.¹⁰⁴ These skills were important for his reputation as a portraitist serving the Grand Tour. His clients wanted to be shown as refined, British gentlemen in Italy, who were both educated and fashionable.

Batoni's paintings contain a wide array of dress including fancy-dress, military uniforms and ceremonial customs, but most of his British male sitters were depicted in high-quality three piece suits. Most common are single coloured plain silks and velvets, although a few such as the painting of George Lucy (1758) show brocaded waistcoats.¹⁰⁵ Compositionally, his paintings were designed to complement or show off the sitters' clothes. The backgrounds are usually dark or muted in contrast to the bright reds and deep blues of his subjects' dress; smooth marble and stone brings out the tactile qualities of furs and lace. The emphasis on single, strong colours reflects the qualities that Italian silks were admired for.

¹⁰¹ John Brewer, 'Whose Grand Tour?' in *The English prize: the capture of the Westmorland, an episode of the grand tour*, eds. María Dolores Sánchez-Jáuregui & Scott Wilcox, (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2012.), p.55.

¹⁰² Eleanor Hughes, 'Trade and transport' in Sánchez-Jáuregui *et al*, eds. *The English prize*, pp.33-37.

¹⁰³ Edgar Peters Bowron & Peter Björn Kerber, *Pompeo Batoni: Prince of Painters in Eighteenth-century Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press; Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), p.42.

¹⁰⁴ Bowron and Kerber, *Pompeo Batoni*, p.169.

¹⁰⁵ See Fig. 44 in Bowron and Kerber, *Pompeo Batoni*, p.47. Also at

<http://www.nationaltrustimages.org.uk/image.aspx?id=31284&loggedIn=False>.

Whether they are accurate records of what each individual sitter wore in Rome is debatable. Batoni painted costumes directly from life onto the canvas without relying on preparatory drawings. However, he was well known for re-using stock poses and backgrounds. Batoni had many commissions and varied widely on how long it took him to finish a portrait; he could need as few as two or three sittings with the subject.

Most of his portraits were completed after the sitter had left Rome, and they often departed with only the head having been completed. The similarity in dress of his British subjects is striking. Many of his sitters wear red coats with gold trimmings, lace collars and cuffs, and black ribbons – the solatire - tying back hair or worn around the neck also re- occur (see images 18 and 19, painted in the same year).¹⁰⁶ Repetitions of blue or green suits also re-occur: John Dawson and Arthur Sanders Gore are wearing identical green coats with gold trimming, and very similar waistcoats in their separate portraits, both finished in 1769.¹⁰⁷ They are not totally accurate records of the sitters' wardrobe, but do reflect the conformity of fashion. It may be best to think of Batoni's work as flattering his subjects as fashionable men in Rome. The paintings not only recorded fashions but also served to transmit them, carrying an image of luxury silks back to the English house. Whilst Italian silks do not feature strongly in the seizure figures, they still played an important role in making foreign silks desirable.

¹⁰⁶ Bowron and Kerber, *Pompeo Batoni*, p.161, p.56, pp.57-59, p.171.

¹⁰⁷ See figs 69 & 70 in Bowron and Kerber, *Pompeo Batoni*, p. 74.



Image 18 (left). Pompeo Batoni, *Philip Metcalfe*, (c. 1766-1767.) Oil on canvas, 718 mm x 597 mm. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Image 19 (above). Pompeo Batoni, *Edward Howard*, 1766), Oil on canvas. 139 cm x 101.5 cm x 251.7 cm. Museum number: W.36:1-1949. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O56523/edward-howard-oil-painting-batoni-pompeo/>. © V & A, London. Edward Howard (1744-1767) son of Lord Philip Howard, nephew of 9th Duke of Norfolk.



Image 20 (left). Pompeo Batoni, *Portrait of John Scott (?) of Banks Fee*, (1774). Oil on canvas, 101.3 x 74 cm. Inventory number: NG6308. © National Gallery, London.

This common practice of travellers in Europe bringing silks back to Britain obviously posed a problem for Customs officers. The belief that fashionable society in London was being un-patriotic by wearing foreign silks had been used by the silk interest when it was lobbying for legislative protection. Newspaper reports circulated that gentlemen were sidestepping the prohibitions by having silk suits made up in Paris for them to collect.¹⁰⁸ The weaver Mr Triquet thought that by the mid-1760s the only people bringing gold and silver brocade into the country were “Gentleman themselves for their own particular wear.”¹⁰⁹ Customs officials had to turn their attention to the personal possessions of patricians and other well connected people. British diplomats had their baggage inspected just as much as foreign officials did. Sir William Eden’s baggage was searched when he was returning from a diplomatic posting in France, although it was allowed to pass without paying any duties.¹¹⁰ Even the possessions of the royal family were included in Customs searches. The Duke of Cumberland’s baggage was searched at his London residence after he had returned from France.¹¹¹ In 1714 the King’s baggage was examined “taking care not to pass any customable or prohibited goods”.¹¹² Searching people’s luggage and deciding what could pass duty free, what needed to pay duty and what was outright unlawful was a time consuming process.

It could also require sensitivities: Customs officers’ wives were employed as ‘female searchers’ to look for contraband in the dresses of female passengers.¹¹³ At times, officials faced a backlog of foreign made apparel and millinery to assess. To speed things up in 1788, owners that presented goods that were “really & bona fide worn, & not merely powdered or soiled” could pass through without paying duties. Worn goods without owners could be liable for duties and illegal goods were to be seized.¹¹⁴ As with the legality of searching the houses of foreign ministers, Customs was unsure of the legality of foreign clothing that people were wearing. Some officials on the ground were keen to seize goods or prosecute offenders; even small numbers of foreign silks seemed to be in breach of the spirit

¹⁰⁸ *London Evening Post*, September 1-3 1761.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Report of Committee on the Silk Industry’, (1766): 725.

¹¹⁰ TNA CUST 28/4, f.384.

¹¹¹ TNA CUST 29/4, f.72.

¹¹² TNA CUST 29/1, f.64.

¹¹³ North, ‘The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction’: 100.

¹¹⁴ TNA CUST 29/4, f.48.

of the Acts. Samuel Wills, a tidesman in the Port of London, had found shirts and India handkerchiefs in the portmanteaux of Mr Egelsham and decided to withhold them from Egelsham. Soon afterwards Wills was served with a writ by Egelsham and the Customs' solicitors had to defend his actions.¹¹⁵ In 1763 a legal opinion, requested by officials, stated that the Acts were meant to apply "at point of importation or sale, or premises of dealers, tailors etc". Whilst officers often received information that foreign silks and embroideries were making their way into people's homes they were not allowed to prosecute. Goods in "private houses or the lodgings of gentlemen" were not covered by the Acts and officers did not have the powers to search such premises.¹¹⁶

Still some prosecutions of private individuals were attempted. Lord Villiers was tried in 1773 for breaching the Act prohibiting foreign gold and silver lace. "Several coats, waistcoats, and breeches, were produced in Court" and deemed to be foreign lace and therefore illegal.¹¹⁷ One of his waistcoats was identified as having been made for him in France – he had gone to collect it and had it with him when he returned through Dover.¹¹⁸ Villiers was known as a flashy dresser, and had appeared at the Royal Court during a period of mourning dressed in "a pale purple velvet coat turned up with lemon colour" and embroidered with pearls and medallions.¹¹⁹ The counsel prosecuting conceded that the thrust of the Acts exempted individuals wearing of foreign clothing, but as Villiers was not actually wearing the clothing when entered Britain he was in effect 'an importer'. If the court found in Villiers favour then a situation would be created where there would be nothing to stop "the nobility or gentry who want any quantity of French cloaths, to send a servant over, who might just put them on his back in France and then they may be imported safely."¹²⁰

The Lord Chief Justice was having none of it, however "it would in his opinion be the most monstrous sentence ever given; that the legislators could never mean to

¹¹⁵ TNA CUST 28/1, f.335.

¹¹⁶ TNA CUST 41/4, ff.177-178.

¹¹⁷ *London Evening Post*, February 20 – 23 1773.

¹¹⁸ TNA CUST 41/7, f.43.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Mary M. Drummond, VILLIERS, George, Visct. Villiers (1751-1800). *History of Parliament Online*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/villiers-george-1751-1800>. Accessed 09/01/2013.

¹²⁰ TNA CUST 41/7, f.48

strip a man stark naked the very moment he landed in this kingdom from abroad, for having an embroidered button on his coat; - that if it was so, it would be particularly hard upon the numbers of foreigners who were daily coming into this kingdom on necessary business; that such people can have no other than the manufacture of their own country".¹²¹ The political campaigning against foreign silks had been very vocal, and had targeted consumers seen to be wearing such clothing. Despite the political pressures to make aristocrats patriotic consumers, their social position and influence protected them somewhat from serious sanctions. The original framing of the legislation and practical pressures of searching individual luggage also restricted the efforts of Customs officers. In effect, contraband silks for 'personal use' were allowed into Britain.



Image 21. Anon, *Lord - or the Nosegay Macaroni* (1773). A plate from 'The Macaroni and Theatrical Magazine', February 1773, p.193. Museum number: 1866,1208.867 (© Trustees of the British Museum.) http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1646737&partId=1&searchText=Nosegay+Macaroni+&page=1.

The British Museum catalogue identifies this print as Lord Villiers and it depicts his dress as extravagant and foppish. His coat and breeches are spotted, he wears a lace collar and cuffs, a large black ribbon ties back his hair, and a floral display is on his lapel.

¹²¹ TNA CUST 41/7, f.49.

Accept no substitutes

Goods supplied by the black economy carried a hint of ambiguity about them. As smugglers used deception and evasion to get contraband into the country, so the goods they carried could be seen as untrustworthy too. Compared to tea or brandy, the problem was compounded in the case of silks. Whereas tea was not produced in Britain and had no rival, contraband silks were competing with home manufacturers. A consumer without experience of other countries, or trying to catch up on a new style, might be picking between English, French or Indian silks. Current explanations for the success or failure of competing textiles tend to suggest this was not a problem. The research on Indian cottons, in particular, has focused on the materiality of the textiles themselves, to show how they ‘stood out’ to early modern consumers, thanks to qualities such as superior dyes, finishing techniques. Similar trends can be found with contraband silks. Textile curators find it relatively easy to classify Chinese silks apart from European ones, for example. Chinese silks of this period are consistently wider than European or Indian ones, as Chinese weavers used broader looms. The selvages (edges) of Chinese silks are of contrasting colours, something not found on other silks. They also have a distinctive finish and feel, achieved through a calendaring process (passing the silks between a wooden roller and stone base plate.)¹²²

Indian silk handkerchiefs were more ambiguous. The Committee of Manufacturers of Silk Handkerchief talked of English handkerchief “made in imitation” of those smuggled from East-India ones.¹²³ For many consumers, however, they were a product that clearly stood out to consumers by offering better colours and quality than the ones from Spitalfields. The Old Bailey trial of the shoplifter George Paterson demonstrates this point nicely. Paterson had entered a draper’s shop and asked them to show him a selection of handkerchiefs. A picky customer, he rejected the initial plain ones show to him “Mr. Bloomfield [the draper] asked him if he wanted some square ones, or corner ones; he said he did not want white ones, he wanted coloured silk handkerchiefs; he made a great deal of objection, he had several pieces shewn him”. Instead he demanded coloured silk ones of a dark

¹²² Lee-Whitman, ‘The Silk Trade: Chinese Silks and the British East India Company’: 24-25.

¹²³ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, January 4 1780.

colour and of the best quality. For comparison, he pointed to the silk handkerchief around his neck “of the Spitalfields sort, and it is all gone to pieces, and I wanted something of the India kind”.¹²⁴

With these problems in mind, analysing exactly why bandanas from eastern India, not only became popular but remained competitive to c.1800 against rival British products is difficult. Silk handkerchiefs from this period survive poorly compared to dress silk, for example. Of what does survive the majority of the V & A’s examples date from the nineteenth century, few were produced before 1800.¹²⁵ These factors make direct and sustained comparison difficult. The Indian handkerchiefs had distinct colours and patterns, particularly deep red backgrounds and repeated but often irregular ‘spots’ and small floral motifs. These stood out from the plainer colours and patterns, such as cheques and stripes, used in European handkerchiefs. The Indian techniques had been achieved through techniques such as tie-dying, hand painting or block printing directly on silk, that were not practised in Britain.¹²⁶ British manufacturers never attempted to learn these finishing techniques themselves. In 1769, handkerchiefs made in London are described as ‘Italian’ in style, suggesting a different stylistic orientation.¹²⁷ There were attempts to try to produce handkerchiefs in an ‘Indian’ style, although they may not have been concentrated in London. There is evidence that British silk handkerchief makers were experimenting with copper plate printing, using the new techniques developed in the cotton industry.¹²⁸ Others wove *romals* i.e. striped handkerchiefs, where the pattern is produced on the loom.¹²⁹ However, these did not produce the same effects or colours, being less glossy or even too regular in appearance. Indian handkerchiefs remained distinctive and more ‘colourful’ to the discerning eye.

¹²⁴ *OBP*, 6 April 1796, t17960406-21.

¹²⁵ See search when object name: handkerchief, place of origin = Britain, date range = 1700 - 1900. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

¹²⁶ Bean, *Yankee India*, p.77.

¹²⁷ In the so-called ‘List of Prices’ agreed between master and journeymen in 1769. Middlesex Sessions: Sessions Papers - Justices’ Working Documents, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, LL ref: LMSMPS507070024, (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 10 January 2014).

¹²⁸ Mentioned in ‘Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade’, (1832): 801.

¹²⁹ ‘Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade’, (1832): 835.

Some people did buy foreign silks for 'practical' reasons as, for example, British travellers who found that silks were cheaper abroad than at home. However, it is also clear there was an allure around contraband silks. The English aristocratic wearers of Parisian or Roman styles ensured that a certain social glamour was attached to continental silks. Other less patrician consumers, such as actors, also contributed to this. The *Public Advertiser* complained about two performers, one at Covent Garden and the other at Drury Lane, who in the same week had both appeared in new suits of French silks.¹³⁰ In 1789 Customs officers seized a variety of French silks at the Opera House and in a building in Hanover Square "of great importance in the decoration of Operatical heroes."¹³¹ Those openly breaking the laws had a certain raffish air about them.¹³² Tea smugglers were described as "dressed in silk handkerchiefs around their neck".¹³³ William Hickey had a "hearty laugh" at a man who left England in a "plain brown cloth suit ... with unpowered hair and a single curl" and returned from Paris dressed in a coat "of a thick silk, the colour sky blue, and lined with crimson satin, the waistcoat and breeches also of crimson satin, coat and waistcoat being bedizened with a tawdry spangle lace." Even so, Hickey did like the man's hat and purchased one "even more *outré*".¹³⁴

Con men, particularly the so-called 'duffers', played on people's desire for smuggled silks to good effect.¹³⁵ 'Duffers' were men who lured victims with promises of foreign contraband that were actually British made and, therefore, 'duff' goods. The *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* defined "an East-India duffer" as a "fellow who pretends to sell ignorant people very great bargains of smuggled goods".¹³⁶ In the case of silks they "carry your Spitalfields Goods instead of Run-Goods" and the majority of cases reported in the newspapers involved fake Indian handkerchiefs.¹³⁷ Duffers typically targeted young men and visitors to the capital,

¹³⁰ *Public Advertiser*, October 3 1764.

¹³¹ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, January 24 1789.

¹³² Lemire suggests some thieves wore the clothes they stole rather than sell them because "The reward for daring to break the laws of property was the pleasure of being garbed in the best, the most fashionable of the stolen garments.", "The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism": 264.

¹³³ Quoted in Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*, p.349.

¹³⁴ Peter Quennell, ed. *Memoirs of William Hickey* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.90-91.

¹³⁵ Pedlars were also accused of defrauding their customers by, for example, substituting cotton for linen. Styles, 'Product Innovation in Early Modern London': 139-140.

¹³⁶ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, May 23 1765.

¹³⁷ *OBP*, t17471014-4, 14 October 1747.

groups who might be on the lookout for fashionable items but thought to be gullible. Targeting the gullible allowed conmen to deceive on the type of good itself and on price. So a duffer arrested in Fleet Market had sold a piece to a young man at one pound seven shillings, “pretending it came from India, which was worth no more than 6s.”¹³⁸ Another victim – ‘a countryman’ - was conned at Fleet Market out of money and a shirt for silk stockings valued at 8s a pair “which, upon examining, appeared not to be worth one.” Confusing Bengal for Spitalfields was common. A visitor in the Bear Key public house near the Tower of London was tricked into paying ten pounds for what he thought were East India silk handkerchiefs and other pieces, but was later found to be “the most flimsy manufacturers of Spitalfields”.¹³⁹ A duffer selling a Spitalfields silk handkerchief to a young gentleman as an Indian one in St Martin’s Church Yard near the Strand, also took the opportunity to pick his pocket.¹⁴⁰ Location was important. Places close to the river or markets were often used presumably to give the air of plausibility that the goods were new arrivals. Two girls accused of stealing silk handkerchiefs from a shop claimed that they had bought them from a duffer near Covent Garden.¹⁴¹ Many targets were then taken into inns often under the guise of escaping the gaze of Customs officers, building a cloak and dagger atmosphere to the transaction. One duffer enticed his victim by “shewing some samples of his merchandise from under his great coat, and enjoining secrecy”.¹⁴² One countryman was ushered into a private room in the pub “for fear of being see[n], as the duffer pretended, by the Custom-house officers”. He handed over 36 shillings expecting change for two ‘India’ handkerchiefs sold to him at 4s each – the duffer slipped away leaving the man to pay for the drinks and without his change. The items were said to be Spitalfields made and worth less than half a crown.¹⁴³

A few cases involved silks shapes for waistcoats. Two duffers were arrested near Fleet Bridge after they tried their con-trick on a Customs officer without realising who he was. The officer “seemingly complied with their Soliciatation, and went

¹³⁸ *General Evening Post*, June 6-9, 1761.

¹³⁹ *London Evening Post*, April 22-24 1766.

¹⁴⁰ *Public Advertiser*, February 29 1768.

¹⁴¹ *OBP*, t18061029-21, 29 October 1806.

¹⁴² *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, May 23 1765.

¹⁴³ *General Evening Post*, August 7-9 1770. A very similar case is in *Whitehall Evening Post (1770)*, March 6-8, 1783.

with them to private Room, in order to take a view of some Pieces of pretended India Silk for Waistcoats". But instead of purchasing them he asserted his authority and seized the waistcoat shapes.¹⁴⁴ William Thompson, an American loyalist, was drinking in the King's Head near Radcliffe Highway whilst he waited to take a ship to Scotland. In the public house were men selling silks: Thompson borrowed two and a half guineas and purchased "three pieces of silk for waistcoats". At the trial he said that they "go for India; but I believe they are manufactured in Spital-fields" and were sold to him as smuggled silks. He then claimed that the seller followed him to another pub and then to the ship trying to sell him more goods, before jerking the silks "out of my bosom, and ran away". There was a suggestion at the trial that pieces may have actually been ginghams rather than silks.¹⁴⁵

In the cold light of day everyone agreed that the substitution was easy to spot and that English and Indian handkerchiefs could be told apart. But were other types of silks so easy to tell apart? The hosier John Morice thought that English and French silk stockings were "easily distinguishable" from each other, as were mitts and gloves because the French did not use knitting frames.¹⁴⁶ Germaine Lavie, a mercer, was confident that he could distinguish French and English silks and Italian damasks from English ones, but not Italian plain silk from the English equivalent. Also less confident was Robert Fleetwood who said that he had "often been deceived in plain Mantua Silks."¹⁴⁷ For modern day curators telling European wrought silks apart can be hard without a written province. Many from the eighteenth century are labelled 'French or English' in museum catalogues, so similar are the designs, weaves and finishes.¹⁴⁸ A satire in the *Public Advertiser* published in 1765 played on these concerns. It imagined 'Ebenezer Loom' from Spitalfields placing an advert for his imitation French silks, silk stockings and Bengal handkerchiefs. He was satisfied "that not even the

¹⁴⁴ *London Evening Post*, April 24-26, 1760.

¹⁴⁵ *OBP*, t17861025-121, 25 October 1786.

¹⁴⁶ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1765): 214.

¹⁴⁷ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1766): 726.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, the satin damask with silver thread in the V & A collection made c.1700-1730 described as "Russia (possibly, made), England, Great Britain (possibly, made) France (possibly, made)" Museum number: T.81-1930 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O167928/woven-silk-ciccani-marko/>; or the blue silk coat and breeches made c.1780 and described as 'French or English' in National Trust Collections, Attingham Park, Shropshire, Nos. 609811.1 & 609811.2. <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/609811.1>, <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/609811.2>.

Ambassador himself could discover any Difference between his and the Manufactory of France – except in the Price.” His products were as good as any contraband sold by a “Great-coated Merchant, who invites every Passenger into a bye Court or private Alley, to examine his Goods, which he imports himself from France, or purchased from on board the East Indiamen in the Downs.”¹⁴⁹ On this basis the silk manufacturer William Brunskill thought that smuggling from France had been a good thing because “it supplied us with patterns and styles that we immediately copied.”¹⁵⁰ Once in London, foreign silks could be reused and this further blurred their identity. Silk dyers, for instance, would re-dye Asian silks for customers: in 1769 a silk dyer reported a variety of silk stolen from their workshop including “a blue figured Peeling or India Silk half Ell wide”.¹⁵¹

These ambiguities about identifying silks obviously posed problems for Customs and Excise. The prosecution against John Hooker for illegal importing was stopped after it was found that his ‘foreign cambricks’ were in fact from Scotland.¹⁵² Robert Trott the ‘examiner, searcher and stamper’ of silks for the Customs admitted that “it very difficult to distinguish French from Italian Silks”.¹⁵³ In the mid-1760s, French silks were being imported into Britain as ‘Italian’ via Leghorn. The Board of Trade and Plantations asked British representatives in Nice, Genoa and Turin for official figures on imports and re-exports of French silks and the output of Italian weavers to assess the extent of the problem.¹⁵⁴ Customs could do little to create international standards in units of measurements or quality of textiles. For its own benefit at least, it did have to attempt some order. Seized contraband was stamped by Customs officers as can be seen in image 10. The stamp clearly marked the silk as contraband, alerting any potential retailer or consumer to the object’s true origins; it functioned rather like branding a criminal. Producers also had their own schemes along similar lines. After the move to free trade, the dealer Richard Bottrell proposed stamping all foreign silk imports, and he even designed a changeable stamp that would be hard to forge. Customs were unenthusiastic about

¹⁴⁹ *Public Advertiser*, May 17 1765.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade’, (1832): 447.

¹⁵¹ *Public Advertiser*, November 14 1769.

¹⁵² TNA CUST 28/2, ff.431-432.

¹⁵³ ‘Report of Committee on the Silk Industry’, (1765): 209.

¹⁵⁴ K.H. Ledward, ed. *Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations, Volume 12: January 1764 - December 1767* (1936), p.368, p.372.

the prospect of having to hand-stamp every piece of imported silk.¹⁵⁵ Some manufacturers of silks stockings, gloves and mitts were stamping their goods in the mid-1760s. At the Select Committee of 1765 there was discussion about the feasibility of establishing a national 'Stamp House' to function like an assay office for silk.¹⁵⁶ An advert placed by the Committee of Manufacturers of Silk Handkerchief reminded the public that English silk handkerchiefs made in the Indian style "bear the King's Stamp (which is the figure of the Crown) at the end of the piece, and the purchasers are cautioned, for their own safety, to see that the pieces are thus stamped".¹⁵⁷

However, even these measures were not foolproof. A silk stocking manufacturer worried that if it became a requirement to stamp his products as English "the French might easily counterfeit it."¹⁵⁸ Whilst in other areas the Excise drove the trend for standardisation, in silks it often had to rely on the tacit knowledge of those examining the goods. For Customs officers without particular expertise in handling textiles, expert knowledge was sometimes needed. This was another area where silk weavers could work with Customs and Excise to enforce the legislation they had lobbied for. For example, English manufacturers re-used bits of silks, called 'remnants', in finished pieces and a trade developed in remnants of foreign silks. In one case Customs and Excise dealt with a merchant who wanted to claim an export bounty for 64lbs of silk mixed with gold and silver and 34 lbs of silk pieces. The claim was met with suspicion by the Excise officer. He found them to be made up of 234 remnants and disputed whether a bounty could be claimed on them, partly as it was suspected that some of the remnants were foreign made. "Several eminent weavers" were brought in to give their opinion. They said that all of the mixed silks were English but ten of the plain remnants were foreign. One of the remnants actually had a Customs seal on it which had been attached to it when it was imported into London. Mr Trott confirmed that it was his handwriting on the seal.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ His designs are reproduced in 'Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade', (1832): 7943.

¹⁵⁶ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1765): 215.

¹⁵⁷ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, January 4 1780.

¹⁵⁸ Evidence of John Morrice, 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1765): 214.

¹⁵⁹ TNA CUST 41/5, ff.34-40.

Conclusion

Silks were far from being the main commodity of eighteenth century smuggling. Much more tea and brandy was traded and, of the textiles smuggled, calicos and muslins were more popular. In one sense this is not surprising. Compared to woollens, worsteds and linens, silk was always the smallest textile manufacturing sector. It was a luxury trade and while it may not have had as great an output as the others, its products fetched high prices in the market. The same principles applied in silk smuggling: whilst the volumes traded were low compared to other goods, they were high enough to turn a profit. At the Parliamentary hearing in 1832, the profits at peak time were said to be as high as 50% or even 100%.¹⁶⁰ Certainly, the evidence from the duffers suggests that 'smuggled' silks could be sold at well over double the price of an English equivalent. Going through the Customs records it is possible to find seizures of many different types of silks. The evidence presented here suggests that velvets, satins, damasks or lustrings were not the most common items distributed through the black market.

Instead the greater threat to Spitalfields came from very different ends of the market and from two very different places. At the popular end of the market were silk handkerchiefs that came mainly from India and these were the most common silks in the contraband trade. These were more important than the better studied painted Chinese silks. French brocades and embroidery represented a different, high fashion end of the market but were also important to silk smuggling. From the end of the Seven Years War to the 1770s they threatened the most high profile and creative sub-branches of Spitalfields. They also show that the illegal trade was not only in finished pieces of silks, but with components and accessories that could be assembled in Britain. Indian handkerchiefs and some of the French silks were brought into Britain using the trading routes and techniques that characterised the smuggling of groceries. The East India Company was as important to the black market in handkerchiefs as it was tea; after all both goods were travelling in the same ships. It was more common for smuggled silks to be unloaded in London than it was for tea or brandy, but many were unloaded and brought into Britain via France, the Low Countries and the Isle of Man. However, the contraband trade in

¹⁶⁰ 'Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade', (1832): 7759.

silk had a longer life than that of tea, and was more subject to micro-fluctuations due to changing popularity of different types of goods.

Some of this black market followed the pattern of global commodity connections – desirable Asian goods being imported for European consumers – that have become so well known. Other parts of the black market in silk followed different paths and diverged from the illicit trade in groceries. In silks, non-traders had an important role in bringing goods across borders, and they picked up items, not along the French coast line, but from much further inside Europe. Undoubtedly, people who had travelled or lived in Calcutta or Canton bought home Asian silk with them. For the Customs, however, the greatest concern was people crossing between Britain and the Continent carrying their own clothes or gifts with them. European ambassadors even blurred the boundaries between commerce and non-commerce by trading in goods themselves. Whatever its instincts, Customs often had to accept the reality of the situation and allow prohibited silks ‘for personal use’ to be brought into Britain. Given the importance of India handkerchiefs with their wide consumer market, this could be seen as a lacuna in the campaigns conducted by the silk interest, like its blindness towards domestically produced cottons. However, the activities of diplomats and Grand Tourists indicate that politicisation of their consumption habits was justified. Travellers and diplomats had direct contact with continental fashion and often bought French and Italian silks in Paris or Rome. Their social position and political influence meant they could bend, or escape, from serious enforcement of the law. Smuggling also undermined the clear distinction drawn between English and foreign silks in the prohibition framework. In practice, consumers and revenue officers often found telling different silks apart very difficult, despite the obviously different or superior qualities a product was supposed to have. These problems encouraged manufacturers to distinguish English silks from their competitors, and to further cooperate with Customs and Excise.

Chapter 5: Exporting silks



Images 22 (left) and 23 (right). Image 22 shows a panel of silk damask woven in Spitalfields and worn in Virginia c.1734-40, to a design by Anna Maria Garthwaite. Museum Number: G1975-342. © Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF). Image 23 is a portrait of Mrs Charles Willing by Robert Feke, painted in Philadelphia in 1746. Mrs Willing is wearing a damask gown to a very similar design. © Winterthur Museum.

The portrait of Anne Willing (known as 'Mrs Charles Willing') in image 23 was painted in Philadelphia in 1746 by the artist Robert Feke. Anne Willing was born in colonial America in 1732, the daughter of the merchant Charles Willing. Feke's work is considered important within art history because he raised the standards of portraiture among American artists. This particular painting has attracted interest however, not because of Feke's skills as a painter, but because of the dress Anne Willing is wearing. The buff coloured damask, with a large floral pattern, has a striking resemblance to several surviving silks known to have been produced in Spitalfields. Image 22 shows another buff damask designed by Anna Maria Garthwaite and used in Virginia at least six years before Mrs Willing wore hers when she sat for Feke. The design of the Willing dress has been traced to the

workshop of Mr. Julins, a master weaver active in London between 1742 and 1755. He specialised in mid-price flowered silks including lustrings, tabbies and damasks; he bought sixteen designs from Garthwaite during his career. Several examples of damasks woven by Julins have been traced. Two made between 1751 and 1752 exist in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, one is a buff colour and the other a pale blue. A deep pink version of this design is held at the V & A in London.¹ Three more fabrics similar to the Boston design are in Scandinavian collections, although these are crimson in colour. The common origin of these different coloured silks led Natalie Rothstein to suggest two related points. Firstly that Julins, and therefore other Spitalfields weavers, “wove his damask according to the demands of the different markets.” Secondly, these survivals showed that Americans in the eighteenth century had more sober tastes than British or European consumers. The most popular Spitalfields silks in America were dull damasks and lustrings with a white or cream background.²

The damasks in Boston certainly look plain compared to the bright lemon, pink and green Spitalfields lustrings that are held in English collections.³ Further work on English silks in Norway confirms the popularity of bright coloured damasks, particularly with rich farming families. Norwegian taste for these textiles has been linked to the bold colours and patterns found in Norwegian folk art.⁴ American material culture scholars have been more reluctant to see the Feke picture as representative of a trans-Atlantic divide in taste. Deborah Kraak cautions that portraits may not capture the reality of dress in Philadelphia or elsewhere. Philadelphians were selective about what they wore to the artist’s studio and wanted to be depicted in solid coloured fabrics to emphasize their frugality or modesty.⁵ In the same vein, Shilliam suggests that another American painter, John Singleton Copley, used plain silks in his portraits as these were ‘timeless’ rather

¹ These are Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 47.1021 1751, 59.648 1752; V & A, T.346-1975.

² Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.37, pp.320-321; idem, ‘Silks Imported into America in the 18th Century, An Historical Survey’, in *Imported and domestic textiles in 18th century America.*, ed. Patricia L. Fiske (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1976), pp. 21-23.

³ Miles Lambert, ‘The Consumption of Spitalfields Silks in 18th-Century England: Examples in Collections Outside London’, in *18th-Century Silks: The Industries of England and Northern Europe* (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung Riggisberg, 2000), p.72.

⁴ Anne Kjellberg, ‘English 18th-Century Silks in Norway’ in *18th-Century Silks*, p.141.

⁵ Deborah E. Kraak, ‘Just Imported from London: English Silks in 18th-Century Philadelphia’ in *18th-Century Silks*, p.116.

than heavily patterned silk that might date the picture to a past fashion.⁶ Anne Willing's own dress history is hard to read in a clear cut way. In her late teens she went to London to stay with relatives, whom she continued to correspond with into later life. She supported the boycotts in opposition to the Stamp Acts, but wore quality imported fabrics rather than homespun cloth. As well as a Spitalfields' damask she bought a French-style brocaded canal in the 1760s.⁷ Presenting English consumers as being inherently more fashionable or more adventurous would also be wrong. The plates and samples Barbara Johnson placed in her fashion album, for instance, show that she ignored new styles being made by the silk industry and preferred plainer fabrics.⁸ In any case, from the 1770s silks became much simpler and more muted, as designs moved away from the influence of the rococo.⁹

One of the key issues in the scholarship on global commodities has been the response of manufacturers to foreign demand. Historians have explored the balance of influence between consumers, distributors and producers in making 'global' cottons or porcelains. This did not simply involve selling a pre-packaged 'Indian' or 'Chinese' product to the world, but was an interactive process that turned out different products for different sites of demand. In the case of Indian cottons for example, textiles with white backgrounds sold well in Europe, whilst dark blues and reds were popular in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ For the various markets in the Indian Ocean, Gujarati cotton merchants worked to a high degree of product specification often based on personal knowledge of the places they were exporting to. The trade to Europe was less direct, as access and information was controlled by the East India Companies. It was the companies that marketed Indian printed cotton to consumers, and commissioned designs from Indian producers. These incorporated European design elements, such as the 'tree of life' motif, into the existing template. 'Calicos' became an exoticised, European version of Indian

⁶ Nicola J. Shilliam, 'Fashionable Bostonians and English Silks in the 18th Century' in *18th-Century Silks*, p. 123.

⁷ Kraak, 'Just Imported from London', p.112.

⁸ Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p.31.

⁹ Lambert, 'The Consumption of Spitalfields Silks in 18th-Century England', p.72; Rothstein, *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.37.

¹⁰ Riello and Parthasarathi, 'Introduction: Cotton Textiles and Global History', p.6.

cottons, very different from the textiles sent to south-east Asia.¹¹ In Europe, French silk merchants and mercers had developed the seasonal fashion cycle and made novelty a selling point of their products. 'Lyonnais silks' were now aggressively marketed to consumers. The putting out system placed weavers and designers under the control of merchants and mercers. They made good use of samples, price lists and fashion dolls to advertise their ware, but could also respond to customer feedback and alter their designs accordingly.¹² Most of this business focused on supplying Paris, but Lyon also used these techniques in other European cities. The silk industry in Britain developed a similar product range made for the fashion cycle. However, Alain Cottereau has argued that Lyon remained quicker at responding to orders and requests from mercers, and that this gave the French silk industry a vital edge in export markets.¹³

Smail, Morgan, and Haggerty have all separately argued that the business relationship between British and American merchants was increasingly interdependent and sophisticated.¹⁴ In the North Atlantic trade, marketing techniques and integrated ordering systems became more common from the 1750s. The long distances involved, potentially fragile credit relationships and large product lines all encouraged closer integration between British and American merchants to reduce risks.¹⁵ For their part, American merchants made trips to British ports to see how their counterparts operated. Whilst in Britain they visited Josiah Wedgwood or Yorkshire wool manufacturers and learnt about pricing, stock, and credit opportunities. In the later eighteenth century British merchants became more direct in their operations in America. It was common practice to send customers pattern books, samples, and printed sheets of product

¹¹ Riello, 'The Indian Apprenticeship', pp.336-340; Styles, 'Indian Cottons and European Fashion, 1400-1800', pp.43-44.

¹² Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-century Paris* (London, Victoria and Albert Museum: 1996); Poni, 'Fashion as Flexible Production', pp. 37-74; Sewell, 'The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism': 81-120.

¹³ Cottereau, 'The Fate of Fabriques Collectives in the Industrial World', pp. 75-152.

¹⁴ John Smail, *Merchants, Markets and Manufacture: The English Wool Textile Industry in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), Chapter 5; Kenneth Morgan, 'Business Networks in the British Export Trade to North America, 1750-1800', in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, eds., John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.36-62; Sheryllynne Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760-1810: Men, Women, and the Distribution of Goods* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

¹⁵ Morgan, 'Business Networks in the British Export Trade', pp.39-40.

lines and prices. In this system a New York merchant could show a pattern book to a customer and order using numbers attached to a sample. This allowed greater exactness on price, colour and type. From 1790, Yorkshire woollen merchants sent out agents or partners to the USA to speed up sales and to have better supervision of transportation.¹⁶ Merchants found that what was out of fashion in Britain would not sell easily in New York. Conversely, retailers could sell new items on the basis of their novelty. Morgan argues that these well-developed links between British and American businesses, and effective marketing, gave British manufactures the edge over French rivals up to 1800.¹⁷ These different studies put the weight of explanation on merchants-merciers and the sophistication of marketing in luxury goods.

This chapter uses a case study approach to examine how Spitalfields silks were ordered, designed and distributed for export markets. If London was not as sophisticated in its marketing operations as Lyon, then how were orders placed and designs commissioned? Did Spitalfields produce quite different silks for the export from those made for British consumers, or do the doubts about Mrs Willing's gowns suggest a more complicated picture? The case study is Virginia, chosen for several reasons. Firstly, America was one of the main export markets for English silks, and it makes sense to concentrate on a major market. Secondly, focusing on North America allows a direct engagement with the existing studies of English export silks by Rothstein, Kraak and Shilliam. Those studies used New York, Boston and Philadelphia for their evidence, so turning to a mid-Atlantic colony may reveal important differences. Finally, the collections of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) provide an excellent opportunity to study design, distribution and consumption in one place. Within CWF's decorative arts collections is a large collection of eighteenth and early nineteenth century textiles. This includes English silks with provenances of having been in America during the eighteenth century. The research library at CWF has the extensive correspondence of the merchants of John Norton Sons, who traded tobacco and other goods between London and the Chesapeake. The correspondence covers the years from 1750 to 1795, stretching from the colonial to the post-Revolutionary period. In

¹⁶ Morgan, 'Business Networks in the British Export Trade', pp.46-52.

¹⁷ Morgan, 'Business Networks in the British Export Trade', pp.57-60.

addition the CWF library has the *Virginia Gazette*, with its many advertisements of tradespeople, and diaries of Virginians, many of which record individual and family consumption.

London silks abroad

Whether Spitalfields' mercers and weavers were as sophisticated as other textile industries is unclear. Few business papers survive so their day to day operations are hard to flesh out. The English pattern books used by Montgomery in her study of textiles in America came mainly from woollen and worsted firms.¹⁸ Certainly, a master weaver like John Sabatier did consciously work for export markets, although Rothstein suggested that he was a rare example of weaver who engaged in wholesale. Sabatier told the Parliamentary Committee of 1750 how he had exported several thousand pounds worth of silks to Ireland in the previous few years. Daniel Gobie also produced for the same market, sending his goods via Chester. He had wider horizons than Sabatier as he had customers in France, who took tabbies from him, and Germany, where he sent flowered silks. James Crockatt, a merchant, told the same committee that he sold £2000 a year of silks and velvets to Jamaica and South Carolina during the preceding decade. This was a figure he considered to be only a tenth of the total export to Jamaica. English silk stockings had done well in Italy and Spain where they thought to be of better quality than those made by domestic weavers.¹⁹

¹⁸ Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America, 1650-1870: a Dictionary Based on Original Documents: Prints and Paintings, Commercial Records, American Merchants' Papers, Shopkeepers' Advertisements, and Pattern Books with Original Swatches of Cloth* (New York: Norton, 1984).

¹⁹ 'Growth of Silk in America' in *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 25, (1750): 996. Also Rothstein, 'Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century', p.312, pp.336-337.

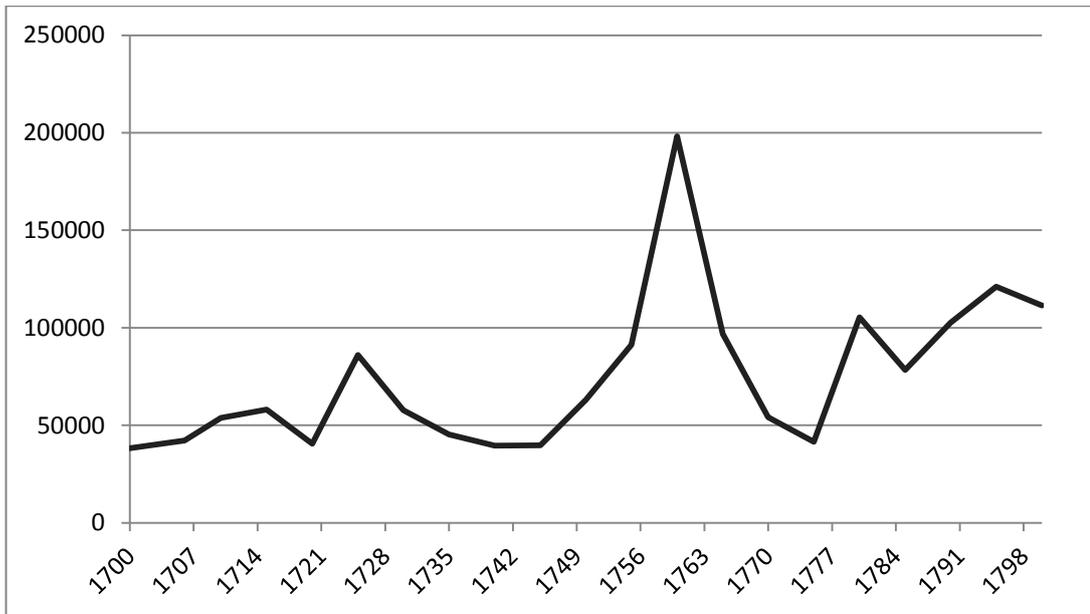


Figure 21. Wrought silk exports from England 1700 to 1800 (lbs), Figures from Schumpeter, *English overseas trade statistics*, Table XXV.

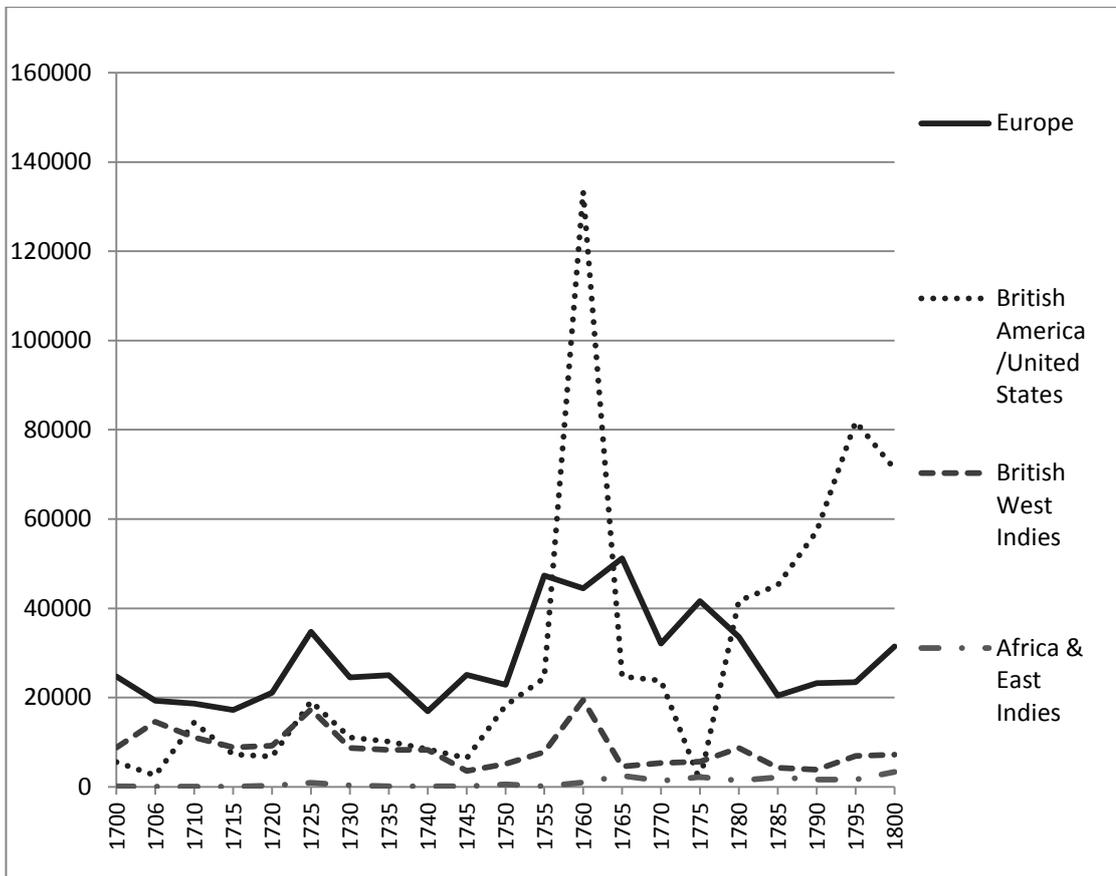


Figure 22. Wrought silk export markets 1700 to 1800 supplied from England (lbs). Data adapted from Schumpeter, *English overseas trade statistics, 1697-1808*, Table XXXV.

Exports of wrought silks from England, measured by weight or by value, more than doubled over the century.²⁰ There were five periods where exports rose: 1700-1714; 1720-1725; 1745-1760; 1775-1780 and 1785-1795. Correspondingly, there were five periods where exports fell: 1715-1720; 1725-1745; 1760-1775; 1780-1785 and 1795-1800. Bounties to encourage the export of wrought silks had been introduced in 1722. In the 1740s silk was the second biggest recipient of expenditure through the bounty schemes, although they were dwarfed by the sums paid out for corn exports.²¹ Silk exports were also dwarfed by those of woollens throughout the century, but were worth more than linens till the 1750s and more than cottons until the 1770s.²² Where silks went to is as important as quantity and value. Figure 22 shows exports of wrought silks divided into four regions: Europe, British America (later the United States), the British West Indies and Africa and the East Indies. Until 1755 Europe was the largest market for English silks, with British America and the West Indies sharing the rest of the trade fairly evenly between them. It was in this period that continental observers began to be impressed with the quality of English silks. By 1700 England had displaced rivals such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Genoa and maintained a position as “number two” silk centre behind Lyon.²³

From 1745 there was a huge boom in exports to the American colonies, peaking in 1760, followed by a huge fall. At the same time there was a similar movement in exports to Europe and the West Indies. The very big increase in 1760, particularly for North America, could be re-exports intended for the French colonies or other markets, cut off from their French suppliers during the Seven Years' War. Most of the European market was divided between Central and Southern Europe until 1750. Then so-called 'British Europe' (i.e. Ireland and the Channel Islands) rose in importance whilst Southern Europe declined as a market. In the second half of the century Central and British Europe became the two biggest markets in the region.

²⁰ See figures for weight (lbs) *English overseas trade statistics, 1697-1808*, (1960) Table XXXV and value (£s) Ralph Davis, 'English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774'. *Economic History Review*, 15 (1962): 302.

²¹ Julian Hoppit, 'Bounties, the Economy and the State in Britain, 1689-1800' in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, p.141, pp.143-144.

²² Davis, 'English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774': 302.

²³ Poni, 'Fashion as flexible production', p.42.

This trend of increasing exports over the eighteenth century, and the rise of North America at the expense of Europe after 1760s, is in line with what happened to British manufacturing exports in general.²⁴ The importance of Europe and the British Atlantic to silk exports were features shared with British woollens, worsteds, cottons and linens. However, cottons and linens did much better in Africa and Asia than silks, highlighting the continuing strength of the Chinese and Indian silk production. Unlike Lancashire cottons, London silks were not worn globally.²⁵ The French silk exports were even more concentrated in Europe and the Levant in the eighteenth century. 90% of French silk exports went there, with 9% going to French colonies. This did change in the 1810s as exports to the United States increased to 20% of total silk exports. By the 1820s and 1830s English silk manufacturers began to feel the threat of competition in what had been 'their' market.²⁶

Existing studies have shown that consumers outside the capital could acquire silks from Spitalfields relatively easily. Order books, advertisements and surviving textiles indicate that most of the product range available in London was sold to these customers. People in the English provinces could purchase silks in several ways. London mercers supplied retailers in Norwich, Bristol, Nottingham and Chester and in a few places, such as Bath, warehouses emerged. Mercers also sold directly to families, and individuals made trips to London to buy in person.²⁷ Analysis of English silks in Welsh gentry families found bizarre silks, taffetas, laced silks and damasks.²⁸ Those in Scottish collections are of a narrower focus, the majority are patterned, floral designs and all date from after 1750s. In surviving correspondence Scottish merchants wanted London mercers to be sent, "what is

²⁴ See table 7.1 in C. Knick Harley, 'Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism and Technology' in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume 1: Industrialization, 1700-1860*, eds. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.), p. 178.

²⁵ Davis, 'English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774': 303 and Schumpeter's figures for linens, *English Overseas Trade Statistics, 1697-1808*, Table XXXIV. British woollens also never found large consumer demand in Africa or Asia. See Pat Hudson, 'The Limits of Wool and the Potential of Cotton in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries' in *The Spinning World*, pp. 327-350.

²⁶ See Table 13.2 in Riello, 'The Globalization of Cotton Textiles', pp. 42-43; 'Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade', (1832): 9135, 9213.

²⁷ Lambert, 'The Consumption of Spitalfields Silks in 18th-Century England', pp.65-66.

²⁸ Christine Stevens, 'Packages Lately Come from London: English Silks Worn by Welsh Gentry' in *18th-Century Silks*, pp.76-78.

fashionable”.²⁹ This was also a concern found across the Irish Sea. Adverts in the *Belfast Newsletter* emphasised that textiles stocked by retailers were “just arrived”. The number of adverts mentioning silks grew in the second half of the century, as social events increased in number. Specialist shops stocked a great variety of silks, including figured, flowered, plain and silk mixes, but even in small market towns modes and Persians were on sale. Silks could be bought wholesale, from a mercer’s shop or ordered individually.³⁰

English silks were well regarded in Denmark and Norway. Most surviving examples date from the 1720s to the 1780s, and include brocades, lustrings, damasks and stripes. Imports from Spitalfields were organised around the timber trade between Oslo and south-east England, with Norwegian merchants serving as the middlemen between consumers and London mercers. The account books of the merchant Halvor Heuch show that he bought textiles from Benjamin Dixon, a linen draper in Wapping, and William Saunders, a haberdasher on the Radcliffe Highway. Heuch returned silks his Norwegian customers did not want and at least once he used samples sent to them to place orders.³¹ Across the Atlantic in Philadelphia, the more detailed orders show that bright colours were in demand from some customers. Philadelphians were well informed about fashions from merchants and milliners, fashion plates and dolls, correspondence with friends and family in England and their own first-hand knowledge of London. Deborah Kraak has argued that Quakers gentry dressed well, including in silks, but restricted themselves to plain colours. Their dominance of the city ended in the 1750s, at which point Philadelphia had its ‘Rococo era’.

In the early eighteenth century the only silks in Philadelphia retail stocks were handkerchiefs. After 1750, mentions of figured, brocaded or damask silks increased as the city became more prosperous. Philadelphia merchants split their orders for silks and worsteds into bright and drab colours, reflecting the two different markets: Quaker/non-Quaker and country/town. Darker textiles were

²⁹ Naomi Tarrant, ‘18th-Century English Silks in Scotland’ in *18th-Century Silks*, p.89.

³⁰ Elizabeth McCrum, ‘The Market for English Silks in the North of Ireland in the 18th Century’ in *18th-Century Silks*, pp. 97–103.

³¹ Kjellberg, ‘English 18th-Century Silks in Norway’, pp.135-138.

usually sent to the country stores.³² In Boston, Shilliam found that the 'Puritan spirit' declined by the 1720s when one finds orders asking for brighter colours and patterns. For Bostonians, the choice of English silks was determined by the city's merchants and their contacts with London.³³ These existing studies of English silks have overlooked central and southern Europe, the West Indies and the southern American colonies. In terms of sources, these studies have tended to divide into those based on textile collections or ones led by newspapers adverts and correspondence.

Silk and consumers in Virginia

Eighteenth-century America was a consumer society *par excellence*. Its growing and more prosperous white population, only a small fraction of whom worked in manufacturing, were dependent upon imports for consumer goods.³⁴ Aided by the good survival of probate inventories historians have shown that there was expanding ownership of goods and a diversification in the type of goods owned, particularly in groceries, textiles, table ware and metal goods. Breen has argued that a distinct American identity was created from this pattern of consumption. This ultimately found political expression in the boycott movements before the outbreak of revolution in 1776. Specialists of individual colonies have been more sceptical of this claim, stressing differences between New England and the mid-Atlantic, and between rural and urban areas. Ann Smart Martin, for example, has argued that there was a 'backcountry style' in western Virginia, clearly different from that found on the big plantations or on the seaboard.³⁵ Although, as Eacott has reminded historians, the Calico Acts allowed Asian textiles to be sold in America³⁶, British manufacturers were able to prosper in America. The Navigation

³² Kraak, 'Just Imported from London: English Silks in 18th-Century Philadelphia', pp. 109-115.

³³ Shilliam, 'Fashionable Bostonians and English Silks in the 18th Century', pp. 122-131.

³⁴ Morgan, 'Business Networks in the British Export Trade', pp.36-37.

³⁵ Carole Shammas. *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.); T. H. Breen, 'An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776'. *Journal of British Studies*, 25, 4 (October 1986): 467-499; *idem*, "Baubles of Britain": The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century'. *Past & Present*, 119 (1988): 73-104; R.C. Nash, *Domestic Material Culture and Consumer Demand in the British Atlantic World: Colonial South Carolina, 1670-1770* (Manchester: Manchester Papers in Economic and Social History. No.59, 2007), pp.4-11; Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp.94-144.

³⁶ Eacott, 'Making an Imperial Compromise': 733-734; Joshua Johnson who dealt in tobacco between Maryland and London, sent Indian Persians and silk handkerchiefs out to his American

Acts forbade foreign shipping to trade with British colonies and between 1700-1 and 1750-1 British exports to North America trebled in value, making up around 10% of total British exports in the period.

After the end of the American Revolutionary Wars, when Atlantic trade re-established itself, British manufacturers did even better. From 1783 down to 1798 exports to America doubled in value, and made up 31% of total British exports. Textiles took up a large share of this trade: in the 1790s a third to half of cotton exports went to the United States; in 1800 40% of British woollens exports were going to the American market.³⁷ Du Plessis' analysis of textiles in merchants' stock in North America and the Caribbean found that woollens and linens were the most popular textiles, followed by cottons and then silks. The exception was Jamaica in the 1680s and 1690s where silk was the third most common textile, representing a relatively high 20% of all textiles in stocks. In Pennsylvania, silks became more common in the 1730s than they had been in the 1680s and 1690s, growing from 6% to 13% of textiles; they fell back to 9% in the 1760s.³⁸ However, Maw's figures found that in New York and Pennsylvania silks were still more popular than cottons in 1773, although they were overtaken by 1791.³⁹

Within this context, Virginia was a favourable environment for buying English silks. Together with Maryland it was the second largest importing region of English textiles after New York and Philadelphia.⁴⁰ Consumption of non-essential goods increased in the eighteenth century as it did in other colonies. Lorena Walsh's study of 4,000 probate inventories of people in the Chesapeake Bay area⁴¹ from 1640 to 1777 found this growth began with the 'tidewater elite' from around 1715. Tobacco planters increased their consumption without detriment to their investment in plantations. In the 1730s middling families began to own more items,

customers. Jacob M Price, ed., *Joshua Johnson's Letterbook 1771-1774: Letters from a Merchant in London to His Partners in Maryland* (London: London Record Society, 1979), pp.304-307.

³⁷ Morgan, 'Business Networks in the British Export Trade', pp.36-37.

³⁸ I use the figures from Pennsylvania as this is the one British colony that Du Plessis has data on for all three of his sample periods. Du Plessis, 'Cotton Consumption in the North Atlantic', Tables 11.1-11.3, pp.291-231.

³⁹ Peter Maw, 'Yorkshire and Lancashire Ascendant: England's Textile Exports to New York and Philadelphia, 1750-1805'. *The Economic History Review*, 63, 3 (2009): Table 2, 736.

⁴⁰ Maw, 'Yorkshire and Lancashire Ascendant': Table 1, 735.

⁴¹ I.e. the region around the mouth of the Chesapeake River, including parts of Maryland and Virginia. This was the heartland of exporting tobacco.

typically furniture, cutlery, plate, and tea; by 1750s this trend can be found in poorer families. Unlike New England and South Carolina, expanding consumption was not confined to towns, but had moved out into the countryside.⁴² The settlement patterns of early Virginia had aided this fairly even spread of consumption across the colony. Plantations had developed along the many rivers leading into Chesapeake Bay without a dominant large port emerging. Revealing the close links between the tobacco trade and retailing, general stores grew up along the rivers, using waterways to distribute goods. This retailing network, and the consumers it sought to supply, spread right out into the backcountry of western Virginia. These stores were mainly Scottish owned, usually financed by British tobacco merchants.⁴³ The storekeepers and assistants were often the sons of merchants learning their trade on the American side of the business; the tobacco merchant John Norton's son was employed in this way. The stores offered credit to their customers, providing an alternative to shopping in town where store owners often wanted to be paid in cash. The elite planters were able to buy goods directly from London or Glasgow, because of their personal ties with Britain.⁴⁴

Greater efficiency in the tobacco trade aided the development of retailing in Virginia, including the consolidation of firms and the move to two annual shipments instead of one. This allowed a better response to the seasonal nature of the demand in consumer goods.⁴⁵ Thanks to the tobacco trade, retailers had fairly direct access to merchants and manufacturers in Britain. It was tobacco merchants who supplied goods to most of the shops. They took orders in Virginia, sourced goods in Britain and then arranged shipping to America. A single shipment for the firm of Semple and Lawson lists over 40 different manufacturers and merchants who supplied them with goods for export.⁴⁶ Store owners relied on the expertise of these agents working in Britain to select the best goods for them. Indeed, one

⁴² Lorena S. Walsh, 'Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777'. *The Journal of Economic History*, 43, 1 (1983): 110-117. For the comparison with South Carolina see Nash, *Domestic Material Culture and Consumer Demand in the British Atlantic World*, pp.11-20.

⁴³ Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, pp.14-15.

⁴⁴ Walsh, 'Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency': 117; Harold B. Gill Jr, *The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series, 1984), p.15, p.26, pp.53-62.

⁴⁵ Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, pp.14-15.

⁴⁶ Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, p.19.

Scottish tobacco firm warned against trying to order directly from a London supplier, arguing that a middleman was needed to exercise quality control and ensure that goods were packed and shipped correctly. Unsurprisingly in a system using so many middlemen, complaints were not uncommon. Store owners complained about old fashioned, poor quality or damaged stock being sent to them. James Russell, a London agent, was singled out for criticism as he “gives his orders to a shop that makes them up without his seeing of them”.⁴⁷

Textiles were a shopkeeper’s most important item. James Hook, the store owner studied by Martin, made 40% of his sales in the autumn of 1771 through textiles, and a further 10% on readymade clothing. He stocked 25 grades of linen, with prices ranging from 10d to 3s 6d a yard.⁴⁸ The inventory of the Glassford Store at Dumfries, valued at £4, 000 in 1772, had 36% of it made up in textiles and sewing materials. William Anderson, a merchant at Hanover County, placed three orders between 1771 and 1772 of which around half were textiles and sewing materials.⁴⁹ Stores competed for customers and so having a wide, attractive stock was important. Bot and Lightfoot of Yorktown sold to over 30 different occupations, including 18 different craftsmen. Most lived locally, for example, at the Prentis Store in Williamsburg (the capital of colonial Virginia) of the 332 customers with outstanding accounts, 60% lived in the vicinity of Williamsburg.⁵⁰ Store owners needed to carry two lines of goods: a large one of lower quality, such as coarse linens, and a smaller and better quality one for richer customers. Martin sees the retailing system as a hierarchical one with demand from wealthy families at the top, who had more to spend, more latitude with merchants over debts and better connections. At the lower end were poorer people, who got small lines of credit and often exchanged labour or home produce for goods.⁵¹

The most likely customers of Spitalfields silks were from the top of this hierarchy, mainly the better off planter families. Not only did they have more disposable income, but their whole lifestyle created a context for the wearing of luxury

⁴⁷ Quoted in Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, pp. 78-79.

⁴⁹ Gill Jr, *The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia*, pp.92-94.

⁵⁰ Gill Jr, *The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia*, pp. 134-141.

⁵¹ Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, p.43.

textiles. It was a culture comparable to that of the English gentry. In the early eighteenth century the Virginia gentry began building 'great houses' or rural retreats for themselves. The great architectural influence was the Governors' Palace in Williamsburg completed in 1720. In its wake followed houses developing a European style that emphasised size, proportion and symmetry. Rees Isaac saw these houses as a physical expression of the consolidation of the plantation economy and the life-style of the planter elite.⁵² Michal Rozicki has argued the importance placed on taste and style by the gentry was a process of legitimation to draw the line between themselves and yeoman farmers, particularly among the first generation.⁵³ In the great houses there was formal dining and important social rituals such as dancing. The expectation was clearly there for those attending to dress up and dress well.⁵⁴ Social distinction also expressed itself in dress, the wearing of wigs or lace cuffs marking those who wore them as men who did not engage in manual work. Certainly in the types of clothes worn, people did not slavishly follow English conventions. In winter people dressed in an English style, but in summer woollens and wigs were discarded, replaced by linens and thin caps.⁵⁵ The diarist Landon Carter was a great complainer about changing temperature and the need to change clothing. In May 1772 it turned "really cold" and he was forced to put thick garments back on. But in September 1773 the weather was "almost too hot to live. I was forced to get again into my summer's cloathing and no bearing the musketoes."⁵⁶

Carter was often critical of lavish spending in others. He was disappointed to see the wife of a planter "act the part of a fine lady in all her towering apparel with at least two maids besides her own girl to get the dinner and wait upon her; but this I do suppose she did to shew her respect."⁵⁷ Signs of wear and tear in people's clothing reflected well on them: "The Gent. Made a demur about his breeches being

⁵² Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA., by University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp.34-35.

⁵³ Michal Rozicki, *The complete colonial gentleman: cultural legitimacy in plantation America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp.128-131.

⁵⁴ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, pp. 76-79.

⁵⁵ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, pp.43-44.

⁵⁶ Jack P. Greene, ed. *The diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778* (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1987), p.693, p.779.

⁵⁷ Greene, ed. *The diary of Colonel Landon Carter*, pp. 727-728.

dirty. I told him dirty breeches are as certainly good to ride in as to stay at home in.”⁵⁸ However, merchants depended upon Virginians having a less rough and ready attitude to clothing. Although from an aggregate view consumption was geographically spread out, for the elite Williamsburg was an important place to buy and wear clothes. It was where the best milliners and tailors had their businesses and the capital developed something of a ‘season’ based around colonial politics. When the General Court and General Assembly were in session members of the gentry travelled into Williamsburg from their estates and would reside there for the duration. Tradespeople expected strong sales in this period and placed adverts in the *Virginia Gazette* accordingly.⁵⁹ The milliner Catherine Rathall moved from Fredericksburg to Williamsburg - “where I hope for three times the Business I ever did” - on this basis.⁶⁰ In a more localised version, visits to houses or attendance of public occasions inspired new purchase. Frances Baylor Hill “got up very early” on the morning of a wedding to alter two gowns, trim her petticoat and make up three turbans. The bride and gown “were dress’d very clever they both look’d handsomer than ever I saw them.” Before going to another event she “run a turban with green silk”.⁶¹ Virginian women also made up clothing themselves and repaired or re-worked older items. Many of the entries in Sarah Fouace Nourse’s diary record her repairing garments and purchasing materials for her work. She cut out and sewed together a pair of breeches and bought a “beautiful shall” and a twelve needles from a pedlar.⁶² Silk twist was bought to mend a black gown, a striped cotton gown was patched up to serve as an alternative to a grey silk one that was being repaired, an old grey lutestring was made into a petticoat.⁶³

To visitors Virginians appeared well dressed, even garish at times. An English Reverend Thomas Gawtkin wrote “an account of the manners of the Virginians” at

⁵⁸ Greene, ed. *The diary of Colonel Landon Carter*, p.1054.

⁵⁹ Mary R.M. Goodwin, *The Colonial Store* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series, 1966), p.74.

⁶⁰ Frances Norton Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia; Being the Papers from Their Counting House for the Years 1750 to 1795*, 2nd ed. (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1968), p.217.

⁶¹ ‘The Diary of Frances Baylor Hill of “Hillsborough”, King and Queen County, Virginia (1797)’. *Early American Literature Newsletter* 2, 3 (1967): 20, 30.

⁶² ‘The Diary of Frances Baylor Hill’: 17.

⁶³ ‘Diary of Mrs Sarah Fouace Nourse, 1781-1782’, John D. Rockefeller Jnr Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Transcript. TR 34, 3-4, 12.

some point after his visit there. He found their preference for great “quantity of plate” and travel by coach showy. This love of parading was carried over into their dress. “Fashion reigns here with despotic sway. New modes are imported full as soon as they are carried conveyed into Counties at a distance from London.” Gentlemen wore woollens in winter and silks or cottons in the summer. Ladies wore Indian cottons prohibited in England and “several kinds of silk, particularly Lutestrings, Taffities and Persians in summer.” Women also wore too many rings and jewellery for his liking.⁶⁴ Virginians certainly owned a broad variety of silks, although whether they were made in London is a different matter. William Tryon’s French cook Pierre Le Blanc left a coat and breeches of brown silk and worsted, and a black silk knit waistcoat.⁶⁵ Edward Brattle Oliver left 3 pairs of light coloured silk stockings and one pair of black; his wife left two taffeta gowns, one pair of silk stockings, six yards of pink colour lustring for a petticoat and one velvet jockey cap hood.⁶⁶ Sarah Fouace Nourse owned a crimson satin gown and a grey silk gown.⁶⁷ Good quality garments could also pass down the social hierarchy through gifting. John Harrower, who went out to Virginia as an indentured servant, found that his clothing changed after he left Britain, becoming lighter and more colourful. In a letter home to his wife he described his dress “you wou’d scarce know me now, there being nothing either brown, blew, or black about me but the head and feet”. His inventory of 1774 records one flowered silk coat and a black silk cravat. He had been given two silk vest coats and pairs of cotton britches “all of them having been very little worn” by his employers.⁶⁸

Surviving English silks

In the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) collections there are seven textile fragments and nine costumes that have been identified as British made silks. They

⁶⁴ Thomas Gawtkin, *Gawtkin’s chronology of Virginia: “an account of the manners of the Virginians* [n.d.], John D. Rockefeller Jnr Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. I must thank Dr Taylor Stoermer of the Foundation for showing me this manuscript.

⁶⁵ William Stevens Powell, ed. *The Correspondence of William Tryon and Other Selected Papers, vol. 1*, (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Dept. of Cultural Resources, 1980), p.391.

⁶⁶ ‘Memorandum Of Wearing Apparrelle Belonging To My Self’ [Edward Brattle Oliver], 1760. John D. Rockefeller Jnr Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

⁶⁷ ‘Diary of Mrs Sarah Fouace Nourse, 1781-1782’. JDR Transcript. TR 34, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁸ Edward Miles Riley, ed. *The Journal of John Harrower, an Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia, 1773-1776* (Colonial Williamsburg; distributed by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York., 1963), p. 57, p.45 p.97.

all have a provenance suggesting they were worn in North America during the 18th century.⁶⁹ Eight have a provenance of having been worn in Virginia in the same period. One (CWF Collection 1983-290) is by tradition part of a gown worn, between 1730 and 1750, by Anne Spotswood, wife of the former Governor of Virginia, Alexander Spotswood. The silk in image 26 is by family tradition worn by Martha Washington's sister Elizabeth Dandridge. Another two fragments (1993-39 and 1970-175) have been linked to Martha Washington herself. The Washington's lived mainly at the Mount Vernon plantation in Virginia, and the Dandridge family also had significant property in the colony. Of the non-Virginian silks, two are linked with Connecticut through the Coit family of Griswold (images 28 and 29), one is from South Carolina, one from Pennsylvania and one from Rhode Island. Another three are linked with Massachusetts: one belonged to the great-grandson of Governor of Massachusetts and two came from the collection of the F. Schumacher Company of that state. Ten, the majority of these textiles, are brocaded silks: they have cream or ivory coloured grounds with brocaded decoration in the form of foliage. Two of these brocades have been linked in the CWF catalogue to designs of Anna Maria Garthwaite. The gown from Rhode Island in image 24 (1951-150, 1) has a similar design to a pattern drawing by Garthwaite of 1726, image 25. The brocaded silk gown in image 26 shares similarities with a gown designed by Garthwaite and woven by Mr Julins in 1752, which is in the V & A collections.⁷⁰

The remaining eight examples differ from the plain ground brocades. One (1983-225) is a peach, red and yellow striped gown shown in image 22 dated between 1770 and 1780. It has a provenance of being worn in the Blair family of Richmond, Virginia. Two fragments are silks with pink grounds and both by tradition belonged to the Coit family of Griswold, Connecticut. The first fragment, image 28 (1995-79), is a brocade and is dated between c.1765-1780. The other, image 29 (1995-78), is a taffeta and dated between 1770 and 1790. It has a floral and striped pattern woven into the cloth. The only gown in the sample that does not have a

⁶⁹ The textile fragments are: 1970-175, 1978-200, 1978-201, 1983-290, 1990-95, 1993-39, 1995-78, 1995-79. The costumes are: 1930-367, 1975-340,1, 1983-225, 1983-227, 1989-119, 1989-330, 1, 1992-37, 1.

⁷⁰ See V & A item T.36-1973, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O361528/sack-back-gown-anna-maria-garthwaite/>.

floral design is a brown gown (1983-227). This dates from 1760 to 1780 and has a province linking it with Pennsylvania. Linda Baumgarten suggests that the plain all over colour and the wide (for eighteenth century gowns) waist size of 30 inches, points to it being made for an older woman.⁷¹ There are two men's three piece suits. One a velvet three piece suit (1992-37,1) with a yellow ground and small multi-coloured sprigs woven into it. It is dated from 1760 to 1780 and is thought to be either English or French made. The other is made of pink ribbed silk lined with linen and worn by Dudley Cotton c. 1776 (G1971-1564.)⁷²



Image 24 (left). Brocaded silk gown, made in England worn in Rhode Island probably by Sarah Wicks Waterman in 1720s, remade 1775-1785. CWF Collections: 1951-150, 1. Photograph: the author's.

Image 25 (right). Design for woven silk by Anna Maria Garthwaite. Made c.1726 in Spitalfields, Watercolour on paper. Museum number: 5970:11, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O90903/design-garthwaite-anna-maria/>. © V & A Collections.

⁷¹ Linda Baumgarten, *Eighteenth-century Clothing at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Va: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1986), pp.26-27.

⁷² Reproduced in Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, Fig 34, p.19.



Image 26 (left). Detail of brocaded silk sack gown, produced England c.1750, altered c.1775. CWF Collections: 1975-340,1. Photograph: the author's. According to family tradition worn in Virginia by Martha Washington's sister Elizabeth Dandridge Aylett Henley. For a full view see Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, Fig 121, p.86.

Image 27 (right). Detail of striped silk gown. Produced in England c.1770-1780. CWF Collections: 1983-225. Photograph: the author's. Worn in Virginia by a member of the Blair family.



Image 28. Fragment of brocaded silk gown. Produced c.1765-1780. CWF Collections: 1995-79. Photograph: the author's.



Image 29. Fragment of silk taffeta gown, produced c.1770-1790. CWF Collections: 1995-78. Photograph: the author's. Both image 28 & 29 have tradition of being worn and used by the Coit family in Griswold, Connecticut.

The predominance of brocades on plain grounds confirms one of Rothstein's arguments that these kinds of silks were popular in the American market. The Colonial Williamsburg examples can be usefully compared with English brocades with yellow and green grounds to make the point about their plainness.⁷³ There are no large, richly decorated mantuas that would have been worn at court in London or Paris.⁷⁴ The links between the two pieces and known Spitalfields designs can also be used as evidence of London producing for a particular market, although there is no written evidence showing that either the weaver or the designer knew they were working for an American customer. Neither is there further comparative material evidence as there is with the Mrs Willing gown. Although Spitalfields did produce more colourful silks, it is quite likely that brocades on a plain background were the most popular type. Just because a variety

⁷³ E.g. Brocaded silk on yellow ground, Spitalfields 1749-52. V & A CIRC.243-1959. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15325/dress-panel-unknown/>; Brocaded silk on green ground, London 1760-1765, V & A T.454 to B-1988, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O134652/dress-fabric-unknown/>.

⁷⁴ E.g. the brocaded mantua made 1755-1760 in the V & A (T.592:1 to 7-1993) <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O137678/mantua-unknown>.

of designs were offered does not mean that they were all produced in equal numbers. All but one of the flowered silk gowns fall into the period 1750 to 1780, which was the high point of woven, flowered design. A search of Garthwaite's designs on V & A online catalogue shows that the majority of her designs are floral patterns on a cream or beige background.⁷⁵ The article on pattern drawing in the *Laboratory of Arts* told its readers that lustring brocades "are either upon a plain or figured ground".⁷⁶ The mercer Ashburner thought that English brocades on white grounds were superior to French ones.⁷⁷

The other six silks should caution against an argument that there was a monolithic American taste for plainer designs. Some American consumers obviously wanted brighter colours, particularly pinks, and non-brocades. The sample also has biases or gaps which serve as a further caution to making sweeping observations from it. There are only two item of men's clothing and one of these is also the only velvet in the sample. There are also no satins and no black silk for mourning, a textile that appears regularly in the merchant order books. In other collections, there is a bias towards flowered silks at the expense of other types. Flowered silks were more expensive and, therefore, were re-used to make new dresses, upholstery or fancy dress in the 1800s.⁷⁸ Neither are there any damasks, surprising perhaps as Mrs Willing's gown was made of damask. There are two damasks in the CWF collection, which were woven in China and worn in America in the eighteenth century, both with large floral designs. One buff coloured fragment of a gown, dating from 1750 to 1770 and was worn in Delaware (1970-10). The other is orange and gold damask gown made between 1740 and 1760 and worn in New York (1985-143,1). This is too small a sample to make any generalisation from, but there obviously were American consumers who owned brighter damasks than Mrs Willing.

⁷⁵ Search when artist = 'Anna Maria Garthwaite' with date range of 1740 to 1750 and 1750 to 1760, the last decade in which she was working. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>, 23/4/2013.

⁷⁶ *The Laboratory, or, School of Arts: Containing a Large Collection of Valuable Secrets, Experiments, and Manual Operations in Arts and Manufactures / Compiled Originally by G. Smith*, 6th edn, vol. 2 (London: H. D. Symonds, J. Waplis, and Wynne and Scholey, 1799), *The Making Of The Modern World* [accessed 29 April 2013], p.45. Rothstein argued that the original version of this article had been written by Garthwaite. *Silk designs of the eighteenth century*, p.22.

⁷⁷ 'Report of Committee on the Silk Industry', (1765): 210.

⁷⁸ Lambert, 'The Consumption of Spitalfields Silks in 18th-Century England', p. 63. Also McCrum, 'The Market for English Silks in the North of Ireland in the 18th Century' in *18th-Century Silks*, p. 103.

Overall, English silks in America appear to share much in common with those worn in Britain, outside of the court and the leaders of the *beau monde*. It is worth noting that outside of silks it was possible to produce obviously 'American' designs. The use of printing in cotton and linen manufacturing, rather than design on the loom allowed greater flexibility to changing patterns. Printing also gave greater clarity to depiction of people than was possible with woven techniques. This allowed designs showing with topical scenes, public figures or moralistic illustrations. This was most common with handkerchiefs; examples include depictions of 'Industry and Idleness', commemorating Lord George Gordon or celebrating the cast iron bridge over the River Wear.⁷⁹ A linen-cotton mix bed curtain in the CWF collection called the "Apotheosis of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington" (1959-18) was made in Britain c.1785 for the export market.⁸⁰ It shows George Washington driving a chariot and Benjamin Franklin standing next the figure of Liberty. Another English printed cotton bed hanging shows George Washington being led by Peace and being crowned by Fame (see image 30). A linen-cotton furnishing textile produced in the same year existed in two different versions to suit domestic and export tastes. The design show a military camp and in the British version a drum head has the words "Royal Artillery" printed on it; in the American version this has been removed, by scraping over the words on the printing plate.⁸¹ This kind of handkerchief is over-represented in textile collections at the expense of plainer and cheaper designs, which have not survived as well even though they sold in larger numbers. However, they do form a useful comparison showing, in a certain light, how the taste of American consumers for English silks looks similar to that of the domestic market.

⁷⁹ See Baumgarten, *Eighteenth-century Clothing at Williamsburg*, pp.67 & V & A T.24-1922 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O363679/handkerchief/>.

⁸⁰ Reproduced in Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, fig. 122 p. 87.

⁸¹ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, p. 87.



Image 30. Detail of plate-printed cotton bed hanging with linen tape. Date: c.1785. CWF Collections 1978-245,2.

Ordering English silks

Rothstein speculated that Americans who bought English silks, wanted plainer, less showy designs. This arguably marked out their taste in fabrics out from British or European tastes. Given the differences in designs found in other luxury export trades, especially Indian cottons, this is a plausible interpretation. However, the material evidence examined here suggests that no obviously ‘American’ designs were produced by the silk industry in London. Neither was a particular type of silk pushed onto the American market. There is little evidence of London silk mercers marketing their wares directly in Virginia or any other American colony. Instead, demand from Virginians was more important in driving exports and determining the kinds of silks that were sent across the Atlantic. For sure, this was made possible by the existing trading links between the Chesapeake and London. Some Virginians were able to buy silks in London personally, but much demand was filtered through retailers and the tobacco merchants. The tobacco merchants John Norton and Sons are an excellent example of this system in action. They used the consignment system to move tobacco from Virginia to London, with John Norton and his wife spending most of this time in London, with their son John Hartley in

Virginia. They acted as agents for planters, arranging for ships to collect tobacco and bring it to London where it was sold. They then organised consumer goods to be sent out to Virginia. Unlike the Glasgow tobacco merchants who moved to the so-called 'direct purchase system' in the 1760s, John Norton continued to use the consignment method. This was because credit remained scarce in Virginia and the consignment system was an easier way to purchase consumer goods.⁸² The Nortons took orders for consumer goods on behalf of planters and their families, as well as from retailers in Williamsburg and other towns. The milliner Catherine Rathall, for example, used the Nortons when ordering her stock. She had met John Norton's younger son in Yorktown where he had assured her that the items she requested would be "bought in the best & Cheapest Manner, and with all the Speed Possible"; she promised to be "Exact and punctual in my Payments".⁸³ The names of some London mercers reoccur with some frequency. For example, the Nortons bought silk stockings and silks breeches from the mercer John Hookham.⁸⁴

Orders placed with John Norton and Sons for silks fabrics were generally small, usually for two or three items. They rarely feature in the large orders by store owners. Invoices for the merchant John Wilkins and Littleton Savage (both of Northampton County), Jerdone & Holt, William Anderson on the York River or Peter Lyon between them only turn up 24 yards of pink and pale blue Persian (a thin silk for linings).⁸⁵ Instead it was silks stockings, handkerchiefs, ribbons and sewing materials that were ordered more regularly. Although these types of silks accessories do survive, and in North American collection are quite well represented, they are less likely to have the kind of provenances attached to larger textiles. They are also harder to link to designs drawn in Spitalfields. However, written orders for silk accessories from London give a good indication of the types and colours that were in demand in Virginia. Stockings usually came in plain colours, as was conventional in eighteenth century dress. White and buff silk

⁸² Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, Xii, xv-xvi.

⁸³ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.210.

⁸⁴ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3. 22 December 1763, folder 1; 22 February 1766, folder 3. Hookham is described as a mercer in *Owen's Weekly Chronicle and Westminster Journal*, June 8, 1765 - June 15, 1765; Issue 378.

⁸⁵ In the invoice for Mr Anderson, John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 20 September 1771, folder 47.

stockings were bought on behalf of Lord Dunmore in 1773.⁸⁶ William Robertson ordered from the Nortons two pairs of white and two pairs of 'neat' coloured silk stockings.⁸⁷

Catherine Rathall wanted some more adventurous line of stockings in dark colours and in white "half with & half without Flowerd Clocks".⁸⁸ A greater variety of colours and weaves was found in in ribbons and handkerchiefs. Whilst Littleton Savage ordered silk satin bonnets in black and white, he also wanted ribbons in paduasoy, satin and sarconet; ribbons that were "fashionable figured", "fashionable striped", "plane fashionable"; ribbons that came in black, white blue, yellow, straw, pink, purple and silver.⁸⁹ Mrs Scott ordered white, blue and pink ribbon, and "2 pounds silk as many different colours as possible but the largest quantity dark blue".⁹⁰ Rathall bought ribbons in pink, blue and white specifying that "no other colours" would be acceptable; she attached a sample of the kind of pink ribbon she wanted.⁹¹ John Curtis, who served on the Governor's council of Virginia, sent an invoice of goods that including white, red, black, lemon, green and blue ribbon.⁹² Not all of these orders were for English silks. Littleton Savage wanted red spotted India silk handkerchiefs, chocolate spotted handkerchiefs, culgees [figured silk worn as a turban], black Barcelona silk handkerchief, white silk handkerchief, silk romal handkerchief and silk bandanoes.⁹³

The smaller individual orders for silk fabrics show that Virginians wanted a more diverse range silks from England than the material evidence represents. Catherine Rathall ordered six yards of "bright pink" and "handsome blue" peeling stain, in conjunction with blue and pink silk jacket buttons to match the blue and pink satins.⁹⁴ An invoice from John Wilkins requested fashionable figured satin cloaks in white and blue.⁹⁵ Customers of the Nortons also sent silks they already owned over

⁸⁶ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.330.

⁸⁷ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp.291-292.

⁸⁸ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp.218-219.

⁸⁹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 4 September 1772, folder 74.

⁹⁰ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.331.

⁹¹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 22 July 1772, folder 66.

⁹² Josephine Little Zuppan, ed. *The letterbook of John Custis IV of Williamsburg, 1717-1742* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield for Virginia Historical Society, 2005), p.89.

⁹³ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 4 September 1772, folder 74.

⁹⁴ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp. 211-212.

⁹⁵ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 21 July 1772, folder 66.

to London to be dyed or re-dyed.⁹⁶ John Norton was received a gown to be dyed from Mrs Lyon “pushed in a little Box with the China”.⁹⁷ Two pieces mantua silk where sent to John Norton as they had become “much spotted” and it was requested that they be “dyed the colour they will take best”, plus another silk that was to be dyed and returned as soon as possible.⁹⁸ James Mincies acting on behalf of Lord Dunmore, enclosed samples of the colours and patterns his client wanted.⁹⁹ Mr Hart sent a white coat and jacket that he wanted dyed “any fashionable colour that will stand the Sun”. If possible trimmings of a “good deep blue” were to be sent back with the jacket.¹⁰⁰ Francis Leigh’s wife wanted a gown of hers to be a dyed in lemon.¹⁰¹

In advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* for tradespeople the diversity of silks was a selling point to the public. Certainly white figured lustrings were advertised.¹⁰² William Turner, however, promised much more, offering black and green lustring; black, green, and pink breeches patterns; flowered, striped, and plain gauze, white and coloured sewing silk.¹⁰³ William Pitt sold velvets, silk patterns, armozeens, lustrings, Persians, tobines, taffetas, crapes.¹⁰⁴ The tailor William Hooper offered “Velvets of several colours, to match any pattern” as well as brocades, mantua silks, flowered silks, velvet hoods, “capas ready made of velvet ... with a very fashionable Snail, Black, Scarlet, or Mix’d Colours”.¹⁰⁵ Catherine Rathall sold flowered and plain satins, flowered and plain modes, persians, English gauze in flowered, striped and plain patterns.¹⁰⁶ She also carried black silks and accessories including black gauze and ribbons for mourning, and coloured silks for quilted petticoats.”¹⁰⁷

⁹⁶ Joshua Johnson also took order for dying gowns. Price, ed. *Joshua Johnson’s Letterbook 1771-1774*, pp. 27-29; 386-387.

⁹⁷ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 15 September 1772, folder 74.

⁹⁸ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p. 371.

⁹⁹ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.328.

¹⁰⁰ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, October 1771, folder 48.

¹⁰¹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 12 October 1771, folder 49.

¹⁰² *Virginia Gazette*, 25 February 1775, page 3.

¹⁰³ *Virginia Gazette*, 26 August 1775, page 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Virginia Gazette* 16 December 1775, page 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Virginia Gazette*, 18 April 1766, page 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Virginia Gazette*, 18 April 1766, page 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Virginia Gazette*, 18 April 1766, page 3; 25 February 1775, page 3.

Getting what you wanted

Relying on intermediaries to select silks could create problems for store owners or consumers. Direct supervision of purchases was relinquished to buyers and control over quality and price was lost. After her first few orders placed with the Nortons, Catherine Rathall found that the items arrived safely and on time but not “as good or as cheap as I have had from London”.¹⁰⁸ This was a problem for all retailers not just for those buying silks. Common complaints were that London merchants overcharged, substituted goods for ones different to those given in the orders, or sent goods that were old fashioned and would not sell Virginia. Peter Lyon complained that the tradesmen used by the Nortons were “extremely negligent or deceitful” sending bad or coarse goods at high prices that were “scarce fit for use”. He recommended that their services should be dispensed with, claiming that he could buy better goods at the same price in Williamsburg. Lyon noted that the Norton’s son had advised Mrs Lyon to send her cambric and handkerchief back, “but she did not choose to trouble you with them”.¹⁰⁹ In 1772 Lyon objected to the behaviour of the mercers Nash and Co. as they had “not minded in any article sent this year”. In the past they had sent him complimentary handkerchiefs to make up for “the Rags” they sent, but he had now had enough of them.¹¹⁰ The Nortons clearly ignored his complaints as two years later Lyon found himself was sending back a piece of bad handkerchief ordered from Nash and Co. to “try to shame them for their behaviour”.¹¹¹ Indeed, he was bitterly offended by what he took to be their disregard for the good taste of consumers in Virginia, “I know they think anything good enough for Virginia, but they should be informed better”.¹¹²

One way of avoiding disappointment was to use more precise descriptions when ordering silks. Writing from London Mrs Norton asked her son to give better instructions, as previous orders had disappointed the milliners in their vagueness.¹¹³ The Nortons’ customers also followed suit. Specifying grades of

¹⁰⁸ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3., 22 July 1772, folder 66.

¹⁰⁹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 15 July 1771, folder 43.

¹¹⁰ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 15 September 1772, folder 74.

¹¹¹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 25 September 1774, folder 47.

¹¹² John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 25 September 1774, folder 47.

¹¹³ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 1773, folder 100.

quality was, admittedly, imprecise and often open to interpretation. Although some people attached physical examples to their letters, it is hard to find examples in the correspondence of people using the most accurate method then available: numbered sample lists or swatches. Some wanted to leave the interpretation up to the Nortons: a customer from Williamsburg ordered “col’d silk of different sorts” in 1771.¹¹⁴ Nathaniel Burnett invoiced the Nortons for one “fashionable” black satin bonnet and “best” sewing silk.¹¹⁵ Other orders might go in the opposite direction, arguably even more question begging. Lord Dunmore wanted a gold laced that was *not* “remarkably fashionable”. Mrs Scott ordered two pairs of stays specifying that, “I don’t mind the fashion if they are made easy & full in the Stomick”.¹¹⁶ Customers were on surer ground specifying colour, size and price. Indeed one of Lord Dunmore’s other requests for silk stockings enclosed his size.¹¹⁷ Augustine Smith wanted a green silk tippet, a red silk bonnet and a cloak for “a Child three years old”.¹¹⁸ Later on Smith requested a “white colour’d silk made into a saque [i.e. a sack gown] & petticoat made in newest fashion for a tall woman.”¹¹⁹ One client asked for two large hats “for a youth 21 yrs Old” and ‘strong’ shoes from a named shop - Didsborough’s – to be ten inches long and for another pair for a sixteen year old boy, also measuring ten inches.¹²⁰ Catherine Rathall noted that gentleman now asked for shoes “with long hind Quarters, and that Buckle Low on the foot.”¹²¹ Francis Leigh enclosed the requests from his wife including, “one pair of best blue sattin pumps to be made exactly to measure” held by Mr Nicholas.¹²²

Store owners in Williamsburg and elsewhere were quick to complain to their suppliers because they had a demanding customer base. Peter Lyon insisted that Virginians ordered textiles and apparel from London to get the best quality, and knew good taste as well as the gentry in England. Catherine Rathall was more contrite than Peter Lyon when an order went wrong, and blamed herself for “not

¹¹⁴ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 12 October 1771, folder 49.

¹¹⁵ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.146.

¹¹⁶ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.330.

¹¹⁷ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.330.

¹¹⁸ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.23.

¹¹⁹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 10 May 1767, folder 6.

¹²⁰ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.125.

¹²¹ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.217.

¹²² John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 12 October 1771, folder 49.

being more particular in my directions".¹²³ However, it was still important to her to get the process right because, as she explained to John Norton, she prided herself on having "the very best & most fashionable goods in Williamsburg".¹²⁴ Rathall wanted one of her orders to be turned round by "the Very first Opportunity As I am quite Out of every sort of Article" and her request for shoe buckles specified that they be "handsome New fashion".¹²⁵ William Robertson wanted his stockings to be sent "as soon as possible as my Stock being worn thin."¹²⁶ Retailers tried to order ahead for the coming season; John Snelson recorded that, "I have given my Customers assurance that I shall be qualified to furnish them with their Fall goods."¹²⁷ William Anderson sent an invoice in September 1771 for goods for the next spring, asking for them to be delivered by March 1772.¹²⁸ Thomas Jett complained to his suppliers that "my Good Customers are now very impatient for their winter Goods for their famailys".¹²⁹ Orders for silks were usually small and this made them very individual. Often there would be request for a complete or personalised outfit. One invoice for a "fashionable" figured white satin cloak, with white satin bonnet, was to be delivered with a necklace and earrings "marked NW".¹³⁰

Tradespeople worked to create a reputation among consumers that they needed to live up to. The advertisements placed in the newspapers by mercers, milliners and tailors stressed the range of stock carried, that it was fashionable and up to date, and that it had been chosen through their connections with the centres of taste. Typically, advertisements would have long lists of all the items in stock, often offering further services for the consumer. Some stressed the tradesperson's own skills in meeting a customer's needs and wants. William Hooper sold patterns to people who wanted or could purchase fabrics themselves but needed directions on what to buy and how to make up garments.¹³¹ Thomas Orrell, who opened a new tailor's shop in 1776, promised prospective customers that they would their work

¹²³ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 22 July 1772, folder 66.

¹²⁴ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.217.

¹²⁵ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp.210-211.

¹²⁶ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp. 291-292.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Gill Jr, *The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia*, p.66.

¹²⁸ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 20 September 1771, folder 47.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Gill Jr, *The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia*, p.66.

¹³⁰ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp. 211-212.

¹³¹ *Virginia Gazette*, 27 May 1737, p.4.

done “in a neat manner, and in any fashion they choose.”¹³² Stephen Buck offered “the genteelest taste and newest fashions, and no pains spared to merit a continuance of their [customers’] favours.”¹³³ Also common were assurance that silks were fresh from the merchant’s ship. Jane Hunter’s shop had “A genteel assortment of Millinery” much of which was “newly imported”. Eliza Strachman also sold “a genteel assortment of millenery” including a “variety of fashionable lustrings ... full suits of fashionable blond lace”. Her goods had just arrived from London on the ship *Berty* and she planned to always have “an early supply of the newest fashions in that way” her customers “may depend on being served in the newest taste, and most expeditious manner”.¹³⁴

Not all used London as a source. After Independence in 1776, Americans had access to textiles from Europe. William Turner advertised newly arrived “European goods” for sale. The merchants Norton & Beall reassured readers that their stock, which given the prominence of French brandy within it was probably from continental Europe, was “equal in quality to those from London”.¹³⁵ However, for those selling their own skills, as well as textiles, experience of the imperial capital was important. When the tailor John Prosser opened his shop in Williamsburg in 1766 he was advertised as being “from London”.¹³⁶ One tailors’ shop assured its clients that the clothes were made up by men who had worked in London.¹³⁷ Catherine Rathall traded on her reputation as a milliner of good judgement. When she arrived in Fredericksburg she was advertised as coming “lately from London” and because she “flatters herself her goods, and prices, will give general satisfaction; for as they were chosen by herself, and bought with ready money from the best hands, they are both good and reasonable.”¹³⁸ Rathall reminded the John Norton that she had “left London my self but last July with a very large cargo”.¹³⁹ Sometimes she ordered directly with a London retailer, using the Nortons only as a carrier. For example, John Norton was instructed to collect

¹³² *Virginia Gazette*, 2 February 1776, p.4.

¹³³ *Virginia Gazette*, 6 November 1766, p.2.

¹³⁴ *Virginia Gazette*, 31 October 1771, p.3.

¹³⁵ *Virginia Gazette*, 10 July 1778, p.2.

¹³⁶ *Virginia Gazette*, 16 May 1766, p.3.

¹³⁷ *Virginia Gazette*, 27 May 1737, p.4.

¹³⁸ *Virginia Gazette*, 18 April 1766, p.3.

¹³⁹ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.217.

goods worth £60 from Flight & Co and ship them to Virginia for her.¹⁴⁰ Not just London but the name 'Spitalfields' could be used to emphasize the quality of shops' silks. Although no adverts in the Virginia Gazette use the term, some in the *South Carolina Gazette* did. Several adverts for sales of textiles promoted "White bordered *Spitalfields* Weaving for Ladies".¹⁴¹ Links between London fashion and social position were also important for customers. Joshua Johnson wanted to assure his partners that the silks and calicos he was sending out to them were not only fashionable, but had been seen on the aristocracy in the capital.¹⁴²

London silks or London fashion was not just a brand, but something some Virginians had first-hand knowledge of. William Byrd's London diary refers to visits to "my milliner's in the City" when he was living there between 1717 and 1721.¹⁴³ Landon Carter was educated in London and his second wife was born in England. On a later visit to England he bought silk stockings from George Maynard, a hosier in Fenwich Street.¹⁴⁴ Sarah Fouace Nourse's husband had been a woollen draper for 15 years in London, before the whole family emigrated in 1789. Direct knowledge of this kind reinforced the pressure on retailers to have an up to date stock and for merchants to purchase good quality silks for their customers in Virginia. When William Robertson wanted several pairs of stockings he named the man – Pope – who was to make them "excat to my measure".¹⁴⁵ An invoice for a Mrs Scott revealed she had already written to a woman in London "whom she expects will call upon you and save you the trouble of buying them [the goods]".¹⁴⁶ Carter rejected a pattern sent to him for inspection by a merchant, as it was too expensive at 10/6 a yard and he wanted one at 9/2 a yard.¹⁴⁷ Carter's diary records the purchases made for himself or for members of the family, as well as some of the decision making process. His daughter Lucy went to a store in Westmoreland County to buy "her favourite Lutestring" and could not get any

¹⁴⁰ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.210.

¹⁴¹ E.g. *South Carolina Gazette*, May 28, 1772.

¹⁴² Price, ed. *Joshua Johnson's Letterbook 1771-1774*, pp. 13-18.

¹⁴³ Louis B. Wright, ed. *The London Diary, 1717-1721: And Other Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.198.

¹⁴⁴ Greene, ed. *The diary of Colonel Landon Carter*, p.242. Maynard also had trading connections with the Chesapeake: he is recorded as having imported 50 hogsheads of tobacco into London in 1775. 'Appendix: Other documents', *Joshua Johnson's Letterbook 1771-1774*, pp. 158-161.

¹⁴⁵ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, pp.291-292

¹⁴⁶ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.329.

¹⁴⁷ Greene, ed. *The diary of Colonel Landon Carter*, pp.951-952.

white ribbon. Prompted by this he wrote to another merchant “to get the flowered Pink Lutestring” and white ribbon. Lucy Carter knew that he disapproved of her orders for “necessaries ... and several such prodigious nothings” but Carter noted that she trusted him to place the orders.¹⁴⁸ Others stressed the importance of timely, as they were ordering for a particular season. John Curtis IV, who served on the Governor’s council of Virginia, sent an invoice for silks that “you will send by the first safe conveyance to York River”.¹⁴⁹ Lord Dunmore asked for his order to be turned around as quickly as possible so that “we may not be under the Necessity of buying their [his family’s] winter Cloathing here [Williamsburg]”¹⁵⁰

For those without direct connections to London, trusting the Nortons’ own knowledge of the capital’s mercers became the next best thing. Many families sent them small personal orders for silks and similar items. Robert Nicholas apologised for “troubling you with little trifling Commissions but so many little articles as one wanted in a family can’t well be collected at once”.¹⁵¹ Mrs Norton, in particular, was often singled out for her expertise and customers would ask for her to pick out some silk for them. According to one letter writer she was known for her “great Carefullness in buying and selling the Neatest and Cheapest goods”.¹⁵² Mrs Norton had a silk dyed blue for her from William Page in London.¹⁵³ The wife of Mann Page sent her compliments to Mrs Norton and thanked her “for the trouble she was at in buying her Things last year”. The writer used the letter to then ask Mrs Norton to take care of an invoice from a relation of his wife Mrs Lucy Randolph.¹⁵⁴ Mrs Hart sent her compliments to Mrs Norton “and begs the favour to choose the China for her if she can do so conveniently”.¹⁵⁵ Even Peter Lyons sent love from Mrs Lyons to the Norton family in London.¹⁵⁶

Others sent gifts, as well as salutations, to maintain the relationship. Mrs Norton was one of three women left a trunk of silks and laces by the grandmother of one of

¹⁴⁸ Greene, ed. *The diary of Colonel Landon Carter*, p.950.

¹⁴⁹ Josephine Little Zuppan, ed. *The letterbook of John Custis IV of Williamsburg, 1717-1742* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield for Virginia Historical Society, 2005), p.89.

¹⁵⁰ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p. 328.

¹⁵¹ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 22 January 1772, folder 52.

¹⁵² Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p. 217.

¹⁵³ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, November 15 1774, folder 117.

¹⁵⁴ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.124.

¹⁵⁵ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 4 October 1771, folder 48.

¹⁵⁶ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 22 January 1772, folder 52.

her customers. These were divided up in Virginia and Mrs Norton's share sent out to her.¹⁵⁷ The Nortons could also help introduce Virginians to the capital. Jerman Barker who ordered silk from the Nortons on behalf of others, thanked them for "your civility to me in London".¹⁵⁸ Other members of the firm also acquired knowledge, even a love of, fine clothes. William Reynolds was sent by his guardians to work with Nortons in London in 1768. He would return to Yorktown in 1771 "a gentlemen of purpose and fashion."¹⁵⁹ He carried on this interest once he was back home ordering six pairs of shoes, a fashionable hat, a suit of blue corduroy with silk facing and "a tight Cuff with buttons on them & pocket flaps". The buttons were of a new fashion and embroidered with a silver sprig. The shoes were to come from 'Smith' who would make them to "my measure". The hat came from Charles Marr who "has my siise". A great coat was to be made by 'Robertson' in a similar colour to the last one he had made there. This time the cloth was to be a little looser "as I think myself rather lustier that when I left London".¹⁶⁰ This added both to Reynolds' own knowledge of textiles and to his reputation as a trusted buyer.

Conclusion

The dress that Anne Willing wore when she sat for Robert Feke may well have been woven in Spitalfields; certainly the same pattern was commissioned there. Other silk damasks from that workshop have been found in London, the United States and Norway. Given the differences in the colour between these silks, Rothstein argued that Spitalfields consciously made silks for different export markets.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, the taste of a particular market could be read from surviving textiles. Rather conforming to type, Bostonians and Philadelphians appeared sober dressers compared to their counterparts in London or Paris. By contrast, the evidence in this chapter suggests that consumers in Virginia wanted a variety of silks from England that could also be bright in colour. Certainly, one type of silk – brocades on plain ground – were popular. As Virginian society lacked a royal court or an aristocratic *beau monde*, its members did not buy the most

¹⁵⁷ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p.108.

¹⁵⁸ John Norton And Sons Papers, JDL, Ms 36.3, 2 April 1770, folder 27.

¹⁵⁹ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p. 518.

¹⁶⁰ Mason, ed. *John Norton & Sons*, p. 239-240.

¹⁶¹ Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, p.37, pp.320-321; *idem*, 'Silks Imported into America in the 18th Century', pp. 21-23.

elaborate gowns or suits. However, Virginians did want fashionable silks, as well as silks that were good quality. What was fashionable in London, and what could be bought and made there, was one of the main guides for people placing their orders in Williamsburg. The taste of Virginians and their opportunities for wearing their purchases resemble the English gentry, rather than sober New Englanders. Whether Spitalfields went out to sell fashionable silks to people in Virginia or Belfast or Oslo is more debatable. In the eighteenth century they certainly did not employ the marketing techniques associated with the Lyon silk industry or Yorkshire woollen merchants. Indeed, the correspondence of the Nortons suggests that sending out samples was more likely to flow from the colonial consumer to metropolitan producer rather than the other way round. Cottereau argued that Spitalfields' performance in business was perfectly respectable until the 1820s.¹⁶² However, this view was mainly based on its record within the domestic market. In overseas markets, the London silk industry was rather old-fashioned compared to Yorkshire woollens or Lancashire cottons. In this area, it was falling behind other textile sectors by the 1770s and 1780s.

Although the distances could cause problems, in general consumers appear confident in their choices and well informed about what was on offer. A hierarchy of knowledge and access existed among consumers and distributors in Virginia. Those at the top had direct knowledge of London and good contacts among retailers there. They could specify a pink lustring or black velvet, and which mercer to buy from: he might even have their size. If customers did not have this kind of knowledge, they could trust a firm such as John Norton or a milliner like Catherine Rathall who would deploy informed judgement on their behalf. Spitalfields did produce silks for different markets, but it let international buyers come to it rather than seek them out. Orders and packages travelled along pre-existing commercial networks, such as the tobacco trade or timber in the North Sea, that had their hubs in London. As orders were small and often personalised, English silks did not need a large trading operation to market and distribute its wares. The London silk industry had worked hard to win a reputation for quality

¹⁶² Cottereau, 'The Fate of Fabriques Collectives in the Industrial World' in *World of possibilities*, eds. Sabel and Zeitlin, pp. 75–152.

and to ensure it could turn out the latest designs. However, compared to the lobbying on raw silk markets the silk interest appears rather complacent about exports. There was little campaigning to protect existing markets or to open up new ones. Some of these routes were indeed protected by an imperial framework. However, the importance of central and southern Europe and post-Revolutionary America, at different times, suggests that colonialism alone did not create exports markets for Spitalfields. Reputation and access to London were as important. What stands out is the similarity of the societies that English silks exported to. Unlike Indian cottons, London silks sold its wares to fewer markets and to people who resembled its clients in the West End (or wanted to resemble them.) Weavers did produce different silks for people in Oslo or Williamsburg, but they did not collaborate in making a 'Norwegian' or 'American' design. Overall, this suggests that the markets created by the empire were important for British consumer goods, but they were not the only framework for creating customers for British exporters. Non-imperial trade networks and a European (or extra-European) pattern of consumption were just as necessary

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Conclusions

Coda: the silk industry c.1820

In 1750 the House of Commons heard optimistic evidence about the cultivation of raw silk in Georgia. Weavers and mercers were enthusiastic about the potential of this new product that was being grown largely for their benefit. Exports were about to enter a boom, and for that generation of silk weavers the future looked promising. Just over eighty years later, Parliament was collecting the report of Dr Kay “on the subject of distress in Spitalfields”.¹ The area and the silk industry became synonymous with low wages and poverty. When Mayhew interviewed people in Spitalfields in 1849 he found a weaver making a “drab velvet for coat collars” at 3s 6d a yard, twenty five years previously the price had been 6s a yard. The healthy part of the trade was in making plain silks for umbrella manufacturers.² It was in the North West and Midlands that factory production and mechanization of silk weaving was developed. The machinery suppliers Devoge & Co. sold the new jacquard looms to Manchester, Macclesfield, Leek, Coventry and Nottingham, but not to London.³ Families from Spitalfields who did flourish in the silk industry later in the nineteenth century, such as the Warners and the Courtaulds, relocated to Essex.⁴

However, even manufactures in Coventry and Macclesfield would not challenge Lyon, which further entrenched its position as Europe’s leading centre of silk weaving and design. British colonial officials in India continued to be disappointed with sericulture in Bengal, and saw their share of the world market decline in the

¹ *Distress, Spitalfields and Nottingham. Copies of the Report of Dr. Kay to the Poor Law Commissioners on the Subject of Distress in Spitalfields; and the Report of Mr. Gulson to the Poor Law Commissioners on the Subject of Distress in Nottingham*, 1837, 376.

² Henry Mayhew, *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle, 1849-1850*, eds. E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, Reprint, first published 1971 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.128-129.

³ Natalie Rothstein, ‘The Introduction of the Jacquard Loom to Great Britain’ in *Studies in textile history: in memory of Harold B. Burnham*, ed. Veronika Gervers (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1977), p.286.

⁴ Sarah Bush, ‘Warner, Sir Frank (1862–1930)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [ODNB], Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48364>, accessed 1 July 2011; D.C. Coleman, “Courtauld, Samuel (1793–1881)”, ODNB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/46847>, accessed 1 July 2011.

mid nineteenth century.⁵ The silk industry in Dublin also found itself much reduced, until it produced a successful export product in poplin.⁶ Elsewhere silk continued its drift westwards, when production moved across the North Atlantic to find a home in Paterson, New Jersey. One quarter of those employed in the new factories had been born in England. It was American manufacturers who finally broke free of Mediterranean sericulture. They came to use raw silk from China and Japan, shipped to California and then sent by rail to the north east.⁷

This thesis has sought to use the silk industry in London to examine global connections in the eighteenth century. Chapters on raw silk and sericulture, migration, political responses, smuggling and exports have mapped the transnational links that were used by the silk industry. It has shown that these were different to those found in other studies of global luxury goods. Whether considered in terms of geography, technological challenges, or policy this picture of silk looks very different to that drawn of cotton or porcelain. The evidence presented here has emphasised early globalisation as an active process that was experienced, in positive and negative ways, by those working in silk manufacture. Fluctuations in supplies of raw materials, the illicit trade in rival products or new arrivals into the workforce all required responses. Some connections needed to be preserved or strengthened, in other cases entirely new one had to be created. In raw materials and protectionism, institutions were important mechanism for responding to these challenges. Finally, the experience of those who worked in the silk industry has been shown to have been of great importance. Thanks to a free, international labour market, weavers were as mobile as luxury goods. Their reactions to trade fluctuations and external competition were a key part of the lobbying that created the regulatory framework overseeing their trade.

In terms of connections, perhaps the key finding has been the importance of Europe and the Mediterranean. One of the great achievements in recent

⁵ Brenda M. King, *Silk and Empire*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.), pp.69-73.

⁶ Mairead Dunlevy, *Pomp and Poverty: a History of Silk in Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.6.

⁷ Debin Ma, 'The Modern Silk Road: The Global Raw-Silk Market, 1850-1930'. *The Journal of Economic History*, 56, 2 (2009): 335-338.

historiography has been the questioning of Euro-centric accounts of world history. It has never been the aim of this thesis to present a narrative of 'how Spitalfields made the world' or the like. Indeed one of the reasons for choosing Spitalfields as the case study was that it went into decline in the nineteenth century. The London silk industry has an inherently un-triumphalist history. However, provincialising Europe should not mean ignoring it. Neither should the importance of Europe be seen as an example of 'de-globalisation'. Over the eighty years covered here the silk industry stayed 'as global' as it had at the beginning; it remained part of a trading world with Europe, South Asia and North America. Conversely, it is also not the argument of this thesis that globalisation increased in importance for silk. What can be seen instead is that some connections changed their geographic orientation with important consequences for the industry. The overall 'system' was not transformed however. The place of Spitalfields within the web of early globalisation was only undermined in the nineteenth century when the support and protectionism it had previously received was removed.

The importance of Europe for Spitalfields is clearest in raw silk. At the start of the eighteenth century the English industry bought its raw silk from the Ottoman Empire and northern Italy, with a small amount coming from China and Bengal. Ready thrown silk was bought from Piedmont, and was highly regarded for its quality. As English traders found themselves excluded from the market in Aleppo and Smyrna, less silk was bought from the Levant. Italian imports now became even more important. Even after the Lombes had successfully put their throwing machine into use, weavers in London wanted the best quality thrown silk available and imports of organzine continued to rise. Imports from Bengal did increase in the last quarter of the century, although they did not achieve the reputation for quality that the East India Company had hoped for. As the Lombes knew, Italy and France remained important influences in design and technology, as they were the places of 'best practice' in sericulture, throwing and weaving.

Due to this reputation continental Europeans also provided workers for London. Weavers came from France and Ireland, particularly northern France and Dublin, to work in London. There were differences between the two groups. Weavers from France were religious refugees escaping Catholic persecution of Protestants; those

who came from Dublin wanted to escape a depression in their home city. Both groups found work easily in London. They already possessed weaving skills, and were aided by family and friends already in the capital. People also left Spitalfields to find employment abroad, attracted by offers of work in Glasgow and Copenhagen. Many more went even further afield by joining the army and navy. The weavers who followed this path were escaping unemployment in London, for some permanently for others temporarily. They travelled much further than those who stayed within the textile industries, being taken to the Mediterranean, the Caribbean and India. Much of this type of migration depended upon the Royal Navy, the Army and the East India Company.

Some connections were more threats than opportunities. As well as Indian printed cottons, there was also competition from foreign silks. For most of the century rival goods entered the country as contraband, brought in by smugglers. This took the form of two very different trades. On the one hand, the most popular items were silk handkerchiefs from eastern India and were carried in East India Company ships to London, either in official cargos or as private trade. At the other end, expensive brocaded and embroidered silks were bought in from France and Italy, mainly by individuals or opportunistic mercers. In other markets, Spitalfields met less competition. Silk weavers in London were well placed to serve the local, high society fashion market. However, they also served consumers beyond the city. The reputation of 'Spitalfields' and London fashions had grown such that silk made in the capital could be sold elsewhere. London silks were sold in the English provinces, Wales and Scotland. Despite the efforts by the Irish Parliament to promote silk weaving English silks sold well there too. There were never going to be significant sales in France as Lyon remained the leading European silk industry. However, continental Europe was still an important part of English silk exports. Indeed from 1700 to 1755 it was the largest export market, particularly central and southern Europe. After 1755 'British Europe' became more important and sales to southern Europe fell away. Outside of Europe the main export markets were North America and the West Indies. During the Seven Years War and then from 1780 to the end of century, North America would be the largest export market. For consumers in those countries, Spitalfields silks were associated with

quality and fashion. Gentry families in the Chesapeake wanted a 'London look' and the capital's silk industry was an important source of supply.

The silk industry in London was connected to Ireland, France, Italy, Turkey, eastern India, the West Indies and North America. The flows of goods and people do not fit into an easy model however. The silk industry took in raw materials from places eastwards of London and sent its finished goods out westwards. The good that competed against Spitalfields in the British market also came in from the east. However, the circulation of people revolving around London complicates such a picture, with people arriving from the west, and going out north and eastwards. Overall, there was no drift to the Atlantic as observed by Riello in cotton production. Neither did changes within the British Empire, such as the shift from America to India analysed by Marshall, have a decisive influence on the silk industry.⁸ British silk was not limited to the 'British world' – it was a global industry. Exports to North America were important, but attempts to turn plantations in Georgia and South Carolina over to silk production failed. Bengal may have produced the biggest selling rival finished silks product, but the East India Company's raw silk continued to be seen as of lower quality. Where Spitalfields was not connected too is as revealing as positive links with other places. Unlike British cottons and linens, the industry did not export silks to West Africa, and despite efforts, raw silk did not come to rely on the labour of West Africans.

Some of the 'disconnections' were the result of British traders being excluded or side-lined. China, still probably the largest market for raw and wrought silk at this time, has played little part in this story. This is not surprising given the Qing dynasty's decision to restrict trade, and explains the failures of the East India Company to employ Chinese sericulture experts in Bengal. The lack of importance of Chinese silks to designers or weavers in Spitalfields is more surprising. This suggests that historians might be more critical about the (Asian) import (European) substitution model. Designers and weavers were not seeking to provide an alternative to Chinese silks, despite their reputation. The chronology of

⁸ P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c.1750-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the import-substitution model, which sees the heyday of Indian and Chinese imports ending in the 1730s, can also be questioned. The strong performance of Bengali handkerchiefs in Britain suggests that some Asian manufactured goods retained a comparative advantage into the early nineteenth century. In the case of handkerchiefs, this was due to the use of techniques of hand painting and tie dying that British artisans could not master. Further comparative study of this area could make a useful contribution to the great divergence debate, as it points to a set of productive conditions in Bengal.

Globalisation was not a smooth process, nor did it move at a glacial pace. It often brought disruptions that needed urgent responses; the transnational connections involved had to be maintained or recast for new situations. Important work was carried out by institutions, particularly the trading companies and the British state. Exports to British colonies in America and the West Indies benefitted from the framework of Britain's imperial economy. The more direct engagements were the sericulture schemes in America and India. The experiments in Georgia, South Carolina and Madras may have been failures, but all were conceived to supply the London market with raw silk, and justified in terms of the national interest. More successfully, the East India Company worked to increase the amount of raw silk it sent to London from Bengal, following the decline of the Levant Company. Within London, the Weavers' Company may not have been involved in moving commodities or people around the world, but it was still important. The Company channelled the energies of silk weavers and polemical pamphleteering, into effective lobbying of Parliament. This secured a series of laws placing high duties or outright bans on the consumption of imported silks in Britain. Although the Calico Acts are the most famous example of this type of legislation, they were in fact only the beginning. Over the eighteenth century attention moved away from Indian printed cottons to imported silks of all types. This was not simply reactionary protectionism or popular imperialism. Intellectually, at least, the campaigns against imported silks were transnational in their inspiration. The silk interest drew on examples of similar policies in other European countries as inspiration for its proposals.

The Company did give up its historic function of enforcing regulations concerning training and employment. This did not mean that it was becoming irrelevant; in fact it was able to respond effectively to a new situation. It provided a space for Huguenot and Irish weavers to attain some status and influence. Unsurprisingly, the Company became a defender of the right of immigrants to practice weaving in London. Viewed alongside its campaigns for import bans, control of raw materials, and even help capturing French designs, this formed a coherent framework. Over the long eighteenth century a policy was forged of allowing a framework of free movement of labour, but control of the international flows of goods. While Styles is right to highlight the importance of inter-state competition in Europe for the rise of fashion, these states were responding to transnational pressures, even if the particular case of calicos has been overplayed. Martin Daunton has suggested that later periods of globalisation can be analysed as a trade-off between aspects of the world economy, resulting in particular policy combination of free or restricted movement of labour, finance and currency exchange.⁹ Whilst 'mercantilism' has been a useful concept in this study a task of future work on early globalisation may be to see if more precise schemas can be found. In Britain, the textile industries were one of the few economic sectors with a consistent pattern of regulation directed towards it.¹⁰ How true this was across Eurasia, and why textiles were awarded special status, deserves further consideration.

Institutions did not create the only global pathways, and it is important to acknowledge their limits. Commercial trade routes carried most of the supplies of raw and thrown silk to London. The silk exports were carried by traders who dealt mainly in another commodity, such as tobacco and timber. The orders were small and dependent upon high levels of personal knowledge from consumers and buyers. In the American case, demand really came from colonial elites rather than being shaped by Spitalfields merchants. Many American consumers had been to London and felt confident in placing orders for English silks. Those without personal knowledge could use trusted intermediaries such as family members or

⁹ Martin Daunton, 'Britain And Globalisation Since 1850: I. Creating a Global Order, 1850–1914'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 16 (2006): 1-38.

¹⁰ Julian Hoppit, 'The Nation, the State, and the First Industrial Revolution'. *The Journal of British Studies*, 50 (2012), 317-318.

merchants with appropriate British credentials. This efficient trading system allowed individual taste to be satisfied. The smuggling trade also followed a similar path. Even the contraband carried by the East India Company was organised around 'private trade'. Silks were selected by individual captains and officials who thought they might make a small profit. Once in London, contraband silks were filtered out into the black economy, though face to face exchanges. This is drawn out even more in the contraband trade from France and Italy, which was highly personal. The boundaries became blurred between 'personal use' and profiteering. Whether they were ambassadors on the make or tourist returning with a new waistcoat it was the individual nature of the smuggling that made it hard for Customs officials to police. The similarity between silks from different countries, and the inherently deceptive nature of smuggling, complicated the problem even further. Even here though, institutions had a role. The Customs saw that it had a problem and bought in experts from the silk industry to advise it. Much of the activity was coordinated through the Weavers' Company, which saw the benefits that could be acquired through such work. Not only would they be helping to enforce the legislation they had wanted, but they could acquire useful knowledge, as in the case of the capture French pattern books.

Artisans (and labour in general) have been left out of recent global histories of this period. An assumption lurking behind this neglect is that skilled workers were immobile and not aware of their place within transnational exchanges. Certainly, Spitalfields weavers did not consciously produce designs for overseas markets, perhaps the most obvious way in which craft work reveals such influences. To avoid this problem, studies of workers in global history usually either use a division of labour model, or a comparative analysis of work regimes. However, this would have become very complicated very quickly: Spitalfields used raw and thrown silk from several places and these changed over time. The Ottoman Empire, Piedmont and Bengal sold their products elsewhere and were not dependent upon the English market; English producers also threw their own silk. In fact, there was no clear division of labour of the kind envisaged by the world-systems analysts. It would be better to examine the ways in which the workers contributed to changes in global connections. Labour in the new sites of silk cultivation did play their part

in those schemes, although in a negative way. In Georgia and South Carolina the sericulture schemes failed to attract either white free labour or the use of plantation slaves. Those workers were put to more immediate, profitable use on other cash crops. In Bengal the available labour was there, but most cultivators were not under control of the East India Company. This made it hard to introduce new techniques, worms and plants on a systematic basis.

These difficulties reflect the main difference between the textile industries in India and Europe. In the European version the relationship between merchant and workers was more direct and managerial, whilst in India it was more indirect and mediated through village hierarchies.¹¹ However, despite this comparatively greater control in the workplace, weavers in London still found they had freedom to move to seek work. The silk industry had benefitted from this freedom of movement in the first wave of Huguenots. This set a precedent that meant Spitalfields became an open labour market for those coming to seek work. It also allowed them to leave in hard times and seek employment elsewhere. As well as being mobile, weavers were also vocal. Conflicts and tensions in the workshop were channelled into popular campaigns for protectionism. By the second half of eighteenth century, poverty in Spitalfields was represented through the ragged clothing of weavers and their families. This stood in contrast to the fine silks that they worked on and their customers wore. The poverty of weavers became a matter of social concern and its relief a policy objective. One of the main reasons for prohibiting foreign textiles was to prevent unemployment in the silk industry. Labour interacted with the flow of commodities and the state to produce a particular form of globalisation. Global history cannot be seen primarily through an imperial lens or as networks of market exchanges. Economic and political spheres overlapped and reinforced each other. Early globalisation was a double-edged sword, operating between state and market, or empire and the world, producing opportunities and disruption

¹¹ Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*, loc. 1598-1643.

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