

PEOPLE AND HOMES IN THE MEDWAY TOWNS :
1687-1783

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AMONG the records of the diocese of Rochester now preserved in the Kent Archives Office are over five hundred probate inventories for the City of Rochester itself and the neighbouring parishes of Chatham, Strood and St. Margaret's.¹ For the comparatively short period that they cover (the main series begins in 1687 and there is only a handful from the years after 1740), they are an extremely valuable source for the economic and social history of the Medway Towns, not least because they give a comparable sample of the inhabitants of each of the four urban parishes. The City archives, which otherwise might be useful, for example, in showing, through the registers of freemen and apprentices, the various trades followed in the town and their relative importance, unfortunately only concern themselves with the inhabitants of the medieval city, which by this time had so far outgrown its boundaries that more than half of the urban population lived outside the city limits. The inventories list the household goods and other personal property of the deceased including wages and other moneys due to him. Often they specify his occupation, and where they do not, it can usually be deduced from the contents of the inventory. They have one grave shortcoming, however, from the point of view of the social historian, in that they do not give a fair sample of the population : neither the rich nor the poor are well represented, the latter because they had not enough property to bequeath to justify making a will, the former because the wills of the gentry and professions and probably the wealthier tradesmen too were generally proved in the Archbishop's Prerogative Court, and not in the courts of the diocese. But the ordinary traders and craftsmen of the town and their social peers are represented by a considerable quantity of documents.

But before proceeding to analyse their contents, it will be well to describe the town from which they came. Already in the Middle Ages Rochester had outgrown its walls, and the parish churches of St. Margaret's and Strood were founded in the eleventh century for the suburban population, but Chatham remained distinct and rather remote until the rapid expansion following the development of the

¹ K.A.O. DRb/Pi 1687/1-1669/1 ; 1/1-58/17 (Consistory Court : 1667-9 and 1687-1783), and DRa/Pi 1/1-26/9 (Archdeaconry Court : 1719-1778). I should like to record my gratitude to the staff of the Archives Office for their help while pursuing these researches.

Dockyard in the seventeenth century. By the end of that century the stranger could hardly tell where Rochester ended and Chatham began : only the bridge and a small area of marshland broke the line of houses along the Dover Road from Strood church to the foot of Chatham Hill, but there was as yet little building off the main thoroughfare. The Hearth Tax Assessments show that in the 1660s and 1670s the largest houses, and hence presumably the wealth of the town, were concentrated in a small area round the cathedral. Here was the commercial centre, along the High Street, and to the south the homes of such fashionable society as the town could boast. Elsewhere off the main street the average of hearths per household drops rapidly to the level of the surrounding rural area, but while in the countryside spartan housing did not necessarily mean poverty, in the town it probably did, as the lists of persons exempted from the 1664 (Lady Day) Assessment show.¹

The population of the town is difficult to calculate with any accuracy. In 1664, 1,232 households were assessed, of which 317 were exempted from the tax, but six years later those chargeable numbered 1,416.² The Compton Return gives the number of inhabitants over 16 in 1676 as 3,810.³ Even assuming that these figures were accurate, any method of calculating the total population from them must be arbitrary and imprecise. The most that can be said is that there were probably between seven and eight thousand inhabitants in the four parishes in 1670. At that period the population in Chatham at least, to judge from the baptisms recorded in the parish registers,⁴ was increasing rapidly and continued to do so until about 1710, after which it remained steady till 1750. The other parishes, less dependent on the Dockyard with its fluctuations of activity, seem to have had a relatively stable population, but, with a high proportion of nonconformists recorded in the Compton Return, parish registers cannot be regarded as a complete index to population changes.

One of the facts that emerges most clearly from the inventories is the importance of the Navy to the town. The vast majority of its seamen were too poor to make a will and hence do not figure in the record, but even so there are nearly thirty inventories of naval or ex-naval personnel. Two of them, a captain who died on active service in the West Indies and a retired ship's carpenter, were well-to-do, with property worth £718 and £305 respectively, but in general, as might be expected, the seamen are the poorest group in the whole series, their chief, and sometimes their only, asset being the arrears of pay outstanding to them, usually for at least six months. Their standard pay

¹ K.A.O. Q/RTh.

² P.R.O. E179/129/746.

³ "A Seventeenth Century Miscellany" (*Kent Records*, Vol. XVII (1960), pp. 153-74).

⁴ K.A.O. P85/1/2.

of 23s. a month *c.* 1690 compared favourably with a domestic servant's 20s. at the same period, but the tardiness of the Navy as a paymaster forced them to live expensively on credit. A typical case is that of Benjamin Stevens, purser's steward on H.M.S. *Cornwall*, who died owed £15 in back pay, but with "insufficient other goods left to pay his arrears of rent". Even so some managed to amass a little capital. A former midshipman had made enough profit by loaning small sums to his shipmates to set himself up in a tavern, where he continued his money-lending activities. Two of the three surgeons whose inventories survive were retired naval men who had set up in practice in the town.

Inventories of Dockyard workers are much more numerous and make up a fifth of the total. Unlike the seamen, who lived all over the town, the Dockyard workers lived mainly in Chatham, close to their employment. There one in three worked in the Yard, to judge from the inventories. In St. Margaret's, which included the houses newly built on the "Banks" joining Rochester to Chatham, the proportion was one in six, in St. Nicholas' one in eleven, while there was none at all in Strood. All the principal shipbuilding crafts are represented, although the proportion of skilled to unskilled workers is distorted, the more so because shipwrights tend to be named as such in their inventories long after the mentioning of trades had fallen out of fashion in the community at large. Clearly they were felt to be something of an aristocracy among the Dockyard employees, a position that their wages and property reflect, although even so only a few were even moderately well-to-do. In general the workers in the Yard were second only to the naval seamen in their poverty, which was due mainly to the same cause: a constantly recurring item in their inventories is their arrears of pay. More than three-quarters were owed greater or lesser sums, commonly amounting to more than half the total value of their inventories, and of the rest most if not all are to be accounted for by retirement and by the fact that many Dockyard workers sold their rights to their pay for ready cash.

Although not all the shipwrights are explicitly stated to have been employed in the Dockyard, there is no clear evidence in the inventories of any civilian shipbuilding. The nearest approach is the detailed description of the tackle of a rope-walk, but even this seems to have been a part-time business since its owner was owed wages from the Yard. It required comparatively little capital to set up a rope-walk—especially when the raw material could be obtained at His Majesty's expense—but very few Dockyard employees had managed to save even that little amount. When they could do so, they were likely to invest it in retail trade or in opening a tavern, probably run by their wives while the husbands worked in the Yard. The furnishing of their

houses reflects their general poverty. Very few had money to spare for luxuries and items for display like the silver plate which was common in tradesmen's houses. Most owned only the bare necessities, and there was a considerable number who were mere lodgers with no household goods of their own.

Naval and Dockyard personnel make up about a quarter of the total of those whose inventories are preserved, but they do not exhaust the number of those who gained their living by the sea. The port of Rochester was of some importance with an extensive coastal trade,¹ and much of this was carried on in local vessels. The Customs Accounts, in which the nature and direction of this trade can be traced, do not differentiate between the various quays within the Medway estuary for which Rochester served as the Customs port, although they can often be identified from the home-ports of the vessels serving them. Apart from a very small overseas trade, exporting oysters and importing wine and linen for civilian use and naval stores for the Dockyard, the principal types of trade were three : the import of coal and salt from Newcastle and Sunderland, the export of fuller's earth to the textile centres of eastern England, especially to Colchester, and a general trade with London in which agricultural products, paper and some leather as outward cargoes were balanced by inward shipments of groceries and manufactured goods. The fuller's earth seems to have been shipped from Aylesford or its neighbourhood, close to the pits from which it was dug. During a specimen twelve months in 1698-9² there were no Rochester ships engaged in this trade. The shipment of farm produce, chiefly oats and hops, was mainly from Maidstone, which had six ships plying regularly to London, making seventy-one journeys in the twelve months. Five Rochester ships and one from Chatham also sailed to London but their trips were fewer : only twenty including twelve by Gravesend boats sailing for a Rochester merchant. None of them carried hops or paper ; oats was the main cargo, with some wheat and barley. This disparity between Rochester and Maidstone reflects the importance of the Maidstone corn market, of which Defoe remarked : " From this town and the neighbouring parts, London is supplied with more particulars than from any single market town in England."³ Lying as it did at the head of effective navigation of the Medway, Maidstone was the natural focus for trade for a wide area in the Weald, whereas for the district north of the Downs there were many quays and creeks from which produce could be shipped as conveniently as from Rochester.

¹ Willan, T. S. : *English Coasting Trade: 1600-1750* (1938), p. 139.

² P.R.O. E190/676/10, 12.

³ " A Tour through England and Wales " (1722) (Everyman edn.), Vol. I, p. 113.

The balance of inward shipments was very different, however. Maidstone vessels brought forty cargoes, all from London ; from the same source Rochester and Chatham vessels brought forty-two and others seven. All contained a miscellany of manufactured goods, foreign imports principally wine and tobacco, and also dairy products. Local agriculture concentrated on arable farming with the emphasis on cash crops for the London market, while dairying was neglected ; and the Medway Towns represented a considerable retail market for food-stuffs no less than for manufactures.

But for local seamen and shipowners the coal trade was more important. Ten ships from Rochester and two from Chatham were engaged in it in 1698-9, but none from other places within the Customs port. In all 2,741 chaldrons of coal were imported, about half in local vessels. Comparable figures for 1683 and 1731 are 2,494 and 2,742 chaldrons respectively, giving the port sixth place among coal-importing towns in the former year and eighth in the latter.¹ A distinctive feature of the coal trade was that the collier skippers invariably acted as merchants as well as carriers of their cargoes, whereas in the London trade the merchants were not usually local men at all.

One inventory survives of a collier captain, John Jones, of the *Richard and Margaret*. He owned a share in the ship, worth some £12 or £13, but the total value of his inventory amounts to only £37. The six hoymen, whose vessels no doubt shared in the London trade, and in one case fared as far as St. Sebastian, were all wealthier men, their goods being valued at between £51 and £716. The hoys themselves varied widely in value. The *Henry and Mary* was capable of sailing to Calais and Ostend in 1698, but in 1703 a three-quarter share in her was worth only £20 "being old". The same owner, however, held a half-share in the *Thomas and Mary*, which was worth £80, and the whole of the *Dorothy and Anne*, worth £100. Both these last were trading to London in 1698-9. Another owner had two hoys, three had one, and one, probably retired, had none. Three of them kept shops, one of which contained £12-worth of groceries and spirits, but as has been said, the hoymen were principally carriers rather than traders on their own behalf.

There were other boats on the river whose voyages were more local and therefore are not reflected in the Customs Accounts. A shipwright owned a lighter worth £40 and was owed £30 16s. 8d. for ten shipments of ballast to Chatham and Sheerness Dockyards. Another lighter-owner, a relative of one of the hoymen, had two lighters and a half-share in a third, worth £85 including a smaller boat, as well as a shop with worsted and yarn valued at £8. Also fairly prosperous was the barge-owner who leased a chalk wharf at Frindsbury and no doubt

¹ Willan, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

used his barge to ship the chalk and lime produced. In a very different class of wealth was the vintner who owned two sailing lighters and two rowing lighters, worth together with a brickyard some £120. He was an importer and wholesaler of substance, with a total inventory value of £1,034.

Fishermen were more numerous but on average less prosperous than either hoymen or lightermen and, unlike them, lived mainly in Strood. Their boats, which in most cases were worth as much as all the rest of their possessions put together, varied widely in value, the two most valuable being worth, with their tackle, as much as a large hoy, while others were only estimated at £5 or £7. Most fishermen had a small cock-boat or stoe-boat as well as the larger smack. Dredges and dredge-ropes are mentioned several times, and it is to be assumed that most if not all the fishermen were engaged in the oyster fishery, which supplied not only the local market but also a modest foreign trade, seventeen shipments totalling 508 wash of oysters being sent to Holland in 1699.¹ A few fishermen were fairly well-to-do—one held leases worth £150 in addition to a boat valued at £125 and was worth over £300 in all—but most managed a rather bare subsistence reflected in their modest household possessions and their lack of savings, whether in cash, plate or loans. It is significant of their economic and social status that of eight pauper children apprenticed in the 1680s four were apprenticed to fishermen.²

The other occupations followed by the townsmen were such as might be expected in any market town of the period. Apart from the Dockyard there was no large-scale manufacture in the town, although there was a good number and variety of craftsmen supplying local needs. But as the Customs Accounts show, many manufactured goods were imported, especially textiles and hardware. Only two weavers have left inventories, and one of these was primarily a pawnbroker and the other had no loom. There are also two inventories for successive generations of a family of thread-twisters, an industry that had its centre at Maidstone. The elder James Dadson ran his business on the "putting out" system, only dyeing the yarn himself. In this he was an exception among the town's craftsmen, most of whom were their own masters and employed no labour apart from an occasional apprentice. Their chief asset was their skill rather than their capital or their business organization. Such men were the twelve cordwainers and shoemakers whose inventories remain to us. Nine had stocks of leather and ready-made shoes, six had shops, and only three were worth more than £200.

But there were some trades that demanded greater capital and

¹ P.R.O. E190/676/7.

² City of Rochester : Enrolled Apprenticeship Indentures.

employed some wage-labour. Among them were the tanners and curriers, from whom the cordwainers drew their raw material. One glove-maker tanned his own skins, but generally these trades were carried on separately and on a fair scale. The sole currier to figure among the inventories had property worth £710, and two others of his trade were elected Mayor between 1701 and 1760. The only other craftsmen to attain to the office were four carpenters and a single wheelwright. The former, no doubt, like the more prosperous of the carpenters who have left inventories, were the town's building contractors : the bricklayers, who were also tilers, were less substantial men. Both trades had a steady employment as the towns struggled to accommodate the influx of population of the late seventeenth century. Although the wealthier townsmen were building handsome brick houses for themselves, some of which survive mutilated in the modern High Street, timber and weatherboarding or lath-and-plaster, hastily run up at minimum cost, served for the poor, so that it is not surprising that carpenters dominated the building trade.

Those who had the wealth and social importance to reach the mayoralty were more likely to be tradesmen than craftsmen. This is above all true of food trades : three bakers, three grocers, a butcher and a cheesemonger became Mayor between 1701 and 1760. The same group of trades produced twenty-five inventories, one in three totalling £300 or more. Drapers and tailors were their equals in wealth, even if only the latter became Mayors. Apart from the bakers, all of these carried an extensive stock, much of it imported from abroad like the silks and linens of the drapers or the sugar, tobacco and spices of the grocers, or else originating in distant parts of the kingdom, as did the Wensleydale and Cheshire cheeses and the woollen cloth from East Anglia or the West Country. It is clear both from the Customs Accounts and from the occasional naming of Londoners as compilers of inventories that London merchants were the main intermediaries in this commerce. One seems to have maintained an office in Rochester, where he died worth £967 in personal property, more than all but a handful of the regular inhabitants. The only other purely wholesale merchant was the vintner already mentioned, who was of comparable wealth. The other traders were primarily, if not entirely, retailers, meeting the day-to-day needs of the townfolk and the country round about within a radius of ten miles or so, to judge from the few inventories where book-debts are listed in detail. Other assets mentioned in the inventories lie mainly within the same radius, from which came also half the apprentices other than sons of townfolk whose indentures were enrolled both in the 1680s and in the 1730s.

It is interesting to compare the picture of commerce in the Medway Towns given by the inventories with that compiled from similar sources

for a purely market town. At Petworth¹ over a comparable period much the same trades are represented, but the average of wealth is higher and the vast bulk of the trade was in durable goods especially clothing, not in foodstuffs : butchers are quite numerous but there are no grocers and only one tallow-chandler. The clothing trades were much less specialized than in Rochester and Chatham, where retailers often dealt mainly in hats or lace or ready-made clothes, for the last of which there seems to have been no demand at Petworth. There most of the trade would appear to have been a market-day one, done with the inhabitants of a largely self-sufficient rural area. In the Medway Towns on the other hand the shopkeepers for the most part were selling the day-to-day necessities to their fellow-townsmen.

Another contrast between the two towns becomes apparent if one considers the number and wealth of the victuallers, vintners and inn-holders in each. In both places they make up about a tenth of those whose trades are traceable, but in Rochester and Chatham there were fewer inns by comparison, despite the amount of traffic on the Dover Road, but more ale-houses, some at least mainly patronized by sailors. The keepers of both were a good deal more prosperous there than at Petworth ; they made the most of their opportunity to do a profitable business in discounting seamen's sick tickets and lending money to their more impecunious among the Dockyard employees in addition to their more normal trade. Few of them brewed their own liquor although about one in every five households brewed on a domestic scale. At least one victualler was a client of Best's brewery, and another commercial brewer has left an inventory. Brewing, like malting and distilling, was a trade often carried on on a sufficient scale to make those who practised it eligible for the mayoralty. A brewer and a distiller each became Mayor between 1701 and 1760 and Thomas Best the brewer was one of the " chief inhabitants " of Chatham with whom the City authorities discussed possible boundary changes in 1711.² The maltsters, however, despite their wealth, seem not to have held civic office. They often farmed on considerable scale and belonged to rural rather than urban society.

They, with the miller and the butchers and carriers who grazed their animals on the Common or on other marsh pastures, form a link between the purely urban life of the majority of the population, few of whom even kept a backyard pig, and the farmers and smallholders of the surrounding countryside. Outside the built-up area there were some 7,000 acres of farmland in the four town parishes, and the men who tilled them are well represented in the inventories, where they

¹ Kenyon, G. H., " Petworth Town and Trades " 1610-1760. *Sussex A.C.*, Vol. XCVI, pp. 33 ff., and *Ibid.*, Vol. XCVIII, pp. 71 ff.

² K.A.O. U38/Z1.

form the wealthiest single category. They give a very varied picture of local farming, both as to farm size and farming methods. The fourteen farms for which an arable acreage can be calculated with some certainty had a mean area of 49 acres under crops. The maximum was 273 and the minimum nine, and there was no standard size of holding. Nor was there any standard rotation of crops that can be traced. Wheat, barley and oats were grown in approximately equal proportions although there were some notable differences from farm to farm. Small quantities of peas and more rarely of beans were also grown. Fodder crops, clover and sainfoin, appear in the earliest inventories but were not generally grown until about 1720, though Maidstone had been shipping small quantities of clover seed to London 30 years earlier. By 1720 the larger and more progressive farmers were experimenting with turnips, hitherto only a garden crop. Livestock held a subordinate place in the farm economy, but all save the smallest of smallholders kept a few cattle and often a small flock of sheep besides the horses necessary for working the farm. The smallholders are often described as "gardener" rather than "husbandman", but the name does not necessarily imply market-gardening in the modern sense. Only at the very end of the inventory series, in 1778, is there a description, a very full one, of a market garden and nursery in which were to be found most of the vegetables and fruit-trees to be expected in its modern counterpart. Fruit-trees probably occupied some acreage on most farms but are rarely mentioned since the trees, unlike growing crops, were regarded as fixtures and not as movable property. Hops receive an occasional notice, more often after 1730 than before. Hop-poles and firewood were among the products of the extensive coppice-woods which covered the poorer soils on the clay-with-flints towards the south of Chatham and St. Margaret's parishes. The profits not uncommonly formed a sizable proportion of farmers' incomes in those parishes.

The other occupations that are mentioned in the inventories fall into no neat classification. Some were wage-earners : the servant and the four labourers, one of them employed at the bridge. Others approached professional status, the surgeons, for example, or the scrivener. There were two schoolmistresses, one of them a bo'sun's widow, a schoolmaster, a salaried official of the waterworks, and two Sergeants-at-Mace, one of whom was described as "gentleman". Their duties included charge of the City gaol. What was described as "The Best Prisoners Room" according to one inventory, contained furniture worth £1 7s., comparable with the average apprentice's garret. The less favoured inmates, one assumes, made do with a bare cell.

The deceased is described as "gentleman" in eight of the inventories altogether. Two of them were officials of the Dockyard, one

being a member of the Pett family which figures so prominently in its seventeenth-century history. One was a grocer, one a tallow-chandler, one a maltster, all occupations demanding a fair amount of wealth in those that followed them. Another was the Sergeant-at-Mace already mentioned, and the other two had no occupation that can be traced. In all probability these are not a representative sample of the gentry of the town, being more typical of that stock figure, the younger son apprenticed to trade, than of the heads of their families. They were not significantly wealthier than most of their fellow-citizens, although they managed to maintain something of the decencies of the life to which they had been brought up. The tallow-chandler's house, for example, is the earliest of the few private houses described as having a dining-room. But there is evidence from elsewhere that the gentry did not form as large or as important an element in the Medway Towns as in some others. They were too far from the metropolis to form part of the fashionable fringe that already included Greenwich and Eltham, and yet not far enough away to be able to aspire to the status of a provincial capital. So far as Kent was concerned that position was held about 1700 by Canterbury, where Celia Fiennes mentions the "fine walks and seates and places for the musick to make it acceptable and comodious to the Company".¹ In Rochester she found nothing of note except the bridge and the castle—"a pretty little thing"—and in Chatham the Dockyard on which she expatiates in patriotic pride. Defoe twenty-five years later paints a similar picture, though he had a keener eye for the economic than the social scene. He notes the paucity of gentry in Thames-side Kent and gives as the reason that "it is marshy and unhealthy, by its situation among the waters: so that it is embarrassed with business, such as shipbuilders, fisher-men, seafaring-men and husband-men, or such as depend upon them, and very few families of note are found among them".²

The clergy were no more prominent in the life of the town than the gentry despite the fact that Rochester was a Cathedral city. The bishop was non-resident and the canons had been very ill-served by Henry VIII in his reorganization of the cathedral in 1542, when he took the best of the old priory buildings to make a palace for himself. This was no sooner finished than pulled down, and much of the remainder of the precinct was left to become a rabbit-warren of tumbledown tenements. Only with the building of the Archdeaconry in 1661 and of Minor Canon Row at the beginning of the next century did something of the atmosphere of a Cathedral close gradually develop, and it is not to be wondered at that the clergy of the years following the Restoration tended to be absentees and pluralists and that nonconformity flourished

¹ Diary (Cresset Press edn., p. 123) : she was in Kent in 1697.

² *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 114.

in default of their ministrations. The Compton Returns estimate that there were 504 dissenters over the age of 16 in the four parishes as against 3,810 conformists. The frequency with which Bibles are mentioned in the inventories, especially the early ones which tend to be more detailed, emphasizes the strength of this legacy from the Puritans. Often a Bible was the only book in the house, and where the titles of others are given, devotional works are the most common. Bibles bulk large in the stock valued in the bookseller's inventory, and even workers in the Dockyard commonly owned one when they had few other possessions.

More worldly wealth and security were sought in a variety of ways, some of which can be traced from the inventories, which, as has been said, give details of leases, bonds and debts owing as well as such tangible investments as plate, jewellery and cash. Few kept large quantities of money in the house. Only ninety-three inventories include sums above £10, and in only thirty-six of these does cash account for more than a quarter of the total value. By contrast 247 show debts owed to the deceased, in 63 cases amounting to £100 or more. It is only occasionally possible to interpret the meaning of these entries in detail, and from the way in which the compilers often included debts as an afterthought it is probable that some have been overlooked, especially in the earlier and less professional inventories. The importance of tradesmen and victuallers as suppliers of credit, particularly to the seamen and Dockyard workers, has already been described. Twenty-eight of the inventories list book-debts separately, the totals ranging from £5 to £487. This latter figure was for a Londoner, not a regular resident, and is scarcely typical since the mean amount of book-debt is £25. Good and bad debts are listed separately in 30 cases ; the mean ratio of the one to the other is 8 : 3 but the larger the total amount involved the smaller is the proportion of bad debt. Twenty-six persons were owed money on bonds of an average value of £33, and 29 on bills, which were usually for lesser amounts. Another 15 held notes, usually notes of hand but in one case bank notes. A parcel of tallies, a lottery prize, £100 invested under the Million Act, and some South Sea Annuities are also recorded in various inventories, but in general the townsfolk invested their money locally rather than in the capital.

Land, and more especially house property, whether freehold or on lease, was a favourite long-term investment and a common way of providing for widows. Only leaseholds are directly mentioned in the inventories, but in a town where many of the freeholds were owned by corporate bodies such as the Cathedral Chapter, the Bridge-wardens or the City Corporation, who normally let on long lease, leaseholds were widely owned and seem more often to represent a rent-yielding invest-

ment than a dwelling-house occupied by the deceased. There are a number of other cases where rents are mentioned but no leases, so that in all it would appear that at least one person in ten within the inventory range was receiving some income from this source. The mean rent of those specified was £6 per annum, but it is not possible to tell what size or type of house was being let.

A fairly clear picture of local housing, however, emerges from other sections of the inventories themselves, for it was the compilers' normal practice to list and value household goods room by room, so that, leaving aside the chance that some rooms might be empty or let unfurnished, one can usually gather some idea of the layout of a house as well as its contents. However, as both house-size and the use and nomenclature of the rooms were very varied, it is difficult to describe the typical town house of the period. Nevertheless there are a number of patterns and tendencies that can be traced. One appears rather earlier than the period of the inventories, from a consideration of the Hearth Tax Assessments. In the Lady Day Assessment for 1664, Rochester averaged 3·63 hearths per household, Chatham 3·31, and Strood 3·20. These figures are typical of the towns of Thames-side Kent but substantially higher than those for the surrounding rural parishes. In the Weald, apart from Maidstone (3·26), the averages are lower, as low as 2·03 at Cranbrook, and the gulf between town and country was much less there. Outside Kent comparable statistics are available for Exeter (2·59)¹ and Leicester (2·4)²; there households with a single hearth made up 45 per cent and 52 per cent of the population respectively, but in the Medway Towns they were only 9 per cent of the total. The reason for the disparity was probably not a difference in wealth but a difference in social habits, partly a result of the general tendency for living standards to be higher near the capital, partly a consequence of the relative availability of fuel, which was scarcer and dearer in the Midlands or even in Devon than in well-wooded Kent with its easy communications with the Newcastle coalfield. Hence it was normal for even pauper households to possess a second hearth, even though it might not have been in regular use. Chambers commonly had fire-irons in them according to the inventories, although fires were probably seldom lit there except in time of illness.

Houses were normally of two storeys with garrets in the roof. Single-storey houses were very rare and probably were confined to the outskirts of the town, while only a few three-storeyed houses figure in the inventories. Typically the house stood end-on to the street, with one room front and back and a lean-to wash-house at the rear, but many of the smaller houses were only a single room deep, even though they

¹ Hoskins, W. G., *Industry, Trade and People in Exeter: 1688-1800*.

² Smith, C. T., in *Victoria County History, Leicestershire*, Vol. IV, pp. 156 ff.

might have two storeys, a garret in the roof and a cellar below ground. There were good reasons for crowding the houses on to narrow sites since so many of the inhabitants needed to live within an easy walk of their work in the Dockyard.

There seems to have been no agreement among the inhabitants what the various living-rooms should be called. The obsolescent term "hall" was still in use for the main room, although less frequently as time wore on and then mainly in farm-houses. Many of these were probably of the traditional "yeoman's house" type, with the open central hall now subdivided by a floor so that the "hall chamber" provided additional storage space for seed corn and other perishable goods that were rarely needed. An increasing number of houses on the other hand contained at least one parlour, the proportion rising from 28 per cent before 1700 to 71 per cent after 1740. Parlours tended to be rather sparsely furnished and often lacked fire-irons in the hearth. In most houses clearly they were kept for occasional use, while the regular family living-room was the kitchen. Here or in the buttery adjoining the compilers found most of the articles that were in daily household use—pots and pans, pewter tableware and the like—while such occasional domestic activities as washing or brewing were normally relegated to an outhouse or cellar, together with the coppers and tubs that were used in them. More valuable, however, were the goods upstairs. Not only were beds with their mattresses and hangings the most expensive items in the average inventory, but the best chamber also often contained turkey leather chairs, walnut cabinets and tables and other furniture more elegant than that downstairs, as well as the chest that contained the household linen. The other chambers often held nothing more than a bed, but some, especially in the houses of craftsmen, were used as storage for raw materials, tools and partly finished goods. Only the wealthier as a rule possessed a separate workshop; the poorer artizan tended to use his front room as a shop and the chamber over it as a store-room.

The inventories give some idea of the spread of luxuries and new fashions in furnishing, although the later inventories are rarely detailed enough to be of much help in this. Clocks seem to have been something of a rarity before 1700, but are quite common after that. Wall-paper earns an occasional mention in the 1700s, at a time when painted hangings, though still sometimes found, were declining in popularity. More householders decorated their wall with pictures, usually prints, to judge from their description as "paper pictures". For relaxation and social intercourse Rochester possessed at least one coffee house by 1711, in addition to the many taverns. The wealthier citizens were beginning to drink tea and coffee in their own homes, but beer remained the staple drink of the poor.

A further indication of the growing sophistication of the Medway Towns during the eighteenth century is provided by a comparison of the probate inventories for the first half of that period with the particulars of tradesmen and other inhabitants given by Finch in his *Directory*. By 1803 not only had a greater diversity of shops appeared—confectioners, fruiterers and fishmongers besides the butchers and bakers of the inventories, mantua-makers and milliners, straw-hat men and umbrella-makers in addition to tailors and linen-draper— but the town could also boast a theatre and assembly rooms to cater for the entertainment of its growing middle class and the officers of the garrison. Renewed naval activity in the later years of the eighteenth century had been followed by renewed growth, especially in the new terraces fronting the New Road and in Troy Town. These areas and the outer fringes of the town generally had become the fashionable residential districts in place of the ancient centre around the cathedral. But although there had been growth and change in the outward appearance of the town during the century and a half since the earliest inventories were compiled, the basic pattern of its economic life, with its dualism between ancient cathedral city and modern industrial town, still endured as it was to continue to do right down to the present day.

TABLE 1
TOTAL VALUE OF GOODS AND EFFECTS
GIVEN IN INVENTORIES

Period	£1- £3	£4- £10	£11- £30	£31- £100	£101- £300	£301- £1,000	Over £1,000	?	Total
Up to 1700	2	21	77	67	24	13	—	1	205
1701-10	—	2	16	21	33	20	1	—	93
1711-20	—	—	11	27	16	11	—	2	67
1721-30	—	—	4	20	18	16	2	1	61
1731-40	—	1	8	19	20	4	—	—	52
1741-83	1	1	2	12	9	11	3	—	39
Total	3	25	118	166	120	75	6	4	517

TABLE 2
OCCUPATION OF DECEASED

Dockyard	Total	Worth £300+
Caulker	5	—
Gentleman	2	—
Gunner (at Upnor Castle)	1	—
Joiner	2	1
Labourer	9	—
Master Boatbuilder	1	—
Rigger	1	—
Ropemaker	7	1
Sailmaker	2	—
Sawyer	2	—

PEOPLE AND HOMES IN THE MEDWAY TOWNS : 1687-1783

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Worth £300+</i>
Scavelman	1	—
Servant	1	—
Shipwright	29	3
Unspecified	42	3
	105	8
<i>Agriculture</i>		
Gardener	6	—
Husbandman	4	—
Maltster	4	3
Miller	1	1
Yeoman	7	5
Unspecified	33	13
	55	22
<i>Seamen (a) Civilian</i>		
Bargeman	1	—
Boatswain	1	—
Fisherman	14	2
Hoyman	6	2
Lighterman	1	—
Mariner	2	—
Wherryman	1	—
<i>(b) Naval</i>		
Captain	1	1
Carpenter	1	1
Purser's Steward	1	—
Shipwright	1	—
Others	19	—
	49	6
<i>Drink Trades</i>		
Brewer	1	—
Innholder	1	1
Spirits-seller	2	—
Victualler	15	1
Vintner (retail)	3	2
Vintner (wholesale)	1	1
Wine-cooper	1	—
Unspecified	23	2
	47	7
<i>Clothing Trades</i>		
Chapman	1	—
Cordwainer	11	—
Draper (or linen-draper)	6	4
Glover	1	—
Haberdasher (or ditto of hats)	6	—
Sailsman	1	1
Shoemaker	1	—
Tailor	6	2
Threaddwister	2	—
Weaver	2	1
	37	8

PEOPLE AND HOMES IN THE MEDWAY TOWNS : 1687-1783

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Worth £300+</i>
<i>Building and Furnishing</i>		
Bricklayer	6	—
Brickmaker	1	—
Carpenter	11	3
Glazier	2	—
Joiner	7	2
Turner	1	—
Upholsterer	1	1
	29	6
<i>Food Trades</i>		
Baker	5	2
Butcher	7	1
Cheesemonger	2	2
Grocer	7	1
Tallow-chandler	2	2
Mealman	2	—
	25	8
<i>Other Retailers</i>		
Apothecary	1	—
Barber and bookseller	1	1
Ironmonger	1	—
Tobacconist	3	2
Unspecified	21	4
	27	7
<i>Miscellaneous Crafts</i>		
Basketmaker	1	—
Blacksmith	7	1
Broom-maker	1	—
Cooper	2	—
Currier	1	1
Gunsmith	1	—
Hoopshaver	1	—
Nailor	1	—
Pipemaker	1	—
Saddler	1	—
Tanner	1	—
Wheelwright	6	1
Unspecified	6	1
	30	4
<i>Professions, etc.</i>		
Schoolmaster	1	—
Schoolmistress	2	—
Scrivener	1	—
Sergeant-at-Mace	2	1
Surgeon	3	—
Waterworks official	1	1
	10	2

PEOPLE AND HOMES IN THE MEDWAY TOWNS : 1687-1783

	Total	Worth £300 +
<i>Labourers and Servants</i>		
Labourer	4	—
Servant	1	—
	5	—
<i>Land Transport</i>		
Carrier	2	—
Coachman	1	—
	3	—
<i>No Occupation Traceable</i>		
Gentleman	2	—
Widow	43	1
Others	50	2
	95	3

Note.—The following occupations are mentioned in other sources for the period (viz. as compilers of inventories, freemen, masters and fathers of apprentices) :

Brazier, carver, clockmaker, collarmaker, cook, distiller, dredgerman, fell-monger, goldsmith, hempdresser, locksmith, milliner, paviour, plasterer, plumber, pumpmaker, purser, tinplate-worker, waterman.

TABLE 3
OCCUPATIONS OF MAYORS OF ROCHESTER : 1701-60

Apothecary	1	Grocer	3
Baker	3	Labourer	1
Brewer	1	Surgeon	3
Butcher	1	Tailor	3
Carpenter	4	Vintner	2
Cheesemonger	1	Wheelwright	1
Currier	2	Wine-cooper	1
Distiller	1	Not traceable	1
Esquire	1		—
Fisherman	1		34
Gentleman	3		—

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