

ECONOMIC HISTORY: INDUSTRY AND TRADES

WOOLLEN CLOTH

The woollen cloth industry was well-established in the Taunton area by 1219 when a fulling mill was built near the castle, reputedly the first in the west country, replacing the traditional treading in urine.¹ Grey cloth bought for the bishop in Taunton in 1210—11 may have been made there, eight men sold cloth in breach of the assize in 1242—3 and a local merchant was trading in grey cloth in the 1280s.² Taunton lay outside the main white cloth production area of north and east Somerset and from the 13th century or earlier was producing finished broadcloth using every process from combing and dyeing raw wool to nap shearing. Coloured cloth had a ready market in south-west Europe but was less brightly coloured than white cloth dyed in Germany and the Netherlands because fulling and washing faded the vegetable dyes used. Dyers were recorded from the early 13th century and weavers, tuckers, shearmen, slay makers,³ a girdler and a girdle weaver,⁴ a challoneer or blanker maker and calenderers from the early 14th.⁵ In the later 13th century Henry Teynturer or Tincter also traded in cloth and wine, amassed considerable property and his son took the name Dyer.⁶ William le Waz (fl. 1270) used a seal with a pair of shears.⁷ Men were presented for false cloth from the late 13th century.⁸ A Taunton factor or clothier was supplying wool in 1339 valued at £6 a sack and a

¹ Bishops Hall, econ. hist.; M. Havinden, *The Somerset Landscape* (1981), 112.

² SHC, T/PH/win 1210—11; Chadwyck-Healey, *Som. Pleas c. 1200—1256*, p. 296; T. J. Hunt, 'Some notes on the cloth trade in Taunton in the 13th century', *PSANHS CI—II*, 103.

³ The comb that holds warp threads apart, guides shuttles and is used to firm up weft.

⁴ SHC, T/PH/win 1299—1300; A/BFA/3.

⁵ F. Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest etc* (Som. Rec. Soc. 3), 127; E. Green, *Feet of Fines 1196—1307* (SRS 6), 201—2, 306—7, 317; E. Green, *Feet of Fines 1307—46* (SRS 12), 183—4; SHC, T/PH/win 1286—7, 1301—2, 1358—9; DD/PM/7/2/1; BL, Add. MS. 16322; Harl. Ch. 57 A 3.

⁶ Green, *Fines 1196—1307* (SRS 6), 201—2; Hunt, 'Some notes on the cloth trade', *PSANHS CI—II*, 101—2.

⁷ TNA, E326/4955, 5095.

⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1289—90, 1300—1.

woolmonger was recorded in 1401.⁹ Medieval weavers appear to have been much better off than later serge weavers.¹⁰ Dyers and weavers were reeves of the borough and of the priory manor in the early 14th century when they were among the highest taxpayers.¹¹ In 1357 a dyer had two burgages in High Street.¹² Flemish weavers were said to have settled in the town in the 1330s and a century later a Breton man was in Taunton and a tucker was among aliens granted denization.¹³ At least two late 14th-century Taunton MPs were clothiers one of whom was taxed on the sale of 283 dozens, short cloths, in 1395—7, when Taunton produced nine per cent of Somerset cloth.¹⁴ In addition to tauntons during the 14th century Taunton also produced narrow cloth or 'straits'.¹⁵ In the late 15th century tauntons in many colours and Taunton kersey, a smooth surfaced fabric used for coats, were exported to several countries.¹⁶

Several tuckers and weavers were recorded in the 15th century some involved in criminal activity including a Taunton weaver who broke out of Ilchester gaol.¹⁷ Others accused of stealing large quantities of cloth at Bridgwater may have been involved in trade disputes.¹⁸ A Taunton tucker in 1400 released a Bridport merchant from all debts and in 1424 a dyer owed over £48 to the same merchant and was later his executor.¹⁹ At least nine

⁹ *Cal. Pat.* 1336—40, 294; TNA, CP40/561, image 791: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

A sack was normally 240 fleeces c. 360 lb.

¹⁰ e.g. TNA, CP40/776, images 61, 999, 1166d: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

¹¹ SHC, I/PH/wm 1328—9, 1332—3; A/BFA/6; Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest*, 274.

¹² TNA, E326/5002.

¹³ *VCH Som.* II, 407, 420; TNA, C1/108/42.

¹⁴ T. Mayberry, *The Vale of Taunton Past* (Chichester, 1998), 27; J. Hare, 'Pensford and the Growth of the Cloth Industry in Late Medieval Somerset', *PSANHS CXLVII* (2004), 173—8.

¹⁵ W.R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978), 79.

¹⁶ TNA, C1/5671/83; *VCH Som.* VI, 218; P. Ashford, 'The West Somerset Woollen Trade, 1500—1714', *PSANHS CLI*, 169.

¹⁷ E. Green, *Feet of Fines 1399—1485* (SRS 22), 52; *Cal. Pat.* 1422—9, 310, 331, 435, 549; 1436—41, 10; *Cal. Inq. Misc.* VIII, p. 40.

¹⁸ SHC, D/B/bw/156, 191.

¹⁹ *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, IV, C5933; I, C. 19; TNA, CP40/685, image 203: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021

Taunton dyers came before the Common Pleas between 1415 and 1425 mainly over debts.²⁰ Cloth and combs were distrained for debt in St James parish in 1429.²¹ Men calling themselves dyers and weavers were sometimes dealers trading in cloth and incurring debts with Taunton and London merchants.²²

Many mercantile families provided for their members with legacies of cloth in packs or single pieces. The wealthy John Bishop left one and a half pack of tauntons to relatives in 1499 and described himself as a tucker, in 1502 Edward Goldeston left violet bridgwaters and Richard Best left his son four packs of tauntons and bridgwaters and in 1509 Alison Togwell left packs of warecloths, tauntons, lockram and dowlais.²³ By the mid 16th century there were several wealthy clothiers in Taunton some of whom were also merchants trading their own cloth.²⁴ John Underhay had invested in tin works in Devon as well as the more conventional land and plate.²⁵ Others like the Pope and Saunders families bought former monastic property.²⁶ Links with clothworkers in east Devon may account for Taunton clothiers and clothworkers holding property there or working there temporarily.²⁷ Several invested in Taunton houses and one had a shop in Dunster kept by his stepson. Even a ‘thrummer’, a man who traded in refuse and short yarn, could pay £20 for a town house in 1579.²⁸

The statutes of the 1550s laying down standards appear to have been ignored.²⁹ The high value of cloth led not only to theft by workers but also fraudulent manufacture connived

²⁰ TNA, CP40, images 618, 621, 636, 641, 656: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

²¹ SHC, DD/SF/373.

²² *Cal. Pat.* 1494—1509, 151, 330.

²³ TNA, PROB 11/12/13; TNA, PROB 11/13/285; Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1501—30*, 30—2, 137—8.

²⁴ TNA, CP40/1295, image 367; 1298, images 171, 1616; 1352, images 837d, 1013; 1353, image 5353; 1354, image 600d; 1373, images 968d, 1366, 1857; 1374, image 1431, 1474: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

²⁵ F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1531—1558* (Som. Rec. Soc. 21), 202—4.

²⁶ *VCH Som.* VI, 203; Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1531—1558*, 110.

²⁷ Devon HC, 1186M/E/1; SHC, Q/SR/15/4; Plymouth and West Devon RO 372/15/2/3; TNA, PROB 11/362/141.

²⁸ TNA, C3/183/12; *Cal. Charters...in Bodleian Library*, p. 403; SHC, D/D/Cd/65 (1628).

²⁹ *VCH Som.* II, 408.

at by clothiers.³⁰ An investigation into the decline in cloth sales in the 1570s unearthed poor quality production that would have damaged trade. In 1579 Taunton broadcloths should have been 27—8 yards long and 1 ½ yards wide after dressing and made of 100 lb. of wool, the dozen or half-cloth of 40 lb., the narrow or sea ware cloth 23—4 yards long of 36 lb. and the redding kersey c. 18 yards by one yard of 28 lb. By comparison Somerset white broadcloths had to be 1 ¾ yards wide but needed only weigh 64 lb. reduced to 63lb. in 1585, halving the weight from 2.4 lb. to 1.3 lb. a square yard.³¹ In 1586 exported red tauntons were apparently the new lightweight short cloths less than half the weight of traditional tauntons.³² Other cloths made on a large scale in Taunton included bridgwaters and black cottons, possibly including the funeral cloth supplied to Minehead in 1643.³³

Sharp practices in the 1570s included mixing up to 20 per cent flock or thrums with the good wool when carding and spinning. The resulting cloth was struck with tallow so it could withstand fulling and finishing and holes were filled with flock in matching colours. Cloths were overstretched on the tenters increasing the length of each cloth by 2—3 yards. Tuckers each dressed cloth for two or three clothiers at a rate of only two cloths a week. Witnesses named 16 Taunton clothiers involved in the fraud who each produced between five and 30 cloths a week, an estimated total of 140 a week, which they sold locally, at fairs or in Lyme, Bristol, Exeter and London. That implies that Taunton might have been producing over 7,000 sub-standard cloths a year. The major producer was Simon Saunders who sealed his cloths but the others used only the town seal applied by the deputy aulnager and there was said to be no statutory searcher appointed.³⁴ The aulnager had appointed a deputy William

³⁰ *Cal. Pat.* 1575—8, 24, 140; SHC, Q/SR/42/37; Q/SR/71/37; Q/SR/87/2—3; Q//SR/201/12; Q/SR/210/7; TNA, E133/3/559.

³¹ TNA, E 133/3/559; Woollen Cloth Act 27 Eliz. c. xvii. That compares with less than 1 lb. for modern suiting cloth.

³² *VCH Som.* II, 411; below, this section.

³³ SHC, D/P/m.st.m/4/1/1 (1643). Cotton was a cheap thin cloth made of wool sometimes mixed with linen. ‘Tauntons’ were also made in Chard; *VCH Som.* II, 415.

³⁴ TNA, E 133/3/559.

Hart, who was accused of levying a charge on clothiers and threatening them with prosecution under clothmaking statutes if they refused to pay him sums varying from 10s. to £6 6s. 8d.³⁵ The Privy Council investigated and issued orders for the proper making of cloth.³⁶ Faulty cloth could be sold if marked with an F seal and faulty Taunton cloth was used from London to Cornwall.³⁷ In 1591 Simon Saunders had his own dyehouse in Taunton, a tucking mill in Combe Florey, lands, houses and a gravel pit, many pieces of plate and left his wife £1,000 and an annual income of c. £50 a year, legacies to relatives and others totalling over £500 and c. £120 to the poor.³⁸ Clothier John Godsell complained in 1592 of sharp practice similar to that investigated in 1579 and the use of counterfeit marks.³⁹ A complaint in 1617 showed such practices continued and damaged woollen manufacture in the town.⁴⁰ In the 1620s the aulnage was subject to fraud.⁴¹

By 1588 Taunton merchants were exporting lighter bays and says.⁴² In the early 17th century Taunton weavers were also making fustian and perpetuanas, which could be made on a smaller loom as they were narrower than broadcloth. Some also made linsey woolsey, a wool and linen cloth.⁴³ Cloth stolen at that period included russet cloth and 43 yards of blue bays.⁴⁴ White and crimson bays were recorded in 1615.⁴⁵ In 1593 Somerset clothiers petitioned for a bill removing penalties for slightly underweight cloth referring to blue 'plunkets or azures', which may have been made in Taunton.⁴⁶ The traditional broadcloths had been replaced by smaller, lighter cloths and in 1606 tauntons were regulated as short

³⁵ TNA, E 133/3/559; *Acts of P.C.* 1578—80, pp. 126, 160, 168; 1581—2, p. 309; BL, Lansdowne MS. 65/24.

³⁶ *Acts of P.C.* 1578—80, pp. 126, 160, 168; 1581—2, p. 309.

³⁷ Finds.org.uk. CORN-3A971, DOR-OB7032, LON-12B4E: accessed 9 June 2022.

³⁸ TNA, PROB 11/77/388.

³⁹ *VCH Som.* II, 411.

⁴⁰ Articles addressed to the king cited in A. Humphries, *Som Parishes*, 672.

⁴¹ SHC, DD/PH/216/57; *HMC 3rd Report, Duke of Northumberland's MSS*, VIII, p. 286.

⁴² D. Taylor, 'Somerset's Sixteenth-Century Maritime History', *A Maritime History of Som.* (Taunton, 2010),

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⁴³ SHC, Q/SR/6/97—8.

⁴⁴ SHC, Q/SR/34/87; Q/SR/55/39—40.

⁴⁵ SHC, DD/SP/50 (July-Aug. 1615).

⁴⁶ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1580—1625, p. 347.

broadcloths up to 13 yards long and 1 ¾ yards wide when wet and weighing up to 30 lb. dry, narrow cloths were only one yard wide but up to 25 yards long and also 30 lb. when dry and half-cloths in proportion. Devonshire kerseys or dozens were 12—13 yards long and only 13 lb. when dried but check kerseys, straights and greys were longer and heavier.⁴⁷ Taunton coarse cottons were exported paying duty at 16 *d.* the piece in the early 17th century.⁴⁸

Although local wool may have been used in the Middle Ages by the 16th century it was mostly imported. In the 1540s merchant John Pope was said to have bought 15 stone of wool from two Glamorgan yeomen at Taunton, implying that Welsh farmers took the initiative in bringing wool to sell.⁴⁹ During the 16th and early 17th century Welsh wool was imported through Minehead and Irish wool through Bridgwater.⁵⁰ From the 1580s merino came from Spain, probably mixed with other wools to make the lighter medley cloth in imitation of high quality Spanish cloth. Medley used yarn spun from a blend of different coloured wools. It was said to have been introduced to England by Benedict Webb who made it in Taunton in the 1580s.⁵¹ Cotswold wool was also imported. A Cirencester clothier had his horse stolen at Taunton by a fellow townsman in 1590⁵² and a Taunton man was sued in 1642 for four horses and equipment hired to go to Cirencester.⁵³

Taunton was the staple town for the Somerset wool trade from 1617 and by 1629 had a yarn market. In 1673 Taunton sergemakers paid well for good Irish combing wool and probably bought much of the c.500 tons of Irish wool imported annually through Minehead in

⁴⁷ An Act for the True Making of Woollen Cloth (4 Jas. I c.11).

⁴⁸ *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1611—18, p. 206.

⁴⁹ TNA, C1/1300/92.

⁵⁰ P. Ashford, 'The West Somerset Woollen Trade, 1500—1714', *PSANHS CLI*, 166; *VCH Som.* VI, 218—19.

⁵¹ *VCH Som.* II, 411; Mayberry, *Vale of Taunton Past*, 58; Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 168.

⁵² *Cal. Pat.* 1592—3, p. 145.

⁵³ TNA, KB27/1672, m. 483: www/waalt.uh.edu/index.php/KB27, accessed May 2021.

the 1690s and probably some of the later imports from the Cotswolds and from Scotland.⁵⁴ By that date English longwool had become too coarse for fine cloth and was used mainly in the northern mills for worsteds and blankets but fine closewool was still available in the west country. Taunton wool men supplied sergemakers in east Devon and in 1684 a Culmstock man owed for 56 stone at 13*d.* a stone.⁵⁵ In the early 19th century local farmers still sold their wool clip to Taunton wool dealers.⁵⁶ In 1964 South West Farmers Ltd built a wool-grading facility and store in Priorswood Road.⁵⁷

Many weavers had their own broad looms and in 1548 a weaver left his to his servant.⁵⁸ Cloth remained on the loom for about a month as even the best weavers could only make two yards a day. Looms were relatively inexpensive at c. 10-13*s.* and households might have three to six if they had a workshop, otherwise they were kept in the hall. Presumably family members and apprentices worked together and some workpeople lived with their employers.⁵⁹ One woman had her looms next to the lord's entry in Canon Street implying they were outside possibly in a shed.⁶⁰ There is evidence of looms standing. Many weavers took apprentices and some abused them.⁶¹ People owned looms although practising another trade including a miller and an innkeeper. Some of these looms would have been used by wives and other household members but others were let out to poor weavers.⁶² In 1660 a weaver gave his house to his son provided he could have a chamber and room in the shop to

⁵⁴ HMC *Ormonde MSS*, III, 336; TNA, E 190/1092/3; SHC, DD/L 1/54/42/1—2, 1/58/17/12; DD/SP/51 (Sep. 1629); Richards, *Unending Frontier*, 223—4; D. Hussey, 'The Coastal Trade of Somerset Ports in the late 17th and early 18th centuries', *Maritime Hist. Som.* I, 84.

⁵⁵ TNA, C6/385/94.

⁵⁶ M. Siraut, 'A farming account book', *PSANHS CXXIX* (1985), 167.

⁵⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/158/9692.

⁵⁸ M. Siraut, *Somerset Wills* (Som. Rec. Soc. 89), 111.

⁵⁹ SHC, DD/SP1637/31, 1664/30.

⁶⁰ SHC, DD/SP/376 (1631).

⁶¹ E. H. Bates Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—1625* (Som. Rec. Soc. 23), 151, 173; *Quarter Sessions Records, 1646—1660* (Som. Rec. Soc. 28), 20, 268; SHC, Q/SR/24/42.

⁶² SHC, DD/SP/1666/43, 67.

set up his looms and quill turn rent-free.⁶³ The cost of looms increased by the 1660s and in 1670 they were valued at £2.⁶⁴ A woman left a loom and a year's free loan of two looms in 1672.⁶⁵

Feltmaking was recorded between the mid 16th and mid 18th centuries, possibly for hatmaking.⁶⁶ A feltmaker's sister left small legacies to several tuckers and weavers in 1620 possibly they had worked for her, and in 1631 a feltmaker was accused of taking two apprentices at the same time.⁶⁷ In 1703 Henry Tanner a feltmaker was required to sell his goods to clothier Simon Stacey who allowed him the use of the furnaces and presses provided the proceeds of any sales were handed over, presumably until his debts were paid.⁶⁸ Spinning was done by both sexes and a male thread spinner was recorded in 1630.⁶⁹ The cloth industry provided work for slay and card makers throughout the 17th century, including the Poole family and a man who was also a moneylender.⁷⁰

In 1635 Taunton had the highest ship money assessment in the county at £100 whereas Bath and Bridgwater were only assessed at £70.⁷¹ Although there were periods when the trade was depressed, usually by wars, as in 1622, the Civil War and the Spanish war of 1655,⁷² and at least five clothiers and merchants went bankrupt between 1629 and 1636, many individuals became wealthy.⁷³ Clothier Jasper Chaplin (d. 1655) who was mayor in 1634—5, invested in buying borough rents and in 'Irish adventures', left money to apprentice poor children and those of his relatives and provided out of his property for a large extended

⁶³ SHC, DD/SP/100 (1660), 135 (1660).

⁶⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1668/28; 1669/76; 1670/22.

⁶⁵ *Siraut, Som. Wills*, 14.

⁶⁶ TNA, CP40/1354/226: www.waalt.uh.edu/indexphp/CP40 accessed May 2021; E. H. Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1625—39* (SRS 24), 153; SHC, Q/SR/116/88; D/P/tau.m/13/6/1.

⁶⁷ TNA, PROB 11/136/47; E. H. Bates-Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1625—39* (SRS 24), 153.

⁶⁸ SHC, DD/SP/357 (bdle 1).

⁶⁹ SHC, Q/SR/42/137; Q/SR/64/182.

⁷⁰ SHC, Q/RLa 33; DD/DP/10/4, 23/8; D/D/Ca/184; D/P/tau.ja/2/1/8; DD/SAS/C/238/1/1.

⁷¹ A. Nott and J. Hasler, *Wells Convocation Act Bks*, II, (Som. Rec. Soc. 91), 679.

⁷² *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1619—23, 387—9, 391; 1655—6, p. 260.

⁷³ J. Broadway, R. Cust & S. Roberts, *The Docquets of Lord Keeper Coventry 1625—40* (List & Index Soc. special ser .34 [2004]), 489, 496.

kindred under his will.⁷⁴ However, it is clear from the hearth tax returns that Taunton's prosperity generally had not recovered from the war by the 1660s.⁷⁵ Many clothiers although still describing themselves as such had given up that business before they died or taken up tavern keeping but 44 testators between 1557 and 1698 described themselves as clothiers. The same class of men probably later called themselves sergemakers as did 26 testators between 1696 and 1793.⁷⁶

It is not clear how much if any raw cloth was being produced in Taunton but in 1645 the war meant that none was recorded in the south-west and presumably the same was true for Taunton's finished cloths.⁷⁷ Richard Stephens clothier distributed ginger-coloured cloths among his female relatives in 1656 and had a fore shop adjoining his hall.⁷⁸ Serge-making may have put an end to the production of tauntons but not to all traditional cloths. Taunton merchants were said to have traded several hundred unfinished broadcloths in the mid 17th century although it is not clear where they had been made. The broadcloth trade had declined to almost nothing by the 1680s.⁷⁹

The production of tauntons requiring the whole range of cloth skills meant that the town was well placed to switch to serge, another finished cloth recorded from the mid 16th century, at that date made with a worsted warp and a woollen weft and much small and lighter than broadcloth. In the early 17th century a Taunton clothier sealed serges that were used in Gloucestershire and Norfolk.⁸⁰ By 1640 Richard Pitts was sending Taunton serges by carriers to London to be sold by his son-in-law. In two months he sent 104 pieces and had another 44 with tuckers.⁸¹ A man demanded 13s. 4d. for carrying a pack of cloth to London

⁷⁴ A. Webb, *Somerset Wills* (Som. Rec. Soc. 94), 174; TNA, PROB 11/253/491.

⁷⁵ Gibson, *Religion and Enlightenment 1600—1800*, 114; below, soc. hist. poor relief.

⁷⁶ TNA, PROB 11, passim.

⁷⁷ Parl. archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/185.

⁷⁸ TNA, PROB 11/260/86.

⁷⁹ W. Gibson, *Religion and Enlightenment 1600—1800* (Bern, 2007), 113.

⁸⁰ G. Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals and related items in the British Museum*, 51.

⁸¹ TNA, PROB 11/185/438.

but it was not clear if that was the usual rate.⁸² In 1653 Taunton serges sold for 48 guilders in Holland.⁸³ By the 1670s Taunton serge was reaching Jamestown, Virginia and Stockholm, Sweden as well as London and eastern England.⁸⁴ Several clothmakers issued farthing tokens in the later 17th century bearing cards, combs, shears, shuttles, woosacks and the clothworkers' arms.⁸⁵

Although carding was done by women and children combing of worsted for serge was a male occupation as was breaking or scribbling the fleeces, removing dirt and adding fat, possibly train oil,⁸⁶ to speed up the combing process but requiring strong cleaning later and producing an unpleasant smell in the town.⁸⁷ The oil and the soap were increasingly stocked by the sergemakers who controlled the industry rather than by those who worked on the wool.⁸⁸ Spinners were often countrywomen like the woman from Hatch Beauchamp who in the 1670s claimed money for spinning worsted for Andrew Groves, sergemaker of Taunton.⁸⁹ Worsted yarn sold for 1s. 8d. a pound in 1670 and in 1677 spinning rates were fixed at 10d. the pound for Spanish wool and worsted, 4d. for native wool and 3d. for pinions but even a good spinner would be unlikely to make more than ½ lb of yarn a day. Sergemakers were required to put out wool for spinning in pounds of full weight.⁹⁰ Prices had increased since 1606 when 52 lb. yarn seized for rent was priced at only 8d. a lb.⁹¹ The independent and dispersed organization of the Taunton serge industry may have made it more vulnerable to theft of yarn by weavers and of cloth by fullers.⁹² Weavers were said to sell yarn given them

⁸² TNA, CP40/2496/9680: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021

⁸³ *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1653—4, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 51; Finds.org.uk. BH-892962, BH-95C6A1, NMS-C5A355: accessed 9 June 2022.

⁸⁵ SHC, A/DIF/44; G. Williamson, *Trade Tokens issued in the Seventeenth Century*, (1891), 987—92.

⁸⁶ Fish oil, in Cornwall a by-product of pilchard curing and imported to Taunton by the 1580s SHC, D/D/bw/1474, 1498.

⁸⁷ S. Simpson, *The Agreeable Historian* (1746), 880; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1; DD/SAS/C/2/238/2/5.

⁸⁸ SHC, DD/SP/1681/90, 1715/34.

⁸⁹ Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 175.

⁹⁰ SHC, Q/SR/115/85; M.C.B. Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records: 1666-1677* (Som. Rec. Soc. 34), 218, 224.

⁹¹ SHC, DD/SP/376 (1606).

⁹² SHC, Q/SR/113/3; Q/SR/115/77; Q/SR/127/25; Q/SR/148/5—6.

by sergemakers for 1s. a pound to thrum gatherers who sold it on for up to 1s. 8d. to independent weavers. The practice was said to have been in use for some time by 1670.⁹³ Serge was overstretched as tauntons had been and in 1677 fair goers were encouraged to report overstretched cloth.⁹⁴

Sergemakers could be either capitalists clothiers or weavers. Although the mass of workers were poorly paid many men who controlled the trade amassed considerable wealth like Joseph Whetham who owned much property in the town including the original 18 Fore Street burgage, now Bath Place, and the 'banqueting house' at the east end where he had a combing shop before 1693.⁹⁵ A sergemaker in 1632 was typical of small producers with a large quantity of wool in his house and four sets of scales and lead weights to weigh it out. He also had shears, worsted combs and a rack with room for four cloths but no loom so was engaged in putting out and finishing the cloth.⁹⁶ Another in 1637 used his hall as his workshop with three looms and finishing tools.⁹⁷ In the later 17th century men and women also had combing and warping shops without tools or wool as well as several looms but no yard or cloth their materials all belonging to the clothiers for whom they worked.⁹⁸ Even weavers with four to eight looms owned little else and one with yarn and weaving shops in 1669 had no wool, yarn or cloth.⁹⁹ A poor fuller who died in 1679 had five serges worth £5 5s. placed at the top of his inventory.¹⁰⁰

By contrast in 1668 a clothier had no tools but a stock of wool and worsted, wool out at spinning houses, yarn, serges out on looms or being racked, in his house and at Exeter for

⁹³ SHC, Q/SR/115/85.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 218.

⁹⁵ SHC, DD/SAS.C112/17,

⁹⁶ SHC, DD/SP/1632/5.

⁹⁷ SHC, DD/SP/1637/31.

⁹⁸ SHC, DD/SP/438/118; 1681/72, 104.

⁹⁹ SHC, DD/SP/1668/28; 1669/76; 1670/22, 1677/46.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, PROB 4/7937.

sale all valued at *c.* £160. He also had two mares presumably for carrying.¹⁰¹ In 1670 sergemaker Adam Hellett had wool, oil, dyes, combs and looms, wool worth £39 out for spinning, worsted yarn worth £82 out for weaving and serges valued at £184 for sale in Exeter and Taunton.¹⁰² In 1671 Thomas Hossum, from a family of clothiers in Taunton and Dunster, had stores of oil, dyes, blue and crimson wool, 121 lb. of wool, mostly with spinners, 112 lb. of worsted wool and yarn, and serge at Exeter or with tuckers worth £57.¹⁰³ Similarly Arthur Shute, a dyer in 1651, died in 1674 in possession of wool, yarn, oil, dyes and serge worth £290 but no tools.¹⁰⁴ In 1679 Thomas Burrige, clothier appears to have lent out three pair of looms worth £9. He had worsted wool, wool and worsted yarn, and raw serges worth over £219, goods and debts in London and elsewhere totalling over £965.¹⁰⁵ A woolstapler also let looms to weavers and bought their serge but most of his nominal wealth was in bad debts due in London and Ireland.¹⁰⁶ In 1681 Benjamin Short, sergemaker had wool, worsted, yarn, kersey, over 200 serges, oil and dyes, warping bars and combs worth *c.* £500.¹⁰⁷ In 1681 Alexander March, clothier, put out everything to dyers and spinners and owned the cloth being woven, mainly by women, including serge and drugget. He had a stock of wool and worsted wool and yarn weighing over 1,000 lb. worth over £63 and 885 lb. of wool being broken, combed or spun. His worsted had increased in value from 1*s.* 8*d.* a lb. to 2*s.* 4*d.* as yarn. He had part cloths, perhaps indicating retail sales, and 250 broad druggets, 350 narrow druggets and 147 serges unsold as well as canvas and dowlais but as with many clothiers most of his inventory wealth of over £1,300 was in his accounts.¹⁰⁸ Simon Stacy gave legacies totalling over £2,000 in 1695.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ SHC, DD/SP/1668/45

¹⁰² SHC, DD/SP/1670/33.

¹⁰³ SHC, DD/SP/1671/47; D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1 (1712); 13/3/8 (1714, 1719); *VCH Som.* XIII. forthcoming.

¹⁰⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1675/10; DD/SP/1681/90, 1685/93.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, PROB 4/6912.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, PROB 4/9058.

¹⁰⁷ SHC, DD/SP/1681/90.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, PROB 4/8035.

Taunton dealers sent some cloth to London, where better prices might be available but it was much easier and cheaper to send cloth to Exeter for export through Topsham. The men in this trade were often worth several thousand pounds and like the broadcloth clothiers a century earlier often relied on family and marriage connections for markets and credit. Richard Pitts depended on his son-in-law to sell his serges in London in 1640 and a Taunton clothier stood surety for a kinsman of Youghal in 1661.¹¹⁰ It was difficult if not impossible for a weaver to sell his own cloth even if he owned his loom and bought his own yarn, which many could not afford. Even master sergemakers who provided oil, dyes, wool and yarn and paid spinners and weavers found it easier to sell their cloth to local clothiers with established outlets, partly because the trade was dependent on credit and sergemakers were sometimes owed large sums for their cloth.¹¹¹ A raw serge was valued on average at up to £2 but up to £3 finished in the later 17th century. Fluctuating prices might explain why sometimes sergemakers stored large quantities of raw serges at home.¹¹² A successful clothier needed a great deal of capital, contacts and storage. In 1682 one had a stock of Spanish and North Country wool, some stored in Bridgwater, 4 tons 1 cwt of tallow stored with two men, logwood at Exeter, serges at Bristol, Exeter and Taunton, and debts stretching back over 20 years of trading totalling c. £2,630, including £332 owed by the Alloway family of merchants, accounting for 70 per cent of the value of his inventory.¹¹³ A sergemaker in 1683 had a yarn shop with at least 470 lb. of wool, 156 bundles of worsted out at 'spinning houses', five serges, an iron screw press, 300 lb. of fustic, and 56 lb. of logwood, a tucking shop with a wooden press, two fullers shears and other tools, 10 spaces on racks for cloth and

¹⁰⁹ SHC, DD/SP/438/171.

¹¹⁰ TNA, PROB 11/185/438; SHC, D/P/m.st.m/13/3/1 (1661).

¹¹¹ SHC, DD/SP/1671/1, 1675/10.

¹¹² SHC, DD/SP/1675/10; DD/SP/1681/90, 1685/93.

¹¹³ TNA, PROB 4/25861. The 1st part and name are missing.

serge and serges worth £90 at Exeter.¹¹⁴ Another sent his serges to Exeter and London and they accounted for over half the £833 value of his inventory but he also kept £100 in cash in the house.¹¹⁵ Some lost heavily when their serges were confiscated in London to cover their agent's debts.¹¹⁶ As Taunton's direct overseas trade declined Exeter became the main outlet for Taunton cloth although London's Blackwell Hall was used increasingly in the 18th century. However, planned legislation giving Blackwell Hall greater control in the 1690s specifically granted merchants and factors of Somerset freedom to sell woollen cloth as they had always done.¹¹⁷

Serge production in Taunton from the mid 17th century was described as 'a prodigy of trade'. The large numbers of poor weavers lived in the town were traditionally said to account for the town's support for the parliamentary faction in the Civil War and later for the Monmouth rebellion and nonconformity.¹¹⁸ A late 17th-century ballad praises the Taunton worsted combers.¹¹⁹ The Civil War and the destruction of many buildings must have had a devastating but possibly temporary effect on an industry, which had the advantage of being scattered through hundreds of premises of independent workers rather than in factories. Fluctuations in trade brought poverty as in 1677 when St James parish was overburdened with poor relief and parishioners were forbidden to bring in apprentices or servants.¹²⁰ In 1681 it was said 500 poor serge workers lacked work and were mutinous and that another 500 would soon want work.¹²¹ In 1683 most of 3,000 men in the town were said to be combers and weavers.¹²² Many clothworkers were involved in the Monmouth rebellion of 1685; about

¹¹⁴ TNA, PROB 4/8778.

¹¹⁵ TNA, PROB 4/21981.

¹¹⁶ TNA, C78/900, no 1: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/C78 accessed May 2021.

¹¹⁷ TNA, PROB 11/1169/135; PROB 11/1346/130; SHC, DD/SF/13/2/19.

¹¹⁸ *VCH Som.* II, 415—6; Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 173.

¹¹⁹ *The Taunton Maids Delight, or, Hey for the Honest Woosted-Comber*, cited M. Haywood 'Broadside Ballads', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 79 (2016), 196.

¹²⁰ Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records 1666—77*, 222—4. Pinions were poor parts of fleeces.

¹²¹ *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1680—1, p. 515.

¹²² *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1683, p. 251.

30 were transported, several were believed to have fled abroad and some were later pardoned.¹²³ It has been suggested that some workers were put out of work for political reasons.¹²⁴

Numbers of children from a wide area were apprenticed to Taunton sergeweavers and worsted combers from the 1660s. Between 1666 and 1696 virtually everyone taking a parish apprentice in St James' parish was in the serge trade and of the 68 known to be apprenticed to that trade 15 were girls.¹²⁵ In St Mary's parish c. 255 children were apprenticed into the trade, nearly a quarter of them girls.¹²⁶ A woman from Bridport in Dorset gave £3 10s. and three suits of clothing to apprentice her son, others parents paid premiums of up to £2 in 1681 but premiums were lower later. In 1691 of 14 children apprenticed in St James' parish a girl was apprenticed for nine years to learn woolcombing. Many children were apprenticed to couples, indicating both husband and wife practised the craft. By 1689 several apprentices were poor children described as 'idly brought up'.¹²⁷ Between 1696 and 1726 clothworkers still accounted for most of those taking parish apprentices but in both parishes only 28 girls were apprenticed in the serge trade compared with at least 146 boys.¹²⁸ Between 1710 and 1724 paying apprentices were taken by dyers, fullers, weavers and a comb maker, even five gentlemen apprenticed their sons to fullers, sergeweavers and clothiers in 1715—16 probably with a view to setting up in business.¹²⁹

The later 17th century saw a great influx of weavers and combers from other parts of Somerset, Devon, Dorset and as far afield as Yorkshire. Settlement certificates survive for 91

¹²³ *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1686—7, p. 155; 1687—9, p. 254.

¹²⁴ *Hist. Parl. Commons* 1660—1690; historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690, s.v. Taunton: accessed 10 Nov. 2020.

¹²⁵ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1.

¹²⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/6/1.

¹²⁷ Dorset HC, DC/BTB/Z/1/5; SHC, Q/SPET/1/132; D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1.

¹²⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1; D/P/tau.m/13/6/1.

¹²⁹ TNA, IR1/3; IR1/41, p. 18; IR1/44, pp. 37, 126; IR1/45 (1716—17); IR1/46, p. 137; IR1/47, p. 76; IR1/48, pp. 2, 87—8, 125, 171.

clothworkers who migrated to Taunton St James from the 1660s to 1690s. In 1666 a comber from North Devon said that trade in his area was bad. The influx included apprentices as young as nine and a former soldier.¹³⁰ In 1690 the Huguenot refugee James Fontaine is said to have started a textile manufactory producing cheap calamanco¹³¹ although he had never been apprenticed. He is said to have made £1,000 in three years before moving to Ireland in 1694 as one of 43 clothworkers and soapboilers and their families.¹³² It was later said that an influx of Irish immigrants who learned the trade in Taunton and then returned to Ireland to make cloth cheaper there undermined the English industry, which Taunton petitioners wanted Parliament to support but the families who migrated to Ireland in 1694 were mainly local.¹³³ In 1699 an Act was passed preventing the export of Irish woollens.¹³⁴ By the 18th century Irish bay yarn or noil for making serge was imported through Minehead as spinning was cheaper in Ireland.¹³⁵ Continued links between Taunton and the east Devon clothing towns of Cullompton and Tiverton saw workers moving between them in the 1690s and early 18th century.¹³⁶ People continued to come to Taunton looking for work and poor children were regularly apprenticed in the serge trade until c. 1710. Families from Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire came in 1712 and although some removal orders were made in the 1700s they were usually suspended or quashed by magistrates until much later as trade recovered for a while.¹³⁷ Settlement certificates survive for 154 clothworkers who migrated to Taunton St James between 1697 and 1726, many from rural areas but some from Minehead, Exeter and the cloth towns of east Devon as the industry contracted under competition from Norwich

¹³⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C/238/1—4; D/P/tau.ja/13/3/8; D/P/tau.m/2/1/2; TNA, PROB 11/347/56.

¹³¹ A glossy fabric usually with a check pattern.

¹³² .Alexander, *Jnl John Fontaine*, 7; *SDNQ*, XII, 352.

¹³³ Ashford, 'Woollen Trade, *PSANHS CLI*, 173; E.P. Alexander, *The Journal of John Fontaine* (Williamsburg, 1972), 7; *SDNQ*, XII, 352.

¹³⁴ Parl. archives, HL/PO/JO/10/3/3/189/2q; Alexander, *Jnl John Fontaine*, 7.

¹³⁵ SHC, DD/L/1/56/6/1—2.

¹³⁶ Devon HC, 2404A/PO/194/1, 195/1.

¹³⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/3/1, 8, 13/6/1; DD/SAS/C/238/1/3; DD/SAS/C/238/5—6.

stuffs, cheaper silk and cotton fabrics and growing industrialization in the north of England producing cheaper cloth.¹³⁸

Both men and women wove serge and made rugs.¹³⁹ Jane Bond, clothier, had no debts recorded at her death in 1697 but she had a quantity of wool and yarn stored in her shop and two chambers and serges with the tuckers for dressing and at Exeter.¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth, wife of William Harvey, a lawyer and deputy clerk of the castle, had cloth made and marketed it herself although it appears to have been marked with his initials. She also employed an agent and used her cousin at Lincolns Inn to sell cloth in London although she also went herself. One buyer took 22 narrow sagathies but wanted to reduce the price. He later asked for 100 druggets from her but instead ordered 40 check cloths as coarse horse cloth was all he could sell. Direct selling in London was difficult but presumably more profitable. In 1700 the agent was footsore having tried 60 shops but only succeeded in being robbed in the street.¹⁴¹ She may have supplied drugget and double milled cloth to London in 1708 and a woman was apparently selling cloth for her.¹⁴² Probably at a similar date Elizabeth Raw was accused of refusing to pay a woman who had dressed five serges for her.¹⁴³ Midwife Sarah Stone referred to the many women employed in the woollen trade who had difficult births, presumably from sitting for long periods at the loom, but to which they returned a couple of weeks after giving birth.¹⁴⁴ Mary Maynard, serge dealer, insured her business in 1738 and Mary Pitts, dyer, took n apprentice in 1745 and insured her business in 1750 for £800.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/3/8; DD/SAS/C/238/1—4.

¹³⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/31/5/2; D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1; D/P/tau.m/13/5/2; Q/SR/115/85;.Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 106.

¹⁴⁰ SHC, DD/SP/1697/8.

¹⁴¹ SHC, DD/SP/356 (bdle 1), 359, nos. 450, 466, 485, 492, 50, 504; 360 (1699/1700).

¹⁴² SHC, DD/SP/359, nos. 607, 713.

¹⁴³ SHC, DD/SP/356 (bdle 2).

¹⁴⁴ S. Stone, *A Complete Practice of Midwifery* (London, 1737), 39—48, 54, 73, 80, 85: copy extracts in SHC, T/PH/mcl 3.

¹⁴⁵ *SDNQ*, XXX, pp. 184, 187; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1.

Sergeweaving was less regulated than broadcloth weaving, apprenticeship was not enforced especially for women and some apprentices did not complete their terms. As a result c. 1698 there were 1,200 or more master or servant sergeweavers in Taunton but most were extremely poor as there was insufficient work although young women earned more than for domestic service.¹⁴⁶ Trade was depressed in the 1680s and 1690s when at times hundreds of weavers were unemployed and scarcity of money hindered trade.¹⁴⁷ Although trade was so bad in 1698 that no parish apprentices were taken into the industry that year masters had taken up to five apprentices for the premium money but did not give them adequate training and many were on poor relief.¹⁴⁸ Even when in work wages were too low to enable them to save for periods of unemployment. There was a demand for all woollen weaving to be treated as a regulated trade with compulsory seven year apprenticeships, restricted to two per master, and a weavers' company with a warden and council. They also wanted sergeweavers to be called woollen weavers to bring them within statutory regulation especially for apprentices. They were advised that there would be no advantage from incorporation and nothing was done.¹⁴⁹ Apprenticeship in Taunton was not being enforced and a petition to Parliament in 1702 was not supported initially, allowing people to start work without serving as apprentices.¹⁵⁰ In the mid 18th century a boy after one year's apprenticeship at the age of 15 became a travelling sergeweaver working by the piece and another after four years worked as a woolbreaker. Both apprenticeships had ended with the death of their masters. A London baker's apprentice who had been pressed for the navy set himself up as a sergeweaver. Other weavers and combers changed master frequently and then travelled around the west country

¹⁴⁶ SHC, T/PH/sro/251.

¹⁴⁷ P. Ashford, 'The West Somerset Woollen Trade, 1500—1714', *PSANHS CLI*, 177; SHC, DD/SF/13/2/51.

¹⁴⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1; D/P/tau.m/13/6/1; T/PH/sro/251.

¹⁴⁹ SHC, T/PH/sro/251; DD/SF/13/2/79, 83.

¹⁵⁰ J. de I. Mann, *The Cloth Industry in the West of England, 1640—1880*, (Gloucester, 1987), 100n.

as journeymen, sometimes with periods of military service.¹⁵¹ An apprentice sergeweaver ran away in the 1760s and took work in Somerset and Devon for a few weeks at a time.¹⁵²

In the early 18th century the serge industry still flourished with weavers living throughout the town including Shuttern and Holway.¹⁵³ In 1702 there were said to be 1,500 weavers and looms in Taunton and 500 more within three miles.¹⁵⁴ As well as serges, duroy, a coarse cloth often figured, was made in Taunton and was exported to the West Indies, also sagathy, a twilled worsted for men's suits, and shalloon, a lightweight twill used for linings.¹⁵⁵ Druggets were also made and one clothier or agent was sending them for sale every week as 'spinning is now at the full' and 'we have great occasion for money'.¹⁵⁶ Most fathers with children baptised between 1698 and 1703 were clothworkers and half of fathers were clothworkers between 1707 and 1727.¹⁵⁷ However, between 1727 and 1766 only 38 children including 12 girls were apprenticed to sergeweaving and eight boys to combing. A few children continued to be put into sergemaking in St James' but only five after 1756 three of whom were girls. By the 1760s no poor child was apprenticed to learn a trade but was put to housewifery or husbandry.¹⁵⁸

There was a decline in literacy among sergeweavers from the late 17th to early 18th century, possibly due to a fall in their socio-economic status.¹⁵⁹ In 1706—7 there was some unrest among sergemakers.¹⁶⁰ Taunton was called the 'nursery' of Queen Anne's wars, possibly relating to the recruiting of soldiers among cloth workers rather than the production

¹⁵¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/5, 10; DD/SAS/C/238/5/3, 7; Devon HC 3327A/PO/82/1; 4781A/99/PO19/65.

¹⁵² SHC, DD/SAS/C238/5/3/2.

¹⁵³ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/2.

¹⁵⁴ Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI.*, 165. Claims of 8,500 clothmakers out of a population of 20,000 cannot be substantiated: SHC, A/DIF/9.

¹⁵⁵ S. Simpson, *The Agreeable Historian* (1746), 880; Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI.*, 177.

¹⁵⁶ SHC, DD/SP/356 (bdle 1).

¹⁵⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/8; D/P/tau.m/2/1/2.

¹⁵⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/6/1, 3; D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1; DD/SAS/C795/TN/4.

¹⁵⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/1.

¹⁶⁰ Herts. Archives and Local Studies, DE/P/F150.

of uniform cloth.¹⁶¹ The industry still flourished although there was possibly exaggeration in a statement that 8,500 people in the town were involved in the cloth industry, as that would represent the entire population or more. Daniel Defoe was told 1,100 looms were at work in the town and children as young as five employed.¹⁶² Clothiers were still well-stocked with dyes, wool, worsted and yarn in the early 18th century and were kept supplied with finished serge and drugget.¹⁶³ They could borrow large sums by securely mortgaging their copyholds. It was said £2,000 could be raised on a property worth £100 a year at five per cent interest far below the profit to be made with that sum in the cloth trade.¹⁶⁴ A poem praising the town in 1724 spoke of ‘numerous hands and thriving trade.’¹⁶⁵

However, there were signs of decline by 1725 when sergemakers were accused of oppressing the weavers, reducing wages and paying in truck or kind rather than cash.¹⁶⁶ A sergemaker was fined £10 in 1742 for paying in truck.¹⁶⁷ A weaver who had accepted worsted to work in 1725 was threatened by up to a 100 others that if he did not return the yarn they would break his loom.¹⁶⁸ On 6 October animosity between the combers and weavers erupted into two pitched battles but they later became reconciled and unemployed weavers were taken on again and made themselves a new flag. Combers, weavers and tuckers marched with flags during coronation anniversary celebrations in 1726 and 1727, the leader of the combers dressed as Bishop Blaise. The weavers led the procession to church and the combers the procession back.¹⁶⁹ The 1728 land tax recorded 22 borough taxpayers ‘gone’

¹⁶¹ SHC, A/CPT/15/5, pp. 195—6.

¹⁶² *VCH Som.* II, 417; J. Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 373; D. Defoe, *Tour through Great Britain* (London, 1927), I, 266—7.

¹⁶³ eg SHC, DD/SP/1715/34.

¹⁶⁴ Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage, 374n.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 5.

¹⁶⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/1.

¹⁶⁷ SHC, Q/SR/310/120.

¹⁶⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/1.

¹⁶⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C2548/2 [*Norris's Taunton Jnl*, 21 Oct., 11 Nov. 1726, 13 Oct. 1727].

including at least one sergemaker and a hosier.¹⁷⁰ Some clothworkers absconded leaving their families and apprentices on the parish. One Taunton woolcomber took his London-born wife and their children to Norwich and abandoned them leaving her to beg.¹⁷¹ Cash, partly gold from Falmouth, was delivered to Taunton to honour bills of exchange at a rate of £1,500 a week in 1727—34 but in the following years only £300 and by 1744 no more than £200.¹⁷² Two woolcombers and a tucker still lived on Carpenter's Lane, now Mount Street, in 1740, the latter with a rack on the Rackfield west of the road but the field seems to have been used mainly for dressing skins.¹⁷³ A sergemaker had to release a house and lands in Canon Street to his major creditor in 1729 as he was unable to pay his debts.¹⁷⁴ Of four Taunton traders who went bankrupt in the 1740s one was a woolstapler and another a druggist maker.¹⁷⁵ A woolhouse recorded in 1718 behind a house in Fore Street had been converted into a dwelling by 1771.¹⁷⁶ In the period 1727—42 26 cloth workshops were insured for £12,500 but in 1759—74 only 11 for a total of £3,300. Some clothiers were also malting and one sergemaker sublet his clothing workshops in the 1760s.¹⁷⁷

The elections especially in 1754 were said to have damaged business and cloth orders had to be diverted elsewhere but the decline was already severe by then. Desperate clothworkers were said to have set up looms producing poor quality cloth, which reduced prices and wages. The Taunton industry failed to mechanise and had concentrated on serge. Other cloths were increasingly popular and produced more cheaply elsewhere where money had been invested in new machinery.¹⁷⁸ Angerstein's reference to 1,160 looms producing the

¹⁷⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/27.

¹⁷¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/5, 10; D/P/tau.ja/13/3/10; DD/SAS/C/238/5/3; D/P/b.hl/13/3/5.

¹⁷² SHC, A/CPT/15/5, pp. 196—7.

¹⁷³ SHC, DD/DP/44/9.

¹⁷⁴ SHC, DD/CN/8/4.

¹⁷⁵ SHC, DD/SP/298 (1749); J. H. Thomas, 'Economy and Society in 18th-century Somerset', *PSANHS CXLI*, (1998), 70.

¹⁷⁶ SHC, DD/DP/58/2.

¹⁷⁷ *SDNQ*, XXX, pp. 183—92; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/23/9—10.

¹⁷⁸ SHC, A/CPT/15/5, pp. 197—9.

best serges, sagathies and duroys, sold mostly in Exeter *c.* 1754 was probably outdated but he refers to people from eight to 80 preparing wool, dyeing, spinning, weaving and pressing.¹⁷⁹

The decline is shown in the fall in poor children being apprenticed to the trade and the decline in immigration. Only 11 clothworkers' settlement certificates survive for St James' parish after 1727.¹⁸⁰ Removal orders increased from the 1740s by which date magistrates were enforcing most of them. Many recent arrivals were returned to Devon but a Taunton woolcomber was returned from Bristol.¹⁸¹ Some settlement examinations indicate a desperate move to Taunton as the cloth industry collapsed in other towns. A Bristol sergeweaver had come to Taunton for work *c.* 1752 and a Tiverton sergeweaver had come as late as 1754 to get work scribbling or combing wool as had others from that town and a recent migrant from Crewkerne.¹⁸² The Portman estate had empty houses and ruins by the 1740s and their rental had halved between 1737 and 1762.¹⁸³ The St Mary's church rate of 1755 recorded that 22 rateable houses were down.¹⁸⁴

The Taunton serge industry survived albeit on a much smaller scale for several decades. In 1755 a man describing himself as a merchant had built a new house opposite St James' church, hoped his wool might be worth £950 and left the tools of his woolstapling business to one son and of his fulling trade to another.¹⁸⁵ Some former sergemakers moved into other trades including confectionary but at least two went bankrupt in the 1770s.¹⁸⁶ Sir William Yea had two wool chambers at Pyrland but the wool was moth damaged by *c.* 1785, possibly it had been kept too long in hope of an improved market.¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁹ T. and P. Berg [trans.], *R R Angerstein's Illustrated Travel Diary, 1753—5* (2001), 238.

¹⁸⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/3/8; DD/SAS/C/238/1—2; above, this section.

¹⁸¹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/3/1, 3; DD/SAS/C/238/5—6.

¹⁸² SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/3/5.

¹⁸³ SHC, DD/PM/8/8/1, 5, 21—2.

¹⁸⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/3/1.

¹⁸⁵ TNA, PROB 11/1113/211.

¹⁸⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/3/10—11, 13/6/1; 23/9—10; D/N/tau.mst/1/1/3; Q/AC/4 (1771); DD/HC/16/7/43, 46; TNA, HO47/2/32.

¹⁸⁷ SHC, DD/HC/68/3.

The firm of Jefferies and Chafey was in business in the late 18th century with weaving shops in Mount Street but Joseph Jefferies was also a merchant with partners and premises in London.¹⁸⁸ Charles Cox, variously described as sergemaker or fuller, gave his house to his son Charles in 1786 but retained his wool chambers, drying house, press shop and two weaving shops intending to carry on the business.¹⁸⁹ In 1774 of 568 electors 170 were woollen cloth workers but by 1820 only 14 wool sorters and combers were recorded and 32 weavers some of whom were probably silkweavers.¹⁹⁰ A further blow was the loss of the American export market, which before the outbreak of the war of independence in 1775 was the destination of many Taunton serges.¹⁹¹ In 1784 14 manufacturers of duroys and sagathies were recorded.¹⁹² A new coarse cloth manufactory was proposed in 1787, possibly along the lines of the type of duroy called eslamone being made in Tiverton, but nothing appears to have come of the plan.¹⁹³ In the 1790s four of the Mary Street chapel members were manufacturers of serge and dimities, new light cloths.¹⁹⁴ By that date seven sergemakers and clothiers, some in partnerships, insured property in Taunton and elsewhere including dyer and clothier Robert Culverwell who had a mill in Churchstanton.¹⁹⁵ Two woollen manufacturers and four woolstaplers were recorded c. 1798.¹⁹⁶ In the late 18th century a sergemaker's son was a factor at Blackwell Hall in London, presumably to facilitate the sale of his cloth, and a cousin was a fuller. Others also had possible relatives acting for them.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁸ Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 54; London Met. arch., MS 11936/353/542326; SHC, DD/SP/378.

¹⁸⁹ SHC, DD/CH/69/3.

¹⁹⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/22; D/P/tau.m/23/29.

¹⁹¹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/23/12.

¹⁹² *Bailey's British Dir.* (1784), 454—5.

¹⁹³ J. Bourne, *Georgian Tiverton* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc. 1986), 80; SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1787).

¹⁹⁴ SDNQ, XXXIII (1992), 137.

¹⁹⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, MSS. 11936/353/542326; 11936/358/549783; 11936/361/559898; 11936/385/598541; 11936/388/604091; 11936/390/606127.

¹⁹⁶ *The Universal British Directory* (c. 1798), IV, 587—9.

¹⁹⁷ TNA, PROB 11/1169/135; PROB 11/1346/130; SHC, DD/SP/298 (1800).

Weavers still took paying apprentices, male and female, into the 19th century.¹⁹⁸ At least one weaver was still producing broadcloth in 1806 and was paid £7 to take an apprentice.¹⁹⁹ However, superfine broadcloth was said to be made at a loss at this period and manufacturing costs were half the price of cassimere, twilled broadcloth and more for ‘fancy’ cloth in Taunton. That was partly due to the lack of mechanization although the flying shuttle allowed a weaver to make up to six yards a day in the 1800s and piece rates were halved.²⁰⁰ In the Taunton festival procession in 1814, 40 woolcombers and weavers carrying the emblems of their trade led the traders and craftsmen preceded by men dressed as bishop Blaise and Jack of Newbury.²⁰¹ Some trade had been lost to Wellington, regularly blamed on violent party politics but the introduction of powered production in that town was an inducement to move and it became the centre of serge production in Somerset.²⁰² A Taunton clothier moved his business to Wellington c. 1815 at which date a weaver providing her own loom was paid 2 ½ *d.* a yard, well below the 6*d.* to 10*d.* paid elsewhere.²⁰³ In 1821 there were only c. 10 woollen looms in the town.²⁰⁴

A residual trade in wool continued, woolstapling was worth £10,000 a year in 1824 and in 1828 Taunton clothiers were still buying Cotswold wool from Cirencester.²⁰⁵ A woolstapler who moved to Hereford before 1830 said he would have no work if he returned to Taunton where he said serge production had ceased.²⁰⁶ No wool workers took part in the 1832 Reform festival and the woolstaplers presumably supplied weavers in Wellington and

¹⁹⁸ TNA, IR 1/66, p. 184; IR 1/70, p. 123.

¹⁹⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/6/5.

²⁰⁰ Mann, *Cloth Industry in the W. of Eng.*, 320—1, 325—7.

²⁰¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (printed insert, 1814); DD/SAS/C795/TN/150.

²⁰² J. Billingsley, *Gen. Views of Agric. of Som.* (1798), 295—6; W. Marshall, *Abstr of County Reports 1817—18* (New York, 1968), 602.

²⁰³ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/5 (99); Mann, *Cloth Industry in the W. of Eng.*, 327.

²⁰⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/29; Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 375.

²⁰⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (1824); *VCH Som.* II, 407.

²⁰⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/13 1832); *Dorset County Chronicle*, 6 May 1830 (report on Taunton): BNA accessed 3 June 2021.

elsewhere.²⁰⁷ A longstanding wool business begun by the Capon family in Mill Lane in Bishops Hull was continued by Fox's of Wellington²⁰⁸ and the French family of fellmongers also engaged in the wool trade.²⁰⁹ Taunton was a collecting centre for the coarse blue penistone or blanket cloth produced in the Wiveliscombe area in the early 19th century and the Whitmash carriers were said to have earned £6,000 a year in the 1830s carrying it from Taunton to London.²¹⁰ Although a report of 1847 said there were no worsted workers in the county²¹¹ there were two worsted and serge manufacturers in the town until the 1850s, in Canon Street and Upper High Street, and the former was recorded until 1864.²¹² It was small-scale business employing 13 men and women in 1841 and possibly some of the 37 unspecified weavers but only nine in 1851 and four in 1861 and the surviving business switched to hosiery before 1866.²¹³ However, woollen merchants remained in business in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A single storey textile factory was built at Wood Street for Penny Ltd in 1914 and was occupied by a firm of woolstaplers in 1957 but was later demolished for housing development.²¹⁴

John Gay Price, whose brothers were bed and mattress manufacturers at Wellington, established his own company manufacturing heavy woollen goods before 1872.²¹⁵ In 1873 he entered a partnership with Henry Corner as Price, Corner and Company woollen merchants and manufacturers of coating, tweed, serges, kerseys and blankets in Rowbarton with a

²⁰⁷ *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852).; SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/52.

²⁰⁸ Bishops Hull, econ. hist.

²⁰⁹ *Pigot Dir.* (1842); *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); Harrison, Harrad and Co., *Dir. Som.* (1859).

²¹⁰ *PSANHS*, IX (1884), 34.

²¹¹ *Persons Employed in Cotton, Worsted, Flax and Silk Factories* (1847), 3. The same report said there were no cotton workers in Somerset but several cotton spinners were recorded in Taunton: TNA, HO107/972, 1923.

²¹² *Pigot, London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); SHC, DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 84; *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); Harrison, Harrad and Co., *Dir. Som.* (1859); TNA, RG9/1618; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 107.

²¹³ TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; *P.O.Dir. Som.* (1866); Morris and Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872).

²¹⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/47/724; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 152.

²¹⁵ Morris and Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); SHC, DD/PRC/1/1.

warehouse in Thomas Street built in 1871 and another across the road built in 1888.²¹⁶ They moved in 1893 to Bridge Street, sharing the three-storey warehouses on the river bank used from the 1880s to 1900s by Fox Brothers, weavers of Wellington and wool buyers, and then with Chaffey and Company wool staplers from 1914 to 1927. They also leased the former gymnasium site on Bridge Street, vacated by Newtons.²¹⁷ Eleven wool warehousemen were recorded in 1911.²¹⁸ The Rowbarton buildings became a cake factory and a furniture warehouse but the Bridge Street woollen warehouse continued as John Guy Price and Son buying cloth from Bradford until the firm went bankrupt in 1931.²¹⁹

Price, Corner and Company also made quilts, probably employing the quilters recorded between 1881 and 1911.²²⁰ In 1923 a former timber or builder's yard between 7 and 8 Union Gate was acquired for offices and stores by Messrs Escott and Company, formed as Taunton quilt manufacturers at Duke Street in 1922.²²¹ As The Quilt Company, they claimed to be the only company making hand-made traditional quilts and employed c. 16—24 outworkers but went bankrupt in 1925 and sold the workshop the following year.²²² The Taunton Quilt Manufacturing Company run by F. C. Hawkins was recorded between 1927 and 1931 at 33 East Reach but had closed by 1939.²²³

Woollen Cloth Dyeing and Finishing

In Taunton as elsewhere in west Somerset coloured cloth was produced by dyeing in the wool, or sometimes the yarn, rather than in the cloth. Woad was claimed as a Somerset crop

²¹⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/23/954; DD/SAS/C795/SX/7.

²¹⁷ SHC, DD/AY/328/1—14; D/P/tau.ja/23/17; DD/CWC.ta/unlisted aac. no. G/2468; DD/DP/3/8; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889—1927); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902—3), 178.

²¹⁸ TNA, RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249.

²¹⁹ SHC, DD/AY/328/1—14; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883—99); SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/25/1687; D/CC/ta/7/22.

²²⁰ TNA, RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875, 1877; RG13/2276—8; TNA, RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1894, 1906).

²²¹ SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/18 (1434).

²²² SHC, D/DC/tau.d/7/22; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton.* (1927), 88.

²²³ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton.* (1927), 26; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1931—9).

but by the 14th century was imported and in the late 16th century its cultivation was heavily restricted.²²⁴ Taunton merchants like Nicholas le Webbe were shipping woad, weld and mordants through Exmouth by 1303. In 1312 a cargo of 28 ton of woad and ten stone of weld was shipped by two Taunton burgesses.²²⁵ In 1467 a Taunton clothmaker owed £9 for a bale of madder and two bales of woad.²²⁶ By the late 15th century there appears to have been a market in woad of various kinds including Toulouse and island, possibly Azores green, at Taunton where it was bought by Londoners among others for 10s. to 20s. a hundred delivered to Exeter for onward shipment. Henry Bishop agreed to sell a London mercer 20 pipes for over £266 supplying a half pipe as sample but was accused of carrying the rest away presumably to sell at a higher price to another.²²⁷ At the same period much personal wealth was held in dyestuffs, which formed the bases of legacies not only to relatives but also for charitable purposes like the rebuilding of St Mary's tower. Woad was the commonest and was usually measured by the pipe. In 1493 one merchant left a pipe of woad for his niece's marriage.²²⁸ Brazil, which provides red and purple dyes, was imported through Morlaix in Brittany to Taunton in the early 16th century. It was presumably cheaper than grain or kermes, used to dye wool for the best scarlet and purple cloth.²²⁹ Four merchants imported at least 63 pipes of woad from Bordeaux and Bayonne expecting it would be worth £4 13s. 4d. a quarter in Taunton but in 1509 two Taunton master dyers had valued it at only £3 16s. 8d. not being of the quality stated by the vendor. The town officials complained to the mayors of the two towns seeking restitution for the merchants.²³⁰ Woad was shipped though Bridgwater and Southampton and through Minehead from Portugal by the mid 16th century. Both woad and

²²⁴ *VCH Som. II*, 420—1. Although used for blue dye it was mixed with weld and madder to produce black.

²²⁵ M. Kowaleski, *Local Customs Accounts of the Port of Exeter* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc, 1993), 78, 126—7, 128, 178.

²²⁶ SHC, D/B/bw/203.

²²⁷ TNA, C1/158/1, C 1/1212/87.

²²⁸ TNA, PROB 11/10/31; PROB 11/16/530; Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1501—30*, 137—8; below, rel. hist.

²²⁹ TNA, C1/335/31; Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1383—1500*, 314 (gift of grained gown in 1493).

²³⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/M/18.

madder came to Taunton from Lisbon in Portugal and San Sebastian in Spain.²³¹ In December 1575 Taunton merchant Hugh Andrews imported 18 tons of green woad through Lisbon and Bristol.²³² In the 1580s Southampton complained that merchants of Lyme, Taunton and Bristol had taken over the woad trade.²³³ A 17th-century Taunton carrier marked his tokens with a bag of madder, reflecting the importance of the trade.²³⁴ The best fixative or mordant was alum from the Papal States in Italy. In 1615 it was claimed Taunton dyers took horseloads of alum smuggled off French ships in Watchet.²³⁵

Shearmen seem to have been employed by tuckers and others and in 1538 one man hired his shears for 1s. 4d. a year. In 1528 one man left his son nine 'course of handles' while in 1540 another left his son shears, teasel handles and 40 rings of teasels.²³⁶ Tucker Hugh Cox had a workshop with 12 courses of handles and seven pairs of shears in 1569 so presumably had several employees.²³⁷ A carpenter's daughter was apprenticed to a shearman c. 1611 and a woman sued for the cost of shearing 100 cloths at 4d. each in 1616.²³⁸ Shearers provided work for sheargrinders one of whom in 1670 appears to have used a horse-mill to operate his grindstones, three of which were over 4ft in diameter.²³⁹

Some clothiers were actually prosperous cloth finishers rather than capitalists. They did all the finishing work except fulling at home often only employing family members, keeping a rack in the garden and taking several days to prepare a single heavy cloth, which then had to be dried. One had a house extending over two burgages but it included his workshop and he had a rack in his garden. A tucker's wife had blue kersey cloth stolen from

²³¹ Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 167.

²³² S. Flavin and E.T. Jones, *Bristol's trade with Ireland and the Continent 1503—1601* (Bristol, 2009), 715.

²³³ F.J. Monkhouse, *A Survey of Southampton and Its Region* (Southampton, 1964), 222.

²³⁴ G. Williamson, *Trade Tokens issued in the Seventeenth Century*, 987.

²³⁵ *SDNQ*, XXXI, p. 415.

²³⁶ Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 81, 161; *Wells Cathedral Miscellany* (Som. Rec. Soc. 56), 159.

²³⁷ Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 77.

²³⁸ SHC, Q/SR/27/100—01; DD/SP/63 (1616).

²³⁹ SHC, DD/SP/1670/70.

a rack in 1624.²⁴⁰ Several racks were recorded in Paul Street in 1555 and later a garden there was used to house extra racks.²⁴¹ A house in Middle Street abutting the old town ditch was let in the mid 17th century with racks, lead shuts and a cistern.²⁴² At the same date there were racks on Grasscroft in St James parish. Grassgrove was also known as Rackmeadows in the 18th century although already used partly as a coalyard, and Rack Close was converted to an orchard, named Coal Orchard by 1732 as coalyards began to displace racks. Rack Field east of the last and behind St James' church was still so called in 1839.²⁴³ Pauls Field opposite the later Crescent was also known as Racksfield in the 18th century.²⁴⁴ A rack was let for 6s. a quarter in 1616.²⁴⁵ Racks in the mid 17th century usually took three cloths each and were valued at £4 each in 1675, more than a loom, and a sheerman had three racks valued at £33 in 1677, presumably those were much larger.²⁴⁶ A fuller mortgaged 16 racks in St James parish in 1711.²⁴⁷ A woman who died in 1716 had eight spaces on her racks and a well-equipped finishing shop with shears with boards, hot, cooling and packing presses and 13 burling irons.²⁴⁸ In 1762 the magistrates recommended felling of an elm near Wilton gaol which prevented a Taunton fuller drying serges on his racks.²⁴⁹ Land south of East Reach was known as the Stretch-place in 1798.²⁵⁰

Dyers also appear to have worked from family run dyehouses at home although Simon Stone had two journeymen and two apprentices in 1689.²⁵¹ Thomas Pope was accused in the 1590s of washing his dyed wools in the watercourse in St James' parish that his

²⁴⁰ TNA, PROB E 133/3/559; PROB 11/133/257; PROB 11/129/16; PROB 11/159/353; SHC, Q/SR/51/22.

²⁴¹ TNA, PROB 11/527/341; SHC, T/PH/hps/1.

²⁴² SHC, DD/TP/4 [this collection is no, 416 longer at SHC].

²⁴³ TNA, C3/467/17; SHC, DD/SP/379; DD/TAC/2/3/1, 58, 194; tithe award, St James; DD/HC/16/7/1.

²⁴⁴ SHC, DD/SAS/C112/18/3—4.

²⁴⁵ SHC, DD/SP/63 (1616).

²⁴⁶ SHC, DD/SP/1675/59.

²⁴⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/TN/37.

²⁴⁸ SHC, DD/SP/1716/3.

²⁴⁹ SHC, Q/SR/332/4/1.

²⁵⁰ SHC, DD/SP/178 (1798)

²⁵¹ TNA, PROB 11/397/40, 11/193/479.

neighbours used for potwater and there was a dyehouse near Holway Lane, later South Street, at that date.²⁵² Although most dyeing was of wool for weaving some itinerant traders appear to have brought lengths of white cloth to Taunton dyers to be dyed in a wide variety of colours including powder blue and seawater green for resale at fairs in the late 16th and early 17th century.²⁵³

A washing place on the north side of the bridge in Grasscroft tithing recorded from 1566 may have been associated with the wealthy Applin family's dyehouse, which had a bridge or stage from Withybere in the river over a ditch to Dyers Green in North Town from which wool was washed. Its ownership was disputed but Hannah Applin was allowed to build a large stage in the river in 1756. It had gone out of use by the 19th century.²⁵⁴ Another dyehouse adjoining the Bridewell on the Tone bridge between the road and the Millstream was recorded during the 17th century and in 1691 was sold by a clothier's widow to a dyer for £205 including furnaces and dyeing vats.²⁵⁵ It was presumably the dyehouse and a dyer's ground recorded at the north-west end of North Street in 1759.²⁵⁶ In 1636 part of a property in Canon Street tithing was a dyehouse with right of access for dyeing and washing wool.²⁵⁷ In 1652 there was a dyehouse with workshop at a house north of East Street, possibly converted to a stable for the White Lion at Eastgate by 1698 when its pond was a garden.²⁵⁸

By the mid 17th century more exotic dyes like indigo, fustic and logwood were being traded in Taunton.²⁵⁹ Increasingly the trade was controlled by clothier sergeweavers who owned and stored dyestuffs and mordants including gall, copperas, fustic, logwood,

²⁵² SHC, DD/SP/22/5, 74, ff. 101, 145.

²⁵³ SHC, DD/SP/49 (1586, 1593); DD/SP/63 (1616—17).

²⁵⁴ SHC, DD/MT/5/15; DD/SP/71, f. 52; 74, f. 685; 438/112; 98 (1653); 253 (1786), 257 (1831).

²⁵⁵ Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 115; SHC, DD/SP/357 (bdle 2, 1691).

²⁵⁶ SHC, DD/ES/3/6; DD/SP/18/127, 22/1.

²⁵⁷ SHC, DD/SP/386 (1636 paper).

²⁵⁸ TNA, E304/6/P8; SHC, DD/DP/23/8; A/ADS/1/2; DD/SAS/C795/1 (bdle 6).

²⁵⁹ SHC, Q/SR/93/126; Q/SR 130/30; TNA, PROB 4/8035.

peachwood, sumach, woad and madder and even the cradle and nets used to dye wool.²⁶⁰ In 1681 a clothier had dyestuffs worth over £21 and was trading in blue serges and in 1683 a dyer had 476lb. of dyes and mordants.²⁶¹ Thomas Hellier in 1715 had several dyestuffs and dyed wool, and in 1741 John Pitman had 120 lb. of dyes and dyed wool as well as other packs of dye and wool of various qualities.²⁶²

By 1693 a sergemaker had a calender house in Paul's Field.²⁶³ In 1696 a fuller mortgaged his dyehouse with dwelling in High Street comprising a back shop with a hot press, three cold presses, a fore shop with a 'keeping' press and a chamber housing another press. It was taken over by a maltster and was an inn by 1722.²⁶⁴ Shortly before 1672 John Bevan dyer spent £105 building a new dyehouse with vats and furnaces in North Street.²⁶⁵ It seems to have decayed by 1719 and a dyer rebuilt the house and dyehouse. It had four furnaces and two dye vats when it was sold in 1742. With the decline in the cloth trade it was later converted to a malthouse and was a bakehouse in 1825.²⁶⁶

Dyeing and calendering continued as services to the public in the 19th century and in 1839 there were three or four businesses in Taunton and one in Bishops Hull.²⁶⁷ Ten men and women were employed in the business for most of the later 19th century but by then much of their work was cleaning, however, a dyeing business established in 1812 was still offering to dye a variety of fabrics in Bath Place in 1869.²⁶⁸ The Taunton dye works in the Bell Yard, High Street, continued to offer dyeing as well as cleaning in the 1950s when there was also a

²⁶⁰ SHC, DD/SP/1670/47, 1681/90, 1683/56, 1685/93.

²⁶¹ TNA, PROB 4/8035; SHC, DD/SP/1683/56.

²⁶² SHC, DD/SP/1715/34, 1741/14.

²⁶³ SHC, DD/SAS/C112/17. Calenders are hot presses and were used to create a lustre on the surface of cloth.

²⁶⁴ Wilts and Swindon HC 10075 ???or 1075 CHECK/001/279; SHC, DD/SP/257 (1831).

²⁶⁵ TNA, C78/865, no 8: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/C78 accessed May 2021.

²⁶⁶ SHC, DD/CH/94/2; DD/ES/3/6.

²⁶⁷ *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); Harrison, Harrad and Co., *Dir. Som.* (1859). Bishops Hull, econ. hist.

²⁶⁸ TNA, HO107/1923; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; RG11/2366—8; *Webbs Weekly News* 21/1/1869.

steam-powered dye and cleaning works north-east of High Street. The latter became a steam laundry in 1964.²⁶⁹

Fulling Mills

Most fulling mills were in Bishops Hull but by 1467—8 there was a fulling mill at Firepool with two fulling stocks and a house.²⁷⁰ At 13s. 4d. the rent was a fraction of the £6 paid for the nearby Obridge grain mills and the latter always had priority for water.²⁷¹ Maintenance of banks and stocks was the responsibility of the landlord.²⁷² Fulling mills were not always profitable and in the late 16th century many were converted to grist mills.²⁷³ A one-stock fulling mill at Pool Wall was converted to grist milling c. 1566.²⁷⁴ The new lighter worsted cloths and serge did not require the fulling used on traditional wool cloth but 11 testators between 1679 and 1788 described themselves as fullers.²⁷⁵ George Lissant left Firepool mill, which had been in his family at least four generations, to his wife Jane with a boat in 1669.²⁷⁶ Aaron Floyd left a tucking mill to his wife in 1683.²⁷⁷ In 1697 the tenants were accused of excessively impounding the water at Firepool.²⁷⁸ Between 1731 and c. 1750 rates were no longer paid on Firepool mills, which had presumably fallen out of use but by 1760 it had been converted to a grist mill.²⁷⁹ In 1763 it was bought by the Tone Conservators but they paid no lord's rent and demolished it immediately selling the materials in 1764—5. In 1827 after litigation with the manor the Conservators bought the freehold of the property, by then

²⁶⁹ Kelly's *Dir. Taunton* (1957) ix; SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/15 (1678).

²⁷⁰ SHC, DD/DP/325/35; T/PH/win 1505—6.

²⁷¹ SHC, DD/SP/71.

²⁷² SHC, DD/SP/71; Hants. R.O., 11M59/C1/19/6.

²⁷³ TNA, E134/4JasI/Mich27.

²⁷⁴ TNA, E134/4JasI/Mich27.

²⁷⁵ TNA, PROB 11 passim.

²⁷⁶ SHC, DD/SP/79 (1660), 302; Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 152 [under Lyffard, a misreading by A. J. Monday].

²⁷⁷ TNA, PROB 11/372/17.

²⁷⁸ SHC, DD/MT/15/1 (1697).

²⁷⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/1/3, 13/2/2; DD/MK/51; DD/SP/301.

largely under the river, for £90.²⁸⁰ The wheel trench, sluices, timbers and a fragment of a bridge over the river were visible in 1862.²⁸¹

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²⁸⁰ SHC, DD/SP/301; DD/MK/51, 53; Q/REI/35/25b.

²⁸¹ SHC, PAM 226, T. Hugo, 'A ramble by the Tone', 3.