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Silk in European and American Trade before 1783
A commodity of commerce or a frivolous luxury ?

This outline is taken from my as yet unpublished book on The English Silk Industry 1700-1825, and especially from the chapters on raw silk and the distribution of the woven material. In addition, I have widened the scope for this talk to discuss the subject more generally. In terms of general economic history the quantities of silk produced and sold are minuscule but there are a lot of instructive points to be made which are of general importance - as well as some very pretty objects. The latter are "documents" in the French sense as well as works of art - a point that many people have heard me make only too often. One aspect which I shall state now and, no doubt, several more times in different ways is that we must understand for what a particular fibre was used and how that use may change. Since for all clothing and furnishing there were, effectively, four fibres this should seem self-evident but it does not always seem to be. On the other hand, statistics compiled in a period when in no sense were they compiled scientifically or objectively I prefer to treat with great caution. They can point research in a useful direction but not much more. The Customs compiled yearly statistics of imports and exports in the Port Books now in the Public Record Office in London [1]. They used the great pound, however, and an out of date Book of Rates. So what ? The statistics did tell me to which countries English silks were exported and which were the most important markets, of which more anon.

Sources of raw silk:

The Warp

Even at this first stage an appreciation of the real object is of great importance. The silk for the warp had to be of higher quality than that for the weft since it took the strain of the loom in weaving. Not every country which grew silk could produce a suitable quality. In the 17th-18th century there were two main sources. The first was China and it was imported into Europe with other goods by the English, French and Dutch East India Companies. The quality was usually excellent but it arrived spasmodically [2] making it difficult for silkmens and weavers alike. The second and more important source was Piedmont, an easy market for Lyon in the second half of the 17th century but as the English industry expanded competition in Piedmont between the French and English grew increasingly tense - and the price rose. Raw silk was also exported from Spain in the first half of the 18th century but it is not clear whether it was intended for the warp or the weft. Some silk was exported already thrown as organzine [3]. The pressure of demand led both countries to look for other sources in the 18th century. The English tried growing silk in Georgia and South Carolina but although the climate was suitable slave labour was not. [4] The white mulberry cannot be grown in Northern Europe as a commercial enterprise. Whether or not the myth is true that James I of England encouraged the planting of mulberries is irrelevant because what grows nicely in England is the red mulberry, delicious for humans but not for silk worms. The French were much more practical and began to grow silk in Provence where both labour and climate were suitable. This did not entirely satisfy their needs but reduced French dependance on Piedmont.

The weft

The weft could be of a much lower quality although the finest dress silks required good glossy tram. Raw silk was the main import of the English Levant Company [5] founded in the late 16th century. There were many qualities [6] and when thrown it had different uses. Thus even in the same textile the ground weft and the pattern and brocaded wefts had different needs, one functional and one decorative. Although imported from Turkey the silk itself came from Persia. The markup on its passage through Turkey was thought to be exorbitant and thus the English tried to negotiate for its passage through Russia but that attempt proved abortive as the khans of the south were even more rapacious than the Turkish merchants [7]. Many different kinds of silk were handled by the importers, brokers, silkmen and throwsters. Silk with a naturally yellowish colour could be dyed deep colours, it was useless for white or pale colours. Silk was needed for decorative features in worsteds "silk camlets" or to be woven with linen as "half silks" or with cut and uncut worsted velvet for "caffoys". Although the degree of twist and ply is highly relevant the initial quality was vital. If the throwster in Sherborne or Macclesfield opened a bale and found the wrong quality he could not carry out the order he had been given[8].

Bengal Silk

This could not be used for high quality goods even as late as the mid 19th century. There are three hanks in the current exhibition of Flowered Silks in the V&A, one from China, one from Hungary and one from Bengal all shown in the 1851 exhibition. The Hungarian is possibly the best and the Chinese is glossy and white but, alas, the low quality of the Indian silk is quite apparent even to a non-specialist. It could be and was used for cheap goods like cheap handkerchiefs which were going to be printed, for example. (Bandanas were important East India Company imports - and these were cheap handkerchiefs). Bengal silk was also used for scarfs and tapes for "Bengal scarf" is listed in the inventories of two weavers of ferrits.

Our earliest silk handkerchiefs are the printed Oxford Almanacs which first appeared in the 17th century, printed with printer's ink and not intended to take any strain. Because silk was intrinsically expensive and printing messy with considerable waste the best silk was not used for this purpose. The defects of Indian silk were a considerable handicap to the English industry. Indeed, as late as 1823 a silkman complained to a Select Committee of the House of Commons that "East India Silk is in its infancy as far as quality". [9]

Narrow Weaving

So far I have outlined the sources of raw silk for broad silks but silk for narrow weaving was just as important. A distinction was made at the time between "broad" and "narrow" but the latter included as many variations as the former. There were the ribbons decorating the petticoat breeches of Louis XIV, the silk and worsted lace needed for trimming a chair, the simple narrow ribbon for threading through a baby's smock, the ribbon facing to a livery, millinery ribbons supplied by chapmen* for servant girls' bonnets and those supplied, say, to Queen Mary by the most fashionable haberdashers, points for holding up breeches, ephemeral favours woven in gauze to celebrate a royal wedding [10], the edgings used by bookbinders and many other

uses. The finest silk ribbons from St.Etienne or Coventry required warp threads of comparable quality to the contemporary broad silks.

Silk Thread

Waste and wild silk was spun and used for sewing silk, stockings, kneegarters, ferrits, fringes and for knittings. Even with sewing thread there was a difference between that needed for functional use and that for embroidery and then there was the silk to form the core of metal thread. Willmott, the throwster in Sherborne, objected strongly when a bale contained too much of such low quality silk as the profit in working it was too low [11].

There was thus a use for most types of raw silk but the processing could present special problems only apparent when the bale was opened after its journey from Aleppo or wherever. It could arrive dirty, muddled or damp or even with a large lump of salt inside to give a false idea of the quantity of silk. These problems are however marginally relevant to a paper on trade - even if they make the search for more reliable sources quite understandable. Both throwster and weaver were, however, totally frustrated whenever either the silk for the warp or that for the weft was unobtainable - the one was useless without the other. A sudden shortage of raw silk could be devastating [12]. The attempts to revive industries in northern Italy and Spain in the middle and third quarter of the 18th century were accompanied by strong mercantilist policies which aimed at restricting the export of the raw material to encourage home production.

Broad Silks

Silk was, of course, a luxury, and thus its periods of difficulty do not always conform to general periods of boom and slump and were affected by factors which were not applicable to other textiles. Moreover, as we shall see, ribbons might be in fashion when broad silks were not, so that the weavers in Lyon and London languished while those in St Etienne and Coventry were quite happy. The throwsters might find a change in the type of silk they were sent and its quantity but would still survive.

Silk was, however, an essential luxury, a nice contradiction in terms. A worsted suit or a coat needed facings and linings. Linen was certainly used for the parts which did not show but silk was needed for the parts which did. Moreover, we are talking about western Europe and America in a time of increasing trade and rising prosperity. There were only the four fibres and until the mid 18th century it was impossible to print fabrics with the skill of the Indian craftsman. The natural way to decorate a textile was to weave a pattern and the natural fibre for all social occasions was silk. Wool, worsted and linen were all important - indeed the most expensive fabric bought by Barbara Johnson was broadcloth for a riding habit[13]. Mixtures were, however, an equally important part of the repertoire of both clothing and furnishing and there are some very interesting late 17th and early 18th century silk and linen mixed fabrics preserved in New England collections. Silk and woollen interests combined in 1719-21 in the campaign to prohibit the use and wear of printed cotton in England and the market over which they fought - for all the rhetoric - was not that of high fashion but the cheap mixtures and coarse silks used for mundane purposes[14].

Two other features are relevant to the period from the mid 17th century till 1783. Firstly, after the period of petticoat breeches

cut changed much less radically than colour and pattern until the 1770s. Secondly, silk furnishings were very important in the richest households in the 17th century but from the 1730s were ousted (though not overnight) by plain painted or wall-papered walls and by printed fustian, legal in England from 1736 and by printed cottons, legal from 1774. In France the date when cottons became legal was 1759. Changes in the style of patterns belong mainly to another talk but their relevance here is the effect of such changes on trade. Luxury silks , however, remained in use by the social classes from King to merchant and by the same people for their carriages, state rooms and , in England, barges, and for the Churches and Synagogues. Such demand continued even when the more volatile changes in style changed the type of dress fabric. Venice had been the great supplier of vestments in the 17th century and rich vestments survive woven to shape. This was yet another market which the French were proud of capturing in the 18th century[15].

By the early 18th century there were two great rivals , France and England, with Holland beginning to trail behind. If you visit the exhibition currently in the V&A you will see the standard achieved by the English in Spitalfields but, equally important in the present context, is where these silks have come from, an aspect taken further in the book Silk Designs of the 18th century in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, due out in November.

There have been plenty of general discussions about the shift in trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic but while the former remained vital for the supply of raw silk for the weft it was the latter which was relevant to the success of the English. The British Navigation Acts and command of the sea hampered France during the War of the Spanish Succession and continued to do so. The French in Lyon complained to their Intendant in Paris that the ports were "bouchee" [16]. The early designs by James Leman show that this was just the time when the English were boldly competing in the most fashionable market. The first silk to come to light dating from 1710 is completely sophisticated both in design and execution[17]. The American Colonies were crucial to this industry as they were to the production of all other consumer goods[18]. While the French could not get out to their own markets this one grew rapidly. Thus, of particular importance is the portrait of Isaac de Peyster in the New York Historical Society because he wears a nightgown of silk which can be dated to 1709 by the Leman designs while he was, himself, a merchant with a brother who had visited London and Rotterdam in 1707-8 [19]. From then on surviving objects bear out the statistics of the Port Books which record year by year exports and imports. It should be said in passing that a five yearly survey is irrelevant when looking for so fashionable a material. I looked at every year till 1780 and found enormous variations. The vast array of business correspondence in American state archives and Historical Societies confirms the importance of the drawback on exported silk after 1722 and the regularity of this trade, for the insurance premiums given in the invoices are not high.

French Markets

Apart from Paris itself , the source of fashion and the best market in the country, French silks were sent to Southern Europe, Spain , Portugal and Italy (while Italian furnishing silks were sent all over Europe from Genoa and similar ports). French silks were sent to Germany and throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire from

Vienna (and English competition there was resented [20]). In Northern Europe they were sent to Sweden. By the 1770s they faced competition in many of these traditional markets from the revived, state-protected, native industries. There were such industries in Spain, Northern Italy and Sweden. Sweden has been documented this year by the publication of Anders Berch's collection by the Nordiska Museet[21]. Even in the mid 18th century the factory set up by Gotzkowsky in Berlin restricted the activities of both the French and the English exporters[22]. Against this Mercantilist activity the French retained their markets in South America . Whether or not the same volume of correspondence has survived there as in North America I do not know but it should be investigated. Portraits in South American collections which are occasionally illustrated certainly show rich French silks. How far these markets could offset problems in Europe I cannot judge without such research.

Methods of Trade

The French and English conducted their industries rather differently - the French attempting to impose much more rigid technical and functional divisions than the English. Foreign trade had ,however, much in common. In Lyon the maitre fabricant received his orders via the maitre marchand and had them woven by a workforce not usually on his own premises who had to work to strict criteria enforced by the Maitres Gardes of the city. The orders came after the merchant had sent out a book of patterns or cards numbered according to his own sequence. Before sending these out he might, however, take the advice of an agent such as Carret who worked in the 1760s over northern Europe collecting information about demand and prices and placing orders on this basis [23].

Carret seems to have been linked with one firm but the order-book which we are showing in the current exhibition and which dates, almost certainly, from 1763 is from a merchant who represented a number of firms [24]. These appear as initials at the tops of the pages together with essential information about the textile . To take a couple of pages as examples, on p.10 there are " Batavia raye et cadrille 5/8 de large de 6..12..6 de N.B. Cie une partie de la trame est crue". The samples are numbered in a hand consistent throughout the book and thus, presumably, that of the merchant's clerk. On p.58 there is a sample of "Taff[eta] 5/12 fond violet nue soye de 13 [L or S] L.S.C no.1595" and again the sample is numbered in the clerk's hand, " 607". A design in the Metropolitan Museum enabled me to identify one of these firms as Galy Gallien [25], thus indicating that the other initials represented other firms. The samples themselves probably corresponded to a counterpart kept in Lyon [26]. The Chambre de Commerce in Lyon did not like this system - since it enabled their rivals to see their patterns as, indeed, the London Weavers Company were quick to organise when they got the opportunity [27]. This order book contains quite a variety of silks including half silks , some very expensive elaborate silks, also waistcoat shapes, and a few small patterns for men's suitings. Individual pattern cards or even patterns have been preserved in quite a few collections. That they are intended for goods in trade can be seen from the fact that they are woven as patterns and can be a strip from quite a large design. Similar systems were used for the distribution of printed textiles later in the century.

It is much harder to work out a nice logical system for English practice. There were no technical regulations in the second half of

the 17th century or the 18th century and while the London Weavers Company (founded in 1154 and a powerful body supported by the textile industries) controlled entry to the trade, only losing its effectiveness in the last quarter of the century, it did not attempt to say who did what - except in the matter of taking apprentices. The master weaver received his orders from the mercers of Ludgate Hill and Covent Garden - or the Strand and Pall Mall in the late 18th century - but that begs the question as to whether he sought orders by presenting books of the season's patterns to them or received a specific design by a pattern drawer via the mercer [28]. Whereas it would seem normal for the "American Merchant" (ie not an American but one who dealt with America) to go to the mercer and not to the master weaver, Parliamentary evidence suggests that while some weavers produced for export others exported their own goods directly[29]. A key figure at one time in the London Weavers Company was a man called Sir William Baker who became upper bailiff of the Company and, in due course, Lord Mayor of London. He was an "American Merchant" who corresponded with the leading merchants in the Colonies. The invoices which survive, and there are lots, indicate that ordering by number was the normal method while small samples attached to orders are very few, apart from the invaluable samples of printed linens in the Alexander Papers [30].

It is a truism to state that the American merchants were the aristocracy of the Colonies. I would expect Isaac de Peyster to have a fashionable nightgown. Not only were they buying high quality goods of every kind to sell both in their own towns and to send on to the interior but they themselves were important private purchasers of such goods. The Port Books grouped the Colonies [31] and it is evident both from the figures of exports and my own observation that there was a limited market in the South (although there are 18th century English silks in Charleston, South Carolina and in Richmond, Virginia their numbers are insignificant). The important destinations were New York, Philadelphia, Providence, Salem, Newport R.I. and above all Boston. The Boston Gazette advertised such imports regularly and other newspapers perhaps less frequently but the personal sales to the merchant and his family recur continuously. Whereas the Thirteen Colonies covered a wide area geographically and not every Colonial order contained one for silk (woollens, linens and goods for trading to the Indians were the staples of the textile trade) it must be remembered that, piecemeal as they were, all the orders arrived back in Spitalfields. This was the only centre making fashionable goods in England throughout the 18th century. I have insisted long ago on the American wish to be fashionable [32] which was expressed so often in the letters not only from sea-ports but from places in the interior dependant on the waterways for such supplies.

Although the Customs figures show steady quantities of English woven silk exported to Portugal and Spain I could not find any in Lisbon or Barcelona. On the contrary, both were clearly important for the export of French silks (worsted are another matter). Holland took both silks and worsteds but not in enormous numbers. Excluding Dublin for the moment, the other market of great importance to the English outside England and Scotland was northern Europe. By the early 18th century not only had the English burnt most of the timber they needed for shipping but tar, hemp, rope, linen for sail-cloth were constantly needed and supplied by the Dutch, Danes, merchants of Hamburg and by the Norwegians. Just as in the American Colonies the

merchants at the ports imported consumer goods almost as a by-product of this trade. Thus here, too, we find English silks with a local provenance.

I want to take a few dramatic examples to illustrate this point - some are shown in the current exhibition, some were too fragile to be lent. The first is the dress [33] worn by Catherine Livingstone from Albany, New York state ("people are more nice here than in Boston") in 1742. It can be dated by a design by Anna Maria Garthwaite. Albany was then on the border with the wild Indian tribes but Catherine's father (or husband) was a successful merchant. Moreover, there is part of another dress of the same silk in Dublin with an Irish provenance[34]. According to witnesses to the 1765 Select Committee on the Silk Trade, the master weavers were only allowed by the mercers to make four pieces to a pattern[35] but these two ladies would not meet either each other or any London customers so fashion had a direct economic advantage to the weaver. In June 1743 Garthwaite drew a damask design which she sold to Simon Julins who specialised in the weaving of damasks later in his career [36]. The silk could have been exported in the autumn of 1743 or by the spring ships in 1744. Mrs Charles Willing chose to be painted in it when she sat for her portrait to Robert Feke in Philadelphia in 1746 [37]. Moreover, her sister admired it so much that she, too, was painted in it in a much less successful portrait.

Another example neatly illustrates the significance of the two most important markets. Anna Maria Garthwaite sold another damask design in 1751 again to Simon Julins[38]. There is a dress in buff silk in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts but generously lent to the exhibition and also a version in scarlet made up as a man's nightgown from the Kunstindustrimuseet in Oslo - again with a local provenance. This pair have an additional significance in their colour. Many of the orders from the American Colonies specify "cloth colour" or pale blue so this is a graphic illustration of the Puritan tradition. The American merchant wanted good quality silks at a fair price but in subdued colours. Also in the exhibition is a damask dress of 1752 from a Garthwaite design also from Boston and pale blue[39]. There is a dismembered dress of the same design of which a panel is also shown in the V&A and this has a Scottish provenance - and again is crimson. Then, as now, the merchant studied his market. There are hundreds of silks in the museums and historical societies of the former colonies which I can say are English but it is only those for which the designs survive which have the vital proof of their provenance. Thus I will repeat my earlier statement that it is necessary to look at the actual objects and, pretty as they are, they are real historical facts of greater significance, in my opinion, than any statistic.

Also interesting is a Christening Pouch in the National Museum in Copenhagen because this has been through two stages[40]. It dates from 1742 [41] but the silk was originally a dress silk and has been subsequently made over for this use. It has thus a local provenance and a local use.

The mass of American business records - richer than those of any other country - show the Colonists importing all the other bits and pieces mentioned earlier. There are ribbons, fans, sewing silks and embroidery silks, expensive table-linen, as well as harpsichords and jews-harps ! Incidentally, real Indian goods could be and were legitimately exported to the Colonies by the East India Company which is why there are quite a number of surviving Indian silks in the same collections often made up as dresses as well as Chinese export silk

damasks. The latter can be easily distinguished because of their light weight and lower quality as well as their slightly odd versions of the current fashionable designs.

Dublin was a rich and elegant city throughout the 18th century although I cannot estimate its importance compared with Bath, Exeter or Cheltenham in England. There was a steady increase in exports from £6-7,000 early in the 18th century to an average of £25,000 by the middle, with over £30,000 in a good year. This does not compare with the £233,000 of woven silk sent to the American Colonies in 1760. Dublin certainly had a silk industry and took increasing amounts of raw silk. A Dublin customer was a regular customer of the Bosanquets in the 1760s taking bales of the Turkish silk which they were bringing into the country. Perhaps because of the competition from London in pure silks Dublin became celebrated for its half silks, especially poplins.

There are no statistics for London's production but a work-force of 6000 together with dependants before the Port Books show a great expansion in exports suggests that it was a very large industry by any standard [42]. Moreover, the Worshipful Company of Weavers did not only comprise silk weavers. London made mixtures of all kinds, worsted "town made camlets" feature on some trade cards and there are worsteds from Spitalfields in the Berch Collection [43] as well as silks. London made linens of various qualities, tapes, ribbons, gold and silver thread, sacking, to say nothing of tapestries and professional embroideries using these materials. Moreover, much of this left from the Port of London. The provincial port books have far fewer exports listed. The ribbons from Coventry and the worsteds (including "silk" camlets) from Norwich also were marketed through London. We know that these weavers existed and flourished because they insured their premises and their stock either with the Hand in Hand Insurance Company or with the Sun. All benefitted from the American trade and it was interesting to see the comment by Anders Berch's son, Christers, in a report from his study tour of 1759-61. He praised English damasks and satins and quotes Rouquet on the English wasting silk (at least I think that was his source) "thus... England with her silk goods can never compete in price with Holland or France so that the only regions to which England can export such goods are the Colonies in America" [44].

By the middle of the century some English silks were apparently exported to central Europe [45] or Dutilleu would not have complained. When Eden's Free Trade Treaty of 1786 was being negotiated it was interesting to see that neither the French nor the English wanted ~~any~~ silks to be included.

Benefitting indirectly were the throwsters of Sherborne and Bruton in the West Country and those of Macclesfield, Derby, Congleton and Leek none of whom were weaving before 1783. The numbers of silks in individual orders may be very small compared with trade goods for the Indians or printed fustians, and, later, cottons. In the Colonies the need for a suitable summer fabric existed from the beginning and it was a market no enterprising merchant or producer would ignore. (This need was a stimulus to British production - the normal British summer is not like those of 1989 and 1990). Only fashion could and did stimulate native British demand for cotton all the year round. Silk, of course, apart from its price, is an excellent fibre for clothing: warm, light, easy to dye but cool and gentle with tender skins. Thus, although it was a luxury it was not entirely frivolous. Moreover, its effect upon the economy of Coventry

and London was not, in my opinion, of minor importance. The American trade, as a whole, benefitted every producer of consumer goods in the country but the relevance of silk to these two towns is comparable to the Grande Fabrique in Lyon or to the ribbon industry of St Etienne.

What then went wrong? Why, despite wars, a Revolution, the odd national bankruptcy, the loss of a whole class of customers, did the French ultimately come out on top? After Independence the American customer could have bought French silks had he wished to do so. Why are there not more of them in the USA?

The answer is a simple one: Fashion. Provided that they had some purchasing power even the poor were as fashionable as they could be. Look at any print of London, New York or Boston - or indeed at the fortune made by Robert Peel in supplying them [46]. Look at a middle class lady like Barbara Johnson and the quantity of printed cottons which she had from the 1770s onwards [47]. She could have had silks and when their fashion returned she did - in the 19th century. Again, I will interject: we published her album not just because it was pretty but for a very serious purpose, to illustrate the demand for textiles used in costume. While the qualities of raw silk must have been influenced by the need to weave softer fabrics even more important was the quantity. Such styles required fewer warp threads to the inch (the most expensive element) and fewer yards to the dress. Certainly, the future George IV had silk waistcoats and silk furnishings, often French, but since he did not pay his bills his was not an economic demand, albeit very useful for fashion history. What most people who did pay bought, whether in the USA or Great Britain, were printed cottons, woollens, worsteds, and in the 1790s fine lawns. The American War of Independence came at a point when fashion was changing radically, anyway, in cut and in style. Nor was it irrelevant, since English Radicals approved of the Revolution and the New World was naturally reflected in new styles.

From the 1690s to 1770, approximately, there had been yearly, even seasonal, changes in pattern carried out in heavy, crisp silks with large elaborate patterns [48]. In a few years, between 1770 and 1775, these patterns declined to brocaded sprigs on stripes in repeats of only two to four inches. We have English pattern-books in which to see this happen. The few dated French samples of this period are indistinguishable from the English. Fashion in western Europe was universal.

Lyon had, however, certain advantages. Situated in a rich agricultural area with a ready supply of food and new immigrants it could pay lower wages. (The canuts of Lyon did not benefit from the French Revolution). It had a supply of much cheaper good raw silk. It had had and it kept a market for luxury furnishings supplied to the major Courts of Europe as well as to the palaces of France itself. Napoleon's patronage had quite positive effects economically and artistically. The catalogue of the Mobilier National of fabrics produced for his Court shows the level of excellence [49]. During exactly this time, when plain fabrics were increasingly used for dress, the English pattern-drawer virtually vanished from the scene.

The picture was not entirely bleak - on the contrary. The London industry did not decline - and, in addition, new manufactories were set up in different parts of the country, notably gauze weaving in Paisley, crape weaving in East Anglia, and even a throwster in Sevenoaks [50]. When dresses were made of plain fabrics (including gauze) ribbons and the trimmings for millinery became very

important. Silks for men's wear were still needed and the firm of Maze and Steer whose pattern book we have for the years 1786-1790 and possibly 1791, were so successful that nine of their waistcoats have survived from this book alone [51]. The customers who bought the silks produced by Batchelor Ham and Perigal and their successors after 1783 were among the most important in the trade as their predecessors had been: men with royal appointments who knew their customers. The satin stripes of the 1780s and 1790s were wanted or they would not have been produced. The main slump after 1783 occurred in 1792-3, other years were good. Throwsters, however, flourished until 1826 despite the fall in demand for certain types of silk. The profits recorded by William Willmott's executors in Sherborne were exceptionally good in 1792 although they declined afterwards, only recovering in 1800 [52]. Equally, the importer and the producer of raw silk, despite the hazards of trade in the late 18th century still had a market, if he could reach it.

What was lost in England was the export trade in woven silks. This may have been compensated by the increase in home demand until 1826 but that is another story.

British inventories for probate complete the picture: in the mid 18th century clothes were an asset to be valued and sold. By the 1790's they had often been "given away" or were given low values compared with other objects, which had, in any case, become much more numerous. By 1800 the assessors seldom bothered to mention them. The Americans may have been much more thrifty. If so, what did they have and what were the valuations compared with other possessions? This is work that you can usefully do.

State rooms in any European court required silks, so did state occasions, especially marriages and funerals, the presentation of ambassadors and, equally, the marriage of the prosperous merchants's daughter. In Spain and Sweden there was a conscious effort by the state to patronise its own production - but, as far as one can tell, a good deal of French silk was also imported. Such very formal occasions were however, rare compared with the more normal needs of the fashionable. I do not know because I have not worked there and have only the evidence of the occasional published painting but I suspect that the taste for luxury silks continued much longer among the rich of South America. This was a French export market and was, presumably, affected by the wars of independence in those countries. By then, the demand for silk and indeed for patterned silk had revived in Europe and the French were well placed to supply it. Between 1826 and 1832 the English lost the power to compete - again another story and one relevant to trade but outside the bounds of this talk.

Notes

1. PRO Port Books, Customs 3 and a sub-number for each year.
2. It was entered under the general heading of "East Indies". No silk was imported in 1700, 1702-5, 1707, 1709-10, 1717, 1719, 1741, 1743, 1750 and 1762. The values varied from a few hundred pounds to over £82,000 in 1757. Nathaniel Patterson, a throwster from Congleton, told a Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1749/50 that "China silk is not fine enough in common for the warp but that he has had some as fine as any Italian...China silk in some years was imported as bad as the Turkey", Journals Vol 25 p.996
3. Imported organzine was essential till Sir Thomas Lombe set up his mill on the Derwent near Derby. Captain Peter Lekeux, a weaver of

flowered silks, gave evidence on the renewal of the patent in 1732" the making of organzine silk had not been brought to perfection by Sir Thomas Lombe above a year or two at most". House of Commons Journals Vol.21 p.795. Thomas Willmott of Sherborne installed his first organzine mill in 1773.

4. N. Rothstein. The Silk Industry in London 1700-1766 London University Thesis 1961 pp.478-483 (henceforth abbreviated as "Rothstein Thesis 1961")

5. Ralph Davis Aleppo and Devonshire Square London 1976. Table 31 lists the values of exports in a fairly limited period.

6. In the Bosanquet Account Book of 1758-65 the items include raw ardass, byas, cadamus, mount Lebanon, various types of Antioch, cafroni of a fine wiry thread but yellowish colour, true Tripoli scaled etc. "Very good byas superior" appears from its price to have been one of the best qualities. Willmott mentions antioch, brutia, calabria, murcia, china, italian etc.

7. Gentleman's Magazine Vol. Xll 1742, p.21, a memorial was printed on trade with Turkey through Russia. The text is the same as one dated July 1740 in the Bosanquet papers. "The northern provinces of Persia produce the most and the best sort of raw silk" from which Meshed and Turkey were supplied. It was argued that they could undercut the Turkey merchants and also enable British merchants to supply woollens to Turkey cheaper than the French. An act of Parliament was passed 14 Geo ll cap 36 to authorise the trade. This was closed in 1747 and re-opened in 1750 - despite the opposition of the Levant Company.

8. Maureen Weinstock Studies in Dorset History 1953 pp.87-89

9. 1823 Report p.211 evidence of Paul Tatlock. P. Bertholon Du Commerce et des Manufactures de Lyon Montpellier 1787 p.170 also said that it was only useful for the weft and a tiny proportion was good enough for the warp.

10. N. Rothstein God Bless this Choye Costume, no.11, 1977 pp.56-73, discusses a ribbon favour prepared for the wedding of the Princess Royal in 1733 - but she was eventually married in March 1734.

11. William Willmott wrote to Thomas Sharrer 15 May 1773 on the small profit in working belladine silk which he had only taken for the sake of other work. On December 17th he wrote to John Banning that he had had a great quantity of silk sent down "chiefly for the sewing trade ... which is generally done in London" whereas he had only a few hands to do it and it gave him very little profit.

12. In 1757 an application to Parliament was made by the Weavers Company because of a sudden shortage. This is a continuous theme in the Willmott correspondence. He complained for example in September 1773, December 1773, January 1774, February 1774 and December 1774 and this is just the difficulties of one short period.

13. N. Rothstein, editor, Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics 1987 p.8 of the album, May 1760. It had cost her brother 20s a yard.

14. N. Rothstein The calico campaign of 1719-21 East London Papers Vol.7 no.1 July 1964. One page of the samples submitted to the Commissioners for Trades and Plantations is illustrated on p.14

15. P. Bertholon Du Commerce et des Manufactures de Lyon Montpellier 1787 p.41

16. Rothstein Thesis 1961 p.406 Letter from the Chambre de Commerce to their intendant in Paris July 1706 and p.406, letter of 1700 on the inability of the French to export silks to Holland and England.

17. This has been lent to the current exhibition Flowered Silks no.9 in the exhibition by the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,

1940 AA486. It is illustrated in Silk Designs, p.39.

18. House of Lords MS Report 23 January 1734 presented by the Commissioners for Trades and Plantations. The Colonists "do not at present manufacture a third part of what is necessary for their own use but are generally clothed in English manufactures", quoted by me in Connoisseur 1967, Vol.166, no.168 p.90.

19. N.Rothstein Silks for the American Market Connoisseur Vol.166 1967 no.169, de Peyster and the design are illustrated on p.150

20. F.Bregnot du Lut, editor, Le Livre de Raison de Jacques-Charles Dutilleu, p.47 "Cependant des artistes mediocres se sont formes chez eux, et depuis 1748, on commence a voir dans les foires d'Allemagne quelques unes de leurs etoffes assez goutees mais bien inferieures aux notres...Toutes les annees les etoffes des deux nations comparaisent a Leipsig et a Francfort, et, de l'aveu meme des etrangers nous l'emportons sur nos rivaux". He considered that in Holland French designs were copied "maladroitement "

21. Elisabet Hidemark, editor, Eighteenth Century Textiles, The Anders Berch Collection at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm 1990

22. Weavers Company Court Books 29 March 1749/50 and Rothstein Thesis 1961 pp 470-471 and notes.

23. Lyon, Archives Departementales, Serie B Papiers de Commerçants, see Rothstein thesis p.521

24. T.373-1972 no.112 in current exhibition

25. No.20.100.5. There is a discrepancy between the number in the order book "873" and on the design "879". I am very grateful to Alice Zriebec and Lorraine Karafel for checking this design and its inscription.

26. By analogy with 67-1885 which is the " counterpart of patterns sent to Spain and Portugal" by John Kelly of Norwich in 1763.

27. April 10-12 1764 the London Chronicle reported that Robert Trott [of the Customs] had seized "a very large book of patterns of French wrought silks of all sorts from 5s per yard to £5 and upwards". It was hoped that the patterns "would be preserved for the benefit of our silk manufactures". The book was bought from the Customs by the Weavers Company for £50 and on July 18th they organised its viewing.

28. a point discussed in Silk Designs p.22

29. Silk Designs p.312 Daniel Gobbee had exported "several thousand pounds worth of wrought silks to Ireland" and so had John Sabatier, p.337. Stephen Paris giving evidence in 1765 said "he had never exported any silks but has sold for that purpose", [House of Commons Journals Vol.30 1765 p.210] p.333

30. Florence Montgomery Printed Textiles...1700-1850 1970 pp.18-22

31. They were grouped as New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland, and Carolina.

32. see Connoisseur articles above published in 1967

33. Flowered Silks no. 60, Albany Institute of History and Art 1944.60.1 The design is in the V&A Museum. Both are illustrated in Silk Designs op.cit. p.47 and pl.164

34. 167.1944 National Museum of Ireland

35. Silk Designs p.22

36. Silk Designs pp.320-321

37. Flowered Silks, exhibition no.78. Henry Francis Dupont Winterthur Museum 69.134. The design is in T.391-1971 p.55, exhibition number 77.

Both are illustrated in Silk Designs p.46

38. 5988.28 Flowered Silks exhibition nos.93,94,95. Museum of Fine

Arts Boston 47.1021, Kunstindustrimuseet Oslo OK 5685 Silk Designs, p.49

39. Flowered Silks exhibition 98,99,100. Design 5989.18, Museum of Fine Arts Boston 59.648, V&A Museum T.346-1975

40. Flowered Silks exhibition no.56 design 5981.1a.

41. The Christening pouch in the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen was too fragile to lend. Its number is F.122 b 61/1892. It is illustrated in Silk Designs p.47

42. N.Rothstein Huguenots in the English Silk Industry in the 18th century, p.126 in Huguenots in Britain and their French Background 1550-1800, edited I.Scouloudi, 1987 and N.Rothstein Canterbury and London. The silk industry in the late seventeenth century p.35 in Textile History Vol.20 No.1 Spring 1989.

43. Berch Collection pp.90 and 92

44. Berch Collection English silks appear on pp.149-156. Christer Berch's comment on pp.252-3

45. Daniel Gobbee gave evidence to Parliament in 1750 saying that a great quantity of tabbies were exported to France and flowered silks to Germany, Silk Designs, p.312. The Gentleman's Magazine reported "our mercers now send their silks to Vienna and many other foreign courts where the excellence of English brocades is distinguished and applauded", Vol.xix p.319. This opinion may be compared with that of Dutilleu, footnote 20.

As early as 1719 a member of the Court of the Weavers Company had told the Commissioners for Trades and Plantations that he had sent silk and woollen goods to "Hamburgh, Holland, Germany, Spain & etc." Journal 1718-19 p.118

46. His success is described in S.D.Chapman and S.Chassagne European Textile Printers in the Eighteenth Century, A Study of Peel and Oberkampf Samples of printed cottons are illustrated p.83.

47. Barbara Johnson's Album p.32 and in the album itself pp.19-52

48. Silk Designs pp.37-55

49. Ed. Jean Coural, Paris Mobilier National, Soieries Empires Paris 1980

50. Peter Nouailles. His biography appears in The Quiet Conquest, The Huguenots 1685-1985, catalogue of the exhibition held at the Museum of London 1985 p.300 cat. no.450

51. Three are in the V&A, three in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter and two in the Museum of London. The first six are displayed in Flowered Silks nos.141-146. See also Silk Designs pp.254-5. The pattern book from Maze and Steer, T.384-1972, also shown no.140. Some pages from this are illustrated in Silk Designs pls. 335-338

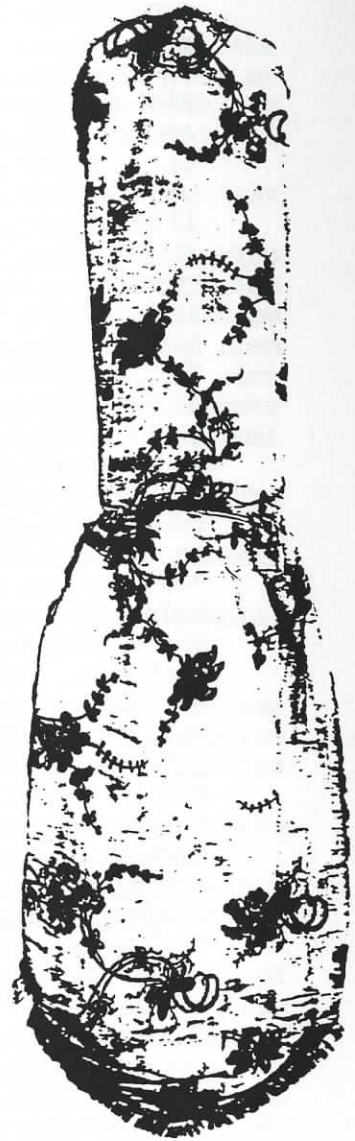
52. Frederick Marsden A short History of the Sherborne Silk Mill from 1753 onwards Journal of the Sherborne History Society 1971 Vol.8 pp.1-28, pp.10 and 11.

* I have not had time to check Margaret Spufford's study which, by all reports, is most valuable The Great Re-clothing of Rural England- Petty Chapmen and their wares in the 17th century 1984, to see what silks the chapmen did distribute.

By
Natalie Rothstein



V&A M.5930.13 , identical
to 5981.1a



Christening robe of brocaded silk
woven from 5981.1A (pl. 162). Courtesy of
the National Museum, Copenhagen; given by
Konsul Brunn (F.122b, 61/1892).