

4. Changes in London's economic hinterland as indicated by debt cases in the Court of Common Pleas

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This paper explores the ways in which the records of pleas of debt in the central Court of Common Pleas can be used to delineate changes in the economic relationship between London and its hinterland. Normally held on the west side of Westminster Hall, the court heard a variety of pleas, among which those of debt became the most common.¹ Plaintiffs from throughout the country resorted to the court for the recovery of debts worth £2 or more. Brooks argues that the overall level of business at the court reflects that in the economy at large.² Our findings support that view, and in particular that the number of pleas of debt indicates the general level of credit and trade. An earlier study based at the Centre for Metropolitan History, focusing on London and the ten surrounding counties during the years around 1400,³ demonstrated the value of the Common Pleas debt cases for establishing a national picture, as the distribution map of debts due to Londoners shows (Fig. 4.1). It clearly demonstrates a pattern of intensive interaction with the numerous small settlements in the immediate metropolitan hinterland, and of strong links with the larger and more distant provincial towns such as Salisbury, Bristol, Coventry and York. Londoners supplied goods and extended credit to their countrymen in all the counties of England, but especially to those of the South East and the Midlands. The current project aims to exploit more of this material in a study of change between about 1300 and 1600, using samples of debt cases laid (for this term, see below) in London, the ten counties around the city, and the more distant counties of Devon, Staffordshire and Yorkshire (Fig. 4.2).⁴ Central questions to be addressed concern changes in the character and extent of London's impact and in the degree to which it, or other forces, had an integrative effect on the English economy. The research also explores the topic of integration through a study of grain prices, preliminary findings from which are presented in another paper in this collection.⁵

¹ For the court and its records, see M. Hastings, *The Court of Common Pleas in Fifteenth Century England: a Study of Legal Administration and Procedure* (Ithaca, 1947) and C.W. Brooks, *Pettyfoggers and Vipers of the Commonwealth: the 'lower branch' of the Legal Profession in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986).

² Brooks, *Vipers*, pp. 75–107.

³ 'Market Networks in the London Region: the Trade in Agrarian Produce, c.1400', funded by the Leverhulme Trust (award holder D. Keene).

⁴ Centre for Metropolitan History Research Project, 'Metropolitan Market Networks, c.1300–1600', funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ref. R000237253; award holders, J.A. Galloway and D. Keene). The samples were collected, edited, and organised by Margaret Murphy. Statistics and maps have been prepared by J.A. Galloway.

⁵ See above, pp. 23–42.

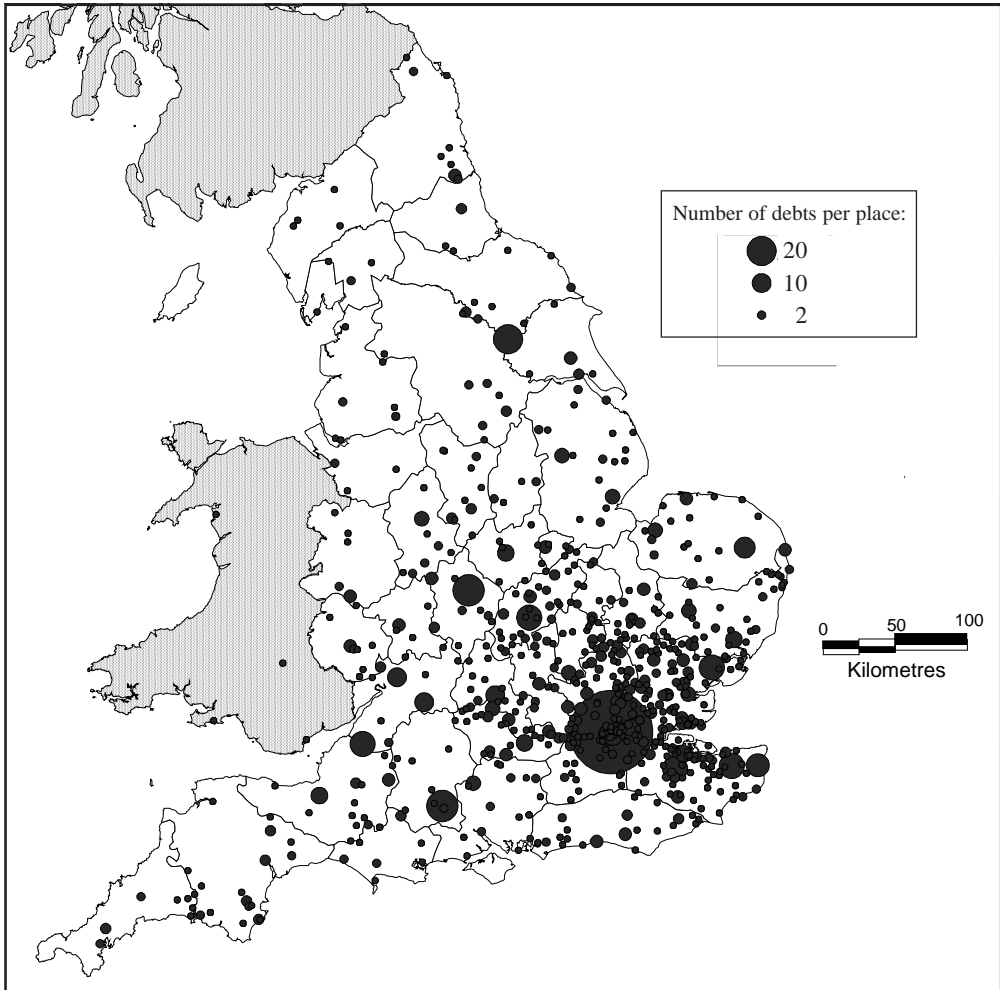


Fig. 4.1. Debts owed to Londoners c.1400

The exercise is based on a sample of 7,806 cases from the Common Plea Rolls (Public Record Office, CP40) for the Michaelmas terms in 1384, 1403, and 1424. In particular, it concerns those 1,409 debts owed to Londoners by individuals whose place of residence is identified. The sample was drawn from cases laid in Beds., Berks., Bucks., Essex, Herts., Kent, London, Middx., Northants., Oxon. and Surrey, but since London plaintiffs mostly laid their pleas in London the exercise presents a reliable picture for England as a whole. For the base map, see Fig. 2.1.

Between the fourteenth and the late sixteenth century London's capacity to interact with and influence its hinterland changed dramatically. Always the largest and wealthiest English city, London in the early fourteenth century was at its medieval peak in size, with a population of, very roughly, 80,000 or more. During the later Middle Ages, following widespread visitations of famine and plague, London was much smaller than before but, on account of its close engagement with Continental markets, sharply increased its share of English wealth. Not until well into the sixteenth century, however, were there clear signs of renewed physical expansion in the city, although such growth began earlier in its suburban periphery, especially Southwark. Only about 1550 did London equal its former population peak, but from then on continued metropolitan expansion was rapid, absorbing



Fig. 4.2. Counties covered by the Common Pleas database, 1424 and 1570
For the base map, see Fig. 2.1.

an ever greater share of the nation's population and resources. Throughout this period London had a number of distinct structural effects on its hinterland through its demand for basic supplies such as food, fuel and building materials, its provision of goods and services, and its promotion of regional markets and networks of production and crafts.⁶

⁶ B. M. S. Campbell, J. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region c.1300* (Historical Geography Research Series, 30, 1993); J. A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, 'Fuelling the city: production and distribution of firewood and fuel in London's region, 1290–1400', *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), pp. 447–72; D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its region', *The London Journal*, 14 (1989), pp. 99–111; D. Keene, 'Small towns and the metropolis: the experience of medieval England' in J.-M. Duvosquel and E. Thoen (eds.), *Peasants and Townsmen in Medieval Europe: Studia in Honorem Adriaan Verhulst* (Gent, 1995), pp. 223–38. The arguments concerning the size and prosperity of late medieval London presented in P. Nightingale, 'The growth of London in the medieval English economy', in R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (eds.), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 89–106 are not all borne out by the evidence cited and should be treated with caution.

London's trade and finance subverted that of some provincial centres, including York,⁷ and in the longer run were to be a powerful force in economic integration. However, the nature of that process of integration, especially in its early stages, has not been much explored. At the same time, the period has sometimes been characterized as one of 'transition from feudalism to capitalism'. Such a transition might be difficult to detect in the context of London's increasingly powerful commercial influence, but evidence from the debt cases concerning regional development and the size of transactions will throw some light on the subject.

The samples of debts upon which explorations are based are drawn from the Michaelmas terms of 1329, 1424 and 1570. Over this period the real value of the minimum size of debt which could be pursued through the court fell sharply, representing about 120 days wages for a carpenter in the 1320s, about 80 days in the 1420s, and about 48 days in the 1570s.⁸ The choice of particular years is dictated primarily by the quality of the information provided by the pleas, by a decision to avoid years of high corn prices when the pattern of London's interaction with its hinterland is likely to have been unusual, and by the physical condition of the rolls. After 1570, the Common Plea rolls tend increasingly to omit details of plaintiffs' residences and, with the growth of debt litigation in the Court of King's Bench, the sample they provide becomes progressively more skewed regionally.⁹ This paper focuses on change between 1424 and 1570. It is exploratory and heuristic rather than thematic and definitive. An important aim is to establish the most robust framework of systematic analysis for use over all three years. Some of the statistics are provisional and are presented in the text as approximations.

Appendix 1 indicates the types of information that the records provide. 'Detailed' cases are very informative on trading connections and commodities, but the 'full' and 'uninformative' cases are much more numerous and it is upon that level of information that the preliminary overviews presented in this paper mainly draw. They concern primarily the numbers of debts and the places of residence, occupations and numbers of creditors and debtors, with some reference to the size of the debts. A few words of explanation are needed on the 'laying' of pleas, since the marginal annotations in the rolls naming the county where pleas were laid provide the only feasible means of selecting samples on a geographical basis from rolls which record many thousands of pleas in each year. In theory, plaintiffs (i.e. creditors in cases of debt) were to lay pleas in the county where the debt originated, thus making the sheriffs of that county responsible for aspects of the subsequent administration of the case as well as facilitating the filing of records in London,¹⁰ but the precise significance of 'laying' is less clear. In practice, cases seem generally to have been laid in the county of the plaintiff's residence, and so the debt cases for that county will reflect its inhabitants' interests as

⁷ D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 99, 104, 229, 285, 335. For York and its hinterland, see J. Kermode, 'Medieval indebtedness: the regions *versus* London', in N. Rogers (ed.), *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1992 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford, 1994), pp. 72–88.

⁸ E. H. Phelps Brown and S. V. Hopkins, 'Seven centuries of building wages', in E.M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Essays in Economic History, II* (London, 1962), pp. 168–78.

⁹ Brooks, *Vipers*, pp. 63–5.

¹⁰ Hastings, *Court of Common Pleas*, pp. 43–56, 158–60, 224–30.

creditors across the country as a whole. Thus, in 1424 85 per cent, and in 1570 95 per cent, of the debts in cases laid by plaintiffs from London and its suburbs were laid in London, and the only other counties in the sample where Londoners laid significant numbers of cases were the adjacent ones of Middlesex, Surrey, Kent and Essex, which collectively accounted for 13 per cent of the total of debts in 1424 and no more than 3 per cent in 1570.

In the discussion which follows the unit of analysis is the debt. Cases sometimes dealt with more than one debt at issue between the parties, so the number of debts will not correspond with the number of individuals involved as creditors or debtors.

During the Michaelmas terms of 1424 and 1570 the court handled approximately the same number of cases, although there had been a substantial shrinkage and regrowth of business between those dates.¹¹ The range in size of debts is virtually identical at the two dates, with coefficients of variation of 147 per cent and 145 per cent if we exclude three extraordinarily large 'outlier' debts from the 1424 sample. The mean value of debts (excluding outliers), however, rose from £8.91 to £30.92 between 1424 and 1570. Correcting the latter figure for inflation, using a commodity prices rather than wages as an index, it seems that the real rise in the mean value of debt was about 38 per cent. This is to be explained by a reduction in the proportion of small debts rather than an increase in that of large ones, since the proportion of debts of £100 or more, in 1424 values, was the same at both dates (0.6 per cent). Thus the effect of inflation on the £2 threshold did not push the court 'down market'; in fact, a reverse tendency is evident.¹² Nevertheless, the samples are roughly comparable in providing a view of the 'middling' range of transactions. We know that in the Middle Ages and later local courts handled a mass of smaller-scale and more localised debt litigation. Over our period the proportion of such business handled by local courts may have increased. The possible effects of such changes in the mean size of debt should be allowed for in interpreting the analyses of the Common Plea material.

There were some striking regional shifts between 1424 and 1570. London was the dominant centre for business, and debt cases laid in London increased their share of the sample by two and a half times, to 65 per cent (Table 4.1). Devon was modestly buoyant and enlarged its share, from just over 7 to almost 9 per cent. Staffordshire also increased its small share. The share of the 'metropolitan counties' near London, however, fell to 15 per cent, almost a third of what it had been in 1424. Districts closest to London displayed the sharpest decline: the shares of Essex and Middlesex fell to less than a fifth of their 1424 figures, and that of Surrey to a quarter. Yorkshire's share more than halved. Such changes seem clearly to reflect local levels of trade or prosperity, contrasting experiences in the provinces, and, above all, the great concentration of population and business in London. This exercise thus provides a useful measure of regional changes for which other indications exist but which are not easy to quantify. In particular, the expanding metropolis seems to have been drawing in business from its immediate region, which thus became more directly dependent upon London. The experience of Essex was particularly, even unexpectedly, dramatic and presumably

¹¹ Brooks, *Vipers*, pp. 48–57.

¹² When a wage-rate index of inflation is used the tendency appears even more extreme, with a rise in the mean size of debts of 108 per cent in real terms.

TABLE 4.1
Counties where debts were laid, 1424 and 1570

County where debt was laid	1424			1570		
	N.	% of metrop. region	% of whole sample	N.	% of metrop. region	% of whole sample
<i>Metropolitan region:</i>						
London	1160	37.3	25.8	3031 ¹	81.1	65.4
Beds	194	6.2	4.3	56	1.5	1.2
Berks	75	2.4	1.7	13	0.3	0.3
Bucks	93	3.0	2.1	45	1.2	1.0
Essex	422	13.6	9.4	81	2.2	1.7
Herts	82	2.6	1.8	54	1.4	1.2
Kent	393	12.6	8.8	239	6.4	5.2
Middx	267	8.6	5.9	49	1.3	1.1
Nhants	164	5.3	3.7	89	2.4	1.9
Oxon	130	4.2	2.9	47	1.3	1.0
Surrey	132	4.2	2.9	33	0.9	0.7
Subtotal	3112	100	69.3	3737	100	80.7
<i>Other counties:</i>						
Devon	331		7.4	215		4.6
Exeter	–		–	187		4.0
Staffs	75		1.7	116		2.5
Lichfield	–		–	4		0.1
Yorkshire	853		19.0	240		5.2
York	118		2.6	137		3.0
Total	4489		100	4636		100

Source: CP40 database.

Note: ¹ Includes cases not in the database, but counted in the roll: the number of these has been reduced by 1 per cent to allow for duplication, based on analysis of the parallel figures for other counties. London figure excludes those 'alias' cases where both parties appear to have resided outside London and the thirteen study counties: in 1424 such cases would most likely have been laid in the defendant's county of residence (Lancashire, Nottinghamshire etc.). If these debts were included the number of London cases would increase to 3,726.

reflects the misfortunes of its traditional textile industry as well as proximity to London. The 1570 sample probably catches the county at a low point, for by the early seventeenth century its 'new draperies' were flourishing.¹³ However, other possible explanatory factors for general and localised trends, such as the use of alternative courts for debt litigation, should certainly be borne in mind, both here and throughout the following discussion, although it is impossible to allow for them in any consistent fashion.

When we examine the debts according to the counties where creditors and debtors resided, irrespective of the counties in which debt cases were laid, the pattern of change is similar (Table 4.2i). For London and surrounding counties the change is less dramatic than by the measure of cases laid,¹⁴ presumably because more plaintiffs from those counties than from others were resorting to legal fictions which would enable cases to

¹³ J.E. Pilgrim, 'The cloth industry of East Anglia', in J.G. Jenkins (ed.), *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain* (London, 1972), pp. 252–6.

¹⁴ Despite including London's suburbs, which expanded greatly, along with the city.

be laid in London.¹⁵ Even so, the share of creditors and debtors from both Essex and Yorkshire fell by more than half, while those for both Devon and Staffordshire increased slightly. Separating creditors and debtors is instructive (Table 4.2ii–iii). Devon seems particularly dynamic, doubling its share of creditors and with a much smaller increase in debtors, while Yorkshire’s weakening, or increasingly dependent, economic position may be indicated by the greater fall in its share of creditors than of debtors. Essex experienced equally sharp contractions in its share of both creditors and debtors, perhaps as it lost both trade and the laying of pleas to London. Kent’s share of debtors fell more sharply than its share of creditors, possibly indicating a relative buoyancy in locally-based business by comparison with other counties close to London. London’s share of debtors rose much more sharply than its share of creditors. That may reflect the capital’s growth as a centre of purchasing and consumption, a matter dealt with further below.

For all the sample counties apart from London, resident debtors outnumbered creditors. London creditors outnumbered London debtors to a comparable degree (Table 4.2). This clearly indicates the extent to which Londoners provided goods and money throughout the realm rather than just within the immediate territory of the city. No provincial town in the sampled counties matched London in this role. In most provincial towns for which adequate numbers of cases are available debtors outnumbered creditors, the relatively prosperous towns of Exeter and Reading being, provisionally, the only exceptions. Between 1424 and 1570, in every county and every town in the sample (including the London suburbs, but possibly excluding Hull) the ratio of debtors to creditors appears to have risen, while in the London area as a whole it fell. This presumably indicates the city’s particular and increasing role as a general provider of goods and credit. This topic will be pursued further through an analysis of the size and subject of debts.

The focus now shifts to the debts due to London plaintiffs, which provide a picture of their interests valid for the whole of England and Wales and not just the sample counties (Table 4.3). Analysis of these debts also helps to define contrasting provincial experiences. As a proportion of all debts due to Londoners, those from fellow Londoners rose from 12 to 29 per cent of the total between 1424 and 1570, again indicating the overall increase of business within the metropolis. Unfortunate Essex’s share of debts to Londoners more than halved, suggesting that at the level of the activities represented by these transactions the county’s economy was both declining and becoming less closely associated with the major commercial forces in London’s economy. Essex may have been becoming, in a sense, more ‘suburban’ in its relationship to London, and it may be that the market connections between Essex and London came to be expressed in the small-scale debts which are less common in the Common Pleas sample for 1570 than in that for 1424. Again, consideration of the size and subject of debts will throw further light on this issue. Kent’s experience appears to have been similar to that of Essex. Moreover, in all counties near London (apart from Surrey) and in a few of the more distant counties, debts from residents to Londoners fell as a proportion of the total, though not to the dramatic degree apparent in Essex.

¹⁵ By 1570 increasing numbers of defendants were described as ‘of London’, but ‘*alias of*’ another place, presumably with the purpose of enabling pleas to be more readily laid in London. These defendants have been counted as resident in the *alias* place rather than in London.

TABLE 4.2
Counties of residence of parties to debts, 1424 and 1570

Counties	1424			1570			
	N. of debts	% of metrop. counties + London	% of total where county specified	N. of debts (dbase)	N. of debts (Roll) ³	% of metrop. counties + London	% of total where county specified
<i>i. Creditors and debtors</i>							
London ¹	1185	32.3	18.7	1441	2813	57.3	34.4
Beds	243	6.6	3.8	128	187	3.8	2.3
Berks	133	3.6	2.1	64	114	2.3	1.4
Bucks	143	3.9	2.3	101	149	3.0	1.8
Essex	631	17.2	10.0	213	318	6.5	3.9
Herts	144	3.9	2.3	162	257	5.2	3.1
Kent	585	16.0	9.2	362	450	9.2	5.5
Middx ²	111	3.0	1.8	60	104	2.1	1.3
Nhants	217	5.9	3.4	175	224	4.6	2.7
Oxon	166	4.5	2.6	122	196	4.0	2.4
Surrey ²	103	2.8	1.6	63	94	1.9	1.2
Subtotal: metrop. counties	2476	67.6	39.1	1450	2093	42.7	25.6
Subtotal: metrop. counties + London	3661	100	57.8	2891	4906	100	60.1
Devon	389		6.1	594	618		7.6
Staffs	110		1.7	187	243		3.0
Yorks	1258		19.9	664	766		9.4
Counties 'out of sample'	918		14.5	1000	1636		20.0
Total specified	6336		100	5336	8169		100
County not specified or discoverable	2642		868	1103			
<i>ii. Creditors</i>							
London ¹	930	67.6	49.1	1032	2034	73.8	57.1
Beds	70	5.1	3.7	50	68	2.5	1.9
Berks	20	1.5	1.1	22	37	1.3	1.0
Bucks	14	1.0	0.7	44	66	2.4	1.9
Essex	131	9.5	6.9	71	100	3.6	2.8
Herts	23	1.7	1.2	63	97	3.5	2.7
Kent	97	7.0	5.1	120	139	5.0	3.9
Middx ²	16	1.2	0.8	18	32	1.2	0.9
Nhants	25	1.8	1.3	75	93	3.4	2.6
Oxon	34	2.5	1.8	45	72	2.6	2.0
Surrey ²	16	1.2	0.8	11	18	0.7	0.5
Subtotal: metrop. counties	446	32.4	23.5	519	722	26.2	20.3
Subtotal: metrop. counties + London	1376	100	72.7	1551	2756	100	77.4
Devon	62		3.3	239	246		6.9
Staffs	30		1.6	60	70		2.0
Yorks	334		17.6	236	251		7.1
Counties 'out of sample'	92		4.9	163	237		6.7
Total specified	1894		100	2249	3560		100
County not specified or discoverable	2595			853	1076		

Table 4.2 continued

Counties	1424			1570			
	N. of debts	% of metrop. counties + London	% of total where county specified	N. of debts (dbase)	N. of debts (Roll) ³	% of metrop. counties + London	% of total where county specified
<i>iii. Debtors</i>							
London ¹	255	11.2	5.7	409	779	36.2	16.9
Beds	173	7.6	3.9	78	119	5.5	2.6
Berks	113	4.9	2.5	42	77	3.6	1.7
Bucks	129	5.6	2.9	57	83	3.9	1.8
Essex	500	21.9	11.3	142	218	10.1	4.7
Herts	121	5.3	2.7	99	160	7.4	3.5
Kent	488	21.4	11.0	242	311	14.5	6.7
Middx ²	95	4.2	2.1	42	72	3.3	1.6
Nhants	192	8.4	4.3	100	131	6.1	2.8
Oxon	132	5.8	3.0	77	124	5.8	2.7
Surrey ²	87	3.8	2.0	52	76	3.5	1.6
Subtotal: metrop. counties	2030	88.8	45.7	931	1371	63.8	29.7
Subtotal: metrop. counties + London	2285	100	51.4	1340	2150	100	46.6
Devon	327		7.4	355	372		8.1
Staffs	80		1.8	127	173		3.8
Yorks	924		20.8	428	515		11.2
Counties 'out of sample'	826		18.6	837	1399		30.4
Total specified	4442		100	3087	4609		100
County not specified or discoverable	47			15	27		

Source: CP40 database.

Notes: ¹ City plus the contiguous suburbs outside the City's jurisdiction. The place-names counted as suburbs are: Holborn, Shoreditch, (West) Smithfield, Southwark, St. Giles, St. John's Street, St. Mary Matfelon, Turnmill Street and Westminster in 1424; and Barnard's Inn, Clement's Inn, Clerkenwell, Clifford's Inn, Gray's Inn, Inner Temple, Lincoln's Inn, Middle Temple, New Inn, St. Clement (Danes), St. Giles, St. Giles outside Cripplegate, St Giles in the Fields, St. John's Street, St. Katharine, St. Martin in the Fields, St. Saviour, The Savoy, Southwark, Staple Inn, Strand, Thavie's Inn, and Westminster in 1570

² Excluding London suburbs

³ Estimated, by assuming that uncollected 'London' cases have same county breakdown as those in the database.

The contrasting cases of Devon and Yorkshire are instructive. Devon's share of debts to London halved, suggesting that its relatively buoyant economy became less associated with and dependent upon the city. That picture certainly fits with what we know from other sources of the growth of the Devon textile industry and Exeter's international trade at the end of the Middle Ages, and of Exeter's relative independence of London as a city engaged in overseas trade during the sixteenth century.¹⁶ The grain price evidence may also be relevant, since it suggests a close association between London and Exeter

¹⁶ W.T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540–1640* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1958 and 1975), pp. 165–6, 171; E.M. Carus-Wilson, *The Expansion of Exeter at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Exeter, 1963); W.R. Childs, 'Devon's overseas trade in the late Middle Ages' and J. Youngs with P.W. Cornford, 'Sea-faring and maritime trade in sixteenth-century Devon', in M. Duffy, S. Fisher, B. Greenhill, D.J. Starkey, and J. Youngs (eds.), *The New Maritime History of Devon* (Exeter, 1992), pp. 79–89 and 98–107.

TABLE 4.3
Counties of residence of debtors to Londoners, 1424 and 1570

Counties	1424			1570		
	N.	% of England and Wales		N.	% of England and Wales	
		Incl. London	Excl. London		Incl. London	Excl. London
Beds	18	2.0	2.2	14	1.4	1.9
Berks	28	3.1	3.5	17	1.7	2.3
Bucks	22	2.4	2.7	16	1.6	2.2
Cambs	22	2.4	2.7	7	0.7	1.0
Cheshire	4	0.4	0.5	15	1.5	2.1
Cornwall	15	1.7	1.9	5	0.5	0.7
Cumberland	2	0.2	0.2	1	0.1	0.1
Derbys	7	0.8	0.9	4	0.4	0.5
Devon	22	2.4	2.7	14	1.4	1.9
Dorset	12	1.3	1.5	11	1.1	1.5
Durham	0	0	0	3	0.3	0.4
Essex	82	9.0	10.2	36	3.5	4.9
Gloucs	35	3.9	4.4	19	1.9	2.6
Hants	25	2.8	3.2	26	2.5	3.6
Herefs	19	2.1	2.4	7	0.7	1.0
Herts	22	2.4	2.7	23	2.3	3.2
Hunts	10	1.1	1.2	3	0.3	0.4
Kent	93	10.3	11.6	46	4.5	6.3
Lancs	9	1.0	1.1	7	0.7	1.0
Leics	7	0.8	0.9	6	0.6	0.8
Lincs	27	3.0	3.4	41	4.0	5.6
London ¹	105	11.6	–	294	28.8	–
Middlesex ²	27	3.0	3.4	26	2.5	3.6
Nhants	29	3.2	3.6	16	1.6	2.2
Norfolk	32	3.5	4.0	33	3.2	4.5
Northumb	5	0.6	0.7	12	1.2	1.6
Notts	10	1.1	1.2	13	1.3	1.8
Oxon	14	1.5	1.7	19	1.9	2.6
Rutland	2	0.2	0.2	4	0.4	0.5
Salop	3	0.3	0.4	10	1.0	1.4
Somerset	14	1.5	1.7	34	3.3	4.7
Staffs	17	1.9	2.1	21	2.1	2.9
Suffolk	42	4.6	5.2	22	2.2	3.0
Surrey ²	12	1.3	1.5	17	1.7	2.3
Sussex	26	2.9	3.2	19	1.9	2.6
Warwicks	22	2.4	2.7	19	1.9	2.6
Westmorland	3	0.3	0.4	4	0.4	0.5
Wilts	19	2.1	2.4	43	4.2	5.9
Worcs	5	0.6	0.7	8	0.8	1.1
Yorks	34	3.7	4.2	55	5.4	7.6
Wales	5	0.6	0.7	32	3.2	4.5
Total	907	100	100	1022	100	100

Source: CP40 database.

Note: ¹ City and suburbs. For the suburbs, see Table 4.2 n.1.

² Non-metropolitan, i.e. excluding London suburbs.

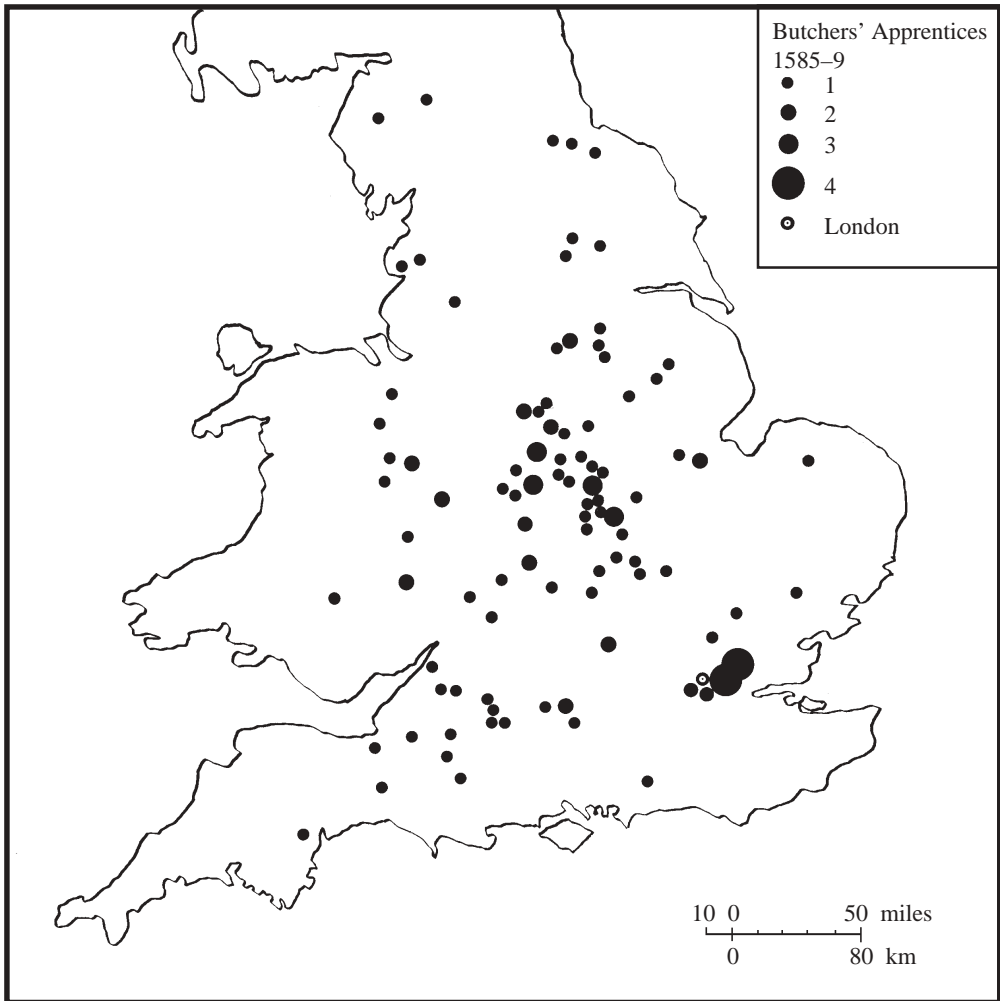


Fig. 4.3. Places of origin of London butchers' apprentices, 1585-9

markets in the early fourteenth century which subsequently diminished. Moreover, the marked decline in grain price volatility at Exeter in the fifteenth century may well reflect the increasing strength and articulation of the local economy.¹⁷ Yorkshire, on the other hand, between 1424 and 1570 experienced an increase in indebtedness to London despite the fall in its share of debts overall: its sluggish business seems to have been associated with a growing dependence on London credit and trade. Increases in the share of debts due from certain Midland and Northern counties may indicate an extension of London's influence in those areas, perhaps in particular associated with its growing consumption of coal (cf. Durham, Northumberland) and with the livestock trade which increasingly focused on the capital (cf. Cheshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, and Staffordshire), but we cannot compare this change with any indication of the trends in the overall level of business in these counties, except in the case of Staffordshire, where it certainly increased. The significance of the London livestock

¹⁷ See above, pp. 39-41

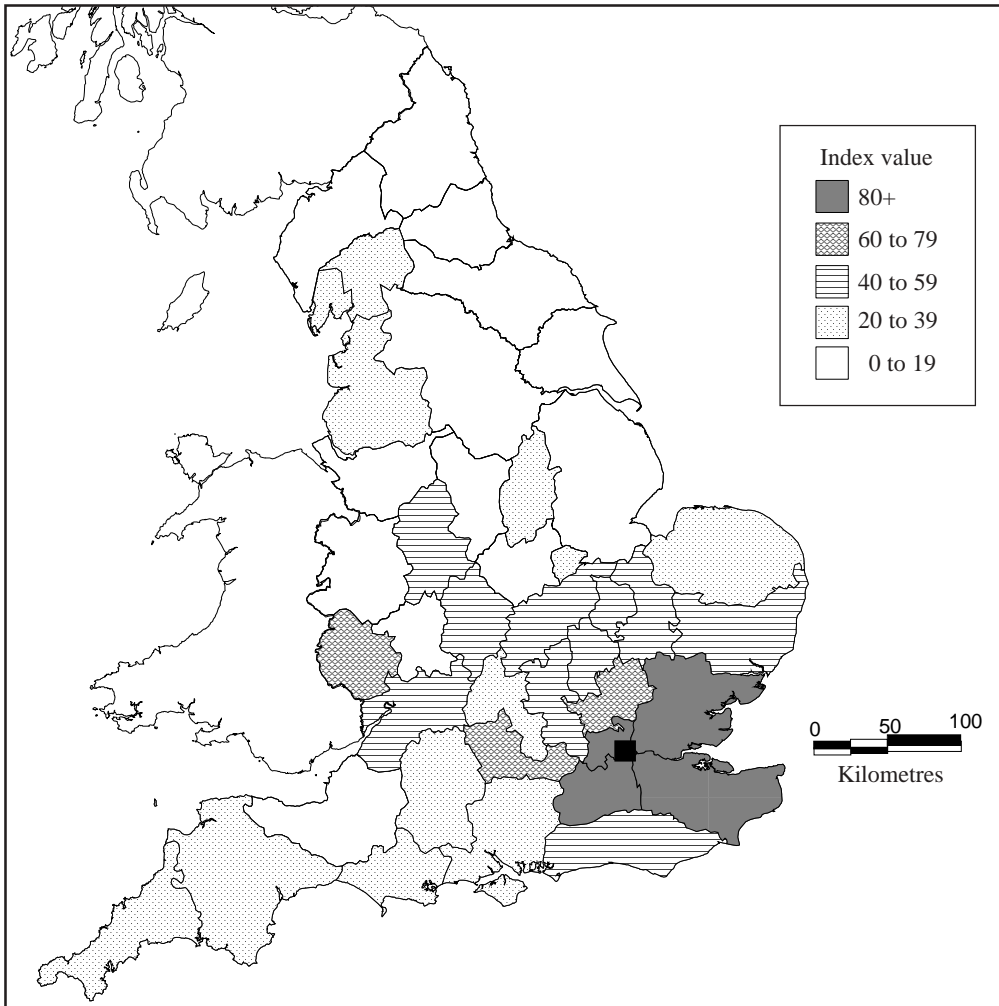


Fig. 4.4. Debts owed to Londoners in 1424, adjusted for estimated county populations. *Source:* Common Pleas database. Population figures are derived from the Poll Tax of 1377: C. Fenwick (ed.), *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1381*, Records of Social and Economic History, new series 27 (Oxford, 1998). Numbers of debts per county have been indexed against the maximum non-metropolitan county value: Essex=100; Middlesex=212. For base map, see Fig. 2.1.

trade for these counties, however, is certainly indicated by the distribution of the places of origin of the London butchers' apprentices, which suggest a strong association between the metropolitan cattle market and local markets in the Midlands and some western areas (Fig. 4.3). The coal and cattle trades, arising from London's growing demand, would not directly promote the indebtedness of these counties to London, but presumably prompted a reciprocal supply of goods and credit which is reflected in the number of pleas of debt. The similar increases in the shares of debt due to Londoners from residents in Somerset and Wiltshire may also have connections with the livestock trade, although an alternative, or further explanation is likely to be provided by their textile industries, for which London served as an important market. The Somerset and Wiltshire industries were at a relatively low point in 1570, but had nevertheless grown

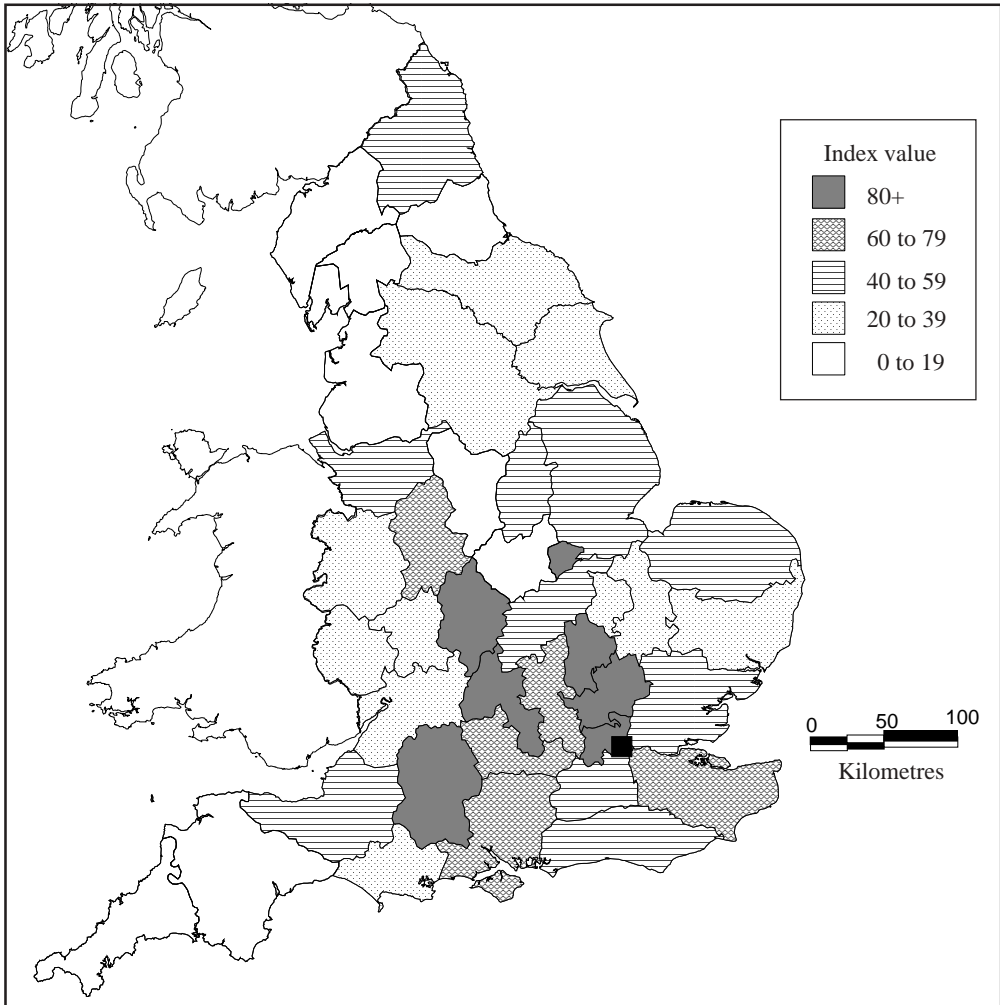


Fig. 4.5. Debts owed to Londoners in 1570, adjusted for estimated county populations. *Source:* Common Pleas database. Population figures are derived from Rickman's 'back-projected' totals for 1570, with values interpolated from 1600 where necessary: *Parliamentary Papers 1843*, XXII, *Census of 1841*, 'Enumeration Abstract', pp. 36–7. Numbers of debts per county have been indexed against the maximum non-metropolitan county value: Rutland=100; Middlesex=308. For the base map, see Fig. 2.1.

substantially since 1424.¹⁸ In so far as the debts represent London's role as a force in the national economy, they seem to indicate a shift between 1424 and 1570 from close engagement with the counties of the South East, especially those lying towards the Low Countries, to a pattern of more extended linkages with interior counties to the north and west of London. This development, certainly a form of integration, is clearly indicated by mapping the county totals of debts to Londoners adjusted for estimated county populations at the two dates (Figs 4.4 and 4.5). The change is in marked contrast to the shift in the concentration of population and wealth towards the South East which

¹⁸ G.D. Ramsay, *The Wiltshire Woollen Industry of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* 2nd edn. (London, 1965); V.C.H. *Wiltshire* IV, pp. 115–47.

took place between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century,¹⁹ suggesting that within that region there was a movement of business into London itself and that for middling- and larger-scale transactions the more distant counties were becoming more important for Londoners than the counties close to the city. This perhaps represents a secondary stage in the long-term process by which London demands, markets and capital contributed towards the emergence of specialised industrial cultures in several English regions.²⁰

In most cases which came before the Court of Common Pleas one or both of the parties seem, to judge from their status or occupation, to have depended primarily upon the land for their income.²¹ The members of this 'landed interest'²² were involved in transactions of a commercial character, concerning the supply of rural produce or the purchase of imported or manufactured goods, as well as unspecified credit transactions (see Appendix 1). In many cases, the nature of their transactions is not recorded, but at the present level of analysis the landed group forms a useful category to distinguish from those whose primary interest seems to have been in commerce or manufacture. A provisional count indicates that in 1424, in 69 per cent of counties where a reasonable calculation can be made,²³ half or more of the debts to Londoners (other county or regional groups of creditors have yet to be explored) were owed by residents primarily with a landed interest. The proportion with a commercial or craft interest was highest among the debtors resident in London, at about 84 per cent. Other debtor groups containing high proportions in the commercial and craft category in 1424 (between 62 and 80 per cent) were those resident in Devon, Surrey, Sussex, Warwickshire, and Wiltshire. By 1570, when as a result of the rise of agrarian land values the landed group enjoyed higher real incomes than in 1424, the proportion of debts owed to Londoners by those associated with the land had increased from 51 to 64 per cent, and the proportion of counties where such debts represented more than half the total had risen to 83 per cent. Areas where the proportional increase in landed debtors was high were Bedfordshire, Essex, Kent, London, Surrey, Sussex, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and probably Wales.

Except in Wiltshire, this development was accompanied by a fall in the number of trades or crafts practised by the debtors. This was especially marked in Bedfordshire, Essex, Kent, and Surrey, where the numbers of recorded trades fell from 8 to 1, 18 to 3, 18 to 6 and 9 to 2, respectively. Presumably these areas had lost specialised commerce and manufactures to London and elsewhere, while their economic role in relation to the capital had become more exclusively that of suppliers of primary agrarian produce. We know from other evidence that London had enhanced its roles as an importer of manufactured goods from overseas and as a distributor of them to the internal market,²⁴

¹⁹ R.S. Schofield, 'The geographical distribution of wealth in England, 1334–1649', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 18 (1965), pp. 483–510.

²⁰ cf. Keene, 'Small towns and the metropolis'.

²¹ The following discussion is based on provisional statistics.

²² i.e. clergy, peers, knights, esquires, gentlemen, yeomen and husbandmen.

²³ Counting Wales as a county for this purpose, and excluding counties where the sample contains fewer than ten debts to Londoners.

²⁴ H.S. Cobb (ed.), *The Overseas Trade of London: Exchequer Customs Accounts, 1480–1* (London Record Society 27, 1990), pp. xxxiii–xliii; cf. B. Dietz (ed.), *The Port and Trade of Early Elizabethan London: Documents* (London Record Society, 8, 1972).

and that presumably undermined manufactures in London's hinterland. In London itself the total of trades recorded among the debtors rose between 1424 and 1570 from 28 to 35, emphasising the dramatic growth of London as a centre of consumption, manufactures and services. The increasing role of 'gentlemen' resident in London as debtors to Londoners provides a further illustration of this development. In 1424 they owed 7 per cent of the debts due from Londoners and in 1570 36 per cent. People identified as 'gentlemen' increased greatly in number during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with developments in rural landholding and incomes. Many of those gentlemen resorted to London, especially in early manhood for training in the law.²⁵ In Middlesex in 1570, for example, gentlemen owed 52 per cent of the debts due to Londoners, and almost all of those gentlemen debtors resided in those western suburbs of London associated with the law and with the social attractions of the court. Gentlemen also provided credit, for in 1570 they were the second most numerous group among creditors resident in London, rivalling the members of the Merchant Tailors' Company and well ahead of the Clothworkers. It seems likely that following the dissolution of the religious houses lay landlords succeeded some ecclesiastics in providing loans.²⁶ Moreover, London was perhaps increasingly the place from which all those with a landed interest managed their affairs. They presumably did that either as landowners themselves or as lawyers or agents acting on behalf of others, although the variety of ways in which that could be done is imperfectly revealed at this level of analysis.²⁷ At York, the city for which we have the next most useful body of data on the matter, gentlemen similarly became more significant as both debtors and creditors, but to a much less marked degree.

In this context, those counties where the proportion of 'landed' debtors to Londoners fell and where the diversity of occupations among the debtors increased have a special interest as likely areas of commercial and manufacturing growth. They include distant counties such as Lancashire and Northumberland which were apparently becoming more commercialised both locally and in their contacts with London, and Somerset, where, to judge from the occupations of debtors, the local capmaking and clothmaking industries brought the area into a closer relationship with London. In 1424 the most occupationally diverse areas after London, as revealed by the occupations of debtors to Londoners, were Essex, Kent, Surrey and Sussex. In 1570 they were the more distant counties of Norfolk and Somerset, again suggesting London's increasing engagement with craft production beyond the immediate vicinity of the capital.

These changes can also be explored at the level of individual towns. Thus among debtors to Londoners in 1424, those from Canterbury, Salisbury and Sandwich had the greatest diversity of occupations, although with no more than five separate trades recorded for each. Those from the first two towns included dyers, weavers and other manufacturing craftsmen, while the debtors from Sandwich had a more purely mercantile character. In Essex in 1424 occupational diversity seems to have been a feature of debtors to Londoners

²⁵ W.R. Prest, *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts, 1590–1640* (London, 1972), pp. 6–7, 21–46.

²⁶ cf. Kermode, 'Medieval indebtedness'.

²⁷ For a revealing account of the way in which at a later date a young member of a landed family used London as a base for both family business and trade, see S. Whyman, 'Land and trade revisited: the case of John Verney, London merchant and baronet', *The London Journal*, 22 (1997), pp. 16–32.

TABLE 4.4
Debts owed by chapmen, 1424 and 1570

Year	Mean size of debts owed by chapmen (£)		Mean size of all debts (£)
	all debts	debts to Londoners	
A. 1424	7.09	6.60	8.91 ²
B. 1570	22.35	24.17	30.92
C. 1570 at 1424 prices ¹	8.87	9.57	12.27
C as % of A	125	145	138

Source: CP40 database.

Notes: ¹ Using the mean values of the composite commodity index for 1420–4 (101) and 1566–7 (255); E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins, 'Seven centuries of the prices of consumable, compared with builders' wages-rates' in E.M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Essays in Economic History*, volume two (London, 1962), pp. 179–96.

² Omits three large 'outliers', each of 1000 marks or more.

from the smaller settlements, sometimes described by historians as 'industrial villages', rather than the principal towns such as Colchester. This pattern of occupational diversity had also been a characteristic of the county in the early fourteenth century, but since the Essex cloth-making villages seem no longer to have prospered by the early fifteenth century it may be that London creditors' interests in craft production in that county bypassed Colchester, its principal cloth market, and focused on other trades.²⁸ In 1570 debtors from Norwich and Newcastle were occupationally the most diverse, while those from Canterbury, Salisbury and York had become markedly less so. These characteristics seem representative of all debtors in these towns, and not just of those in debt to Londoners, but that topic remains to be more fully explored, along with the detailed occupational profiles of place, where sufficient cases are available.

One of the most distinctive expressions of London's role in a national network of distributive trade in luxury (or semi-luxury) and imported goods²⁹ was the frequency with which London merchants (predominantly mercers and grocers in 1424, but from a much wider range of city companies in 1570) claimed debts from provincial chapmen. The term chapman — the Old English word for merchant — is of great interest in itself, for it denoted not only the itinerant pedlar but also the local trader of some standing, who often obtained his supplies from dealers in London, carrying country products such as cloth or hides to London in exchange.³⁰ It seems that men who in their home districts would be recognised as merchants or mercers would sometimes be deemed chapmen by Londoners on account of their subordinate status. In the 1420s men from Ipswich, Maldon, and Newport Pagnell described as 'mercens [or merchants] or chapmen', for example, were in debt to London mercers and other city merchants.³¹ The scale of the chapmen's

²⁸ Keene, 'Small towns'; R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 14, 79–85.

²⁹ S. Thrupp, 'The Grocers of London, a study in distributive trade', in E. Power and M.M. Postan (eds.), *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1933), pp. 247–92; P. Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: the Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000–1485* (New Haven and London, 1995), passim.

³⁰ Thrupp, 'Grocers'; Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, pp. 366–8; D.G. Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: the City of Wells in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 92–3.

³¹ *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1422–9*, pp. 148, 308, 510. D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 320–1.

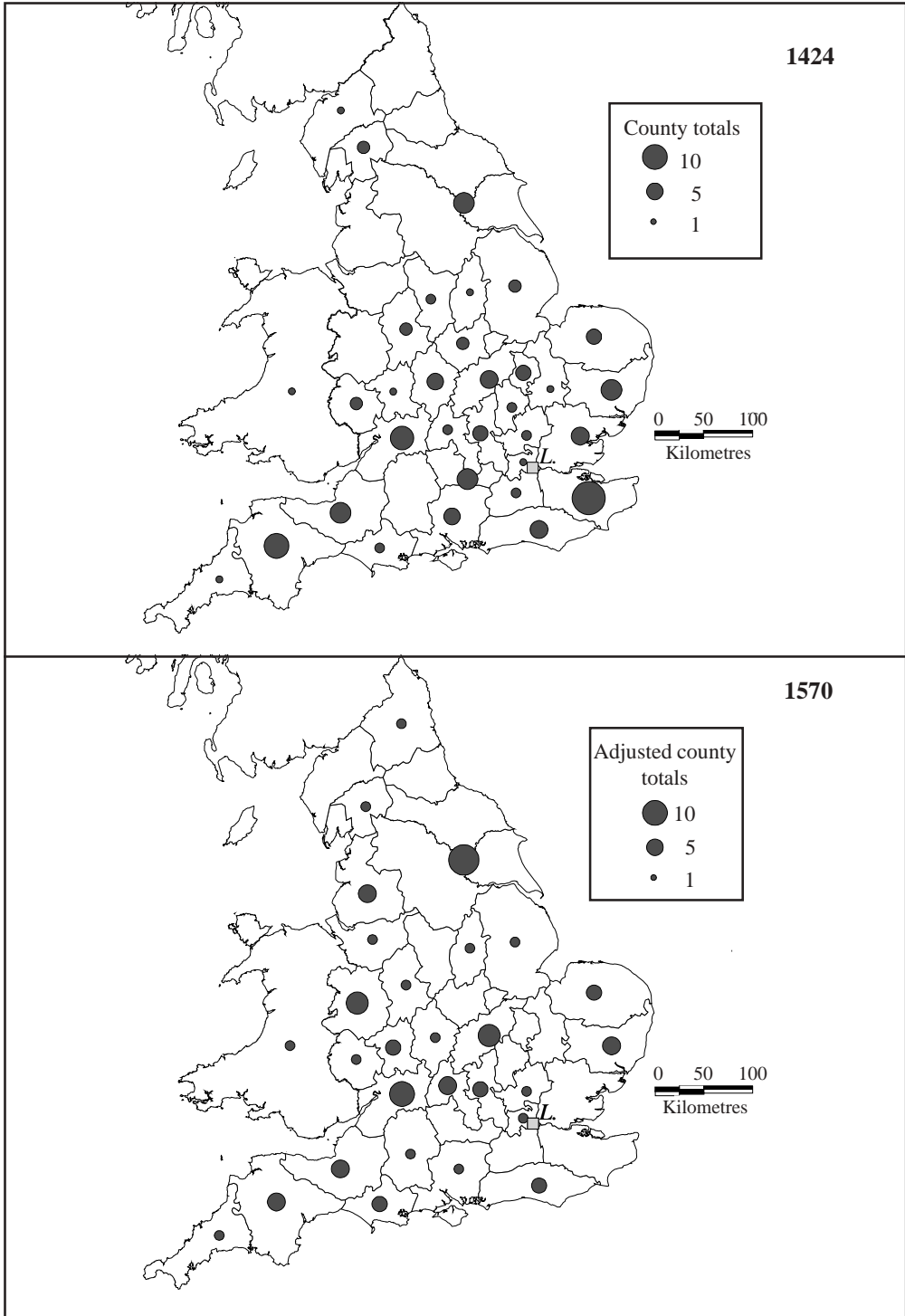


Fig. 4.6. Chapmen indebted to Londoners: county totals, 1424 and 1570.

Source: Common Pleas database. In order to make the 1570 totals directly comparable with those for 1424, they have been adjusted according to the principles described in Appendix 2. For the base maps, see Fig. 2.1.

operations is evident from the size of their debts. Chapmen owed to Londoners sums as large as £40 in 1424, and £200 (£79.37 in 1424 values) in 1570, while over the period the mean size of their debts to Londoners rose by 45 per cent in real terms, much more than the means for all debts owed by chapmen and for all debts in the database (Table 4.4). Thus chapmen supplied by Londoners substantially increased the scale of their operations, a clear indication of the growing importance of the metropolitan distributive trade. In 1424 chapmen in debt to Londoners resided in all but seven counties, most of which were distant from London (Cheshire, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Rutland, Shropshire, and Wiltshire). The greatest numbers of chapmen dealing with London were to be found in Devon, Gloucestershire, Kent, Somerset, Suffolk and Yorkshire (Fig. 4.6). In the 1570 sample, chapmen in debt to Londoners had disappeared from twelve counties, almost all close to London; they underwent a relative decline in numbers in three counties, including Devon; and they appeared for the first time in four distant counties and in Wiltshire. There is a strong correlation between these changes and the changes in the counties' shares of all debts to Londoners outlined earlier. The greatest numbers of chapmen dealing with London were now to be found in Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, and Yorkshire. In Shropshire, where they had been absent in 1424, they were responsible for over a third of debts to Londoners in 1570; but in Devon, where they had been responsible for 45 per cent of debts to Londoners in 1424, their share had more than halved by 1570. The activities of the chapmen thus reinforce other indications of strengthening commercial links between London and distant counties such as Shropshire, Cheshire and Northumberland; of a relative increase in the dependency of Yorkshire on London; of an increase in Devon's economic independence of London; and of a major change in the distributive system for goods in the counties close to London, where direct purchasing in the metropolis may have been replacing the operations of chapmen working through a hierarchy of local markets.

The debts also reveal Londoners' role in supplying goods and/or credit to provincial industry. In 1424 they supplied cloth finishers in Essex, Kent, Northampton, Coventry and Salisbury. By 1570 they had ceased to do so, although new provincial developments in the textile industry are apparent in their contacts with a Witney dyer, weavers, clothiers and cappers in Somerset, clothiers and a woad grower in Suffolk and clothiers in Halifax. Londoners seem to have had fewer interests in other provincial industries, although their strong connection with the Thaxted cutlery industry is apparent in the 1424 sample, and the decay of that trade is evident in its apparent absence from the 1570 sample.³²

At this level of analysis, the debts are not especially revealing on the supply of foodstuffs to London. Occupational terms associated with debtors and creditors in 1424, however, suggest the supply of cattle from Essex and Sussex, indicated by debts owed to Londoners by drovers and debts owed by London butchers; of fish by rapid overland transport from Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, indicated by debts owed to Londoners by ripiers; and of malt or barley from Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, indicated by debts owed by and to London brewers. So far as it goes, this evidence does not indicate major changes by 1570, when Essex, Suffolk, Kent and Bedfordshire are apparent as suppliers of cattle, Sussex of fish, Hertfordshire of malt, and Kent of

³² For London and the Thaxted cutlery industry, see Keene, 'Small towns'.

supplies for beer-brewing. A Staffordshire chapman in debt to a London gentleman in 1570 was also described as a drover, suggesting that London's supply networks could also serve to promote its distributive trade.

Several of the themes identified so far can also be explored by focusing on provincial towns and their hinterlands. The York plaintiffs in 1424, for example, resembled their London counterparts in significant ways, although their interests were much less extensive, being confined to Yorkshire and five other northern counties. At that time York was clearly a dynamic regional centre, supplying chapmen in three counties and materials and credit to the Westmoreland as well as to the Yorkshire textile industry. In 1570 York was in a much weaker position. Its northern connections were less extensive than in 1424, and its plaintiffs had more contacts in the direction of London. York merchants no longer supplied chapmen in its hinterland; the chapmen active in Yorkshire now did business with men of Beverley, Rotherham and Wakefield, but above all with Londoners. In the growing West Riding textile town of Halifax, which had its own chapmen and whose cloth had an established place in London markets,³³ London creditors outnumbered those from Yorkshire and there were none from York itself. The debts reveal Hull to have become a more significant regional centre of commerce than York. Exeter's experience was almost exactly the reverse of York's. In 1424 Exeter creditors' interests extended throughout Devon and into the adjacent counties of Somerset and Cornwall, but did not include dealings with chapmen. At that time the chapmen of the south-west were supplied directly from London. By 1570 Exeter creditors had extended their operations to Dorset and Kent, while in Devon itself, by contrast with the situation in 1424, their debtors were notable for a diversity of manufacturing interests, including textiles. One Exeter merchant in 1570 supplied a chapman in Cornwall and, as we have seen, the role of Londoners in the distributive trade of the region had diminished.

The characteristics of the debtors resident in provincial towns are equally revealing. The number of trades represented among the York defendants fell from thirty-nine in 1424 (when it exceeded the total for London) to five in 1570. In Exeter the comparable figure remained constant at seven. The proportion of defendants dwelling in York who were in debt to Londoners rose from 6 per cent in 1424 to 15 per cent in 1570, while at Exeter the comparable proportions were 18 per cent for 1424 and 14 per cent for 1570. Similarly, the proportion of 'landed' debts at Exeter fell from 35 per cent in 1424 to 21 per cent in 1570, while at York it rose from 15 to 46 per cent, suggesting, as do other aspects of the data, that while York declined as a commercial and manufacturing city its relative significance as a social and political centre for its region increased. Canterbury also experienced marked increases in its proportions of 'landed' debtors and London creditors. By contrast, Exeter and its hinterland showed signs of commercial and manufacturing growth and increasing independence of London.

Comparison of the top ten towns at the two dates, in terms both of total numbers of debts owed by their residents and of those debts that they owed to Londoners (Table 4.5), summarises key aspects of these changes in regional economies and in the strength of

³³ H. Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries from Earliest Times up to the Industrial Revolution* 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1965), pp. 68–88, 146–8.

TABLE 4.5
Total of debts owed by the residents of the top ten towns, 1424 and 1570

All debts owed by residents:				Debts owed to Londoners:			
1424		1570		1424		1570	
Town	N.	Town	N.	Town	N.	Town	N.
London & suburbs	255	London & suburbs	779	London & suburbs	105	London & suburbs	585
York	140	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	22	Coventry	13	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	18
Canterbury	34	Oxford	21	Salisbury	12	Norwich	18
Beverley	32	Norwich	20	Sandwich	11	Coventry	13
Maidstone	30	Lichfield	19	Canterbury	10	Bristol	12
Hull	29	Canterbury	18	Maidstone	10	Lincoln	12
Northampton	29	York	18	York	9	Chichester	10
Chelmsford	28	Bristol	17	Gloucester	8	Lichfield	10
Colchester	28	Coventry	17	Bristol	7	Reading	10
Abingdon	25	Northampton	17	Northampton	7	Chester	9

Source: CP40 database.

Note: All totals adjusted, allocating 1570 residences in the uncollected 'London' cases in proportion to those found in the database; see Appendix 2.

their association with London. Measures by all debts owed will favour towns in the fourteen counties sampled. With that in mind, the rise to prominence by both measures of Newcastle upon Tyne, which was not in the counties sampled, is especially notable. London's contacts with Newcastle became especially close, presumably on account of the coal trade which developed with the rapid growth of the metropolis, although that trade is not apparent from the stated occupations of the parties to the cases. The rise of Norwich and Bristol, again by both measures, is also notable. York, Coventry, Salisbury, Northampton, Canterbury, Maidstone, Sandwich, Chelmsford and Colchester all lost ground. The last five of these cases may reflect a general drift of business to London in the counties of its immediate hinterland, although within the same radius of the capital Reading certainly rose to some prominence, presumably as a textile centre and as a market supplying food to London. Overall there seems to have been a relative growth of contacts between London and distant commercial centres in parts of northern and eastern England, indicating a strengthening of certain long-distance trading networks, both coastal and inland.

Conclusion

Several of these depictions of regional development and contacts with London, and their implications for the fortunes of provincial towns, are not new. Their significance is that they indicate the robustness of the dataset for drawing such conclusions, along with its utility for characterising regions where little other evidence is accessible and for making systematic comparisons over space and time. The broad similarity of the conclusions which emerge from examining the data from several points of view, also lends confidence to this approach.

The material seems to be particularly revealing on the different types of relationship between London and the regions and on the changes which took place in them over the

period. Yorkshire, Devon, and the counties within London's immediate hinterland exemplify three different patterns of change. A concentric model suggests itself in which London became increasingly dominant, and in which provincial towns and regions could gain or lose influence either by virtue of their connections to the metropolis or through factors which seem not directly to have been driven by London. Thus York was to some degree undermined by London, but the West Riding clothing industry profited from direct contacts with Londoners. Newcastle clearly benefited from London trade. On the other hand, Exeter's prosperity, modest though it was by comparison with growth at London and Newcastle, seems to have been largely independent of the capital, and probably arose from the interaction between the particular resources of its region, including textiles and fish, and its geographical advantage over London for trade with Normandy, Brittany, Gascony and Spain. By the seventeenth century Exeter merchants were even establishing an independent position in the Low Countries. The Common Pleas cases, however, probably underestimate the degree of commercial contact between Devon and London, for some Devon merchants, like John Greneway 'of Tiverton' also achieved prominence as citizens of London, where they conducted a substantial part of their trade, and so would probably appear in the Court of Common Pleas as Londoners. Moreover, we know that much of the linen imported through Exeter, which sharply increased in quantity from 1480 onwards, was sent overland to London. Exeter, however, did not become an outport of London, in the way that Southampton did. These contrasting changes presumably had different impacts on tendencies towards, or away from, market integration within England and Wales, and a future aim is to see whether such effects are apparent in the data on grain prices.

As analysed so far, the debt cases are more revealing of changes in distributive trade emanating from London and other centres, in the financing of manufactures, and in what we might broadly characterise as 'gentry consumption', than of any more general trends towards, or away from, economic integration. In particular, any detailed picture that the cases may provide on the trades in basic bulk commodities such as cattle, corn and fuel has yet to be revealed, although changes in the geographic spread of the debts as a whole are themselves certainly suggestive. A more concrete picture is likely to emerge from examining the detailed cases in relation to the sort of overviews presented in this paper, from fuller exploration of the values of debts by occupational and other categories, and by mapping the data on a point as well as a county basis, exercises which have yet to be completed.

APPENDIX 1

Sample records of debt from the Court of Common Pleas

A. Michaelmas term 1424

1. 'Uninformative'

[Case laid in] Middlesex: [plaintiff] Peter Tillull *versus* [defendant] Richard Swynburn, merchant, of Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland, [debt of] £8.

Note: a very few cases lack details for both parties.

2. 'Full'

London: Robert Strode, citizen and mercer of London, v. Thomas Ballard, chapman, of Alfold, Surrey, £2. 15s. 5d.

3. 'Detailed'

Kent: John Mille of Petworth, Sussex v. John Bedel, husbandman, of Charing, Kent, £20. By bond dated 5 Sept. 1423 Bedel was bound to pay the said sum by Christmas 1423. Bedel states that in accordance with the endorsement on the bond, he gave to Mille at Charing 16 q. of wheat, 20 q. of barley, 6 q. of beans, peas, and vetches, and 10 q. of great oats. Mille claims that he did not receive the grain.

B. Michaelmas term 1570

1. 'Full'

Yorks: Executor of Matthew Garbray, merchant of Beverley, Yorks, v. Hugh Atkinson, merchant of Barton upon Humber, Lincs, £40.

2. 'Details of payment'

London: Edward Holme, citizen and scrivener of London, v. Elizabeth Ratclyffe, widow of Elstow, Beds, £10. Debt of £5. 10s. incurred by bond at London 16 Sept 1568, to be repaid by instalments of 30s. at Christmas, Annunciation, Nat. St John, and Michaelmas following; £10 due in event of default.

3. 'Details of transaction'

London: Gilbert Thurston, citizen and salter of London, *versus* Laurence Baker, blacksmith of Stockbury, Kent, £10. 7s. In London on 24 May 1569 Baker agreed by bond to pay Thurston £6. 8s. 6d. by 1 August; on 6 June in London he bought from Thurston 3 chalders of sea-coal for 40s.; on 7 June he bought 4 cwt. of English iron for 38s., and on same day borrowed 6d.

4. 'Details of transaction'

London: William Mese, citizen and grocer of London, v. Alexander Anthony, yeoman of Stamford, Lincs, £6. 2s. 5d. In London on 1 March 1567 Anthony bought from Mese spices, almonds, turpentine, quicksilver, currants, dates, and sugar (full details given) for £10. 14s. 8d; on 6 July 1568 he purchased spices, currants, almonds and red lead for £10. 10s. 2d.; on 1 November in London he purchased currants, spices, sugar and rice for £5. 5s. 7d; a total of £26. 10s. 5d., of which Anthony has paid £20. 7s. 8d. well and faithfully.

5. 'Details of transaction'

London: Anthony Pygott, citizen and clothworker of London, v. Michael Pepwell, chapman, of Bristol, £22. Being the balance owed on £32 owed for cloths bought in London on 6 July and 20 September 1568, viz. 2 pieces of linen called 'feane fustian', 12 pieces of 'moccade', 5 pieces of canvas, 2 pieces of linen called 'holmes' and other.

6. 'Details of transaction'

London: Paul Pope, citizen and engraver of London, v. Michael Sheppard, yeoman, of Willesden, Middlesex, £10. Being the penalty due on a bond made in London 24 August 1569, whereby Sheppard had undertaken to deliver to Pope's house in Fleet Street 4 q. of wheatmeal 'good, sweet and dry', in regular parcels of 2 bushels (dates specified), and further to deliver at or before 27 December following one turkey cock and one turkey hen, living, fat and 'in good lyking'; Pope claims that the terms were not honoured.

APPENDIX 2*Common Pleas collection and analysis*

For Michaelmas 1424, all cases laid in London and the 13 counties of the study area were collected. These cases were identified from the county names indicated in the margins of each membrane of the plea roll. Analysis of the database constructed from these cases is generally straightforward.

Constraints of time meant that it was not possible to be as comprehensive for the 1570 Michaelmas term roll. This necessitated some adjustment of data collection and analysis procedures, in order to make the two years comparable and to compensate for procedural changes which would otherwise distort the 1570 sample. For 1570, all cases laid in the 13 'territorial' counties were collected, but only a proportion of the 'London' cases, which by this date had come to dominate the record to a notable degree. In addition, cases laid in London but where both parties' stated residences lay outside the city or the study counties were systematically excluded, to counter the growing tendency of plaintiffs to lay in London cases which had no connection with the city, a major problem in 1570 but not discernably so in 1424 (see Brooks, *Vipers*, pp. 64–5). A counting exercise revealed that, after discounting duplicates, the 1570 roll contained 3,031 cases laid in London where one or both parties residence lay, or could reasonably be assumed to lie, in London or one of the study counties. Of these, 1,497 were collected and entered into the database (49.4 per cent). All statistics calculated from the 1570 database have therefore been adjusted by the appropriate factor to reflect the composition of the whole roll, on the working assumption that the breakdown of uncollected London cases is the same as that of the collected cases.

