Consumption conundrums unravelled

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Abstract

While consumption has moved to centre stage in accounts of Britain's industrialisation evidence on the mass transformation of homes and expenditure on novelty is hard to reconcile with the poor living standards experienced by many working people. Part of the conundrum arises from the limitations of available probate evidence but the motivational drivers behind raised consumption can also be questioned. Was it changed tastes or falling prices because of improved technology which prompted the purchase of new goods? Utilising evidence from an alternative source, property stolen through housebreaking and burglary as reported in the Old Bailey Papers and Proceedings for 1750-1821, we identify those goods that were commonly stolen as the fashion icons of their day, trace such goods back to their original owners, thus linking ownership and status, and through analysis over time show how consumption evolved. This analysis incorporates the influence of price and real incomes on ownership allowing the influence of price and fashion on consumption patterns to be separately identified. We find that, in addition to price and income effects, fashion had a strong influence, but this was not just emulation; differentiation too was evident. The evidence points to a complex interplay between desires and differentiation, aspiration and affordability in determining the goods people possessed.

Consumption conundrums unravelled[1]

Consumption has moved to centre stage in accounts of Britain's early industrialisation.[2] Some have seen exotic new goods and a desire to own them as prompting a surge in industriousness which culminated in economic growth.[3] Others have de-emphasised changes in tastes, instead seeing increased consumption alongside innovative production as a dynamic late eighteenth-century dyad: new goods, new methods of production and expanded employment opportunities creating a virtuous circle of spending and earning.[4] Rich and poor alike allegedly began to enjoy colonial groceries,[5] and more stylish clothing with labouring people said to "possess accoutrements of dress such as coloured stockings, gloves, buckled shoes …..and ribbon trimmed hats."[6] Domestic producers were not slow to imitate the oriental luxuries imported by the wealthy in an eighteenth-century version of import substitution. Witness Wedgwood's manufacture of copies of Etruscan pottery and earthenware products, the printed cottons derived from Indian chintzes, the Birmingham 'toys' that usurped imported ornamental brassware, the Axminster carpets that replaced Turkish rugs, and the fashionable 'japanned' objects that evolved from copies of Japanese lacquer ware.[7] Commonly used sources, probate inventories, which list the stock of moveable goods on death, trace the spread in ownership of household durables from the 1650s.[8] Homes were transformed with window curtains and superior furniture, as drawers replaced chests and comfortable feather mattresses primitive bolsters. [9] Clocks and mirrors aided time-keeping, appearance and light diffusion. Eating became a new experience as people substituted glasses and earthenware for pewter tankards and wooden platters and metal cutlery for their own fingers. New consumption opportunities imply a 'comfort revolution' too in the early modern period.

[1] We are grateful to the Ellen Macarthur Fund, University of Cambridge, for a grant which enabled much of the data inputting and to the anonymous referees whose detailed comments helped us to refine our arguments.
[2] For a detailed account of the historiography and current evidence see Horrell, 'Consumption'.
[3] De Vries, 'Between purchasing power'; *Industrious Revolution*.
[4] Berg, 'Imitation'; 'Pursuit'; McKendrick, 'Home demand'; 'Consumer revolution'; Berg and Bruland, *Technological Revolutions*.
[5] Shammas, *Preindustrial Consumer*.
[6] Clay, *Economic Expansion*, p.31.
[7] Berg, 'Imitation', 'Pursuit'.
[8] Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour*; Shammas, *Preindustrial Consumer*; Overton et al, *Production*; French, *Middle Sort*.
[9] Lemire, *Force*.

However, it is difficult to reconcile the alleged democratization of luxury with direct evidence of miserable living standards in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.[10] For example, working peoples' household budgets prioritised food expenditures, implying that few had surpluses to spend on household durables.[11] Some workers had insufficient resources to consume adequate calories,[12] heat their homes or clothe their children; there was nothing left to purchase fashion or enjoy more domestic comfort. Just how far down the social scale did the new goods and expanded consumption opportunities descend? Here there is a gap in our knowledge, for the literature on the consumer and industrious revolutions suffers from a relative scarcity of empirical documentation. It has relied either on aggregate level official data such as imports of colonial groceries, or highly disaggregate data from probate inventories, which, valuable as they are, pertain predominantly to the 'middling' sorts - tradesmen, artisans, small farmers and upwards – and become scarce after 1720.[13] But even on this evidence, the diffusion of new consumption goods was not geographically widespread until the middle of the eighteenth century. New goods radiated out from London[14] and the scant information we have on the possessions of labourers from a smattering of inventories shows Essex paupers and rural labourers in peripheral counties just beginning to share in the purported avalanche of tea-drinking paraphernalia, clocks, mirrors, knives, bed linen and candlesticks by 1800.[15]

A further question arises about the motivational drivers behind raised consumption. Changing tastes and a new acquisitiveness shaped by the advent of innovative commodities lie behind de Vries' 'industrious revolution', the industriousness part of which involved increased engagement of households with market activities. A more judicious interplay of innovation and income, prices and preferences features in the eighteenth-century 'consumer revolution'.[16] Indeed, some economic historians have been sceptical about the extent to which tastes could drive consumption, arguing instead that improved technology reduced costs so that increased consumption of new items was a passive (and standard) response to a price

[10] Horrell and Humphries, 'Old questions'; Feinstein, 'Pessimism perpetuated'.
[11] Horrell and Humphries, 'Old questions'; Horrell, 'Home demand'.
[12] Shammas,'Eighteenth-century English diet'; Floud et al, *Changing Body*.
[13] Cox and Cox, 'Probate'.
[14] Lemire, *Force*; Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour*; Shammas, *Preindustrial Consumer*; Overton et al, *Production*; French, *Middle Sort*.
[15] King, 'Pauper'; Sneath, 'Consumption'; Muldrew, *Food*.
[16] Berg, 'Imitation', 'Pursuit'; McKendrick, 'Home demand', 'Consumer revolution'; Berg and Bruland, *Technological Revolutions*.

stimulus.[17] This view is consistent with the long-term decline in the price of consumer durables found in probate inventories.[18]

Thus, consumption remains something of a conundrum. Did the majority of people, particularly labouring families, share in the expansion of consumption opportunities in the second half of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries? And, if so, was this driven by fashion-conscious preferences or declining prices?[19] To answer these questions new evidence is required, which links specific goods to the status of owners over time while controlling for changes in prices and incomes.

The Old Bailey Papers and Proceedings provide evidence which, with ingenuity and care, can be brought to bear on these issues. In particular, we identify goods that were commonly stolen as the fashion icons of their day, trace such goods back to their original owners thus linking consumption and status, and through analysis over time show how ownership evolved during the consumer revolution. Our approach develops those of Beverly Lemire, John Styles and Miles Lambert who have all used records of stolen property, triangulated by other sources, to provide accounts of plebeian dress, consumerism and the distributive trades in the eighteenth century.[20] Our questions and methodology are however rather different. We are interested not only in working people and their clothing but a broader array of social groups and their possessions and particularly in the pace at which particular goods percolated through the social hierarchy and we seek to quantify such trends over time.

Over the period we consider, 1750-1821, the Old Bailey covered all serious crimes committed in the City of London and the county of Middlesex, essentially the area north of the Thames, which accounted for 60 per cent of London's urban population in 1680 and more subsequently.[21] London was a fashionable centre whose extensive emporia showcased new goods.[22] If a consumer revolution was happening, it would have been etched into the capital's

[17] Mokyr, 'Demand vs supply'.
[18] Overton et al, *Production;* Shammas, *Preindustrial Consumer, pp.76-96.*
[19] We abstract from any analysis of the putative increase in industriousness that yielded the income with which to purchase these commodities, instead controlling for the level of income in our analyses. Voth, 'Time and work'; Allen and Weisdorf, 'Was there an 'industrious revolution?' and Muldrew, *Food*, consider this aspect of the Industrious Revolution debate.
[20] Styles, *Dress; Lemire 'Theft of clothes'; Lambert, 'Cast-off'..*
[21] Shoemaker, *Prosecution*, ch.1.
[22] Schwartz, 'London', p.648; Boulton, 'London', p.325.

crime statistics. Indeed, Henry Fielding, made London's Chief Magistrate in 1748, linked the "spirit of luxury travelling down through the social spectrum ... with the rise in crime."[23]

Our interest is in the composition of stolen property, for although not representative of the stock or flow of consumption, it does capture significant trends. Then, as now, swag reflects both the goods available in the premises of victims and the preferences of thieves. As *Social Trends* puts it:

"The nature of crime may change over time. Some crime, such as burglary, may stay the same in that it involves the breaking and entering of households and theft of goods, but the type of articles stolen in a burglary will change, reflecting amongst other things fashions, technological developments, and the desirability and availability of various household goods".[24]

Court records do not document ownership in the historic population, but they do indicate the extent to which particular goods had become popular and facilitate an analysis of their key characteristics. Moreover, it is not just the type of good stolen that these Old Bailey records list, the indictments also specify their value, and the material from which they were made, and most importantly from our perspective, from whom they were stolen, often stating the erstwhile owners' occupation or status. Uniquely, this data can be utilised to address our research questions. How far down the social scale did ownership of new consumption items drift? What was the chronology of any democratisation? And, what was the relative importance of prices and fashions in driving observed consumption patterns?

We start by describing the source and its suitability for our purpose before identifying some key trends. We then select some goods which were both frequently stolen and emblematic of novelty consumption, new materials and status aspiration to analyse trends in ownership and price. Initially we focus on items which have been well documented, money, silverware, watches and stockings, and then move on to less familiar goods particularly those associated with domestic comfort: feather beds, napkins, tablecloths and counterpanes.[25] These goods encapsulate the comfort revolution suggested by probate inventories and their spread enables

[23] Lemire, *Dress*, p.126.
[24] *Social Trends*, 2002, p.153.
[25] For more on goods and domestic interiors, see: Riello, 'Fabricating'; Shammas, 'The Domestic Environment; Nenadic, 'Middle-class consumers'; Ponsonby, *Stories*; Edwards, *Turning Houses.*

us to track this development through time and social class. The goods also embody aspects of new technology and materials as well as aspiration to respectability.[26] We conclude that eighteenth-century consumption was driven by a combination of price stimuli and fashion, but price did not always operate in the direction predicted by economic theory. Cheapness was one thing, but consumers, then as now, also sought quality and tried through ownership of elite goods to stand above the crowd.

I

We concentrate on thefts through housebreaking and burglary. Our rationale is twofold: indictments for these offences were less likely to have been affected by legal changes than other types of theft, and what was taken from people's houses suggests the range of goods owned and coveted. [27] We focus on thefts between 1750-1 and 1820-1. For each decade, a two-year period is taken to yield a reasonable sample size. The start date is chosen to identify consumption patterns in early industrialisation when existing probate evidence fades away. The end date is dictated by the discontinuities in classification and coverage that followed the restructuring of criminal law by Sir Robert Peel in the 1820s.[28] By the 1850s, the Old Bailey specialized in serious crime.[29]

Before proceeding we need to establish the suitability of the Old Bailey records as an incidental commentary on consumption. Utilising extant sources to investigate issues unconnected with the purpose for which the data was originally collected is fraught with difficulty and the likelihood of inherent bias. Indeed the susceptibility of crime statistics to unrepresentativeness and mutability over time is widely known. Horrell, Humphries and Sneath attest to the records' validity as a source of information about the goods owned by different socio-economic groups.[30] Here we summarise their findings on key questions: first, were the cases documented in the Papers and Proceedings a reliable record of prosecutions or

[26] Other 'novel' and 'fashionable' goods, such as mahogany furniture and equipage for tea, would also have been of interest but the range of items stolen proved too heterogeneous to enable meaningful analysis. Items such as mirrors were only infrequently stolen in the years considered.

[27] For further detail on how changing definitions of crime influenced the Old Bailey records but left indictments for housebreaking and burglary relatively unchanged, see, Horrell et al, 'Cupidity', and references cited therein.

[28] Beattie, *Crime*, p.13.

[29] Non-violent theft, more than 80% of the Courts' business in the eighteenth century, was reduced to around 5% by the 1900s. www.oldbaileyonline.org

[30] Horrell et al, 'Cupidity'. The influence of economic factors, such as high bread prices and the dislocations associated with wartime, affected the number of thefts but had no systematic effect on the value of goods stolen.

were they a biased sample? Second, did prosecutions provide a reliable record of thefts or were they a biased sample? Third, were goods stolen broadly representative of availability and attractiveness or were they selected according to specific characteristics, such as portability?

Cases detailed in the Old Bailey Papers and Proceedings have an undeniable London bias. This is unproblematic for our purpose as if a consumer revolution was happening anywhere it was here in the fashion-conscious metropolis. . Londoners were at the forefront of fashion and constantly exposed to new goods unavailable in many of the provinces. The source itself transformed from sensation-mongering chap books in the Elizabethan period to a complete and 'quasi-official' account of Old Bailey trials by 1729.[31] However, the reports sometimes descended into brief 'squib' accounts. While clearly unsuitable for analysing changes in legal procedures, even summary reports still specify what was stolen, its value and, often, the occupation of the original owner and so remain pertinent to our purposes.

More serious perhaps are the potential biases involved in the selection of thefts for prosecution. A crime was only recorded in the Proceedings when actually prosecuted. Many stages had to pass before this point was reached: a putative offence had to occur; the alleged perpetrator had to be caught and brought before a Justice of the Peace, a responsibility which fell to the injured party; and the magistrate had to determine the nature of the crime and the appropriate response. Only if the crime was deemed sufficiently serious was an indictment drawn up for the case to be heard by High Court circuit judges at an Assizes.[32] Often restitution, a whipping, or a stay in a House of Correction brought proceedings to a premature close. Fortunately for our purposes, magistrates in the City and Middlesex referred nearly all cases of theft in the capital to judges at the Old Bailey, ensuring a complete record of prosecuted property crime.[33] But the possibility that the goods reported in indictments may be biased towards ownership by people more able and willing to pursue prosecution remains. Detailed consideration of the factors affecting likelihood of apprehension, reimbursement of the costs of prosecution, probability of a guilty verdict and the public acceptability of the associated punishment, all of which changed over time, corroborates the view that by the

[31] Langbein, *Origins*, p.183; Beattie, *Policing*, p.24.
[32] Shoemaker, *Prosecution*; Beattie, *Crime.*
[33] Beattie, *Policing*, p.17.

mid-eighteenth century burglary victims of all classes were likely to pursue and prosecute. Indeed, by this time, ordinary people brought nearly half of all prosecutions.[34]

While the number of thefts prosecuted at the Old Bailey shows some correlation with economic circumstances, such as high grain prices and wartime demobilisation, these factors did not have any systematic effect on the value of stolen goods or the social class of injured parties.[35] It is harder to ascertain decisively whether thieves changed their targets to yield specific goods over time. However, the majority of thefts in the dataset involved clothing, household linen or valuables, items whose basic nature was unchanging, while, as shown in section II, there were no obvious trends over time in the social class of the owners of the stolen goods. Furthermore, the accounts of victims and witnesses make it clear that many thefts were committed by people known to erstwhile owners or were opportunistic rather than planned.

Finally, were stolen goods selected for their ease of onward sale and transportability?[36] The multifarious arrangements for the exchange of goods in early-modern London ranged from smart retail outlets to peddlers and hawkers who dealt in second hand. In between, there were street sellers, markets, dealers, pawnshops, auctions held in people's homes or in inns, and straightforward barter.[37] Clothing and cloth were the most frequent targets, thieves apparently motivated by a desire to look stylish, indeed they were often caught because they were besporting their booty! But clothing was also targeted for the ease with which it could be converted into cash or other commodities. The mass of people bought second-hand, clothes could be traded in against new purchases, and the ease of convertibility meant clothing functioned as an alternative currency.[38] Much of the trade involved dealers "flirting for profit with criminal contacts and illegal opportunities."[39] Other goods too circulated in this manner. There was a significant market for second-hand household goods, such as linen, china and furniture. Some shops sold both new and second-hand, often accepting old goods as a trade-in

[34] Shoemaker, *Prosecution*, introduction; Beattie, *Crime*, p.193. Woodward, 'Burglary', pp.63-4, finds over a third of prosecuted thefts in Wales were brought by those classified as unskilled or skilled workers.
[35] Horrell et al, 'Cupidity'. Beattie, *Crime*, pp.199-236; Hay, 'War'; and Shoemaker, *Prosecution*, also find a relationship between economic circumstances and the number of thefts prosecuted.
[36] Modern studies suggest that burglars target items which are portable and have high value-weight ratios, but alongside those which are difficult to identify and trace and that can be disposed of easily, see Wellsmith and Burrell, 'Influence'.
[37] Lemire, 'Plebian', 'Consumerism'.
[38] Lemire, *Dress*, pp.121-41.
[39] Lambert, 'Cast-off', p.1.

for new. As Henry Fielding opined, provided specialist receivers were not required, 'the thief is under no difficulty in turning them [the stolen goods] into money'.[40] Indeed, receivers were hardly in short supply, Patrick Colquhoun estimated there to be over 4000 operating in the metropolis in the late-eighteenth century.[41] There was ample opportunity to slip dishonestly-acquired goods of all sorts into the tangled web of formal and informal channels of exchange. Most people frequented some of the less formal outlets for some purchases and even the wealthy occasionally bought second-hand.[42]

Were thieves attracted to what was portable as well as desirable? Surprisingly perhaps London housebreakers and burglars in our period were not always limited to what was easily moved. Gangs of thieves, organised crime, and even opportunistic criminality could lead to whole houses being stripped. One victim reported how everything, including the curtains from his windows, had been removed, another how she was locked in her cellar by five men while they removed the entire contents of her shop.[43] Burglary particularly attracted professional thieves because of the promise of large rewards.[44] Beds, mattresses, desks and carpets all found their way from people's homes onto the resale market alongside smaller items such as clothing, household linen, jewellery and glassware. Mayhew's (only slightly later) accounts of housebreaking and burglary provide a vivid picture of thieves at work that is entirely consistent with the idea of a systematic sifting of property for it attractiveness and value. Thieves are described as well-equipped and organised, often starting on the top floor of premises and working their way through the building, pausing to force the servant's money box, readily evaluating plate and other valuables and calmly packing up large numbers of shirts and silk handkerchiefs.[45] The size of attractive booty was no deterrent: "Should the plunder be bulky, they will have a cart or cab, or a costermonger's barrow, ready on a given signal to carry it away".[46] Even if portability was an issue, it remained a roughly constant constraint through the period; goods that were hard to move in 1750 were also hard to move in 1820.

[40] Lemire, *Dress*, p.128.
[41] ibid, p,129
[42] Stobart, 'Clothes'.
[43] Beattie, *Crime*, p.163 n.52, p.164 n.53.
[44] Ibid, pp.161-7.
[45] Mayhew, *London Labour*, pp.366-73.
[46] Ibid, p.372.

To sum up, our claim is that stolen property, historically as today, reflects a subset of the goods that people owned selected at least in part by portability but also determined by what thieves wanted either for their own use or to sell on. Thus changes over time in the composition of stolen property captures shifts in both availability and desirability. The Old Bailey records can be used to map the process whereby novelties became first commonplace and then outmoded, and, if goods are matched to erstwhile owners, to trace the pace at which transitions in consumption filtered down the social hierarchy.

II

To construct the data set we select every case of housebreaking and burglary in the Old Bailey Papers and Proceedings for the years 1750-1, 1760-1, 1770-1, 1780-1, 1790-1, 1800-1, 1810-11, and 1820-1. This yields 780 instances of theft involving some 4600 goods. For each crime we record the date of the crime, details of the owner of the property – sex, status, occupation – and for each of the goods stolen we record the item, what it was made of and its value.[47] Every item listed in a burglary prosecution over each two year time period is recorded. By inspecting the data, we can identify patterns in the composition of swag which suggest what commodities were attractive and available at different points in time; in this way we avoid making *a priori* decisions about relevant consumption goods.

The accounts vary in the extent to which they detail the composition of stolen items. In the eighteenth century, descriptions were available for between three fifths and four fifths of all stolen items; by the 1820s, this had declined to just over ten per cent. Whether items were made of gold or silver or contained gem stones continued to be reported, but references to other metals and types of cloth became less common, perhaps because innovations in materials made specification more difficult or because the Proceedings became more compressed. [48]

Of particular interest in answering our research questions are the values attached to the stolen articles and what is known about the original owners. In each indictment, the value of the stolen property was reported as agreed between the owner and the court clerk. Invariably, these were second-hand values (representing both the current value and the price usually paid

[47] For thefts of multiple identical items we made only one record but noted the number taken.

[48] Styles, *Dress*, p.329 observes this change in reports of stolen clothing in the Old Bailey papers but continues to find materials stated in the Northern quarter sessions reports, supporting the latter explanation.

by the majority who purchased used goods) but they are not thought to involve any systematic bias. There was no obvious benefit to the claimant in either inflating or deflating the value, although the defendant may have preferred it reduced below the threshold above which the death penalty applied! Styles has shown that the values given for a wide range of clothing items in the Proceedings were similar to those recorded elsewhere.[49] Court valuations reflected the prices that thieves anticipated receiving and, indeed, may be better indications of the prices usually paid for goods than are the wholesale or institutional prices commonly cited by economic historians. Of the 4542 items stolen, only 423 had no specific value attached. [50]

In around half of all cases, the injured party was assigned a status or occupation. Occasionally, status might be a title (Duke, Earl), officer's rank (General, Captain) or, more frequently, Esquire, but the majority of descriptors relate to occupations. Over one hundred different occupations are listed, ranging from Keeper of State Papers, Alderman, solicitor, doctor and school master through warehouse keeper, goldsmith, watchmaker, pawnbroker, workhouse master, milliner and publican to farmer, innkeeper, miller, mason, coal merchant, barber, salesman, bricklayer and cow keeper. In 122 of the 780 cases, the victims of theft were women, but only 34 of these had an occupational descriptor. In general, the occupational titles appear to over-represent the trades/artisans section of society upwards, missing out many of the labouring poor. Probably, the Proceedings catered to its middle-class readership by reporting prominent cases more fully,[51] but the focus on housebreaking and burglary, thefts from people in their own homes, excludes lodging houses, where many poorer people lived. One way to check for any potential bias is to compare what was stolen from victims with known occupations with what was stolen from those without and the average valuations in both subsamples (table 1). The valuation given to the items stolen is considerably higher in cases where the owner's status was also recorded, suggesting a bias towards fuller reporting of thefts from the elite. However, including those of unknown occupation at the lower end of the social scale fails to improve the fit of regressions in subsequent analysis; this may not be surprising as many of the victims of theft who were not given an occupation were either apparently quite wealthy widows, or gentlemen with

[49] Styles, *Dress*, app. 2 t.17-19.
[50] Individual values were not attached to a large proportion of the items stolen in 1750-1 (69%) and 1760-1 (48%) but this reduced to less than 1% of items from 1780-1 onwards.
[51] For an account of this possible bias, see Shoemaker, 'Old Bailey Proceedings'.

numerous residences and a number of servants.[52] Indeed, the types of goods stolen were remarkably similar. Regardless of whether or not occupation was recorded, nearly one quarter of the items stolen can be classed as valuables (clocks, watches, silverware, jewellery, money) and around two fifths as clothing. Those with occupations known are slightly less likely to have lost household goods, linen, and furniture (14.6 per cent versus 19.0 per cent of items) and slightly more likely to have been robbed of cloth, foodstuffs, work materials and tools (12.5 per cent versus 5.7 per cent), possibly reflecting thefts related to trade. [53] This is reassuring. The Old Bailey proceedings may have provided more detail on ownership where victims were of a relatively high rank and some of these thefts involved goods of higher value but the range of goods stolen remained similar to those purloined in less noteworthy crimes.

To proceed further we need a way of analysing occupational structure. We use broad occupational categories to cluster the individual occupations given in the Old Bailey proceedings, and then rank the broader groups according to the CAMSIS occupational scale.[54] For instance, haberdasher and linen draper are categorised as non-food shopkeepers in our classification. These are given a score of 76 in the CAMSIS scale which ranks them above food shopkeepers who are given a score of 66. Albeit sometimes controversial, this scale provides a continuous historical rating for occupational status capturing economic as well as social distance, which is useful for our purpose as we are concerned to identify the movement of ownership through social groups which might reasonably be viewed as sharing similar within-group consumption patterns. Table 2 gives the occupational status classification devised with a sample of occupations in each and the corresponding range of CAMSIS ranks for all the occupations included.[55] Where women were given an occupational title, we have given them the ranking of the analogous male job. The occupational rankings

[52] Difference of means tests of the values of items stolen in each decade by whether occupation was known or unknown showed no significant differences.

[53] Comparing the goods stolen in London with those taken in rural Wales in a roughly similar time period, shows, consistent with the rural setting, Welsh burglars were more likely to take food, tools, and raw materials than their metropolitan counterparts, while clothing was stolen in both contexts, Woodward, 'Burglary', p.68.

[54] , Two historical versions of the CAMSIS scale have been constructed for Britain (see Prandy and Bottero, 'Social reproduction'), one for the period 1777-1865, and this has been used to develop an ordinal ranking of those occupations that occur in the Old Bailey records. The CAMSIS ratings of common occupant ions are shown at www.cj.ac.uk/socsci/CAMSIS/Data/BritainC19.html accessed 2 December 2003, and reproduced and discussed in Humphries, *Childhood*, pp. 121-3.

[55] There were 37 cases of theft where more than one owner appeared in the indictment, these were typically partners in a business although sometimes servants or lodgers. Each case was examined to ensure ownership of the stolen goods was correctly attributed.

may therefore err on the high side for women but this does not seem unreasonable.[56] It is crucial to our analysis to ensure that our sample of the victims of housebreaking and burglary does not change its overall occupational representation over time, and particularly that we are not oversampling those of higher status in the earlier decades. To check we conduct a number of statistical tests (table 3) which demonstrate reassuringly that although the mean status of victims varies somewhat there is no clear time trend.

III

To introduce our analysis we show how items stolen can track fashions. To do this, in addition to the data already collected, we have taken a further 322 instances of theft through housebreaking and burglary for the years 1680-1, 1690-1, 1700-1, 1710-11, 1720-1, 1730-1 and 1740-1. Unfortunately we were unable to incorporate these years into the full analysis as the earlier accounts do not record value, material or occupation systematically, nor is it until the mid-eighteenth century that prosecutions and reporting become complete. However, the earlier reports do illustrate trends (table 4). Amongst clothing items, we can see garments and accessories changing in popularity. Silver buckles, aprons and sleeves rose then fell according to the fashions of the day, wigs became outmoded, but trousers, jackets, drawers (underwear) and umbrellas became the designer attire of the early nineteenth century.[57] Household goods too show strong trends. Before 1750, tea-making paraphernalia (tongs, tea kettle, teapot, caddy, tea tray, tea board, tea) was not stolen on any scale. At this point probate inventories suggest that tea-drinking had become more widespread with people lower down the social scale imitating the leisurely ritual hitherto limited to the middling sorts. The appearance of tea-drinking equipment in the thieves' lexicon follows this chronology. Similarly, as pewter was superseded by china, earthenware and glass,[58] it also became less attractive or less available to thieves. In contrast, stationery, pencils, inkstands, books, games and musical instruments were stolen increasingly frequently, reflecting new desires associated with increased leisure or aspirational consumption. Curtains, however, were a perennial favourite. Window curtains had become ubiquitous in London before the mid-

[56] The female CAMSIS scale relates only to women's jobs and cannot easily be inserted into a male scale. But there is a substantive reason to link these women's occupations into the men's scale: husbands were the legal owners of marital property, they may have been the purchaser of the stolen item, and would likely have had an occupational rating above their wife's. Examples of female occupations are jeweller, publican, mantua maker, servant, washerwoman and coffee shop keeper.

[57] For a full analysis of these clothing trends see Styles, *Dress;* Horrell et al, 'Cupidity'.

[58] Muldrew, *Food*, p.195.

eighteenth century,[59] but were still novel to those from outside the metropolis. For instance, Benjamin Franklin, visiting London in 1758, sent his wife '56 yards of cotton, printed curiously from copper plates, a new invention to make bed and window curtains'.[60] These examples demonstrate that stolen items can track the move from the new and novel to the old and obsolete. We now return to the analysis of the data for the period 1750-1821 to resolve the debate about the relative roles of price and fashion in driving trends in consumption.

IV

Our question is whether the ownership of specific items; valuables, clothing and domestic comfort items; taken to exemplify the consumer revolution, became democratised, that is, owned by those further down the social hierarchy, over time, and, more specifically, whether the cause of democratization was affordability (declining price) or the emulation of fashion. To answer this question, item by item, we regress our index of the status of the legal owner on a time trend while controlling for the effects of price changes, variations in quality and any increases in average real wages.

The difficulty is to control for price trends and variations in quality. The court valuations given to stolen goods constitute two principle components – the price of a homogeneous article over time and variations in this price that may reflect quality. A trend in the price of the homogeneous good captures changes in technology and in the underlying cost of raw materials, an aspect we need to identify if we are to determine if affordability affected ownership. The second component of the court valuation is important because it may be that people of higher status owned higher quality or newer variants of an item. Thus, to determine the influence of cost-cutting changes we need to separate these effects. To do this we try to find alternative series that reflect the underlying price of the homogeneous good. In some cases this can be extracted from exogenous sources, for instance the market value of a gramme of silver,[61] in others we utilise information from elsewhere in the Old Bailey records to capture the value attributed to new variants of the stolen item, for instance cotton stockings taken by shoplifters. We give further detail on the series used to proxy prices as we proceed.

[59] Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, p.88 finds 62% of Londoners leaving curtains in probate inventories in 1725.
[60] Lemire, *Fashion's favourite*, p.109.
[61] This was kindly provided to us by N. Mayhew and A. Hotson from their ongoing project 'Sterling: the rise and fall of a currency', drawing on data from Gregory Clark based on Jastram, *Silver*, t.15 and app. C.

A relative value variable divides the court valuation attributed to the stolen item by the proxy price in each time period to capture the variation in quality of the items stolen.[62]

Having identified suitable proxy prices and calculated relative valuations we regress the occupational status of the former owner against a time trend, these variables, and the average real wage to capture any income effects.[63] Additional dummy variables are included for the material the item is made of where appropriate. More formally, for any good, j:

$$\text{Status of Owner}_j = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1(\text{time}) + \alpha_2(\text{price}_j) + \alpha_3(\text{relative value}_j) + \alpha_4(\text{real wages})$$

The time trend captures the influence of fashion on what is owned, and any tendency for our emblematic goods to percolate down through the social/occupational hierarchy over time. The research hypothesis is that $\alpha_1 < 0$, and, drawing on standard consumer theory, that $\alpha_2 > 0$ i.e. that lower prices would be associated with lower status owners, $\alpha_3 > 0$ i.e. that lower relative value would be associated with lower status owners, and $\alpha_4 < 0$, i.e. that lower wages would be associated with concentration of ownership in the upper echelons of the status distribution.

V

Initially we analyse thefts of money, silverware, watches and stockings. These items were frequently stolen throughout the period and were subject to 'fashions' and changes in material. Table 5 summarises the key statistics for these goods which are reassuringly consistent with *a priori* expectations. For example, the mean values of different types of theft are logically consistent: the mean value of money stolen in the form of notes exceeds that stolen as coins and both exceed the mean values of other types of stolen property; the mean value of stolen silk stockings exceeds the values of other types of stolen stockings. Similarly the average occupational statuses of original owners of different kinds of good are also consistent with historical priors: owners of notes had higher mean status than owners of coins, while the owners of silverware, a less functional valuable purchased for display

[62] For all the stolen goods we analyse we regress each of the average court valuation and the alternative price for each time period against a time trend. For the initial goods analysed, only the price of shoplifted silk stockings shows a discernible trend and this is upwards (coefficient 0.061, t-statistic 2.18). For domestic comfort goods the price of feathers per pound weight (0.004, t-statistic 4.86), the valuation given to beds (0.330, t-statistic 3.40) and the value of linen per yard (0.003, t-statistic 2.30) show significant upward trends.

[63] Average real wage for all workers is taken from Feinstein, 'Pessimism perpetuated', pp.652-3 for 1770-1821 and spliced with Clark, 'Long march', farm labourers' real wage for 1750-1 and 1760-1.

purposes, had higher statuses still. The average status of owners of watches, an aspirational but useful possession for working men, was in line with the mean for victims of cash theft but lower than for silverware. The mean status of owners of silk stocking was higher than for cotton, clearly signalling the quality/price difference that composition entailed. Although there would appear to be a shift towards all type of stocking being owned by those of higher status over time, neither chi-squared nor Mann-Whitney U-tests indicate any significant changes. While ownership of silk stockings likely identified the elite throughout our period, wealthy consumers also owned worsted and cotton and might have joined with working people in substituting cotton for worsted in the last decades of the eighteenth century. [64] To disentangle these possibilities we use regression analysis to control for price (own and some substitutes) and income effects. We now look more closely by product type and try to isolate trends in the status of owners from other factors which might disguise the relationship in the descriptive statistics.

Comparison of thefts of money with what is known from other sources supports our argument that the Old Bailey tracks trends in fashions and ownership. While burglars targeted coins throughout our period, by the 1800s, stolen money was as likely to be notes as coins. By 1820-1, coinage thefts were described in terms of the total loss rather than as earlier its composition of particular denominations.[65] These findings reflect changes in the monetary stock. In the earlier period, coinage was often in short supply and in a poor state, and so was supplemented by a variety of tokens issued by the Bank of England as well as by tradesmen. Foreign coins, for instance old French 12 and 24 sous also circulated alongside British coins. No wonder then that monies lost were described in all their heterogeneity! While bank notes were used prior to the Suspension (1797-1821) and credit notes had been developed during the eighteenth century, these tended to be for large denominations. The Suspension necessitated the issue of lower value notes which could then be tendered for smaller transactions and these circulated efficiently.[66] The regression results (table 6) revealed no clear differences in the amount of money stolen from those of different social classes but coins were taken from people further down the social scale over time and notes were more likely to be taken from such groups in periods when real wages were higher and proletarian

[64] Styles says that 'Silk stockings were confined to the wealthy but stockings made from worsted and cotton were common to rich and poor' see *Dress*, p.34, see also p.44, pp.91-2.

[65] For example, in 1750 Elizabeth Trussin was indicted for stealing "one penny, three moidores, one 36s. piece, one guinea, one half guinea", Old Bailey record reference number t17500912-7.

[66] Notes of less than £1 were banned in England and Wales in 1775 and those for less than £5 had to be made out for an individual and endorsed each time they changed hands from 1777. Weale, '1300 years'.

money holdings were not easily accommodated by the coinage. Figure 1 uses the results from the regression to illustrate democratization of coins.[67]

Another valuable, silverware, was a very popular target for burglars in the 1770s reflecting its kudos as an early modern consumption good. It was also one where the century saw changes in production that resulted in cheaper, perhaps inferior variants. In the late 1600s, silverware had been an expensive luxury good *par excellence*, additionally attractive because it could be easily converted into ready money.[68] However the invention of Sheffield plate in 1742 made plate very similar in appearance to solid silver so that after 1770 even runaways and rascals could apparently boast buckles made of silver, albeit plated silver, in place of the base metals they had worn earlier in the century. [69] As the price of silver decreased and cheaper forms became available, ownership became more widespread but silverware remained a relatively valuable possession, witness the care taken in listing it in the probate inventories of the middling sort. The regressions of thefts of silverware reflect these changes (table 6). [70] There was a visible drift of silverware down the social scale over time, as figure 1 illustrates, but this only incorporated groups from the upper echelons of the social and economic hierarchy. Moreover, as the positive and significant coefficient on relative value indicates, higher value probably solid silver items were taken from those of higher status. It was plated silver that democratised. Those lower down the social scale were becoming owners but of less valuable variants of silverware, 'populuxe' for the aspirant middling sort.[71] More surprisingly, trends in real wages were not related to changes in social status. For the other goods, higher real wages did enable those lower down the social scale to share in ownership, but in the case of silverware the relationship is the opposite. Good quality silverware did (as table 5 suggests) remain an elite good purchased for display and beyond the means of the labouring men whose wages feature in the real wage series, but why would higher real wages be associated with retrenchment in ownership, and lower real wages with newer groups being able to afford silver populuxe? Periods of prosperity might well have boosted the incomes of employers and professional men more than working-class wages and led individuals to increase the

[67] The figures capture significant time trends from the regressions, they utilise the regression coefficient and average occupational status for 1770 for each item.
[68] Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor*.
[69] Styles, *Dress*, p.88, p.93.
[70] Here we utilize the market price of silver per gramme in each decade to represent the underlying price of the stolen item and the relative value to reflect quality. The wide range of silverware taken, from teaspoons to tankards, thimbles to tureens, would allow the functional meaning of these items to be considered but this extends beyond our current scope. Instead we focus on ownership motivated by value and aspirational consumption.
[71] Fairchilds, 'Populuxe goods'.

ownership of items for show and ostentation to differentiate themselves from their peers. [72] Alternatively it might be that the desire for display was socially limited and as some historians have argued on the basis of the inventory evidence, when working people acquired extra disposable income they spent in on useful household goods not conspicuous consumption.[73]

Watches were a popular item for theft throughout the period. Although few gold watches were taken they tended to be from those of higher status and to be more expensive. Silver and metal watches were cheaper and more common. For watches it is hard to determine a homogeneous price because of the varied composition of their cases. However, there are numerous examples of watches being stolen by pickpockets in the Old Bailey records and we take the 64 instances of silver watches stolen in our sample years to calculate the average valuation given to silver timepieces. Relative value captures the variation about this price and we also include dummy variables for whether the burgled watch was made of gold or silver, where this is stated.[74] Unsurprisingly, silver watches were taken from those of lower status than were those made of gold or an unspecified material (table 6). Price and income impacted too, as the price of silver watches declined, more men of lower status owned them and this effect was enhanced by rising real wages, but the strongest effect on ownership was that of fashion. Watches permeated through the social scale over time (figure 1). Indeed, from 1750 onwards, most thefts of watches recorded in the Old Bailey were from men who might be considered plebeian reflecting the widespread ownership of timepieces in London.[75] Watches were decorative as well as sophisticated pieces of technology and signalled a degree of affluence as well as being a useful store of value which could be pawned in hard times.

For stockings different considerations pertain. Ownership of stockings was ubiquitous, all people wore stockings, what varied was the material from which they were made: predominantly silk, worsted and cotton. Variation in the quality of stockings is likely to be less pronounced than for the other items so far considered but they will have been worn more or less and court valuations would likely have reflected this. We therefore take prices of pairs

[72] Note Allen's building labourers' real wages 1780-1821 (www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/Allen accessed 8.11.13) show a strongly positive relationship with social status of owners of silverware, whereas building craftsmen's wages have no effect. Possibly those of carpenter status could not aspire to owning quality silverware and high wages for labourers (and thus servants) represented a cost to employers and inhibited the purchasing of silverware down the hierarchy.
[73] Fairchilds, 'Populuxe goods', p. 230.
[74] The material from which watches were made was imperfectly recorded so this only amounts to 4 and 10 cases respectively.
[75] Styles, *Dress*, pp.96-107.

of stockings made of different materials from another type of theft in the Old Bailey Papers and Proceedings – shoplifting. Shoplifted stockings were likely new and thus of uniform quality. Taking all 379 shoplifting thefts from 1750 to 1821, the average decadal price for cotton, silk and worsted stockings was calculated. Cotton stockings were nearly three times as expensive as worsted, although both showed a slight decrease in price over time, whereas silk stockings cost around twice as much as cotton and the price of silk stockings increased quite considerably. The values per pair of stockings taken in housebreaking and burglary show the same trends for each type of material but were somewhat lower than the shoplifted cotton and considerably lower than the shoplifted silk, reflecting the markdown of worn and second-hand stockings relative to new bought. Worsted stockings retained their value better. We use the shop price for each type of stocking to capture both own price and cross-price effects in the regressions on ownership (table 6). Controlling for other factors, there was no trend in ownership for silk stockings, which is consistent with Styles' finding, on the basis of other sorts of evidence, that ownership of silk stockings was confined to the wealthy; working people had little use for such impractical clothing and thieves seldom found such frippery in their homes.[76] That cotton ones moved up the social scale from a midway position and worsted ones moved downwards (figure 2) is also consistent with other evidence suggesting that all social groups sought some pairs of stylish, comfortable and readily cleaned cotton stockings, leaving worsted as the least preferred option for the poor or the garb of necessity for those who laboured outside in all weathers.[77] In both cases better quality variants were taken from more elite victims and worsted stockings were confined to those in the lower reaches as real wages rose. Cotton stockings were a fashion item largely unaffected by the real wage, or the price of alternatives, although the own price response indicates that they drifted down the social scale as they became more affordable. They became increasingly popular as items for theft from 1770 and substituted for both silk and worsted variants.[78]

This examination of the ownership of some commonly stolen items demonstrates that trends brought about by changes in preferences and tastes can be distinguished from those generated by price changes or rising real incomes. All played their part in the evolution of ownership but the relative influence of each factor depended on the type of good and its characteristics.

[76] Styles, *Dress*, pp.34-5, p.44.
[77] Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, pp.87-8.
[78] Incorporating other types of stocking also recorded as stolen in the Old Bailey proceedings; yarn, wool and worsted, thread, linen, and muslin; shows these results on status to be robust to alternative categorisations of materials.

VI

We now turn our attention to household items related to domestic comfort. As already seen, probate inventories document an increase in the possession of household goods from the late-seventeenth century but the nature of the source limits what can be said about the extent to which people lower down the social scale shared in ownership and the comfort revolution. Furthermore, inventories are inclined to cluster items together under catch-all groupings, such as linen, bedding and tableware, and valued collectively. Old Bailey evidence can be used to extend the time horizon, capture the possessions of social classes below the middling sorts and disentangle the various influences on ownership.

Inspection of our Old Bailey data set, which recorded all items for which the theft was prosecuted, revealed some of particular interest and frequency, specifically feather beds (mattresses filled with feathers), napkins, tablecloths and counterpanes (also described as quilts, coverlets and coverlids). Feather beds had become a marker of increasing living standards; William Harrison's 1577 *Description of England,* for example, reported that feather beds were spreading down the social scale, replacing the traditional flat beds employed for generations.[79] By the eighteenth century, around two-fifths of labourers' inventories listed feather beds. The valuations given to these beds rose over time, which Muldrew interprets as indicative of improved quality. [80] We start by considering from whom feather beds were taken, thus providing a link between our evidence and the probate inventories. Napkins and tablecloths might be viewed as aspirational items exemplifying the lifestyle of the polite middling sort and desired for the identification of linen with cleanliness as much as providing domestic comfort, while counterpanes were both decorative and functional.[81] Analysis of these specific items has other advantages. Although there was a shift in the material from which some of these were manufactured, which may reflect the influence of both consumer preferences and technological change, controlling for composition, they are reasonably homogeneous goods and so court valuations can be thought of as broadly reflective of market prices over time. However, they may not be a perfect proxy, so in each case we also include the price of a component material to capture any underlying price trends in the cost of raw material or processing technology.

[79] Quoted in Riello, 'Fabricating', p. 49
[80] Muldrew, *Food*, pp. 195 ff
[81] Riello, 'Fabricating'; Lemire, *Cotton*.

Unfortunately our existing dataset provided insufficient observations of the theft of these particular goods to enable meaningful analysis. We therefore extended the dataset by collecting information on every prosecution for theft through housebreaking or burglary involving these goods for the years 1750 to 1821. The key statistics are summarised in table 5. The same methodology was adopted for distinguishing between price, quality, income and fashion changes as previously.

There were 42 cases of theft of feather beds between 1750 and 1821, but in only 18 of these was a specific occupational designation ascribed to the original owner. In probate inventories, these feather mattresses were valued by the weight of the feathers they contained and the price of feathers.[82] We utilise this observation to find an alternative price for mattresses in our regression analysis. Prosecutions for the theft of feathers were quite frequent at the Old Bailey and we take the 58 observations of court valuations per pound weight from 1750 to 1825 to compute the average price per pound in five-yearly time periods. This shows an increase in the price of feathers from around £0.04 per lb to 1780, then a rise in the 1790s to around £0.06 and a near doubling to £0.08 by 1821-25. Mattresses themselves showed an even greater rise in value from around £1.60 1750-79 to £4.48 by 1810-19. Unsurprisingly the price of feathers and the valuation given to the mattresses are significantly related but it is notable that the valuation increase is greater, implying improved quality, that is, more feathers per mattress, as well as an increase in the raw material cost.[83] The regression analysis of ownership shows that feather beds were taken from those further down the social scale over time, with higher quality variants taken from those higher up (table 7 and figure 3). The increasing price corroborates the quality improvement found in inventories. However, despite the claim that the whole of the early modern period might be titled the Age of the Bed,[84] diffusion was not complete by the 1700s as feather beds were increasingly stolen from those further down the social scale in the years after 1750. Domestic comfort still featured strongly in people's aspirations and they were prepared to pay ever higher prices for improvements.

Specific items of table ware or table linen rarely feature in probate inventories and yet such commodities capture elements of both domestic comfort and desire for respectability, being non-essential luxuries. Napkins and tablecloths were frequently stolen throughout the period

[82] Quality also related to the type of feather used but type was rarely documented in the Old Bailey records.
[83] The correlation coefficient for feathers and value of mattresses taken in five-yearly time periods was 0.641 (significance 0.046). The price of linen per yard and the value given to tablecloths and the price of printed cotton per yard and the value given to counterpanes were also both positively and significantly related.
[84] Shammas, *Pre-industrial consumer*, p.169.

and were usually made of linen or damask. Originally applied to silks woven with intricate designs in Damascus, by our period damasks referred to twilled linen where the revelation of subtle patterns relied on reflected light. Here we utilise the 61 Old Bailey valuations of linen per yard taken in shoplifting from 1750 to 1825 to create a proxy price variable. A dummy variable is included in the regressions to reflect whether the item was made of linen. Unsurprisingly, economic factors influenced the ownership of these items. Napkins and tablecloths were more likely to be taken from those lower down the social scale as price declined and incomes rose, respectively, and higher quality napkins were owned by those of higher status.[85] But, in addition to these price and income effects, fashions and aspirations again played a role: ownership of napkins drifted down the social hierarchy over time, tracking the desire for respectability. Small sample sizes mean subdivision by type of material yields few further insights with the exception that ownership of damask napkins travelled up the social scale over time.[86] What can we infer? Ownership of table linen was a general ambition, which those below the middling sorts increasingly sought. However, the cheaper variants were what they could afford: populuxe apparent again in the differential rates of diffusion of different types of commodity. Linen napkins were valued around one shilling each, damask ones between one and two shillings. The movement of damask into the higher reaches of the social scale hints at owners' desire to differentiate themselves from lower social groups by using more expensive, higher quality and more physically attractive variants of the same functional goods. Fashions, aspirations, incomes, prices, quality and distinctiveness all played their parts in this story.

For counterpanes we use the 106 values given to printed cotton material that was shoplifted to calculate a representative price per yard.[87] Regression analysis reveals that more expensive counterpanes and coverlets were owned by higher status people but the general trend in ownership was downwards (table 7 and figure 4). Counterpanes were made of a variety of materials, including satin and damask, but, over time, linen was superseded by cotton with over half of all counterpanes whose composition was recorded being made from

[85] Although linen napkins were taken from those of higher status than napkins made of other materials, with the converse being observed for tablecloths, it should be noted that in only 12 cases was the material from which the napkins were made stated and only in 23 cases for tablecloths.

[86] Regression results:

Ownership damask napkins = 1766.13 +1.77 time – 17.71 real wage

(4.45)* (2.69)* (-4.28)* ad. R2 = 0.67, F = 9.22*, n=9

[87] Although counterpanes, quilts and coverlets are all synonymous according to the dictionary definitions there is some indication in our data that their price and ownership may be differentiated so we allow for each type in the regression analysis. Similarly we include dummy variables for whether they are made of cotton or linen. We exclude one observation where the counterpane was valued at £30.

cotton by the 1780s and 1790s.[88] Beverly Lemire's detailed analysis of quilts illuminates this trend.[89] Quilts had long been a desirable luxury commodity for the elite and were imported in considerable numbers from India over the seventeenth century. Their popularity was allied to the division of homes into functionally separate spaces, the increased desire for domestic comfort and aesthetics and the ease of washing compared to woollen blankets. By the early eighteenth century those further down the social scale were also engaging in this consumption, facilitated by the sourcing of cheaper, colourful, cotton calico variants in India. The ban on Indian cottons in Britain in 1721 stopped this trade but, as with other cotton products, the Lancashire market had been developing its skills and quickly stepped in to fill the gap. Through a process of emulation and innovation, printed linen and linen with cotton varieties were initially made, but the well-known technological advances enabled cheap, colourfully printed, English cotton quilts to be produced by the 1780s.[90] However, from the court records, cotton counterpanes were no cheaper than linen ones. Valued at just over ten shillings on average, they were substituting for the six or seven shilling linen variants.[91] Thus technology made cotton goods available but movements towards cotton were not always occasioned by price declines. Elsewhere it has been observed that cotton gowns were not the cheapest[92] and, as we saw earlier, the shift towards cotton stockings occurred despite less expensive alternatives being available. In other areas, cotton made few inroads. For instance, linen continued to be preferred for underwear.[93] On the other hand, cotton counterpanes were desired as a key component of decorative domestic comfort and increasingly sought after by ordinary people as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, humble goods whose consumption nonetheless mirrors "geopolitical ambition, industrial innovation and domestic transformation".[94]

VII

This paper uses empirical evidence on the ownership of key consumption goods to disentangle historians' account of a consumer revolution spreading down from the middling

[88] In a regression utilising value per item rather than price and relative value, increased ownership of cotton counterpanes by those lower down the social scale is evident.
[89] Lemire, *Cotton*. pp.99-123.
[90] Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, pp.3-42, 77-114.
[91] No trend in price was found for counterpanes made of either type of material.
[92] Styles, *Dress*, p. 109
[93] Styles, *Dress*, p. 129; Horrell et al, 'Cupidity', p. 260.
[94] Lemire, *Cotton*, p.121. See also Riello, *Cotton*.

sort and driven by changing tastes from economists' more prosaic explanation of endogenous consumption promoted by rising incomes and falling prices. Evidence on the items stolen through housebreaking and burglary from 1750 to 1821 has been used to analyse the relative influence of price and fashion on the ownership of a variety of goods, while controlling for income changes. Focussing first on valuables and second on goods associated with domestic comfort, we observe a tendency for iconic consumer goods to have been stolen from and therefore originally owned by households further down the social scale over time, a pioneering empirical demonstration of the democratization of consumption in the period. Fashion had a strong influence on consumption but this was not just about trickle-down or emulation, other influences were striking. Consumers sought domestic comfort: feather beds were of improved quality and cotton counterpanes were preferred to their cheaper linen counterparts. People also aspired to signal their respectability and politeness through the ownership of goods such as napkins. But, as households lower down the social strata began to own these and similar items, households higher up altered the variants which they possessed to ensure continued differentiation; specifically they boasted higher quality damask napkins. Similarly, while cotton stockings became a fashion item for all, those who continued to wear silk bought more expensive, higher quality versions. And while the ownership of silverware spread downwards, it only encompassed the middling sorts and even then higher quality and value remained the prerogative of the elite. Through the composition and quality and not just the types of good they owned, the eighteenth-century Joneses remained ahead of the consumption curve.

Changing tastes and popular fashions were not however detached from the prosaic influence of incomes and prices. Ownership of some goods varied positively with income supporting the idea that growing prosperity perhaps linked to increased industriousness underpinned the metropolitan consumer boom.[95] In addition, the impact of technology and changed materials in reducing prices can also be detected in expanding consumption, for example in the popularization of plated silverware and watches. But these technico-economic causal mechanisms in the consumer revolution were not always standard. Technology impacted on the production of cotton items, but this rarely caused a significant reduction in the value attributed to final goods. Instead, consumers appear to have substituted towards more expensive cotton stockings and counterpanes and away from worsted and linen ones

[95] Voth, 'Time and work'; Allen and Weisdorf, 'Was there an 'industrious revolution'?'.

respectively. Moreover, people paid more to improve the quality of their feather beds, an item presumably unaffected by production changes.

Our findings underline the importance of fashion and tastes, which exerted an independent influence on the ownership of all the items that we examined, but make space too for price and income effects. The relative magnitude of fashion, price and income varied according to the specific item considered but none should be omitted in an account of the consumer revolution, which our evidence suggests involved a complex interplay between desires and differentiation, and aspiration and affordability.

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Table 1.

Goods stolen from those without and without known occupations

Items stolen (%)	Occupation: Unknown	Known
Clocks, watches	2.0	2.7
Valuables	16.6	17.8
Money, coins	3.4	4.2
Clothing	45.2	39.1
Material / cloth	2.8	8.3
Household goods	4.5	4.1
Household linen	10.9	7.9
China, glass pewter	2.1	1.7
Furniture	1.5	0.9
Books, games, stationery	0.8	1.1
Personal items	2.8	2.8
Ornaments	0.9	0.5
Foodstuff	1.8	2.9
Metals	0.2	0.3
Leather	0.0	0.0
Other materials	0.3	0.1
Work tools	0.3	0.4
Miscellaneous work related	0.3	0.5
Saddlery	0.4	0.5
Locks and keys	0.3	0.2
Miscellaneous	1.2	1.9
Firearms/ swords	0.3	0.6
Unknown	1.1	1.4
Total number of items	2332	2267
Average value per item	£1.01	£4.93

Table 2.

Occupational status classification

Rank	Type	Sample of occupations included	Range of CAMSIS values of included occupations
90	Titled	Earl, Duke, Viscount, General	99
80	Professional	Esquire, solicitor, doctor, surgeon, clergy	89-98
75	Paperwork	Bookkeeper, statuary, schoolmaster, clerk, accountant, missionary	75-81
70	Non-food seller	Haberdasher, tallow chandler, book seller, wine seller	55-82
60	Jeweller	Silversmith, goldsmith, watchmaker	69
50	Innkeeper	Publican	63
40	Food seller	Baker, butcher, fishmonger, coffee shop keeper, egg merchant, cheesemonger	46-66
30	Clothing maker	Shoe maker, tailor, milliner, mantua maker stay maker, currier, weaver, silk dresser, hosier	27-64
20	Trades	Builder, plasterer, bricklayer, carpenter, carpenter, joiner, chairmaker, pewterer	28-66
15	Army/servant	Sailor, soldier, gardener	37-44
10	Casual	Porter, coachman, traveller, hostler, cow-keeper, washerwoman, labourer	1-40
0	Unknown		

Table 3. Occupational status over time.

	1750-1	1760-1	1770-1	1780-1	1790-1	1800-1	1810-11	1820-1
No. of thefts	51	15	123	75	94	127	155	140
No. where occupational status known	23	7	45	31	52	73	101	69
% in each category:								
Titled	4	-	11	3	-	3	2	3
Professional	4	57	13	10	6	1	3	16
Paperwork	4	-	4	-	4	7	3	4
Non-food seller	39	14	24	10	23	21	35	10
Jeweller	-	14	7	7	4	8	9	9
Innkeeper	-	-	13	13	14	11	12	10
Food seller	9	14	4	7	4	10	10	10
Clothing maker	13	-	9	3	14	15	9	9
Trades	17	-	4	19	8	7	3	10
Army/servant	9	-	2	16	12	1	6	3
Casual	-	-	7	13	14	16	9	16
Mean status	50.2	70.0	58.1	38.9	42.9	45.1	50.9	46.7
% female occupations	4.3	14.3	13.3	9.7	11.5	6.8	5.9	8.6

Correlation coefficients:
Pearson's R -0.063 (0.21 significance)
Spearman's Rank -0.046 (0.36 significance)

Chi-Squared:

	1750-81	1790-1821
Jeweller and above	50.9%	43.7%
Innkeeper and below	49.1%	56.3%
(sample)	(106)	(265)

χ^2 1.636 (0.20 significance)

Regression:
Status rank = 52.658 - 0.782 time trend
(14.15)* (-1.25)
Adjusted R^2 = 0.001, F = 1.567, n = 401
t-ratio in parentheses. *Significant at 10% level or higher

Table 4. Fashions tracked through theft of selected items

	1680-1741	1750-1791	1800-1821
Total number of items stolen	1197	2429	2170
Individual items:			
Silver buckles	3	45	4
Aprons	23	86	35
Sleeves	2	17	1
Peruke/wig	7	4	0
Trousers	0	0	20
Pelisse	0	0	11
Spencer	0	0	6
Drawers	0	2	5
Umbrella	0	0	5
Tea paraphernalia	8	64	64
Pewter goods	47	8	0
Curtains	10	29	37
Stationery	9	15	29

Table 5. Summary statistics of stolen items

		With occupational status:								
					% jeweller and above				£ mean	
	Number Thefts	Number	Mean Status	Standard deviation	1750-81	1790-1821	χ^2	M-WU	value per item	Standard deviation
Selected years 1750-1821										
Money										
– notes	70	39	46.41	27.22	66.7	38.9	0.88	26.5	41.64	159.23
– coins	106	57	43.33	24.35	38.9	25.6	1.03	238.0*	10.56	26.98
Silverware	553	253	67.73	23.44	78.3	58.6	10.9*	3841*	1.843	8.270
Watches										
– all	72	40	48.38	23.52	90.9	48.3	6.0*	95.0*	3.778	6.31
Stockings										
– silk	21	10	50.00	32.91	50.0	66.7	0.28	8.0	0.220	0.182
– cotton	42	21	42.14	29.81	16.7	53.3	2.35	32.5	0.092	0.160
– worsted	25	15	58.00	20.78	57.1	75.0	0.54	23.0	0.054	0.033
All years 1750-1821										
Feather beds	42	18	46.11	32.88	80.0	30.8	3.55*	18.5	2.708	1.932
Napkins	88	48	52.29	29.84	66.7	37.5	4.09*	161.5*	0.060	0.051
Tableclothes	147	73	51.85	25.73	46.2	44.7	0.02	543.0	0.310	0.745
Counterpanes (including quilts, coverlets)	176	82	47.22	28.93	52.9	40.4	1.25	621.5*	0.582	2.303

Notes: * indicates significance at 10% level or higher

Table 6. Regression results of trend in owner's occupational status

	Const.	Time trend	Real wage	Relative value[a]	Price	Gold	Silver	Adjusted R^2	F	n
Money – notes	182.97 (4.72)*	0.90 (0.18)	-1.46 (-2.80)*	0.03 (1.48)	omitted			0.24	5.07*	39
Money –coins	38.10 (0.88)	-3.52 (-1.82)[x]	0.22 (0.48)	0.10 (0.12)	omitted			0.06	2.25[x]	57
Silverware	-172.28 (-2.35)*	-4.06 (-4.61)*	0.98 (2.74)*	0.29 (2.50)*	164.79 (3.44)*			0.11	8.71*	253
Watches	167.16 (2.87)*	-9.21 (-3.18)*	-1.11 (-1.88)[x]	-8.50 (-1.51)	20.24 (2.12)*	1.91 (0.12)	-19.06 (-1.99)[x]	0.22	2.84*	40
Stockings:					Price: cotton	silk	worsted			
Silk	9010.94 (1.97)	72.95 (1.06)	-30.78 (-1.98)	80.48 (1.75)	-10328.4 (-1.89)	-3908.0 (-1.76)	-31174.19 (-1.99)	0.45	2.24	10
Cotton	-54.36 (-0.52)	26.59 (2.08)*	-1.82 (-1.00)	35.76 (2.30)*	377.02 (0.73)	x	843.17 (1.17)	0.41	3.81*	21
Worsted	314.31 (3.75)*	-9.58 (-2.75)*	-1.60 (-2.64)*	27.92 (3.68)*	-94.15 (-1.48)	x	-898.88 (-1.25)	0.70	7.45*	15

Notes:
t-ratio in parentheses, * significant at 5% level or higher, [x] significant at 10% level or higher
x indicates too few observations so variable dropped from regression.

[a]For money this variable is the value of the money stolen as there is no relevant price.

Table 7. Regression results of trends in owner's occupational status – domestic comfort items

	Const.	Time trend	Price component	Relative value	Real wage			Ad. R^2	F	n
Feather beds	35.09 (1.15)	-1.46 (-2.45)*	1042.9 (1.52)	0.39 (2.00)[x]	x			0.22	2.63*	18
Napkins	-45.36 (-0.49)	-0.54 (-1.72)[x]	509.41 (1.98)[x]	15.93 (2.21)*	0.55 (0.63)	linen 27.10 (2.06)*		0.21	2.84*	35
Tableclothes	156.43 (3.21)*	-0.18 (-0.85)	77.72 (0.68)	0.43 (1.32)	-1.04 (-2.19)*	linen -15.57 (-1.78)[x]		0.15	3.26*	65
Counterpanes	47.45 (2.47)*	-2.23 (-1.99)*	132.60 (1.28)	1.72 (3.21)*	x	cotton -11.94 (-1.58)	cover 26.87 (2.39)*	0.19	4.48*	77

Notes:
t-ratio in parentheses, * significant at 5% level or higher, [x] significant at 10% level or higher
x indicates variable included in initial regression but not found to be significant

Figure 1. Valuables ownership by occupational status

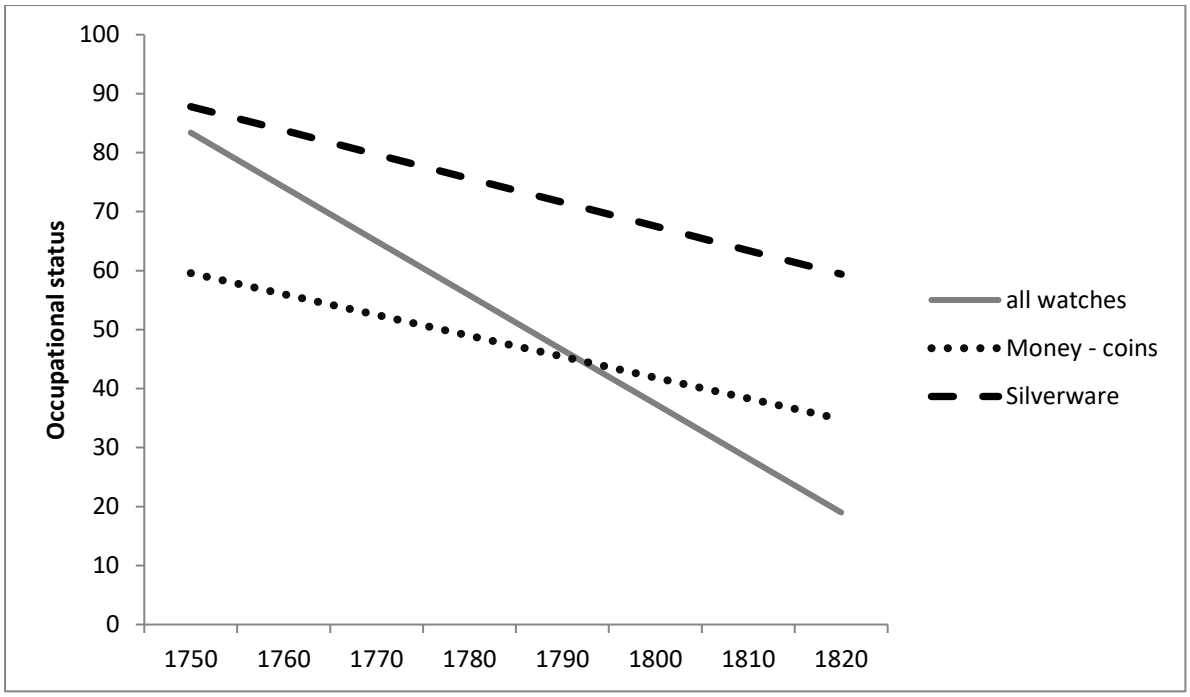

Figure 2. Stocking ownership by occupational status

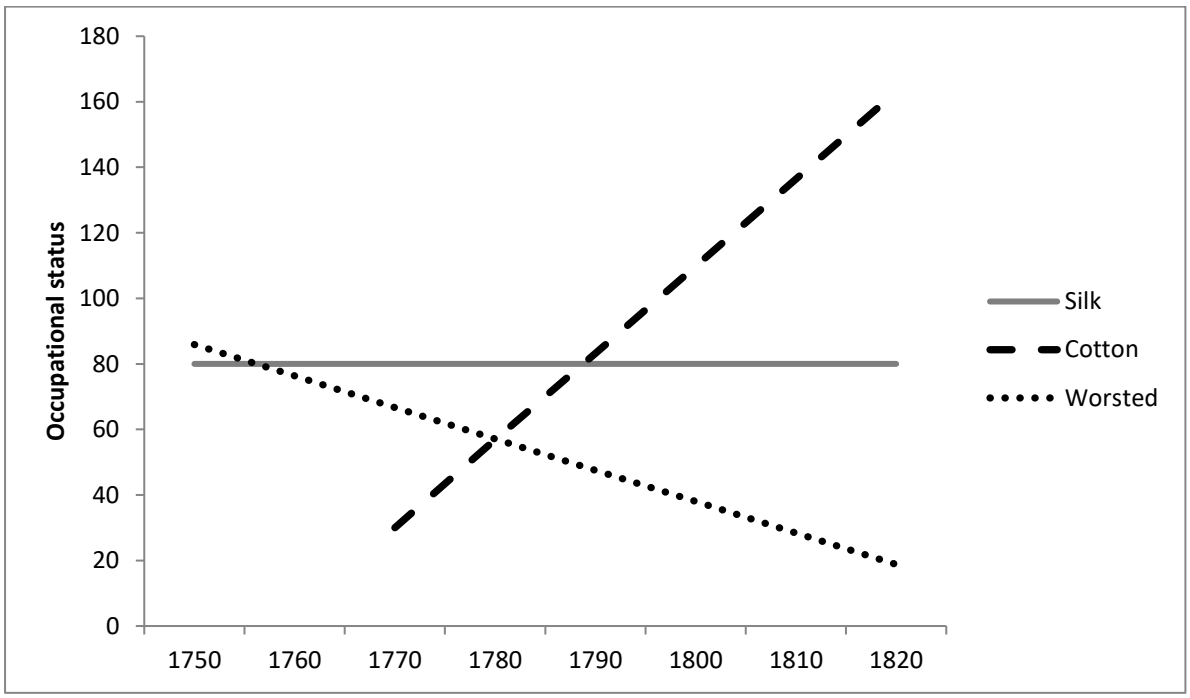

Figure 3. Feather bed ownership and price trend

Figure 4. Table linen ownership by occupational status