

## **THE MARRIAGE DUTY ACTS AND THE SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE EARLY MODERN TOWN — SHREWSBURY, 1695-8**

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According to Gregory King sixteen per cent of the population of England in 1695 lived in 'cities and market towns',<sup>1</sup> with thirty towns housing more than 5000 people each.<sup>2</sup> One of the major problems facing the researcher of these early modern towns is their internal social geography; where such groups as the poor or various trades lived. Contemporary documents do not always specify residence, least of all for those of lesser status. Even when residential location is given it is usually only on a parish or ward basis. Nevertheless, this is better than nothing, and studies have been carried out using the hearth tax returns, freemen's rolls and other sources to examine the social topography of the early modern town.<sup>3</sup> This work has produced some useful generalisations. The wealthier townfolk for instance, tended to live near the centre of the town with the poorer people inhabiting the areas towards the walls. Moreover, certain areas of the town appear to have been dominated by certain crafts and trades. Butchers and fishmongers for example, tended to live in one or two specific streets.

However, problems still arise, because parishes are usually large units and can often obscure any existing geographical pattern. This is especially the case when large rural or suburban areas are included in a parish which also covers an area of the town. This is the case in Shrewsbury where only one parish of the five is truly urban. In addition, most of the county towns and larger cities, especially the faster growing ones, had fewer than ten parishes covering the urban area. Shrewsbury, with a population of over 6000 in 1700 contained only five parishes. This problem is an important one because even a town of 6000 or so people did not cover a very large area. Shrewsbury covered just over one square mile and it is unreasonable to expect that the different quarters present in such a town should display different social, demographic or economic characteristics. Recent work on the late eighteenth and nineteenth century city suggests that it is on the street level that geographic differences are most important with certain streets displaying different characteristics from others.<sup>4</sup> Work on a medieval rental for Gloucester also supports this idea.<sup>5</sup> By using the parish or ward as the basis for analysis in looking at the geography of the county town, any patterns that do exist will be overlooked. Work needs to be undertaken on a street basis if the social topography of the early modern town is to be discovered.

For most towns of this period, however, a street based approach is difficult if not impossible. One relevant potential source of interest to the social historian may be the Marriage Duty Act returns of 1695-8. Their value can be illustrated with reference to Shrewsbury. The Shrewsbury examples, in common with most other listings of this type, record the structure of each household in the town. For each family listed the head of the household is named and his or her status and occupation given, followed by the names of the spouse, children, servants, apprentices and lodgers. More importantly, the listings are organised on a street basis and Shrewsbury is fortunate in having nearly complete returns for the whole town for four consecutive years.<sup>6</sup> The town also boasts a good plan of 1746 and despite the fact that this map is later in date than the listings it probably gives an accurate picture of the street plan and street names since like most county towns over this period, Shrewsbury saw little or no growth.<sup>7</sup>

However, mapping the data from the listings is not as simple as it might appear at first sight. In common with other urban listings it soon becomes obvious that not all the streets of Shrewsbury are named, even if it is clear that the whole population of the town is included in the census. This could make the mapping of information a matter of mere guesswork.<sup>8</sup> There are ways of overcoming this difficulty. In the case of Shrewsbury there are four listings and by comparing them it proved possible to assign individual households to various streets or sections of the town.

The first stage of the analysis was to correlate the information given on each of the listings. From this the differences in each census became apparent. Table 1 shows that in the two years 1695 and 1696, the asses-

**Table 1. Streets named in the Stone ward listings, 1695 and 1696.**

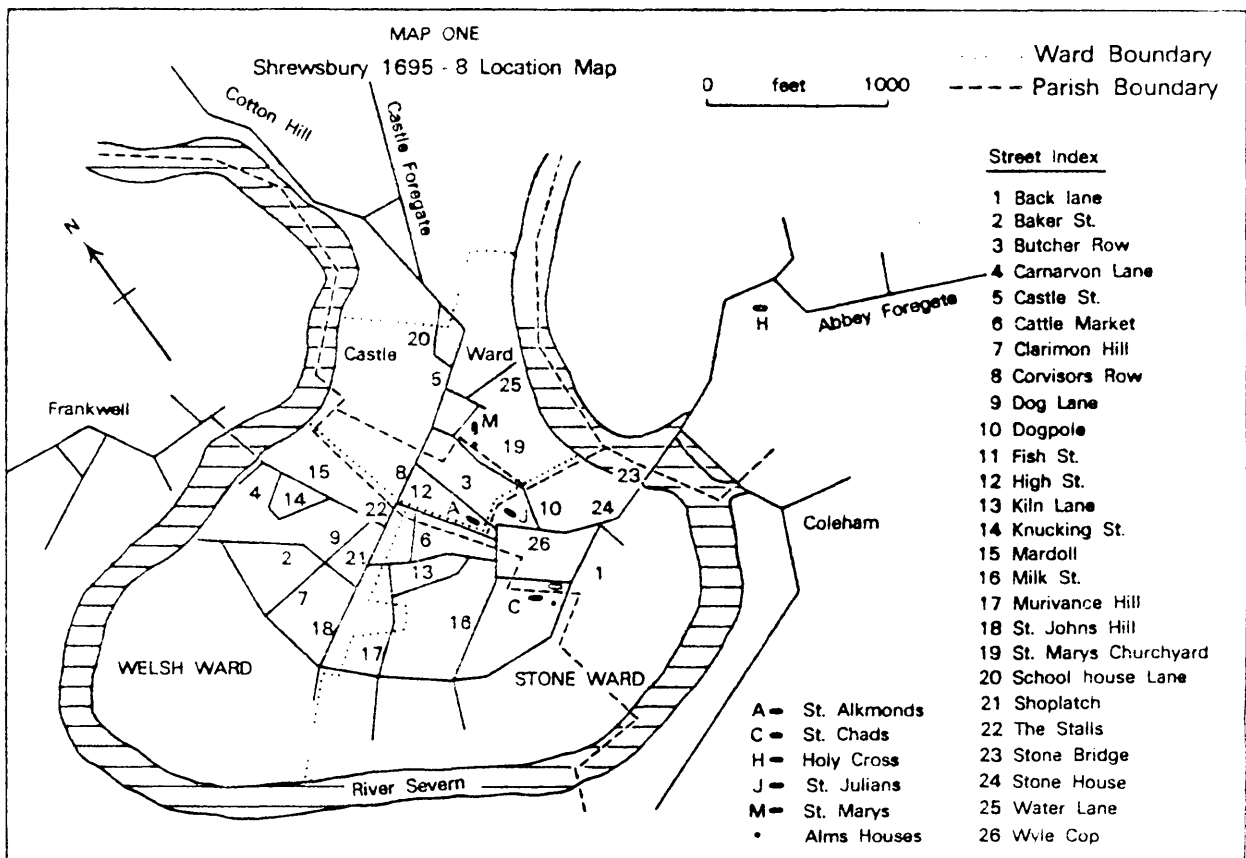
1695	1696
Stone Bridge and Wyle Cop	St. Julians parish
Milk Street	Stone Bridge
Alms Houses	Stone House
Cattle Market	Back Lane
Kiln Lane	St. Chads parish
Murivance Hill	Corn Market
	Merevell Hill
	Swan Hill

sors named different streets as they collected their information, although it is obvious that no streets were omitted and that the whole ward was enumerated. The correlation was done by comparing groups of householders' surnames at the beginning and end of each street that was named. Table 2 illustrates how the information given for 1696 was used to identify the beginning of one street, Swan Hill, that was not named in the 1695 census. The table also shows some of the problems involved in matching the listings. These stem from the fact that the listings do not correlate perfectly name for name, from one year to the next. The most obvious reasons for this are death and migration; the definition of the household also changed from year to year and it is possible that some households were missed accidentally. Despite these difficulties it was

**Table 2. The correlation of listings, Stone ward 1695 and 1696.**

1695	1696
Murivance Hill	Merevell Hill
300 E. Passond	278 E. Passant
301 Owen Evans	279 Owen Evans
—	—
—	—
325 R. Tooth	—
326 Mary Tench	301 Mary Tench
	302 Mary Edwards
	Swan Hill
	303 Elean Griffiths
	304 J. Macormick
	305 R. Asterley
327 Elean Payn	306 Elean Payn
328 C. Wheeler	307 C. Wheeler
329 S. Whitfield	308 Sam Whitfield
330 W. Corral	309 Will Curral

possible for most of the streets in Shrewsbury to be clearly identified. Other locational information helped to divide some streets further; for instance, in Stone ward, the noting of the parish boundaries and Alms Houses by the assessors aided in the location of some households (see Table 1 and Map 1).



This process was comparatively easy in Stone ward, Welsh ward and the suburbs of Coleham, Frankwell and Abbey Foregate because between all the listings, most of the streets were named. Castle ward was a more difficult case because here only two streets were named in the listings despite the fact that over twenty can be identified on the map. In this ward another method was used, along with other sources, to identify the streets and locate each household. This involved the identification of surname set units (ssu) among the 450 or so households in Castle ward. An ssu is a group of families that appears together in all four of the listings and they were identified in the following way. If, say, in taking the census for Castle ward the enumerators had gone around the streets in the same way each year, then the result would have been four listings with the households in the same order in each. In that case only the two streets named could have been identified. This, however, was obviously not the case because the same ssus are to be found ordered in a different sequence each year. Table 3 shows the different ordering of ssus when

**Table 3. The order of surname set units for a part of Castle ward, 1695 and 1698.**

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1695	1698
9	9
10	10
11	17
12	11
13	8
14	12
15	18
16	13
17	14
18	16
19	19
20	20

1695 and 1698 are compared. Ssu 16 for example, can be identified because in 1695 ssu 15 and ssu 17 appeared either side of it, and in 1698 ssu 14 and ssu 19. It is assumed that each ssu corresponds to a particular street on the ground and this assumption is supported by the fact that the total number of ssus and the number of streets are both about twenty. It only remained, after all possible ssus had been identified, to tie particular ssus and streets together.

This stage of the analysis involved the use of other records for Shrewsbury in which the location of households is occasionally given: St. Mary's parish register and other tax documents. The families that were given street locations were matched with listing units and where most of the families mentioned as living in the same street are correlated with one or more ssus, then it was assumed that that ssu (or group of ssus) corresponded to that street. This idea is illustrated in Table 4. In the parish register thirteen families are named as living 'by the cross' between 1695 and 1698. Nine of these families fall within ssu 11 of the listings and it is therefore assumed that this ssu corresponds to the area of Castle ward that is near the Cross. This particular conclusion is supported by the fact

**Table 4. Correlation of listing and parish register information for a part of Castle ward, 1698.**

Listing Ssu 11	Parish register 'by the cross'
299 And Tomas	X
300 Geo Hosier	
301 Edw Harwood	X
302 Will Prince Esq	
303 Tho Peters	X
304 Eliz Dod	
305 Mr. John Buckridge	X
306 Sam Beddoe	X
307 Abr Bayley	X
308 Somerset Fox	X
309 — Albertus	
310 John Hancox	
311 John Farmer	X
312 Jos Wilkinson	
313 Jos Beddoe	
314 Eliz Humphreyson	
315 John Morris	
316 Tho ap Evans	
317 Mrs. Taylor	
318 Margaret Brayne	
319 Jos Thomas	X
320 Andrew Roe	

that the Alms Houses precede ssu 11 in the census and are also geographically near the cross. Similar information gleaned from other tax lists in addition to the parish register allowed nine of the twenty streets in Castle ward to be identified (see Table 5).

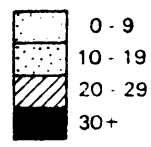
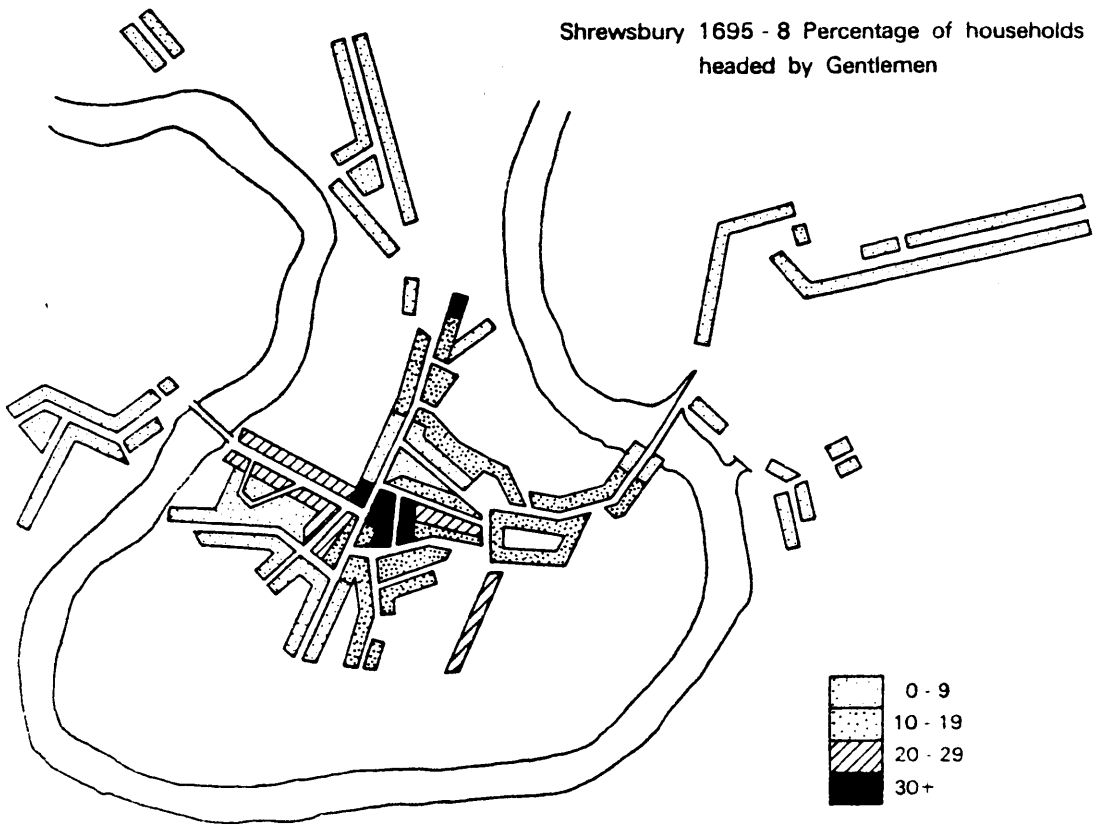
**Table 5. Sources of street information for Castle ward.**

Listing
Within the wall
Corvisors Row
Parish register
Council House
By the Cross
St. Marys' Churchyard
School House Lane
Other listings
High Stree
High Pavement
Butcher Row and Fish Street

By using the foregoing methods, the Marriage Duty Act returns were used to compile a series of maps showing the social, economic and demographic topography of Shrewsbury at the end of the seventeenth century. The maps confirm the already general idea that the poorer households tended to live towards the outskirts of the town, with the suburbs of Frankwell, Castle Foregate, Coleham and Abbey Foregate all showing low numbers of gentlemen's households and a high percentage of households headed by labourers (Map 2). Map 3 also supports the idea that certain trades tended to occupy certain areas of the town. In the case of Shrews-

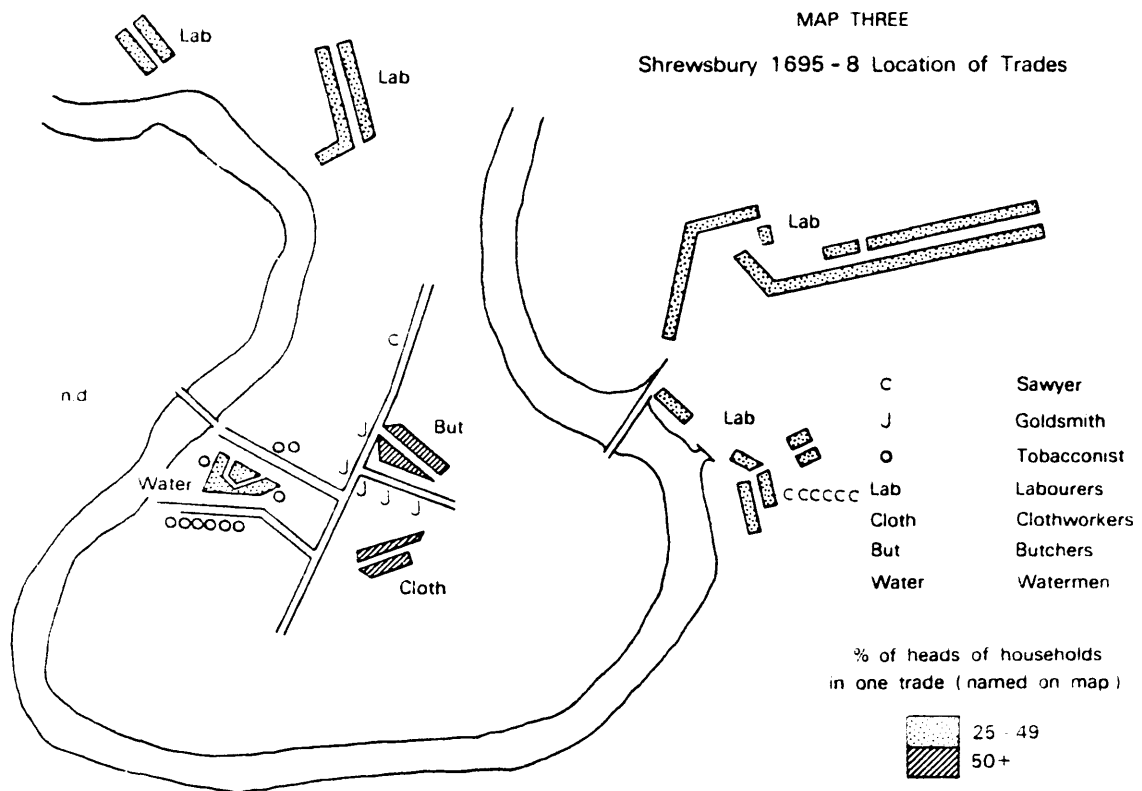
MAP TWO

Shrewsbury 1695 - 8 Percentage of households headed by Gentlemen



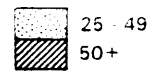
MAP THREE

Shrewsbury 1695 - 8 Location of Trades



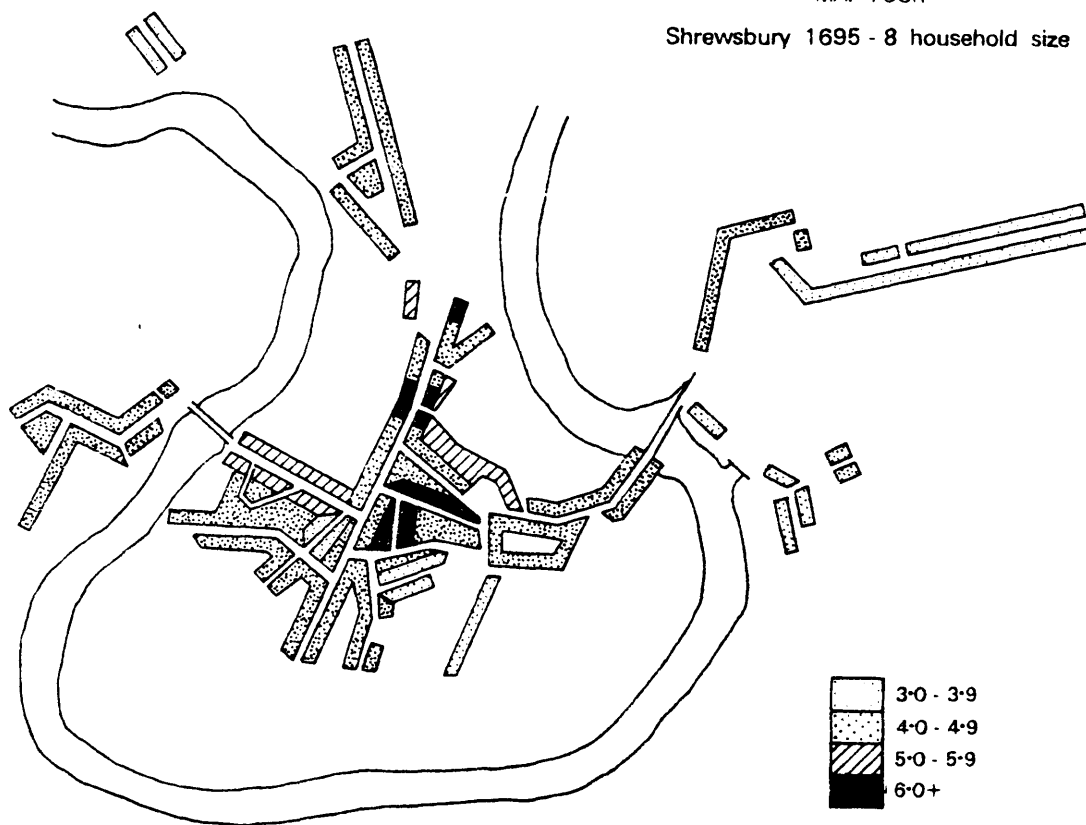
- |       |              |
|-------|--------------|
| C     | Sawyer       |
| J     | Goldsmith    |
| O     | Tobacconist  |
| Lab   | Labourers    |
| Cloth | Clothworkers |
| But   | Butchers     |
| Water | Watermen     |

% of heads of households in one trade (named on map)



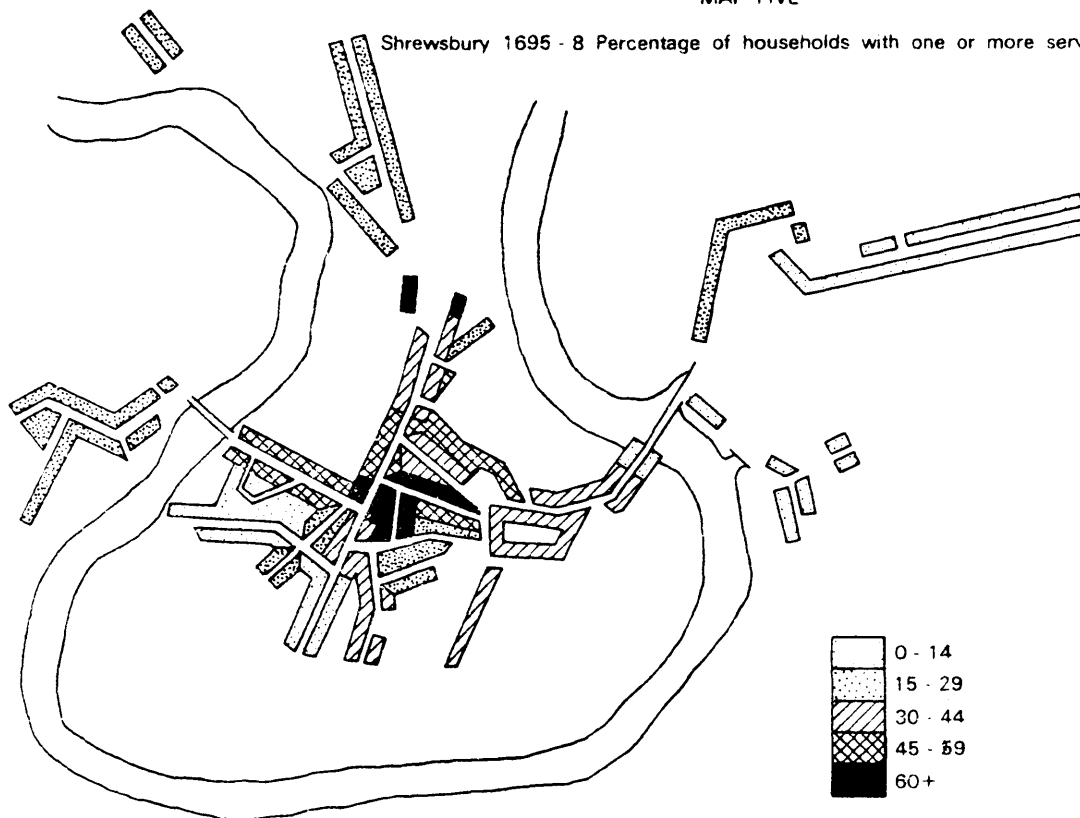
MAP FOUR

Shrewsbury 1695 - 8 household size



MAP FIVE

Shrewsbury 1695 - 8 Percentage of households with one or more servants



bury the butchers are the best example. The listings also allow demographic information to be mapped. Map 4 shows that the poorer families in the suburbs were smaller than those in the town itself, and by comparing Maps 4 and 5 it appears that this was partly because there were fewer servants living in suburban households.

More importantly, however, the maps show a complex patterning on a street basis, with certain streets possessing identifiable characteristics. The area around the market for instance, stands out as one with large households, a high percentage of them headed by gentlemen, and many servants. Dog Lane, on the other hand, although having a high percentage of gentlemen households, had fewer servants in smaller families. Milk Street, away from the centre of the town, had large households, many headed by gentlemen but only a moderate number of servants. Over fifty per cent of households in Swan Hill were clothworkers and other occupations also tended to congregate in specific areas; six out of Shrewsbury's seven sawyers lived in Coleham, all five goldsmiths lived near the market and six of the ten tobacconists lived in Barker Street with the other four living nearby.

Despite John Patten's assertion that the parish is, 'the only valid division of the often muddled urban topography' in the early modern town, the inescapable conclusion from this study is that the geography of the town displays variation based on individual streets rather than areas or quarters.<sup>9</sup> Detailed analysis is needed to pick out this variation and sources like the Marriage Duty Acts returns can help in this task.

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#### NOTES

1. P. Laslett, **The world we have lost**, 1979, p. 55.
2. R. M. Smith, 'Population and its geography in England, 1500-1730', p. 225, in R. Dodgshon and R. Butlin. **An historical geography of England and Wales**, 1978.
3. J. Langton, 'Residential patterns in pre-industrial cities; some case studies from seventeenth century Britain', **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, 1975, 65.
4. H. Carter and S. Wheatley, 'Residential segregation in nineteenth century cities', **Area**, 1980, 12.
5. J. Langton, 'Late medieval Gloucester: some data from a rental of 1455', **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, n.s. 2, 1977.
6. P. Laslett and R. Wall, **Household and family in past time**, 1972. This contains a full description of the type of listings used in this analysis, and also of other studies that have been carried out using them.
7. P. Clark and P. Slack, **English towns in transition**, 1976, p. 96.
8. The Cambridge Group hold an up to date record of existing listings and their location.
9. J. Patten, **English towns, 1500-1700**, 1978, p. 145.