

# **PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION ACROSS AN URBAN HIERARCHY 1650-1725**

**PhD Thesis by Janet Sleep, University of East Anglia 1996**

This thesis concerns itself with explaining and mapping the explosive rise in consumerism evident in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the major sources used derive from Norfolk and Suffolk, it is highly likely that the conclusions reached are of general application, the most important of which are that it was the urban revolution which created the consumer revolution and that it was demand which created supply. The approach is to build a model for the rise in consumption based on various theories of style messaging together with other research on innovation diffusion and a number of related hypotheses emerges from it. These are tested out against a series of samples of probate inventories which are representative of four levels within the urban hierarchy. Samples for two rural control groups are also assessed. While the approach is both numerical and graphical there is also a large amount of information on the furniture and furnishings of middle class homes which would be of interest to the furniture historian: the changes over three time periods being largely summarised in chapter 5 where there is also a small supply side study. Anyone contemplating an extensive use of probate inventories would find chapter 2 particularly helpful: there are many traps for the unwary.

Chapter 6 examines the hierarchy of values operating in the world of material possessions through a study of diaries, memoirs, newspapers, tracts, as well as the pattern of bequests in wills. An important finding is that relative values, attaching to different classes of material good, changed over time but were always distinctly different in urban and rural contexts, gentlemen tending to follow the rural model. The thesis is available on inter-library loan from The Library, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

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