'Here chapman billies tak their stand': a pilot study of Scottish chapmen, packmen and pedlars

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas kailyard literature has left a lasting, though somewhat stereotyped, picture of the travelling packman, his predecessor, the chapman, remains a marginal figure in Scottish society. At worst the chapman is completely ignored, his role often dismissed in a couple of sentences. The word 'chapman', meaning 'a petty or itinerant merchant or dealer', is rare in Scotland until the late 16th century (*DOST*). The derivation is probably from the Old English *céapman*: *céap* meaning barter or dealing, thus a man who barters or deals (*OED*). Variants of the word have been traced in England from as far back as the ninth century (*ibid*). It would thus appear unlikely that a Scottish equivalent should only emerge seven centuries later.

The *Leges Burgorum* and surviving fragments of ancient customary law contain references to chapmen prototypes known by interchangeable terms such as 'dustiefute', 'farandman' and 'pipouderus'. Skene interprets 'dustiefute' as 'ane pedder or cremar, quha hes na certaine dwelling place quhare he may dicht the dust from his feet' (1774, 432). This clearly indicates a form of itinerant pedlar or dealer in small wares. 'Pipouderus' is a scotticism derived from piepowder, which in turn seems to have been an anglicization of the Old French for pedlar, *pied poudre*. A note in Kames's *Statute Law* suggests that traces of the old piepowder court were found in Scotland (Kames 1774, 424). In view of the Anglo-Norman influence on early Scots Law and our institutions, it is a suggestion which merits further investigation.

FAIRS

Piepowder courts were held at fairs, some continuing in existence in England until the 19th century (Addison 1953, 12). According to Kames, these rendered justice in disputes between buyers and sellers. In fact, the fair court had a wider jurisdiction and power to deal with all manner of disputes and offences that arose on fair days, and was not simply restricted to mercantile quarrels (Moore 1985, 165–6). The court was hallmarked by the informality and speed of procedure in securing redress. It was vital that matters be settled quickly before parties dispersed and any spark of unrest be defused before it spilled into wider disorder which could disrupt the main function of the fair, namely trade. For example, any summons had to be answered within an hour, and at most a day (Addison 1953, 12).

Charles Rogers, the social historian, suggests that dustyfoot traders enjoyed a limited role in being able to traffic at fairs between Ascension Day and Lammas, latterly extended to year-round

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trade in different burgh markets (Rogers 1884, I, 338). Along with burgesses and merchants, the dustyfeet were afforded protection under the Merchants' Law when they passed beyond the burgh, or boundaries of the barony (*APS*, I, 726). In theory this enabled them to go about their business without disturbance. In the event of them suffering any injury, the dustyfeet class of trader was not denied access to litigation because of his failure to find someone who would pledge a cash surety on their behalf. Instead, the dustyfoot could initiate an action by pledging his foot (*ibid*, I, 725–6). Once summoned, the defender had until the passing of three tides to come forward and answer the charge. Undoubtedly the punitive undertones behind such a pledge resulted in few vexatious actions.

A contemporary yardstick for settling matters at a fair can still be found at the annual Lammas Market in St Andrews. It remains one of the oldest surviving street fairs in Britain. Each year an on-site meeting takes place at the end of the fair between a representative of the Showmen's Guild and local authority officials to find an acceptable figure of compensation for damage caused to kerbs and pavements by the vehicles and plant connected with the fair. In this way the question of compensation is settled before the traders and show people move to their next fairground location (NE Fife District Council information).

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's clown reminds us that pedlars in the Middle Ages haunted such events as 'wakes, fairs, and bear-baiting' (1611, Act IV, Sc III). In Scotland, fairs were attended by a wide cross-section of society and served as the main mechanism for attracting longer-distance trade. Initially they were an important preserve of the royal burghs and the greater ecclesiastical burghs, generating revenue through business with foreign merchants. Describing the pilgrimages to St Andrews, McRoberts refers to the merchants and itinerant showmen who later in the day provided food, trade and entertainment for the visiting pilgrims (1976, 101). Fairs such as the Rood Fair, Dumfries, coincided with the great feast-days and religious festivals. The link between business riding on the back of devotion (and vice-versa) is still seen at Irish, Italian and Spanish pilgrimages to shrines, transient pedlars being amongst the concourse with their religious knicknacks and charms.

The Scottish fairs afforded unfreemen a less restricted environment than the tightly controlled weekly markets. There was a chance to trade with dealers from other parts. Free trade stimulated mercantile interaction and benefited the burghs concerned since people came from further afield with different goods and the more important commodities. Different classes of trader moved between the principal fairs, amongst them the travelling chapmen of the 16th and 17th centuries. The following description of Dundee's principal fair reveals that it had to change location on account of congestion:

> 'all cramers, chepmen and merchants – baith neighbours and strangers handling merchandise and small cramerie wares – wha use to stand in the mercat with tents and crames, come to the kirkyard, on the south side of Our Lady Kirk, and big their stands and tents there . . .' (Maxwell 1891, 305).

It is important to distinguish these periodic market fairs from the regular weekly burgh markets.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BURGHS

The burghs essentially controlled every aspect of the market place and market trade, including the economic activities of those below the privileged class of freemen or burgesses. The market reflected the vested interests that attached to the position of burgess and guild brethren, which, at least for purposes of their customary unfettered freedom of access to inland trade and freedom from toll, were virtually one and the same.

The *Burgh Laws* were at best 'a common core of customs and regulations' selectively adopted by each burgh as it saw fit (Lynch *et al* 1988, 7). For example, on market days different rates of custom could be levied on the covered and uncovered stands used by traders (*APS*, I, 334, c 37; cf Skene 1774,

234, c 40). 'Bord penny' was exacted from those who traded from a table in the street; 'terrage' could be levied on those who displayed their wares on the ground. Any 'cremar' or stall-holder who owed an outstanding debt to any burgess could have his goods poinded in settlement (Skene 1774, 240, c 63). The actual market day was staunchly protected against casual trading and the right to trade was sometimes further restricted by guildry pronouncements. For instance, in June 1621, the Stirling Guildry ordered chapmen to 'flit and remove' themselves from the gait on market day by noon, nor could they use 'tayled standis' (Cook & Morris 1916, 40).

Any references to Scottish towns must take into account their diversity and their relationship with their hinterland. Recent research has highlighted the dangers of generalizing about Scottish towns (Lynch *et al* 1988, 7 & ch 15), and they must be viewed with regard to their regional character and economy, as well as their geographical situation. The 'four great towns of Scotland' – Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Perth and Dundee – remained the leading towns for more than three centuries. Edinburgh is exceptional, in truly reflecting an urban character, although the task of reflecting the structure of any town is a difficult one before 1600 (*ibid*). In many of the small towns the burgesses were peasants first and only petty merchants or craftsmen as subsidiary occupations (Smout 1989, 167). Perth as one of the larger towns in the late 16th century had a population in the region of 4500, its merchant community including chapmen, hucksters, carters, fish buyers and stablers (Lynch *et al* 1988, 271).

In general, the guilds kept chapmen at arm's length. William Mentheit, a chapman at 'the burn of Cambis' was something of an exception, being admitted to the Stirling Guildry in 1615 on payment of £40 (Cook & Morris 1916, 36). If he were to marry a guild brother's daughter by Michaelmas, the entrance fee was to be halved. As early as 1509 however, several chapmen were listed as enjoying the freedom of the Dunfermline Guild, a small burgh with a higher percentage of Guild members (Torrie 1986, 48). A similar picture of exclusion is seen in relation to burgess entry requirements which probably varied just as the burghs varied in terms of structure. The Commissioners of Burghs who met at Edinburgh in 1529 ordained 'that na outland chapman be made burges within the burght for vii yeir' except upon marrying the daughter of a burgess and 'be worth ane hundreth lib. of his awin gudis' (Marwick 1909, 67–8). This did not prevent Andrew Thomson from becoming a chapman burgess of Dundee in the 16th century (*St Andrews Tests*, 341), and for later periods there were chapmen burgesses of Arbroath, Montrose and Perth.

Market monopoly in what was a largely unfree society also fuelled a reaction in terms of illegal trading, especially forestalling – the purchase and re-sale of goods outwith official markets. At local and national level it was a matter of deep concern. In April 1589, the Convention of Royal Burghs ordained that no chapmen or other unfree persons should trade in staple goods (*Convention of Royal Burghs*, I, 304). The Stirling Guildry declared such staple wares as oil, soap, linen, dyed plaiding, tea, muslin, butter, figs, plums, raisins and vinegar (Morris 1919, 115). From the 16th-century records of Inverness, it is apparent that forestalling was widespread throughout its large hinterland. There must have been considerable difficulties in physically policing such an area, and those who were caught probably represented the tip of the iceberg. It is known that a variety of skins and furs – marten, beaver, weasel and fox – fetched good prices amongst incoming merchants. Chapmen were definitely engaged in forestalling as evidenced by the enactments against them. One Inverness example records a chapman forestalling marten and otter skins at adjacent markets such as St Martin's in the Black Isle (Mackay 1911, 25).

An insight into what was occurring in the more distant areas is afforded by the 'County Acts' of local sheriffs. For example, the Northern Isles, which had been under the jurisdiction of Norse Law until 1611, passed in the following year a specific act against chapmen forestallers (*Maitland Club Misc*, II, 159–60). This prohibited middlemen from trading directly with merchant ships until due notice of the latter's arrival had been made public, it being first open to local people to obtain

necessary items before the chapmen had a chance to add their profit margin. Under the 'Act', 'all pedderis chapmen or buyeris of hydis skins or woll' were required to appear before the respective parish bailie, present the marks of purchase on their goods, and provide an oral deposition guaranteeing that such wares had been bought in good faith (*ibid*, 162–3). Any infingement was to result in the confiscation of their packs.

SCOTS PEDLARS ABROAD

Throughout Western Europe, the rising class of pedlars was reaching the more isolated settlements. For example, 16th-century Irish pedlars reached the Isle of Man on herring boats, dealing in small goods such as 'fish-hooks, knives, combs, pewter and grind-stones' (Cubban 1942). East Prussia and Poland witnessed a considerable influx of Scots pedlars. Indeed, north Europe and the Baltic countries in particular were full of young Scottish merchants tired of poverty and restriction at home (Smout 1987, 154–5). In Poland 'a Scots pedlar's pack' became a proverbial expression. Many Scots started new careers as pack pedlars selling different types of cloth, embroidered linen kerchiefs, readymade garments and hardware items like knives, scissors and tin-ware (Steuart 1915, xii). Along with the Jews and Gypsies, Scots pedlars became a despised class of incomers, singled out in Polish legislation designed to curb the practice of forestalling. By 1564, Scots pedlars had become a taxable category in Poland: 'The Scots who go with packs and have no carts must pay 1 zloty per head, and those who have carts and horses must pay 2 zloty . . .' (*ibid*, 87). With emmigration and the search for a better life there went the risk of considerable hardship, as testified by commentators such as Sir George Skene and Fynes Moryson, the former mentioning that he had met a vast multitude of his countrymen in that condition at Cracow in the south of Poland.

CHAPMEN – A SHORT HISTORY

16TH CENTURY

To give a detailed picture of how Scottish chapmen functioned at home during this period is far from easy. References to 16-century chapmen are sporadic. For instance, we learn that at Dalkeith in 1581, a chapman had his goods confiscated because he made and circulated false coin (*RSS*, VIII, 100). A brief entry in the protocol book of J Scott (1585) merely records that 'ane chaipeman . . . deid of the pest' (*DOST*, Chapman). Outbreaks of epidemic disease were a recurring hazard of the times. Apart from having a check on population, there must have been an impact on trade. To arrest the spread of plague in 1584, it was forbidden by Act of Parliament to convene at 'cryit fairs' (*APS*, III, 690). Visitors by land were not allowed to trade within affected towns, and strict quarantine regulations were imposed on the crews and passengers of ships. The pattern of plague in the 1580s seems to have concentrated on south-east towns in particular. The merchants' society in Brechin produced no trade accounts in 1647 when 600 of the inhabitants were wiped out by the 'noisome plague of pestilence' (Thomas 1968, 18–19).

17TH CENTURY

Poll Tax returns for 1693 equally do not reflect an even representation of a society at this time. The broad occupational classification highlights the elusiveness of chapmen in certain areas. A search of 14 000 entries for Edinburgh revealed only five persons designated as chapmen in the parishes of College Kirk, Tron, Greyfriars, New Kirk and West Kirk (Helen Dingwall, Dept Scot Hist, Univ Edin, pers comm). A more rewarding area was Aberdeenshire. Ten chapmen were traced as serving

the several parishes that made up the Presbytery of Deer. John Swan in the town of Old Deer appears as an exception with stock assessed at over '500 merks' (Stuart 1844, II, 550–618). Thirteen chapmen were found in four out of the seven parishes that constituted the neighbouring Presbytery of Turriff. There is a risk in overstating the conclusions which can be drawn from this type of source (Whyte 1987; Lynch *et al* 1988, ch 15). The position is further complicated when dealing with a transient occupational category. For example, we find an unrelated chapman staying with a husband and wife at 'Crosfield' who, along with the cottars, was listed under servants (Stuart 1844, II, 356). In contrast, the chapman Alexander Duncan is listed as the son of the tenant at Mill of Pitsglassie in the Kirktoune of Auchterless (*ibid*, 385). And where in occupational terms would one place 'George Milne, about eighteen years, sells bits of tobacco through the country'? (*ibid*). The Aberdeenshire Tax Roll shows that even the smallest centres had chapmen and other minor local traders, some of whom had negligible stock. 'Among the smallest centres, Old Meldrum and Huntly had unexpectedly large numbers of merchants in relation to their size, suggesting that they had important subregional roles in trading and distribution' (Whyte 1987, 227).

It is known that certain chapmen travelled for particular merchants, possibly explaining the designation 'travelling merchant' as distinct from 'chapman' (Sanderson 1982, 185). In testamentary designations one comes upon infrequent cases of a 'traveller or chapman' which might denote a type of merchant's deputy who disposed of surplus stock and collected cash on behalf of his employer. Those who combined occupations could also have slipped through the classification net. How unusual was Walter Laisk, 'ane salter boy and fute chopman' who died illegitimate without disponing his goods in 1584 (*RSS*, VIII, 420, *2404*)? Studies of urban occupations have shown the poor as being under-represented in that they had more than one means of earning a living and one wonders whether there was not a parallel in certain sectors of the rural poor (Whyte 1987, 242).

Testaments can provide a large amount of random data concerning individuals. Lists of debtors and creditors help depict trading relationships and mobility up to a point. Similarly, the inventories of moveable estate, sometimes including stock in trade, take us into the homes of a cross-section of society, although these tend to reflect the better off. An extensive survey of over 1200 Dumfries testaments between 1600 and 1665 found that 32 chapmen, two tinkers and one traveller owed debts for wares to 10 different merchants. The commodities included lint, linen, medhop dye, belts, girths, saddles, buckles, thread, thimbles, gloves and plaids (Coutts 1982, 154). It is possible to build on this with regard to other evidence. An alleged case of highway robbery in 1648 reveals that a rural-based chapman was travelling with a packhorse and had the following goods with him: 40 elns of plaiding, 200 merks worth of linen cloth, a number of tanned leather skins and six muskets (Irvine Smith 1974, 783). Despite the firearms being an open invitation for trouble during a time of unrest in the south-west, the quantities, value and type of goods would hardly fit the description of a petty trader.

Four years earlier in Aberdeenshire, another Justice Court case sheds light on the substantial quantities of goods transacted between a chapman in Tarves (four miles north-east of Old Meldrum) and an Aberdeen burgess who was accused amongst other things of using false weights. The goods involved were 18 stones of dyed or beat flax, six stones of Dutch flax, three pounds six ounces of 'pan brase', nine stones of iron, £7 worth of lead, two pounds of alum, six pounds of rosin, one and a half stones of 'reis' hemp, 10 pounds of hops, two stones 13 pounds of tobacco, and three pounds of aniseed and liquorice (*ibid*, 615–7). The amount of goods involved suggest that this was a booth-owning chapman or one of higher substance than the ordinary foot pedlar.

Settlement could sometimes be by barter as well as by cash. This was found in the case of two chapmen from Tain who struck a bargain with Elgin merchants at 'saint Benat's fair' to supply hides and skins in payment for goods (MacGill 1909, I, 206, no 521). Indeed, well into the 18th century, Highland pedlars were bartering skins for linen and other goods at the fairs in Callander (Wills 1973, 6).

Unfortunately there are few 16th century testaments to provide details of the trading activities of chapmen at this time. The earliest traced by the writer is that of Robert Low for 1592–3 (St Andrews Register of Testaments: SRO, CC 20/4/2 – Robert Low). Low was based at Glenduckie in the parish of Flisk, North Fife. His total moveable estate of £50.8s was comprised almost exclusively of outstanding debts, suggesting a credit relationship with his better known customers. Amongst these were two ladies from the lesser aristocracy, a fellow chapman, a tailor, a wright, tenant farmers and George Morris in 'cottoun of cairny' who bought 'ane furnyst quhinger' or small sword (*ibid*). Using 'Roy's Map' as a guide to settlement patterns (Roy 1755), it is clear that his debtors were from small unenclosed estates, hill farms, and dispersed hamlet clusters almost entirely on the north side of the River Eden. Roy shows that the largest concentration of settlements in the Stratheden area were on the south side of the river. In only one case, however, did a customer appear from that side, the 'guid wyfe of Pitillok' (Pitillock, near Falkland), about eight and a half miles south as the crow flies from Glenduckie. One can only speculate that detours because of lack of bridges accounted for the Eden delineating a local trading pattern. Moreover, in view of the small distances it seems likely that Low was a foot chapman who worked a local beat following routes that can still be walked to this day.

More abundant sources in the 17th century ease the task of looking at a specific area in greater depth, to find out more about the interaction between town and hinterland. Brechin has been chosen, partly because greater attention is needed for the smaller burghs, but also because sources exist which complement information gleaned from testaments. The tax lists of 1690 shows that Brechin was a middle-ranking small royal burgh which had not achieved its legally Incorporated Guildry until 1666. Its inland trade was described as 'very mean and small', having declined dramatically from about the 1680s, with an estimated one-third of the inhabitants being either bankrupt or forced to leave the burgh (*State of the Burghs* 1692, 100). In 1662, the merchants had petitioned the Town Council with regard to the effect of illegal trading which was difficult to suppress:

> 'We . . . the merchants of this burgh, are heavily wronged by a number of chapmen dwelling in landward round about us upon all our corners, who retail and buy all sorts of staple goods such as lint hemp iron tobacco salt serp and yarn, whereby they detain the country people from coming into the burgh to buy such commodities from us . . .' (Thomas 1968, 23).

The particular problems ascribed to Brechin were caused by its distance from the sea, and the inland competition from the laird of Edzell's weekly market, as well as the St Lawrence Fair. In addition, there was an illegal weekly market at the North Water Bridge over the River North Esk, plus competition from 10 individual traders in neighbouring parishes. Also, the neighbouring burghs of barony, Rescobie and Kirriemuir, both had weekly markets and several yearly fairs (*State of the Burghs*, 1692, 101). Amongst those traders operating in the landward areas were 'David Smart and David Cardean', both listed under the parish of Tannadice. It is beyond coincidence to find the testament of a David 'Smairt', then in Leithnot at the time of his death in 1697 (Brechin Register of Testaments, SRO CC 3/3/8 – David Smairt). Sadly, there is no detailed list of his debtors. Smairt was designated as a 'packman', his moveable estate being valued at £165 6s 8d. This included the estimate of £66 13s 4d in respect of 'the defunct's pack', and it is also revealed that he possessed 62 sheep , a cow calf and a stirk. One can infer from the livestock that he would have worked a local beat, sheep in particular requiring care.

18TH CENTURY

The testament of John Webster for 1738 does, however, provide a detailed list of his debtors (*ibid*, CC 3/4/2 – John Webster). Webster's base has been given as 'over Tenements of Caldhame' (*Brechin Tests*, Webster, John). The lands of Caldhame lay on the east side of Brechin across the Den

Burn, and the road to Montrose divided them into the Upper and Nether Tenements, all of which were outside the burgh royalty (Thomas 1968, 40). By far the largest proportion of debtors lived relatively close to Brechin, a few exceptions being found in the Mearns.

Chapmen testaments also shed light on moveable wealth. Smart's moveable estate is close to the value of £181 calculated in 1714 on that of John Milne, 'chapman, traveller in Fife, Parish of Moneymyll' (Monimail) (St Andrews Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 20/4/17, 390–2 – John Milne). In 1724, Patrick Colt, a booth-owning chapman in Perth had a lengthy inventory with estate valued at over £211 (*ibid*, CC 20/4/18 – Patrick Colt). This was virtually the same total as given to a Brechin cadger in 1614 (Brechin Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 3/3/3). A year earlier, the inventory and debts of David Alexander, 'ane poor and simple chapman' from Crail, came to over £72 (St Andrews Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 20/4/18 – David Alexander). An Angus chapman who died in Dundee during 1643 had his inventory assessed at just over £37 (Brechin Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 3/4/19 – John Watson). By comparison, three years earlier the bedal of Kilconqhar left £60 of estate. Amongst the goods and personal effects of Charles McCallum, a chapman in Kilmartin parish, Argyll, were 31 spindles, 32 pounds of coarse tea, a kettle and still (Argyll Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 2/3/11, 246–8). For the same year, 1751, an obituary notice for an Aberdeenshire chapman reveals that he left a small hoard of £500 sterling, mostly bank notes and good bills that were found in his pockets (Alexander 1981, 128–9).

Sometimes inventories give a detailed breakdown of merchandise, while in other instances the value of stock is afforded a blanket estimate. Each give useful clues as to the standing of the chapman involved. The goods in James Fyfe's wallet at £13 11s 6d were worth over twice those in his pack (Brechin Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 3/3/9 – James Fyfe). Nearly 40 years later in 1775, the value of a chapman's pack stolen at Coupar Angus was valued at between £70 and £80 for the Perth Court (*Scots Mag*, 1775, 524). The stock-list of Patrick Colt runs to several pages and itemises household goods such as a chaff bed and bolster, a sack of peats, some old bits of iron for horseshoes, '5 deals and two trees for a chapman's stand with a canvas' worth £3 12s (St Andrews Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 20/4/18). In Black's *History of Brechin*, the author mentions that a local cooper made a trade out of hiring the wooden framework of the chapmen's booths, which were covered with blanketing to keep out the wet (1867, 275).

Chapbooks

While some Scottish chapmen did carry a portion of their stock in printed material such as the Glasgow and Falkirk chapbooks, these were not found in any popular sense until around 1700. A chapbook could be anything from a broadside to a decent-sized volume, and were certainly in existence before pedlars started to hawk them (Harvey 1903, 12). While ballads were issued as early as 1611, any form of popular literature would hinge on the question of accessibility through literacy, and must be seen against the background of an orally literate society. Almanacs were the most widely distributed type of chapbook, their size being compatible with bulk carrying (McDonald 1966, 260). The principal sections were designed for those attending fairs, and Raban's almanac of 1625 refers to the role of chapmen in furnishing the printer with information about fair dates (*ibid*). Henry Graham contends that a popular and vernacular literature did not reach the rural population until about 1750 (1901, 188). On the strength that chapmen hawked both pious and spurious tracts, could they in fact read? They probably had a basic or functional literacy, a working knowledge that served their needs as salesmen. Examples of chapmen's signatures from the 18th century show that some were clearly familiar with using a quill when it came to writing their names, but others reveal a hand bordering on the illegible.

There was always room for exceptions. John Brown (1722–87) began his working life as a herd boy and sometime packman, before becoming a Professor of Divinity, best known for his Self-Interpreting Bible. He acquired a self-taught knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. There is also increasing evidence of rural schools, even in the Highlands, and the testament of the rural chapman, John Milne, reveals that here was one chapman who at least kept a compt book in the early 18th century. Again, our task is to establish a pattern. According to Rogers few rural traders were skilled in numeracy: 'For every customer and each article of merchandise, the dealer used a notch-stick' (Rogers 1885, I, 356). Settlement was expected once 20 to 30 notches had been made. One must also consider that memory was a more finely tuned mechanism than it is today, and accounts or transactions were settled in person at the rural fairs. In turn, this may explain why longer-distance customers did not secure credit in their dealings with chapmen.

The appendix shows a list of goods sold by chapmen which has largely been taken from testaments. Yet inventories listing goods, or stock on death, do not show exactly what chapmen took with them on their travels. Some would obviously have a stock of goods at home. In 1691, the Stirling Guildry appointed three of their brethren to search the chapmen's chambers for staple wares (Cook & Morris 1916, 77 & 46–7). What amounts did chapmen carry, how in fact did they transport their commodities, what places did they visit and what routes did they take? At first glance this seems a daunting set of questions to try to answer. Inroads can, however, be made using the evidence contained in Justiciary Records where the indictment or dittay sets out the nature of the charge in some detail.

CHAPMEN AS VICTIMS

The Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles (1664–1742) (Cameron 1949; Imrie 1969) show chapmen as accused and victim, the emphasis, however, resting on the fact that their occupation made them particularly susceptible to 'stouthreif' – aggravated theft with violence. Chapmen were among the few groups who had any reason for travelling at a time when society was essentially localized. There was an inherent risk in taking goods across large tracts of uninhabited moors considering the floating population of outlaws – those put to the horn – mendicant soldiers, broken clansmen, vagabonds and professional thieves. The Argyll cases reveal such persons finding refuge in uninhabited shieling huts and a pattern emerges of chapmen, along with others such as drovers, being prime targets for robbers.

In November 1670, a packman was robbed of five or six shillings and his pack goods that included 30 ells of coloured ribbon, two pairs of shears, combs and other small wares (Cameron 1949, 44). Four years earlier, a chapman had been stabbed to death while travelling on the King's Highway upon the lands of Colgine. His corpse was hidden in a peat hole and most of his wares secreted in fox dens. The indictment lists the goods as two plaids, one dirk, 'ane by-knife', one bonnet, knives, shears, 'elshoe irones' (awls), some indigo, over 12 ells of linen, alum, pepper, aconite and two dollars in cash (*ibid*, 33). In addition to cloth, dye-stuffs were also carried by chapmen . 'A pock of madder and Brisall' (Brazil) together with some knives and other small goods comprised the haul stolen from a chapman travelling through Appin (*ibid*, 13). During most of the 18th century, a great deal of traffic in all kinds of cloth and haberdashery was carried on by these semi-itinerant dealers.

Chapmen belonging to the Isle of Mull are specifically mentioned as being amongst those who travelled through Argyll and Lorne (*ibid*, 163). A band of notorious thieves and broken men preyed upon traders attending the fairs and markets at Kilmore, Clachan-Seil, 'foord of Annacra', Kilmartin and Kilmichael. At various times, money was extorted from chapmen and merchants for safe passage across the moorland ways such as between Kilmore and Kilchrenan (Loch Aweside) (*ibid*). By comparison with the chapman who was robbed in the 'Braes of Drumnashellaig' (Drumnashellaig,

Braes of Lorn) of 4 merks and 1 pound of tobacco (*ibid*, 185), a Lismore drover lost 80 merks when he ran into some desperate characters at the 'ale house of Teyiphurt' (*ibid*, 162). The murder of a packman in Mull during March 1740 reveals the state of lawlessness which then existed. He had been travelling a hill-route across the narrowest part of the island – 'upon the high road from Aros through Auchashennaig' – with a packhorse loaded with chests of long-bladed knives, one of which became the murder weapon (Imrie 1969, 484–6).

CHAPMEN'S ROUTES

As we have seen it is occasionally possible to piece together the routes followed by chapmen as they pushed trade into every nook of the country. By plotting fair sites in relation to known tracks and fords, some idea of local communications can be obtained. Similarly, the locations of change-houses offer clues as to some of the old routes taken by chapmen and other travellers. The one-time change-house at Ciaran, south of remote Loch Treig, was certainly on an old packhorse and droving route, although it now lies under the Blackwater Reservoir (Robertson 1943, 18). Chapmen from Lochaber are known to have gone south for goods by way of Kinloch Rannoch (Wills 1973, 34), and a much-used route from the west entered Glen Lyon by way of Gorton and Gleann Meran, fording the River Lyon at Lubreoch en route to Glen Lochay and Killin (Robertson 1943, 1–26). Fairs on the fringes of the Highlands, like Crieff, were important outlets for such commodities as shoes, home-made cloths and chapmen's wares.

In certain areas, the military road network may have benefited travellers, although these were primarily constructed to ease the movements of troops and military supplies, rather than assist inland trade. That chapmen undertook rigorous journeys to outlying parts is also implicit from place-name evidence. *Cnoc a' cheannachie*, the Pedlar's Knoll, is found a short distance from the famous Comyn's Road near Ruthven in Badenoch, the derivation being that it was the appointed spot where a pedlar would sell his goods (Kerr 1984, 23). On the Priest's or Whisky Road that links Glen Lethnot and Glen Esk in Angus is a shallow rocky defile marked on maps as 'Chapmans Holmes' (NGR 494 760). And on one of the Lammermuir hill-tracks is found 'Chapman's Slack' (Graham 1960, 227). These and other routes would have been used by chapmen on their rounds to outlying farms, hamlets and fairs. That said, more common are Cadger place-names and roads, doubtlessly used by chapmen as well as other traffic.

There is a recurring tradition connected with packmen in that they met with accidental death at stones or dykes where they had halted to test their enormous packs. With the shoulder strap still on, the pack is said to have tumbled over the other side of the stone, and the helpless packman was choked to death (Mack 1926, 239–41; *Blairgowrie Advertiser*, 5 Feb 1887, 5). A similar act of fate is enshrined in Alexander Pennicuik's poem in celebration of Jamie the Packman:

> 'He sat down at a fauld dyke for to ease his back;
> 'Twad bursten our mare to have carried his pack:
> As he was rising to gang some miles farther,
> He hitched his pack o'er his left shoulder,
> The swing of the pack brought him to the ground,
> And chok'd him dead . . .' (*Merry Tales*).

Inclement weather also played its part in chapmen deaths, who like fishermen, frequently died away from home. Robert Burns reminds us of Tam O' Shanter's homeward journey:

> 'By this time he was cross the ford
> Whare in the snaw the chapman smoor'd' (Henley & Henderson 1896, I, 282).

A percentage of chapmen certainly would have transported their goods by packhorse, which in upland areas was for long the only feasible means. The likes of Glen Esk in Angus had no road suitable for carts until 1764, although by 1790 they were relatively common (*SAS*, Angus, XIII, xxix). Those chapmen with packhorses carried cloth and yarn in bales slung on each side of the horse (Brown 1886, II, 56; Black 1867, 275), and 50 years before the old *Statistical Account*, 15 packhorse chapmen served East Lothian, 'all of whom had a good trade'. By the time of the 1790s their numbers had dropped to no more than six (*SAS*, The Lothians, II, 582–3). Those of greater substance also could afford carts, although probably by far the majority relied on Shanks's pony. Oral tradition testifies to the weight and size of later packs carried by packmen, who in certain parts of the Highlands were known as Highland Donkeys (pers comm, Mr John 'Ton' MacDonald (b 1893), Mingarry, Moidart, 27 September, 1984). Orphan boys were sometimes set adrift in the rural areas with a box containing small haberdashery items, and apprentice merchants started out with a pack in many instances. According to the *Scottish National Dictionary*, a 'paidle' was a small leather bag sometimes used by pedlars. Oilskin-covered baskets were also used latterly, as were custom-made boxes used by specialists in small hardware items and jewellery.

Peebles Museum has a highly distinctive box with an inscribed brass plate to its owner, Robert N Farquhar, a pedlar-poet who is thought to have been the oldest son of an Irish family that settled in the Old Town about the 1850s. The box is decorated with a representation of the burgh arms (three salmon) plus distinctive playing-card symbols. This box could be carried as a grip or on one's back. There are shoulder straps and a leather back-pad showing signs of insect infestation. The main compartment, which is 16 in [406 mm] deep shows no sign of drawers or trays, although it could have been sub-divided at one time.

THE LINEN TRADE

Unlike England, chapmen in Scotland appear to have largely eluded any attempts to license their activities. A report into the Scottish linen trade recommended that the trade would gain, if pedlars and packsmen – 'the ordinary instruments of country trade' – were brought under supervision through a licence system. This was never implemented (Durie 1979, 17). It has been suggested that the most prosperous period for Scottish chapmen was from 1710 to 1810 (Brown 1886, II, 56), although this would have varied in degree and length according to the area and the individual concerned. In East Lothian for example, the inland trade of Haddington was in the hands of poor mean packmen at the close of the 17th century (*State of the Burghs* 1642, 81). By the end of the next century, however, the chapmen's trade was greatly in decline (*SAS* The Lothians, II, 582). Available evidence does seem to point to the middle of the 18th century as being a time when their prosperity peaked. Chapmen testaments from this period increasingly reflect greater wealth and lengthier stock-lists. The 1740s was also a time when Scottish linen merchants began to oust incoming merchants from England. Dealer rings were evident in places like Perth, and by this time, English merchants were less numerous at the big Scottish fairs (Durie 1979, 154).

The domestic handloom-weaving industry also gradually emerged from about the 1740s, acclerating after 1760 (Smout 1969, 343). In 1769, the traveller Thomas Pennant wrote:

> 'The inhabitants around Loch Tay, within the last thirty years, manufacture a great deal of thread (linen yarn). They spin with *rocks*, which they do while they attend their cattle on the hills; and in the four fairs in the year held at Kenmore, about £1600 worth of yarn is sold out of Breadalbane only. . . . Less than forty years ago, there was not the least trade in this article' (1774, II, 56).

Pennant informs us that the yarn was bought by middlemen who resold it in places like Perth and Glasgow, where it was manufactured into cloth. This could suggest chapmen having such a role. Certainly, merchants frequently employed middlemen to intercept country weavers on their way to

Perth, the ell-wide linen made in country districts being generally sold in a half-bleached condition (Baxter 1936, 43). It is possible that the role of chapman as distributors has been under-stated. 'The traditional mechanism for sales at home was for the country weaver to sell his web to either a merchant or a chapman, who gathered 10–12 webs in this way for sale at the fairs to the bigger lowland merchants or English buyers for the English markets' (Durie 1979, 41). Taken together as a group, they moved substantial quantities of linen and other cloth at rural fairs, as well as places far from recognized trading centres. To some extent it would appear that tightly controlled trading monopolies forced the middlemen out into rural areas. Arbroath's 'land customs' reveal that in 1718, a chapman's stand, or horsepack, was levied at six times the rate for a stand of a smith, wright, or country shoemaker. Likewise, a burgess could dispose of 60 ells of brown linen at the same customs rate as that imposed on a packman who stopped in the street to sell some goods from his pack (Finlayson 1923, 30). By comparison, the great linen market at Dunkeld, St Colm's Fair, revealed no such discrimination against chapmen stall-holders at the same period (Atholl Chartulary, 276). But by 1852, the *Perthshire Advertiser* reported that 'a single cart of "hemit claeth" was the only remnant of the ancient market, one of the most considerable in the Highlands' (*Perthshire Advertiser*, July 1852, 3).

By the last decade of the 18th century, a new prosperity had reached rural areas such as Angus. In the parish of Mains of Fintry this manifested itself in a boom in tea kettles and in the increased wearing of English cloth, silk-faced plaids for the better off, and cotton and thread stockings (*SAS*, Angus, XIII, 489). The 1754 inventory of John Duncan, chapman traveller and late merchant in Colinsburgh, Fife, testifies to the popularity of the napkin (St Andrews Register of Testaments, SRO CC 20/4/21). Eleven years later, that of Alexander Baxter in Fort Augustus included human hair (for wigs), 104 horse tails, old brass and copper candlesticks and goose quills (Inverness Register of Testaments, SRO, CC 11/1/6, 126–9).

Writing in 1836, George Penny states that mounted chapmen were numerous 'about 50 years before. They travelled on horseback with large packs and lodged at farm-houses (1836, 134–5). As with other travellers, chapmen were accorded hospitality in rural districts, and as a rule received as much food as served them until they reached their next destination. Like the itinerant tailors, they were usually a well-informed class of men (and women) and played a useful role in circulating the news of the day, telling of matters political, ecclesiastical, and domestic. Perhaps for this reason, pedlars were perceived as carriers of sedition. In 1681, the Privy Council were informed that chapmen were 'the persons who debauch and abuse the people and convene them to field conventicles' (Fittis 1874, 3). Sir Richard Musgrove's *History* of the various rebellions in Ireland (1801) also contains scattered references to the impact of pedlars in the spread of various political ideas. Also of interest was the case of a chapman called David Clark who arrived at a Golspie inn with 12 pounds of gunpowder in a bag. This was ignited by a spark from the fire, resulting in the death of the landlord's son, destruction of the premises and five or six people in the room being 'miserably scorched' (*Scots Mag*, 145 (1753), 100).

THE CHAPMEN SOCIETIES

The 18th century also saw the rise and decline of the Chapmen Societies. These self-styled Incorporations were found in a number of counties: Angus, Fife, the Lothians, Perthshire, Stirling and Clackmannan. These were sub-divided into district branches, each with their own elected officers. They appear to have courted respectability, functioning along the lines of a pseudo guild with freemasonry undertones. The Dunkeld Chapmen reputedly owed their foundation charter to James V. Their rules or so-called 'Acts' are outlined in some surviving 18th-century Minute Books. These

also include information on trading standards, etiquette, and a pious moral code with fines for those members who indulged in such nefarious conduct as travelling with goods on the Sabbath, failure to carry a bible, and backbiting or slandering a neighbouring chapman (NLS, MSS 200). The trappings of the Stirling Chapmen, who were not incorporated until 1726, included a secret motto: 'Practice no fraud' (*ibid*, MSS 197).

The opening rule of the Cupar branch of the Fife Chapmen makes clear the prerequisite of protestant allegiance, and there appears to have been a secret oath of membership for the East Neuk branch:

> 'I command and chairg in the King's neme and my Lord's neme and in neme and behef of the Rest of the Brethren that no Sabbath breakers nor Whoremongers no adulterers nor Swearers nor Drunkards nor thievs nor Vagabonds or aney other extravagant person shall travel in this shyre under the neme of a chapman under the paine of confiscation of his goods and punishment of his person and publik Banishment out of this said shyre – God save the King' (*ibid*, MSS 198).

The chapmen of the Three Lothians convened at Prestonpans for their annual election. At one time they had held their own fair at Preston Cross (Green 1907, 58–9), acquiring a right to the actual cross in 1636 (*SAS*, The Lothians, II, 582). It stood in an open field on the site of a lost village, and in this context there was a 'Chepman's Cros' in the Lindores area of Fife (*RSS*, XI, 622; cf 'Chapmoncroft' *Retours*, I, 877. Possibly the word 'crof' has been interpreted as 'cros'). At certain fairs the chapmen societies held a so-called 'Court' in camera, it being an offence to reveal to outsiders any of its proceedings (NLS, MSS 200). The chapman baillie of each locality where there was a fair appears to have been given the responsibility for collecting a pledge, in cash or goods, from each member to secure his attendance at the 'Court'. The baillie list of the Fife Chapmen runs to such officers at fairs across Fife. From 1706 to 1730, the East Neuk branch of the Fife Chapmen convened at Kilconquhar, a non-burghal market fair having been established there in 1609. By 1803, the Cupar Society had noted its declining membership and resolved to admit merchants (*ibid*).

Apart from fostering self-interest, the Chapmen Societies appear to have attempted to bring greater respectability to their occupation, perhaps in an effort to distance themselves from less reputable types. Trading standards was one area which had reflected them in a poor light. The various Societies could not usurp the power of the Guildry in this respect, but they appear to have been given a measure of self-autonomy. The Scottish Standards had been abolished by the Treaty of Union, but in practice continued to be used side by side with the English Standards. This added to the general confusion since there were local departures from the national measures. The standard Scots ell was 37 inches. The Dunkeld ell, which still hangs on the side of a house near the old market place, was fractionally over 37 inches. Frequently it is misrepresented as an actual ellwand or measuring rod, when in fact it was the local Standard for testing the accuracy of the ellwands carried by traders. By comparison, the Ceres branch of the Fife Chapmen had its own folding yard-measure (exactly 36 inches) dated '1705' and a year earlier than the date inscribed on the Dunkeld measure (Anderson 1923, 167–70). More curious is the ell-groove that can still be seen on the shaft of the market cross at Fettercairn, reputed to have come from the lost village of Kincardine. 'Jagging' was a punishment primarily applied to fraudulent traders whereby they were manicled by an iron collar to a market cross or similar site (Rogers 1885, II, 354).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, chapmen have proved to be a more complex occupational group than was at first realized. Clearly by the middle of the 18th century some were more akin to minor merchants, and Penny describes their double row of covered stalls on fair days at Perth, as filling the High Street from

the Kirkgate to the Guard Vennel (Penny 1836, 134–5). The more substantial mounted chapmen and those with packhorses occupied a role similar to mobile shops. Yet essentially the petty chapman was a pedestrian, as were his successors, the stereotyped couthie packman and the tramp pedlar. Each played a part in local inland trade, as well as the more adventurous who helped steer trade into outlying glens and distant communities. It has been shown that in earlier times this was often done at considerable personal risk. Oral tradition for this overlaps and complements written factual evidence.

Emerging evidence tends to suggest that market monopoly was to the fore in creating much illegal trade, particularly in regard to staple wares. The amount of legislation directed against chapmen as middlemen also suggests a need for a closer look at their operations and functions as distributors. Taken as a whole, they undoubtedly moved considerable amounts of cloth at home and in England (Spufford 1984, 12–13, 26–8, 144–6). When seen in this light and in terms of the diversity of small goods that they sold, their contribution to society goes beyond being seen as marginal. They returned from journeys to the south with a wealth of information which enabled them to suggest new styles and varieties, thus injecting new life into the domestic linen industry. Moreover, they brought fresh insight into the interaction and competition between town and hinterland. By the second or third decade of the 19th century, chapmen had been eclipsed by the changing trading pattern which they had helped bring about. Other specialist dealers were already on the scene by the 1820s, such as the flying stationers, itinerant drapers and hardware merchants. The hey-day of the great rural fairs was over by the 1840s, just as we witness the rise of specialist shops in rural areas. A glance at the appendix shows the diversity of items which came by way of the pack and helps illuminate the small nooks and crannies of material culture which tend to be overlooked.

In turn, the packman and tramp pedlar were squeezed into the more remote districts such as the West Highlands, where up until the mid-1950s, certain communities were devoid of shops and tarmac roads (Leitch 1985, 26–7; Sanderson 1958, 243–5). Such areas flung the pedlar's trade a last lifeline, but other areas which had once owed the chapmen a debt for bringing goods directly to their door, no longer had any need for them. Yet it was the chapman who provided the link to a revolution in everyday domestic life, providing many with small necessities, as well as an increasing number with small, but affordable luxuries that made life more enjoyable.

APPENDIX: GOODS TRADED BY CHAPMEN 1550–1750

Aconite
Alum
Almanacs
Aniseed
Awls

'Balkis'
Ballads
Band Boxes
Band Strings
Beeds
Bells
Belting
Belts
Bibles
Binding
'Black Plush'
Bobbins
Books
Bonnets
'Bowie'
Buckles
'Builkis'
'Brase'
'Brestels'
'Brisall'
Broom Seed
Buckle Glasses
Buckrum
Buttons

Calligo
'Camblet'
'Cambrick'
'Camreck'
Candle Shears
Capes
Chalk
Clasps
Cloth
Combs
Chapbooks
Chessmen
Cords
Corks
Corn Hooks
Cotton
'Craipe'
Curtain Rings

'Elshoe Irones' (awls)

Fans
Felt
Fir
Flax
Forks
Fustine

Garters
Gemlocks
Glasses
Gloves
Gunpowder

Hair
Hemp
Hops

Indigo
Ink Holders
Ink Horns

Kail Seed
'Knettings'
Knives

Lace
Laces
Linen
Lint
Liquorice
Locks

Madder
Masks
Medhop Dye
Mills (snuff)
Mirror Glasses
'Muffels'
Muskets
Muslin

Napkins
Necklaces
Needles

Pamphlets
Pen Holders
Pen Knives

'Pasmentis'
Pepper
Pin Cases
Pins
Plaiding
Plaids
Points
Purses

'Quhinger'

Razors
Ribbons
Ring Dials
Roset
'Rudiments'

Salt Cellars
'Shanbo Shin'
Shirts
Shears
Shoemaker's Knives
Silk
Skins
Snuff
Soap
Spectacles & Cases
'Spiceries'
Spoons
Stockings
Stringing

Tape
Tartan
'Taycloth'
Thimbles
Threads
Tobacco
Tobacco Boxes
Tobacco Pipes
'Towcards'
Traces
Trumps

Whalebone
Wheel Bands
Whistles

Yarn

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