



# **Discussion Papers In Economics And Business**

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-An analysis based on probate inventories-

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Discussion Paper 12-15

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research note is to study the mariner occupation in Bristol by analyzing probate inventories from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A large percentage of people were engaged in the occupation of a mariner, and this was a primary occupation for many in Bristol. In this research note, the general distribution and value of mariners' inventories are determined. It is difficult to define the occupation of a mariner by referring to only one image. Almost all mariners belonged to the middle-income group, but some inventories recorded very high values. High-value inventories were particularly recorded in the seventeenth century. Hence, the mariner occupation belonged to the upper-middle-income group in the seventeenth century; later, this occupation gave way to that of low-wage worker in the eighteenth century. The word "mariner" has a board meaning, and it cannot be restricted to only one occupation.

**JEL Classification:** N3, N13

**Key-words:** English economic history, probate inventories, mariners, Bristol

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### ***Probate inventories in Bristol***

The purpose of this research note is to study the mariner occupation in Bristol by analyzing probate inventories from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A probate inventory is a historical source for studies on British economic history between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. It comprised a list of movable objects, and one can access immense information regarding not only goods and chattels but also credits. Hence, if these inventories are analyzed, it is possible to show not only patterns in lifestyle and consumer behavior, but also the financial life cycle. In addition, we could gather information on occupations and values and possibly clarify social economic structures from thesis by Gregory King or roll of middling sort. As seen in the research of L. Wetherill and of M. Overton, frequencies of ownership were often analyzed.<sup>1</sup> However, some people opine that probate inventories are an unsuitable historical material owing to content inaccuracy. For example, M. Spufford examines whether probate inventories are acceptable or not as historical material by omission of goods, unconfirmed numbers, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, from the perspective of the probate process, it is possible to expect a high level of accuracy because some appraisers belonged to the same profession as that of the deceased and a rigid probate process was followed.<sup>3</sup>

Some recent research adopts take new approaches. For example, P. Bowen investigated the stock of a “shop” in probate inventories around Cardiff. Bowen suggests that merchant inventories included the category of “shop”. Perhaps, the stock in shops were appraised correctly because of the nature of the commodities.<sup>4</sup> N. Cox and Wolverhampton University also collaborated on a research project titled the ‘*Dictionary of traded goods and commodities 1550-1800*’.<sup>5</sup> In this project, Cox insists that the most important historical sources are the probate inventories collected in the

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<sup>1</sup> Weatherill, L. (1996) *Consumer Behaviour & Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760*, Routledge., Overton, M., Whittle, J., Dean, D., Hann, A. (2004) *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750*, Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Spufford, M. (1990) ‘The limitations of the probate inventory’, in J. Chartres ed., *English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.139-174.

<sup>3</sup> Okabe, Y., ‘Legal background and appraisal method of probate inventories in England’, *Osaka Economic Papers* (December 2009), Osaka University.

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, P. (2004) *Shopkeepers and Tradesmen in Cardiff and the Vale 1633-1857*, Bowen.

<sup>5</sup> Cox, N. (2000) *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550-1820*, Ashgate.

West Midlands, North Midlands, London, and Sussex.

The publication of probate inventories were issued by societies in each county. In recent years, many researchers have begun to refer to such publications. J. Moore states that an effective use of probate inventories in research can result in continuity.<sup>6</sup> The probate inventories stored at the Bristol Record Office are an example of records maintained in a good condition.

With regard to the inventories in Bristol, there are two useful publications. The first is a set of three volumes edited by E. and S. George.<sup>7</sup> This research investigated all probate inventories within the city and deanery of Bristol from 1542 to 1804; in all, 330 inventories were selected as a representative sample. The second is a guide to probate inventories in Bristol also edited by E. and S. George; this book is similar to the index of other record offices. This guide includes 7,169 inventories from the deanery of the Bristol diocese,<sup>8</sup> and each inventory is listed alphabetically and includes some information, for example, the year, reference, name, parish and area, occupation or status, and value. This note utilizes this index to analyze patterns in the content of probate inventories in Bristol.

This note also investigates the tendency of one primary occupation in Bristol: that of a mariner. A large percentage of people were engaged in the occupation of a mariner, and this was a primary occupation for many in Bristol because the city was well known and large port in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This note tries to determine the type of mariner profession prevalent in Bristol during this period.

### ***Mariners in Bristol between seventeenth and eighteenth centuries***

The number of existing probate records are estimated to be two million wills, one million probate inventories, and 30,000 probate accounts,<sup>9</sup> but these numbers are not

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<sup>6</sup> Moore, J. S. (1985) 'Probate Inventories: Problems and Prospects', in P. Riden ed., *Probate Records and the Local Community*, Gloucester: Alan Sutton, p.12.

<sup>7</sup> George, E. and S. (2008) *Bristol Probate Inventories Part III: 1690-1804*, Bristol Record Society's Publication Vol.60. George, E. and S. with the assistance of P. Fleming (2005) *Bristol Probate Inventories: 1657-1689*, Bristol Record Society's Publication Vol.57. George, E. and S. with the assistance of P. Fleming (2002) *Bristol Probate Inventories Part I: 1542-1650*, Bristol Record Society's Publication Vol.54.

<sup>8</sup> George, E. and S. (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery of the Diocese of Bristol (1542-1804)*, Bristol Record Society.

<sup>9</sup> Takahashi, M. (1999) *Mura No Sōden : Shinzoku Kōzō Sōzokukankō Sedaikeishō*.

confirmed. Probate inventories in Bristol range from the middle of the sixteenth to the latter half of the eighteenth centuries, as shown in Figure I. The oldest inventory in Bristol dates back to 1542. From the 1600s, the number of inventories increased peaking in the 1630s; however in 1638, the number dropped to zero. Inventory recording picked up again in 1639, which listed 103 inventories, and these numbers continued to rapidly increase. The number dropped to zero yet again in 1645 because the outbreak of Puritan Revolution compelled mariners to probate their inventories only in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Later numbers rose again, and the use of probate inventories reached its peak between the 1730s and 1750s. The last inventory was recorded in 1804.

Table I shows the different type of occupations mentioned in probate inventories; in all, 251 occupations have been included, and the table illustrates the division of labor in Bristol. For example, the occupation of saddler (No. 169) was similar to that of a saddle-tree maker (No. 170) but recognized as separate occupation with different name. Soap-boiler (No. 201) and soap-maker (No. 202) are other similar examples.

Table I also present the occupational structure in Bristol. The number of mariners (No. 122) listed in the inventories is 1,675-23.4% of all the occupations and is the largest group. The distribution of mariners' inventories is quite different from the total distribution shown in Figure I. As seen in Figure II, the probate inventories of mariners in Bristol primarily existed from 1610 - 1780, with the first inventor being recorded in 1608. By the 1700s, there were a small number of inventories. However, almost all inventories were written between 1707 and 1766, perhaps because of the impact of various wars at sea.<sup>10</sup>

These inventories have not recorded the type of personal possessions but only recorded wages or apparel. E. and S. George selected eight mariners' inventories from 1690-1804 in their publication.<sup>11</sup> Of these, only three inventories contain a list of personal goods, and the rest record other information, such as wages or apparel. Many probate inventories of the Royal Navy provide only the name, date, and rank of the

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*Kindaieikoku* (in Japanese), Tosui Shobo, p.84.

<sup>10</sup> George, E. and S, (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, p.270.

<sup>11</sup> George, E. and S. (2008) *Bristol Probate Inventories Part III*, pp.1-242.

mariner and name of the ship.<sup>12</sup> The mariners' inventories in Bristol demonstrate a similar tendency to that of navy records. Take the inventory of Richard Phillips (C. B., 1710, £12) for instance.<sup>13</sup> In his inventory, there are records of "two month's wages," and of the fact that he boarded "Her Majestyes Ship Hampshire," and his work was "Man of Warr." When we analyze the details of mariners' inventories, we need to create a distinction between high-value lists of personal possessions and low-value lists.

It appears that the term "mariner" to denote an occupation gained popularity after the eighteenth century; this occupational group was a minority in Bristol in the seventeenth century, even though Bristol was already one of the largest ports flourishing on the slave trade in England. Further, the work of a seventeenth-century mariner and that of an eighteenth-century mariner would also have differed.

As shown in Figure III, the largest value recorded in the probate inventories is from £10- £19, which is seen in 657 inventories. The second-largest value is from £5- £9, observed in 441 inventories. Therefore, 88.6% of inventories are recorded value of under £19. Thus, the occupation of a mariner appears to belong to middle-income group. On the other hand, some inventories recorded very large values that amounted to over £50. Within the mariner-occupation group, there seems to be large income gap. Hence the mariner could have led different lives according to their income levels.

Some differences have been observed in the mariners' probate inventories between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Table II lists the probate inventories valued to be over £50 in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which numbered 7,169 inventories in Bristol. By the seventeenth century, some mariners had recorded a large number of inventories. For example, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the highest amount recorded in an inventory is that of John Sharp in 1635, which amounted to £1,995. However, after the eighteenth century, these values reduced, and the number of mariners' inventories over £50 also slightly decreased. The highest value recorded in this period is that of Timothy Payne's inventory in 1707, which amounted to £975, -only 48.8% of Sharp's inventory value. In the seventeenth century, 24 mariner inventories were valued over £100, with the average amount being about £314. In mariners'

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<sup>12</sup> Grannum, K., Taylor, N. (2009) *Wills & Probate Records: A Guide for Family Historians Second Edition*, The National Archives, pp.124-126.

<sup>13</sup> George, E. and S. (2008) *Bristol Probate Inventories Part III*, p. 70.

inventories from the eighteenth century, only nine inventories were valued at over £100, the average amount being about £192, which is only 61% of the average value in the seventeenth century. This implies that the majority of the mariners were engaged in low-wage work post 1700. On the other hand, by 1700, the category of mariners included captains and master classes.

From among the inventories valued at over £50, which numbered five in the seventeenth century, 13.8% of the mariners lived in the rural parishes of Abbots Leigh, Clifton, Henbury, Mangotsfield, and Westbury-on-Trym. After the eighteenth century, only two mariners (i.e., 8%) continued to live there. Some mariners in the higher value group lived in rural areas in the seventeenth century but moved to city parishes in the eighteenth century. This suggests that not only their mode of life had changed, but also their working style.

There are some exceptions in the eighteenth century. For example, George Walker's inventory, appraised on May 29, 1772 in the city of Bristol, recorded many goods and credits amounting to around £767.<sup>14</sup> In his long list, there is information about his house that comprised five rooms, a kitchen, and cellar. Typically, goods would be appraised according to rooms, but in this list, the china, plates, and linen were appraised separately. His ship arrived after his death; therefore, many goods and chattels, products, and the balance of the deceased mariner's share were recorded in the account. As indicated in this long inventory, his status was "Master" of a ship named "Jane".<sup>15</sup>

### ***Summary***

The probate inventories in Bristol have been maintained in a very good condition and are useful for research on British economic and social history. The reason is not only their continuity but also their well-listed contents that are readily accessible for study. There exists an index as well as three publications of representative samples. This research note attempts to determine patterns in the contents of probate inventories in Bristol in order to prepare for future research.

In this research note, the general distribution and value of mariners' inventories are

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<sup>14</sup> George, E. and S. (2002) *Bristol Probate Inventories Part III*, pp.195-200. George, E. and S. (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> George, E. and S. (2002) *Bristol Probate Inventories Part III*, p.198.



determined. In addition, the residences of rich mariners in each century suggest that some lived in rural areas surrounding Bristol in the seventeenth century but moved to the city centre in the eighteenth century. A change definitely occurred in the mariners' status and lives.

It is difficult to define the occupation of a mariner by referring to only one image. Almost all mariners belonged to the middle-income group, but some inventories recorded very high values. High-value inventories were particularly recorded in the seventeenth century. Hence, the mariner occupation belonged to the upper-middle-income group in the seventeenth century; later, this occupation gave way to that of low-wage worker in the eighteenth century. In some rural English areas, a mariner implied a river trader<sup>16</sup>; hence, the range of work of a mariner was quite broad. Further, not only occupation, but income and status as well were quite different through the centuries. In Bristol, there is the possibility that many mariners in the seventeenth century were captains or in the master classes. Although not recorded, in the eighteenth century, some mariners belonged to the captain class, as seen in the designation of George Walker.

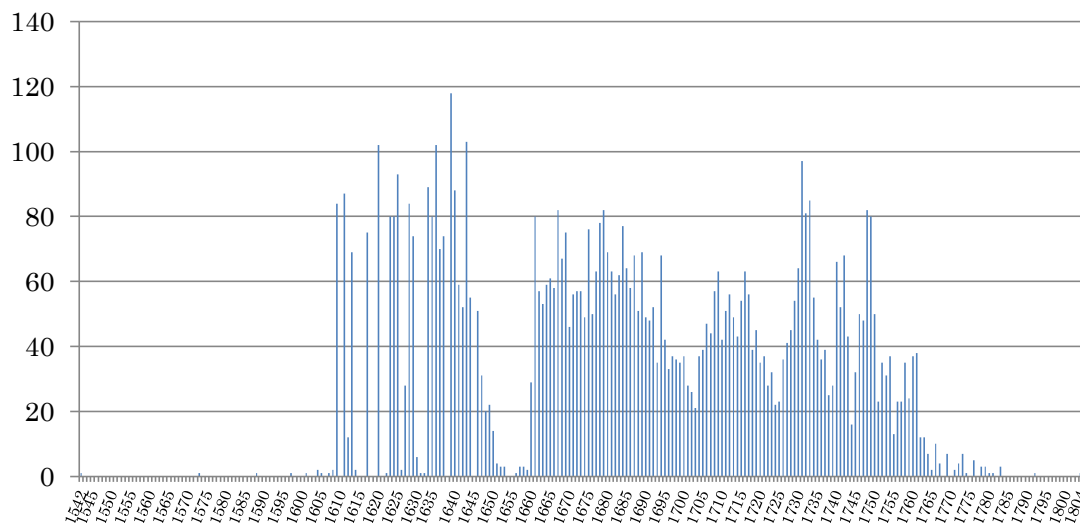
Nevertheless, the occupation of a mariner could denote one more profession: a serviceman in the navy.<sup>17</sup> These inventories were primarily registered by ship and recorded under the Admiralty of the Royal Navy. The word "mariner" has a board meaning, and it cannot be restricted to only one occupation. To derive more information, it is necessary to research other sources, for example, admiralty records and probate inventories in different areas. This will be the topics of my future research.

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<sup>16</sup> Cox, N. (2000) *Miners & Mariners of the Severn Gorge; Probate Inventories for Benthall, Broseley, Little Wenlock, and Madeley, 1660-1764*, Philmore, p.24.

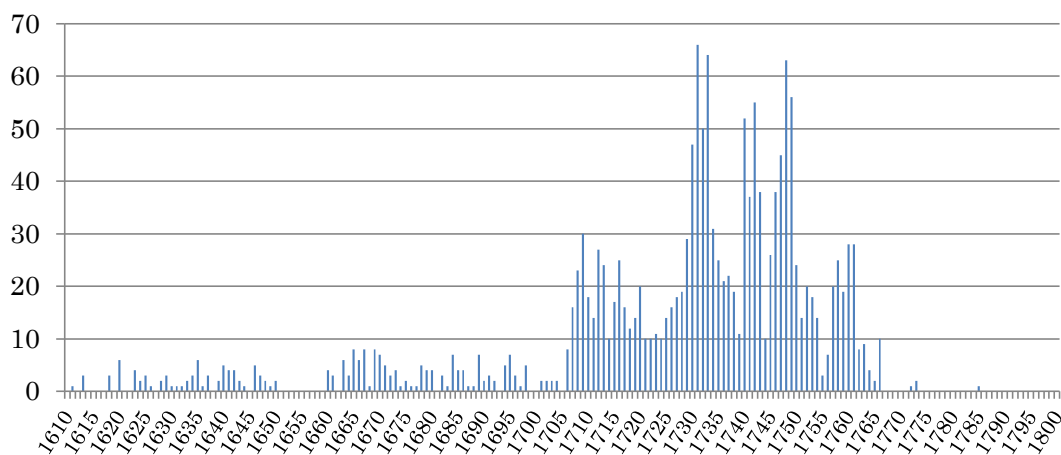
<sup>17</sup> Grannum, K., Taylor, N. (2009) *Wills & Probate Records*: pp.124-126.

**FIGURE I**  
*Distribution of Probate Inventories in Bristol*



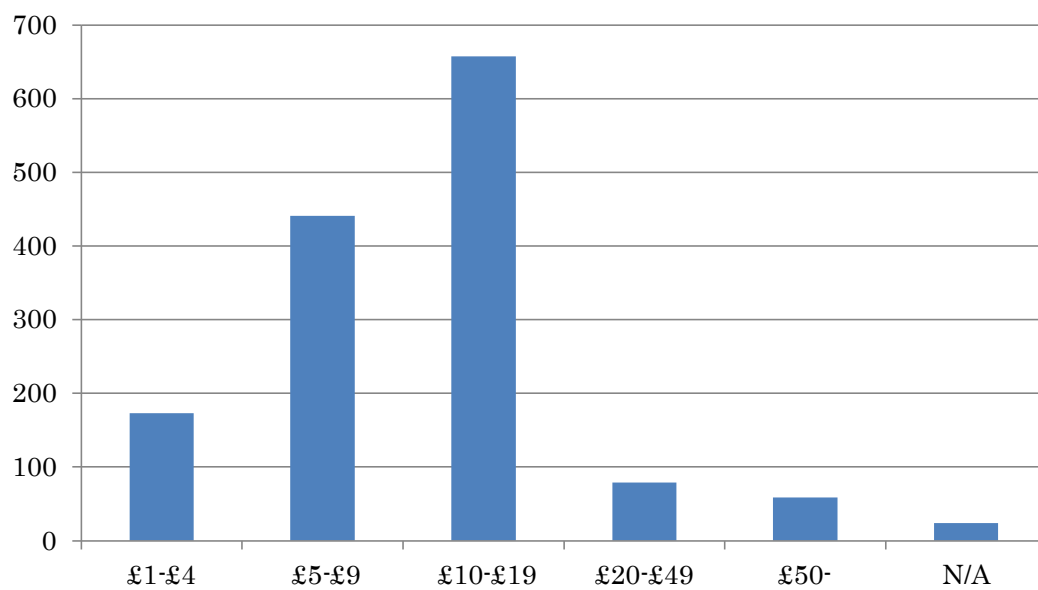
Source: George, E. and S.(1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, pp.2-264.

**FIGURE II**  
*Distribution of Mariners' Probate Inventories*



Source: George, E. and S. (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, pp.2-264.

**FIGURE III**  
*Values of Mariners' Probate Inventories*



Source: George, E. and S. (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, pp.2-264.

**TABLE I**  
*Occupational Groups in Bristol*

Occupational Group	Number	Occupational Group	Number	Occupational Group	Number	Occupational Group	Number
1. ale-draper/ale seller	2	71. doctor of laws	1	141. parchment maker	1	211. tailor	86
2. anchor-smith	3	72. draper	3	142. parish clerk	4	212. tanner	19
3. apothecary	7	73. dyer	9	143. parson	1	213. tallow-chandler	1
4. architector	1	74. embroiderer	1	144. patten-maker	1	214. tapster	1
5. arms painter	1	75. exciseman	1	145. pavier	1	215. tea man	1
6. artist(included in "painter")	/	76. factor	1	146. puke maker	3	216. thatcher	1
7. baker	47	77. fanmaker	1	147. pewterer	17	217. tideman/waiter	4
8. barber	5	78. farrier	13	148.physician/practitioner of physic	5	218. tiler	19
9. barber-surgeon	16	79. felt-maker	20	149. pilot	8	219. tiller	2
10. basket-maker	5	80. fine-drawer	1	150. pinker	1	220.tin-maker/man/plateman/worker	5
11. bay-maker	1	81. fisherman	1	151. pin-maker/pinner	10	221. tobacco cutter	7
12. bell founder	1	82. fishman	1	152. pipemaker	4	222. tobacco dealer	18
13. black smith	49	83. fishmonger	2	153. planter	1	223. tobacconist	9
14. block maker	9	84. fletcher	1	154. plasterer	1	224. tobacco-pipe maker	8
15. boat man	2	85. freemason	3	155. plate-maker	1	225. tobacco-roller	8
16. boatswain	1	86. gallipot maker	2	156. plumber	3	226. translator	2
17. bodice-maker	3	87. gardener	21	157. point-maker	2	227. trunk-maker	2
18. bone-lace weaver	1	88. glass-bottle maker	1	158. porter	9	228. tucker	2
19. book binder	1	89. glass-maker/glassman	5	159. potter	3	229. turner	8
20. book seller	1	90. glazier	16	160. presser and packer	1	230. upholsterer	4
21. brass-founder	1	91. glover	10	161. pump-maker	4	231. vicar	5
22. brazier	7	92. goldsmith	9	162. quarrier	4	232. victualler	90
23. brass worker	2	93. grocer	17	163. ranger	1	233. vintner	11
24. brewer/jorney-man	33	94. gunner	1	164. rector	3	234. virginal maker	2
25. brickmaker	3	95. gunsmith	8	165. rigger of ships	1	235. watch maker	1
26. bridle-cutter	1	96. haberdasher	16	166. ropemaker	8	236. water-bailiff	1
27. broadweaver	1	97. hair-weaver	2	167. rough-mason	11	237. water-man	2
28. broker	2	98. hatter	7	168. rough-pavier	1	238. wax-chandler	1
29. brush-maker	2	99. haulier	28	169. saddler-maker	9	239.weaver	39
30. buckle-maker	1	100. hooper	31	170. saddle-tree maker	1	240. wheelwright	3
31. butcher	78	101. horner	3	171. sail maker	11	241. whitawer	14
32. butter merchant	1	102. horce-driver	6	172. sailor/seaman/seafarer	47	242. white-smith	1
33. button-maker	6	103. hosier	5	173. salt-boiler	1	243. whip-maker	1
34. button-mould maker	1	104. hot-presser	1	174. salter	1	244. wine-cooper	7
35. cabinet-maker	1	105. house-carpenter	24	175. salt-maker	3	245. wine-marchant	1
36. card maker	1	106. husbandman	214	176. saltpeter-man	2	246. wire-drawer	7
37. carpenter	45	107. inn-holder/keeper	56	177. sawyer	3	247. wool-carder	1
38. carrier	1	108. instrument maker	1	178. sayer	1	248. wool-comber	3
39. carver	1	109. ironmonger	2	179. scavenger	2	249. woolen-draper	6
40. castor-maker	1	110. jeweller	1	180. schoolmaster	9	250. writing master	1
41. chandler	3	111. joiner	39	181. scrivener	3	251. yeoman	519
42. chapman	8	112.keeper of the gaol of newgate	1	182. serge-maker/weaver	6		
43. charcoal maker	1	113. labourer	15	183. servant	7		
44. chaser	1	114. lacemaker	1	184. set-cooper	2		
45. cheesemonger	1	115. latten-plate worker	1	185. sexton	1		
46. cider merchant	1	116. lay clerk	1	186. shag-weaver	1		
47. clerk	17	117. lighterman	9	187. sheargrinder	1		
48. clockmaker	1	118. lime-burner	6	188. shearman	24		
49. clothier	18	119. linen-draper	5	189. shepherd	1		
50. cloth-worker	28	120. locksmith	2	190. ship-carpenter	12		
51. coach-harness maker	1	121. malster/maltman	14	191. shipwright	82		
52. coach-painter	1	122. mariner	1675	192. shomaker	23		
53. coal-driver	7	123. mason	25	193. shop-keeper	1		
54. coal-miner	18	124. meal man	2	194. sieve-maker	2		
55. coffee seller	1	125. mercer	6	195. silk weaver	4		
56. collar-maker	1	126. merchant	49	196. silversmith	1		
57. collier	1	127. merchant tailor	8	197. skinner	7		
58.colour-merchant/man	1	128. miller	13	198. slaughterman	1		
59. cook	9	129. milliner	6	199. smith	12		
60. cooper	141	130. millwright	4	200. snuff-grinder	1		
61. cordwainer	84	131. minister/ of the gospel	4	201. soap-boiler	13		
62. cork-cutter	3	132. mould-maker	1	202. soap-maker	23		
63. corn-chandler	2	133. musician	4	203. staymaker	1		
64. corn-factor	1	134. nailer	6	204. stocking-maker	2		
65. cow keeper	2	135. needle maker	1	205. ston-carver	1		
66. curate	1	136. notary public	1	206. stonemason	1		
67. currier	4	137. oatmeal-maker	2	207. strong-water distiller	1		
68. cutler	9	138. organist	2	208. stuff-maker	1		
69. distiller	6	139. organ maker	2	209. sugar-baker	2		
70. doctor	2	140. painter/artist	7	210. surgeon	56		

Source: George, E. and S. (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, pp.275-286.

**TABLE II**  
*Mariners Valued at Over £50 in Probate Inventories*

~1699					1700~				
	Name	Parish or area	Year	Value		Name	Parish or area	Year	Value
1	Sharp, John	St. Stephen	1635	£1995	1	Payne, Timothy	C.B.	1707	£975
2	James, Benjamin	C. B.	1680	£ 932	2	Walker, George	St. Mary Redcliffe	1772	£767
3	Lane, John	St. Stephen	1667	£798	3	Pinny, Alexander	C.B.	1707	£524
4	Phelpes, Willian	St. Mary Redcliffe	1666	£820	4	King, Samuel	C.B.	1713	£421
5	Cook, John	St. Stephen	1649	£774	5	Owen, James	C.B.	1763	£281
6	Nicholls, John	St. Ewen	1661	£677	6	Weaver, John	C.B.	1725	£209
7	Garland Thomas	Clifton	1680	£579	7	White, John	C.B.	1717	£207
8	Smether, James	Westbury on Trym	1670	£401	8	Edwards, Joshua	C.B.	1717	£171
9	Taylor, Morgan	St. Leonard	1675	£309	9	Mercer, Alexander	S S Philip & Jacob	1714	£143
10	Inkoldon, William	C. B.	1669	£274	10	Seaborne, Nicholas	C.B.	1725	£125
11	Rockwell, Thomas	St. James	1623	£254	11	Shawe, George	C.B.	1711	£117
12	Paine, Richard	St. Stephen	1642	£239	12	Paine, Timothy	C.B.	1710	£92
13	Pearce, Thomas	C. B.	1663	£215	13	Taylor, Thomas	C.B.	1711	£79
14	Masters, Thomas	C. B.	1689	£200	14	Rogers, Stephen	St. Stephen	1764	£74
15	Symons, Willian	C. B.	1665	£199	15	Campbell, Patrick	C.B.	1751	£71
16	Peard, Christopher	St. Stephen	1667	£196	16	Tregoe, James	C.B.	1703	£69
17	Weaver, Henry	St. Mary Redcliffe	1637	£176	17	Lewis, George	C.B.	1704	£64
18	Green, John	St. Nicholas	1618	£118	18	Collins, John	C.B.	1783	£66
19	Homead, Richard	Temple	1663	£112	19	Saunders, Abraham	Westbury on Trym	1710	£66
20	Nicholls, John	St. Ewen	1664	£110	20	Cross, William	Westbury on Trym	1729	£63
21	Grindon, Philip	St. Stephen	1679	£109	21	Roberts, Issac	C.B.	1714	£59
22	Spencer, William	St. Michael	1663	£109	22	Smith, Thomas	St. Augustine	1773	£57
23	Parsons, Richard	Abbots Leigh	1641	£109	23	Finlay, John	C.B.	1764	£53
24	Childe, William	Christchurch	1643	£101	24	Hearne, George	C.B.	1702	£52
25	Fines, William	St. James	1661	£95	25	Tombes, Daniel	C.B.	1742	£50
26	Gibbs, Edward	C. B.	1670	£85					
27	Smith, Edward	Henbury	1634	£75					
28	Hooper, William	St. Stephen	1691	£73					
29	Davis James	St. Stephen	1631	£72					
30	Lan, Anthony	St. Mary Redcliffe	1685	£66					
31	Dyke, Robert	C. B.	1682	£63					
32	Morgan, Richard	St. Stephen	1639	£62					
33	Munday, Thomas	Temple	1660	£61					
34	Wills, Simon	St. Stephen	1674	£61					
35	Rockwel, Thomas	St. James	1620	£59					
36	Watts, Michael	St. Nicholas	1682	£59					

Source: George, E. and S. (1988) *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery*, pp.275-286.

Note: C.B. denotes 'City of Bristol'.