

CHEESE MANUFACTURE AND MARKETING IN DERBYSHIRE AND NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

1670-1870

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AS early as 1593 Sampson Erdeswick described the river Dove dividing his county from Derbyshire as a "very fair river, having one of the best banks in England",¹ and fourteen years later John Norden asserted that the meadows along the banks of the Dove shared with Taunton Dean, the Severn, and other streams pride of place among the grazing grounds of England.² Indeed, the fame of its rich pastures became proverbial, as Dr. Plot again testified in 1686.³ The Dove valley formed the axis of the dairying country of south and west Derbyshire and north Staffordshire, which extended along the valley from its source to its mouth, embracing both the limestone and gritstone hills of the southern Peak District as well as the marl and alluvial lowlands of the midland plain. The boundaries of this region were roughly the Wye and the Derwent valleys on the north and east, Needwood Forest on the south, and Leek and Cheadle on the west.

Although cheese and butter making was carried out by the farmers of north and east Derbyshire and of the gritstone Staffordshire moorlands, the manufacture of dairy produce never held such an important place in their economy as it did in those of the region just described. In these other areas farming was often supplemented by industrial activities, and cheese and butter were produced for subsistence rather than for commercial sale. "Many thousands live and work at lead mines, coal mines, stone pits and iron works" stated the Derbyshire justices in 1620,⁴ and to these sources of employment were later added the domestic textile industry, and subsequently the cotton mills. Apart from this small-scale dairying, farming was chiefly concentrated on the cultivation of oats, and on wool and beef production. In the High Peak around Tideswell Arthur Young noticed in 1771 both sheep and "very large herds of cows fattening ;

¹ S. Erdeswick, *Antiquities of Staffordshire*, 1593.

² J. Norden, *Surveyor's dialogue*, 1607.

³ Robert Plot, *Natural history of Staffordshire*, 1686.

⁴ Joan Thirsk, "Industries in the countryside", in F. J. Fisher, ed., *Essays in the economic and social history of Tudor and Stuart England*, 1961, 73.

which is the general use to which they apply all the hilly country",⁵ and James Pilkington in 1789 wrote of the same area that "the farmers raise their rent chiefly by grazing and the breeding of cattle", which were fattened for the Manchester and Sheffield markets.⁶ This area could never produce enough food to supply its industrial population, and wheat, rye, malt, and cheese had to be imported from the southern parts of Derbyshire, from adjacent counties, or even from abroad. "The hardcorn gotten therein will not serve above the one half of the people that live in it," reported the Derbyshire justices about their county in 1620, and consequently the population had to rely on rye imported from Danzig.⁷ The chief trade of Derby market in 1712 was described as supplying "most of the Peake country with bread of hard corn, they haveing not much but oats amongst themselves", and in the latter part of the 18th century the county was still an importer of wheat and rye.⁸

In south and west Derbyshire and parts of north-west Staffordshire, however, the peasant economy had an almost entirely agricultural basis. Here were a large number of farmers occupying small or medium-sized holdings who were engaged in mixed farming, but with an emphasis on dairying that gradually increased over the period under review.

The importance of dairying in this region was that cheese and butter were produced as items of commerce, and they shared with malt the distinction of being the only foodstuffs that Derbyshire ever *exported*, in contrast to the items imported mentioned above. Thomas Brown, who reported on Derbyshire farming for the Board of Agriculture in 1794, stated explicitly that cheese was "the chief, if not the only, article of provision which the natives can spare out of their own county".⁹ Although it would be misleading to regard cheese as the local dairy farmers' only "cash-crop", many of them relied on the proceeds of their dairies to pay their rent.

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The type of cheese made in Derbyshire in the 18th and 19th centuries was normally uncoloured and thick in texture. An individual cheese was usually about 2½ to 3 in. thick, 14 in. in diameter, and could weigh up to 30 lb.¹⁰ Pilkington described it as "generally mild, and in taste, tho' not always in colour, greatly resembles that which is made in Gloucestershire".¹¹ Apparently it was also somewhat similar to Cheshire, and indeed much of it was sold in London masquerading as Cheshire, which enjoyed

⁵ Arthur Young, *Tour through eastern England*, 1771, I, 217.

⁶ James Pilkington, *View of the present state of Derbyshire*, 1789, I, 300; R. W. Sturgess, "A study of agricultural change in the Staffordshire moorlands 1780-1815", *North Staffs. Journal of Field Studies*, I, (1961), 78-84.

⁷ Thirsk, 73.

⁸ William Wolley, *The history of the county of Derby, 1712* (manuscript), no. 3343, Derby Borough Library; Thomas Brown, *General view of the agriculture of the county of Derby, 1794*, 38.

⁹ Brown, 48.

¹⁰ Pilkington, I, 291-2.

¹¹ Pilkington, I, 301.

the greater reputation.¹² However, in 1693 John Houghton was informed by a local correspondent that he believed Derbyshire "to make as good cheese as Cheshire, or Europe".¹³ John Byng, later Viscount Torrington, noted in his diary after dining at the Blackamoor's Head at Ashbourne in 1790 that "the cheese of this country pleases me much; being a medium between the Cheshire and the Stilton".¹⁴

The methods of making Derbyshire cheese in farm dairies varied from one farm to another. Brown in 1794 described three different methods he saw being practised, and John Farey mentioned other systems.¹⁵ Broadly, the process was as follows: the fresh milk was poured into a deep wooden, brass or copper tub or pan about three feet in diameter, known as a cheese tub or "cheese kettle", and rennet was introduced in order to separate the curd from the whey. This was an acid substance made by the butcher from the stomach skins of young calves which had been cleaned, dried and salted.¹⁶ After the whey had been effectively separated it was drained off for use as pig feed, and the remaining curd was then broken up and put through a small hand-operated cheese mill; salt was then added and the substance placed in hoops of the desired size and subjected to great pressure for some days. In this region the cheese presses usually consisted of massive square blocks of limestone or gritstone supported by a wooden frame, such as Farey saw in use on a farm at Weston Underwood. This type was gradually supplanted by a metal lever version during the course of the 19th century, and later still by screw presses. After pressing, the cheeses were left to mature on shelves in the cheese chamber or curing room, usually a small attic over the farm dairy or kitchen.

Farmhouse cheesemaking was extremely hard work, notwithstanding the romantic images of dairymaids projected by such Victorian authors as George Eliot or Thomas Hardy,¹⁷ and was always performed by female labour; professional dairymaids were employed on larger farms but the task normally fell to the farmer's wife or daughter. Hours were long, often from five o'clock in the morning to seven at night, seven days a week, as the produce of both morning and evening milkings had to be dealt with; considerable manual labour was involved before the invention of mechanical devices to ease the burden in the second half of the 19th century. But most important of all, the bacteriological changes of the cheesemaking process were not scientifically understood, and therefore successful making could only be learned by empirical methods; some

¹² This appears to have been common practice. In 1682 the Warwickshire justices complained that Londoners were being subjected to "the deceit of those who have used to sell to them the cheese of other counties by the name of Warwickshire . . .", *Warwick county records*, VII, 254-5.

¹³ John Houghton, *A collection of letters for the improvement of husbandry and trade*, 19 May 1693.

¹⁴ C. B. Andrews, ed., *The Torrington diaries*, 1936, II, 166.

¹⁵ Brown, 48-52; John Farey, *General view of the agriculture of Derbyshire*, III, 1817, 43-61.

¹⁶ F. White, *Directory of Staffordshire*, 1851, records that at Uttoxeter "a large trade is . . . carried on in preparing calves' maws — used in curdling milk for cheese-making." Seven such manufacturers are listed.

¹⁷ *Adam Bede* by George Eliot (1859) is set in the countryside near Ashbourne and contains a description of work in the farm dairy.

never acquired the skill that the process demanded, whilst others became locally famous for the consistently high quality of their products.

Before the closing years of the 19th century dairy farming in this region could be virtually equated with cheese and butter manufacture as opposed to liquid milk production, it being impossible to market fresh milk outside the immediate vicinity of the farm because of the inadequacy of transport facilities. Some milk was retained for domestic consumption, but by far the greater proportion of it was processed. Farey remarked on the shortage of liquid milk available for the poor because the farmers were so committed to cheese and butter making.¹⁸ The dairy herds consisted originally of longhorn cows, gradually supplanted by shorthorns during the course of the 19th century, and the cheesemaking season lasted normally only from mid-April to mid-November, because of the poor quality of the milk produced during the winter months. It was not until the last decades of the 19th century that farmers began using cheap imported maize, cotton-seed-cake, or brewers' grains from Burton as winter feeds, enabling better milk production to continue throughout the year.¹⁹

In the late 17th century dairy farming in the Derbyshire-Staffordshire region was only one branch of an essentially mixed agrarian economy, vying with beef cattle and sheepgrazing and the cultivation of oats on the uplands, and with barley, oats, and wheat on the lowlands.²⁰ An analysis of the probate inventories listing the possessions and stock of some 70 farmers in the region whose wills were proved in the years 1700 and 1701 shows that cattle occur in nearly every inventory, and sheep are mentioned in 53 instances, evenly distributed over the region.²¹ Corn of one type or another is referred to in 44 of the documents, again all over the region, but where wheat, oats, barley or rye is singled out all the cases come from the lowland area of Derbyshire south-west of a line from Ashbourne to Derby. Surprisingly, wheat is specified more frequently than the other crops. Large sheep flocks are recorded on the uplands, at Brassington (three instances), Carsington (a flock of nearly 300), Parwich, and Fenny Bentley, all on the edge of the Derbyshire limestone plateau, and at Grindon, Butterton, Wootton, and Hardingsbooth (near Longnor) on the Staffordshire moorlands. Rearing of beef cattle is also apparent on parts of the limestone and shales, but it is difficult to distinguish beef cattle from cows kept for dairying. The presence of cheese or of dairy equipment such as cheese presses, tubs, vats, boards, shelves or churns is recorded in 42 inventories of persons who had lived in places scattered over the whole area, illustrating how widespread dairying was as an integral part of mixed farming. Cheese chambers for storing the produce are specifically mentioned in eight instances, one at

¹⁸ Farey, III, 30.

¹⁹ C. S. Orwin and E. H. Whetham, *History of British agriculture, 1846-1914*, 1964, 149.

²⁰ Plot, chapter "Of earths".

²¹ Lichfield Joint Record Office.

Stramshall near Uttoxeter being described as "over the porch". However, there is no evidence of any specialization in dairying to the exclusion of other branches of agriculture. Although quantities of cheese are valued in a number of the documents, it is impossible to draw any meaningful conclusions from them as the amount of cheese present on the farm depended on the time of the year at which the inventory was taken; but generally the values never amount to much more than 20% of the total goods listed. Quantities such as 28 cheeses are mentioned at Uttoxeter, 70 at Doveridge, 105 at Trusley, 120 at Sutton-on-the-Hill, 500 (5 cwt.?) at Parwich, and 400 (4 cwt.?) at Atlow. Although it is not possible to equate the given values with weight, inventories recording cheese of more than £2 value exist for farms at Loxley, Bramshall, Stramshall, and Doveridge in the vicinity of Uttoxeter, at Okeover, Mayfield and Underwood immediately adjacent to Ashbourne, at Longford, Boyleston, Trusley, Sutton-on-the-Hill, and Burnaston on the lowlands, and at Turnditch, Atlow and Parwich on the upland fringe.

There are few relevant sources of agrarian history available for the greater part of the 18th century, but by the 1780s dairying had apparently gained considerable ground. The south-west corner of the county, Pilkington said, was "equally divided betwixt tillage and pasture", and corn was grown in the Derby area, around Brailsford, and in isolated pockets at Bradbourne and Hartington. But dairying was prevalent in the Dove valley, in the neighbourhood of Ashbourne, around Mugginton, and in the Wirksworth hundred generally. Along the lower Dove valley near Egginton and Scropton, he noticed that "the dairies are in general very large; upon some of the farms forty or fifty milking cows are kept". He also observed that a swing from arable towards pasture farming was taking place: "Several hundred acres in different parts of the county are laid down for pasture, which were some years ago in tillage."²² However, Brown calculated in 1794 that in the south of Derbyshire about one-third of the land was devoted to arable, in the Low Peak about two-thirds, and in the High Peak about one-fifth, still a substantial area.²³

How far this trend away from arable farming towards dairying was accelerated by the parliamentary enclosure movement is difficult to assess, although on the whole most of the Derbyshire acts in the late 18th century were for enclosure of common pasture and not arable. But Farey estimated that 40% of the newly enclosed parishes had increased their production of cheese and butter, and remarked on a concurrent decrease in arable. Also, he observed that on the limestone the old sheep breeds had "almost entirely given place to dairy cows or to more useful varieties of sheep".²⁴ The expansion of dairying can perhaps best be viewed as a movement towards that branch of farming for which the land in the region was most suited, and as a reflection of the growing demand for cheese and butter

²² Pilkington, I, 291-3, 299, 301.

²³ Brown, 15.

²⁴ Farey, II, 75; III, 88.

from the rapidly increasing population of the late 18th century; the enclosure movement was in itself also a symptom of this demand for more food.

During the course of the 19th century the dependence on dairying within the region increased, although grain production remained an important alternative in the area bounded by Ashbourne, Derby and Uttoxeter. In 1875 the parishes in this area rarely had less than 6% of their area under cultivation, and half had over 10%.²⁵ Also, beef cattle and sheep rearing were important on the mountain limestone area around Tissington and Newton Grange, but cheese production could in 1829 be described as "the most important article in the economy of a Derbyshire farm".²⁶ From the 1840s to the '60s dairy prices rose continuously, and in 1853 John Rowley estimated the annual production of the county to be 10,000 tons. "Cheese is the great staple of the district," he observed of the area west of Cromford, and remarked that "many of the Derbyshire dairies are equal in production to those of Cheshire or Gloucestershire".²⁷ In the same period interest in improved methods of cheese manufacture was being aroused, and new techniques were evolved by inventive farmers such as George Sheldon of Youlgreave and others.²⁸ This trend was encouraged by the growth of local agricultural societies where new ideas and methods could be discussed and disseminated. One such institution was the Wirksworth Farmers' Club, whose members in 1852 heard a lecture on cheesemaking delivered by Mark Abbott; another was the Derbyshire Agricultural Society, a meeting of which in 1863 was addressed by a local landowner, Mr. H. Chandos-Pole, on the desirability of adopting improved methods of cheese manufacture in order to standardize the quality of the produce.²⁹

There is scanty information available on the actual economics of dairy farming at this period. Colonel Pole told Arthur Young in 1771 that the herd of Lancashire longhorns on his Radbourne estate produced an annual average of 3 cwt. of cheese saleable at 30s. per cwt., 10s. worth of butter, and 7s. from calving, giving an annual profit of £5. 7s. per cow.³⁰ Pitt estimated that a yield of 3 cwt. of cheese per cow was a good average, but that some animals would produce up to 5 cwt. He also quoted the example of a small farmer near Needwood Forest with only seven cows, which produced 40 cwt. per annum between them, but this was obviously exceptional.³¹ The farm accounts of Joseph Parkinson at Wilsthorpe, near Long Eaton, from 1841 to 1854 reveal that the profits of his cheesemaking formed a steady source of income in a period when his fortunes were fluctuating considerably. Although he lived on the fringe of the dairying

²⁵ *Agricultural statistics*, 1875.

²⁶ S. Glover, *History, gazetteer and directory of Derbyshire*, 1829, I, 209.

²⁷ J. Rowley, "The farming of Derbyshire", *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, XIV (1853), 57.

²⁸ J. P. Sheldon, *Dairy farming*, 1912, 370.

²⁹ *Derbyshire red book*, 1863, 160, Derby Borough Library.

³⁰ Young, I, 165.

³¹ W. Pitt, *A topographical history of Staffordshire*, 1817, 67.

area and reared cattle and grew oats and barley as well as making cheese, the accounts show an income of between £120 and £150 per annum from his twice-yearly cheese sales out of an annual turnover of approximately £1,000. In one exceptional year, 1846, his cheese realized £248, 33 cwt., being sold to a Nottingham dealer in March, and 46 cwt. to Messrs. Etches, the Derby cheesefactors, in September, both at a price of 61s. per cwt.³²

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The marketing of cheese in the period under review was primarily centred on the weekly markets of Derby, Ashbourne, Bakewell, Chesterfield, Uttoxeter, Leek, Burton, Nottingham or Mansfield, but the larger quantities were sold at the annual cheese fairs held in many of these towns. The farmers normally prepared their cheese to be ready in three lots, the produce of the first half of the season in August, that of the second half in October, and the inferior winter make in March, and the fairs were timed accordingly; Derby had cheese fairs at the end of March, September and November and at the beginning of August, whilst those at Ashbourne were at the beginning of March, September and November. Despite its name, Nottingham's famous October goose fair was predominantly a cheese fair in the late 18th century, and here Derbyshire cheese competed with Stilton from the Vale of Belvoir.³³

Details of prices realized by farmers for their cheese at local fairs and markets can be gleaned somewhat sporadically from different sources both within and on the fringe of the region. The accounts of William Tompson of Abbots Bromley, an arable and dairy farmer, show that his cheese sold for 34s. per cwt. in 1767, but in the war years of the 1790s prices rose to between 41s. and 56s. In 1801 a record 81s. was reached and the figure rarely fell below 60s. for the next decade.³⁴ This trend seems to be confirmed by the prices prevalent at Nottingham's goose fair between 1785 and 1825. At the beginning of that period the figure ranged from 34s. to 39s., but gradually rose to a maximum of 90s. in 1809 and remained high for the next five or so years; prices of over 80s. were common in the 1820s.³⁵ Robert Thornhill of Great Longstone sold cheese to Matthew Furniss of Chesterfield at prices ranging from 48s. to 79s. between 1814 and 1818.³⁶ Whilst higher prices were obviously to the advantage of the farmers, the increase could be catastrophic to the poor consumer in the difficult period of the early 1800s; it is significant that the years of the highest prices at Nottingham coincided with the years of Luddism and the greatest industrial unrest. Throughout the first half of the 19th century prices remained at a relatively high level affording prosperity to the local dairy farmer. Cheese sold in Ashbourne market

³² Wilsthorpe farm accounts 1841-54, in private hands.

³³ *Nottingham Journal*, 8 October 1785; *The description of England and Wales*, 1769, VII, 149.

³⁴ W. B. Mercer, "Two centuries of Cheshire cheese farming", *J.R.A.S.E.*, XCVIII (1937), 70-2.

³⁵ M. Thomis, *Old Nottingham*, 1968, 136-7.

³⁶ R. Thornhill, *About a Derbyshire village 1770-1820*, 1958, 20-2.

by John Gallimore of Swinscoe only once realized less than 60s. in the period 1829 to 1839, and this was only to 55s. in 1834-5.³⁷ However, Joseph Parkinson of Wilsthorpe experienced wide variations in the prices reached by his produce at Derby or Nottingham, the figure ranging from 43s. to 70s. between 1841 and 1854.³⁸ But Rowley, writing in 1853, said that the prices at Derby markets and fairs over the previous 14 years averaged 55s. 3d. per cwt., figures calculated from the accounts of a local cheesefactor.³⁹

At these markets and fairs, cheese was sold either in small quantities direct to the consumers, or else in bulk to local cheesemongers and provision dealers or to the cheese factors, the middlemen who dominated much of the trade until the late 19th century. The local consumers were the inhabitants of the market towns and of the surrounding countryside engaged in crafts or industrial occupations, such as the inhabitants of the lead and coal mining areas of north and east Derbyshire. These workers required a constant supply of cheese, as this commodity, together with oatcakes, formed the miners' staple diet; most of this had to be imported from the dairying area. The account book of Robert Thornhill of Great Longstone in the 1790s shows payments to carriers bringing pack-horse loads of cheese from Longnor in the north Staffordshire dairying country across the limestone plateau to Longstone, and occasionally to Ashford or even to Sheffield.⁴⁰ The bulk of this cheese was probably purchased at Longnor market and retailed in the Longstone area to the local leadmining community.

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The highest quality produce, however, was not destined for local consumption but was bought up by the local cheesefactors at the markets and fairs and exported to London or even to the continent. Throughout most of the period the factors usually acted as agents for the cheesemongers of London who, from the late 17th century at least, built up a virtual monopoly of all trade in dairy products throughout England. Unlike other London tradesmen, they were never organized officially into a chartered company or granted a crown monopoly, but their dominance of the trade apparently stemmed simply from the fact that the capital was by far the largest market for foodstuffs of all kinds; in the 1720s the city had a population of some half a million, greatly exceeding that of any provincial town. The local factors were commissioned to purchase cheese in the areas where it was produced and to organize its carriage to London. Much of the south of England, the west country, the midlands and Cheshire were tapped by the Londoners in the 18th century in order

³⁷ *North Staffs. Journal of Field Studies*, I (1961), 82-3.

³⁸ Wilsthorpe accounts.

³⁹ *J.R.A.S.E.*, XIV (1853), 51.

⁴⁰ Thornhill, 6-11.

to satisfy the ceaseless demands of the metropolis.⁴¹ The earliest reference in 1686 to the activities of the London cheesemongers in this region shows that they had already developed a marketing organization here. Dr. Robert Plot, describing the north Staffordshire moorlands, remarked that from the "Limestone hills, and rich pastures and meadows, the great dairys are maintained in this part of Staffordshire, that supply Uttoxeter mercat with such vast quantities of good butter and cheese, that the cheesemongers of London have thought it worth their while to set up a factorage here, for these commodities, which are brought in from this, and the neighbouring county of Derby, in so great plenty, that the factors many mercat days lay out no less than five hundred pounds a day, in those two commodities only".⁴² £500 could represent anything up to 25 tons of cheese, and although the figure may be an exaggeration, the impression is of a trade of some magnitude. There is no local evidence to show whether the members of the Uttoxeter "factorage" attempted to fix prices as their fellows did in other counties, but it is probable that they did. On Warwickshire the justices in 1682 stated that "many cheesemongers and others living in and about the city of London and their factors and agents have by combinations and forestalling very much oppressed the freeholders and farmers of this county (who make cheese to sell) by forcing down the prices of the same . . .", and they ordered that no local cheesemongers could buy Warwickshire cheese for a year; instead the justices resolved to licence carriers to transport it to London.⁴³

From Uttoxeter and the other markets of Staffordshire and Derbyshire the cheese was transported to London by land or by water. Although it may seem unlikely that such bulky objects as cheeses would be taken more than a hundred miles by land carriage over the rough roads of the 17th century, there is evidence of this. In 1698 the inhabitants of Northampton stated they were "supplied by land carriage with coals, cheese and butter" from Derbyshire,⁴⁴ which is explicable in the absence of an alternative river route, but it was claimed at the same period that "Great quantities of butter and cheese out of Staffordshire and the parts of Cheshire thereto adjoining and out of those parts of Derbyshire and Leicestershire which lie near Burton are sent to London by land carriage" which cost at least £5 a ton.⁴⁵ As the object of this statement was to urge an extension of the Trent navigation and thereby enable goods to be sent by water for under 20s. a ton, it is possible that the volume of overland traffic is exaggerated, but it is certainly true that land transport was considerably more expensive than water. In the early 18th century, the

⁴¹ G. E. Fussell, "The London cheesemongers of the 18th century", *Economic History*, I (1926-9), 394-8; G. E. Fussell and C. Goodman, "18th-century traffic in milk products", *Economic History*, III (1934-7), 380-7; Val Cheke, *The story of cheesemaking in Britain*, 1959.

⁴² Plot, 108.

⁴³ *Warwick County Records*, VII, 254-5.

⁴⁴ Petition of the corporation and inhabitants of Northampton . . ., *Journal of the House of Commons*, 9 February 1699.

⁴⁵ *The care of the river Trent in respect of the navigation thereof showing how much the same will be for the public good*, c. 1698. Coke MSS., Melbourne Hall.

cost of conveying goods for the nine miles from Derby to Wilden Ferry at Shardlow was estimated at double that of their water carriage from Wilden to Gainsborough, a distance of 60 to 70 miles.⁴⁶ On the other hand that 24-lb. pots of butter were being sent to London by stage wagon as late as 1742, appears from the depositions relative to the theft of quantities of this commodity at Ashbourne.⁴⁷ The more usual and cheaper method of transport, however, was for the cheese to be taken overland to the small Trentside port of Wilden Ferry (or later to the wharves of Willington, Burton or Derby), and carried by boat down the Trent to Gainsborough and Hull, whence it was shipped to London. In the 1690s Wilden Ferry was the effective head of the Trent navigation, and cheese was the port's most important item of transit, brought in from parts of Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Cheshire as well as Derbyshire and Staffordshire. According to Daniel Defoe in the 1720s, 14,000 tons of Cheshire cheese were shipped from Chester by the long sea route around Cornwall to London, but a further 8,000 tons were carried overland to the Severn and the Trent for shipment.⁴⁸ This doubtless explains how Cheshire and Derbyshire cheese could come to be confused.

In the 17th century, Wilden Ferry was owned by the Coke family of Melbourne and was leased to Leonard Fosbrooke, who effectively operated a monopoly over all goods passing down the Trent from this point, naturally engendering considerable opposition in the process.⁴⁹ In 1699 a number of Derby merchants attempted to export their cheese from Shardlow or Sawley instead of Wilden in an effort to break the monopoly, with the result that legal proceedings were commenced between them and Fosbrooke, and the two parties actually came to blows. But the same year saw the passing of an act of parliament to make the Trent navigable as far as Burton, a considerable threat to Fosbrooke's monopoly. However, the act's promoter, Lord Paget, a Burton landowner, was not able to make its provisions effective until 1711, when he permitted a lessee, George Hayne of Wirksworth, to commence the improvements. In 1712 Hayne reached agreement with Fosbrooke by which the two divided the monopoly of the river between them, Hayne controlling it from Burton to Wilden and Fosbrooke from there to Gainsborough. Further agreements were concluded in 1714 and 1720. It is not unnatural that the London cheesemongers found themselves in conflict with the Trent monopolists, and in 1710 no less than 58 of them signed an agreement with Fosbrooke.⁵⁰ The terms were that he was to have complete control over all cheese delivered to his warehouse at Wilden, and was to despatch it to Gainsborough within ten days of receipt at a cost of 12s. per ton

⁴⁶ W. T. Jackman, *The development of transportation in modern England*, 1966, I, 208.

⁴⁷ J. C. Cox, *Three centuries of Derbyshire annals*, 1890, II, 78.

⁴⁸ Daniel Defoe, *Tour through England and Wales* (1724-6), 7th ed., II, 394.

⁴⁹ The details following are taken from C. C. Owen, "The early history of the upper Trent navigation", *Transport History*, I, no. 3 (November 1968).

⁵⁰ Agreement between Leonard Fosbrooke and Lancelott Skynner and others, 20 June 1710, Coke MSS. See also George H. Green, "London cheesemongers at Shardlow", *Derbyshire Miscellany*, II, no. 5 (February 1961).

during the first year and 11s. thereafter. The cheesemongers were to be able to retain a clerk, Samuel Waters, at Wilden to record the cheese brought in. In 1712 Hayne agreed to allow Fosbrooke control over the London cheese trade and to pay him 11s. per ton for all cheese carried by the former from Burton to Wilden; in 1720 it was resolved that all cheese and other goods from Derby, Ashbourne and 3 miles around Ashbourne were to be taken to Wilden, but those from Uttoxeter, the south Derbyshire border, and any of the adjacent counties to the west and south were to be taken to the new collecting wharves at Burton or Willington; these had been established by Hayne between 1711 and 1714.⁵¹ The 1719 act extending the navigation up the Derwent to Derby led to the creation of a further wharf there, but this route seems to have carried little traffic.

The cheese export trade seems to have continued on much the same basis from the 1720s to the 1770s. In 1730 an estimated 1,407 tons was exported via Gainsborough and Hull.⁵² Ashbourne was described in 1748 as being "a small town . . . and in a rich soil, tho' it enjoys little or no trade, except in cheese, which is sent from here in great quantities down the Trent", and the town's fame in this respect was repeated by other writers between 1776 and 1811.⁵³ In 1766 the trade witnessed further outbreaks of violence, this time perpetuated by mobs protesting against the high price of provisions. A series of riots broke out all over the country and one began at Derby at the time of the October cheese fair. The mob attacked a barge on the Derwent carrying off £300 worth of cheese. They then marched to Cavendish Bridge at Shardlow (recently built to replace Wilden Ferry) and plundered the cheese warehouse there. A detachment of dragoons was sent to protect the Willington warehouses but this proved unnecessary.⁵⁴ The continued interest of the London cheesemongers in this trade is illustrated by the fact that they presented silver cups to at least two of the county magistrates, Dr. John Taylor and Robert Longden, both of Ashbourne, for their assistance in protecting their property.⁵⁵ And in 1784 it is recorded that Michael Dobinson, "Agent to the Cheesemonger's Co." was resident in Derby.⁵⁶

In 1760 the Fosbrooke family lease of Wilden Ferry, and therefore the Trent monopoly, had expired, and, with the completion of the Trent

⁵¹ Agreement between George Hayne and Leonard Fosbrooke, 25 June 1720, Coke MSS. See also A. C. Wood, "The history of trade and transport on the river Trent", *Thoroton Society Trans.*, 54 (1950), 1-44, for details of petitions to the House of Commons by the London cheesemongers and various towns objecting to proposals in 1713-4 to make the 1699 act more effective.

⁵² G. E. Fussell, *Economic History*, I (1926-9), 394-8.

⁵³ *Universal Magazine*, 1748; *England described . . .*, 1776, 57; Edmund Butcher, *An excursion from Sidmouth to Chester . . .*, 1805, II; D. P. Davies, *A new historical and descriptive view of Derbyshire*, 1811, 420.

⁵⁴ *Derby Mercury*, 9 October 1766; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 36 (1766), 494; at Nottingham goose fair, the mayor was actually knocked over by a rolling cheese during a similar riot, *Nottingham Date Book*, October 1766.

⁵⁵ *Manchester Mercury*, 10 February 1767; E. A. Sadler, "Dr. Johnson's Ashbourne friends", *D.A.J.*, LX (1939), 1-20. Taylor refused his cup in favour of a charity, and Longden bequeathed his to the churchwardens of Ashbourne.

⁵⁶ W. Bailey, *Western Directory*, 1784 (Derby).

and Mersey canal in 1777, the upper Trent navigation became redundant. This canal was constructed parallel to the river from north Staffordshire through Burton and Willington joining the Trent at Shardlow; warehouses for cheese and other commodities were built on the new wharves at Horninglow, near Burton, Willington, and Shardlow. After the Derby canal was completed in 1796 other warehouses were erected at Derby (Siddals Road). All these warehouses were under the management of professional clerks, presumably retained by the London dealers as under the old system.⁵⁷ Further north, the promoters of the Chesterfield canal hoped to attract some of the cheese trade in their direction, as they stated optimistically that "when the intended canal shall be compleat, cheese will be a great object in the trade of the town of Chesterfield".⁵⁸ But, despite the fact that the canal ran directly across to the Trent near Gainsborough, thus by-passing most of the lower Trent navigation, cheese never came to form a very high proportion of the goods carried. The canals helped to lower the transport costs of cheese, especially where they replaced land carriage, but markets such as Ashbourne still remained remote from water transport. A branch of the Trent and Mersey was opened to Uttoxeter in 1811, but a proposal to continue it up the Dove valley to Ashbourne came to nothing.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the trade continued to flourish, and Pilkington wrote in 1789 that nearly 2,000 tons of cheese were exported annually to London and the east coast sea-ports.⁶⁰ By 1809 Pitt estimated that the total amount was over 5,000 tons each year from north Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, of which the last-named county contributed 1,500 tons; most was bound for London or for victualling the navy.⁶¹ Farey in 1815 thought that some of the local cheesefactors purchased 2,000 or more tons of cheese annually, on commission for London dealers or persons with government contracts.⁶²

After this date most local writers simply repeat Farey's facts, but there seems no reason to believe that the trade did not continue in similar fashion until the advent of the railways, which considerably speeded up the export of cheese to London or to other parts of the country. If contemporary estimates are to be believed, there was considerable expansion of production during the early 19th century. The annual produce in 1857 was calculated by one writer at 10,000 tons, which was sent to all parts of the kingdom, and he compared this with previous decades. In 1846, he said, "the quantity of cheese made was about 8,000 tons, and forty years ago it did not exceed 2,000 tons".⁶³ However, even in the opening

⁵⁷ Farey, III, 61-3.

⁵⁸ Notts. Record Office, DDP 60/27.

⁵⁹ C. Hadfield, *The canals of the east midlands*, 1966, and *The canals of the west midlands*, 1966; T. Baines, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, II, 212. Apparently the amount of Cheshire cheese brought overland to the Trent at Willington had by the late 18th century shrunk to 100 tons. With the improvement of the Weaver navigation and the opening of the Trent and Mersey canal all the trade was diverted to the Mersey.

⁶⁰ Pilkington, I, 301.

⁶¹ W. Pitt, *General view of the agriculture of the county of Leicester*, 1809, 228.

⁶² Farey, III, 62.

⁶³ F. White, *Directory of Derbyshire*, 1857, 13.

years of the 19th century there were signs of a development which was ultimately to supersede cheese manufacture in this region — the liquid milk trade. With the rapid expansion of the towns of the north midlands during the period of the industrial revolution more and more fresh milk was needed for the industrial population. "Around Derby, Chesterfield, and others of the larger towns, there are numbers of cows kept and their milk sent twice a-day, in small conical tubs or barrels slung on the sides of asses or donkeys to supply the regular milk-sellers or hawkers, and the inhabitants."⁶⁴

* * *

It is significant that in the 1766 food riots the fury of the mob was directed not against the farmers who made the cheese, but against the cheesefactors and the warehouses to which they consigned their purchases.⁶⁵ As middlemen the factors were frequently responsible for fixing prices and consequently often attracted the anger of either producer or consumer. Although they originally made their purchases at the markets and fairs of the region, by the early years of the 19th century they had adopted a more direct approach by actually visiting the farms where the cheese was made. This practice, according to Farey, was not general all over the country, but confined to this region, Durham, and the North Riding of Yorkshire. The factors travelled around the farms usually in August and inspected the newly made cheeses — the first produce of the second make of the season — and marked the ones they wished to purchase; these had to be delivered to the canal-side warehouses by the farmers within two or three weeks. The smaller men had to accept whatever price was offered to them, but an unusual practice was operated by the substantial farmers. Half their cheese would be sent to the warehouses in September, but the rest was kept back until the price was determined by that realized at Derby's October fair or other fairs in the area. The drawbacks of this "childish and absurd mode of dealing", as Farey described it, were that the smaller men could not afford to wait for their money, and were prepared to accept a low price in August without waiting for a possible improvement in the eventual market price.⁶⁶ Another related practice was for the factors to give the farmers a cash advance on their unripe or even unmade cheese, in return for which privilege they would be obliged to settle for a lower price when the produce was ready.⁶⁷ Farey considered that the whole system led to monopoly and fraud, but it did not end until the advent of the cheese-factory movement in the 1870s, which was naturally viewed by the factors with violent hostility. The classic slogan propogated by advocates of cheese-factories was that it was "better for the farmer to have a factory for his bank than a factor for his banker".⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Farey, III, 30.

⁶⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 36 (1766), 494.

⁶⁶ Farey, III, 61-3.

⁶⁷ J. P. Sheldon, *Dairy farming*, 1881, 560.

⁶⁸ H. M. Jenkins, "Report on the cheese-factory system and its adaptability to English dairy districts", *J.R.A.S.E.*, 2nd series, 7 (1870).

Most factors were local men, often farming on their own account as well, but it is evident that in the 18th century the factor's calling was considered as respectable as that of a mercer or merchant and was not beneath some members of the minor gentry. In the late 18th century for example, Walter Evans of Derby, a member of the Darley Abbey cotton spinning and banking family, is described as a cheesefactor.⁶⁹ Another family of rising gentry engaged in the cheese trade were the Longdens of Ashbourne. In 1745 John Longden, cheesefactor, contributed ten guineas towards the costs of raising a regiment of volunteers,⁷⁰ and later in the century Robert Longden, almost certainly John's son, formed part of Dr. Johnson's social circle at Ashbourne. A justice of the peace, he was described by James Boswell as "a civil and rather spruce squire, intelligent enough. Has an estate of his own and gets £500 a year as a cheese-factor", a comfortable income for the period.⁷¹ The 19th century furnishes another example of a family rising to affluence on the profits of the cheese trade. William Smith of Clifton, near Ashbourne, appears in the 1846 directory as a "cheesefactor", but owned a considerable amount of land in the parish.⁷² By 1857, after the extension of the railway from Rocester to Ashbourne through Clifton, he had become a cheese, iron, coal and general merchant.⁷³ Although he died the following year, he bequeathed a considerable fortune to his seven children, two of whom took over the two largest mansions in the village, and who subsequently assumed the surname of Clifton-Smith with a proprietary air. A well-known name in the Derbyshire cheese trade was that of Messrs. Etches of Derby, now represented by Messrs. Etches, Smith, Cox and Co. of Siddals Road. Supposed to have been established in 1790 by Charles Etches, it passed to his two sons, William Jeffery and Charles Edward Etches in 1840, and became Etches and Co. in 1879, later amalgamating with another old established Derby firm of factors, Smith, Cox & Co.⁷⁴ The Parkinsons of Wilsthorpe sold much of their cheese to Messrs. Etches in the 1840s and '50's.

Some idea of the distribution of cheesefactors over the area can be gained from an analysis of the commercial directories of the 19th century, and other sources. These show that they were mainly concentrated in the towns such as Ashbourne, Derby, Uttoxeter, and Burton, although there was a significant group in the Longnor-Hartington area. For example, White's Staffordshire directory of 1851 names five factors in Burton, five in Uttoxeter, and five more closely concentrated in the Longnor-Sheen district, whilst the Derbyshire directory of 1857 records six factors in Derby, one in Clifton, and two in the Hartington area.

⁶⁹ Derbyshire deeds, nos. 1715-7, Derby Borough Library.

⁷⁰ Cox, I, 196.

⁷¹ R. H. Isham, *Private papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle*, 1928-34, XIII, 24; Sadler, *D.A.J.*, LX (1939), 14; Nottingham Public Library, Archives Dept., TC2/74/1.

⁷² S. Bagshaw, *Directory of Derbyshire*, 1846, 344; Clifton tithe award 1846.

⁷³ White, 397.

⁷⁴ C. E. W. Etches, notes on Etches family history 1948-52, Derby Borough Library.

It is proposed to continue the history of Derbyshire cheese manufacture up to 1900 in a subsequent article. The period 1870-1900 witnessed the growth of the cheese-factory movement in this region, the first of its kind in Europe, which helped to bring about the almost total disappearance of domestic cheesemaking in Derbyshire.

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