

THE MONMOUTH CAP

by Kirstie Buckland



Any Cap, whate'er it be,
Is still the sign of some Degree.

(Elizabethan ballad)

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EVERYONE KNOWS Shakespeare's claim that Welshmen wore leeks in their Monmouth Caps at the battle of Agincourt, and, although Fluellen is, in fact, referring to the Welshmen in the service of the Black Prince at Crecy in 1346¹ the play *Henry V* was written in 1599 when Monmouth caps reached the height of production and popularity. Nevertheless, the Roll of the names that fought at Agincourt in 1415 contains, in the retinue of the Duke of Gloucester, the name of Thomas Capper,² a name prominent in Monmouth's affairs throughout the following two hundred years. Archers at Agincourt wore basinets in battle, and the mounted archers 'had a skull cap of plate or mail, covered with canvas'³ — did they also wear a particular type of fitted woollen lining for protection and comfort? Datini wrote of his wife 'sewing helmets'⁴ in the fifteenth century, so possibly Shakespeare was more accurate than is supposed.

There is no confirmation of any fifteenth-century organization in Monmouth, but there were cappers living in the town in 1449, and they appeared in court during that year. The nineteenth-century writers Charles Heath⁵ and James Robinson Planché⁶ both attribute the earliest mention of the wearing of caps to 'the Book of Worcester' reporting that 'in 1369 they began to use caps of divers colours, especially red, with costly linings . . .'⁷ and the altarpiece of Buxtehude, the famous 'Knitting Madonna', shows that knitting in the round on four needles was a method known and used on the continent at the end of the fourteenth century. In Britain, early references appear to knitted caps and stockings; in 1465 Marjoria Claton of Ripon was described as a 'cappeknytter'⁸ and in 1478 the sisters, Joan and Isabella Capper, of Nottingham, applied for a licence to trade as 'Cappeknytters'.⁹ The Town Knitters of Alcester probably made caps, and in Coventry cappers appeared in the thirteenth century¹⁰ and were well established by 1424 — the Cappers' Company, still active today, was already organized and their rules entered in the Leet Book in 1496.¹¹

The Hundred Court of the Town of Monmouth was established by charter in 1447, and a fifteen foot parchment roll records its proceedings for six months in 1449. The Court sat weekly, with the Mayor and Bailiffs acting as Affreerors, or Justices. It dealt with petty debts, assault, apprenticeships, slander, and all the minor scandals that absorb a small town; neighbours continually sued each other in tit-for-tat cases. Textile occupations are represented by the names Tailor, Hosier, Wever, Dier, Glover, Lace, Card-maker and Capper. Richard Capper appeared twice to support a plea of debt against Thomas ap Davy, one of very few Welsh names.¹² The Charter describes the burgesses as suffering ' . . . manifold . . . and divers oppressions, which the Welshmen, out of their malice heretofore often inflicted upon them, and hence the aforesaid town . . . is now . . . for the greater part waste and desolate . . .'. The cappers slowly prospered with the town, and by the reign of Henry VIII they had assumed important positions as bailiffs, burgesses and jurors. In 1523 Thomas Capper leased a house in Monnow Street for forty years at twenty-four shillings a year¹³ which seems to have been used as a shop — during the term of that tenancy Thomas Capper emerges as the proprietor of a shop

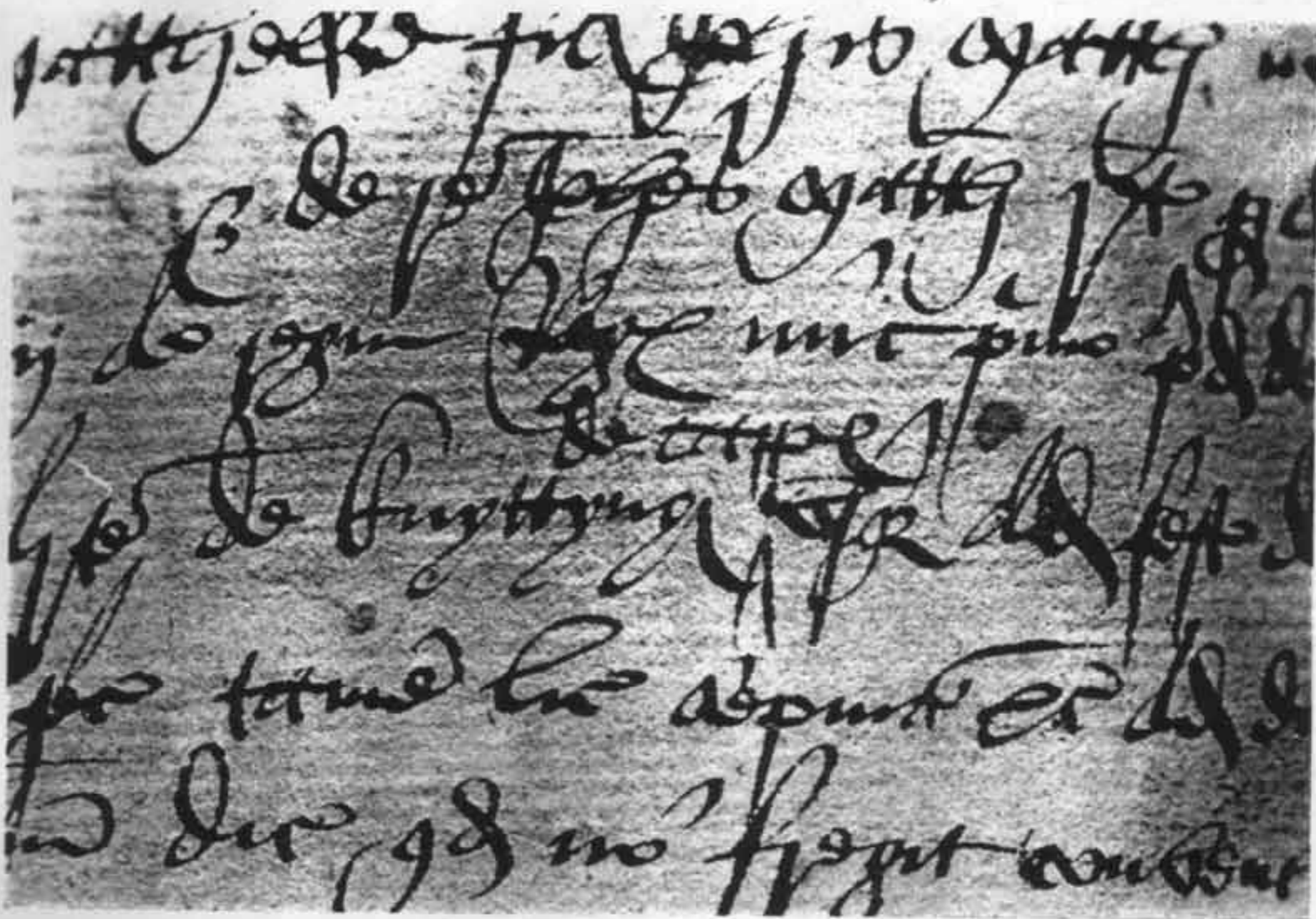


FIG. 1. The words 'Knyttyng de Cappes' from the records of the Hundred Court of Monmouth, 16 January 1548

selling and displaying caps in its window. Cappers were prolific and prominent residents; on one occasion six of the nineteen people in court were called Capper — five administering the law, and one transgressor¹⁴ — but their decline was rapid, and after 1585 they are seldom mentioned.

By 1529 Bristol's cappers were already complaining to the Court of the Star Chamber that cappers from London were threatening the livelihood of hundreds of carders, spinners and knitters in Bristol. Monmouth had close ties with the port on account of the river trade, and Bristol was the outlet for the finished article, explaining its surprisingly worldwide distribution. There is nothing to show a flourishing woollen industry in the vicinity of Monmouth although the county's importance is suggested by the granting to William Webb, in 1543, of the alnage of all cloths made in the county of Monmouth and in the twelve shires of Wales.¹⁵

A later volume of Hundred Court records is more informative than the earlier roll — two cases in 1548 concerned capping. On 29 August, Lissott Bannour (the name, Bannwr, is the Welsh form of Fuller) complained that Robert Mason, who was pledged by Rees Capper, entered his house and stole and unravelled wool and yarn, described as 'clearly cap yarn' to the value of twelve pence ('lanum et yaron videlicet cappes yaron ad valenciam xij^d . . .'). Five months later, on 16 January, Christopher Here laid a complaint against Joan Matthewe, concerning a broken agreement ' . . . to serve him in respect of

her craft of the knitting of caps (ad Artem de knyttyng de Cappes) up to the feast of the Christmas next following'. In 1550, on 1 April, William Berewe and David Capper disputed the share payable to each earned from the craft of making caps ('... artem de cappis craft...') and calculated the price at 2*d.* each;¹⁶ and five years later, John Williams accused a man of breaking into his house and stealing a cap valued at two shillings.¹⁷ In June 1550, the Hundred Court closed temporarily with an explanation that '... this court was lost by the reason of a variance...'¹⁸. However, in 1561, cappers were again in trouble when there was controversy over the use of mills and the relevant documents were lost. John Kynyllyn claimed '... They were torn and sewed together again, and Thomas Capper used them instead of a cloth to lay under his caps in his shop window...'. William Capper was accused of not searching for the documents, and was sued by John Kynyllyn before the Council of the Marches, "... for certain evidences", viz. three copies under the Exchequer seal of Monmouthe...'.¹⁹

Throughout the Tudor reigns legislation was passed to protect the capping industry. The Cappers' Act of 1488 fixed the prices of knitted caps and hats as '... Hatmakers and Kapmakers doth sell their hattes and cappes at such an outrageous price...', heavy fines were imposed on anyone wearing a foreign-made cap or hat, half for the King, half for the informer, and in 1512 an Act decreed that '... no caps or hats ready wrought should be brought from beyond the seas...', John Shakespeare was fined 20*d.* in 1509, and sixteen hatters and cappers of Coventry were pardoned for similar breaches in 1517.²⁰ Woollen caps also became fashionable — John Stow's *Chronicles* (1565) tell that '... under Henry VIII... the youthful citizens also took them to the New fashion of flat caps, knit of woollen yarn black...'. Wool was still a valuable commodity on which prosperity depended; capmaking was an economical way of using it, and employed a great many people — according to the Elizabethan statute '... eight thousand in London, twice as many in the land beside...', while the Reverend Samuel Clarke describes Alcester as still consisting of knitters in 1657.²¹

The Elizabethan Statute of 1571 was 'An Act for the Continuance of the Making of Caps' and it lists fifteen distinct crafts in their manufacture,²² insisting that '... all above the age of six years except some of certain state and condition, shall wear upon the Sabbath and Holydays, one cap of wool knit, thicked and dressed in England, upon the forfeiture of 3*s.* 4*d.*...'. Women were similarly restricted, and all Citizens' wives '... were constrained to wear white knit caps of woollen yarn, unless their husbands were of good value in the Queen's book, or could prove themselves gentlemen by descent...'.²³ Naturally this imposition on sartorial liberty was resented and ignored, only the conscientious obeyed, and the Statute Cap was frequently ridiculed. It did little to help the declining industry, and the Act was repealed in 1597. Some attempt was made to enforce it — Thomas Grene was charged with wearing a hat, not a cap, on Sunday, and Henry Shakespeare was fined in 1583.²⁴ The Council of the Marches on learning, in 1576, that '... the trade is now in many places decayed... and intending reformation... of the mystery of cappers' ordered that offenders should be sought out and their forfeitures distributed amongst the poor cappers of twenty-seven towns, including Monmouth, and the account taken at Bewdley. It found that '... the Statute was passed to procure the wearing of English caps for the benefit of the company of cappers, and others employed in that craft'.²⁵



FIGS. 2-4. Knitted cap in
Monmouth Local History Collection

Permission of Monmouth Museum

Photographs by D. H. Jones

The same year, 1576, brings the first use of the name 'Monmouth Cap' in a letter from Lord Gilbert Talbot of Goodrich Castle to his father, the ninth Earl of Shrewsbury: 'According to my riches, and the country I dwell in, and not to my desire, I send your Lordship a new year's gift: a Monmouth Cappe, and a rundlette of perrye, and I must require pardon to name the other homely thing, a pair of Rosse boots, which, if they be fit for your Lordship, you may have as many as please you to appoint.'²⁶ This indicates that, although a 'homely thing', a Monmouth cap was a suitable present for an aristocratic father and important local landowner, and they were always surprisingly expensive. Fuller calls them '... the most ancient, general warm and profitable covering of men's heads in the island...'. He left, in 'The Worthies of England', the nearest and fullest account of capping as he saw it just before his death in 1661: 'The best caps were formerly made at Monmouth, where the Cappers' Chapel doth still remain, being better carved and gilded than any other part of the Church. But on the occasion of a great plague happening in this town, the trade was some years since removed hence to Bewdley in Worcestershire, yet so that they are called "Monmouth Caps" to this day. Thus this town retains, though not the profit, the credit of capping; and... if at this day the phrase of "Wearing a Monmouth Cap" be taken in a bad acception, I hope the inhabitants of that Town will endeavour to disprove the occasion thereof.'²⁷ This is the only, much-quoted, reference to the Cappers' Chapel, with its suggestion of a prosperous community. Monmouth, characteristically, had its parish churches in different dioceses: St Mary's, the old priory church in the area where the majority of Cappers lived, was in the diocese of Hereford; St Thomas's in the area sometimes referred to as Cappers' Town, presumably from the location of the workers' homes, was in the diocese of Llandaff. There is no record of a chapel for cappers in either diocesan records. Fuller, chaplain to the Berkeley family (his portrait hangs in Berkeley Castle), listed Monmouthshire as an English county, cunningly sidestepping the recurrent question with '... I may fitly call this an English-Welsh county...'. He is very specific about his sources of information, and, according to his biographer, was extremely observant and well-travelled.²⁸ So was the carved and gilded Cappers' Chapel the evidence of his own eyes? The use of guild chapels was abolished in 1545 and 1547, and a document of 1549 mentions the transfer of '... all lands and tenements late belonging to the service or chantry of Saint Mary in the church of Monmouth... by authority of a certain Act... lately published, are now parcel of the Duchy of Lancaster in the county of Monmouth...'.²⁹ Though Coventry had its Cappers' chapel, and Paris established a Knitters' Guild in 1527 which included a cap in its final examination, the only guilds recorded in Monmouth associated a mixture of activities in 1616,³⁰ and 1701.³¹ There is similar lack of confirmation for Fuller's 'great plague' resulting in the migration of capping to Bewdley. Outbreaks frequently occurred, and Bewdley was not immune at that time; more than 5 per cent of the recorded population died from plague in 1604, the capping community was tragically depleted in 1593 when, of the 202 burials, thirteen in August comprised 'John ap Bowen, Capper', his wife and four children, followed by Henry James and his family.³² Capping appears to have reached Bewdley earlier than supposed, an inventory of 1547 lists considerable quantities of caps in varying condition, 'rawe', 'hard', 'old', with a 'cappers presse called a cold presse'³³ and cappers were established by 1574.³⁴ L. T. C. Rolt even suggests that Monmouth's cappers were settled there by Richard,

Duke of York, in 1446. It is more likely to have been a natural extension of the already busy river trade with Bristol. Merchants from Bristol had established depots for their goods in Bewdley with frequent regular trows plying between the two spreading the fame of Monmouth's caps nationwide. Gilbert Lymbery's inventory, made for the Exeter Orphans' Court in 1576, lists Monmouth Caps at 2s. 4d.³⁵ They were ordered for soldiers in 1627³⁶ and 1642;³⁷ they appear in the slop clothing lists for the navy throughout the seventeenth century with contractors' prices rising to 3s. 6d. for 'Best Monmouth Caps', these were regulated by Instructions issued by the Duke of York, as Lord High Admiral, in 1663; an attempt to clothe penniless seamen, the Instructions list Monmouth Caps at 2s. 6d. each, Red Caps at 1s. 3d. each.³⁸ More interesting are the exchequer accounts for the last, fatal voyage of Drake and Hawkins to the West Indies in 1596. Fifteen hundred sailors, and one thousand soldiers were engaged for the unsuccessful trip, many pressed from Gloucestershire and Herefordshire;³⁹ they took with them thirty-six dozen Monmouth caps in two qualities, costing over £40. It was before slop contractors were introduced in 1623, and they do not appear in the lists of clothing but between 'oxen' and 'bows and bowstrings', so was there a connexion with archers? Forty dozen capbands at a penny each accompanied them, and the caps cost 2s. 2d. and 1s. 8d. each — more than shirts, shoes, or linen breeches, less than worsted or woollen stockings.⁴⁰ In general cap prices were high, from 1s. 8d. to 3s. 6d. each, and averaging about 2s. 6d., well above the cost of imported felt hats, or red or leather caps, in spite of frequent legislation to stabilize the price. Leominster wool caps cost double those of Cotswold wool, and in 1637 Lord Conway's steward paid eleven shillings 'for a Monmouth Cap for my Lord'.⁴¹ By today's values the best rate of exchange was fifteen pounds of tobacco each, in an American inventory of 1673.⁴² Cottagers were paid a few pence to knit them which probably included the spinning. In spite of inflated prices they thrived, and appear in songs, satires, and inventories throughout the seventeenth century, attached to soldiers, sailors, Welshmen, and 'the lower orders'.

What did they look like, and how were they made? All references are brief and uncommunicative; no description is ever given, no shape, size, or identification. The name was so familiar that it was self-explanatory. Even the gullible, gossipy Heath can only say 'We have not any evidence among us of the Cap here manufactured'.⁴³ The court evidence shows that they were knitted; isolated literary references over two hundred years merely describe them as 'round', 'brown', and 'pinnacled with the battlement of a button'. Something distinguished them from other woollen caps of the period. Some interesting sixteenth-century caps in the National Museum of Ireland are described as 'felt with wool tufts', but feltmaking was not introduced into Coventry, with its long history of capping, until 1636.

There is a brownish knitted cap in Monmouth's Local History collection which is believed to be a genuine specimen and the only survivor. It has been studied by experts who agree that there is nothing opposing a sixteenth-century date. It is seamless stocking stitch throughout, with a flat double brim knitted together at the edge, which continues into a loop, the crown is finished off with a small button, and it is knitted in coarse, thick, 2-ply wool, felted, thickened and shorn. It may have been dyed after or during felting. The most noticeable feature is the shape which is achieved with mathematical care and simplicity; all in plain knitting, and in multiples of ten and twenty, it could not

be simpler for an illiterate novice to learn. It follows a carefully head-hugging, helmet-shaped pattern suggesting that this was important. It is in excellent condition but very small, eight inches deep, twenty-two inches (55 cm.) and only fifty-nine stitches in circumference at the junction of crown and brim, making roughly $2\frac{1}{2}$ stitches to the inch (one stitch per centimetre) after shrinking. It is arrogant to presume that the knitter made a mistake, but it is obviously more successful with sixty stitches. It follows the shape of the wearer's head, curving where he pulled it down to his ears. It was not designed to flatter — was it intended to be worn inside a helmet? The similarity to the typical sixteenth-century 'Spanish morion' is remarkable, even to the small top-knot. Or was it originally a dual-purpose object, both lining and receptacle, the loop for carrying, the button for anchorage? An ordinance of 1544 recommends '... every man to have a cap to be made to put his salette in, after such fashion as I have desired, which William Taylor, capper, doth make for me, where you may have as many of them as you list for 8*d.* a piece'.⁴⁴

As capping faded in Monmouth it gained importance in Bewdley, and trade tokens were issued by two eminent Bewdley cappers in 1656 and 1670. From these it is difficult to imagine that Walter Palmer designed his token without basing it on a cap like that in Monmouth. It clearly shows the same shape, the button and loop. His colleague, Thomas Farloe, shows an exaggerated shape, the button and loop still just visible on the originals (particularly that in the Cotton collection at Worcester City Museum).⁴⁵ A possible link between the two shapes is provided by the knitted hat bought by Peter I in Amsterdam, and now in the Hermitage.⁴⁶ The photograph shows a similar construction, and it was interesting to find that, using the same wool and method, it was only necessary to alter the sums; starting with the same number of stitches, substituting fifteen for the multiples of ten used in the cap at Monmouth, with pounding and shrinking to reduce the size a reasonable resemblance can be produced. Daniel Defoe, in his 'Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain' made in 1712, describes 'Monmouth Caps, sold chiefly to the Dutch seamen, and made only at Bewdley...'. Peter the Great worked in the Dutch shipyards of the East India Company in 1697. Did he return to St Petersburg wearing a 'Monmouth', made in Bewdley, and bought in Amsterdam? His hat and the tokens indicate that the same simple method was adapted to make two shapes, one small and practical, the other more fashionable — a poor man's beaver. Countrymen were told to '... cast off for ever your two shilling bonnets, cover your coxcombs with £3 beavers...'.⁴⁷

No source has yet been found for the cap in Monmouth. Known to have been with the Borough's collection in the Rolls Hall in the 1930s, no local resident, curator or archivist can shed any light on how it arrived there. One lead may yet provide a clue — the north-west corner of the county, tucked under the Black Mountains in a loop of the Monnow, is known locally as 'Monmouth Cap'. No one knows why, but it is marked as such on ordnance maps from 1830. The only building of any size in the tiny hamlet of Llangua was an old coaching inn called the Monmouth Cap Inn. This was for centuries the property of the Kentchurch estate, and adjoined a ruined priory. Alehouse recognizances are available from 1811, and, on being sold as a private house in 1946, the deeds contained an injunction 'never to let the old sign out of the house'. The beer cellars and parts of the house are very old, it has been added to extensively, and the sign, which used

to hang in the courtyard, is now in the hall. It shows a typical brown cap, with a leek, on a red cushion, on a pedestal bearing the Shakespearian quotation 'Wearing Leeks in their Monmouth Caps'. The reverse shows the name of Amelia Dew, the last licencee, who succeeded her father in the mid-nineteenth century. It is said that two genuine caps were always kept at the inn, but, if so, their fate is unknown. The area has no connexions with the town of Monmouth, having closer ties with Hereford. However, it did form the third corner, with Ross-on-Wye and Monmouth, of the triangular area known in the Middle Ages as Archenfield, which is of some interest in considering why an important capping industry rose and fell in Monmouth at that time.



FIG. 5. Bewdley cappers' tokens, 1670. The drawings appeared in *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society* for 1932, in an article by the late Mrs J. F. Parker, 'Old Bewdley and its Industries'

Copyright for these drawings cannot be traced

In 1123 the monastery of Leominster formed part of the endowment of the new Benedictine foundation at Reading, thus helping Henry I keep informed during troublesome times in the Marches. Leominster shared the commercial advantages granted to Reading, and prospered as an agricultural and marketing centre throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At the same time a superior breed of sheep was developing in the

rye-growing area of Archenfield, south of Ross-on-Wye, and they are mentioned in 1343. The Book of Fees for the County of Hereford of 1278 records two Manors of Rye in Archenfield, both as Fees for the Honour of Monmouth.⁴⁸ The Ryeland breed took its name from this area, of which Monmouth was the southernmost tip, and the Statutes Merchant of Henry VIII, 1511 'bears testimony to the value of the wool from Archenfield and its high breed of sheep . . .'. They were valuable, carefully shepherded and housed. The meat was good, and the small, fine fleeces were unsurpassed by any other breed; each fibre said to be 1/750 inch in diameter, their nearest rivals, the Southdowns, could boast only 1/660 inch, with Cotswolds very much longer and coarser.⁴⁹ Although 'improved' in recent years, the wool retains exceptional felting qualities. It was exported in quantity despite the government's preventative measures, and it seems logical that a cottage industry should arise to make use of this valuable and very expensive local product. The monks of Leominster realized its value and became the main outlet for its sale. When Queen Mary came to the throne she granted Leominster a charter which gave such extensive privileges that it became known as the greatest market town within the county. The Archenfield wool attracted crowds of dealers, it became known as 'Lemster Ore', the Golden Fleece of Leominster (whose arms show a lion carrying a fleece in its mouth), the price rose, and the cappers of Monmouth began to find themselves priced out of their basic material. Mary's charter coincided with the height of capping in Monmouth, and was followed by its downward slide. The Ryeland breed spread north through the county and became the Herefordshire breed, and the name Capper appeared throughout that county. When James I renewed this charter in 1605 commenting on the growth of Leominster ' . . . in a wonderful manner . . . as well in wealth as in population, it doth flourish: we, intending the better sale and dispersion of the fine wool produced in that neighbourhood into different parts of our kingdom, and being persuaded that the assembly of buyers and sellers of that commodity there, may be a great encouragement of the woollen manufacture in this kingdom . . .', he granted extra privileges and fair days. The soil is not the light, rye-growing soil of southern Archenfield, yet Leominster Ore reached the height of its fame and profit at the turn of the century when some effusive poetical allusions were made to it⁵⁰ — even Fuller comments ' . . . great the plenty of wool . . . Lemster Ore being absolutely the finest in this county and indeed in all England'.⁵¹ This was just the time when Monmouth's cappers were relinquishing their burgages⁵² and struggling for survival, to the extent that they applied, in 1655, to the Haberdashers' Company (who still own much property in the town) to establish a workhouse ' . . . for the promotion of their ancient trade of making caps'. They declared that the poverty of the town made it impossible without 'some charitable assistance from persons able and of public spirit'. They were offered ' . . . a workhouse for the making of caps, that, if the trade of capping take not effect to the benefit of the poor in the place within the two years next ensuing, it shall be void'.⁵³ It did not take effect, and the house was sold two years later. Other contributory causes were the extension of alnage to caps, changes in fashion, and the intrusion of fulling mills; said to ruin caps, they were continually forbidden to full them. They increased unemployment as ' . . . a mill would thicken and full more caps in a day than fourscore men, and it was considered inconvenient to turn so many labouring men to idleness . . .'.⁵⁴ If the high hat is left unfulled, it automatically assumes the stocking shape sometimes attributed to Monmouth caps.



FIG. 6. Knitted hat bought in Holland by Peter I, now in the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad
(Reproduced from *Textile History*, vol. 4 (October 1974))



FIG. 7. Nineteenth-century inn sign from the *Monmouth Cap Inn* at Llangua
(By permission of Mrs Downey)

Meanwhile, capping continued in Bewdley taking Monmouth's name across the world. A hypochondriac soldier serving in the Netherlands wrote for one in 1632 '... to lie in my hut in the night, that I may preserve my health ...',⁵⁵ and in 1607 they arrived in the New World with the first shipload of settlers to Jamestown. The newly chartered Virginia Company advised each emigrant to take a list of practical clothing, headed by a Monmouth Cap, and followed by what they considered suitable raiment for clearing virgin forest.⁵⁶ Captain John Smith, who led this unhappy band of 105 men was critical of its composition '... We had far too many gentlemen adventurers among us ... in Virginia a plain soldier that can use a pickaxe and spade is better than five knights ...'.⁵⁷ Of these 105, only John Capper is listed without an explanatory occupation — neither gentleman nor labourer, he appears in the list of nine artisans with 'William Love, Taylor; Daniel Stalling, Jeweller; Robert Cotton, Tobacco-pipe maker'; John Capper alone has no description — did his name supply it? When Captain Smith made an official visit to Powhatan, the father of Pocahontas, they exchanged the usual diplomatic gifts. The Englishmen were given corn, women, and a village, all useful commodities in their circumstances; while Powhatan, the powerful Indian chief, known as 'The Emperor', received in exchange '... A sute of red cloath, a white greyhound, and a Hatte, as jewels he esteemed them ...'.⁵⁸ That hat was described as 'conical and rounded at the top'⁵⁹ like those shown on Farloe's token, and bought by Peter I in Amsterdam.

In 1633 another John Smith⁶⁰ discovered them in the Shetland Islands. He reported to the Earl of Pembroke that saleable goods in the islands were: fishing tackle, food, 'strong beer, strong water, and Monmouth Caps'. Again there is a connexion with Dutch seamen, the 'Hollanders', whom he found 'laborious and industrious', while the Shetlanders were 'like unto the idle Irish', but it is not clear who made or sold the caps to whom. The two caps from the seventeenth-century Gunnister grave are more intricate, but similar in shape and finish.

In America, the caps continued to be worn throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by planters and 'the lower orders', in this case, negro slaves. Orders for large quantities were sent to London, up to fourteen dozen at a time, so it is surprising that none has survived in Virginia, and it appears only once in an advertisement for a runaway servant.⁶¹ The Massachusetts Bay Company ordered two each for plantation labourers in 1629, together with one hat and five red knit caps;⁶² George Washington ordered four dozen from Liverpool in his own handwriting, among 'Coarse Goods for the Estates Use'.⁶³ All these were dependent on quotations from the same merchants for the sale of the tobacco crops; as in the earlier inventory, tobacco was money. Between 1662 and 1663, 3,619 dozen Monmouth Caps were exported from London alone, valued at £4,343. 9s. od.⁶⁴ It is not clear where these were made — the trade in Bewdley was described as '... grown so low ... wholly decayed ... and in a very low condition'.⁶⁵ When by Act of Common Council in 1665, all caps had to be taken to Blackwell Hall, only Monmouth and Bewdley caps were exempted. It must have revived in the eighteenth century, as Defoe's observation was followed, in 1751, by Postlethwaite's 'Universal Dictionary of Trade', the Worcestershire Guide of 1797, and the Directory of Worcestershire for 1820, all still connecting Bewdley with '... Dutch and sailors' caps, which are much prized for the excellent napping, a considerable number of which are sent to London and other places for exportation'.⁶⁶

Their excellence seems to have escaped the discerning traveller in Wales in 1742, whose scorn knows no bounds in describing the Welsh peasants — in addition to a lyrical passage on their vermin, and 'their feet, it seems, are of an hot complexion, for they often air their distocking'd pettitoes' he sums up his disgust with '... the Summit of his Head is commonly crown'd with a Monmouth Cap, and its Crown is commonly pinnacled with the Battlement of a Button'.⁶⁷ This view was shared by 'Twm Shon Catti; a Wild Wag of Wales'. Said to have been born about 1530, this lad's merry pranks involved a number of disguises. As a 'country booby' the author dresses him in straw and sacking, '... the whole surmounted with a soldier's cast-off Monmouth Cap, so highly varnished with grease as to appear waterproof...'. Shortly afterwards appearing as 'a grave puritanical farmer... in stockings of the wool of a black sheep, and a knitted Welsh Wig of the same, that fitted like a skull cap, and concealed every lock of his hair...'.⁶⁸ The term 'Welsh Wig' would seem to be a rude name for a Monmouth Cap, but this author, writing in 1836, differentiates between the two, and the specimen in the Folk Museum at St Fagans is very unusual — finely knitted, close fitting, with looped woollen 'curls' hanging down the nape of the neck. It was received by Mr Horsfall of Leeds in 1854, as a sample from knitters in the Bangor district. Two dozen were ordered and sent to soldiers fighting in the Crimea. It bears no resemblance to the 'Welsh Wig' described by Planché: 'It is a curious fact that what is known at the present day as a "Welsh Wig", if not pulled down tightly upon the head, will take of itself so completely the shape of the Phrygian cap, that it is by no means improbable that the manufacture of it has been continued without variation of pattern from the times of the Keltic and Kimbric colonisation of Britain.'⁶⁹ Archaeologists at Caerleon, the Roman fortress of Isca, recently excavated two large tomb finials in the shape of heads. Dating from the third century, both are carved in the local pink sandstone, and both wear typical Phrygian caps.

Fairholt includes a drawing claiming to be '... the Monmouth-cap, as worn by the celebrated soldier, Sir William Stanley, temp. Henry VIII'.⁷⁰ The drawing is obviously taken from the portrait at Wentworth Woodhouse, owned by Earl Fitzwilliam, which bears the inscription 'Sir W: Stanley Lorde Chamberlaine of the houshold to Henry the 7th' [*sic*] who was beheaded in 1494 for an indiscreet association with Perkin Warbeck. His portrait, painted posthumously in the mid-sixteenth century, shows him in magnificent armour and a dark, typically Tudor bonnet, trimmed with plume and jewels. Fairholt muddled his kings, but what made him describe the sitter in a Monmouth Cap?

A living witness adds a postscript. In May 1927, Mrs Lucia Rosher, formerly of Trewyn, died, aged 96, in her cottage in the Black Mountains. She left instructions that her Monmouth Cap should be buried with her in Oldcastle churchyard, and that the Pandy village choir should sing 'Rule Britannia' over her grave, for which they were promised five shillings. My friend remembers seeing cap and coffin descend the mountain by horse-drawn hearse; despite the inducement the choir refused to sing, but the cap, which appeared to be flat and dark, reached its resting place and lies in a neglected, weed-covered tomb on the north-east side of the mountain scarp — isolated and gloomy even in bright sunshine. Mrs Rosher, true to her family's motto — 'Consider the End' — shared d'Urfey's opinion that '... Any Cap, whate'er it be, Is still the sign of some Degree'.

RHYMES AND REFERENCES

The *Monmouth Cap*, the Saylor's' Thrum,
 And that wherein the Tradesmen come;
 The Physick lawe, the Cap divine,
 And that which crowns the muses nine;
 The Cap that fools do countenance,
 The goodly Cap of Maintenance.

Any Cap, whate'er it be,
 Is still the sign of some degree.

* * *

The Souldiers that the *Monmouth* wear
 On castle tops their Enseignes rear:
 The Saylor's with their Thrums do stand
 On higher place than all the land.

Any Cap, whate'er it be,
 Is still the sign of some degree.

D'Urfey, *The Ballad of the Caps* (Elizabethan ballad)
 reproduced in 'Wit and Mirth, or Pills to
 Purge Melancholy, an odd collection of
 songs'.

A sword and buckler good and strong,
 To give Jack Sauce a rap;
 And on his head, instead of a crown,
 He wore a *Monmouth Cap*.

King Arthur and the Shepherd as printed in
 'Mr. Evans' Collection' reproduced
 by C. Heath.

With *Monmouth Cap*, and cutlace by my side,
 Striding at least a yard at every stride,
 I'm come to tell you, after much petition,
 The Admiralty has given me a Commission.

A Satyre on Sea Officers. Sir H.S., published with the
 Duke of Buckingham's 'Miscellanies'. Dodsley —
 'Old Plays' (Collier's edn, 1825)

Hurl away a brown dozen of *Monmouth caps* in a sea ceremony to your bon voyage . . .

Eastward Hoe — Marston.

They came to church in round *Monmouth Capps* . . .

'Arminian Nunnery' — Robert Armin, 1641

The Welsh his *Monmouth* used to wear . . .

'The Fashions; Merry Drolleries', 1661

REFERENCES

- ¹ *King Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 7.
- ² Sir Harris Nicholas, *The History of the Battle of Agincourt* (London, 1833).
- ³ *Ibid.* A basinet was a basin-shaped helmet which sometimes had a hollow finial to hold plumes.
- ⁴ I. Origo, *The Merchant of Prato* (London, 1957), p. 48.
- ⁵ Charles Heath, 'Historical and Descriptive Accounts of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Monmouth' (Monmouth, 1804).
- ⁶ J. R. Planché, *A Cyclopaedia of Costume* (London, 1876).
- ⁷ Worcester Cathedral's medieval manuscripts contain no such homely reference. This may refer to William of Worcester's Collections respecting the wars in France and Normandy, and his 'Annales rerum Anglicarum, 1324-1491'.
- ⁸ Ripon Chapter Acts, 1452-1506. Surtees Soc., 1875, vol. 64, p. 120.
- ⁹ Records of the Borough of Nottingham, vol. II (1399-1485), 298-99.
- ¹⁰ Joan C. Lancaster, 'Victoria County History of Warwickshire', vol. VIII, *Crafts and Industries*.
- ¹¹ *The Coventry Leet Book or Mayor's Register (1420-1555)*. Transcribed and edited by Mary Dormer Harris for the Early English Text Society, 1907.
- ¹² 'Roll of the Hundred Court of the Town of Monmouth' (1449). Monmouth Borough Archives were partially transcribed in October 1907, by John Hobson Matthews describing himself as 'Archivist pro tem. to the Mayor of Monmouth'. All references are taken from his transcription. Welsh names increased in number after the arrival of the Tudors, before which they are predominantly occupational or place names.
- ¹³ Gwent Record Office. Williams and Tweedy, 795. D.10, vol. II (29 September), 15 Henry VIII.
- ¹⁴ MBA. vol. 6. Hundred Court Records, 1545-1550.
- ¹⁵ T. C. Mendenhall, *The Shrewsbury Drapers and the Welsh Wool Trade in the XVI and XVII Centuries* (O.U.P., 1953). The Statute of 34-35 Henry VIII, c.26. William Webb collected 1d. for the larger cloths, and ½d. for the smaller in Monmouth and the twelve shires of Wales.
- ¹⁶ M.B.A. Hundred Court Records.
- ¹⁷ Cal. Pat. Rolls, 15.3.1555.
- ¹⁸ M.B.A. vol. 6. Hundred Court Records.
- ¹⁹ M.B.A. vol. 2, p. 170. Depositions a^o 3 Eliz: no. 29. Feb. 4th. The Queen's Records. 'He had two accounts as to the Queen's revenue in those parts.'
- ²⁰ V.C.H., *Warwickshire*.
- ²¹ Revd Samuel Clarke, *Geographical Description of all the Countries in the Known World*, 167. He was Rector of Alcester, 1633-45.
- ²² 13 Eliz. Cap. 19. The callings listed are: 'Carders; Spinners, Knitters; Parters of Wool; Forcers; Thickers; Dressers; Walkers; Dyers; Buttellers; Shearers; Pressers; Edgers; Liners; Bandmakers; and other exercises.'
- ²³ Howes's Additions to Stowe's *Annales* (1631 edn), p. 1039.
- ²⁴ V.C.H., *Warwickshire*, vol. 2.
- ²⁵ R. Flenley, *Calendar of the Register of the Queen's Majesty's Council in the Dominion and Principality of Wales and the Marches of the Same, 1569-1591*. Bodley MS no. 904, Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (1916).
- ²⁶ Quoted by R. Waugh, *Guide to Monmouth* (1879).
- ²⁷ T. Fuller, *The Worthies of England* (1661) (ed. J. Freeman, 1952).
- ²⁸ A. Jessop, *Wise Words and Quaint Counsels of Thos. Fuller* (1892). 'England he knew as only they can know it . . . who are gifted by nature with a geographical eye.' An ancient chapel was used as a hatter's shop in the eighteenth century.
- ²⁹ M.B.A., vol. 1, p. 98. 3 Edw. VI.
- ³⁰ Guild of Mercers, Drapers, Grocers, Tanners and Glovers.
- ³¹ Guild of Joiners, Periwig-makers, Hemp and Flax Dressers, Glaziers and Coopers.
- ³² Ribbesford Church Register.
- ³³ PRO. SC 2. Portfolio 210 no. 16. The Goods of Andrew Coxon.
- ³⁴ Ribbesford Church Register: Baptism, 'John sonne of Ambros Hartley, Caper'. (12 December 1574).
- ³⁵ East Devon Record Office.
- ³⁶ The Privy Council ordered a contract for '. . . 6,000 suits for land soldiers, viz: casacks, hose, cloath, shoes, stockings, shirts, bands and Monmouth caps'.
- ³⁷ Ordnance lists: '. . . Monmouth caps, doublets, coats or cassocks of Suffolk, Coventry or Gloucester cloth and breeches of Reading or other cloth both shrunk in cold water, stockings of good Welsh cotton, shoes, shirts, etc. . . .'
- ³⁸ D. Jarrett, *British Naval Dress* (London, 1960), p. 18. James, Duke of York, Lord High Admiral: 'Instructions to be observed in ye impresting or vending of cloathes on board any of his Ma^{ty}s Shippes.' (26 March 1663.)
- ³⁹ K. R. Andrews, *The Last Voyage of Drake and Hawkins*, Hakluyt Society (1972), '1d. a man a mile, with presters charges, thirty shillings — £235.13.4d.'
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ D. Matthews, *The Social Structure in Caroline England* (Oxford, 1948), p. 101.
- ⁴² Westmoreland County, Virginia, Records, 'Deed Pattents & Accts, Depositions &c. p. 180. An Inventory of ye Estate of Cap^a Jno Lee, decs^d' (March 1673-74). All evaluations made in pounds of tobacco.

⁴³ C. Heath, *Monmouth* (1804). Published and printed by the Author.

⁴⁴ Ordnance 36 Henry VIII.

⁴⁵ Reproduced by permission of Bewdley Museum and Worcester City Museum. The drawings are taken from 'Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society', vol. IX (1932), by permission of the editor. Owners of copyright of the drawings were sought but could not be traced.

⁴⁶ Reproduced from I. Turnau, 'Aspects of the Russian Artisan', in *Textile History*, vol. 4 (October 1973), p. 15. '... One of the hats has a double knitted brim ... the simple technique of these hats proves that they were articles in common use. They were probably worn by Dutch artisans and fishermen, and Peter I bought them when he worked as a labourer in Amsterdam.'

⁴⁷ T. Dekker, *Ghoyse Drollery* (1656).

⁴⁸ M.B.A., vol. I, p. 27. Return of Knight's Fees (DL 40) Hen. II—Ch. I.

⁴⁹ W. Youatt, *Sheep, Their Breeds, Management and Diseases* (1837), p. 261. Fineness is linked to housing and economy of nutrition. Sir Joseph Banks remarked that Ryelands deserved '... a niche in the Temple of Famine ...'. He was instrumental in sending the first Merinos to Australia, in the reign of George III.

And beauteous Albion ... with many a lock appears
Of silky lustre: chief, *Siluria*, thine;
Thine, *Vaga*, favour'd stream, from sheep minute
On *Cambria* bred; a pound outweighs a fleece.

(*The Fleece*, Dyer, 1757)

⁵⁰ Michael Drayton, 'Poly-Olbion' (1591), 'Agincourt'. Phillips, 'Cyder' (1705).

⁵¹ T. Fuller, *The Worthies of England* (Herefordshire, 1661).

⁵² W. Rees, *A Survey of the Duchy of Lancaster Lordships* (1609–13), pp. 17, 25.

⁵³ Revd W. M. Warlow, *The Charities of William Jones* (11.7.1655) (Bristol, 1899).

⁵⁴ T. Fuller, *The Worthies of England* (1661).

⁵⁵ *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. XI (1859). Letter from Francis Wilson (1632).

⁵⁶ Captain John Smith, *History of the Virginia Settlement* (1624).

⁵⁷ There were fifty-two gentlemen adventurers '... and of a necessity some of these must needs not be quite all we could wish as reliable companions'.

⁵⁸ Captain John Smith, *ibid.*, '... with a great oration made by three of his nobles ... kindly accepted them with a publik confirmation of a perpetuall league and friendship ...'.

⁵⁹ P. L. Barbour, *Pocahontas and her world* (London, 1971), p. 259 (quoted from Werner Muller, 'Die Religionen der Waldlandindianer Nordamerikas', 27).

⁶⁰ John Smith, *Trade and Fishing of Great Britain Displayed* (London, 1661).

⁶¹ *The Virginia Gazette*, Rind, ed. (22 September 1768): 'Fredericksburg, August 29, 1768. Run away from the subscribers ... The Mulatto fellow ... is named Jack; ... he carried with him, and might have on when he went away, a Monmouth cap, a brown linen shirt and trowsers ...'.

⁶² Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay. 'Equipment sent on ships, Talbot ... for the use of the plantation at Naumkeag (Salem) ... 16 March, 1629. Apparell for 100 men' (quoted by Alice Morse Earle, *Two Centuries of Costume in America* (Macmillan 1903)).

⁶³ J. C. Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1769*, vol. 2 (1757–69), U.S. Govt Printing Office (ed. John C. Fitzpatrick).

⁶⁴ BM Add. MS 36785 (quoted by Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects* (1977)). This represents 43,428 caps @ approximately 2s. each.

⁶⁵ Andrew Yarrenton, *England's Improvement*, Part 2 (1677–81).

⁶⁶ In 1820 three cappers are listed; by 1855 one remained as 'Malster and cap-manufacturer'; by 1865 she had dropped capping, appearing as 'maltster'; shortly after that a relative appears at the same address as 'Auctioneer'.

⁶⁷ *Travels and Memoirs of Wales* (1742).

⁶⁸ T. L. Pritchard, *The Comical Adventures of Twm Shon Catti* (1836).

⁶⁹ J. R. Planché, *A Cyclopaedia of Costume*, vol. I (London, 1876).

⁷⁰ F. W. Fairholt, *Costume in England* (1846), p. 242.