


# **Socio-economic change in English Market Towns: The case of Swaffham**

Craig Wheway, BA,  
MSc, PhD Candidate in  
Human Geography



# Structure

1. Key objectives of the research
2. Methodology: How the data was collected
3. Key Findings
4. The implications
5. Final thoughts

# 1. Key objectives of the research

- To look specifically at market towns in terms of their population and changing role within the urban/rural settlement hierarchy.
- Comparing different types of market town i.e. 'accessible' and 'remote'.
  - Swaffham (Norfolk)
  - Towcester (Northamptonshire)
  - Lutterworth (Leicestershire)
- Looking more closely at the reasons why different groups of people choose to reside in market towns.

# Research questions for the PhD

- 1. Extent of population changes/trends
- 2. Investigation of urban/rural representations.
- 3. Analysing everyday practices/experiences of Swaffham



# Methodology: How the Data was collected

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- Firstly via Questionnaires:
  - Questions on Swaffham,
  - Property and consumption
  - Basic data on the respondent (employment)
- Secondly via detailed semi-structured interviews
  - Where have respondents lived before?
  - Detailed descriptions of experiences
  - What do people 'do' in market towns?

# Key Findings: Summary

- 1) Swaffham some evidence of gentrification.
- 2) Attraction of 'semi-rural' lifestyle.
- 3) Community group contribution to the economy.
- 4) Swaffham as service centre.
- 5) Young people: intergenerational understanding

# Key Findings: Evidence of Gentrification

- Significant flows of pre retirement/retirement migration.
- Unlocking of capital flows, particularly from London.
- Reaching a stage of the lifecourse whereby an urban lifestyle is incompatible with lifestyle requirements.

## Key Findings: Rural lifestyle

*“Rural structures inherited from the past will have to be remodelled and new components inserted into rural landscapes. Growing numbers of urban dwellers will make the countryside a more precious resource to compensate for city living than ever before”*  
(Clout, 1972: 195)

# Rural Lifestyle

- Less hectic lifestyle
  - Linked to health circumstances
- Many manage to preserve their recent urban past (Errington, 1994). However, residents still desire facilities such as leisure and health provision.
- However there is a disconnect in terms of those with the social mobility to achieve the house in the country and those who have to grow up and live within Swaffham.

## Key findings: Contribution to economy and society

- Nearly a third of respondents were involved in local associations.
- However some residents felt that activities were often geared towards the two extremes of young and old, although that does reflect the population. Of Swaffham.
- These residents were often middle-aged.

## Being stuck in the middle

- *“Well erm.., I have tried especially since I retired erm.. but there is really nothing for... someone in my position. I did a WEA course, which I really enjoyed on Thomas Payne, but there has never been anything remotely like that since. Erm... They are geared ether to families with young children or...elderly people. And I’m not ready to fit into that category”.* (Interviewee 12: 6)

# Swaffham population trends

Table 1: Comparing Swaffham with the rest of England (2001 census)

Demographic Groups	Age bands	Census 2001 Swaffham	Census 2001 (England)
Younger	0-15, 16-19	21%	25%
Young Adults	20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39	21%	28%
Middle Age	40-44, 45-49, 50-54	19%	20%
Early Retirement/Older	55-59, 60-64, 65-74	26%	19%
Elderly	75-79, 80-84, 85-89, 90+	14%	7%

\*Figures rounded up so may not exactly add to 100%

Table 2: Comparing Swaffham with the rest of England (1991 Census)

Demographic Groups	Age bands	Census 1991 Swaffham	Census 1991 England
Younger	0-15, 16-19	21%	25%
Young Adults	20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39	23%	29%
Middle Age	40-44, 45-49, 50-54	17%	19%
Early Retirement/Older	55-59, 60-64, 65-74	27%	19%
Elderly	75-79, 80-84, 85-89, 90+	13%	7%

# Key Findings: Young people

- Increasing pressures on younger members of society
  - 'Generation Debt' (Anya Kamenetz)
  - Skilling of the workforce.
  - Transport: For provided activities.

The National Housing and Planning Unit (NHPU) supports this and argue that housing supply needs to increase to bridge the affordability ratio for the poorest 20% of the population. Affordability ratios the NHPU argue, would increase with the average home costing 7.25 times the pay of the poorest 20% and by 2026 this would increase to 8.6 times at current prices.

# The implications

- Swaffham not just a retirement town. Town depends on a social mix.
- Links with the hinterland: Outlying villages rely on key nodes such as Swaffham.
- New development and service relationship. Uniform estates.



# Finale.....

- Although I have highlighted challenges and problems, there are positives....
  - There are opportunities to promote Swaffham as a drop-off point before the4 coast.
  - The concentration of resources in market towns should preserve these icons of the English Landscape.



Thank you very much for your time