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Pawning and pawners in the industrial era: evidence from Sweden, 1870 to 1950¹

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ABSTRACT

Many people, both the poor and from the middle-classes, depended on pawn-broking. We have used a unique material, the daily ledgers from a Swedish pawnshop in naval town Karlskrona, during a long period of time 1880-1950. We find that the number of loans in relation to population did decline, especially after 1910, but in no year was the value of the average loan less than that of a day's work for a day labourer, meaning that the average loans did not show signs of being the act of a very impoverished person. The main objects being pawned was clothes, and among them coats. Most of them were pawned in May, which would support an idea of seasonal pawning, rather than weekly pawning. A majority of the pawners consisted of military men and workers. Women made up a small part of the sample, between ten and twenty per cent. In general, workers pawned mostly clothes and shoes, but they also pawned rings. Likely, the national context does affect when shifts and changes occur. pawnbroking Sweden working class middle class.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

Pawning uses basic procedures. A pawnner presents a pledge to the pawnshop and will, in turn, receive a sum of money, appropriate to the value of the pawn. However, pawning is also viewed as the archetypical unequal relationship in business: the last desperate option of the truly poor used to put food on the table or starve as an alternative.² Still, other evidence points to the fact that most goods were redeemed; goods were also only pawned when there was adequate hope of redeeming the pledge, or a valued and legitimate financial service was an option.³ In historical pawning in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, pawning depended on differences in living standards. Over- or underestimating pawning varied among the working or middle classes, but also possibly differed by country. The source material will also possibly differ and lead to different results.

We use a unique material, the daily ledgers from a Swedish pawnshop, during a long time period, 1880–1950. We will thereby be able to see what was pawned, its value, how long it was held in pledge, and when, or if, it was redeemed. Thus, we may increase the general knowledge of pawning and working-life credit.

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Pawn-broking in the industrial society

Many people, both from the poor and middling classes, depended on pawnbroking.⁴ The general view seems to be that the dominant group of pawners were members of the working class, who were not necessarily poor but had periods of income insufficiency and therefore had a greater need for short-term loans to afford necessities.⁵ Pawning, as well as payday loans, was accused of impairing the conditions of the poor, actually contributing to poverty.⁶

Melanie Tebbutt declares that pawning was not necessarily a sign of destitution but, on the other hand, she has also quoted many sources that show the regular need for pawning. The amount that one could pawn an object for was not solely dependent on the actual financial value of the asset, but on its value for the borrower as well. One example of an object that did not have a financial value, but was of great importance and use (also in connection with authorities, etc.), was the marriage certificate, which was accordingly a common pawn.⁷

In early nineteenth-century Ireland, namely 1838–48, Eoin McLaughlin and Rowena Pecchenino find that pawnbrokers provided a steady source of credit. This credit stream was more durable than the alternative financial service offered by providers on the fringe banking market, especially during the Great Famine.⁸

In Germany, Karl Christian Führer argues in his study that pawning only took place when the pawnier had good hopes of redeeming the pledge. Few statistics exist, but there are figures for the number of loans taken in Munich in 1902 and Hamburg in 1912. There are also figures for a few years and cities on the size of loans, showing that the majority of pledges in the years before the First World War equalled one or two days' wages for a skilled male worker, a figure that had declined over the years.⁹

The fact that most loans were small is confirmed in a study of the pawnshop in the Swedish industrial town of Borås in the 1920s and 1930s by Tony Kenttä. He shows that loans, in general, corresponded to less than a week's pay, and that the dominating kind of borrowers were those who had temporary income insufficiency. Married women with many children dominated as borrowers, while unmarried women and men with regular incomes were, in general, less inclined to pawn. Middle-class borrowers, in general, redeemed their objects as soon as possible, while working-class borrowers acted differently. Objects with high use value – e.g. clothes and shoes – were redeemed just after a few days, in most cases, while highly valued objects with lower use value, such as jewellery, could have a redemption time of several months.¹⁰

Several studies confirm that pawn-broking declined when industrialization began to accelerate, as was the case in England, Mexico, and Sweden.¹¹ Goods became comparatively cheap and thus more obtainable for larger groups in society. Tebutt has also claimed that many kinds of textiles were rejected at the end of the nineteenth century and the sale of second-hand clothes, on the whole, diminished. Mass-produced clothes and other mass-produced item such as watches, for example, received decreasing pledge values. At the same time, real wages increased, especially for the poorest. There were also more ways of obtaining credit.¹²

A. L. Minkes has studied the decline of pawnbroking, measured as the number of pawnshops in Britain from its peak in 1913–14–1950. Without further testing, he concludes that the emerging welfare state, increased incomes and full employment

contributed to the decline. Access to cheaper goods in combination with hire-rental purchases and changes in attitudes were also possible factors.¹³

Sofia Murhem has found in her study of pawnbroking in Sweden that the decline was largely due to changes in demand for pawning, notably improved labour market conditions as reflected in rising real wages and employment opportunities. There was no evidence of an effect of regulation changes, the availability of other sources of credit, or the expansion of the welfare system.¹⁴

It is clear that the different regulations affected the way that the business of pawnbroking developed. A pawnshop owner charging massive interest rates would probably leave the pawner in a precarious position. It was possible to set interest rates at will to increase the supply of pawning. Caskey argues that one of the main reasons why American pawnbroking did not decline in the same manner as British pawnbroking was the regulation of British interest rates. He also finds support for this when comparing different American states.¹⁵

Clothes and textiles were most likely the dominating collaterals for a long period of time. However, there are few studies of the changes in the composition of the collaterals over time due to the lack of preserved sets of ledgers. In most studies, the conclusions are drawn from rather small samples, such as from one ledger or only from statements.¹⁶ Increased real wages and the emergence of cheaper, newly manufactured goods probably affected the composition of the collaterals, wherein clothes were replaced by jewellery and household utensils.

Paul Jonson cites a leading pawnbroker in 1870 who claimed that 50 per cent of all pledges were clothes. A considerable part of the remaining pledges were also various kinds of textiles. There are records declaring that pawnshops were used for storing clothes due to a lack of suitable means of keeping them at home.¹⁷

Marie Eileen Francois has data on items pawned in Mexico City from 1787–1830, 1867–80, 1902–09 and 1914–21, using ledgers from Monte de Piedad and private pawnbrokers. Focusing on the three latter periods, corresponding to the period studied here, the major category pawned from 1867 to 1880 was clothes. Generic clothing was the largest group within this category, followed by female clothing, while the smallest group was men's clothing. Household textiles came second, then jewellery. In the following period, 1902–1909, jewellery was the largest category, closely followed by clothes. Table services were next, then watches, followed by household textiles. In 1915–21, jewellery was still at the top, while furniture and furnishings were second. Clothing was the third category, while household textiles had decreased to almost nothing.¹⁸

In his study on the Borås, Sweden, pawnshop in the 1920s and 30s, Kenttä confirms this ongoing shift from clothes to jewellery, which also affected the redemption time. Clothes, in general, had a higher use value than an economic one, with a short redemption time as a result. Meanwhile, more valuable and thus less needed goods, like jewellery and household utensils, could stay in hock for months.¹⁹

This brings us to the much-discussed habit of weekly pawning. For England, most evidence is quite anecdotal. Tebbutt quotes interviews discussing the importance of weekly pawning. On Monday, the weekend's clothes were pawned and redeemed again on Saturday.²⁰ The infamous weekly pawning of Sunday clothes was condemned by contemporary critics. In her autobiography, Alice Foley gives a vivid account of her memory of her mother's weekly trip to the pawnshop, carrying the Sunday clothes tied into a bundle.²¹

Wendy Woloson also states that Sunday clothes' pawning was common in the US. She only has ledgers for six months in 1838 from one New York pawnbroker, but the importance of clothes and textiles is confirmed in this case.²² From Hamburg in 1906, the majority of pledges were redeemed on Saturdays, as was the case in Augsburg. Reports from public pawnshops indicated that weekly pawning was rare.²³ There are no traces of weekly pawning in Borås in Sweden in the 1920s and 1930s. The only objects pawned regularly were coats, which were pawned in the spring and redeemed in the early autumn.²⁴

Aim

This study aims to analyse the business of the pawnshop in the naval town of Karlskrona between 1872 and 1950, with a special focus on changes over time of the collaterals, their values, and the redemption time. We also aim to discuss who the pawners were by using a ledger containing lost pawn tickets for the years 1910 to 1951.

Pawn broking in Sweden

In Sweden, a government agency, *Generalassistansekontoret*, was founded in 1772 to assist the poorer population with loans against security in goods. The supply of pawnshops increased in the middle of the nineteenth century. The industrialization and urbanization process caused an increased demand for short-term credits by the new, urban poor. When the Swedish business and trade market was deregulated in 1864, and the strict system of guilds was abolished, it was possible to meet that demand through an increase in (private) pawnbroking.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, private pawnshops were established in more than 30 towns in Sweden. In Stockholm, the police list 42 private pawnbrokers in 1872 and 1887, lending around 570,000 loans annually. In Gothenburg, there were 12–18 private pawnbrokers with an average of 440,000 annual loans in total. There is some mention of municipal pawnshops in some towns as well. In 1905, there were municipal pawnshops in Malmö, Karlskrona, Gothenburg, Stockholm, and Sundsvall.²⁵

Those businesses, however, were not regulated. In 1885, private pawning was regulated by law. Only those who were of public confidence, independent, and overall suitable were granted permission. It was mandatory to keep records of the pawns left for each loan, the day of the transaction, the terms and conditions, as well as the pawner's name, occupation, and residence. This law did not cover the public pawnbrokers. The possible use of usury was high on the Swedish debate agenda in the late nineteenth century.

Instead, public or philanthropic pawnshops were opened in many Swedish cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, usually with some attempts to use any surplus for charity. Their interest rates were modest. For example, the Karlskrona public pawnshop charged two per cent per month between 1872 and 1930. This was higher than banks, which had an annual rate of about six per cent, but was far from being usury. Thus, private pawnshops probably found it difficult to charge higher rates as they would risk being driven out of business.

In 1918, a new law was introduced. Accepting a pawn from someone who was under eighteen years of age or intoxicated was now illegal. Pawnbrokers were also obligated to

perform investigations related to stolen goods. A further novelty was that the law applied also to public pawnbrokers.

The basic regulation for pawnshops in Sweden was set down by the Swedish Act on Commerce. The Act regulated what would happen if the pawn was not redeemed. Unredeemed pawns would be sold at auction. If the price made at auction was higher than the accumulated interest plus the money lent, the surplus would go to the borrower. If the price was lower, the pawnshop stood to pay the difference. This means that the pawnshop had no interest whatsoever in trying to cheat the client over the value of the pawn.²⁶

Karlskrona city and pawnshop

The period studied here, 1872–1950, was a time when Swedish society transformed from a rural agrarian economy to an industrialized, urban welfare state. The number of workers employed in industry, most often on a daily basis, increased, as did wages. However, the country was still comparatively poor and the rural population became increasingly proletarianized. In the 1880s, emigration to – foremost – the US rose dramatically. The industrialization process did improve economic growth and living standards but the distribution of wealth was uneven. Many of those who moved into the cities found themselves at the bottom of the urban working class. The First World War caused rising prices and limited the availability of goods through rationing that, in combination with high unemployment in the years following the war, caused many to apply for poor relief. The crisis of the 1930s also resulted in financial problems for both rich and poor, as well as high levels of unemployment.²⁷

Karlskrona, the town used for this study, was founded in 1680 as a naval port city on the Swedish east coast. It was, and still is, the base for the Swedish Royal Navy. In 1880, it had a population of 18,300 and was the sixth-largest town in Sweden. In 1930, there were 25,491 inhabitants, although Karlskrona's growth rate had declined by then relative to other towns in Sweden and was only the fourteenth town in size.

The town was dominated by the military. Apart from the navy, there were the naval shipyards, as well as the artillery and the grenadier regiments.²⁸ There was also a small civilian industry, which grew in size at the end of the nineteenth century. Apart from shipping companies and shipbuilding established in the mid-nineteenth century, industries also included stone-masonry, food industries, among them a dairy, textile industries, and a galvanization factory. However, shipbuilding was by far the most important industry.²⁹ The dominance of the navy and the naval shipyard, both as employers and buyers of materials and services, meant that when production and employment in the navy and shipyard were cut back, the whole town was affected. Paul Johnson has emphasized that in port cities, with a large proportion of casual dock workers, pawning was especially important.³⁰

Method and material

This study is based on the ledgers of the Karlskrona public pawnshop (*Karlskrona stads allmänna pantlåneinrättning*) between 1872 and 1950. The pawnshop was the only one in the town. We can also claim that the Karlskrona pawnshop was representative as the

Table 1. Average number of loans and number of loans per person in different towns in 1901–1905.

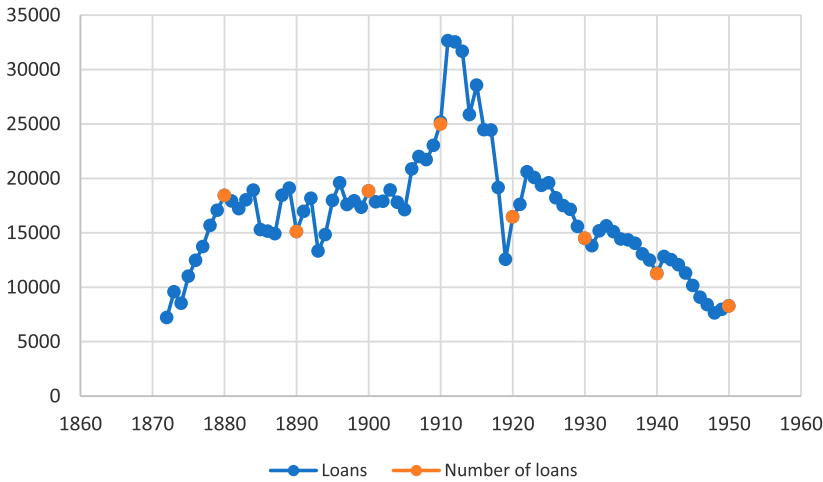
Pawnshop	Average number of loans annually	Number of loans per inhabitant 1901–1905
Sundsvall	25,590	1.63
Eskilstuna (1902-1905)	18,996	1.41
Kalmar	14,915	1.11
Uppsala (1905)	17,822	0.73
Falun (1905)	5,837	0.55
Borås (1904-1905)	6,800	0.37
Nyköping	2,244	0.29
Västerås	3,200	0.24
Kristianstad	1,597	0.15
Total average	10,261	0.72
Karlskrona (1905)	17,915	0.70

Source: Kenttä (2016, Table 4.3, p. 97).

number of loans in relation to the size of the town's population was more or less the same as in corresponding towns. A comparison with municipal pawnbrokers in nine medium-sized towns in Sweden shows that the number of loans differed between 0.15 and 1.63 loans per citizen, with a total average of 0.72 loans per citizen. The quota for Karlskrona was 0.70. Bigger, industrialized towns had, in general, more loans per citizen than smaller, less developed towns. This is not surprising as the proportion of workers was higher in the former. (Table 1)

The ledgers are complete, except for 1921 when numbers 1–490 are missing and entries start on 13 January. For every loan, there is a record of what the pawn was, the sum borrowed, when and if it was repaid, and whether the loans had been renewed or the pawn sold at auction. The number of loans has been counted for every tenth year beginning with 1872, 1880, and 1890 onwards, where each sample contains between 866 and 1909 entries, depending on the total number of loans each year and with data from all months. In all, the total constructed database has 11,687 entries, each representing a pledge. This corresponds to nine per cent of all pledges in these years. The chosen years seem to be quite representative in relation to the general development of the pawnshop (Diagram 1).

The ledgers, although detailed, lack the names of pawners. To access who the pawners were, we have used a ledger containing lost pawn tickets for the years 1910–11, 1920–21, 1930–31, 1940–41 and 1950–51. All pawners during those years have been entered into a database, totalling 659 entries. Not all entries are unique, however. In some cases, the same pawnner lost more than one pawn ticket over the years. Here, pawnners are stated by title (in most cases) and addresses. For those who do not have a title, we used their names and addresses and determined them to be workers. This sample of pawnners cannot be treated as a representative sample of all pawnners, however. People with irregular home lives or careless habits are probably over-represented among those who lost their pawn tickets. Naval and military men are expected to be over-represented, for example, because they live in military compounds away from home. In addition, naval men, fishermen, and sailors could also be over-represented, as they led a more risk-filled life. There are entries that read 'pawn ticket lost when owner drowned, recovered on body'. We can also assume that most pawnners who had lost their tickets reported this to the pawnshop. Of course, the higher the value of the pawn, the more incentive there might have been to report it. But since the pawnners

Loans and number of loans in Karlskrona pawnshop 1872-1950

Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank

Diagram 1. Loans and number of loans in Karlskrona pawnshop 1872-1950 Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank.

pawned out of economic necessity, even a small ticket was probably important enough to report. Even those who had small hope or no intention of redeeming their goods had an incentive to report a lost ticket as they stood to gain if the pawn fetched a higher price at the subsequent auction. Hence, the list of lost pawn tickets and their owners gives an overview of the pawners, which category of society they belonged to, and what they had pawned. For this purpose, the representativeness of the sample is less important.

For the discussion of day labourers' wages, data were collected for the first period from Jörberg. For the later years, various publications for relevant years from Statistics Sweden were used. The Consumer Price Index used for adjusting nominal values to real values is the Historical Consumer Price Index 1, provided by the Swedish Riksbank.³¹

Pawning at Karlskrona public pawnshop

The pawnshop studied here is a public pawnshop, which was founded in 1872 to decrease the cost of loans to the poor and to make them less dependent on private lenders. In the Karlskrona pawnshop, interest rates were set at two per cent per month from the founding year and during the entire period of study. This can be compared to the interest rates set by savings banks that could have an annual interest rate on loans of between five and 6.5 per cent, 1880–1910.³² Pawning interest rates were set at two per cent per month, which was larger but quicker (and easier). The Karlskrona pawnshop was located in central Karlskrona from July 1880 onwards. (Table 2)

The pawnshop in Karlskrona became a large lender only a few years after it was founded.³³ Measured as loans in relation to the population of the city, the number

Table 2. Number of loans in Karlskrona pawnshop, number of inhabitants in Karlskrona and loans/inhabitant 1880–1950.

Year	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Number of loans	18436	15105	18840	24979	16466	14508	11251	8259
Population	16877	19127	22496	26673	28536	27716	28447	31505
Loans/ person	1,09	0,79	0,84	0,94	0,58	0,52	0,40	0,26

Source: Murhem (2016)

of loans was approximately one per person or three to four per household until the First World War. Since not all households pawned, this figure was probably at least double for the households that did. We should also bear in mind that a considerable proportion of those who pledged their possessions were military men – many of them conscripted. The importance of the pawnshop as a credit provider decreased after the First World War; in 1950, the amount of credit was a mere fraction of what it had been at its peak.³⁴

The value of the average pawn did not differ significantly in terms of real prices during the period up until 1940, while they had almost doubled in 1950. This is contrary to the results of Tebbutt, who found a decreasing pledge value at the end of the nineteenth century onwards.³⁵ Another way of measuring the size of the pawn loans is to relate them to the number of days that a day labourer had to work in order to earn the sum of the average pawn loan. This way of measuring gives a different picture from the one presented above. (Tables 3 and 4)

During the nineteenth century, the amount measured as working time was much higher. During the twentieth century, even if the exact time that one had to work to earn the amount varied, it was more or less constant. But we cannot, in any of these cases, argue that the average loan was insignificant. Looking at the smallest loans, we see that they are still considerable up until 1920. The First World War caused wartime posting and rising prices; the financial and economic crises in the 1920s were a result. Subsequently, we do find small loans but, as will be discussed further below, this is probably due to cheaper clothes and a diversification of pawns. This points to wealthier pledgers rather than poorer.

The number of loans in relation to population did decline, but in no year was the value of the average loan less than that of a day's work for a day labourer. This probably means that the average loans did not show signs of being the act of a very impoverished person. This assumption is also supported by results in Kenttä's study on the Borås pawnshop in Sweden.³⁶

Table 3. Mean, median, maximum and minimum values in real prices, SEK, (year 1880) for pawn loans in Karlskrona Pawnshop 1880–1950.

Year	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Mean	4,2	3,33	2,59	2,68	3,80	3,73	4,07	7,41
Median	3	2,22	1,99	1,80	2,44	2,55	3,42	6,36
Max	40	33,31	24,87	45,05	60,97	43,35	74,91	63,55
Min	1	1,11	0,99	0,90	1,52	0,51	0,43	0,64

Source: Murhem (2016)

Table 4. Mean and minimum value of pawn loans in Karlskrona pawnshop, average wages for day labourers and the time a day labourer had to work to finance the average and minimum loan 1880–1950.

Year	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Mean	4,2	3,00	2,60	2,97	12,47	7,32	9,50	23,32
Min	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	2
Wages	1,29	1,21	1,65	2,25	7,03	4,02	7,14	15,67
Days of work for average loan	3,26	2,48	1,58	1,32	1,77	1,82	1,33	1,49
Days of work for minimum loan	0,78	0,83	0,61	0,44	0,71	0,25	0,14	0,13

Source: Jörberg 1972 p. 601, SOS Sociala meddelanden 1921, nb 2, p. 90, SOS Lönestatistik årsbok för Sverige 1930 p. 23, SOS Lönestatistik årsbok för Sverige 1940 p. 20,28, SOS Lönestatistik årsbok för Sverige 1950 p. 22,26.

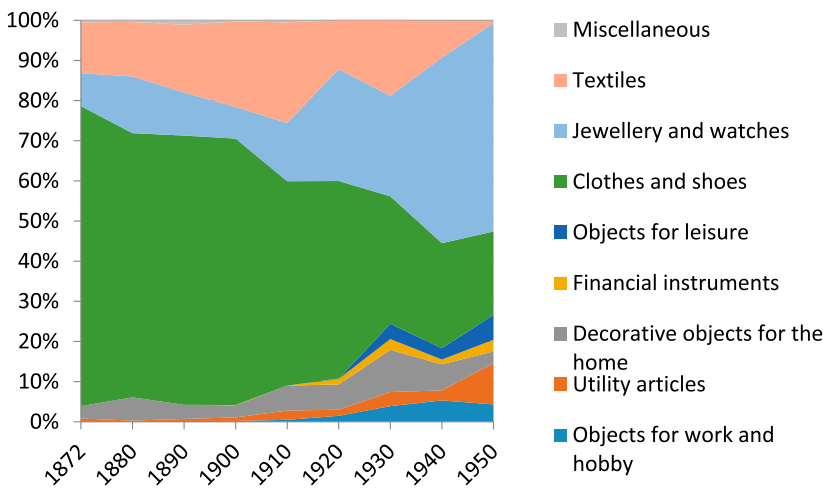
Note: Data on day labourer's wages in Blekinge, the county in which Karlskrona is situated, are not available until 1906, but for the period up until then, an average value for the nearby area in southern Sweden (Jönköping county) has been used. 1920 calculated on wage earners answers, 1930 Blekinge, 1940–1950 Sweden in general.

Objects being pledged

The diagram shows how many objects were pawned by category. Clothes and shoes were, by far, the largest category until after 1930. Jewellery and watches then became the largest. In other words, this confirms the pattern found in the pawnshop in Borås in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷ (Diagrams 2 and 3)

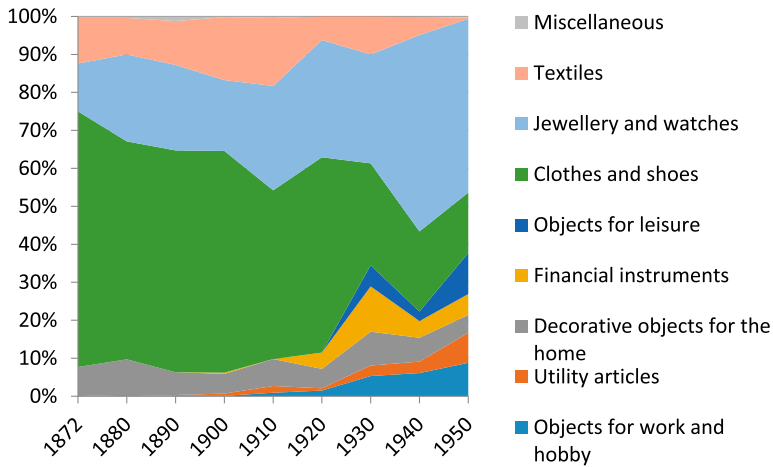
Compared to Francois' study of Mexico City, the emergence of jewellery as the largest category was later in Sweden. In Mexico, the shift was evident in her 1909–1910 sample, while it took 30 additional years in Sweden. In Hamburg, Germany, the situation seems to have been similar to that of Mexico; watches and jewellery were the largest category as early as 1906.³⁸ It is possible that such differences between Karlskrona, on the one hand, and Mexico City and Hamburg, on the other, could be related to the size of the cities.

Percentage pawns per category in Karlskrona pawnshop 1872-1950



Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank

Diagram 2. Percentage pawns per category in Karlskrona pawnshop 1872-1950. Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank.

Percentage value per category of pawns in Karlskrona pawnshop 1872-1950

Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank

Diagram 3. Percentage value per category of pawns in Karlskrona pawnshop 1872-1950. Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank.

Both Mexico City and Hamburg were much bigger than Karlskrona. The shift possibly came earlier in those locations as Karlskrona was comparatively rural.

Considering the nature of pawning – leaving an object of enough value at the pawnshop for the duration of the loan – the lower the use value of the pawn, the better for the pawnier. In other words, it is easier to live without the object. In short, it is better to pawn things less necessary for survival than something truly needed. A major discussion in the literature has been the pawning of Sunday clothes, which were considered highly important for working-class respectability. We will go further into this by studying clothes in more detail below.

The number of textiles increased until 1910 before declining. Compared to pawning clothes and shoes, which have a high use value, other kinds of textiles that were less important for daily use, if available, were preferable. Textiles were probably expensive until 1940, but jewellery and watches were the second-largest category in 1920, and the largest category for 1930 onwards. Decorative objects for the home, a steady albeit less significant category throughout the period, were probably even better as their use value was lower. This could be an example of Johnson's discussion of how working-class people saved money by buying possessions that could later be pawned, if necessary. Again, if one had something smaller and more valuable that one could pawn, such as jewellery, it was even more preferable.

The composition of objects used as pawns is much more varied later on in the period. Two new categories emerged in 1910: financial instruments, i.e. premium bonds, and objects for work and hobby, such as musical instruments and tools. There was an additional category in 1920: objects for leisure, such as books and record players. This points to greater material wealth among the pawniers and more to choose from when it came to pawning, as well as novel kinds of goods.

There are reports for the entire period discussed here that poor people in England used material possession as a means of saving. In good times, they bought objects that they, in turn, pawned when times were hard.³⁹

At the beginning of the period, clothes were rather valuable, although their relative value decreased over the years. That could have made them less attractive as pawns, but less costly clothes could also mean that one could afford more clothes. Thus, they would miss them less while they were pawned. The figure below shows the pawned worth of each category, illustrating that the pawned value of clothes was lower than the number of clothes, while jewellery and watches were comparatively more valuable.

The fact that the value of clothes also decreased more than the number of clothes pawned supports the assumption that clothes as objects became less costly during the period, which seems not to have been noted in earlier research. The same goes for textiles. However, if the pawners had the same material standard during the period, the relative value would not have affected the composition of the pawns. The relative value is only important if one has the opportunity to choose between objects to pawn. If one does not have anything but clothes to pawn, they will have to suffice, as long as they are accepted by the pawnshop as collateral.

Categories in hock

We will further examine the category of clothes to see if we find evidence of the pawning of Sunday clothes, as described by foremost British authors and scholars. The Sunday clothes were most notably suits, required for working-class respectability. The largest category in our material, in terms of quantity, was coats and not suits. Suits were admittedly a large category, but it was not until 1920 onwards that it became the second-largest category. Before that, this was miscellaneous clothes: shawls, shirts, jumpers, etc. The fact that coats were the largest throughout the period could indicate seasonal pawning rather than habitual. One pawned winter coats when they were not needed. Additionally, it would point to a certain surplus of clothes rather than the pawning of clothes one had to use within a week. Unless, of course, winter clothes had to be pawned in the winter; considering the Swedish climate, this would be very problematic.

There are two possible ways of examining if this was seasonal pawning since there is usually no specification on what kind of coat was pawned. The first is to see if there is a seasonal pattern to the value of the pawned coats, assuming that winter coats were more expensive. A closer examination of the pawns showed that this was not the case; the value of the pawned coats did not vary in any particular way during the year. There was no systematic pattern at all for the years studied.

Another method is to examine when most coats were pawned. If coats were unevenly pawned during the year, in a manner that other goods were not, this shows that coats were special in this respect. If most coats were pawned in late spring, we can assume that those were winter coats that were pawned when they were no longer needed (taking into account the fact that cold weather can last at least through May in this area). In general, poorer people most likely had few coats, usually one for the winter while probably having to make do with a shawl or jumper during the warmer months. Winter coats were a necessity while spring coats were not.

The loans, in general, are rather evenly distributed throughout the year with a peak in October and November. This is the case for the entire period. One explanation for this could be the so-called Free Week (*frivecka*) in October when employees were allowed to change employers. This was common for all kinds of workers in steady employment, extending to seasonal workers as well. We do know that the system was used at the Karlskrona dockyard at least until 1910, but probably after that as well.⁴⁰ However, the system did mean that the workers had to do without wages for that week, which could affect pawning. (Table 5)

Looking at the pawning of coats, however, we find a different pattern. Certainly, many were pawned in October when pawning, in general, increased, with the real peak in May. This supports the assumption of seasonal pawning. In May, when the weather was warmer, if one had to pawn something, a winter coat was a suitable object; it was something that one would not need for a considerable time. A similar seasonal pawning of coats was found by Kenttä, in the interwar town of Borås, Sweden.⁴¹

Dresses, the female equivalent of the suit, made up a very small category throughout the period. The fact that generic clothes comprised such a large proportion could also be an indication of a certain surplus. Skirts were a much larger category, peaking in 1910 and then declining dramatically. Up until 1910, female clothes were more often pawned than male, but after that, men's clothing increased dramatically. However, the number of clothes and shoes that could be used by either gender was still larger during the entire period of study. This is similar to the results of Francois, who showed that for Mexico in the late nineteenth century, generic clothes made up the largest category, followed by female clothes, and lastly male clothes.⁴² Clearly, there is little that shows a pattern of the weekly pawning of Sunday clothes. However, to examine this further, we proceeded to study the amount of time the pawns were held in pawn.

Apart from the study of possible patterns of weekly pawning, we are also interested in how long pawns were left in general, as this could also be an indication of the pawnner's financial status.

Objects were generally left for four months in the pawnshop, the median number of days in the pawnshop per category. This was more or less stable during the period, except for a sharp decline in 1950. Most subcategories under clothes and shoes (excluding the figures based on less than 20 values) were lower than the average, indicating a higher use value. Miscellaneous clothes had, on the other hand, a longer average number of days, probably reflecting a lower use value and perhaps showing that they could be surplus clothes and less necessary to redeem. Coats were kept longer in the pawnshop than other kinds of clothes, reflecting the previously assumed seasonal pawning pattern. So far, little points to weekly pawning. (Tables 6 and 7)

Table 5. Pawning of coats 1880–1950 in May and October, number and percentage of all loans.

Coats, number and percentage	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Number of loans on coats								
May	137	88	59	74	115	116	70	59
October	72	63	32	62	106	79	33	17
Percentage coats of all loans								
May	9.3%	6.3%	3.7%	3.1%	9.4%	8.4%	8.2%	7.3%
October	4.6%	4.1%	2.1%	2.1%	5.6%	6.4%	2.8%	2.4%

Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank

Table 6. Median number of days in the pawnshop per category, only the largest categories included, and total average 1872–1950.

Main category	Subcategory	1872	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Clothes and shoes	Trousers	31	61	46	19	112	28	5	60*	97*
Clothes and shoes	Skirts	39	103	143	78	103	53	149	259	
Clothes and shoes	Suits	12	119	49	8	24	37	35	109	38
Clothes and shoes	Coats	132	148	163	148	152	132	141	136	116
Clothes and shoes	Shoes	37*	57*	13*	9	16	12	41	47*	191*
Clothes and shoes	Miscellaneous, clothes	44	159	123	144	138	97	199	212	197
Jewellery and watches	Rings	143	180	190	178	192	129	191	135	69
Jewellery and watches	Watches	54	110	72	59	61	48	123	30	31
Textiles	Decorative textiles	165*	126	211	142	203	218	206	220	138*
Textiles	Bed linen	81	188	159	140	188	189	197	234	34*
Textiles	Fabric	47	144	186	83	178	239	208	205	
Decorative objects for the home	Cutlery	183*	180	180	180	210	208	208	234	183
Total all categories		63	145	143	110	126	88	160	116	53

Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank

Note: Figures marked with * are based on less than 20 pawns and are thus insecure.

Median values were generally lower than average values, indicating that some objects left for much longer in the pawnshop distort the curve somewhat. For some clothes, however, the differences were considerable. For trousers, the median was about half of the mean. Shoes and suits were about the same as trousers. Clearly, the high use value of such clothes meant that they were redeemed quicker in many cases, but we are quite far from the weekly pawning. For rings, the median was higher than the mean value, showing that some very short durations in the pawnshop distort the curve. This could point to the pawning of wedding rings, which were needed for respectability and thus quickly redeemed. Such pawners were most likely desperate, but there were not many of them. The category in which about half of the pawn loans were renewed was cutlery.

This is probably reminiscent of the traditional way of using cutlery, mostly silver spoons, as a means of saving. This could be compared to Johnson's argument on the use by the working class of objects as a means of saving, pawning them when times were hard.⁴³ An even better example of this is the premium bonds, which were issued

Table 7. Percentage pawns loans renewed per category 1880–1950.

Main category	Subcategory	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Decorative objects for the home	Cutlery	45	57	35	45	45	28	75	67*
Financial instruments	Premium bonds	n.a.	n.a.	100*	n.a.	54	60	58*	70
Clothes and shoes	Trousers	7	3	0	8	6	0	36*	25*
Clothes and shoes	Skirts	0	2	1	6	6	0*	100*	n.a.
Clothes and shoes	Dresses	8	5	0	6*	23*	0*	33*	100*
Clothes and shoes	Suits	6	0	4	6	6	8	19	12
Clothes and shoes	Coats	7	7	4	9	9	7	15	11
Clothes and shoes	Skor	0*	5*	0	1	3	2	18*	50*
Clothes and shoes	Miscellaneous, clothes	7	2	1	4	6	8	63	33*
Jewellery and watches	Rings	31	34	39	53	27	25	30	13
Jewellery and watches	Watches	13	8	15	19	9	12	14	4
Textiles	Decorative textiles	0	0	0	6	25	7	74	50*
Textiles	Bed linen	8	3	3	11	25	10	66	100*
Textiles	Fabric	18	10	8	6	34	8	44	n.a.

Source: Database Karlskrona pantbank

Note: Categories with the majority of results based on less than 20 pawns have been excluded. Figures marked with * are based on less than 20 pawns.

Table 8. Percentage pawns not redeemed per category 1880–1950.

Main category	Subcategory	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	
Utility articles	Miscellaneous Utility articles					0.0	0.0	23.5	12.5	9.1
Decorative objects for the home	Miscellaneous home objects	0.0	16.7	0.0	18.8	14.3	0.0	11.8	0.0	
Financial instruments	Premium bonds	n.a.	n.a.	0*	n.a.	3.8	12.0	0*	4.3	
Objects for leisure	Books	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0*	16.7	0*	6.7*	
Objects for leisure	Records players	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.0	0.0	0*	
Objects for leisure	Miscellaneous. objects for leisure	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0*	15.6	
Clothes and shoes	Trousers	1.4	0.0	7.1	6.3	0.0	1.9	9.09*	0*	
Clothes and shoes	Skirts	4.3	2.7	4.7	6.1	2.8	25.0*	0.0	n.a.	
Clothes and shoes	Dresses	3.2	3.2	0.0	n.a.	15.4*	8.3*	33.3*	0*	
Clothes and shoes	Suits	1.2	0.0	0.0	8.2	2.4	3.6	4.2	9.0	
Clothes and shoes	Coats	2.9	3.3	0.8	8.8	3.3	5.0	7.5	4.7	
Clothes and shoes	Shoes	8.3*	4.8*	2.9	3.4	6.6	6.9	0*	0*	
Clothes and shoes	Miscellaneous. clothes	4.5	3.8	9.1	7.6	2.2	2.7	15.8	0*	
Jewellery and watches	Rings	1.5	0.0	9.1	6.5	1.9	6.9	5.2	4.4	
Textiles	Decorative textiles	0.0	10.3	2.5	10.4	0.0	6.5	3.2	0*	
Textiles	Bed linen	6.3	4.1	6.8	6.1	1.8	3.7	8.5	0*	
Textiles	Fabric	3.8	2.5	7.8	6.3	7.5	7.7	44.4	n.a.	

Source: *Database Karlskrona pantbank*

Note: Categories with the majority of results based on less than 20 pawns have been excluded. Figures marked with * are based on less than 20 pawns.

by the government and combined a set interest rate with a lottery, thus making them definite savings instruments. We also found a high proportion of the renewal of pawn loans for rings and watches – categories that represented a high economic value but were less necessary for daily life. One exception was wedding rings, which were important for respectability; however, the pawned ring could also be an inherited wedding ring.

An even stronger indication of the financial status of the pawner was the proportion of pawns not redeemed. Most pawns were redeemed but between five and ten per cent were not, increasing slightly towards the end of the period. In fact, today in Sweden, the percentage of goods not redeemed is the same on average. This, again, is a strong indication that the pawners were not destitute. (Table 8)

Interestingly, in 1940 there were increases in the number of pawns not redeemed and thus sold at auction, most notably for clothes and textiles. Fabric increased from 7.7 per cent not redeemed in 1930 to 44 per cent in 1940. The reason for this change is probably explained by the wartime economy.

Sweden was up to 80% self-sufficient in the production of clothes and other textiles before the war, most of the raw materials were imported. However, because of the war, a shortage of fabric and clothes arose. In 1940, the government declared that wool and cotton should be replaced with, foremost, cellulose wool. Prices of items of pre-war quality increased, causing the government to declare fixed prices in 1942.⁴⁴ As a result, the second-hand market boomed, probably explaining the increase in pawns sold at auction.

The pawners

Using the ledger of lost pawn tickets, we have examined the pawners more closely. As we suspected, military men made up a large proportion of those who had lost their tickets,

Table 9. Percentage pawners per category of those who had lost their ticket 1910–1950.

Year	Category						Gender		
	Military	Workers	Wives and unmarried women*	Craftsmen	Civil servants	Title missing*	Workers total	Male	Female
1910	43	11	19	8	0	19	49	81	19
1920	57	9	14	1	1	18	41	86	14
1930	46	26	16	4		8	50	84	16
1940	66	17	10	2	1	4	31	90	10
1950	55	4	12		1	28	44	88	12

Source: *Database Karlskrona pantbank*

Note: *Categories marked with * counted as workers, judging by their family name and address.*

which was, as discussed earlier, a larger proportion than that of total pawners. Based on their family names and addresses, we have also assumed those in the category of wives and unmarried women and those lacking a title to be workers. Hence, workers were the largest individual group. There are a few craftsmen and a very small proportion of civil servants.

Most likely, the population of pawners were dominated by workers and secondly military men.

Between ten and twenty per cent of the pawners who had lost their tickets were female. If the assumption that military men are overrepresented in this sample is correct, then the percentage of female pawners is actually higher in the general population. There is no reason to assume that men or women, in general, were more careless, so the percentage of female pawners most likely exceeded ten to twenty per cent.(Table 9)

Judging from the lost tickets, military men dominated the pawned categories such as musical instruments, watches, suitcases, and suits. If we assume that people pawn what they have access to, this is hardly surprising. We cannot expect people who lacked households but lived in dormitories to have many household objects. What we could expect them to have are movable goods that form part of their attire (suits, watches), could be used for storing or packaging (suitcases), or instruments if they belonged to a military music corps. Women dominate categories that include what could be assumed to be items associated with traditionally female responsibilities such as bed linen, fabric, and decorative household objects.

Workers, both men and women, pawned clothes and shoes. Rings were pawned by workers, but not by members of militaries. Certainly, the rings could be their weddings ring but they could also be the wedding ring of their parents. Even if the members of militaries had inherited such rings, they would probably not bring them to temporary lodgings.

Conclusions

Pawning in 1880–1950 in Sweden met future and present demands. In the industrializing regions, where non-agricultural employment (i.e. the relationship between two parties regulating the provision of paid-labour services) was growing and increasing, and a modern monetary system was weak, pawning was essential. The pawnbroking industry provided a particular purpose for the value of the pledge and did not request the finding, allowing clients to make a claim for founding.

We have used the daily ledgers from 1872 to 1950 of a Swedish public pawnshop, Karlskrona pawnshop, in a naval town situated on the Swedish east coast. The number of

loans in relation to population did decline, but in no year was the value of the average loan less than that of a day's work for a day labourer. This probably means that the average loans did not show signs of being the act of a very impoverished person. Even the smallest loans equalled approximately three-quarters of a day's work up until 1920 when they started to diminish in value.

It was not until after 1930 that clothes stopped being the most important category. The most significant category of clothes was coats. Since most of them were pawned in May, we assume that they were winter coats. In short, this would support the idea of seasonal rather than weekly pawning.

On average, every pawn spent about four months in hock. Clothes had a shorter time frame, probably reflecting their higher use value, but it was far from a weekly pattern. Coats were an exception: they were left longer in pledge, indicating seasonal pawning. Objects with high economic value, but low use value, were redeemed more often, while objects such as clothes, which had a high use value but a lower economic value, were redeemed less often. Most loans were redeemed, although between five and ten per cent were not. There are indications that pawners used the pawnshop for selling objects.

In our sample of pawners, consisting of those who had lost their ticket, military men were overrepresented, as could be expected. They pawned objects that could be brought to a dormitory: suits, watches, suitcases, and instruments. The majority of the pawners, albeit a small one, were workers. Women made up a small part of the sample, between ten and twenty per cent. In general, workers mostly pawned clothes and shoes, but they also pawned rings. It is possible that the Swedish legislation entitling the pawner to the surplus from the auction if the pawns were not redeemed helped to create an environment more favourable for those who needed to pledge their objects.

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