

Abstract

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The main purpose of this thesis was to investigate how much iron the rural population in Sweden possessed 1750-1870. The aim was also to investigate and to calculate the amount of iron needed to replenish iron stocks lost to each year due to attrition.

Many studies of inventories have been conducted in Western Europe and North America however; these studies have primarily focused on luxuries items such as gold, silver and furniture. Iron objects were different, as households did not consider their consumption as a luxury.

Households used objects made of iron as cooking pots and other kitchen utensils. On farms the use of iron also increased. During the period 1750-1870, iron steadily replaced wooden parts in almost all farm implements, from spades to ploughs and harrows. The transition from wood to iron parts played an important role as humans gradually took control over the landscape. The new iron tools made digging ditches easier and facilitated large-scale drainage of marshes. Iron parts on ploughs and harrows broke the soil faster and deeper than older ones made entirely of wood.

Iron tools were not luxuries but they played an important role in farm economics during the period studied. In the mid 18th century, an average farm possessed about 150 kilos of iron, in 1870 that had increased to around 500 kilos. During that time the composition of the different groups of iron shifted. Iron used in transport and agricultural production became increasingly important. It was in the transport sector that the rise in the possession of iron was first noted as farmers began to use iron tipped wheels and iron axles on wagons and carts. This improvement meant that wagons and carts could load more goods.

The second wave of new and improved iron objects included agricultural tools – ploughs and harrows.

Some important changes were made already in the late 18th century, however, the breakthrough of iron implements in agriculture came 1800-20. It is interesting to note that this change was contemporary with a major shift to iron ploughs and harrows in British, Danish and Norwegian farming

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