Abstract
The preindustrial possession and consumption of iron in rural Sweden 1750-1870. (Publications of the
Department of Economic History, School of Economics and Commercial Law, Göteborg university no 89)

Author: Per Hallén

Doctoral Dissertation at the Department of Economic History, Göteborg university.
(Written in Swedish with a Summary in English).

Distribution: the Department of Economic History, Göteborg university, Box 720, SE-405 30 Göteborg,
Sweden.

The main purpose of this thesis was to investigate how much iron the rural population in Sweden possessed
1750-1870. The aim was also 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 luxurious 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 axels 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.

KEYWORDS: iron, iron tools, agrarian history, rural Sweden, agrarian implements, agrarian tools,
consumption history, commercialisation of farming.