

THE BROKAGE BOOKS OF SOUTHAMPTON.

A Hampshire Merchant and some aspects of Medieval Transport.

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THE purpose of this paper is twofold. In the first place it is intended to show the kind of material available to economic historians in the Southampton series of Brokage Books. Secondly, an analysis of the activities of one particular Hampshire merchant throws some light on the transport facilities available in the early fifteenth century.

The date of Walter Fetplace's birth is unknown, but he probably died in 1458 or 1459.¹ He was an important and wealthy citizen of Southampton, who held a variety of municipal offices, steward in 1412 and 1413, bailiff in 1414, and mayor in 1426, 1432 and 1439.² In local politics he probably belonged to the pro-alien group of Southampton merchants and may also have been a Yorkist.³ He had his own shop and house and was officially a draper, selling cloth for the uniforms of the town officials and minstrels, and cloth for export to alien merchants.⁴ An entry in the Steward's Books of 1456-57 shows that in times of stress he lent money to the town,⁵ but in normal times his expenses as mayor were paid for him—in 1433 he claimed 8*d.* for wine when he entertained the great Cardinal Beaufort at Southwick.⁶ He was, therefore, a Hampshire man of importance, and a large proportion of his wealth came from foreign trade. This is clearly indicated in the Southampton Port Books dealing with the foreign and coastal trade of the port. Thus, in 1427-28, Fetplace imported, amongst other things, sixty-five tons of wine, one hundred sort of fruit and forty-one bales of madder.⁷ He imported wine, canvas, iron and silk in 1429-30,² in 1433-34 herrings, black soap, iron, almonds, ginger and madder, in 1435-36 wine only, in 1439-40 wine and oil, and in 1440-41 wood (two hundred and thirty-nine balets), cloth, silk and wine again. National records also show Fetplace as a merchant of importance. Thus in 1440 (in partnership with

1. *Brokage Books of Southampton*, edited B. D. M. Carpenter Turner (*née* Bunyard) Southampton Record Society. Vol. I. xxii, note 3.

2. *Black Book of Southampton*, edited A. Wallis Chapman, I, 50. n.; II, 18. See also I, 137, 139, 159. *History of Southampton*, 377, edited J. S. Silvester Davies. As Alderman Fetplace witnessed deeds in 1428 and 1435. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, Henry VI, Vol. II, 454; III, 32, 40.

3. *Black Book I*, XV, XVI.

4. *Accounts Various. Foreign Merchants*, 1439-44, 128/30-36. (Public Record Office *Steward's Books II*, 1434-39, p. 19, n. (S.R.S)).

5. *Steward's Books* (Manuscript), f. 15v., 1456-57.

6. *Steward's Books II*, 1434-39, p. 86 (S.R.S.).

7. *Port Books of Southampton* (Manuscript), 1427-28.

Peter Jamys) he bought twenty-three butts of Malvosey from a Spanish galley and on his own accord Rochelle wine from Brittany, and iron from the Hanse.⁸ He sold his cloth to aliens—for example, in 1442, when he sold £33. 6s. 8d. worth to a Hanse merchant.⁹ He was licensed to ship wool to Lombardy, and also sold it direct to the Florentine firm of Borromei.¹⁰

The Brokage Books of Southampton, of which six survive for the reign of Henry VI, show that his transactions in England were likewise widespread. The books contemporary with him are those for 1439-40, 1444-45, 1448-49, 1450-51 and 1454-55, of which three provide the basis for this note.¹¹ They show that he sent raw materials and finished goods to many different towns and villages.

A significant fact which at once emerges is that with one exception, all Fetplace's goods were carried by cart and not by pack-horse. The exception occurred on October 9th, 1439, when two men, "Jacow *et* Trewey" brought in cloth on four horses.¹² This use of carts is of great importance, for it is perhaps an indication that roads were better than has generally been imagined. Fetplace was not exceptional in his use of carts, for all the surviving Brokage Books mention pack-horses only very occasionally, for long journeys, or the carrying of specially precious goods.

Year.	Pack-horses.	Carts.
1439-40	17	1637
1444-45	90	2181
1448-49	50	1251
1450-51	66	1620

The average number of carts leaving Southampton per year in the first half of the fifteenth century was well over fifteen hundred. The town, therefore, served as an important centre for the inland distributing trade. Some idea of the extent of this trade is given by the number of destinations—two hundred and twelve, of which one hundred and thirty-two were in the south of England. A merchant like Fetplace would find no difficulty in getting his goods transported by road. In the three years 1439-40, 1445-46 and 1454-55 he sent commodities to eighteen different places. To the north-west his carters' destinations were Salisbury, Wilton, Wimborne, Warminster, Shaftesbury, Frome and Romsey, with Marlborough, Hungerford and Abingdon to the north. To the north-east, Winchester, Reading, Henley-on-Thames, Guildford and Alton formed another group, and outside the main groups were Poole, Coventry and London.

8. Port Book of Southampton (Manuscript), 1429-30.

9. Accounts Various, 128/30-31, Foreign Merchants, 1439-44 (Public Record Office).

10. *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1436-41, 397. G. Biscaro, *Il Banco Filippo Borromei e compagni di Loundra*, 1436-1439. (Archivio Storico Lombardo, 4th Series, no. XIX, pp. 88, 91.)

11. No Fetplace entry occurs in the book for 1450-51, and only one in that of 1448-49.

12. *Brokage Books of Southampton*, 1439-40.

The Brokage Books have an unusual interest in so far as they provide records of the names of carters or carriers and the quantities and types of goods which were carried. An analysis of the journeys made shows that carters usually worked along routes which they knew, and that they tended to keep in the same direction. In 1439-40 Fetplace employed thirty-six carters of whom twenty-eight men made only one journey each. Of the others, John Bor' went seven times to Salisbury and once to Frome. John Smith do le Broke went to Salisbury, Wimborne, Shaftesbury and Frome, a total of seven journeys. Henry Chawyn once each to Salisbury, Frome and Romsey, Ralph Bocher and John Borgeys to Reading and Henley-on-Thames, John Hewit to Guildford and Reading. The only carrier who made journeys to differing districts was John Pynhorne who went once to Henley and twice to Salisbury. However, he appears again in the 1454 book, when he made four journeys for Fetplace, of which three were to Salisbury and one to Marlborough.

It would thus appear that Fetplace did not employ any carriers who worked regularly for him alone, for in 1454-55 the majority of his carters are mentioned for only one journey each—twenty-seven carters made altogether a total of thirty-seven journeys, of whom one man made four journeys, two made three each, and three made two. The men who took his goods worked for other merchants, and when he employed a man more than once it would seem to be rather that the carter was plying regularly in a certain direction than that Fetplace had his own carriers.

Perhaps the most valuable record in the Brokage Books is the detailed account of the goods which were sent from Southampton to all parts of England. It is not the purpose of this paper to describe the local customs system. The majority of commodities leaving the town paid three local duties. These were the local custom (*custuma*) brokage (*brokagium*), probably a survival from the days when the town broker received a fee for witnessing bargains, and pontage (*pontagium*), a payment for the upkeep of bridges. Southampton burgesses were free of the first of these, the local custom, as were also the merchants of various other towns.¹³ Occasionally, however, Fetplace was not the owner of the goods carried, but merely the consignor, and then the local customs were paid in full.¹⁴

An examination of the commodities carried shows that Fetplace was interested not only in the raw materials of his proper trade, drapery, but also in a variety of other types of goods. A detailed analysis shows that his chief market was Salisbury, and that his busiest year was apparently 1439-40. He took only a small part in the victualling trade. In 1439-40 he sent out nine butts and

13. Davies, *opus cit.*, 229, 230. There is also a 15th century manuscript lost in the Southampton archives.

14. Goods are listed as *directis per W. Fetplace*.

one "Kartlet" of wine, and in 1445-46, six pipes, one hogshead and half a "Galey barrel." These loads went to Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Hungerford, Henley-on-Thames and Reading. In 1454-55 he took no real part in the victualling trade, sending only one bale of cinnamon to Salisbury. In the two other years examined he dealt in fish (one barrel of white herrings and one barrel of salmon went to Salisbury in 1440, one "burden" of unspecified fish to Henley-on-Thames in 1445), and in some of the many commodities classed as spices. As well as cinnamon to Salisbury, he sent one balet of saffron to Henley-on-Thames in 1439, which could have been used either for cooking or dyeing, and dried fruit, a total of seven sorts and seven pieces, which went to Henley, Guildford, London and Reading, as well as six pieces of raisins.¹⁵

The majority, however, of the goods entered as actually belonging to Fetplace were connected with the cloth industry, chiefly dyes, fixatives or other raw materials. Thus he sent oil to Winchester, Reading and Abingdon, one barrel of black soap to Salisbury in 1439, and one barrel of fuller's earth to Guildford in the same year.

He also dealt in teasels, sending two skeawes to Salisbury in 1440. Alum was of great importance in the dyeing of cloth. Fetplace sent, in the years here examined, forty-nine bales, one fardel, one pipe, ten balets, and ten little balets to Salisbury, and smaller quantities totalling four bales, a little balet and two little bags to Frome, Winchester, Wilton, Reading and Alton.¹⁶ He also dealt in salt and madder. The greater part, however, of his carts carried woad, to help produce that blue cloth for which England was famous. Thus in 1439-40 he sent to Salisbury (fifty-two balets), Henley-on-Thames (one cartload), Winchester (twenty-five balets), Wimborne (eighteen balets), Frome (sixteen balets), Reading (ten balets) and Romsey (one balet). In 1445-46 thirteen balets went to Salisbury, four balets and one pipe to Frome; in 1455-56 twenty-eight balets to Salisbury and two balets to Romsey. Small quantities of wool and cloth also appear—one sack of "lockys" (to Salisbury, 1439) one balet of "lyn-cloth" (to Frome, 1439) five sacks of wool (to Frome, 1446), twenty cloths to Romsey¹⁷ and two parcels of woollen cloth to Poole in 1450.

It is obvious that this class of commodity, that is, that used in the cloth industry, helped to maintain Fetplace as a draper, for the areas to which he sent raw material were those from which he obtained some of the finished cloth exported or sold in his Southampton shops. The Brokage Books occasionally record carters coming into the town, though unfortunately the form of entry does not always indicate clearly the owner of the goods. In September, 1455, William Bagmor brought in two cart loads of wool for

15. By custom, in the Port Books, 1 sort = 3 pieces. 1 piece = 3 qtrs. 4 qtrs = 128 bunches of dried fruit.

16. By 1494 one balet = half a bale. *Brokage Books of Southampton*, xxv.

17. *Brokage Books*, Dec., 1454. "Ye cloth went to menyngye."

Fetplace,¹⁸ and in 1439-40 the latter probably imported cloth, wool, malt and corn into Southampton by road.¹⁹

Fetplace's business activities were not limited to his own commodities. He knew a number of merchants and industrialists outside the town, for whom he bought goods, consigning them to various destinations. This is well illustrated in the books of 1439-40 and 1454-55. In 1439-40 he consigned four sarplers and twenty-four balets of woad for a Frome merchant, a pipe of oil to Reading, eleven balets of woad to Salisbury, a pipe of oil and a bale of madder to Warminster, and for William Hyllys, a Winchester merchant, he consigned five balets of woad. By 1454 his consignments were up in quantity. Salisbury merchants received one *centena* of Fuller's earth, one *centena* of almonds, and fifty-six balets of woad. Fetplace consigned six sarplers and one poke of wool to Frome, seven woollen cloths to Romsey, a butt and a hogsh-head of wine to Marlborough, two butts to Coventry, whilst a cloth worker, Edmund Dyer of Reading, was his consignee for eighteen balets of woad and five bales of madder.

It would thus appear that a merchant like Fetplace, although living in the troubled years of the early fifteenth century, did not find his commercial activities hindered by lack of road transport. Hampshire roads if not entirely satisfactory, were at least in good enough condition to sustain the traffic which left Southampton for the towns and villages of southern England. The packhorse was not yet necessary; the link in the moving chain of commerce was the professional carter.

18. Owner clearly stated: "wool of Walter Fetplace."

19. Brokage Books, 1439-40, Oct. 9th, Dec. 3rd, Feb. 10th, March 18th, May 14th.