

MEDIEVAL WHITCHURCH: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW TOWN

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ABSTRACT

The first tenants of the new town of Whitchurch came from the surrounding manor, mainly from its lower social levels. Victualling predominated among their occupations, although there is also some evidence for clothing trades. Initial economic success soon evaporated, although the town survived the depopulation of the Black Death, and showed signs of recovery by the 16th century.

INTRODUCTION

The small town of Whitchurch lies about half-way between Andover and Basingstoke, and ten miles south of the Berkshire border. It was founded on a manor of St. Swithun's Priory, the monastery of Winchester Cathedral, in about 1248. A previous article suggested that it was originally a roadside settlement on the route between Winchester and the Midlands (Deveson 1998). The present article will take up the story of its economic development until shortly after the dissolution of the Priory. The origins and occupations of the first tenants will be discussed and the town's economic performance examined, using the evidence of account and court rolls.

THE FIRST BURGESSES

The town was laid out in a regular plan with 57 burgage plots, within three years of its foundation charter; the layout has already been mapped and discussed (Deveson 1998, 129–33). A custumal dated 1251 contains the names of both manorial and borough tenants (Hanna 1954), and provides sufficient information to allow us to consider the

background of those who took up the first borough tenancies.

At that time, the largest land-holders in Whitchurch manor were the freemen Walter Hachemus, Walter de Lewes, William de Chalgrave and John Durdent, *alias* Durdaunt, and one unfree tenant, Robert de Lammedone. Of these, only the last two also had an interest in the town. Durdent's manorial holdings were made up of a half-hide and two small pieces of land, and he was liable for heavier services than the other freemen. He had held land in the manor before 1248, and members of his family were to feature prominently in the hundred and borough court rolls for several decades thereafter. With his nine burgage plots he had the air of an entrepreneur. Walter Hachemus, the freeman with the most land (two hides) and the fewest restrictions, did not take up any burgage plots. Neither did William de Chalgrave, who later considered himself sufficiently prosperous and independent to petition the Pope for a private chapel (Deveson 1997). In view of the close association that was later to develop between Chalgrave and the Bishop's land in Freefolk, it might have been natural for William de Chalgrave to look to Overton if he had wished for commercial opportunities, but there is no sign of him in the Bishops' Pipe Rolls around these years. The conclusion must be that the leading rank, such as it was, of local society was not drawn to new-town life.

Eight of the new burgesses and one former burgess had some land outside the town. Almost all their manorial holdings were in Whitchurch tithing, the area closest to the town, thus conforming with the observation that recruits to medieval English towns often came from near at hand (Clark 1980, 31; Hilton 1982, 10). It is, of course, possible that none of the new burgesses actually lived in the

town and that all the houses were let to subtenants. However, several of the 1251 surnames, some of which were fairly distinctive, continued to appear in the borough rolls and it is likely that burgesses were normally resident, even if, as in Winchester, the second and third burgages in a block of holdings were sublet (Keene 1985 i, 235).

The names of the first burgesses provide a list with which to speculate in more detail about their origins (Deveson 1995, 42–7, 163–5). All the personal names belong to the small group of names of continental origin which had replaced the multiplicity of Old English and Scandinavian names by the mid-13th century (McKinley 1990, 94–5). Cultural origins, therefore, are not to be looked for, and there is little to be said about the narrower geographical origins, within the British Isles, such as others have been able to demonstrate (Clark 1980, 26–9; Carus-Wilson 1965, 53). Only two of the locative and topographical names can be firmly said to indicate immigration and only one from a substantial distance. This minuscule proportion is even smaller than that found in a study of 14th-century surnames in Nottinghamshire, where a low proportion of locative surnames in a community is connected with very short migration distances and the small size of the communities into which immigration took place (McClure 1979, 174–5).

Although occupational surnames eventually became hereditary, they are generally thought to have reflected their owners' trades in the 13th century, sometimes alternating with or replacing surnames of other types (Postan 1972, 226; Hey 1987, 17). Only about a quarter of the Whitchurch names were occupational, perhaps less than a quarter. The distinction between occupational surnames and nicknames in this area was sometimes blurred; Freefolk yielded a *Bysshop* and a *Kyng*, Charlcot and Whitchurch tithings two *Chapelayns*, a *Diaconus* and a *Dene*. When surnames of this type are discounted, the total number of truly occupational surnames in the town is so small as hardly to allow any conclusions about trade or craft specialization; indeed their paucity points to a lack of distinctively urban occupations at this time.

Six of the Whitchurch names were derived from personal names; surnames of this type evolved relatively early, and were common among small freeholders and serfs by 1250 (McKinley 1990, 98,

102). Five more were from an associated group, being either nicknames or derived from nicknames of Old French, Old Welsh and Old English origin. All of these names recur in the local rolls, associated with other individuals, before the end of the 13th century, and it seems improbable that their first occurrence was in 1251, thereafter to be stabilized into surnames. It therefore seems likely that all these names had become hereditary in Whitchurch by the mid-13th century. Three people were described by relationships, one has yet to be identified, and one had no surname.

The overall impression is that most of the first burgesses bore surnames which were already hereditary; indeed, they may nearly all have done so, although in the case of common topographical and occupational names it is impossible to be sure. There were regional variations in the periods at which names of different types became hereditary, and surnames tended to stabilize earlier in the south of England than in other regions. It would not therefore be surprising to find a high proportion of hereditary surnames in mid-13th-century Whitchurch (McKinley 1990, 25–50, and pers. comm.).

In a similar study at Stratford, there was a marked contrast between the name-stock of borough and manor (Carus-Wilson 1965, 56–7). The very similarity of the pattern in Whitchurch borough and manor, while not evidence in itself, reinforces the impression already gained, that the first burgesses were drawn from families already established very close at hand. The preponderance of names derived from personal names and nicknames accords well with McKinley's association of this group with small freeholders and serfs, such as the first burgesses of Whitchurch, on the other available evidence, are likely to have been. Probably most of them were already living in the manor either as landless men or cottars who exchanged their holdings in the hope of a better life in small-town society. About a quarter were virgaters who decided to keep a foot in both camps for the time being.

THE VICTUALLING TRADES IN THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

In return for the freedom granted by the borough charter, the burgesses of Whitchurch were to pay

annual rents on each burgage plot; the means whereby they raised the money was their own affair, but the assumption was that, as in most medieval towns, it would be by a combination of agriculture and trade (Goodman 1927, 203). The borough court rolls are the principal source of evidence for the outcome of their ventures. For most of the 13th and 14th centuries, cases of brewing against the assize of ale outnumbered every other offence, and generally accounted for just over half the cases at the twice-yearly court called 'the view of frankpledge' (Deveson 1995, 171–4). The assizes of bread and ale, though nationally enforced, varied in detail from place to place and became part of local custom in the 13th century (Britnell 1993, 94–6). It was so at Whitchurch, where the ale trade was well established from the town's inception. Ten of the burgesses recorded in the 1251 custumal were presented in the manorial court for breach of the assize in 1247–8, of whom two, along with the father of an eleventh, were also amerced for breach of the assize of bread. Such offences would normally have been dealt with in the borough court, but it was not yet operative (Deveson 1998, 127). It is, of course, possible that some of the future burgesses were living elsewhere in the manor at the time of their offence, and only moved into the town in the intervening three years. However, a total of four bakers and twenty-one brewers, of whom four also baked, were presented in 1247–8, and it is hard to see where such large numbers would have found an outlet for their products unless in Whitchurch itself, since there was no other nucleated settlement within the manor apart from the small community at Freefolk.

Many of those presented for brewing incurred multiple penalties, a sign of regular business in the trade. It has been rightly observed that amercements at a view of frankpledge represented at best only half the annual total paid by many of the regular brewers and bakers, and that assessment of a base rate of amercement for brewing is extremely hazardous when a roll does not specify the number of offences (Post 1975, 306). But the Whitchurch manor account roll for 1248 reads as though the clerk had copied the records of four individual courts, rather than amalgamating them, as was the usual later practice. Breaches of the

assizes were heard at all four courts, and hence it is probable that in that year at least, the number and scale of brewing amercements can be related more closely than usual to brewing offences. The usual amercements for brewing in 1248 were 12*d.* and 6*d.*, though two people paid 2*s.* at a single session, and one the exceptional amount of 6*s.* 8*d.* This certainly seems to indicate a relationship between amercements and numbers of offences. On this evidence, six people brewed five or six times each, and one many times more – a very high initial level of activity among brewers, even allowing for the fact that some may have been operating outside the town. There was also a good deal of continuity in the brewing trade between 1248 and 1267, to judge from the names of those presented. Four or five of the 1248 burgess brewers were active in 1261, and three were still operating in 1267; between 1261 and 1267 there was an overlap of seven brewers altogether.

The replacement of the 12*d.* amercement by the 6*d.*, which is apparent between the 1260s and the 1280s, marks the beginning of a general downward trend in amercements at Whitchurch (*cf.* Razi & Smith 1996, 49). The 3*d.* amercement for brewing and other offences first appeared in the 1290s but did not entirely supplant the 6*d.* amercement. The two levels existed in parallel, with no obvious reason for discrimination between offenders other than frequency of brewing, but with a tendency for the lower amount to predominate after the turn of the century. It is often considered that breaches of the assize of ale constituted a licensing system, but on St. Swithun's Priory manors they seem to have been real offences, initially at least. It is not until the 1320s that the beginnings of a licensing system are detectable, when a more regular scheme of amercements emerged at the end of a seven-year gap in the records. In 1321 there was a base rate of 4*d.* (occasionally 3*d.*) for a single brewing, 8*d.* for two brewings and a 'common' amercement of 2*s.* (occasionally 1*s.*) for any number above two. In the same year tapsters were presented at a uniform rate of 6*d.* for the separate offence of ale-selling. This system lasted at least until 1368, with small variations in the rates. The distinction between brewers and tapsters was maintained, except in 1340, when some brewers were also presented as tapsters but were not

charged an extra amount. It is slightly surprising to find that the licensing system at Whitchurch anticipated a similar system at Winchester by several decades; the distinction between brewers and tapsters was not drawn at Winchester until about 1360 (Keene 1985 i, 265, 267).

Between 1321 and 1368 the epithet 'common', originally attached to the amercement for multiple offences, came to be applied to offenders, who sometimes paid the same as, or even less than, other brewers. The tentative conclusion that 'common' brewers were running more permanent establishments than the others is strengthened by another development in the licensing system which appeared, again after a considerable gap in the records, in 1381. The offence of being a 'common' brewer was generally, though not invariably, associated with that of being a 'common' hosteller, and also a baker of horse-bread. Hostelrys were lodging-houses, the Whitchurch equivalent of inns in larger towns at this period (Keene 1985 i, 274) and were providing food and accommodation for travellers, often at excessive prices, or so the formula claimed.

Brewing is frequently stated to have been a domestic affair in the 13th century, whether as a by-employment or to dispose of the occasional surplus of peasant households. It is also widely contended that women were the principal brewers, whether or not they were presented in their own names in court (Graham 1992, 136-44; Jewell 1996, 72-3). Undoubtedly some women began to appear in the Whitchurch records only after being widowed, no doubt carrying on their husbands' businesses, but married women appeared in the court in their own right in all other types of cases, and there are instances where a woman was presented for brewing during her husband's lifetime (Deveson 1995, 119). There is therefore good reason to suppose that the clear predominance of men over women in brewing presentments in Whitchurch reflects the actual situation. In particular, the keepers of lodging-houses in the 1380s and 1390s were exclusively men. By contrast, the balance between men and women among tapsters fluctuated during the 14th century, and tapsters disappeared entirely from the records between 1386 and 1394. Their businesses always appear to have been much less profitable than those of the brewers and hostel-

lers proper, to judge from the amount of revenue generated for the Priory (Deveson 1995, 178-80).

The numbers of people amerced at each court varied widely during the town's first 150 years, but the total numbers involved in the ale trade in any one year varied between eleven and twenty-seven, in the years for which an annual total is possible (Table 1). Not all brewers were presented at every court, but some overlap is always apparent, at least when there is no great discontinuity in the records. The 13th- and 14th-century documents have survived in four groups or periods, 1248-67, 1282-1314, 1321-68 and 1381-95, each, fortuitously, with its own administrative practice in respect of the trade. The first period was evidently the busiest and most prosperous time for Whitchurch brewers. By the 1280s a considerable drop in business had ensued, greater than can be accounted for by the general reduction in amercement and pardon levels, and business remained poor at least until about 1330, apart from an exceptionally thirsty time in 1321. In each of the first two periods, about five businesses appear to have operated continuously, either in the hands of one man, his widow or possibly a son with the same name. During the 1290s many people had a spasmodic involvement with the trade, but more continuity is apparent in the early-14th century, and even over the time of the Black Death, although many new names also appeared in the records for 1350. There were also many new names in 1363, but this was after a longer gap than usual in the records. By the end of the 14th century several businesses had been stable not merely for several years but for two decades.

The existence of regular businesses, even in the earliest period, presupposes permanent premises, particularly when the brewers were burgesses trading in and from their own homes. It has been suggested that most ale-selling in towns in the 13th century was as 'small scale and intermittent' as in rural areas, but that 'the urban ale trade may have been acquiring a more organised and regular character by the early 14th century' (Clark 1983, 22-3). On the other hand, the commercial nature of the brewing business in the 13th century has been noted in other areas, both rural and urban; a ratio of one brewer to every twenty-five males provides a crude index of the number of small

Table 1 The ale trade, 1247-1542

<i>Account years</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total amount paid</i>
1247-8	18	3	21	£1 13s 8d
1260-1	14	3	17	£1 0s 0d
1266-7	15	3	18	£1 2s 6d
1281-2	?	?	10-16	? + 3s 0d
1290-1	12	3	15	5s 3d
1292-3	10	4	14	6s 6d
1295-6	?	?	? + 9	? + 2s 6d
1296-7	9	6	15	? + 4s 9d
1306-7	8	3	11	3s 6d
1308-9	10	3	13	6s 0d
1311-12	10	3	13	4s 6d
1313-14	10	4	14	5s 0d
1330-1	13	0	13	7s 3d
1347-8	14	6	20	17s 7d
1349-50	21	6	27	13s 2d
1351-2	14	6	20	13s 8d
1363-4	11	11	22	15s 10d
1384-5	12	2	14	£1 8s 6d
1385-6	12	1	13	19s 11d
1394-5	10	4	14	14s 10d
1408-9	16	2	18	14s 0d
1419-20	15	1	16	14s 4d
1422-3	12	0	12	6s 8d
1423-4	14	0	14	9s 7d
1439-40	12	1	13	9s 7d
1454-5	16	0	16	6s 8d?
1519-20	4	1	5	2s 8d
1520-21	4	1	5	1s 10d
1525-6	6	1	7	2s 11d?
1539-40	4	0	4	2s 10d
1540-1	4	0	4	1s 4d
1541-2	3	0	3	1s 2d

taverns in an agrarian community (Post 1975, 308–9). Even if every household in Whitchurch had an adult son, and even if only the six most frequent brewers in 1248 were in regular business, the ratio would have been higher than that. The scale of the trade suggests more than a local demand for ale in such a small community. The premises would not have been the cramped accommodation offered in rural alehouses but relatively spacious town houses. It is not improbable that some of the first burgesses had alehouses in mind when they chose their plots.

Alehouses would not have been the only drinking establishments in late-13th-century Whitchurch. Richard Schort was presented at the eyre in 1280–1 for selling eight *dolea* of wine against the assize (*PRO JUST*1/789, m.8). Wine was generally sold in taverns, which did not provide accommodation but were essentially drinking-houses (Clark 1983, 11), and the brawl ‘in quadam taberna’ in 1293 bears witness to the existence of at least one of these fashionable establishments.

The evidence for the brewing trade, subject as it was to close regulation, will always exceed that for other occupations in small towns such as Whitchurch, where there were no craft organizations or freemen registers. For some people it may have been a sideline, as it probably was for John Bachyn, amerced for brewing but described as a cobbler in 1331 and 1344. Brewing fitted well with the baking trade, and Whitchurch bakers, or their wives, sometimes brewed. On the whole, however, the bakers’ craft was more specialized than the brewers’, and Whitchurch bakers sometimes operated over many years, being often, though not invariably, distinguished in the records by the occupational surname *pistor*. The baking of horse-bread was combined with the keeping of hostelries as an offence in the 1380s and was evidently considered an infringement of the assize of ale rather than bread for a short time, but by the end of the 14th century only the regular bakers were making bread, for both human and animal consumption.

There was always at least one presentment of a baker at most courts for which records survive, the total number occasionally rising as high as six or seven. In general, however, the town only supported one or two regular bakers (all men) at a time, any others having a more

casual involvement in the business (Table 2). These were probably hucksters of bread bought elsewhere rather than bakers, since baking required substantial investment in an oven; in 1340 three people were presented for selling underweight bread bought outside the town. The meat trade was also subject to local regulation in many places, but presentments of butchers were very rare in Whitchurch. Even allowing for the gaps in the documentary record, it appears either that very few butchers operated in the town in this period, or that there was not the same concern for hygiene, in such matters as waste-disposal, as there was in larger towns (*g*Bonney 1990, 150–1).

OTHER TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS IN THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

Evidence for other trades is harder to find than that for the victualling trades. Occupational surnames are not a completely reliable guide, since it has been shown that surnames tended to be hereditary in Whitchurch by the mid-13th century. However, the 13th-century occupational surnames as a whole are derived mainly from low-status trades, a type of name considered to be reliable evidence of occupation in Winchester at the same period (Keene 1985 i, 392). They relate to metal- and wood-working, clothing, victualling, agriculture and trade, and are to be expected in a small pre-industrial town engaged in the provision of the basic necessities of life to its occupants and near neighbours (Deveson 1995, 123–5). They are as unspecialized as that in many other towns, although the provision of services to travellers might be regarded as a specialist function in itself. It is in the nature of the documents that occupations other than brewing were hardly ever recorded, but it is evident that surnames such as Shepherd, Hayward, Whelere, Sopere, Payntour, Tayllour and Webbe had become true hereditary surnames by the mid-14th century if not earlier, and that their bearers were making their principal livelihoods from brewing and the keeping of alehouses and hostelries.

Nevertheless, some of them – Skynnere, Dighere, Webbe, Tayllour – denote a more distant origin in the various clothing trades, none of them particularly specialized or unusual. Weaving, particularly

Table 2 Bakers, 1247–1542

<i>Account years</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total amount paid</i>
1247–8	5	3	8	9s 0d
1260–1	1	0	1	6d
1266–7	0	0	0	0d
1281–2	2	1	3	2s 0d
1290–1	0	0	0	0d
1292–3	5	2	7	3s 6d
1295–6	0	0	0	0d
1296–7	1	0	1	1s 0d
1306–7	2	0	2	1s 6d
1308–9	2	0	2	1s 0d
1311–12	2	0	2	9d
1313–14	4	2	6	1s 3d
1330–1	2	0	2	1s 6d
1347–8	4	0	4	1s 10d
1349–50	2	0	2	1s 0d
1351–2	3	0	3	2s 0d
1363–4	1	0	1	2s 6d
1384–5	0	0	0	0d
1385–6	2	0	2	6d
1394–5	3	0	3	11d
1408–9	0	0	0	0
1419–20	0	0	0	0
1422–3	0	0	0	0
1423–4	0	0	0	0
1439–40	2	0	2	8d
1454–5	2	0	2	9d?
1519–20	2	0	2	10d
1520–1	3	0	3	10d
1525–6	3	0	3	12d
1539–40	1	0	1	2d + ?
1540–1	1	0	1	?
1541–2	1	0	1	?

on a domestic scale, would be an entirely plausible occupation in medieval north Hampshire, and was later to be confirmed as a source of local employment, although Bettey exaggerated in calling Whitchurch a 'centre' of 16th-century cloth manufacture, comparable with Andover, Basingstoke and other Hampshire towns (Bettey 1986, 138). Some Whitchurch kersey-makers paid tax in 1434 (*VCH* v, 484), and their kerses were probably fulled at one of the two manorial mills listed in 1086, but there is no evidence that it was in continuous use as a fulling mill throughout the medieval period. However, the Domesday mill in Freefolk Manor had been converted for fulling by 1352 at the latest (Deveson 1995, 57–8, 127) and there was also a fulling mill in the neighbouring manor of Hurstbourne Priors (*VCH* iv, 289). There is a possible reference to a Whitchurch weaver in 1292, when Juliana Philips was presented for tearing cloths of unstated value, belonging to John Galon. If Galon was a weaver, it was not his sole occupation – he was a brewer and an occasional dealer in grain, watercress and possibly other goods (*WCL* Whitchurch borough court rolls, 1291–1313). Watercress, now a major local industry, was evidently a commercial venture in the early-14th century, since a disputed quantity in 1313 was valued at the considerable sum of twenty shillings.

John Bachyn, a frequent brewer, was additionally named 'cobbler' in 1331 and 1344, presumably to distinguish him from another John Bachyn. The other occupational surnames found in the late-13th and 14th centuries relate to very ordinary trades – smith, carpenter, clerk, cook – and only serve to emphasize the unspecialized nature of local employment. The rural nature of the community in its early years is shown in the relatively large number of people presented for offences concerning farming matters in 1267; straying pigs were causing a nuisance in 1290 and the ownership of a crop sown in the burgage field was disputed in 1363. Such matters appear to diminish through time, though agricultural disagreements may be concealed in unspecified pleas of trespass. Several people surnamed *bercarius* and Shepherd are recorded in the town, but only one, John de Anne, additionally named *bercarius*, can be firmly identified as a shepherd; the others appeared in court in their capacities as burgesses or brewers.

Whitchurch was no different from many other small towns in displaying rural characteristics, although it appears to have been genuinely differentiated from the surrounding manorial tithings by the reliance of its inhabitants on occupations other than agriculture, and particularly on the victualling trades, for their principal livelihoods. For those burgesses without manorial land, the standard two burgage-field acres per burgage, and the long back yard, would by no means have supported a family throughout the year, and subtenants may not even have had access to the burgage-field land. A degree of urban sophistication was demonstrated in the appointment of attorneys in a case concerning land in 1340, and also when John le Ryche engaged Henry de Morton to act for him in the purchase of a house in Andover in 1314. There is, however, very little evidence of a possible source of urban income – the provision of credit – apart from the activities of John Galon. The largest debts, such as Galon's twenty shillings, were incurred through non-performance of contracts, and other debts pursued in the courts were for very small sums disputed in the course of trade. For some of the wealthier burgesses, the subletting of property must have been a principal source of income, though not necessarily one which brought profit to the town. John Durdent, who took nine of the original burgage plots, was a freeman of the manor. Members of the Durdent family were numerous and litigious, but may never have lived in the town themselves, the burgage-holders among them continuing to sublet their burgages (Deveson 1995, 128).

BOROUGH FINANCES

The Priory continued to exercise financial oversight in its new town, at least for the first thirty years. The evidence for this is contained in the six surviving Whitchurch borough account rolls, from 1261 to 1283. They are enrolled or filed immediately before or after the manorial rolls for the corresponding years, and are very much shorter than the manorial, reflecting the restricted nature of the borough's financial affairs. The first sections correspond to the 'charge' of a manorial

account, listing payments due – arrears, rents of assize and recognitions, the latter paid sometimes in cash and sometimes in wax. Court perquisites appear in full on the first two account rolls, but from 1272 onwards, only totals are recorded. The final sections are a 'delivery' – a record of cash handed over to the Priory and a statement of the balance owed.

In 1261 the account itself was reasonably straightforward, but the delivery is difficult to follow through because the balance was recalculated and alterations made as money came in. It is obviously a working document rather than a carefully-presented statement, as also is the manorial account for that year. Six years later, the delivery was in the same form, but was a fair copy, drawn up after most of the money had been collected. In 1272 the delivery became extremely complicated, as allowances began to be made to individual reeves for burgages on which no rent had been paid during their term of office. The difficulty of following through the delivery in some accounts (and no doubt of compiling it in the first place) is due to the large number of arrears, which were already accumulating by 1261, were worse at some periods than others but which were never wiped out in any surviving account. The volume of arrears made it difficult to present the accounts in the traditional form and the clerk's solution from 1280 onwards was to incorporate a separate section for delivery of arrears immediately after the arrears themselves; the final delivery then took the form of a 'reckoning', in which the remaining individual responsibilities for arrears were stated or restated (Drew 1947, 26).

At first the accounts were rendered jointly by a borough reeve and the same Priory official who rendered the Whitchurch manorial account, but as the borough finances became more convoluted, the Priory official withdrew and the accounts were rendered jointly by those responsible for the arrears. Final responsibility for each year's account, as for the manorial accounts at that time, fell on the serving reeve (Drew 1947, 27). As also in the manor, arrears were allowed to accumulate, sometimes for many years; outright pardons were rare. This was the period at which the Priory's supervision of its manorial accounts was 'spasmodic and unmethodical', and that of the borough accounts

more so, to judge both from the appearance of the rolls and the vagaries of the accounting (Drew 1947, 28).

The income always varied, depending on the success of individual reeves in collecting money, on the level of court perquisites and on the Priory's leniency in making allowances, which in 1272 amounted to over £3, a relatively large proportion of the total borough rent (Deveson 1995, 177). Very few allowances were made for reasons other than vacancy, and there were no deductions for expenses. The chief cause of variation in income was the performance of the reeves. Every year began with a burden of arrears from previous years, which seems to have reached a maximum around 1280. The figure for that year looks exceptionally high because of the lack of allowances; even if these were subsequently made, the year began with an unusually large deficit, of which little was paid off during its course. Arrears were generally paid in part or in full during each year, but some of the current year's debts always remained uncollected by the end. The position was particularly bad in 1280, when William Gewel collected less than a quarter of the current year's rent, although he made up most of the deficit within the next two years. Gewel does not seem to have been a particularly inefficient reeve; large debts remained outstanding against other reeves for longer periods, and he acted as reeve several times. By 1283 the clerk was no longer trying to account properly for the arrears, and merely stated that they were 'for many years past'.

In 1261 the rent total amounted to £15 2s. 0d., a rise of only two pence from the sum of the burgage rents in 1251. Another twopenny increment in 1267 brought the amount to £15 2s. 2d., at which it remained constant in the rest of the surviving accounts. In 1335 the Priory received £10 for 'the borough rent', the figure recorded as the borough fee-farm in the mid-16th century and almost the same as the sum of quit-rents in the nineteenth (Kitchin 1892, 226; Kitchin and Madge 1889, 88; *Whitchurch Borough Rental Book*). In the early-17th century the Dean and Chapter thought that at 'the tyme of the dissolution of the monastery yt should appere that the borough was decayed for the yearly collection of the maior which formerlie had been fyftene poundes was then but ten poundes'

(WCL T2A/3/1/54/1). In fact the decay had occurred long before the Dissolution; it had been impossible to collect the full sum almost from the start.

It is clear that the Priory had compounded with the town for a fixed fee-farm, based on the income it usually derived from the town rather than the theoretical value. The fee-farm can be dated between 1283 and 1335, and was almost certainly in place before the end of the 13th century. The 1280s was the decade in which the Priory began to preserve its court rolls systematically, and there may have been other administrative changes, perhaps associated with the advent of William Basing as Prior in 1283 or his comprehensive property agreement with Bishop John de Pontissara in 1284. In view of the difficulty of collecting rents, financial freedom would have been a mixed blessing to the reeves, even taking into account the reduction by a third of the total rent obligation.

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWN

The signs were ominous almost from the beginning. Only two small, non-burgage plots, had been added to the occupied land within the town by the 1280s, and it had evidently not been necessary to create any new burgages. By 1291 at least one burgage had been divided, presumably to accommodate the second generation of a burgess family, and John Durdent's multiple holdings in 1251 brought a legacy of disputes among his descendants (WCL Whitchurch borough court rolls 1291, 1306, 1309, 1314). But on the whole there is little documentary evidence for the subdivision of burgages after the initial allocation. Total occupation began to decline even during the first twenty years; the allowances in the 1272 account indicate that five burgages were then vacant, two for the four previous years and one for three. At least two of these were still among the vacancies ten years later, one of them a bakery, despite the steward's instruction to the bailiff that it should be reassigned.

The early fall in income from brewing amercements is much greater than would be accounted for by the decline in amercement rates. There was also a substantial drop in the numbers of brewers

between 1267 and 1282 and of bakers between 1248 and 1261 (Tables 1-2) and occasional pardons 'on account of poverty' begin to appear in the court rolls from April 1282 onwards. The late-13th century should have been a time of prosperity for small towns such as Whitchurch, or at least of population increase, given the problems which were developing in the rural economy in general. There are some signs of difficulties in the local manors; tallage was pardoned at Hurstbourne in 1273, and at Hurstbourne and Whitchurch in 1280, all 'on account of poverty', but was paid again at both in 1282 and 1283. But overpopulation does not seem to have been a problem in Whitchurch manor. There was little or no subdivision of holdings between 1251 and 1349 (Deveson 1995, 189, 196) and *cotagia* (which comprised the majority of holdings in Whitchurch tithing) were usually thirteen acres or more, not generous but sufficient for a family to break even in a normal year (Dyer 1989, 117). Even if the documents concealed an unquantifiable number of subtenants, and if population pressure was genuinely beginning to build up in the neighbouring countryside, peasants were not flocking into Whitchurch.

There are some signs that Whitchurch's economy began to improve in the second quarter of 14th century, albeit from a low base; nearly all the taxpayers in the 1327 and 1332 lay subsidies were manorial, not borough, tenants (PRO E179/173/4; E179/242/15a). In spite of the reduced amercement rates, court income from the ale trade began to rise from the 1330s, with little evidence of a check over the period of the plague, apart from the lateness of the Martinmas court in 1349-50 and some changes in the list of regular brewers. By the end of the century, the licences of hostellers were bringing in a steady income to the Priory. The court held in July 1350 issued an unusual number of licences to agree, in pleas of debt and trespass, the latter perhaps as a result of the difficulty of keeping boundaries in good repair. But in contrast to the situation in the manor, there was otherwise nothing abnormal about that or subsequent courts. The borough court itself seems to have been at its busiest in the three decades after 1340, although the population level probably recovered only slowly from the plague mortality (Deveson 1995, 136, 187-96).

It seems clear that the victualling trades were a major source of employment in Whitchurch, particularly in its earliest years. An overnight stay at Whitchurch might not have been necessary for a horseman *en route* from Winchester to Newbury, assuming a morning start, but carts travelled much more slowly, and Whitchurch was the obvious stopping-place between the two. If the town had owed its early promise to its position on the road from Winchester to the Midlands, its commercial decline would have been intimately connected with that of Winchester, which, although most marked in the 14th century, is thought to have begun in the late-13th century or even earlier. The cloth trade continued to be Winchester's major industry, but with fluctuating fortunes in the 14th century (Keene 1985 i, 89, 92, 299). It may be more than coincidence that the Winchester cloth trade and the Whitchurch ale trade were both improving in the 1330s and early-1340s. Nevertheless, the consolidation of the Whitchurch ale trade in the late-14th century is more likely to have resulted from the expansion of traffic on the east-west road than from the town's connection with Winchester (Deveson 1998, 128).

The 13th-century evidence for Whitchurch has shown little sign of industry other than the ordinary crafts. Even if the market had been flourishing in the 1240s, it was conspicuous by its absence from the medieval documentary record, and the central market-place was so small that it could not have accommodated many stalls (Fig. 1). By contrast, Overton's main market-street was wide enough to hold a sheep fair, which Whitchurch never had, but even this facility was not enough to prevent Overton from falling into financial trouble in the late-13th century (*VCH* iv, 211). Markets in such small towns probably could not compete effectively with each other, even if they were held on different days of the week. The speedy change of market day from Monday to Thursday at Whitchurch in the 1240s confirms that the licensing authority had been mistaken in thinking that there would be enough business for Monday markets at Overton and Whitchurch to co-exist (Deveson 1998, 127). The markets certainly could not compete with those of their larger neighbours; Andover and Basingstoke were not

quite within the notional day's journey and return from Whitchurch and Overton respectively, but were scarcely over it. The two small towns thus had no natural hinterlands apart from their surrounding manors, which were lightly populated and incapable of sustaining towns on their own. Indeed, being so close together, their spheres of influence would have overlapped and each detracted from the other. Nor could they depend on the custom of long-distance travellers; the bulk of Hampshire's medieval trade avoided the area, which appears as a blank triangle on a map of known and theoretical medieval roads (Hindle 1982, 206). Goods and people travelling between the Bishops' and Priors' manors would have ensured that the local roads continued in use, but ecclesiastical travellers were a charge on the manors through which they passed, and should not have needed to spend much money in towns. Only on court days, that is, twice in the year, would the town have entertained an unusual number of visitors.

The decline in business was most marked in the brewing trade, particularly in the 16th century, both in the numbers of people involved, and in the income generated (Table 1). By the middle of that century, the number of alehousekeepers had dwindled from double figures to about four. Two innkeepers, who were also bakers, had a virtual monopoly of the supply of bread, not only to travellers but even to local people, and by 1577 there was only one licensed inn (*PRO* SP12/117/74). Butchers were more strictly regulated than before, and there were generally two of these. By the late-15th century, the borough court dealt with little other than licensing, and the records are uninformative on other trades, but we must suppose that they existed, since the town did not entirely disappear. A population of about 250 is suggested for the 1520s and it had certainly begun to grow again by the end of the century (Deveson 1995, 187–96; *HRO* 44M69/J23/3). It is even possible that the late-15th and early-16th centuries were a time of prosperity, since a recent survey of surviving timber-framed buildings has revealed several good-quality structures of that period, including a putative row of shops (E. Roberts, pers. comm.) This prosperity, if such it was, must have been founded on the development

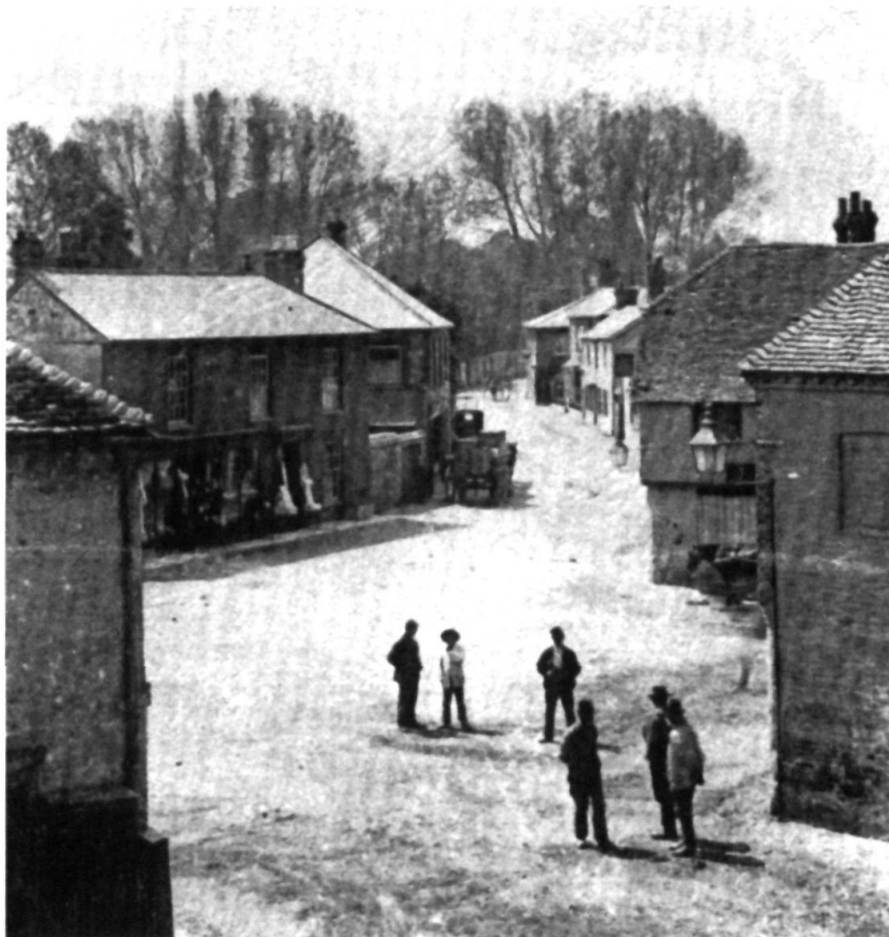


Fig. 1 Whitchurch market-place, c. 1890

of an internal economy, in which the cloth trade doubtless played a large part. But clothiers require food and drink, and the town was not supporting anything like the former number of victuallers. Although the early-modern period saw a small increase in the number of inns, this was not necessarily a genuine increase but more likely an upgrading of the late-medieval alehouses (Deveson 1995, 121).

The borough farm of £10 was still paid – at least, when the town was not in dispute with its lord (*WCL* T2A/3/1/154/1). But Whitchurch had become an obvious target for candidates seeking a

‘pocket borough’ when it was given a parliamentary franchise in 1584. Nevertheless it had acquired some distinctive features of urban life, which will be explored in a future article.

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