

An evaluation of the factors affecting maritime activities in Cornwall during the later Medieval period, with particular reference to the towns of Lostwithiel, Fowey and Polruan and the Fowey estuary.

Jill James

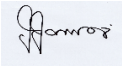
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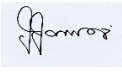
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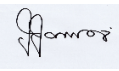
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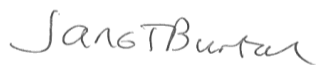
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An evaluation of the factors affecting maritime activities in Cornwall during the later Medieval period, with particular reference to the towns of Lostwithiel, Fowey and Polruan and the Fowey estuary.

Abstract:

Medieval Cornwall has been portrayed as a backwater, unaffected by wider affairs. This implies that the county did not influence, and was not influenced by, national and international affairs. This dissertation examines how appropriate this perception is or how far it can be argued that Cornwall was acutely affected by, and an active participant in, national and international affairs.

The dissertation focuses on maritime activities in the Fowey estuary, evaluating:

- (i) What were the most significant factors influencing activities?
- (ii) Did these result from local conditions, or reflect national and international trends?
- (iii) To what extent were the people of Cornwall active participants in national affairs?

Fowey was the most significant port in Cornwall at the time, and the town of Lostwithiel was administrative centre for the Duchy of Cornwall, resulting in a considerable quantity of existing records.

The dissertation considers the commercial activities in the broader context of English medieval trade, identifying chronologically, for each type, the most significant influencing factors. Data relating to Fowey exports was compared against national patterns, allowing evaluation of the impact of national and local conditions.

Impacts of warfare on ships and manpower are evaluated, as is the choice of Lostwithiel as Edward of Woodstock's headquarters and Cornwall's largest stannary. The consequences of variations in the strength of the monarchy, and Cornwall's remoteness from England's centre of governance are considered. The dissertation also considers effects changes in religious practice and local conditions on pilgrim transportation.

The dissertation argues that maritime activity in the Fowey estuary exhibits the influence of multi-layered inter-related factors including national, international, and local. Furthermore, it illuminates the role of the Cornish people in international conflicts both as fighting men, and vital suppliers. We see that Cornwall's ports were actively involved in trading essential goods allowing enterprise to flourish and enabling the improvement of local economic conditions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my thanks to Dr Janet Burton for her help and support throughout my learning and during the production of this dissertation. I would also like to thank the library resources and administrative staff at the University of Wales Trinity St. David for their patience and helpfulness. I acknowledge with thanks the work of academic authors on this topic whose research has enabled the production of this dissertation. All errors and omissions are my own.

Introduction: aims and objectives, literature review and methodology

Introduction

Medieval Cornwall has been portrayed as remote and isolated from national affairs. Elliott-Binns pictures the county as a backwater, whose inhabitants paid little attention to national and international affairs:

Cornwall may, indeed, be likened to a backwater, ruffled from time to time by the wash of passing ships in the mainstream, but otherwise tranquil and undisturbed. Its inhabitants, like others elsewhere paid little heed to outside events....¹

Certainly, in the medieval period, travel and communications to the county were adversely affected by its remote location. Elliott-Binns' viewpoint was shared in medieval opinion. Indeed, Bishop John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, in 1327 described Cornwall thus:

Et ecce, Pater dulcissime, dum nedum in mundi finibus, set- uta ita dicam- in finium finibus consisto

(not only the ends of the earth, but the very ends of the ends thereof). ²

Cornwall's distance from the national centre of governance also had practical societal repercussions, ensuring that many of the aristocrats who owned land in the county never visited their properties. This absence led to increased significance for a relatively few ancient Cornish gentry families, a factor that was to affect many aspects of the economy, trade, and social order throughout the period.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore whether the portrait of Cornwall as a remote backwater, isolated from national and international

¹ L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955), p.70

² John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, Register 1328/9 as cited in D.R. Williams D.R. *A Strange and Unquenchable Race, Cornwall and the Cornish in quotations* (Truro, Truran, 2007), p.12

contemporary affairs is accurate, particularly in relation to its maritime activities. The Fowey estuary was chosen as a focus for this study as Fowey's deep-water harbour was the most important in Cornwall and made it a focus of Cornish maritime activity.

Literature Review

Many aspects relating to medieval Cornwall have been explored in detail by academic authors. John Hatcher gained access to the medieval records still held by the Duchy of Cornwall and undertook an extensive evaluation of the information contained therein. His analysis of the financial affairs of the Duchy properties provides a detailed and comprehensive assessment of the economies of the medieval manors belonging to the duchy between 1300 and 1500, and assesses in economic terms the impact of the Black Death on tin and agricultural production, together with the associated demographic and social change amongst others.³

A number of authors such as Halliday and Payton have focused on providing a comprehensive chronological assessment of the history of the county as a whole.⁴ These works have given us a cohesive picture of a developing landscape and its people over time, analysing chronologically the mechanisms and repercussions of change over the longer period. They also provide a portrait of the distinct characteristics of the county and its people, leading to a greater sense of the separation with which they were viewed. This work has been extremely useful in terms of providing an overall context, but, as is expected in a work of

³ J.A. Hatcher, 'Diversified Economy: Later Medieval Cornwall', *The Economic History Review*, Vol.22, no.2 (Aug. 1969), pp.208-227 and J.A. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

⁴ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000) and P. Payton, *Cornwall: A History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2017)

this scope, it lacks detail on individual localities and the inter-relationship of economic influences that have affected them.

Further analyses have been undertaken by authors with reference to a single family or estate.⁵ This methodology is particularly relevant to Cornwall, where the land-owning aristocracy did not, in general, have an active presence in the county. Additionally, this type of academic literature is particularly useful for understanding the consequent influence of the Cornish gentry and social hierarchies as well as being especially relevant for local or family historians.

In addition to the above, a number of authors have focused on particular aspects of Cornish culture, trade or economy. A comprehensive exploration of the development of Christianity and pilgrimage has been provided by Nicholas Orme's works on the topic.⁶ Specific aspects of Cornwall's trading activities have been analysed by several works by Kowaleski, Drake and others, whilst the county's naval history is comprehensively covered in Rodger's history of naval Britain.⁷ Such

⁵ D. Archer and C. Poole *Tinners, Sinners and Winners, The History of the Manor of Cosawes 1086 -2015* (Truro: Dorothy Archer and Colin Poole, 2016); G. Howells and M. England *Lanhydrock – The First Three Centuries* (Bodmin: Bodmin Town Museum, 2008); C. Lorigan *Boconnoc, the History of a Cornish Estate* (Stroud: The History Press, 2017); R.M. Prideaux, *Prideaux, A West Country Clan* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1989) and A. Rideout *The Treffry Family* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 1984) et.al.

⁶ N. Orme, *Cornwall and the Cross: Christianity 500-1560* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 2007) and *Medieval Pilgrimage, with a Survey of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Bristol* (Exeter: Impress Books Ltd., 2018) et al.

⁷ M. Kowaleski, ' 'Alien' Encounters in the Maritime World of Medieval England', *Medieval Encounters*, Vol. 13 (2007), pp.96-121; M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug. 2000), pp.429-454; S.J. Drake, 'The Gallants of Fawey: a case study of Fowey during the Hundred Years' War c1337-1399', *Historical Research*, Vol. 90, no. 248 (May 2017), pp. 296-317; S.J. Drake, 'Pirates and Pilchards: The Wealth and Peopling of Fowey during The Hundred Years War', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, Vol. 30 (2015), pp.23-44 and

academic works contribute detailed analysis and data evaluation on the aspects of commerce that they relate to. However, as a result of this focus, they can omit the impact of inter-relationships between different types of commercial activity, particularly when these are specific to individual communities.

However, in order to add further analysis to the academic debate regarding whether Cornwall's remote location provided immunity from the impact of national and international change, both an evaluation of the inter-relationships between factors affecting all types of economic activity, and an analysis of the contributing circumstances that had affected their commercial success over time was required. By extracting this data for one small location in Cornwall chronologically, it is hoped that this dissertation will identify relationships between the most significant influences in the expansion of seafaring activity. Furthermore, by comparing this information with data from a broader national context it is hoped to evaluate the extent of the area's responses to national and international influences.

Methodology

Maritime naval and commercial activity in the Fowey estuary was chosen as the focus for this analysis. Shipping in the estuary was involved in a wide range of commercial and military affairs and the locality therefore appeared to offer a true reflection of the many elements of Cornish seafaring activity. Additionally, Fowey, as the largest port in Cornwall at this time, generated sufficient source material to allow a meaningful analysis of data. Furthermore, as Lostwithiel was the administrative centre of the Duchy of Cornwall, the Havener's accounts were available and these provided a useful source of shipping

N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)

data.⁸ Additionally, as the site of the county's largest stannary, comparatively comprehensive statistics on the officially reported volumes of tin production were also available. We must accept that data is not complete, especially for the earlier medieval period and this has limited, to a certain extent, the conclusions that could be drawn.

Where available, information relating to the quantities of goods carried, together with the frequency of voyages was obtained from a number of written sources, many of which provide relevant data analysis of original records. These were then compared against national commercial activity patterns. Statistics relating to Cornish tin production have largely been drawn from John Hatcher's analysis of the records currently held by the Duchy of Cornwall.⁹ For figures on the medieval wine trade, I have referred extensively to the study of this data by Margery Kirkbride James.¹⁰ Information on pilgrim ship licenses, both national and local have been drawn largely from Constance Mary Storrs' research into this topic.¹¹

In addition to this comparison of local data with national trends, the impact of local conditions including geographical factors such as the silting of the upper reaches of the estuary, the repercussions of naval service on the ship-building and fitting industry and the activities of pirates and privateers on merchant shipping during warfare were also considered.

⁸ For a discussion of this office, please see below p. 17

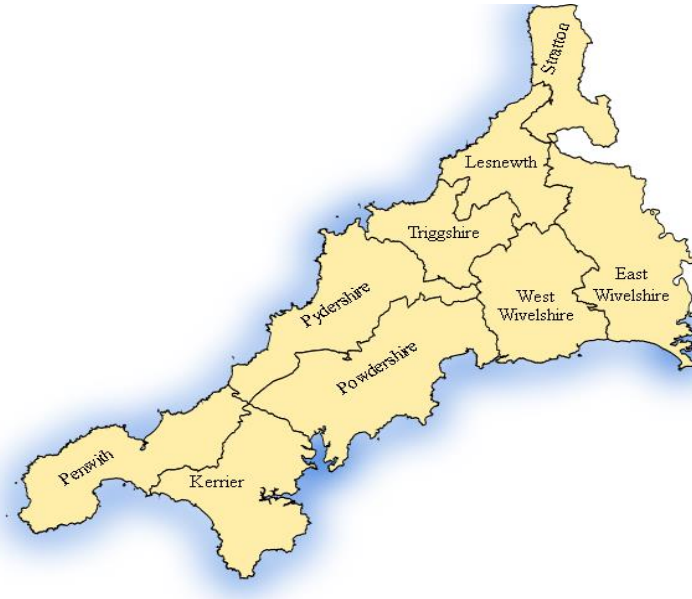
⁹ J.A. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

¹⁰ M.K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)

¹¹ C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998)

An introduction to medieval Cornwall

Administrative structure and communications



Map of Cornish Hundreds ¹²

During the medieval period, there were nine hundreds in Cornwall: East and West Wivel, Kirrier, Penwith, Powder (originally known as Tibesterna or Tibestei), Trigg, Lesnewth, Stratton, and Pydar. The towns of Fowey and Lostwithiel were located in the hundred of Powder which had the rivers Fal and Fowey as its west and east boundaries respectively. The sea formed the southern boundary and the northern reaches were on the granite ridgeway which ran along the breadth of the Cornish peninsula.

The population of Cornwall at the time was generally centred around the fertile river estuaries. In the Powder hundred, the majority of the

¹² Map attribution: This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) license. Accessed On 25th august 2020 @17:21

at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundreds_of_Cornwall

population were sited along a narrow belt of fertile land which ran through Probus, Creed, St. Ewe, St. Austell, Golant, and Tywardreath. Historically, the landscape in the Powder Hundred also reflects much older population centres with evidence of a multitude of hill fortresses and early earthworks. In his seminal work on the subject, Charles Henderson contends that at least seventeen of the major manors during the period were sited on older population centres.¹³ These comprised: Arallas, Lostwithiel, Lanescot, Edless, Moresk, Elerky, Carhays, Truro, Branel, Prideaux, Goviley, Galowras, Goodern, Tybesta, Tywardreath, Domeliock and Tewington of which thirteen are visible in the Domesday Book.

The manor of Tybesta was originally the head manor in Powder Hundred and the manor of Tewington was of secondary significance. Henderson suggests that this position was later reversed, citing in support of this proposal the wording of a grant in 1159 stating that a grant of St. Austell is given “with the consent of the whole Hundred Court of Teuintone”.¹⁴

Four miles to the north-west of Fowey is the village of Tywardreath, in which the Benedictine priory of St. Andrew was located. The Benedictine monks originally came from the Abbey of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus in Angers. The priory, which was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Exeter, acquired substantial land holdings and churches throughout Cornwall initially including control over the town of Fowey. As an alien priory, its position became complicated during the Hundred Years War and it consequently suffered confiscation of its assets and the temporary removal of the monks. The priory lay on the Saints Way pilgrim route and was used as a hospice for those travelling from

¹³ C. Henderson, *Essays in Cornish History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.112

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.116

Bodmin to Fowey where they boarded ships for the voyage to Santiago de Compostella.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of medieval maritime trade to the local economy. Transport by sea represented a far safer method of conveying people and goods at the time. During the medieval period, much of the Cornish land had not yet been cultivated and remained as forest or moorland dependent on altitude. As Halliday notes, the Domesday book shows us that only around one half of Cornish land was cultivated at the time¹⁵. To traverse the moorlands required the navigation of areas of bog or swamp which hindered the progress of carts and animals. Furthermore, the lowland forests were made impenetrable by thick undergrowth and any traveller attempting to trek through them on horseback away from the roads also risked attack by wild animals or outlaws.

In general east to west land travel through the county was undertaken along the great highway running through North Cornwall. This road, named the *via regalis Cornubiensis* in a 1260 Launceston Borough charter, crossed the Tamar at Polston Bridge which had been constructed shortly after the Conquest. After passing through Launceston, the road ran across to Camelford and crossed the river Cam at Wadebridge before carrying on to Truro. To the south of Cornwall, the main east-west route crossed the Tamar at Plymouth via the Cremyll ferry and passed over Looe bridge which was constructed in the early fifteenth century. This road then carried on across the ridges to Fowey where the estuary could be crossed at the Bodinnick ferry and carried onwards through Par, passing through St Austel and Tregony, continuing on until finally reaching St. Michael's Mount and Lands' End.

¹⁵ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.116

Three minor roads crossed Cornwall north to south. The first connected the Camel estuary near St. Issey to the Fowey estuary near St Winnow. Many of the travellers on this road were bound for France from Wales and Ireland but wished to avoid the hazardous sea voyage around Land's End. A second road ran from Gannel through Truro and on to Penryn. The third lay further west joining Lelant and St Michael's Mount. As discussed below, these ancient trading routes became particularly important to the pilgrim crossings during the middle ages. Smaller roads joined communities throughout Cornwall as required by local trade. In the Fowey area, a road linked Lostwithiel with Fowey town.

Away from the established roads many of the coastal areas effectively remained unreachable except by sea. It is not surprising therefore that the deeper estuaries which facilitated the transportation of heavy goods from the high moorlands of Cornwall to the sea without traversing the deeply forested Cornish lowlands became critically important in medieval trade. As Elliott-Binns notes, all the rivers from the high moorlands with the exception of the Camel flow southwards and the south-east of Cornwall was particularly densely forested¹⁶. As a result, the estuaries in the south-east of Cornwall were particularly significant in the development of trade during this period, and a network of small roads facilitated their use for trade and transportation across the county.

The Fowey Estuary

The deep-water Fowey estuary allowed commercial trade to penetrate six miles inland as far as the stannary town of Lostwithiel in the Middle Ages, and on the western side of the Fowey promontory a broad estuary

¹⁶ L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955), p.28

reached as far inland as St. Blazey bridge which was bordered on either side by sandy flats.

Until the fourteenth century, Lostwithiel was the principal harbour on the Fowey estuary. However as early as the mid-fourteenth century, estuary silting resulting from tin mining activities reduced the water depth and turned much of the river at Lostwithiel to mud flats.

Eventually, this was to entirely block the passage of boats this far upriver. Consequently, the impact of the silting was the gradual replacement of Lostwithiel as primary harbour by Fowey which being at the mouth of the river had greater water depth. Similar silting affected other Cornish estuaries and to the west of Fowey silting later removed the Tywardreath estuary entirely. As Leland commented in the sixteenth century the Fowey river 'hath ebbd and flown above Lostwithiel, but it now floweth not ful to the town'.¹⁷

Lostwithiel

The town of Lostwithiel appears to have been in existence prior to the Conquest. Indeed, Henderson argues that it may have one of the few pre-conquest names still surviving in the county.¹⁸ Early records are scarce but the town's early significance is evident when, in 1194, the king was paid ten marks for the privilege of holding an annual fair, by Robert de Cardinan. At approximately the same time Robert de Cardinan confirmed a variety of privileges on the burgesses and men of the town, including those relating to the Borough Court, and the authority of the burgesses.

In approximately 1268 Isolda de Cardinan, granddaughter of Robert, sold Lostwithiel and Restormel Castle to Richard, Earl of Cornwall,

¹⁷ Leland, *Itinerary* as cited in L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955), p.26

¹⁸ C. Henderson, *Essays in Cornish History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.44

brother of Henry III.¹⁹ On acquisition, Richard issued a charter to the burgesses of Lostwithiel and “Pennek” declaring that they would be one free borough with a Gild Merchant and enjoying all the privileges of similar towns. Henderson contends that this charter conveyed a much more independent status to the community enabling the burgesses to hold their own courts and regulate their own commercial activity, thus further supporting the growth of trade in the area.²⁰

Richard’s son Edmund, who succeeded him, made Restormel Castle in Lostwithiel his main residence, until his death in 1299. Edmund was also responsible for a building program in the town that resulted in the construction of the “Duchy Palace”, housing the county administration centre, and the Shire Hall which housed the County Court.²¹

In 1337 Edward III issued a royal charter creating the Duchy of Cornwall and appointed Edward of Woodstock, his eldest son, aged just eleven year’s old at the time, as the first Duke of Cornwall. In adulthood, Edward gained a reputation as a formidable warrior and led successful campaigns in the Hundred Years War. He visited his Duchy in August 1354 and again at Easter in 1363. Henderson argues that Restormel Castle, located a short distance above Lostwithiel, was at that time, the only castle of sufficient size to accommodate both Edward and the knights in his retinue. As a result, Lostwithiel became the headquarters of the duchy.²² Lostwithiel was situated at the high-water mark of the Fowey estuary and was initially a port in its own right. This fact,

¹⁹ History of Parliament, Research, Constituencies, 1386-1421, Lostwithiel
Accessed at: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/constituencies/lostwithiel> on 28/8/2020

²⁰ Henderson, C., *Essays in Cornish History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.45-46

²¹ History of Parliament, Research, Constituencies, 1386-1421, Lostwithiel
Accessed at: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/constituencies/lostwithiel> on 28/8/2020

²² Henderson, C., *Essays in Cornish History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 5

together with the existence of a deep-water harbour at Fowey and Polruan led to the crucial role of the estuary during the prince's campaigns in France at the start of the Hundred Years War.

Lostwithiel continued as the administrative centre for the Duchy of Cornwall. Trade on the waters of the Fowey estuary was under the control of Lostwithiel, and the two towns developed and prospered in parallel.²³ However, when the estuary silted up during the fourteenth century due to excessive streaming, the harbour at Lostwithiel became un-navigable to sea-going ships. Consequently, large ships were restricted to Fowey and Polruan down-stream, and goods for export were transported from Lostwithiel in flat-bottomed boats down-river to Fowey for loading.²⁴

The increase in shipping from Fowey attracted merchants, harbour-men, and administrators to the town. Consequently, the town developed and expanded to service this trade, not only in the construction of appropriate housing for increasingly wealthy inhabitants but also the introduction of support infrastructure such as additional quays, landing bays and storage facilities, which extended the town along the estuary.

All shipping dues were paid to Lostwithiel and this income was controlled by the Havener, a significant, salaried position which was under the control of Edward of Woodstock. The Caption of Seisin of 1337 records that the borough of Lostwithiel claimed keelage of 4d from every vessel mooring in the port of Fowey and being unloaded, 8d for ships under 40 tuns and 16d from ships over 40 tuns. Boats and ships were also required to pay a similar amount if they loaded in the

²³ H. Doe, *A Maritime History of Fowey Harbour* (St. Agnes: Truran Books Ltd., 2010), p.3

²⁴ Cornwall Council, *Fowey Conservation Area, Character appraisal and Management Proposals*, P.16

port.²⁵The Havener, who was based in Fowey harbour, was responsible for the collection of prisage tax, shipping and fishing dues, together with the administration of the right of wreck for the Duchy. Additionally, the Havener was also involved with shipping disputes which were dealt with locally at dedicated maritime courts located in both Fowey and Lostwithiel.

International Relations

The first of the broader influences on maritime activity that we shall consider relates to England's international relations. In particular, we will examine the effect of the Hundred Years War and the conflict with Scotland.

During this period, the monarch had the right to impress merchant shipping to provide service in the king's fleet. As there was no dedicated naval force this was a frequent occurrence during times of conflict. The obligations were onerous, taking ships and men out of the ports and thus restricting the capacity for marine commercial activity. Thus, international relations and the supply of ships for naval service had a significant impact on maritime activity in many Cornish ports including Fowey and Polruan.

For the early years of the medieval period information on the number of ships supplied by Cornwall to the king's service is incomplete although it appears likely that in 1171 Cornwall provided some of the vessels for the conveyance of Henry II's army to Ireland.²⁶ There does not appear to be any evidence of Fowey providing vessels during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries although it is clear that Cornwall provided

²⁵ M. Kowaleski, (Ed.), *The Havener's Accounts of the Earldom & Duchy of Cornwall 1287-1356* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 2001), p.309

²⁶ W. Page (Ed.) *The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England: Cornwall Vol. I*, p.477

shipbuilding and fitting expertise for the construction of king's ships during the period.²⁷

In 1301 Fowey was summoned to provide just one ship to Berwick to take part in the Scottish war.²⁸ In 1302 Cornwall was again required to provide ships for the king's fleet in the Scotch War, of which Fowey was to provide one. Significantly, in 1302 a levy security was required from both Fowey and Looe because in the previous year several towns, including Fowey, had failed to obey the king's writ.²⁹ Whilst this would appear to indicate a reluctance to supply ships for the king's service, it has been argued that initially this was not generally the case as this service guaranteed salaries for masters and crew together with the money required for fitting out and preparing the ships.³⁰ As Halliday points out, at a time before marine insurance, shipping activities were a risky enterprise.³¹ Unpredictable weather, piracy, and uncertainty of eventual income streams could quickly bring ruin to shipping merchants. By contrast, Halliday argues, the King's service offered certainty in the rates paid for ships' fitting and hire, together with a good day-rate for the crew. However, as Rodgers points out, the owners of ships lost on the king's service, rarely received compensation.³² He cites the case of the *Dieu Garde* of Bristol which was lost on the 1344 Brittany expedition, with all her cargo. Initially her owners were fined £60 for deserting the

²⁷ W. Page (Ed.) *The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England: Cornwall Vol. I*, p.477

²⁸ PRO: SC 1/16 No.37 as cited in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 492-495

²⁹ W. Page (Ed.) *The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England: Cornwall Vol. I*, p.477

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.477

³¹ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.144

³² N.A.M. Rodger *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.121

king's fleet, and, although this was later remitted, they were not compensated for the loss of the vessel³³. The position was not consistent and on occasion compensation was made, or good service was rewarded by remission of debts to the crown.³⁴

The position temporarily was changed, however, during the reign of Edward II when the treasury was in such a depleted condition that shipowners were expected to fund their own ships, at least for a portion of the voyage. Evidence of this is seen in 1317 when Fowey was required to provide one ship for the king's service and bear the costs for the first month. In 1319 there was a requirement for Fowey to provide further ships to serve for three or four months, all of which were to be funded by the town's burgesses. When, in 1322, Edward II required further ships to be provided, at their owners' expense this was not well received and protests ensured that later the same month the writ was amended to show that the crown would bear the expenses.

After the 1323 truce with Scotland, warfare against France commenced swiftly thereafter and records show that Fowey was required to send one ship for the transportation of men to Gascony. In 1326 two Fowey ships over fifty tons and forty-six men were supplied to a naval force assembling at Portsmouth which unsuccessfully attempted to resist a threatened invasion by Queen Isabella and Prince Edward.³⁵ Despite a large naval force opposing her, Queen Isabella prevailed and shortly afterwards Edward II's government was overthrown.

The records show an increasing contribution of ships for naval affairs from both Fowey and Polruan during the fourteenth century. This

³³ N.A.M. Rodger *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p 122

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Calendar of Close Rolls 1323-27 pp.608-613 and 641-642, Calendar of Patent Rolls 1324-27, pp.315-316 as cited in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 492-495

reflects a wider picture of an expanding maritime contribution to England's military campaigns in the Hundred Years War. Cornish gentry families also provided manpower for the Hundred Years War and many, such as Walter de Carminow of Boconnoc fought alongside Edward of Woodstock at Crécy.

Rodger argues that in the early part of the fourteenth century English naval forces proved to be too slow to gather when compared with the French fleets, resulting in the French forces seizing the advantage.³⁶ This became most apparent when, in 1336, a French fleet of fast-moving galleys attacked the Isle of Wight and Suffolk coasts. At the time, the only English resistance available was a number of requisitioned merchant vessels that proved unable to mount an effective defence. The French campaign continued in 1338 when Portsmouth and Jersey were attacked. Twenty Genoese galleys reinforced the French fleet, together with a further seventeen galleys from Monaco. In the autumn of 1338, the Genoese galleys were successful in taking Guernsey and continued to capture and burn Southampton. By the end of that year, it became clear that the English vessels were too few in number, and too slow-moving, to effectively defend the English south coast against the galleys. The south coast ports awaited the following year's raids with trepidation. The following March a force of eight thousand men travelling on the Monaco galleys and accompanied by thirty-five Norman barges reinforced Guernsey before entering the Gironde. Simultaneously, the Genoese galley fleet swept along the south coast attacking Harwich and Hastings before entering the Bristol Channel. Further to the west, the fleet was successful in taking a number of ships sheltering in Plymouth harbour.

³⁶ N.A.M. Rodger *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.100

The 1338/1339 attacks required the English to acquire more robust naval defence and this is also seen in the recorded numbers of ships provided by Fowey and Polruan for naval service. Prior to these campaigns, the limited obligation to provide for ships for the king's service is unlikely to have had a significant impact in the area.

However, following the galley campaigns, in 1340 the English fleet of 12 to 160 vessels included six Fowey ships and one from Polruan.³⁷ These ships took part in the battle of Sluys, which has been considered to be the first real naval battle. During this engagement, the French fleet of galleys was anchored in a three-line formation, chained together, which was considered to create an impenetrable force. This fleet consisted of 202 ships, 6 galleys and 22 barges whereas the English force opposing them consisted only of 120 to 160 vessels. However, the effect of the French formation was to remove their manoeuvrability and their ability to escape, whilst they were picked off by English archers. This resulted in a resounding victory for the English fleet which destroyed 190 French ships and approximately 16000-18000 fighting men including two admirals.³⁸

In 1342 a large fleet was dispatched to Brittany and Edward III travelled with them. However, after the king's arrival, a large number of ships deserted, leaving the king and his army in a perilous position. It is noteworthy that in 1343 eight Fowey ships and five Polruan ships were listed as having deserted or evaded king's service the previous year.³⁹

³⁷ M. Lyon, B. Lyon and H.S. Lucas (eds.) *The Wardrobe Book of William de Norwell, 12 July 1338 to 27 May 1340* (Brussels 1983) as cited in N.A.M. Rodger *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.492 - 497

³⁸ N.A.M. Rodger *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.99

³⁹ Calendar of Close Rolls 1343-46 pp.128-134 as cited in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 492-495

As a penalty, the ships and their goods were forfeited, and the masters fined.⁴⁰

In 1347 Fowey provided 47 ships and 770 men, more than any other port for the fleet assembled to support the siege of Calais.⁴¹ However, it has been argued that these figures should be treated with some caution as Fowey was unlikely at this point to have such a large amount of manpower available, and it has been suggested that not all of this shipping was local and that the port was used as a meeting place for vessels originating all along the Cornish coast.⁴²

In 1364 The war in Brittany ended with the final defeat and death of Charles de Blois. Peace was short-lived however and war recommenced following the French intervention in the Castilian civil war. In 1367 Edward of Woodstock invaded Castile, in support of Pedro the Cruel against the French forces acting on behalf of Henry of Trastamara. The English were successful in defeating the French at the battle of Najera, but Pedro was eventually killed in 1369 following fresh revolts. In 1371, Edward III's fourth son, John of Gaunt, the most powerful landowner in England married Constance of Castile the daughter of Pedro and claimed the kingship of Castile. Later in 1371 John of Gaunt landed at Fowey with his new bride.

The war in Castile continued unabated and was compounded when in 1366 and 1369 the French received an offer from King Valdemar II of Denmark of twelve thousand Danish fighters for a fee of six hundred thousand florins. It was only in 1380, with the death of Charles V of

⁴⁰ W. Page (Ed.) *The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England: Cornwall Vol. I*, p.480

⁴¹ J. Charnock, *History of Marine Architecture Vol. 1* (London, 1801) xxxviii-xliii, as cited in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 492-495

⁴² W. Page (Ed.) *The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England: Cornwall Vol. I*, p.480

France that some relief from the raiding was achieved. There was a number of French campaigns in the 1380s, finally culminating when a truce was agreed in 1389. The political impact of the failure of defence in the 1370s and 1380s continued, however. Rogers suggests that such a public demonstration of failure ultimately contributed to the fury which led to the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 and also the deposition and murder of Richard II in 1399.

French pirates often sailed under the Scottish flag, and a Castilian squadron in the Channel supposedly tasked with protecting trade also indulged unofficially in piracy and attacked the West country ports.⁴³ As coastal raids continued, with Dartmouth Plymouth and Bristol retaliating for the burning of Plymouth in 1403, all foreign shipping was considered a fair target.

Richard's successor, Henry IV was fully occupied by home affairs, chiefly the ongoing war with Scotland and the Welsh revolt led by Owain Glyndwr. An alliance was formed between the French and the Welsh forces in July 1404 and Henry IV was fully engaged attempting to repel both a Franco-Welsh army and their fleet which was following up the Bristol Channel.

As Rodgers points out, it would be a mistake to overstate the distinction between warships and merchant shipping during this period.⁴⁴ The vast majority of ships in royal service were merchant ships supplied at the King's order. However, on his accession in 1413 Henry V was determined to establish a naval fighting force of his own. The system of impressment was ineffective and caused complaints.

⁴³ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.115

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.114

Following Henry V's death in 1422 the Royal Navy was sold off, and the task of keeping the seas safe was initially allocated to contractors. However, their performance was unsatisfactory and in 1442 Parliament ordered that they should be replaced by a large squadron of vessels from coastal ports. In Fowey, we see that the privateer John Seelander was one of the men allocated to this merchant marine force. The Parliamentary order did not, however, abolish all impressment immediately and the contribution of Fowey and Polruan merchant ships continued to be substantial in the fifteenth century. In 1437 Fowey and Polruan provided more large ships than London for Royal Service, and in 1451 Fowey supplied ten ships for service in the expedition to Bordeaux.

In 1457 a combined Norman and Breton force raided Sandwich and also attacked Fowey on their return journey, burning down half the town. It has been suggested that this exhibits a particular need for revenge against the town of Fowey although there is inadequate evidence to support this.⁴⁵

We can see from the above brief analysis of naval service in the period that Cornwall, and in particular the Fowey estuary was not unaffected by the broader implications of international relationships. To the contrary, shipping and manpower provided by Cornwall played a significant role in the conflicts throughout the Hundred Years War. This is particularly evident after the galley campaigns of 1338/1339. The provision of these amounts of shipping removed vital manpower and resources from other commercial maritime activity in the area, whilst concurrently increasing the risk to the safe passage of merchant shipping. However, Payton argues that the Hundred Years War also provided economic stimulus

⁴⁵ W. Page (Ed.) *The Victoria Histories of the Counties of England: Cornwall Vol. I*, p.483

and renewed growth, creating prosperity to the southern coastal ports such as Fowey, Saltash and Looe.⁴⁶ He contends that, as a result, by the middle of the fifteenth century the Cornish ports had become increasingly important in the provision of naval logistics.

Piracy and Privateering

We shall continue by examining the evidence of local and national influences on the Fowey estuary's involvement in privateering and piracy.

As Rodger comments, coastal raids were a very effective tactic because ships were valuable assets and were easy to attack when in their home ports.⁴⁷ The resulting destruction and burning of the harbour towns ruined the merchants, destroyed their trade, and terrorised communities. As Rodger points out, the English ports generally suffered less than those in France as the war was fought on French soil. Nevertheless, the English were not immune to the psychological and political consequences of these raids.

As the Hundred Years War was underway, the lack of an effective English navy meant that a systematic defence of English coastal areas was impossible, and French coastal raids were common along the south coast. In 1369 French raiders burnt Portsmouth. Rodgers contends that in addition to the practical damage that such raids inflicted, there was

⁴⁶ P. Payton, *Cornwall: A History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2017), p.89

⁴⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp.91 to 93

also substantial political implications arising from the inability of the government to defend the coastline populations.⁴⁸

The town of Fowey suffered significantly from the French raid discussed above. The town was sacked and partially burnt, starting in the south-west areas where we are told that the invaders killed everyone they could find, causing many residents to flee out of the town for safety.⁴⁹

The raiders continued onwards to attack Place, the residence of the Treffry family in the town centre. Thomas Treffry, Chamberlain to Henry VI was absent at court, but his wife Elizabeth was in residence at Place during the attack. With the help of local men Elizabeth Treffry successfully defended Place from the raiders. It was as a result of this attack that Thomas Treffry partially funded the construction of blockhouses at the entrance to the harbour in Fowey and Polruan. A chain was attached to both blockhouses, which could be raised in the case of threat thus removing access to the harbour.

Given these threats, it is unsurprising that the provision of ships for royal service was supplemented by the lucrative trade in piracy in Fowey during the same period. Indeed, as Kingsford points out, during a period when all ships were armed for defence, and international relations so tense incidents of piracy were inevitable.⁵⁰ Rideout notes that following the destruction large areas of Fowey in the raids, much of the rebuilding was funded with wealth acquired by privateering.⁵¹

The Truce of Luelingham in 1403 included an agreement that neither England nor France would offer shelter in their ports to sea-robbers.

⁴⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.112

⁴⁹ A. Rideout, *The Treffry Family* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 1984), p.22

⁵⁰ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.79

⁵¹ A. Rideout, *The Treffry Family* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 1984), p.24

Kingsford questions the effectiveness of this agreement citing the case of John Kyghley whose exploits was so infamous at the time that he was specifically named and his arrest ordered.⁵² Despite the arrest order, Kyghley sailed into Weymouth the following year and took the *Marie* of Bordeaux, which was at anchor in the harbour.

Early Chancery Proceedings provide a wealth of evidence that Fowey ships were also implicated in this period of privateering. As a reward for the contribution made by the port during the Siege of Calais and the Battle of Agincourt, Fowey was licensed to attack and seize French shipping. At this point several privateers formed a group known as the Fowey Gallants. Evidence of their piratical activities can be seen in the Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings:

(C1/16/29 date:1407) which shows that in 1407 John de Peynell, a merchant from Lisbon complained that his barge, loaded with salt worth 500 marks had been seized by two balingers. One of these was from Fowey, and the other from Dartmouth. The petitioner claimed that his barge was brought into the port of Shoreham where the load of salt was sold.⁵³

C1/4/29 (date:1419-1424) where Gyles de Taville, merchant of Algarve complained that after five tuns and one pipe of his own wine had been loaded into the barge *St. Katharine of Spain* it was taken by the English fleet while sailing near Belle Ile. The barge was brought into the port of Fowey where the goods were sold.⁵⁴

⁵² C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.85

⁵³ D.M. Gardiner, (Ed.), *A Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1976), p.9

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.21

Even when the country was at peace, foreign vessels were not safe from piracy and unprovoked attacks were common. Even the King's own ships took part in piracy and were themselves attacked. Known pirates served in the king's service. The ten ships Fowey sent for the king's service in the expedition to Bordeaux in 1451 included vessels implicated in piracy,⁵⁵ Fowey pirate Mark Mixtow who had seized Spanish ships in 1402, despite the truce, had been employed in the king's service just the previous year.⁵⁶ As Kingsford points out, the uncertainty and fluidity of international relations created an easy excuse for piracy as seen in 1406 when John Gascoygne of Fowey with others seized a ship from Lisbon claiming in their defence that it was owned by Bretons.⁵⁷

Rodgers concludes that piracy was least controlled during the reigns of weaker kings as, without naval resources of their own, they were not in a position to effectively control it.⁵⁸ Kingsford agrees, commenting that the only remedy for the piracy problem was the effective keeping of the seas by a royal fleet, and that, with the exception of the reign of Henry V, sea-keeping was spasmodic and ineffective.⁵⁹

In 1414 Henry V enacted that all breakers of truces and safe-conducts at sea together with all who abetted them would be found guilty of treason. In order to enforce this, a conservator of truces was to be appointed in all ports. The role of these individuals was to investigate

⁵⁵ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.82

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.84

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.85

⁵⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain 660-1649* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.116

⁵⁹ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.80

alleged offences. All masters of ships were required to swear that they would observe truces and safe-conducts. Despite the 1414 enactment, the ports of Fowey and Polruan continued to be frequently implicated in the reports of piracy and privateering during this period. Kingsford contends that the ports of Fowey and Dartmouth were the most significant in the pursuance of piracy although all ports were implicated to some extent.⁶⁰

Following the death of Henry V, English seamen pressed for a relaxation of the 1414 enactment, and in 1430 and 1431 petitions requesting this amendment were presented in Parliament but were initially rejected. However, in 1435 further pressure from the merchants claiming that their enemies were so emboldened by the stringent nature of the 1414 enactment that the trade was being seriously affected, resulted in its suspension. The suspension was initially limited to seven years but, when that period had elapsed, it was extended for a further twenty years. Kingsford contends that the effectiveness of the 1414 enactment became clear on its suspension when incidents of piracy on both foreign and national shipping substantially increased. We see the evidence of this increase in the Fowey estuary in the records contained in the Calendar of Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493. These provide evidence of an escalation of the incidents of piracy in the area following the suspension such as:

- Chancery Proceedings: C1/7/119 (date: 1426-1432)
Symon Rydoul, a merchant from Amiens, claimed that he had loaded a ship with six tuns and one pipe of woad. The ship had been taken and brought into Fowey where the woad was

⁶⁰ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.82

delivered to John Smyth of Fowey. Furthermore, John Smyth had subsequently caused other unknown people to take the petitioner in a ship and throw him into the high sea, which he only prevented under duress by making a document of release to the wrong doers.⁶¹

- Chancery Proceedings:C1/70/103 (date:1432-1433)
John Brykles, a draper of London complained that whilst a ship freighted by his servant Robert Galos was on its way to London, it had been captured by William Chattoy and John Mesowet of Fowey in a balinger called the *Magdalene* of Plymouth. The balinger had been armed for war and had taken his ship into the port of Fowey, where John Galos had been fettered in irons for 6 weeks and forced to acquit them of the capture.⁶²
- Chancery proceedings: C1/11/204 (date 1433)
John Chirche, a mercer of London, had been trading under letters patent issued in 1432 with Spain. Under this authority, he had purchased eight tuns of oil in Seville, which had been loaded into a caravel of Genoa for passage to the port of Sandwich. However, whilst at sea John Mixstow of Fowey, together with Thomas Adam and John Waterman of Polruan and others in a balinger armed with 200 men had captured the caravel off Cape St. Vincent. After putting the crew ashore destitute on a barren coast in Portugal and Mixtow had taken it into the port of Fowey

⁶¹ D.M. Gardiner, (Ed.), *A Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1976), p.22

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.31

and there despoiled it of all its goods and merchandise.⁶³ Mixstow later claimed that he believed the crew to be 'Sarasesnes', although they were not. Despite an offer by John Chirche and the other merchants to prove ownership, they were initially denied redress. It was only when Chirche subsequently made a petition to Chancery, obtaining the support of the merchants of Genoa in London, that a commission of inquiry was held. It is notable that although a commission was issued to ensure that Chirche was recompensed nothing was done in the matter.⁶⁴

In response to the escalation of piracy following the suspension, in 1442 Henry VI passed an ordinance requiring ships on royal service be at sea between Candlemas to Martinmas to prevent further incidents.⁶⁵ However, as Kingsford points out, the royal ships themselves engaged in piracy and as a result, this ordinance had little effect.⁶⁶ Documentation included in the following entries in the Chancery Proceedings shows that the involvement of Fowey and Polruan in piratical activities continued unabated:

- Chancery Proceedings: C1/43/35 (date: 1438-1443)
The petitioner, John Lord Talbot and Furnyvale complained that his ship the *Margaret of Portladow* which was sailing to Rouen

⁶³ D.M. Gardiner, (Ed.), *A Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1976), p.36

⁶⁴ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.89

⁶⁵ Rolls of Parliament v. 59 as cited in C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.81

⁶⁶ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.81

with a load of salt was seized by the *Jenot of Fowey*, part-owned by Thomas Jerard of Fowey.⁶⁷

- Chancery Proceedings: C1/15/183

In the 1440s John Legodeck of Brittany claimed that his ship, the *St. Trevers* of Penmarch whilst loaded with salt was taken by “sea rovers” and forced into Fowey harbour where ship and freight were then sold to one Thomas Clerk of Ireland.⁶⁸

- Chancery Proceedings: C1/71/75 (date 1441-2)

Thomas Guychard, merchant of Brittany, who was joint owner of the ship *Katherine* of Blavet claimed that while the ship was sailing to England loaded with salt and wine it was seized the master and mate of a balinger of Fowey. The ship was brought into Fowey and goods valued at 350 nobles were taken from it.⁶⁹

- Chancery Proceedings: C1/22/57 (dated 1452-1453)

The petitioner, John Valanson, was a merchant of Brittany who was in possession of letters of safe conduct from the king for his ship *St. Yves* of St Malo together with its cargo and seamen. The ship, which carried 70 tuns of wine and 10 tons of iron, was on its way to England when it was seized by John Harle, the master of

⁶⁷ D.M. Gardiner, (Ed.), *A Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1976), p.44

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.65

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.55-56

a balinger the *Nicholas* of Fowey and brought into the port of Fowey and plundered.⁷⁰

- Chancery Proceedings: C1/22/14 (dated 1452-1453).
The petitioner claimed that the ship *Seyt Cruce* of Spain was seized whilst travelling under letters patent from the king, by Thomas Adam of Polruan master of a ship called *la Julyan* of Fowey. The *Seyt Cruce* was forcibly brought into the port of Fowey. Thomas Adam had previously been accused, amongst others, of seizing a Genoese carrack sailing to England from Spain and forcing it to land at the port of Fowey.

It was during this period one that of the most notorious west country pirates, John (or Hankyn) Seelander traded out of both Falmouth and Fowey. In 1442 Seelander, together with three other ship masters, was appointed by the Crown as privateers, charged with protecting the Cornish coast. It was the start of thirty years of increased piratical activity in the waters around Fowey. Evidence of some of his activities is seen in the Chancery Proceedings:

C1/16/234 (dated: 1443-4). This outlined the case of the petitioners who owned a pinnace, the *Mighell* of Dartmouth. This ship, when loaded with 21 tuns of wine and 17 pieces of linen, was sailing from Brittany to Plymouth when it was seized by a barge named *the Palmer* of Fowey

⁷⁰ D.M. Gardiner, (Ed.), *A Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1976), pp. 69-70

owned by John Hankyn (Seelander). The pinnace was taken to Newport where the goods onboard were taken from the ship.⁷¹

In 1443 Seelander captured the *Christofere* of Legue in Brittany and landed her cargo of in excess of one hundred tuns of wine in Fowey, together with iron and leather, for further distribution. Although orders were issued for the piratical ships and restitution of the cargo, nothing was done.⁷²

As Kingsford argues, during this period there is little evidence of the most notorious pirates being brought to justice. With many in the king's service also involved in the practice and a ready market for the cheap wine and other goods that were brought in, he maintains that effective enforcement was practically impossible without a sea-keeping force.⁷³ Furthermore, the Cornish gentry actively participated in the practice and in some cases owned the ships used, or received the goods seized. Kingsford cites as an example of the involvement of the Cornish gentry families, the case of piracy undertaken by the ship *Edward* of Polruan. In 1449, together with the barge *Mackerell* of Fowey, the *Edward* attacked a ship, the *Seynt Antoyne and Seynt Francisse* owned by merchants of Barcelona, despite the guarantee of safe conduct held by the vessel. The *Edward of Polruan* was owned by John Trevelyan, a significant individual in the court of Henry VI and holder of several stewardships in Devon and Cornwall. Its victuallers were Sir Hugh Courtney, and Thomas Tregarthen. Tregarthen was a water-bailiff at Dartmouth and a London lawyer serving at Lincoln's Inn. The victualler

⁷¹ D.M. Gardiner, (Ed.), *A Calendar of Early Chancery Proceedings relating to West Country Shipping 1388-1493* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1976), p.59

⁷² C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.91

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.93

of the *Mackerell* was Nicholas Carmynowe, a squire from one of the Cornish gentry families. After a failed first inquiry into the affair a second enquiry was ordered in 1452. The head of the enquiry was none other than Sir Hugh Courtenay, victualler to the *Edward*. As Kingsford points out, it was not surprising that the plaintiffs received no redress.⁷⁴

Hugh Courtenay of Boconnoc was frequently connected to piratical activities. His ships attacked both foreign and native vessels, bringing them into Fowey where their cargoes could be distributed. Despite this, Hugh Courtenay was named in 1469 as a Commissioner charged with investigating complaints of piracy in Fowey.

Another such individual was Richard Penpons, owner of the piratical vessel *The Kateryn* of St. Ives. Penpons was himself a justice of the peace as well as being employed on several king's commissions. The influence and status of such individuals ensured that many pirates throughout Cornwall escaped justice, continuing their activities without any penalty. Lorigan claims that many of the members of commissions into piratical activities were themselves receivers of the stolen goods.⁷⁵ As a result, Lorigan states, the Crown made very little effort to bring participants to justice, believing that any attempts would be a lost cause.

As this analysis shows, the extent of piracy and privateering in the region was considerably amplified by local conditions. Lorigan points out the absence of the nobility and distance from the centre of governance led to the local elite running the governance of the county, with local sheriffs and other office holders being drawn from local gentry families

⁷⁴ C.J. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), p.95

⁷⁵ C. Lorigan, *Boconnoc, the History of a Cornish Estate* (Stroud: The History Press, 2017), p.29

such as the Bodrugans and the Carminows.⁷⁶ Such families were themselves deeply involved in piratical activities and receivers of stolen cargoes. However, the effect of this could be mitigated in periods of strong monarchical controls and peaceful international relationships. These local and national factors were inter-related and resulted in fluctuating levels of activity throughout the period.

Exports

Tin

There is evidence that Cornwall has had a tin industry since pre-Christian times and that even the Phoenicians were familiar with Cornish tin.⁷⁷ Initially, Cornwall was the primary tin producer for the whole of western Europe, but when Spain was settled in the time of Augustus this produced an alternative supplier, resulting temporarily in the decline of Cornish production. After the Norman conquest, Cornish production was revived, and the tin extraction continued thereafter to be a significant industry despite the discovery of tin in Germany in 1214. Throughout the remaining medieval period, tin continued to be a prized commodity of which Cornwall was the main producer. As the administrative centre of the Duchy of Cornwall, Lostwithiel became the most significant stannary town. Here the tin was assayed prior to being transported by barge to the port of Fowey. The export of Cornish tin constituted a very significant element of Fowey maritime commercial activity throughout the later Middle Ages.

⁷⁶ C. Lorigan, *Boconnoc, the History of a Cornish Estate* (Stroud: The History Press, 2017), p.24

⁷⁷ T.A. Rickard, 'The Casserides and Ancient Tin Trade', *Journal of Royal Institute of Cornwall*, Vol. XXII, p.200, as cited in L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955), p.185

In general, information on the Cornish tin mining industry is considered difficult to accurately evaluate, partially because the high rate of taxes on tin led to under-declaration of output. Tin was subject to a duty of forty shillings per thousand-weight, or approximately 20% of the selling price. Furthermore, following the 1305 confirmation by Edward I of King John's charter, individuals involved in the mining industry were also exempt from most forms of taxation, meaning that the historian is forced to rely on just two main sources of information.

The first of these are the records relating to the subsidy of 1307. Whilst the original subsidy lists have largely been lost, a 1316 list of miners who had not yet paid still exists. John Hatcher has used this information to calculate that approximately two-thirds of the original debt was still outstanding in 1316 and from this has concluded that approximately two thousand people were originally taxed in 1307.⁷⁸ He concedes that this figure would still represent an under-estimate of the numbers of individuals engaged in mining activities in Cornwall, as many would have been exempt from the subsidy, or simply evaded the tax.

Tax evasion was rife in the industry, as tinnners sought to circumvent the problems created by the coinage system. Coinages were restricted to twice a year, thus extending the wait before tinnners could receive payment. Even then, not only was the tax of four shillings per hundredweight imposed but, as Halliday points out abuses of this system meant that tinnners were also expected to pay gratuities and give gifts to all the officers involved in the process including weighers, cutters, porters etc.⁷⁹ Halliday contends that it is unsurprising, therefore, that tin smuggling developed over the medieval period with travelling

⁷⁸ J. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.31

⁷⁹ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.147

tinkers purchasing small amounts of uncoined tin, “pocket tin” which was later smuggled aboard merchant ships harboured at Fowey and Mevagissey.⁸⁰

Further information can be deduced from the tribulage accounts, but Hatcher contends that these records are even more unreliable than the subsidy records.⁸¹ He reasons that this poll-tax levied on all who worked with a shovel failed to capture many of the other types of stannary labourers involved in mining activities. He demonstrates this by comparing the tax records of 1316 against the tribulage accounts for the Penwith and Kirrier stannary, and also the Blackmore stannary. In the former 450 individuals owed taxes but only 240 paid tribulage, and in the latter a total of 650 persons owed tax but only 265 had paid tribulage.

During the first half of the fourteenth century tin output consistently increased. In 1337 the production of tin reached record levels. Halliday contends that the production of increasingly popular church bells and also cannons required for the Hundred Years War jointly provided the stimulus for this production.⁸²

However, the advent of the Black Death in the 1340s decimated the production. There were wide fluctuations of the output of the tin mines during the medieval period, and as the industry was labour-intensive it was particularly affected by the Black Death. As Hatcher points out, the effect of the Black Death on mining activities was not only a result of deaths in the mining communities but also because the subsequent increases in pay enjoyed by agrarian labourers tempted many miners away from the difficulties and dangers of mining, prompting a migration

⁸⁰ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.148

⁸¹ J. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.30

⁸² F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.145

to agrarian labouring.⁸³ Indeed Hatcher argues that this was a factor in the relative demand for land and stability in land prices in Cornwall throughout the fourteenth century when compared to other regions. Even after excluding the effects of the pestilence, Hatcher points out that official tin outputs from Cornwall as a whole fluctuated from approximately 500,000 lbs. to 1,500,000 per annum.

Despite the effects of the Black Death on the availability of miners, in the years following 1350 plague the tin industry gradually recovered, reaching levels in the 1390s that almost met pre-plague amounts. However, tin production decreased consistently in the first half of the fifteenth century before levelling off at approximately 600,000lbs per annum until the end of the medieval period.

As the chief port for the export of tin from the Lostwithiel stannary, Fowey was one of the most significant Cornish ports for the industry, others included Falmouth, Mounts Bay and Padstow. In 1498 Fowey exported no less than 143,400 lbs. In the earlier part of the medieval period, tin was generally transported along the south coast to London, where Italian and French ships transported it onwards across the channel and into the Bay of Biscay. New overland trade routes were established and by the fourteenth century much of the tin was transported through France, Venice, and Constantinople to the Near East where it was used to plate the inside surfaces of copper vessels. Fluctuations in tin production would have had a significant impact on trade from the Fowey estuary.

It was during the later years of the period that we see the local gentry families involving themselves in the tin trade. Halliday contends that it was the absence of the nobility in this remote county that effectively

⁸³ J. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.146

created the peaceful conditions needed for these business enterprises to flourish.⁸⁴ We see the involvement of ancient gentry families in the Fowey area such as the Champernownes and the Courtenays of Boconnoc together with other established Cornish families from across the county such as the Grenvilles, the Arundells and the Godolphins.

As Elliott-Binns points out during the early part of the medieval period most of the exports from England were carried by foreign ships, and English traders largely tended to stay close to the coast.⁸⁵ There was some trade between Cornwall and Brittany and also with South Wales. However, during this earlier period, Cornish tin was largely carried by Italian and French ships, and some transported along the south coast to London for further export. Elliott-Binns suggests that one of the reasons for this was that trading ships of the time were very small, even a ship of two hundred tons being considered large, and therefore they more suited to coastal waters. He argues that, as Crusaders brought back new ideas from the Mediterranean, ship design improved, and vessels became larger enabling Cornish traders to venture further afield.⁸⁶

Thus, we see that the extent of maritime activity related to the export of tin through the Fowey estuary was significantly influenced by local, national, and international factors. Locally, the geology of the region and the presence of the Duchy stannary led to the development of trade routes. This was then further impacted by national influences such as the tin taxation system and the social upheaval seen throughout England in the post-Black Death era. Internationally, the absence of significant competition in the tin industry, and developments in the shipbuilding industry all combined to improve the profitability of the

⁸⁴ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.171

⁸⁵ L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955), p.185

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.186

trade, thus influencing the volume and range of Fowey's activities in tin transportation.

Wine and other commodities

During the Medieval period, Fowey had the largest share of Cornwall's foreign trade. The principal destination was Brittany and export cargoes included cloth, hide, wool, salt, linen, herrings, and other food. On their return, ships carried wine from Gascony, Spanish fruit, canvas and linen from Brittany, charcoal and wood from South Wales, and fish from Ireland. Small amounts of cloth were exported, but this was a relatively insignificant industry in Cornwall as the wool that was produced locally was of relatively poor quality.⁸⁷

After the tin trade, the import of wine represented the most profitable commercial trade in the estuary. As the Great Charter of 1337, in which Prince Edward was made Duke of Cornwall included, amongst other privileges, the right to the presage and custom of wine, this trade also created high-value revenues for the Duchy.

However, during this period the wine import trade was continually disrupted by on-going hostilities with France and the frequent embargoes that were imposed particularly during the reign of Edward II. As we saw above, many of the trading vessels fell prey to pirates, privateers, and wreckers, making commercial activities both expensive and dangerous.

Margery Kirkbride James has undertaken an extensive analysis of the medieval wine trade, and data she produced clearly shows the impact of the hostilities and other factors on the volumes of wine imported both through the Cornish ports and also elsewhere in England. For source data on the total amounts of wine exported from Gascony, James used

⁸⁷ L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955), p.187

the customs registers of Constables of Bordeaux which also allowed some additional analysis by area of production.⁸⁸ For information about the amounts of wine imported into England, James' primary source was the royal butler's accounts of the prise of wine. For areas that fell outside this jurisdiction, such as Chester, North and South Wales and Cornwall alternative sources were necessary. This data was obtained from the Recognizance Rolls of Chester, the accounts of the chamberlains of Wales, and the accounts of the Havener for Cornwall. At the start of the fourteenth century, James calculates that total wine imports to England approximated 20,000 tons annually, a figure that represented around a quarter of the total exports of Bordeaux.⁸⁹ A short period of decline was noted in 1310-1312 due to poor harvest and again in 1315-17 when the pestilence created a decline in exports. Trade began to recover in 1317 and by 1320 volumes had returned to levels experienced at the beginning of the century.

In the following years, we see the impact of worsening international relations on the wine volumes imported through the Cornish ports. The commencement of hostilities with France in 1324 created a sharp decline in the exports from Gascony where some of the military conflicts were located. James notes that whilst the trade gradually recovered due largely to Edward III's renewal of the privileges of the vintners of Gascony, it was notable that most importing was undertaken by denizen merchants, rather than the aliens who had previously predominated.⁹⁰ During this period a total of 18 ships were loaded in the Cornish ports, all by denizen merchants.

⁸⁸ M.K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.10

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14

The outbreak of the Hundred Years War in 1337, and the French destruction of many of the vineyards of Gascony, resulted in a sharp contraction of exports to less than a quarter of those of the previous year.⁹¹ As the war progressed the French galleys threatened the wine ships of England, necessitating special protection measures for the wine fleets as they crossed the Channel. Many of the ships previously involved in the wine trade were requisitioned for royal service, and in 1337 writs were issued prohibiting individual ships from trading unless under protection, in order to avoid their goods being captured by the enemy. Thus, a convoy arrangement was organized, which successfully protected relatively large fleets of ships. However, the continuity of supply was interrupted, and this considerably impacted the prices paid for wine during the period.

Truce in 1340 resulted in a brief respite from hostilities and a recovery of trade until the recommencement of hostilities in 1345, shortly followed by the arrival of the Black Death in Gascony in 1348. This resulted in a sharp temporary contraction of the trade. The costs associated with the protection of the wine fleet, resulted in a significant rise in the cost of wine in England, despite measures to fix the price. Prices continued to rise despite the cessation of hostilities following the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360. Whilst the denizen merchants of the Cornish ports laded eleven ships in the late 1330s, the years 1340/41 to 1348/49 show no further loadings. However, in the year 1363/64 alien merchants laded a total of 50 ships from Cornish ports.⁹²

The renewal of conflict in 1369, followed by the Black Death of 1374 in Bordelais and resulting famine of 1374 resulted in a further contraction

⁹¹ M.K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.15

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.102-104

in the amount of wine exported to approximately 8,000 tons in 1374-5.⁹³ It was not until the truces of 1383-5 and 1388-96, followed by the cessation of hostilities of 1396 that the wine-producing regions showed some signs of recovery with the re-planting of decimated vineyards. This trend is also evidenced in the data of wine entering through the Cornish ports which in 1383/84 laded 400 tons of wine but made no further imports until 1391/92 when a further 380 tons was imported.⁹⁴ Nationally, the percentage of Gascony wine that was exported to England increased in the last years of the fourteenth century and by the beginning of the fifteenth century supply was more consistent although prices remained high for the rest of the medieval period.

As James points out the supply of wine during the first half of the fifteenth century was far more consistent than seen in the fourteenth century although exports to England remained at the relatively low level of nine thousand to eleven thousand tons annually.⁹⁵ Higher levels of production were experienced in 1408 to 1410 and 1413 to 1418. This was also reflected in the imports through the Cornish ports which averaged 112 tons annually for the years 1403/04 to 1407/08, rising to an average of 421 tons annually for 1408/09 and 1409/10.⁹⁶ During the years 1410/11 to 1413/14, the annual average imported through the Cornish ports then dropped to 190 tons annually rising to an average of 447 tons annually for the years 1414/15 to 1417/18. Thus, fluctuations in Cornish ports appear to be directly impacted by the factors affecting production in Gascony.

⁹³ M.K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.27

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.107

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.38

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.108

In 1425/26 pests and diseases reduced the volume of wine produced. Again, we see this reflected in the Cornish imports which totalled just 151 tons in that year, a reduction of 169 tons from the previous year. Similarly, in 1427/28 poor weather badly affected the harvest, and the Cornish imports were reduced to just 11 tons in that year.

However, during this period the continuing hostilities had little effect on the wine-producing region until in 1438 the French forces once again attempted to capture the region. This had a disastrous effect on production, which was compounded by the pestilence of 1437-38. Volumes recovered to a certain extent but generally remained low until the Truce of Tours in 1444 which began a period of relative peace and prosperity for the next five years. Imports through the Cornish ports which had reduced to an average of only 278 tons annually for the three years between 1436/37 and 1438/39, also recovered and an average of 697 tons annually was achieved for the years between 1439/40 and 1448/49.

The 1450s saw unsettled trade with the capture of Bordeaux by the French. Whilst some trading continued, there were difficulties in arranging safe passage for ships, and no guarantees that these would be effective. Piracy was rife during this period and safe-conducts sometimes failed to protect the cargo from seizure.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, Louis XI encouraged the export of wine to countries other than England in an attempt to retain his control. He initially refused to allow English merchants access to Bordeaux even those possessing certificates of safe conduct. This reversed in 1463 when, in the Ordinance of Amboise, English merchants with safe conduct were allowed to trade in the city again. Despite this, trade remained difficult and unpredictable resulting in reductions in numbers of English merchants involved in the trade. Volumes of wine

imported were substantially reduced and the imports were generally undertaken by alien merchants, generally in small Spanish ships.

The volume of wine imports through the Cornish ports reflects the trading difficulties in the latter half of the century. Volumes did not recover until the 1490s. During the years 1450/51 to 1489/90 the annual average volume of wine imported through the Cornish ports reduced to just 235 tons annually.

The brief analysis above indicates that national and international influences had a more significant effect on Fowey's wine importing activities than purely local conditions. As with tin exporting activity, extended periods of poor international relationships were responsible for many disruptions to this lucrative trade. Factors local to the wine-producing regions in Bordeaux, such as poor weather and local conflicts affected production volumes. Nationally, attempts to fix the price of wine, and failure to adequately control the activities of pirates also impacted the extent and profitability of the trade.

Whilst never as significant as the wine trade, textile export also represented a consistent element in Fowey's commercial activity. The manufacture of Cornish textiles was a well-established trade in the period, as evidence by the purchase of Cornish burel cloth by the Royal Almoner in 1180/81.⁹⁷ During the early fifteenth century, Cornwall experienced an expansion in textile export, as East Cornwall and West Devon became significant areas of production.

In the 1440s an average of over one thousand cloths were exported from Plymouth and the Cornish ports including Fowey. Of this, approximately forty percent was shipped from the Cornish ports

⁹⁷ J. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.170

between the years 1418 and 1438 although this percentage reduced in subsequent years. The increase in exports was also experienced by Exeter and the ports of East Devon.

Hatcher argues that the expansion of the textile industry in Cornwall also locally increased the import of foodstuffs and local agricultural production, in order to feed the expanded population. Cloth production reduced somewhat by the mid fifteenth century, but Hatcher argues that the expanded food supply continued to be supported by the increased volumes of tin production in the west Devon stannaries' of Chagford, Tavistock and Ashburton. Thus, we see the inter-related factors affecting local importation of food and other goods as a result of increasing economic well-being and growing population levels.

Fishing and Salt

The trade in fish and salt also represented a significant element in Fowey estuary commercial activity in the latter part of the medieval period. Kowaleski has argued that the expansion of the south-western fisheries and the subsequent increases in related maritime activity have been an underappreciated element in the diversity of the Cornish economy.⁹⁸ This diversity, Kowaleski contends, offered some protection to Cornwall from national crises impacting the rest of England.

Using data available from the Exeter local customs accounts, Kowaleski was able to prove that the number of ships carrying fish tripled in the one-hundred-and-fifty-year period between 1315 and 1465. For the

⁹⁸ M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug. 2000), p.429

same period, the numbers of cargoes of fish and fish importers doubled.⁹⁹

The data that Kowalski extracted from the Exeter Local Port customs accounts for 1315-1320, 1386-1391 and 1460-65 records no ships from Fowey and Polruan during the earlier two periods but a total of nineteen ships between 1460-65. This points to the development of the Cornish coastal fishing industry, an assumption which is supported by the records of Fowey fishing vessels taxed during the period.¹⁰⁰ This trend is also reflected on the changes in the Cornish fishing industry in general, as Kowaleski points out that by the 1460s almost ninety percent of the ships carrying fish originated from Devon and Cornwall, and contrasts this with the position 150 years earlier when the herring trade from Yarmouth dominated the industry. In 1315-20 sixty-seven Yarmouth ships are recorded. By 1386-90 this number had reduced to five, and no Yarmouth shipping is recorded for the period 1460-65.¹⁰¹

Significantly, this change in location can be explained by the data which also points to changing trends in the type of fish imported to Exeter. During the 1315-1320 period, imports were dominated by herring and hake. By the 1490s a broader variety of fish appeared, including salmon, mulwell, ling broadfish, whitefish and sturgeon. Furthermore, fishing vessels from Devon and Cornwall were no longer restricted to local coastal fishing during this later period but had expanded their area of operation to include the west coast of Ireland, thus gaining access to a broader variety of fish. Kowaleski argues that the increasing per capita

⁹⁹ M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug. 2000), p.430

¹⁰⁰ DCO Ministers Accounts 75,79,80, 82,83,85 and 89 as cited in M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review* New Series Vol. 53, No. 3 (Aug.2000), p.434

¹⁰¹ M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug.2000), p.434

incomes available after the Black Death, the decline of the eastern fishing industry, and the Church's requirements that Christians abstain from meat for significant parts of the year, created a new demand that enabled this expansion to take place.¹⁰² Furthermore, the expanding fishing industry provided wealth and employment along the south Cornwall coast during this period. This was, in part, responsible for the improvements in economic stability enjoyed by region during this period. Employment was not restricted to the fishermen themselves, but also included the supporting industries of ship construction and fitting, together with fish predation and fish-curing which employed large numbers of women.¹⁰³

As we see from the above review, the factors influencing the salt and fish trade were predominantly influenced by national and international trends. Variations in demand reflect the changes in religious practice in contemporary society. This resulted in the relocation of the industry to the Cornish ports and expanded fisheries further afield.

Pilgrim Transportation

During the Middle Ages, many pilgrimage journeys were local in nature and this form of pilgrimage was frequently all that was available to the peasantry. Orme identifies twenty-seven pilgrimage sites in Cornwall, and local pilgrimage was an established practice in the county. The most significant pilgrim site in the county, and the only one that could be classified as a national shrine, was St Michael's Mount near

¹⁰² M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug.2000), p.449

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.446

Penzance.¹⁰⁴ What is pertinent to this dissertation is the maritime engagement in pilgrim transportation to sites in Europe, most notably to Santiago de Compostella in Galicia.

A number of pilgrim routes across Cornwall became established, sometimes following much older trading routes. One of the oldest of these was The Saints Way. This ancient pathway ran north to south across Cornwall from Padstow to Fowey. A long-established route, it had been used historically by traders and missionaries from Wales and Ireland. The route passed Bodmin where, in the twelfth century, Bishop Warelwast had reorganised the existing priory and formed a new Augustinian house. The house contained the relics of St. Petroc which ensured that a considerable amount of revenue was generated from pilgrims, leading ultimately to the emergence of Bodmin as one of the wealthiest towns in Cornwall at the time.¹⁰⁵ During the medieval period, the Saints Way became a commonly used route in Cornwall for pilgrims seeking not only local religious sites, but also passage from Fowey to visit pilgrimage sites overseas. Of these, the three most significant shrines were those of Peter and Paul in Rome, the holy site at Jerusalem, and the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostella. As Orme points out, it was Santiago de Compostella which was particularly popular as it was the nearest of the three and the voyage was relatively easy.¹⁰⁶

This holy site, dedicated to St. James, attracted pilgrims from across Europe. Several overland routes to the shrine were established across Europe and guides were available which gave information on towns and

¹⁰⁴ N. Orme, *Medieval Pilgrimage, with a Survey of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Bristol* (Exeter: Impress Books Ltd., 2018), p. 46

¹⁰⁵ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.119

¹⁰⁶ N. Orme, *Cornwall and the Cross: Christianity 500-1560* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 2007), p.121

hospices along the routes. The perils that pilgrims faced were numerous as routes passed over mountain ranges, through forests and over rivers. Tolls were demanded at various points along the routes and pilgrims could be attacked if they lacked the means to pay.¹⁰⁷ These dangers, together with the uncertainties caused by conflict across Europe led many pilgrims to choose the relative safety of a sea crossing directly to Corunna, just a short distance from Santiago. Generally, English pilgrims travelled via Lymington, whilst those originating from Ireland and Wales used the South Cornish ports. However, as Orme points out, pilgrims travelled across Cornwall using a variety of routes and therefore embarked on the voyage from ports all along the South Cornish coast.¹⁰⁸ As evidence of this he points to the 1434 issue of pilgrim licences to Falmouth, Landulph, St. Michael's Mount, Penzance and Saltash as well as Fowey.

The practice of pilgrimage was promoted by the Church as it provided a useful source of revenue. Christians who believed that they had sinned were required to confess their sins and seek absolution, which was initially only granted on the performance of penance by the sinner. During the early medieval period, the Church began to offer indulgences which allowed the recipient to avoid the performance of the allotted penance, by payment of a defined sum of money to the Church. The earliest indulgences of this type were issued only in circumstances where the penitent was not physically able to perform the required penance. However, in the eleventh century general indulgences, which

¹⁰⁷ J. Sumption, *Pilgrimage, An Image of Medieval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 177

¹⁰⁸ N. Orme, *Cornwall and the Cross: Christianity 500-1560* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 2007), p.121

gave remission to anyone prepared to meet the financial requirements began to make an appearance.

Early indulgences offered to remit only a portion of the required penance. As Sumption points out, these early papal indulgences were only granted sparingly. However, bishops who realised their financial advantages quickly claimed the right to issue indulgences themselves and were far more generous, particularly to local churches.¹⁰⁹

During the thirteenth century, there was further expansion in the quantities of plenary indulgences. These indulgences offered remission for all the sins that the penitent had ever committed. It was, as Sumption points out, a guarantee of salvation.¹¹⁰ At a time of fervent religious belief, in particular the fear of the torments of purgatory, it is unsurprising that pilgrim travel to sites that offered plenary indulgences such increased in this period.

The papacy exploited the financial benefits of indulgences and by the end of the medieval period, any shrine wishing to obtain plenary indulgence for a year was required to pay an up-front fee of 400 to 500 gold florins, together with a percentage of the income from pilgrims. This varied from approximately one third to seventy percent.¹¹¹

In the twelfth century Don Diego Gelmirez, Bishop of the see of Santiago claimed that he had obtained the favour of a Jubilee Year, enabling the Cathedral to grant plenary indulgences whenever July 25th fell on a Sunday. This happens in a sequence of six, five, six and eleven years. As Storrs points out, however, authorities on the history of the

¹⁰⁹ J. Sumption, *Pilgrimage, An Image of Medieval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 142

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.142

¹¹¹ A.R. Bell, and R.S. Dale, 'The Medieval Pilgrimage Business', *Enterprise and Society*, Vol.12, no. 3 (September 2011), p.605

cathedral acknowledge that this was not adequately documented.¹¹² This practice was to affect the frequency and timing of pilgrim transportation voyages from Fowey.

Gelmirez also enhanced and beautified the buildings around the shrine. As Storrs points out, this coincided with a surge in secular and religious literary output such as *Historia Compostelana*, the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* and the philosophical works of Averroes. Storrs argues that these contributed to a 'Golden Age' of pilgrimage which increased English interest in the shrine.¹¹³

As Storrs points out, in the early medieval period the numbers of pilgrims crossing the English Channel to Galicia travelling to Santiago de Compostella fluctuated widely, reflecting the dangers of maritime activities and lack of ships during the Hundred Years War. For the earlier part of the Hundred Years War Storrs admits that it is hard to obtain accurate data for the voyages.¹¹⁴ During this early period, pilgrims made their way independently in small groups and were frequently transported on trading ships primarily carrying other goods. The practice of pilgrimage was often associated with journeys taken primarily for other purposes. As Storrs points out, however, the numbers of pilgrims undertaking this journey during the first half of the fourteenth century appear to be considerable as evidenced from later accounts of their journeys.¹¹⁵ It is likely that the exaggerated claims of

¹¹² A. Lopez Ferreiro, *Historia*, IV, Appendice LIV pp. 138-139 as cited by C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.40

¹¹³ C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.42

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.111

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.77

indulgences and proliferation of stories of miracles of the time contributed to these numbers.

However, with the temporary respite in hostilities, after the Treaty of Bretigny, it became a requirement for masters of ships transporting pilgrims to firstly apply to Chancery for a licence to do so. These licences provide us with evidence on the extent of Fowey's contribution to this trade. Constance Storrs has undertaken a comprehensive review of the licenses granted for pilgrim ships to Santiago de Compostella. The data Storrs analysed covers the period 1361 to 1484 and this allows some clarification of the numbers involved in pilgrim voyages from Fowey between these years.

However, the interpretation of this data requires some caution as the terms varied between licences, and some pilgrims were transported in unlicensed vessels. Occasionally licences were issued without a limit on the number of pilgrims carried, such as that granted to Walter Derby of Bristol, who was permitted to transport any number of people provided that they were not of a prohibited category and were of no great estate.¹¹⁶ Some licences were issued for just one voyage but others were valid for a year or a pilgrim season with no limitations as to the number of times that the voyage could be undertaken during that period. As a result of these factors, total numbers of voyages or quantities of pilgrims carried cannot be accurately ascertained from this data, but it is nevertheless useful in identifying national and local trends.

For the first thirty years of this period, no pilgrim licences were issued to Fowey vessels. Very few licences were issued at all in England, even in Jubilee Years, and Storrs attributes this initially to the reduction of numbers of available ships following the disasters at La Rochelle and

¹¹⁶ C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.120

later to further shortages created by the expeditions of Cambridge and Lancaster.¹¹⁷

Despite the lack of licences, Storrs points out that some Englishmen were still undertaking pilgrimage to Santiago.¹¹⁸ As evidence Storrs gives the case of six people from Beverly and Barton who were imprisoned on their return journey in 1375.

Following the Truce of Luelingham which ended the second phase of the Hundred Years War, Storrs notes that there was a revival in the pilgrim trade.¹¹⁹ This is reflected in the first licence we see issued to a Fowey vessel in 1394. The George of Fowey was licenced to carry eighty pilgrims that year. Storrs notes that the following year, 1395, being a Jubilee year saw the peak of pilgrim transport sailings for the fourteenth century.¹²⁰ The George of Fowey was again licensed to carry eighty pilgrims in 1395.

Halliday observes that the port of Fowey benefitted from the presence of a large Irish population in Padstow at this time. He contends that this encouraged Irish pilgrims to land at Padstow, and many then took the shortcut across Cornwall, through Bodmin, to Fowey.¹²¹ Some, on the other hand, took the opportunity to visit the shrine at St. Michael's Mount before their voyage, but may have been deterred by continuing

¹¹⁷ C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.112

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p49

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.113

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.161

harassment by the French, despite the Parliamentary grant to the prior of St. Michael's Mount for the maintenance of a garrison.¹²²

For the first twenty years of the fifteenth century, the pilgrim trade continued at a slow pace. As Storrs points out, this period marks a time of civil war and succession disputes in Spain which continued to deteriorate into the second half of the century.¹²³ In 1401 a license was issued for the Mary of Fowey to carry fifty pilgrims. There were no further licenses issued for Fowey vessels until 1411 when the Margaret of Fowey was licensed to carry thirty pilgrims. In 1413 and 1414 just one license was issued each year for Fowey vessels and thereafter until 1428 no further licenses were issued to Fowey vessels. This reflects the national pattern of the time and Storr notes that even Margery Kempe was forced to wait six weeks in the port of Bristol for a pilgrim ship to Galacia.¹²⁴

As Storrs points out sailings after 1423 were principally limited to Jubilee Years at Santiago de Compostela, but that the pilgrim trade during those years was very active.¹²⁵ In 1428, for example, Storrs notes that nationally fifty-four licenses were issued for the transportation of two thousand, eight hundred and forty-two pilgrims.¹²⁶ This trend was

¹²² F.E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall* (London: The House of Stratus, 2000), p.162

¹²³ C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.49

¹²⁴ S.B. Meech and H.E. Allen (eds.) *The Book of Margery Kempe* (E.E.T.S. Original Series, CCXII, 1940) p.107 as cited in C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.114

¹²⁵ C.M. Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century* (London: Confraternity of Saint James, 1998), p.111

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.114

reflected in Fowey where we see four licenses for a total of one hundred and ninety pilgrims that year.

The following Jubilee year, 1434, saw the maximum number of pilgrims from Fowey, reaching approximately two hundred and ten. This was also the peak year nationally for the issue of licenses, a total of sixty-one licenses for two thousand, nine hundred and ninety pilgrims. The year 1445 saw the start of the decline in numbers both nationally and in Fowey where just two licenses for one hundred and ten pilgrims were issued. Activity for the rest of the fifteenth century was much reduced.

It is likely that the decline in numbers of pilgrim sailings from Fowey reflected a national trend which was partially due to the practice of selling dispensations from vows of pilgrimage. The practice of issuing dispensations began in 1350 when Pope Clement VI allowed people from Mallorca to claim a Jubilee indulgence without having to make a pilgrimage to Rome in return for a payment representing the cost of the journey. This practice was later extended to dispensation for pilgrimage journeys to other notable shrines. The amount charged reflected the income of the individual and the cost that the journey would have incurred. Initially, Rome and Santiago de Compostella were generally excluded from these dispensations and thus the effect on the Fowey pilgrim sailings was limited. However, as Sumption points out, by 1470 dispensations included a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella.

The effects of the sale of dispensations were compounded by the practice of offering indulgences *ad instar* i.e. offering the indulgences of major shrines, including Santiago de Compostella, from smaller local churches, enabling pilgrims to avoid long and hazardous journeys overseas, and therefore reducing the number of pilgrim sailings.

Furthermore, as Sumption points out, the fifteenth century also witnessed the production of a number of Lollard texts, such as the *Lanterne of Light*, which claimed traditional pilgrimage was unnecessary as living a Christian life fulfilled the same function. Adair contends that Chaucer's book, *The Canterbury Tales*, which was written between 1380 and 1400, paints an image of pilgrimages undertaken for secular reasons, and that this reflects changes in contemporary opinions.¹²⁷ Adair also contends that another fundamental reason for the decline in pilgrimage in the late fifteenth century was that the religious practice inherent in pilgrimage had been developed to such an extent that they 'strained the credulity of intelligent contemporaries'.¹²⁸

As the above brief assessment shows, trends in pilgrim transportation from Fowey were largely caused by changes in international Christian practice, rather than any local influences.

Conclusion

In summary, when we look at the chronology of the factors affecting all maritime activity in the Fowey Estuary, a pattern of increasing activity and prosperity throughout this period can be determined. The area benefitted from a number of significant attributes which supported this development: a natural deep harbour; an established ship-building industry; the presence of valuable minerals; a history of maritime activity and the presence of significant numbers of highly experienced mariners amongst others.

¹²⁷ A. Adair, *The Pilgrims' Way: Shrines and Saints in Britain and Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) p.14

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

These factors alone are not, however, sufficient to explain the changing level and types of maritime activity in the late medieval period. Instead, it is clear that external, national factors are also required to provide a comprehensive explanation. Thus, the claim that Cornwall was immune to external influences appears to be rejected. The evidence indicates that the pattern of maritime activity in the Fowey estuary exhibits a more complex influence of multi-layered inter-related factors at an international, national, and local level.

Nationally, the fluctuations in international relations such as those experienced in the Hundred Years War affected the availability of ships and manpower in Cornwall as it did elsewhere. At a local level, the presence of the Edward of Woodstock's headquarters in Lostwithiel on the Fowey estuary ensured that his role in the war had a disproportionate impact on the local area. Fowey was one of the key strategic ports during this period along with Dartmouth and Plymouth, and the provision of ships and men for then king's service had a detrimental effect on some commodities trading. However, this also resulted in the advantages of further development of the ship-building and fitting industries and the training of local mariners. Indeed, Kowalski argues that it is these factors which contributed to the availability of ships and trained seamen, which allowed the future development of fishing, maritime trade, and pilgrim transportation which brought economic prosperity and stability to the area in the later medieval period.¹²⁹

Similarly, at a national level, it is apparent that the relative strength or weakness of the reigning monarchy demonstrably affected the impact of

¹²⁹ M. Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug.2000), p.451

piracy and privateering on the southern coastlines. Their capacity to enforce national regulations to control piracy was critical to the provision of safe passage for trading vessels. At a local level, this was compounded by the distance to England's centre of governance in London and also the active involvement of many of the Cornish gentry, factors which insured that culprits often evaded justice. Furthermore, the fluctuating impact of piracy and privateering that this created impacted on the level of business confidence which was required for the substantial investments that shipbuilding represented.

Across the nation labour-intensive industries were decimated by successive waves of plague. These similarly affected the production of tin were the most significant factor in the volumes of the mineral extracted and transported from Fowey harbour. Locally the choice of Lostwithiel to be Cornwall's largest stannary ensured that Fowey remained the most significant Cornish exporter of the mineral. This brought prosperity to the area, and this was a major factor in the development of both the shipping industry and all the associated ancillary functions. However, as a result the prosperity of Lostwithiel, Fowey and Polruan were disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of fluctuations in both price and production volumes.

In the aftermath of the plague, there was social upheaval and a demand for rising wages across England. The increased wealth not only affected the demand for wine and similar luxury goods. The trade in wine was affected by national and international factors. As we have seen volumes of wine production were impacted by poor weather and the effects of pestilence, in addition to the destruction of vineyards that took place when Gascony became an area of conflict with the French forces. Even when sufficient quantities of wine were available for import

the effect of poorly controlled piracy and privateering sometimes dissuaded merchants from investing in this trade.

The expansion of textile production in Cornwall in the early fifteenth century attracted a higher population to the area. Increases in the export of cloth were matched by greater imports of foodstuffs to feed the growing population. Increasing wealth following the aftermath of the plague also boosted the demand for wider varieties and greater quantities of fish. The cessation of warfare enabled the import of cheap salt allowing this demand to be fulfilled efficiently by the rapidly expanding Cornish fishing industry.

We have also examined the trade in pilgrim transportation through the issue of pilgrim ship licenses, principally to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. Clear trends are apparent and these principally rely on the factors relating to the public perception of pilgrimage as a whole and those specifically associated with Santiago de Compostella itself, such as the impact of the plenary indulgences offered by the site. Locally, the presence of a long-established route initially used as a trade path but later associated with pilgrims, together with a supporting network of holy houses and shrines along the Saints Way enabled a significant number of pilgrims to make their way to the Cornish south coast and thereafter depart for Galacia from Fowey Harbour. The presence of a large Irish population in Padstow encouraged Irish pilgrims to the established Saints Way route across Cornwall from Padstow, through Bodmin, to Fowey. However, the medieval view of pilgrimage was changing and by the end of the fifteenth century, the practice had lost much of its earlier significance. The reducing quantity of pilgrims transported from Fowey to Galacia in the fifteenth century, reflected decreasing numbers of pilgrimages undertaken internationally as religious practice and beliefs

started to reflect new ideas that were eventually a contributory factor in the English Reformation.

By examining the above, it is apparent that all maritime activity was profoundly influenced by national and international factors as well as local influences. These are clearly closely inter-related and when they are viewed as a whole provide the historian with an overview of patterns of trade in a Cornish community within the context of political and social change affecting the whole of Western Europe. In doing so, it has become apparent that both national and local factors contributed significantly. Furthermore, we see that the county and its people were active participants in the conflict and the growth of commercial enterprise that are so indicative of this period of history. Whilst outside the scope of this dissertation, further research on the social structure of Cornwall may provide additional insights into the medieval development of the area. It has been apparent throughout this study that a significant factor for the economic development of the area was the presence of an influential gentry class made up of a relatively small number of Cornish families. Perhaps due to the distance from the centre of governance, the influence of the nobility was less apparent than in other parts of the kingdom. As a result, the gentry families may have had more significant influence than they would otherwise have done. Further research might provide useful additional analysis of the impacts of this social structure on the religious, commercial, and cultural aspects of Cornish society.

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