

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Taunton traders who were burgesses or tenants of the bishop of Winchester enjoyed freedom from tolls and dues whether trading by land or water, except the royal trona of wool for export. The burgesses were free of toll under the charter of King Stephen *c.* 1137 and the tenants under a charter of 1231—2.<sup>1</sup> That right was confirmed by the king in 1381.<sup>2</sup> Freedom from duties means that Taunton merchants often went unrecorded in port accounts. Although cloth production was a major impetus for trade it is clear that agricultural produce had been an important export in the 13th century when the bishop of Winchester's tenants were required to carry grain to Topsham, Devon and load it onto ships and to bring wine from Topsham and Exeter as well as Bridgwater. The pipe rolls do not record overseas corn sales so that requirement might be an obsolete custom but wine was bought at Exeter and other goods such as building stone and timber came upriver from Bridgwater in the mid 13th century and grain may have gone back down.<sup>3</sup> The surname Merchant occurs in the 14th century.<sup>4</sup> Some clothiers described themselves as merchants and cloth trading was the foundation of wealth for many prominent Taunton families. Several invested in land and became country gentlemen although often retaining a town house but others preferred to remain burgesses and several served as MPs for the town.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 14th century Taunton merchants like Nicholas le Webbe shipped woad, weld and mordants through Exmouth. They did not confine themselves to dyes but also imported large quantities of onions, presumably from Brittany, almonds, wax, copper, pitch and tar.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Cal. Chart. R.* 1226—57, 145; 1257—1300, 274, 324.

<sup>2</sup> *Cal. Close*, 1377—81, 447—8.

<sup>3</sup> Hunt, *Med. Customs Taunton*, xxxiv—xxxv, 32; SHC, T/PH/win 1244—8.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, CP40/541, image 35; 732, images 944, 1559: at [waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021; T. Mayberry, *The Vale of Taunton Past* (Chichester, 1998), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Below, *soc. hist.*; *parl. rep.*

<sup>6</sup> M. Kowaleski, *Local Customs Accounts of the Port of Exeter* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc, 1993), 78, 126—7, 128, 178, 198.

The cloth trade involved a network of merchants across England and overseas. Much Taunton trade through the Bristol Channel ports was with Spain, which seems to have been a good market for coloured English cloth. In the 14th century Taunton narrow cloths or ‘straits’ were exported to Andalusia.<sup>7</sup> Much Taunton cloth was sold through Exeter by the late Middle Ages but also through Bristol and Bridgwater where in 1385 three Taunton drapers were accused of selling cloth away from the stalls on market day.<sup>8</sup> Of c.15 traders recorded with debts owed or owing on statutes staple with merchants from neighbouring counties and London in the 14th century the largest debt was £250 incurred by two brothers in 1397. Debts of £40 or more were not uncommon in the later decades of the century.<sup>9</sup> The merchandise is not specified on the staple debts but debts were incurred in the wine and cloth trades.<sup>10</sup> Traders also found themselves having to supply the Crown for war in Wales and c. 1405 one was owed £49 for wine, ale, grain and the cost of 12 archers.<sup>11</sup>

Taunton merchants objected to paying customs at Exeter in the 15th century claiming it was against the franchises granted to the bishop of Winchester whose tenants they were. Their freedom from custom appears to have been accepted except during the period in the mid 16th century when the Crown held Taunton Deane manor.<sup>12</sup> Mid 15th-century Taunton merchants were owed money by merchants and others from Cornwall, Bideford, Barnstaple, Minehead, Bridgwater, Bristol, Weymouth, Lyme, Exeter and Dartmouth. Seven Taunton merchants were in the Common Pleas in one term in 1444.<sup>13</sup> During the 15th century traders bought and sold goods in Bristol and London possibly much for onward trade and there were

<sup>7</sup> W.R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978), 79.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, C1/197/79; C 1/220/61; T. B. Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Archives, 1377—99* (Som. Rec. Soc. LIII), 439.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, C241/152/3; C 241/158/31; C 241/171/21; C 241/178/49; C 241/184/2; C 241/187/87.

<sup>10</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1391—6, 679; 1396—9, 128.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, E 28/25.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, C1/6/329; BL, Lansdowne MS 110/19.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, CP40/732/732, images 107, 312, 944, 1258, 1559, 1588, 1636; 748, image 1450; 788, images 1263, 1830, 1936; 853, image 60; 861, image 220: at [waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021.

inland trading links with Salisbury, Wilts.<sup>14</sup> A Taunton merchant sold woad to a London mercer c. 1500.<sup>15</sup> In 1557 a Taunton merchant made his will in London.<sup>16</sup>

A man from Bordeaux came to Taunton with two horses buying goods from seven London merchants, probably at the fair, in 1426 and was defrauded by men from Taunton and Exeter.<sup>17</sup> The circulation of foreign coin in the town may explain why a counterfeiter's hoard of forged and blank later 15th-century French coins and jettons was found on the premises of the former George inn.<sup>18</sup> In 1429 Taunton merchants contributed £15 to the loan to the king, more than any other town in the county.<sup>19</sup> Several probably acted as money lenders.<sup>20</sup> Two merchants were pardoned in 1561 for carrying money out of the realm.<sup>21</sup> In 1567 another owed £600 to a Hanseatic merchant.<sup>22</sup>

Trade with Brittany was important in the 15th and 16th centuries. A Taunton merchant joined with Breton merchants c. 1440 to recover a ship laden with canvas, cloth and iron from a Dartmouth mariner who had seized it.<sup>23</sup> Two brothers paid a Taunton weaver not only to be apprenticed to the trade but also for instruction in the Breton language.<sup>24</sup> In 1467 two Taunton merchants were accused of freighting 5,000 pieces of tin and 3000 dozen woollen cloths in a St Malo carvel from Topsham without licence or customs.<sup>25</sup> In the 1490s a Taunton vessel shipped Breton linen, wine, woad and iron.<sup>26</sup> From the early 16th to early 17th centuries Bretons bought woollen cloth from Taunton and sold linen to its merchants.<sup>27</sup>

Widowed Joan Best sold linen cloth to a Taunton merchant in Bristol, presumably at St James

<sup>14</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1441—6, 308; 1452—61, 2; 1461—7, 173, 413; TNA, CP40/841, image 37; 861, image 345; 895, image 348: [www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, C1/58/1.

<sup>16</sup> Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—58*, 204.

<sup>17</sup> TNA SC 8/188/9375; *Cal. Close*, 1422—9, 271.

<sup>18</sup> SWHT, HER 44409

<sup>19</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1429—36, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Dunning and Tremlett, *Bridgwater Borough Archives*, p. 80.

<sup>21</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1560—3, 99.

<sup>22</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1566—9, 122.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, C1/73/84

<sup>24</sup> TNA, C1/108/42

<sup>25</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1467—77, 55.

<sup>26</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, *The Expansion of Exeter At the Close of the Middle Ages* (1963) 21.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, C1/308/72; C1507/9.

fair in the early 16th century, and sued for goods bought by her late husband in Brittany.<sup>28</sup> Taunton merchants shipped linen, spices and dyes mainly from Morlaix where they had agents and agreed for ships.<sup>29</sup> A Taunton goldsmith settled an account with a Devon merchant with bills of exchange in Rouen.<sup>30</sup> Taunton merchants imported Rochelle salt and in 1588 three shipped 54 cloths to La Rochelle probably in return for salt.<sup>31</sup> By 1603 Taunton merchant James Reynolds (d. 1611) was shipping black and coloured bays, russets, reddings, dunsters and blue mells through Lyme to Morlaix where he had English agents whom he supplied with high value bills of exchange. They bought for him large quantities of canvas, dowlais and other linen cloth. In 1606—7 he received two shipments each worth almost £600 and in 1610 his agent sent tregar and dowlais worth over £400.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1440s Richard Burton of Taunton appealed for safe conduct for the 120-ton *Mary of Bilbao* and her crew to bring the goods he had bought from a Spanish merchant and to return with English merchandise.<sup>33</sup> Henry Bishop exported cloth to Spain in 1493 and Taunton cloth shipped to San Sebastian, Spain c. 1500 was attached for the factor's debts. In 1547 a cargo of 68 dozen tauntons and kerseys and 51 serges was shipped to San Sebastian.<sup>34</sup> Cloth for Spain also went via Bordeaux.<sup>35</sup> James Joyce made his will in London in 1534 before voyaging to Toulouse and Lyons but it was the following year on a visit to Bilbao that he was taken ill and died at the house of an English resident.<sup>36</sup>

By c. 1500 John Roper had delivered bridgwaters, ware cloth and tauntons worth £60 to a factor at Lisbon to sell on his account.<sup>37</sup> Portuguese trader Pedro Gonzalez was in

<sup>28</sup> TNA, C1/335/31, 91.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, C1/308/72; C1/335/31; C1/717/23; *Acts PC*, 1587—8., p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, C1/625/9—10.

<sup>31</sup> D. Taylor, 'Somerset's Sixteenth-Century Maritime History', *A Maritime History of Som.* (Taunton, 2010), 6; TNA, E190/1081/1.

<sup>32</sup> SHC, DD/TOR/422. Tregar a coarse linen cloth from Trequier.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, SC8/186/9289.

<sup>34</sup> *VCH Som.* VI, 218—19.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, PROB11/10/31; C1/253/46.

<sup>36</sup> F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1531—58* (Som. Rec. Soc. 21), 22—3.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, C1/567/83.

Taunton in 1545 when he bought 2 butts of sack for his host and borrowed money, presumably to buy merchandise.<sup>38</sup> In late 1575 Hugh Andrews had two shipments from Lisbon through Bristol of 18 ton of woad and 26 cwt of spices worth a total of over £439.<sup>39</sup> Trade with Italy was presumably less important than with the Atlantic seaboard as six Taunton men on a Fowey ship seized a Genoese carrack c. 1434, put the crew ashore in Portugal and sold the cargo.<sup>40</sup>

Overseas trade had its dangers both personal and economic. One of Alexander Toose's servants had to be ransomed when he was taken at sea in the 15th century.<sup>41</sup> Two merchants were in dispute in 1481 over the release of another who had been in chains in prison in Dieppe.<sup>42</sup> More commonly factors abroad failed to account for merchandise delivered to them for onward sale or falsified the sale of goods.<sup>43</sup> Many mercantile Taunton families had brothers and sons trading elsewhere sharing the cost of overseas ventures.<sup>44</sup> In 1543 the two sons of a Taunton merchant were overseas trading for their father.<sup>45</sup>

One of the commonest reasons for litigation in the later 15th century was bond debt for wool and cloth. In the 1460s a parcel of woollen cloth intended for overseas trade was bought for £90.<sup>46</sup> Some traders bought Taunton cloth for sale to merchants for export but the trade depended on credit. A barber who invested in the purchase and resale of 'watchetts' and Taunton cloth lost money when a purchaser absconded.<sup>47</sup> In the 1590s Taunton cloth was sold in packs of 55 on credit, which might be extended for several years.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>38</sup> J. Vanes, *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538—50* (Bristol Rec. Soc. XXVIII, 1974), 271.

<sup>39</sup> Flavin and Jones, *Bristol's trade... 1503—1601*, 715.

<sup>40</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1429—36, 355, 469.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, C1/108/1.

<sup>42</sup> *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, II, C. 51786.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, C1/253/46; C1/1112/2.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. *L&P Hen. VIII* Add (1), p. 318.

<sup>45</sup> Weaver, *Som. Wills 1531—58*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, C1/27/164; C1/28/291; C1/29/98; C1/74/107.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, C1/28/291; C1/186/12; C1/197/79.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, C1/186/12..

Taunton merchants used a variety of ports, possibly because each family or business monopolised a particular trade route and that spread the risk for the town's trade as a whole. Also although some specialised in the cloth trade most merchants had a mix of trade goods including woad and other dyes, wine, spices, oil and iron.<sup>49</sup> Most merchants used Topsham and Exeter, and later Lyme, rather than the Bristol Channel ports.<sup>50</sup> The last continued to be used for Welsh and Irish trade and in 1464 Thomas Blower imported four tuns of iron and 51 dozens of linen cloth from an Irish merchant based in Bridgwater. He and his father John Blower exported and imported cloth in the 15th century.<sup>51</sup> Taunton red cloths appear occasionally in the customs records of Somerset ports and coal and iron came through Bridgwater.<sup>52</sup> A Taunton mercer lent money to Bridgwater men in the late 15th century and a merchant took a Bridgwater merchant's son as his apprentice.<sup>53</sup> During the 16th and early 17th century finished cloth was exported through both Bridgwater and Lyme Regis.<sup>54</sup> Bristol was still used by some Taunton merchants to import wine and woad like Simon Fisher and Thomas Mefllyn in 1504. The latter was in dispute with the sheriff of Bristol over merchandise from Brittany.<sup>55</sup> Richard Newton of Taunton was in Chepstow in 1564 presumably to accompany his cargo of iron, wine and vinegar to Bristol.<sup>56</sup>

Taunton men were trading through Southampton by the 15th century.<sup>57</sup> In 1502 Edward Goldeston of Taunton was owed money by a Southampton sheerman and a Lombard and left money to St Michael's church, Southampton and also to Twyneham church, possibly

<sup>49</sup> F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Wills 1501—30* (Som. Rec. Soc. 19), 124—5; TNA, C1/475/33.; PROB 11/14/794.

<sup>50</sup> medievalandtudorships.org: accessed 30 July 2020; below, this section.

<sup>51</sup> TNA, C1/28/291; C1/220/61; SHC, D/B/bw/173.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, 'Somerset's Sixteenth-Century Maritime History', *Maritime Hist. Som.* 6.

<sup>53</sup> R.W. Dunning and T.D. Tremlett, *Bridgwater Borough Archives* (Som. Rec. Soc. 70), p. 42; SHC, D/B/bw/842.

<sup>54</sup> Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 166.

<sup>55</sup> Flavin and Jones, *Bristol's trade... 1503—1601*, 715.

<sup>56</sup> J. Vanes, *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the 16th century* (Bristol Rec. Soc. XXXI, 1979), 45; Flavin and Jones, *Bristol's trade... 1503—1601*, 664.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, CP40/853, image 1375: [www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40](http://www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40) accessed May 2021. *Acts of PC*, 1586—7, p. 19; P. Ashford, 'The West Somerset Woollen Trade, 1500—1714', *PSANHS CLI*, 171.

his birthplace. He traded in violet bridgwaters and copper, leaving 1,000 lb and 250 lb of beaten wares to Twyneham church.<sup>58</sup> Although ports from Lyme westward were favoured by the late 16th century Taunton merchant Walter Edney owed money in Southampton in 1586.<sup>59</sup>

Taunton established strong links with Lyme, Dorset. John Bishop's kinsman and namesake in Lyme in 1499 possibly acted as his agent.<sup>60</sup> The Roper al. Potell family of merchants also had a member in Lyme until c. 1559 and at least one Lyme merchant settled in Taunton.<sup>61</sup> Taunton merchants left money to maintain Lyme cobb, presumably because they used it, and also to the church fraternity and the almshouses there.<sup>62</sup> William Leonard not only retained his father's house in Lyme but leased a 'great house' there and owned much property in Taunton. The family may have come from Brittany.<sup>63</sup> In the early 16th century a Lyme merchant sued for payment for linen bought by William Mory of Taunton deceased.<sup>64</sup> Taunton merchant William Godber exported Taunton and Hampshire cloth through Lyme in 1586.<sup>65</sup> In 1588 Taunton was compelled to contribute to the two ships Lyme had to supply to the Queen's service.<sup>66</sup> In 1620 the mayor of Lyme wanted Taunton merchants to contribute to the levy to fight pirates imposed on the port. They had threatened to withdraw their trade.<sup>67</sup> In 1635 merchants from Taunton and Lyme were joint grantees, probably in trust, of Devon land.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>58</sup> TNA, C1/561/83.

<sup>59</sup> F.J. Monkhouse, *A Survey of Southampton and Its Region* (Southampton, 1964), 222; *Acts of P.C.*, 1586—7, 192.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, PROB 11/12/13.

<sup>61</sup> *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, II, C1786; *Cal. Pat.* 1553—4, p. 426; *Cal. Pat.* 1558—60, p. 245; TNA, C78/99/16.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, PROB 11/13/242; PROB 11/31/105; PROB 11/62/392.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, PROB 11/45/206; C1/1507/9.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, C1/234/63.

<sup>65</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 411.

<sup>66</sup> *Acts PC*, 1588, pp. 56, 161, 281.

<sup>67</sup> *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1619—23, 156.

<sup>68</sup> SHC, DD/SP/367.

Politics and war damaged trade. Two merchants were pardoned in 1561 for carrying money out of the realm.<sup>69</sup> In 1587 a French ship claimed it had permission to seize English goods after seizing linen and sacks bought at Morlaix by Taunton merchants said to be worth £3,800. French ships arriving at Dartmouth from Brazil were held pending restitution.<sup>70</sup> One of the merchants Walter Edney claimed that goods stolen from him were being traded in Devon in 1589.<sup>71</sup> In 1592—3 while trade with France was forbidden a Taunton merchant was accused of trading illegally with St Malo.<sup>72</sup> Others were accused of suing each other in the French courts in 1597.<sup>73</sup> In 1596 a Taunton man with others from Essex and Southampton seized a St Malo ship and stole goods including British linen belonging to English merchants.<sup>74</sup> There were similar problems in the 1620s, which made merchants reluctant to ship goods for fear of piracy or reprisals.<sup>75</sup> Some traders went bankrupt, one apparently twice in the 1630s.<sup>76</sup>

In 1588 a group of Taunton merchants had a ship trading to Guinea, West Africa seized by the Spanish.<sup>77</sup> Merchant Thomas Gregory seems to have traded there and explored the area south of the river Nunez with a view to trade. He also knew the Azores and was able to provide Lord Burghley with information about them.<sup>78</sup> In 1592 on Gregory's petition the queen gave a group of Taunton merchants, including himself and members of the Pope and Dare families, a ten-year grant of sole rights to trade as a society in part of Guinea, with the monarchs of England and Portugal taking a share of the profits. Shortly afterwards ten Taunton merchants hired a ship at Topsham to take their cloth and other merchandize to Guinea in company with Exeter ships under a Portuguese escort but their ship was stayed and

<sup>69</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1560—3, 99.

<sup>70</sup> BL, Lansdowne MS 157/32; *Acts PC*, 1587—8, pp. 138—9.

<sup>71</sup> *Acts PC*, 1589—90, p. 103.

<sup>72</sup> *Acts PC*, 1592—3, p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> *Acts PC*, 1597, p. 20.

<sup>74</sup> *Cal. Pat.*, 1595—6, p. 167.

<sup>75</sup> *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1623—5, 173.

<sup>76</sup> *The Doquets of Lord Keeper Coventry* (List and Index Soc. 2004), 489, 496.

<sup>77</sup> *Acts PC*, 1588, p. 294.

<sup>78</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1591—2, p.56; BL, Lansdowne MS 81/18.

the Exeter ships left without them. They had already sent three vessels from Lyme to the same destination but it appeared that the Exeter merchants considered the Guinea trade should be theirs only as there was insufficient business for more than three ships a year.<sup>79</sup> Taunton cloth continued to go to Africa and the town petitioned against the creation of a monopoly Africa Company in 1698.<sup>80</sup>

Eleven Taunton merchants were founder members of the Company of London Merchants trading to Spain and Portugal in 1605 and in 1611 three of them and eight others joined the Company of London Merchants trading to France.<sup>81</sup> Some ventured further afield. In 1610 Lawrence Femell made his will before voyaging to the East Indies for the East India Company for a salary of £200 a year.<sup>82</sup> In 1625 Robert Manstidge took merchandise to Virginia intending to buy tobacco.<sup>83</sup> In 1651 Taunton serge was being sold in a shop in Boston, Mass. and in 1683 William Alloway of Minchhead possibly bought serge from William Salway, a fellow Quaker in Taunton. They traded together with serges to Pennsylvania where Salway set up a fulling mill.<sup>84</sup> In the early 18th century Taunton merchants traded in the Baltic but by then fewer Taunton people were directly involved in international trade.<sup>85</sup> Merchant Thomas Noble was with his wife in Naples in 1753 when he died and was buried there.<sup>86</sup> By the 18th-century merchants were investing in the West Indies. Nathaniel Webb, a merchant from a Taunton sergemaking family had invested in plantations with slaves in Monserrat and St Kitts and was living in Monserrat in 1739.<sup>87</sup> John

<sup>79</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1591—2, p.56; BL, Lansdowne MSS 55/21, 24; T. Mayberry, *The Vale of Taunton Past* (Chichester, 1998), 58—9.

<sup>80</sup> *VCH Som.* II, 416.

<sup>81</sup> *SDNQ*, XXVIII, 338—9.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, PROB 11/122/533.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, PROB 11/157/166.

<sup>84</sup> Ashford, 'Woollen Trade', *PSANHS CLI*, 174.

<sup>85</sup> *Descriptive List of Secretaries of State Papers Domestic Anne* (List and Index Soc. 259) appendix citing TNA, SP 34/34/43D.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, PROB 11/808/360.

<sup>87</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/1/1/2; TNA, PROB 11/708/50.

Bowdidge Webb, merchant was living in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1767.<sup>88</sup> In 1790 Thomas Gibbons was impoverished by losses ‘by troubled times on sea’.<sup>89</sup> By the 19th century merchants were almost entirely local traders in specific commodities like coal, corn and timber but one coal merchant and corn dealer acted as a local agent for several shipping companies.<sup>90</sup>

### Ships

Despite being so far inland Taunton had ships in the Middle Ages, which probably gave greater freedom over choice of port and destination for goods. In 1498—9 the largest and most valuable cargoes recorded at Exeter were carried in a Taunton ship.<sup>91</sup> During the late 15th and early 16th century Taunton ships mainly used Topsham as a home port, including the *Anne*, *Christopher*, *Clement*, *Jesus*, *Marie*, and *Thomas*, but the *Marie* was also trading between Bristol and Spain in 1493.<sup>92</sup> Henry Bishop left a quarter of his vessel to his brother John in 1493 to trade to Spain on his behalf.<sup>93</sup>

Local ship owning declined in the post-medieval period but the *Taunton Merchant* carried cloth from Minehead to Barbados in 1700 and the East Indiaman *Taunton Castle* was built in 1790 by wealthy men with Taunton connections.<sup>94</sup> The *Taunton Packet* was an 82-ton schooner launched in 1838, which sailed out of Bridgwater to Ireland, Jersey, London and Newcastle.<sup>95</sup> In the 19th century local men invested in coastal vessels, usually registered at Bridgwater, to import coal and lime from south Wales and Gloucestershire, including Richard Stone of Yard House who owned the 43-ton *Chard*.<sup>96</sup> The Goodland family of coal merchants

<sup>88</sup> SHC, D/N/tau.mst/1/1/3.

<sup>89</sup> *Acts of P.C.*, 1590, p. 152.

<sup>90</sup> SHC, D/P/stapg/4/1/6.

<sup>91</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, *The Expansion of Exeter At the Close of the Middle Ages* (1963) 21.

<sup>92</sup> medievalandtudorships.org: accessed 30 July 2020; below, this section.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, PROB 11/10/31.

<sup>94</sup> Ashford, ‘Woollen Trade’, *PSANHS CLI*, 174; painting in the Museum of Somerset.

<sup>95</sup> SHC, DD/RSS/1/36, 2/49.

<sup>96</sup> SHC, DD/RSS/1/1/30—1, 1/31/22.

owned several vessels including the 64-ton *James and Sarah*.<sup>97</sup> In 1857 Taunton linendraper Francis Wookey bought a Bristol ship, *The County of Pembroke*, but sold her two years later.<sup>98</sup>

### River and canal trade

Although livestock could be driven and high value goods brought by packhorse most roads outside the summer season were difficult for laden waggons. More prosaic goods such as coal, lime and iron were imported by river from Bridgwater. There may have been a quay near French weir in 1302.<sup>99</sup> Lead for the castle came upriver as far as Bathpool in 1369.<sup>100</sup> In 1382 the abbot of Glastonbury, when accused of obstructing waterborne trade with his Bathpool mill and willow trees, claimed boats from Bridgwater discharged at Bathpool cross and only went as far as Obridge in time of flood.<sup>101</sup> However, in 1414 it was said that a new narrow watergate at Bathpool mill, West Monkton obstructed the river trade between Taunton and Bridgwater used by barks and trows carrying, timber, firewood, coal, stone, lime, peas, grain, malt and wine. The loss was said to be £1,000 or more.<sup>102</sup> Trows were recorded from the 15th to 19th centuries when 'lock-up' trows were operated.<sup>103</sup> Above the town bridge boats were poled.<sup>104</sup>

From the 16th century Taunton merchants brought iron, coal, stone, nails, casks, salt, vinegar, wine, Irish linen, dyestuffs, train oil, salmon, figs, raisins, millstones and grindstones upriver. Wine also went downriver. Although some goods were offloaded into wains at Bridgwater by the later 16th century most cargoes went by boat. As river boats only carried a

<sup>97</sup> SHC, DD/RSS/1/1/11—12, 1/19/17a.

<sup>98</sup> G. Farr, *Records of Bristol Ships over 150 tons 1800—38* (Bristol Rec. Soc. XV, 1950), 184.

<sup>99</sup> SHC, T/PH/win 1301—2.

<sup>100</sup> SHC, T/PH/win 1368—9.

<sup>101</sup> Hugo, *Taunton Priory*, 48—50.

<sup>102</sup> BL, Add. MS 30289 (45); *Cal. Inq. Misc.* VII, p. 259.

<sup>103</sup> BL, Add. MS 30289 (45); *Pigot Dir.* (1830).

<sup>104</sup> SHC, A/DAS/2 (12281).

few tons, especially in summer when the water was low, bulk cargoes were stored in Bridgwater cellars and brought upriver in instalments.<sup>105</sup> In 1596—7 alabaster, grindstones, woad and 1,000 trenchers came up from Bridgwater.<sup>106</sup> In the 1590s and 1600s Alexander Hill had his own account with the Bridgwater water bailiff and employed lighters to fetch coal and iron from Cardiff and Newport ships, mainly at Comwich, under Bridgwater bridge and upriver to Taunton. Even the 1625 Bridgwater plague did not halt traffic as trows were permitted to come upriver provided the crews did not go into the town.<sup>107</sup> Thomas Pitcher of Taunton shipped 108 tun of wine in 1627—8, 146 ton of iron and 137 cases of glass in 1628—9 rising to 208 cases in 1630—1.<sup>108</sup> By the late 17th century coal, culm, deals, lead, iron, stone, bottles, salt, sugar, tobacco, tallow, tiles and wool shipped upriver for Taunton were mainly unloaded at Coal Harbour in Creech St Michael and brought overland or in barges to Taunton. It was said that improving navigation would affect the carrying trade and bring in cheaper Welsh goods. However, even a toll of 6*d.* a wey on coal boats was cheaper than employing the 30 horses required to carry a wey to Taunton.<sup>109</sup> After improvements by the Tone Conservators shallow vessels made the complete journey from Bridgwater to Taunton like a 4-ton boatload of tobacco and other goods on 24 December 1705. By the early 18th century up to 20 vessels a day paid toll to come upriver and commodities included pitch, tar, hemp, flax, oil, wine, grocery and dyes.<sup>110</sup> However, the increased tolls on through traffic made it cheaper to bring some goods overland from Coal Harbour again. A proposal to solve the issue in 1707 by charging the higher toll at Coal Harbour received objections from c. 500 labourers and 40 boatmen from Taunton, probably engineered by the Bobbets of Coal

<sup>105</sup> SHC, D/B/bw/1429—35, 1437—9, 1442, 1445, 1448—50, 1460, 1462, 1465, 1467, 1480, 1486—7, 1490, 1495, 1498, 1505—13, 1515, 1517, 1557, 1559, 1581.

<sup>106</sup> SHC, D/B/bw/1585.

<sup>107</sup> M. Siraut, 'Coal Harbour', *Maritime Hist. Som.* 107—8; *VCH Som.* VI, 86; SHC, D/B/bw/1477, 1485—7, 1503, 1884.

<sup>108</sup> SHC, D/B/bw/1508—10.

<sup>109</sup> SHC, DD/SF/13/2/48, 51, 72.

<sup>110</sup> M. Siraut, 'Coal Harbour', *Maritime Hist. Som.* 107—14.

Harbour. A new lock and toll house were built at Ham by 1717 and by the 1730s most goods for Taunton were shipped straight through in boats of between two and five tons. By the early 19th century barges carried up to 15 tons and boatmen were prosecuted for exceeding a maximum limit of 7 ½ tons.<sup>111</sup>

Coal from Neath and Tenby was one of the principal cargoes and Samuel Paine shipped at least 1,861 chaldrons upriver c. 1719.<sup>112</sup> During the 18th century coal imports for domestic and industrial use increased. Fragile goods like glass and ceramics came upriver and agricultural produce and cloth would have gone down. A special jury in 1710 considered the damage done by building wharves near Tone Bridge.<sup>113</sup> Thomas Parsons, a coal and culm merchant, used his own lighters and trows to bring Welsh coal upriver to Taunton between 1738 and 1761 and carried other men's goods such as iron, glass, bottles, and wine shipped from Bristol to Bridgwater.<sup>114</sup>

River tolls increased from an average of £353 a year 1719—28, to £651 in 1779—89 and over £2,200 in the early 1820s and probably the majority of those goods was travelling to or from Taunton including c. 11,500 tons of coal annually.<sup>115</sup> In 1823 28,500 tons of coal and 1,879 tons of other goods paid toll to go from Bridgwater to Taunton with a further 712 tons shipped from Langport to Taunton and 802 tons went downriver from Taunton to Bridgwater. In May 1830 5,000 tiles came upriver, probably a regular cargo.<sup>116</sup> In 1824 the coal and salt trade was valued at £40,000 a year, timber and brick trade at £15,000 and the navigation and wharfage a further £3,500.<sup>117</sup> There were 47 boats on the river and horses towed boats on the Tone if the water was low. The whole journey from Bridgwater to Taunton took 5 to 6 hours

<sup>111</sup> SHC, DD/TC/9; *The History of the Navigation of the River Tone* (Taunton, 1832), 9; Siraut, 'Coal Harbour', *Maritime Hist. Som.* 107—13.

<sup>112</sup> SHC, D/B/bw/1644.

<sup>113</sup> SHC, Q/RUi/1.

<sup>114</sup> SHC, DD/HC/44/2.

<sup>115</sup> *Hist. Navigation of the River Tone*, 10; Siraut, 'Coal Harbour', *Maritime Hist. Som.* 112—3.

<sup>116</sup> SHC, DD/TC/16; Siraut, 'Coal Harbour', *Maritime Hist. Som.* 113.

<sup>117</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (1824).

if tides and water level allowed but there were problems coming from Firepool to the wharves in dry weather. Each boat had a captain, two men and a boy and carried c. 8 tons on average usually coal but also salt, pig iron and general cargoes.<sup>118</sup> The smack *Concord* was shipping goods from London to Lyme and Taunton in 1821 and furniture from London was shipped via Bridgwater and the Tone in the 1830s.<sup>119</sup> In the early 19th century 14 merchants were said to employ c. 100 men in the waterborne trade.<sup>120</sup>

The cutting of the Taunton and Bridgwater Canal in 1827 probably increased traffic at the wharves and in 1833 a 100-ft wharf north of the river was offered to let with coalyard, warehouse, stabling and an orchard.<sup>121</sup> A merchant estimated that one boat could bring 180 tons a week by canal but only 30 by river and he had been able to reduce the price of coal from 1s. 5d. to 11d. a cwt. Another had doubled his imports of coal and reduced his costs in boatmen's wages and tolls from up to 7s. a chaldron by river to 4s. 9d. when the canal opened because of the shorter journey time.<sup>122</sup> The loss to river traffic was considerable. In December 1818 Taunton merchants paid toll at Ham lock on the Tone for 899½ weys of coal, 145½ tons of other goods coming upriver and 66 tons going down but in December 1830 on only 511 weys of coal, 30 tons of other goods going up and 36½ tons going down.<sup>123</sup>

The canal company paid for rebuilding part of the town bridge in 1834 and removing shoals from the river wharves but in 1838 the Grand Western Canal joined the earlier canal enabling boats to bypass the river, although the Parliamentary Cut allowed traffic to move between the river and the Grand Western Canal at French weir. The gasworks still used that cut in the 1860s.<sup>124</sup> In 1831 the canal had a large wharf with storage facilities at Firepool

<sup>118</sup> SHC, DD/MK/60.

<sup>119</sup> SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/23; DD/HC/62/10.

<sup>120</sup> Goldsworthy, *Recollections of Old Taunton*, 14.

<sup>121</sup> *Taunton Courier*, 11 Sep. 1833.

<sup>122</sup> SHC, DD/MK/89.

<sup>123</sup> SHC, DD/TC/43.

<sup>124</sup> Above, intro., canals; SHC, A/ERX/1/1; D. Gledhill, *Taunton Gas 1816—1949* (S.I.A.S. 1989), 31.

which was destroyed when the Grand Western Canal was cut through.<sup>125</sup> In 1836 a coal merchant who had moved to the canal said he no longer saw barges for Taunton on the Tone but river tolls of *c.* £500 a year were collected throughout the decade mostly from a Taunton coal merchant, a firm of ironfounders and a maltster, each paying over £100 a year.<sup>126</sup> A disadvantage of the canal was that it terminated at Huntworth until 1841 when it was cut through to the Bridgwater docks. Even after the railway opened in 1842 traffic continued at the river wharves, although the quay wall at North Town was out of repair in 1842, and the canal company office was at William Goodland's coalyard south-east of the bridge.<sup>127</sup>

In 1840 a river wharf was offered for sale after 30 years use in the coal, culm and salt trade.<sup>128</sup> Maria Long had a coal wharf with crane north-west of the bridge, which she used to import stone and marble for her workshops in the 1840s.<sup>129</sup> A canal scheme of 1845 if carried out would have involved the destruction of two canal wharves, one belonging to the railway and one by the nearby limekiln with their boatsheds, and eight river wharves with coal, timber and slate yards, warehouses and counting houses.<sup>130</sup> From 1851 a lockkeeper and other canal workers were recorded and no doubt some of the boatmen and dischargers in St James' parish worked on the canal. Goodlands coal merchants continued to offer to dispatch goods in lock-up barges in the 1850s but it is not clear whether by canal or river.<sup>131</sup> In the later 19th century the river wharves comprised those at Coal Orchard south-east of the river, Tone Bridge and North Town wharves on the north-east bank, the latter with tile and deal yards, Bridge Wharf north-west of the bridge, part of the Yard estate in 1805 and formerly

<sup>125</sup> SHC, DD/TC/15 (plan 1831).

<sup>126</sup> BL, Parl. Papers HL 135.1: evidence on the Parrett Navigation Bill (1836), pp, 27, 147; SHC, A/ERX/1/1.

<sup>127</sup> C. A. Buchanan, *The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal* (S.I.A.S. 1984), 6; SHC, DD/TAC/6/4/1; DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 48.

<sup>128</sup> SHC, DD/HC/105/14/39.

<sup>129</sup> SHC, DD/CH/81/7; above, industry.

<sup>130</sup> SHC, Q/RUp/192.

<sup>131</sup> TNA, HO 107/972, 1922—3; RG 9/1618; RG 10/2374; RG 12/1877; SHC, D/P/stapg/4/1/6 (1856).

used by Long's, and further west a barge basin at Pollard's sawmills.<sup>132</sup> On the south-west bank were the Tangier and gas company wharves in Bishops Hull.<sup>133</sup> Coal merchants had their own vessels and two or three were also wharfingers, offering a daily passage for goods to Bridgwater and lock-up facilities.<sup>134</sup> Large warehouses were built on both sides of the river either side of the bridge, most demolished in the later 20th century.<sup>135</sup>

The railway eventually took over the bulk carrying trade and water carriage to Bridgwater was no longer offered as a general service.<sup>136</sup> In 1867 the Great Western Railway bought the Grand Western Canal and closed the Somerset section ending water traffic westwards.<sup>137</sup> In 1874 it was said that the canal company took too much water out of the river and both waterways were foul and silted up, full of offensive matter, increasing journey time for canal barges between Bridgwater and Taunton from six hours to 14 and reducing loads from 25 to 18 tons.<sup>138</sup> In 1875 Pollards complained that low water in their basin off the river, partly caused by sewage accumulation, made loading and unloading impossible.<sup>139</sup> In 1893 a woman whose family had been wharf owners sold five boats, presumably no longer needed, to the council to assist with rebuilding the town bridge.<sup>140</sup> By 1901, when only two boatmen were recorded, there were complaints that barges could no longer reach Taunton although the railway company still maintained a lockkeeper at Firepool. The last barge was said to have made the journey in 1907 but some businesses maintained their river wharves in the 1920s.<sup>141</sup> North Town Wharf was home to vulcanising and electrical works, a glove factory, wool

<sup>132</sup> SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/1/8; Q/Rup/192; DD/CH/78/5; DD/DP/43/4/15 (1805); DD/CWC/ta/unlisted acc. no. G/2468; DD/SAS/C212/13/1, pp. 90—1.

<sup>133</sup> OS Map, 1:1,250 LXX. 12.11 (1888); Bishops Hull, econ. hist.

<sup>134</sup> Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); *Pigot Dir.* (1842); *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852).

<sup>135</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d (2017/328), box 10; A/DIF/114/19.

<sup>136</sup> *PO Dir. Som.* (1861, 1866).

<sup>137</sup> Buchanan, *Bridgwater and Taunton Canal*, 6.

<sup>138</sup> SHC, DD/TC/16.

<sup>139</sup> SHC, D/B/ta/3/5/1 (1875).

<sup>140</sup> SHC, Q/Rup/192; D/B/ta/3/12/1 (1893).

<sup>141</sup> TNA, RG13/2276; SHC, A/DIG/1; D/R/ta/34/9/3, pp. 235, 321—3.

stores and timber and coal yards in the 1920s but they used road transport..<sup>142</sup> In the 1950s there was a demand to re-open the river and canal for coal and timber, both very expensive to move by road or rail but the river was badly silted and there were obstacles like fixed bridges so although the locks and banks of the canal had been maintained the project was abandoned.<sup>143</sup> North Town Wharf and some of its warehouses survived until 1992 after which it was renamed Hammet's Wharf and occupied by flats and a supermarket.<sup>144</sup> One converted warehouse on the former Tone Bridge wharf survives.

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<sup>142</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 8.

<sup>143</sup> SHC, DD/TC/30, 32, 36.

<sup>144</sup> SHC, D/DC/tau.d/24/2/12; A/AUS/106/4; above, intro.