

Tudor Shipping, Seafarers and Trade in our area

5th September 2019 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

Craig Lambert, Professor of Maritime History at Southampton University, who had previously given a very popular talk to the Society about Henry V's ships based in the Southampton area, gave another talk on his latest research about Tudor shipping in our area during Queen Elizabeth I reign. In particular he talked about 'Shipping, Seafarers and Trade: Southampton and its Associated Ports from 1565 to 1580' and focussed on the shipping and trade of the ports and settlements located on Southampton Water, including Hamble.

He started by explaining the sources he used in his research such as custom records, government surveys and naval records that listed the crown's wartime requisitioning of merchant vessels. Elizabeth I used the new rising merchant men who were willing to be pirates/privateers as a cheap means of waging a war.

From 1565 to 1580 it is recorded 277 Hampshire vessels made voyages overseas and 594 were coastal trips. Most overseas voyages were to the low countries and Spain but on occasions the ships were taking cannons and arms to Italy. During this 15-year period most coastal voyages were to Sussex, Dorset (Poole) and the Channel Islands. The ships were reasonably small with the average size of 30 tons and carried goods as diverse as tin from Cornwall and firewood from the New Forest.

Craig showed a copy of the original document of the 'John of Hamble' (10 tons) commanded by Edmund Clarke, heading from London to Portsmouth in 1565 mostly carrying haberdashery wears and other goods. Another document he showed was the 12 ton 'William of Hamble' commanded by William Dalaple, sailing from Southampton to Rye with salt in April 1575.

In a 2-year period in the early 1570s 2 ships at Hamble (average 11 tons) and 5 ships at Bursledon (average 17 tons) are listed but it is known far more were not recorded. One of these ships the 25 ton 'James' of Bursledon commanded by John Euystaces (Eustace) was carrying wheat from Chichester to Rye in 1573. Edmund Clarke was master of the 12 ton 'George of Bursledon' taking a cargo of 3,000 Newfoundland fish from Weymouth to Southampton.

One survey provided good information about local vessels and interestingly the biggest ship in Southampton was not recorded as carrying merchant goods but other records indicate it was built as a privateer to take prizes. This survey also included small boats such as fishing boats, lighters, oyster dredgers that are not recorded in other documents. Craig gave an example of how long a career was at sea. Ship master, John Holford, spent 35 years at sea commanding 5 different vessels.

Elizabeth I commissioned a survey of ships in the country as she was concerned about piracy. She asked that it found out who was a pirate, what the shipping was doing and how many ships and houses there were in each port. In Hampshire there were 174

boats and 166 ship owners. Southampton had 323 occupied houses with another 52 uninhabited. In 1565 Hamble had 26 households, 22 boats owned by 24 men. Most of its boats were between 1 and 2 tons with the largest 12 tons. Warsash had 5 boats and 5 ship owners and it was clear that there were links between Hamble and Warsash such as Thomas Sexes appears in both lists.

Craig concluded that his research had found out Southampton Water ports formed an important link in the south coast trade networks. It was experienced in foreign trade, but specialised in Cross-Channel runs for wine and salt. There was a healthy merchant fleet due to the need to undertake frequent voyages to the south-west and London, as well as short runs to Dorset and Sussex. They were a versatile bunch of shippers that managed complex trade networks and provided vital service in ports and in feeding urban populations.

For more information about Craig's research project please see his website www.medievalandtudorships.org that includes a database of over 53,000 ship voyages from over 500 English ports during 1400-1585.

As part of the question and answer session at the end Craig said in the middle ages the Hamble River was an important place with documents saying it had 300 ships but a lot were docking in the river rather than going to Southampton and many of them may have been Southampton ships. Hamble was also important for naval operations and involved in the Bordeaux wine trade but by the time of his research it was a much smaller port mostly involved in fishing.

At the end of the 14th century there was a church dispute in Hamble when its men, who had close links to John of Gaunt and the Earl of March, built a church. The local bishop said you cannot build it here and he does not give his permission as he is worried that they would pay towards it rather to his diocese. He sent men down to Hamble to rough up the villagers but because they were backed up by John of Gaunt, who had important maritime connections, they barricaded the bishop's men out of Hamble.

Craig's talk was very well received with great interest. His new comprehensive research information will add much to our knowledge of shipping, trade and the seafarers in our locality including Hamble and its river.