

From Cradle to the Grave: living, working and dying in late medieval Dover

Pilgrims and Passengers

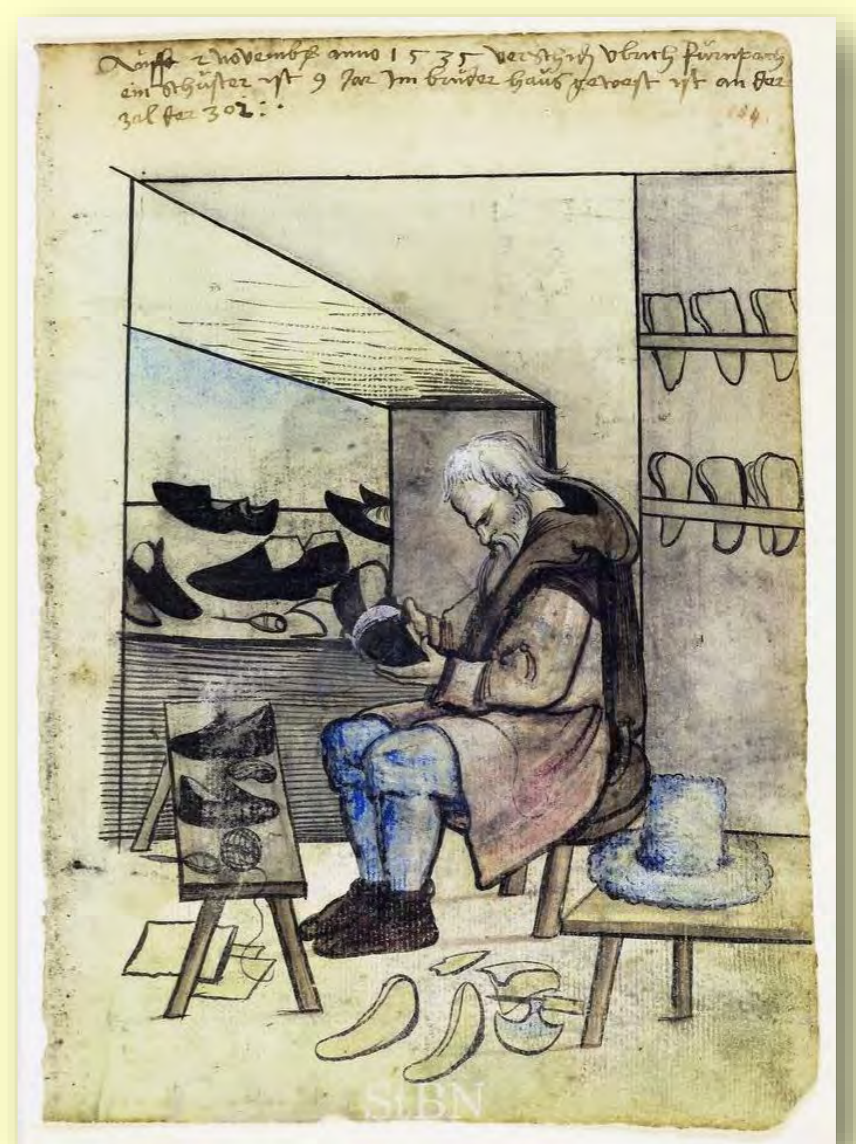


In the later Middle Ages, Dover was keen to monopolize the transportation of passengers: travellers, pilgrims, soldiers, diplomats etc., across the Narrow Seas. Those providing this passage were members of the town's Fership Guild and we know the names of some shipmasters and their ships, including in the late 14th century Robert Gibbe, master of 'le Leonell' and a century later, Thomas Rymour master of 'le Mergaret'.



However, the surviving records almost never record the names of their passengers. Among the very few exceptions were members of the royal court, such as John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon who following his release from French captivity in 1425 returned to England, while Cecily, Duchess of York, Edward IV's mother, was given a present of wine and 12 capons at a cost of 15s by the civic authorities in 1462 when she arrived in Dover. Other passengers were grouped together, in October 1426 a band of soldiers was transported overseas to join the garrison at English Calais and seven years later an ambassador and his company were carried across the Channel by Geoffrey Spaldyng.

Dover also attracted workers from overseas, such as a tailor in the 1420s called John Ducheman, while a decade later his compatriot known as John Coruesor, Ducheman alias John Clays, was a shoemaker in the town. Yet, when economic conditions became more challenging in the late 15th century, the civic authorities sought to restrict those arriving as migrants. Pilgrims, also not named, may have been welcomed because unless they were poor and perhaps stayed overnight at the Maison Dieu, they aided the local economy – board and lodging, and maybe horse hire. Among Dover's inns was one called 'The Black Bull', and Stephen Weke owned the stable next door.



Author: Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh. Image credits: (top) Cecily Neville, *Neville Book of Hours*, Paris, BNF, Latin MS 1158, fol. 34; (centre) Tailor from the fourteenth-century *Housebook of the Nuremberg Twelve Brothers Foundation*, (foot) A shoemaker, from the same book, Nuremberg, City Library, Amb. 217.2 (Mendel I).