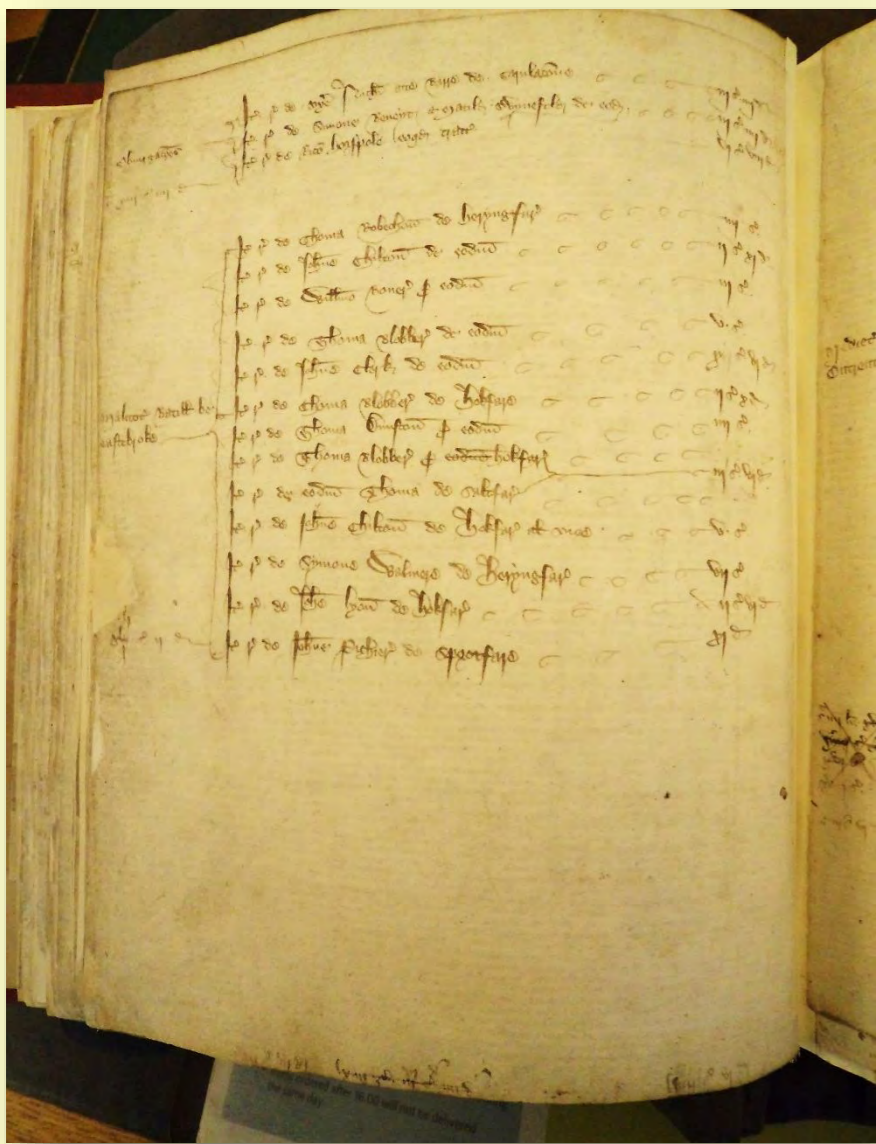


From Cradle to the Grave: living, working and dying in late medieval Dover

Fishing and Fishermen



As elsewhere in Kent, traditionally the fishing community had settled away from the main town centre and at Dover they were east of the river and close to the shoreline in St James' parish, the fisherman apostle. Fish was an important part of the diet for religious reasons, as well as supplying the townspeople and fishmongers, the fish market attracted customers from the religious houses, the monks not allowed to eat meat but only fish on a large number of days.



The year was divided into fishing seasons or fares, named for a mix of fish and fishing methods: herringfare, hokfare, mackerellfare, saltfare, sprotfare and shotfare. In winter, those fishing for herring in local coastal waters used flew nets, whereas in autumn the herring fishermen used the much deeper norward nets when they followed the herring shoals southwards through the far deeper North Sea. Other fish caught by the Dover men included cod and sprats, the fishermen taxed by the town authorities on the size of their catch.

In part as a way of helping to spread the financial risks linked to fishing, some fishermen combined fishing with another occupation such as trading or farming. Another method was having shares in more than one boat. John Pocok had no sons when he died in 1504. Instead, he left a set (mansfare) of fishing nets to Robert his brother, as well as a quarter boat share in 'The Trinity'. John Watson (1513) intended that after his death his half share in 'The Nicholas' and a half share in a boat used by John Mathew from Reculver should be sold to pay his debts and provide money for his widow and three young children.



Author: Keiron Hoyle. Image credits: (top) *Tacuinum sanitates*, a fourteenth-century Latin medical treatise, originally written in eleventh-century Baghdad by Ibn Butlan, Casanatense MS 4182, fol. 157; (centre) Fishermen's taxes, in *Dover Accounts Book*, London, British Library Add. MS 29615, fol. 41v; (foot) Herring on sale in a modern market, photographed by [Claus Ableiter](#).