

Timber Movement on the Severn

Dr Margaret Ponsonby gave a mid-day lecture which opened up a new area of research. The Gloucester Port Books database, at the University of Wolverhampton, contains the record of nearly 40,000 journeys and over 200,000 items of cargo, and provides a wonderful resource for a wide range of historical enquiry. The Gloucester Port Books were kept from 1575 to the mid-18th century when reorganisation of the system took place.

The books recorded boats passing through the port when at least one item in the cargo required duty to be paid. Upriver voyages took imported items that had come through Bristol, such as tobacco and wine, along with imported timber such as mahogany and deal. Downriver voyages, bound usually for the port of Bristol, took cargoes of agricultural produce, including many hundreds of boats laden with timber, as well as named woods such as oak and beech. Manufactured goods from the west midlands were also commonly moved downriver, including many cargoes of chairs and 'woodenwares' manufactured in the region.

There are limitations to what can be deduced from this source because not all cargoes were recorded, there are gaps in the survival of the port books, and because many voyages on the Severn did not touch Gloucester. However, further searches of the database and more detailed queries would no doubt produce much useful information concerning the timber trade, as well as furniture making and consumption in the west midlands region during the early modern period.

Margaret Ponsonby