

## APPRENTICESHIP IN LATE MEDIEVAL IPSWICH

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OPEN ANY CHILDREN'S book on the Middle Ages and one of the chapters will tell you about apprentices, normally playing football rather than applying themselves to their craft. Apprenticeship is, indeed, one of the most familiar of all medieval institutions and, before looking at the way in which it worked in Ipswich, a few words of more general introduction are needed. The origins of apprenticeship in England date back at least to the twelfth century. St William of Norwich is said to have been apprenticed to a skinner and, although this is disputed, without doubt many of his contemporaries began their working lives in this way.<sup>1</sup> Apprenticeship served many purposes. As well as being the principal means of technical education, it was a way of controlling young people, mostly male, from the age of about twelve, in the febrile environment of a medieval town. The long history of riots by apprentices, particularly in London, suggests that, in this respect, it was not entirely successful. On the positive side, it was an early form of quality control, ensuing that craftsmen were able to produce good work. More cynically, it was a restrictive practice, limiting the number of people permitted to follow a trade, and so keeping production low and prices high. For a lucky few it was the road to freedom of their town, and ultimately to commercial success and acceptance within the urban elite. So well established did apprenticeship become that it survived the Middle Ages, inspired Elizabethan legislators to enact the Statute of Artificers and Apprentices in 1563, and later evolved into parish apprentices, modern apprentices and the apprentices of celebrity television.

Returning to medieval Ipswich, this paper looks at the nature of the extant sources; the terms of the surviving apprenticeship indentures; the identity, trades and careers of masters and apprentices; and what the apprenticeship records tell us about broader economic trends within the town.

### SOURCES

The variety of the extant sources enables us to consider apprenticeship in Ipswich from several different perspectives. Apprentices bound themselves to their masters by way of indentures, four of which may be found in the records of the Ipswich petty court in which they were enrolled.<sup>2</sup> Had a decree of the general court in 1477, demanding enrolment of all indentures within a year and a day, been rigorously enforced, there might have been many more.<sup>3</sup> The terms of the four survivors are very similar, but not exactly the same, and, as we shall see, the few differences are significant. Since the archives of medieval London only preserve nineteen such medieval indentures, historians of Ipswich may count themselves lucky.<sup>4</sup> The register of the general court, continued in later composite court books, records the proceedings of a body that had once been pre-eminent in the town but had, by the fifteenth century, lost many of its powers and responsibilities to the petty court. Nevertheless, it remained the forum in which residents, nearly all men, were admitted to the freedom of the borough as burgesses and came to enjoy the right to trade, free of toll, in the town.<sup>5</sup> They could do this in three ways, by patrimony, by payment, and by successful completion of apprenticeship. Consequently, the register provides us with the names of a fortunate minority of sixty apprentices who became freemen. It is far from complete, beginning only in 1415 and thereafter riddled with chronological gaps, but nonetheless is of great evidential value. Wealthier Ipswich residents had been making wills for centuries, but only from the 1440s do these survive in significant

numbers. Several leading merchants and manufacturers mention apprentices in their wills, as do a few of their less exalted contemporaries. Part of an assessment for one of Henry VIII's subsidies lists taxpayers and their apprentices. Although there are no details in the assessment itself, extrinsic evidence suggests that it relates to the east ward of the town and dates from the early 1520s.<sup>6</sup> As such, it is the most recent in time of the relevant Ipswich records. In addition to these borough sources, reference is made to parliamentary and selected Suffolk manorial rolls; as well as to a variety of secondary sources.

While we have plentiful evidence relating to the town's Corpus Christi gild, which flourished in the late Middle Ages, this was not the guild of a single craft, but one to which all burgesses were expected to belong and contribute. Ipswich craft guilds, if they ever existed, have bequeathed us no records, so it is impossible to study the town's apprentices in the context of a guild system.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, there is indirect evidence of organisation, however informal, among members of each of the town's crafts and trades. The borough authorities looked to the foremost amongst each of them to regulate their colleagues. In 1418, for instance, John Deve was admitted as a freeman in return for his undertaking to collect tolls from his fellow butchers for seven years.<sup>8</sup> The Corpus Christi gild itself assumed a degree of cohesion among each craft and trade in the way it ordered the annual procession and funded the banquet that followed. Furthermore, since certain crafts and trades tended to concentrate in certain parts of the town, fraternal gilds, each of which was based on a particular parish church or chapel, may have attracted many of their members from the same occupation. For example, the parish of St Peter appears to have been the centre of pewter production, so pewterers and their apprentices may have gravitated to the gild of Jesus based in the priory church there.<sup>9</sup> Who can say what impact on their training such informal gatherings with their colleagues may have had?

## INDENTURES

The four late medieval apprenticeship indentures record the contracts between William Burre and his master John Wytton, a grocer; John Feere and John Sextayn, a barber; Robert Payn and Thomas Drayll, an eminent mercer; and Thomas Heyward and Geoffrey Osberne, a more humble smith. William Burre's indenture (Fig. 121) reads as follows:

*At this court held on Tuesday next after the feast of St Andrew the Apostle the year above said [29 November 1446]*

*Came into the presence of Robert Wode and William Whethereld bailiffs John Wytton of Ipswich, Suffolk grocer in person and a certain William Burre of Essex servant and apprentice of the same John in the presence of Thomas Fastolf, William Rydout, Edmund Wynter and other worthy burgesses, and produced to the court an indenture in the following terms – This indenture witnesses that William Burre of Lyes in Essex is to become apprentice to John Wytton of Ipswich Suffolk grocer to learn the craft of the same and according to the terms of his apprenticeship [set out and defined] from 29 September 1446 for a term of 7 years during which term the said William apprentice to the said John his master shall truly and faithfully follow his instructions honestly in all respects keeping his secrets. He shall neither do nor see to have done any damage to him to a value of 12d and no more a year by impeding his power or undermining the estate or honesty of his said master or being to any extent dishonest and shall not commit gaming fornication or adultery in the house of his said master under double penalty. During the term he shall not contract marriage nor pledge himself to any wife without the permission of his said master. He shall not trade so as to appropriate or alienate his goods. In accordance with custom he shall not frequent taverns except for the advantage of his said master. From his service above he shall not illicitly desist nor delay but in all that he says and does towards his said master and the master's household be of good habit and honest at all times as above said. And the said John shall teach deal with and inform his said apprentice William in his craft*

of grocer and other callings in the best way he can correcting him in the due manner providing to the same William his apprentice food and drink clothing linen wool shoes and a bed well and sufficient as appropriate to an apprentice of such a craft at all times. 11 October 1446<sup>10</sup>

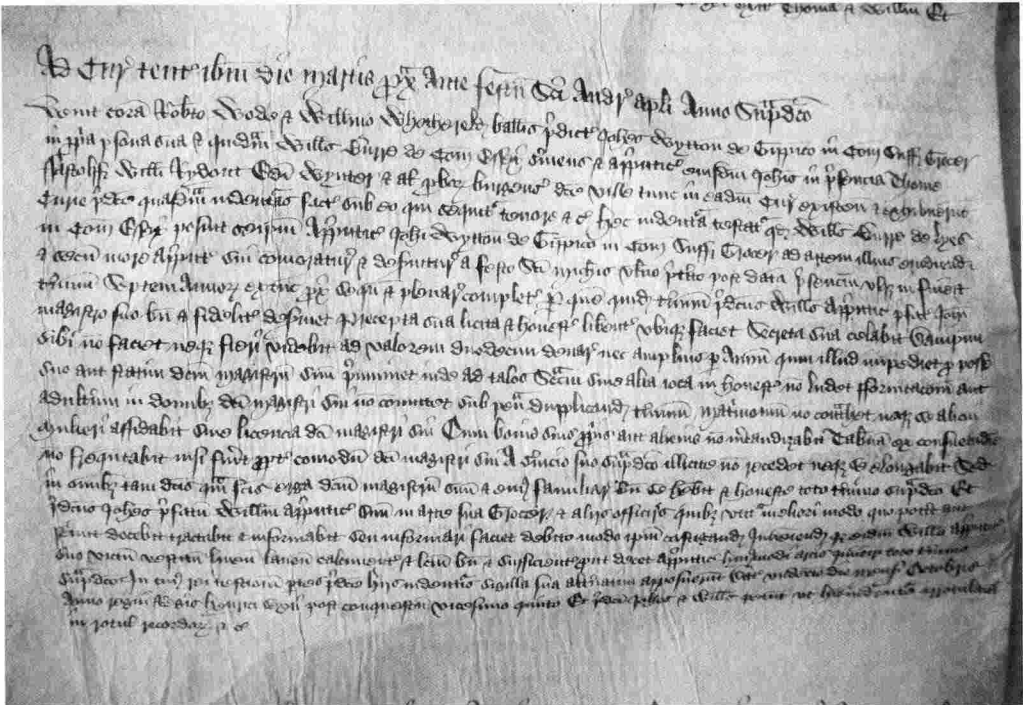


FIG. 121 – Indenture of William Burre, apprenticed to John Wytton (reproduced with kind permission of Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch, and Ipswich Borough Council, ref. SROI, C/2/10/1, m. 2r).

Some of the provisions of this, and the other indentures, will now be considered in more detail.

William Burre was expected to serve for seven years. Traditionally, this has been seen as the normal term of apprenticeship, but no period was fixed until the enactment of the Statute of 1563 and, even then, seven years was only a minimum. In nearby Colchester the ordinances of 1418 required the apprentices of weavers and fullers to serve for at least five years. In fourteenth-century London the term varied from seven to as many as thirteen years; in fifteenth-century Lincoln some mercers expected their apprentices to serve for ten years; and in sixteenth-century Bristol some boys grew into mature men by the time they completed their sixteen years’ training.<sup>11</sup> Like him, Burre’s contemporary John Feere contracted for seven years from 24 June 1448, but later in the century Robert Payn agreed to serve for eight years from 29 September 1479, and Thomas Heyward for nine years from the same date in 1480. Payn became a freeman very shortly after his term expired, but Burre waited two more years. Perhaps he worked temporarily as a journeyman before becoming a burgess.

All four of the apprentices were prohibited from buying or selling goods for their masters. This reflected a more general principle inherent in the relationship of master and servant, as expounded by Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, ‘For may no cherle charter make, ne his chattel selle, / Withouten leave of his lord – no lawe wol it graunte’.<sup>12</sup> Such a rule applied more readily to those operating in and from their masters’ workshops than it did to those indentured to

merchants, and expected to spend some of their time representing their masters abroad. The latter must have had some power to act independently, but woe betide those who abused that privilege. In the mid 1440s the Ipswich merchant John Caldwell sent his apprentice Thomas Bradde to trade on his behalf in Danzig, where Bradde fell into debt with local merchants, including one Hans Stendell, and was ultimately imprisoned in Ipswich gaol. Sad to say, there is no record of Bradde ever becoming a freeman.<sup>13</sup>

The four were expected to be of good habit and honest at all times, proving themselves to be of good standing and conduct, worthy to become burgesses of the town. Consequently, they were not allowed to frequent taverns for their own amusement, but could do so on their masters' behalf. Inns and taverns were an important informal forum for trade where apprentices could learn the cut and thrust of the commercial world. Many of the town's most prominent residents, including five of the forty-four masters recorded in the register, carried on the business of an inn or tavern as a second string to their main occupation.

In return, the apprentices could expect their masters to teach, deal with and inform them in their craft and other callings in the best way. At a time when literacy rates were low and there were no technical manuals, apprenticeship was the principal means of technical education. The training provided by masters could go further. Thomas Heyward's father paid the smith Geoffrey Osborne 10s to send his son to school so that he could learn to read his primer. Indeed, he may have been one of the very first pupils at the Ipswich school endowed by Richard Felawe in 1482.<sup>14</sup> By the late fifteenth century even smiths could benefit from basic literacy.

Ever since Adam Smith, economic historians have been debating the level of skill that apprentices needed to attain, and the time necessary to learn that skill. Writing in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith stated that 'long apprenticeships are altogether unnecessary', being simply a restrictive practice which maintained high wages and prices, and he argued that the skills of most trades could be learned in weeks, if not days.<sup>15</sup> Recently, Professors Ogilvie and Epstein have reignited the debate, with Ogilvie sharing Smith's view and Epstein stoutly defending craft guilds as 'sustained systems for the transmission of skills'.<sup>16</sup> In Ipswich in 1478 David Brewer provided John Sele with a crash course in the art of dyeing cloth for an agreed tuition fee of £2, subsequently claiming that he had 'well and faithfully taught, serviced and informed Sele so that he learned all things relating to the art'.<sup>17</sup> Brewer's case may lend support to the argument that skills could be learned quickly and that lengthy apprenticeships were unnecessary, but conversely Sele's failure to pay Brewer in full may reflect dissatisfaction with the training he had received. Undoubtedly, a high level of technical expertise was more important in late medieval towns than it had previously been. Sophisticated consumers, both in England and abroad, expected better quality goods from the makers of woollen cloth, pewter and household utensils. Faced with intense competition from semi-trained rural workers, urban cloth finishers, such as shearers and dyers, needed exceptional skills to maintain a stake in the industry and make their products saleable in unpredictable international markets. The success of the cloth finishing and metal industries in late fifteenth-century Ipswich shows that the necessary skills had been passed on from one generation to the next.<sup>18</sup> The number of recorded apprentices in the metal industries suggests that apprenticeship had contributed to their success. On the other hand, not one apprentice to a cloth finisher was admitted at this time, reinforcing the impression created by the Brewer case that there were other, less formal, means by which technical expertise could be acquired.

Masters had the right to correct their charges in due manner, and this power of chastisement was just one of the ways in which they were placed in *loco parentis*. Most apprentices spent their teenage years living in their masters' households, where they were provided with basic necessities such as food and drink, clothing, linen, wool, shoes and a bed. Living under their

master's roof, they could hardly expect to raise a family of their own. Consequently, they promised not to contract marriage, nor pledge themselves to any wife without the permission of their master. Although he later married Margaret and had a son John, William Burre almost certainly did so only after becoming a freeman. The record of his admission makes no reference to his having children and only three of the sixty such records do.

Beyond basic necessities, apprentices could not expect any pay. Indeed, although only Thomas Hayward's indenture refers to any payment being made to the master for taking him on, such a premium would have been common practice. Apprentices could, however, hope for reward in certain specific circumstances. The two later fifteenth-century indentures included provision for a reward on completion of apprenticeship, with Thomas Drayll agreeing to pay Robert Payn 20s, and Geoffrey Osberne agreeing to pay Thomas Heyward 16s 8d. In both cases this may have reflected the longer service they had given, beyond the standard seven years, and have been intended to help cover the initial cost of setting up their own businesses. Furthermore, on the deaths of their masters, fortunate apprentices might receive bequests. John Ladyesman left his unnamed apprentice the tools of his trade as a miller, namely an axe, a *loggyngbelte*, a *knottyngbelte*, a *thubyll* and half a *clapper*.<sup>19</sup> The merchant John Dekene and the pewterer Nicholas Winter both made pecuniary bequests to each of their apprentices, while Nicholas' uncle William Winter, who was in the same trade, left raw materials to each of his, namely a hundredweight of new wrought ware and a hundredweight of old lay metal. Ladyesman arranged for his apprentice to complete his training with one Robert Tegge.

Living together for so long, often in cramped quarters, must have put considerable strain on both master and servant, causing them often to fall out. Nevertheless, these testamentary provisions are not the only evidence that the relationship could be a close one. When he died in 1464, rich in years and worldly possessions, John Drayll left the enormous sum of £70 to the Carmelite Friars of Ipswich so that they would pray, for thirty years, for the souls of himself, his friends and John Deken to whom he had been apprenticed forty years earlier.<sup>20</sup> At much the same time William Burre was attending to the affairs of his late former master, John Wytton, for whose estate he may well have been an administrator.<sup>21</sup>

## APPRENTICES

Having considered the terms on which apprentices served and the relationships that they had with their masters, we must now enquire of their social and geographical origins, what proportion of them became freemen and what careers they went on to pursue.

Late medieval legislators took a lively interest in the labour market – in who should do what, and where. They were particularly concerned to preserve a rural workforce that had been depleted by repeated epidemics of plague, and to prevent villeins from taking the opportunity to flee to towns. A statute of 1388 required any child who had worked on the land up until the age of twelve to 'abide at the same labour, without being put to any mystery or handicraft', but this only encouraged some families to find masters for their children before they reached that age.<sup>22</sup> So, a further statute of 1406 ordained that not only 'Whoever is accustomed to working with a plough or cart, or carrying out other labour or work of husbandry, up to the age of twelve' was debarred from being an apprentice, but also anyone whose parents did not have land or rents worth at least 20s a year.<sup>23</sup> While creating an impression that apprenticeship was reserved for the children of reasonably affluent parents, and sending a clear message to the lower orders to keep their place, the policy behind this statute was primarily to protect the interests of rural landowning employers, who had a powerful voice in parliament. A shortage of young urban labour meant that the law was not always strictly enforced. In 1450, and again in 1471, the lord of Dunningworth, Suffolk, some

twelve miles from Ipswich, allowed a villein to leave the manor to take up apprenticeship in the town. In the earlier year, John son of Nicholas Milys, aged thirteen, paid a fine of 12d for permission to be indentured to John Burre, grocer, and in the later, Nicholas Milys, perhaps a kinsman, paid 4d to be indentured to Thomas Grubbe.<sup>24</sup> A similar shortage in London prompted the City livery companies to petition parliament in 1429 against the 20s qualification which was consequently relaxed in their favour.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the prestigious Grocers' Company stipulated that their apprentices should be freeborn, of good reputation, open, honest and not halt, lame, one-eyed or afflicted with leprosy.<sup>26</sup> In sixteenth-century Bristol, nearly one in five apprentices were children of husbandmen, while considerably more than half had a family background of handicraft or commerce.<sup>27</sup> Although the evidence is lacking, no doubt the same applied in Ipswich. Sons of freemen could expect to be admitted by virtue of their parentage, while those with the most ambitious parents were sent away to London with a view to training and becoming members of City companies such as the Mercers.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the sons of some of the town's bailiffs were indentured locally. Thomas son of Robert Blomfeld (alias Blomvyle), and Nicholas son of Edmund Winter were both apprenticed to their fathers.<sup>29</sup>

The geographical origins of Ipswich apprentices can sometimes be identified from the extant sources. We have already met the two from Dunningworth. Of the four whose indentures survive, William Burre hailed from Great or Little Leighs in Essex, and Robert Payn and Thomas Heyward respectively from nearby Woodbridge and Grundisburgh. Only John Feere was a local lad. The admissions register sometimes indicates the origins of those apprentices who became freemen, for instance, Thomas Cowman from Colchester and John Rolf from Witnesham.<sup>30</sup> In the subsidy assessment Robert Cade's apprentice is described as being an alien, born outside the realm.<sup>31</sup> Since Burre's entry makes no reference to his home town, the absence of such an indicator should not be interpreted as meaning that a boy already lived in Ipswich. Very probably, as in Bristol, the majority were recruited from outside, as part of an ongoing effort to maintain the number of skilled craftsmen and traders working in the town.<sup>32</sup>

The pass rate of apprentices, that is the proportion who went on to acquire the freedom of their town or city, was notoriously low. In London, half of those apprenticed as grocers and two-thirds of those apprenticed as skimmers failed to complete their training, and only the ablest and best connected ever became freemen.<sup>33</sup> In Ipswich, in order to become a freeman, an apprentice had to be indentured to a master who was himself already enfranchised.<sup>34</sup> So, undoubtedly, many unenfranchised craftsmen and tradesmen trained apprentices who had no hope of acquiring burgess status. Only two of the four whose indentures survive are named in the admissions register, namely William Burre and Robert Payn. Several other apprentices receive only a passing mention in borough records. For example, those of the carpenter William Wright were earning, on his behalf, 3d a day, assisting him in his work on the town's mills in 1446–47.<sup>35</sup> Young men indentured in prestigious trades, such as those of grocer or mercer, and to prominent masters, were far more likely to become freemen, while those who braved the cold and the wet to keep the mill sails turning were only ever cheap labour. Having become a burgess, William Burre appears, without ever aspiring to high borough office, to have enjoyed a relatively successful career, albeit subject to the normal vicissitudes of trade. In 1465, ten years after becoming a burgess, he was trading with, taking credit from, and issuing letters of obligation to, the London mercer John Wendey for just under £10; was indebted to John Garstangyr, a London grocer who ultimately made his home in Ipswich, for just over 41s; and was holding stocks of woollen cloth that were seized by his creditors.<sup>36</sup>

If Burre's career lacked panache, that of some others who followed the same path to freedom of the borough, did not. Four went on to serve, at least once, as one of the two bailiffs who were elected each year to govern the town. The earliest, Robert Smyth, is a rather

shadowy figure about whom we know least. Apart from his appearance in the admissions register in 1420 as apprentice to the vintner William Debenham, only his appointment as chamberlain in 1439–40, his two terms as bailiff, in 1447–48 and 1452–53, and one as JP in 1453–54, are recorded.<sup>37</sup> It may be that his trade in wine kept him away from the town for long periods. Two more, the merchant John Drayll, and the pewterer Nicholas Winter, we have already met. Drayll became a freeman in 1432 and, from then until his death in 1464 or 1465, traded successfully as a mercer and merchant. He married Margaret and was survived by two sons, of whom John became a priest and Thomas was master to Robert Payn. He was a close friend of William Debenham, the vintner, next to whom he was buried in the Carmelite Friary. He included, within his circle, Edmund Blake, Thomas Kempe, and Thomas Denys, for all of whom he was appointed executor, as well as the lawyer Robert Wymbyll who acted as Drayll's own executor. He lived in the parish of St Mary Tower and accumulated properties in no fewer than six of the town's eleven parishes. At his death his personal goods included a gown of scarlet, a Prussian chest, silver and gold plate, and pewter. He had risen to high office as one of the twelve portmen in 1445, and, thereafter, served as bailiff in 1449–50 and 1457–58.<sup>38</sup> Winter was a member of perhaps the most prominent Ipswich family in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. He grew up with three brothers, and married Agnes, who bore him at least three sons and two daughters.<sup>39</sup> Having been admitted in 1471, he followed his father into the family pewter business, based in the parish of St Peter, in which he remained for a further seventeen years until he died in 1488. His business interests must have been extensive because, when he died, he left cash gifts to churches in London, Hounslow and Burton Lazars, Leicestershire. He was a portman by 1480, but, owing to his premature death, only served once as bailiff in 1485–86.<sup>40</sup> The most illustrious of these four apprentices was Edmund Daundy, a man 'of great substance'.<sup>41</sup> Best known for his patronage of his nephew, the young Thomas Wolsey, this family connection in itself suggests relatively humble beginnings. Had Daundy's sister Joan come from good stock, she would never have been allowed to marry Wolsey's scoundrel of a father, Robert. Neither of Daundy's parents, Thomas and Mary, nor his brother Richard, made any mark on history.<sup>42</sup> He was, therefore, the epitome of the self made man. He first appears in the borough records in 1479, when, at a relatively mature age, he was sworn into a tithing in south ward.<sup>43</sup> Having been apprenticed to the obscure John Wodeward, he became a freeman in 1482 and thereafter slowly built his career as a successful merchant.<sup>44</sup> Within five years he had married Anne, then on her death, Margaret, and left five surviving children when he died in 1515, two of whom were under twenty years of age.<sup>45</sup> Among his friends and colleagues he numbered the merchant Thomas Alvard the elder, the lawyer William Baker, Henry Stannard and William Stysted. He lived in the parish of St Laurence, and owned shops and warehouses in Ipswich, as well as property in various towns and villages of Suffolk and Essex. He endowed almshouses in Lady Lane and a chantry of St Thomas in the church of St Laurence, and paid for the town's market cross. He held a series of parish and junior borough offices, before serving as bailiff in 1488–89 and 1503–4. He was persuaded to serve for a third time in 1510–11 and to become the town's MP in 1512 and 1515, despite buying exemption, in 1509, from holding office as bailiff for six years, in return for a payment of £33 and a consignment of brick and lime, so that 20,000 bricks could be laid upon the common quay.<sup>46</sup> His son Robert became bailiff and MP after him.<sup>47</sup>

Having met the most illustrious of Ipswich's apprentices, let us move on to look more closely at their masters – from what backgrounds they came, how many apprentices they had at any one time, and what occupations they followed.

## MASTERS

A few of those masters named in the admissions register pursued relatively humble trades. John Sextayn was a barber, as was his apprentice, John Wapone, admitted in 1477, who, in turn, was master to Bartholomew Pykenote, admitted in 1500.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, even Wapone may have come from a reasonably well established family, since another John Wapone, perhaps his father, served the town in the office of porter in the 1470s, and he himself became chamberlain in 1486–87.<sup>49</sup> The majority of masters were men of even greater standing in Ipswich, with fifteen of the recorded forty-four being elected to the office of bailiff at least once.

Since one of the purposes of apprenticeship was to restrict entry to a trade, many towns limited the number of apprentices that a master could have at any one time. In Coventry cappers could have only two, and in London, grocers only two every six years.<sup>50</sup> Similar rules may have applied in Ipswich, but, if they did, the evidence has been lost. Certainly, the surviving thirteenth-century custumal contains no such provision. In the fifteenth century, when skilled labour was in short supply, the need to restrict numbers was not so pressing. Surviving wills show that some of the town's leading burgesses had several apprentices at the same time. John Deken mentions four in 1448, and Nicholas Winter three in 1488.<sup>51</sup> Thirty years later, the subsidy return of the early 1520s reveals that one master, the tanner John Forgon, had three apprentices, another had two, but the remaining nine had only one each.<sup>52</sup> A shortage of living space, and of time available to devote to training, probably meant that most masters limited themselves to one apprentice at a time.

The different trades of those masters named in the admissions register are set out in the table below. In total, they followed sixteen different occupations. Undoubtedly, there were others who never had the opportunity or inclination to put their apprentices forward, such as the miller John Ladyesman and the carpenter William Wright. Merchants had more apprentices than any other occupation. Among textile workers, with one possible exception, only dyers are named, reflecting the growing importance of finishing processes within Ipswich. Although the tanning of leather was a very important industry in Ipswich, only one fifteenth-century tanner, Robert Parmasay, is recorded as a master.<sup>53</sup> The stink that he created and the fine that he thereby incurred, in 1419, for dumping the filth of his trade in the river next to Friars Bridge, illustrates why so much leather manufacturing migrated out of town and why tanners were so often snubbed by polite society.<sup>54</sup>

Occupation	1415–39	1440–69	1470–1500
Leather	1	1	0
Merchant or mariner	4–7	2	6
Metal	1	0	8
Other occupations or occupation unknown	7	1	13
Textiles	3	2	1
Vintners	4–7	0	0
Other victuallers (including grocers and millers)	2	1	0
Total	25	7	28

TABLE 1 – Number of apprentices in each trade.<sup>55</sup>

These records not only tell us who were the masters and apprentices of the time, but also reflect broader economic trends within the town, which are considered next.



## ECONOMIC TRENDS

The early importance of the wine trade to Ipswich is reflected in the name of Tavern Street, which lies at the heart of the town and to this day marks the place where wine was once sold in the Vintry.<sup>57</sup> A vibrant overseas trade with Gascony was channelled through the town to an inland network which distributed the wine throughout Suffolk and beyond, up the rivers Gipping, Deben, Stour and Waveney, and overland as far as Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Thetford.<sup>57</sup> In the two years between November 1396 and October 1398, 800 tuns (201,600 gallons) of wine were shipped into the town's port, accounting for nearly 90 per cent in value of all imports.<sup>58</sup> Over 80 per cent of all overseas trade by Ipswich merchants was in wine, and by 1413–14 this proportion had risen to over 90 per cent.<sup>59</sup> In that year William Debenham shipped 45 tuns, and John Joye 63 tuns. Both men appear as masters in the register of admissions, Debenham with four apprentices and Joye with two.<sup>60</sup> With the loss of Gascony by the English Crown in 1453, this trade all but collapsed, and it did not begin to revive until the very end of the century. As we can see, this is reflected starkly in the table, with not one apprentice of a vintner being admitted as a burgess between 1440 and 1500.

The waning fortunes of textile production in Ipswich can also be traced in the declining number of recorded apprentices, as business was lost to the new towns of the Stour Valley such as Hadleigh and, above all, Lavenham.<sup>61</sup> By the end of the century, however, dyers and shearmen, who finished the cloth by giving it a smooth velvety surface, were once more prosperous. Indeed, the dyer John Halle became one of the town's leading burgesses. He carried on business in the north ward of the town, illicitly constructing a dye pit called 'Adam' in the town ditch in 1466–67, and bequeathing a woad house, probably in Soane Street, to his son when he died in 1503.<sup>62</sup> Having been admitted in 1477, he had been elected as a portman by 1488 and served twice as bailiff in 1489–90 and 1495–96.<sup>63</sup> He generously endowed the church of St Margaret, where his merchant mark may still be seen.<sup>64</sup> In the light of earlier discussion about the importance of apprenticeship as a means of technical education, it may be significant that Halle did not become a freeman by virtue of apprenticeship and that there is no evidence of his ever having had apprentices himself.

The middle years of the fifteenth century were difficult ones for the English economy for reasons beyond the collapse of the wine trade. Both central and local government were weakened by the factionalism, known as bastard feudalism, which flared up in the Wars of the Roses, and the ultimate deposition of Henry VI by Edward IV. Poor harvests caused high food prices and shortages, which further undermined civil stability. A paucity of silver coin with which to effect transactions made trade difficult, and resulted in a dangerously heavy dependence on credit. Civil authorities introduced restrictive practices and threw up trade barriers, in the hope of shielding their own industries, but such protectionism only made matters worse. The period has been described by Hatcher and others as the time of the 'Great Slump'.<sup>65</sup> Although Ipswich was cushioned against the worst of this political and economic malaise by the trade of Hanseatic merchants, who invested heavily in exports of woollen cloth from the town, it could not escape entirely. Many signs of strain are apparent. Petty traders, who had no easy access to credit, were particularly badly hit.<sup>66</sup> Of the sixty apprentices named in the register of admissions, only seven are recorded in the thirty years from 1440 to 1469. This cannot be explained away by a lack of evidence because the register of the general court is almost continuous during this period. It may be that masters were hesitant in committing to the training of apprentices, but equally those who completed their training may have been reluctant to venture out on their own in such a harsh economic climate.

While the worst of the Great Slump was over by 1470, for many towns recession continued well into the sixteenth century. Ipswich was probably more fortunate than most. Undoubtedly,

a key engine of growth after 1470 was metal working. Whereas only one apprentice to a metal worker is recorded as having been admitted before 1470, eight appear thereafter. The local pewter industry boomed, producing, at an affordable price, for an expanding consumer market, 'vessels as brilliant as if they were of fine silver'.<sup>67</sup> Three generations of the Winter family were prominent among manufacturers of pewter, becoming powerful figures in both the commercial and political life of the town.<sup>68</sup> Edmund Winter, the founding father of the business, served as bailiff on six occasions and as MP.<sup>69</sup> One apprentice indentured to Edmund, two to his brother William, and a fourth to another Edmund, probably his grandson, were all admitted during these years.<sup>70</sup> As already mentioned, other unnamed apprentices were the beneficiaries of gifts bequeathed in the wills of William and his nephew Nicholas. While smiths did not enjoy the same status or prominence in borough affairs as pewterers, they too were doing well. Henry Basse, Geoffrey Osberne and John Osberne, who all started out in the fractious middle years of the century, may well have built the success of their businesses, not only in making horseshoes, barrel hoops and similar prosaic items, but in responding to the demand for arms at that time. In the twenty years after 1470 four of their apprentices became freemen. Among them were the aptly named Edmund Bladsmyth, and Robert Basse who trained with Henry, and quite probably carried on the family business until the end of the century.<sup>71</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Apprenticeship was not only an archetypal institution of the Middle Ages, but, as the Ipswich evidence shows, also reflects the economic and social context of the world in which apprentices and their masters lived and worked. While serving as one of the restrictive practices of which medieval people were so fond, it also provided a means of teaching technical skills and a ladder of social mobility by which able young men could make their mark. Edmund Daundy offers the outstanding example in late medieval Ipswich of what an apprentice could achieve. He was not of good birth, and almost certainly lacked the means to buy the freedom of the borough, but through his apprenticeship in Ipswich, and the skills he thereby acquired, he ultimately became a man 'of great substance' and the town's leading burgess.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Miller and Hatcher 1995, 372.
- 2 Suffolk Record Office Ipswich (SROI), C/2/3/6/4, mm. 5r-v; C/2/10/1, m. 2r; C/6/11/1.
- 3 British Library (BL), Add. MS 30,158, fol. 34r.
- 4 Barron 2007, 41.
- 5 BL, Add. MS 30,158; SROI, C/2/10/3/1-5.
- 6 SROI, C/1/9/1.
- 7 The acquisition by Ipswich, in 1200, of its royal charter and, with it, the right of self-government would have discouraged the creation of craft guilds: Bailey 2007, 139-40. Two different spellings of the same word are used to distinguish between the craft guild and the religious gild.

- 8 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 2r.
- 9 The pewterer William Winter bequeathed £1 to the gild when he died in 1476, and his nephew Nicholas 3s 4d in 1488: SROI, R2/293 and TNA (The National Archives), PROB 11/8/254v.
- 10 SROI, C/2/10/1, m. 2r.
- 11 Britnell 1986, 239; Miller and Hatcher 1995, 372; TNA, CP 40/636, m. 327r; Hollis 1949, 15, 94, 118, 181.
- 12 Schmidt (ed.) 1978: *Piers Plowman*, passus xi, lines 125–26.
- 13 TNA, C 1/73/162; SROI, C/2/5/2/1.
- 14 SROI, C/2/3/6/4, m. 5v.
- 15 Smith 1776, 92.
- 16 Ogilvie 2004, 302–4; Epstein 2008, 155, 160–62. Their debate focused on the early modern, rather than medieval, period.
- 17 SROI, C/2/10/1/7, m. 11r.
- 18 Amor 2011, 214–16, 219–23.
- 19 SROI, R1/12–13.
- 20 SROI, C/2/10/1/2 mm. 14r–v.
- 21 SROI, C/2/10/1/3, m. 9r.
- 22 Given-Wilson 2000, 23, 28.
- 23 Strachey, J. and others (eds), 1767–77, *Rot. Parl.*, iii, 602.
- 24 SROI, HD1538/207/7–8 (sources courtesy of Professor Mark Bailey).
- 25 *Rot. Parl.*, iv, 394.
- 26 Nightingale 1995, 397.
- 27 Hollis 1949, 11, 209–11.
- 29 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fols 29v, 38v.
- 30 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fols 1r, 5v.
- 31 SROI, C/1/9/1.
- 32 Hollis 1949, 197.
- 33 Veale 2003, 98.
- 34 Bacon 1884, ii.
- 35 SROI, C/3/3/1/1.
- 36 SROI, C/2/10/1/2, m. 7v; C/2/10/1/3, mm. 9r, 12r.
- 37 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 3r; Bacon 1884, 104, 109–10.
- 38 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 9r; Bacon 1884, 107, 116.
- 39 SROI, R2/293; TNA, PROB 11/8/254v.
- 40 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 29v.
- 41 Bindoff 1982, 2, 20.
- 42 Gladys Scott Thomson describes the Daundy family as well connected ‘merchants of Ipswich’, but quotes no sources for her view: *eadem* 1951, 152–53. A sixteenth-century family pedigree includes neither Edmund’s parents nor his brother: Steer 1958, *passim*.
- 43 SROI, C/2/10/1/7, m. 4r.
- 44 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 38v. John Wodeward was appointed by the borough, with others, to chase up payment of the penny tax for the upkeep of the common quay and crane in 1478, and, in the following year, as chief pledge in the leet court of south ward, but his role as Daundy’s master was by far his greatest service to the town: BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 35v; SROI, C/2/10/1/7, m. 4r.
- 45 TNA, PROB 11/18/154v–156v.
- 46 Bacon 1884, 172, 175, 181–83, 188.
- 47 Bindoff 1982, 2, 20–21.
- 48 SROI, C/2/10/3/5, fol. 212.
- 49 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fols 29v, 32v; Bacon 1884, 154.
- 50 Phythian-Adams 1979, 62; Nightingale 1995, 481.
- 51 SROI, C/2/10/1/1, m. 5r; TNA, PROB 11/8/254v.
- 52 SROI, C/1/9/1.
- 53 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 5r.
- 54 SROI, C/2/8/1/4 (south ward).
- 55 BL, Add. MS 30,158; SROI C/2/10/3/1–5). Some explanation of the 1415–39 column is needed. Three young men became freemen in 1434, following apprenticeships with either William Debenham or John Joye, both of whom had earlier been called vintners, but were not so described in these particular entries. If they were no longer vintners, they had probably become general merchants.
- 56 Redstone 1969, 29–30.

- 57 Amor 2011, 64–66, 93–96.  
 58 TNA, E 122/193/33.  
 59 TNA, E 122/51/39.  
 60 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fols 3r, 6r.  
 61 Amor 2011, 166–71.  
 62 SROI, C/2/10/1/3, m. 10; Norfolk Record Office, NCC, Popy 275.  
 63 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fol. 34r; Bacon 1884, 157, 159, 169.  
 64 Blatchly and Northeast 1996, 387–96.  
 65 Hatcher 1996, *passim*.  
 66 *Rot. Parl.*, v, 108–9.  
 67 Hatcher and Barker 1974, 66.  
 68 Amor 2011; 221–23.  
 69 Bacon 1884, 115, 117, 120, 126, 129, 139; Wedgewood and Holt 1938, 205.  
 70 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fols 29v, 36r; SROI, C/2/10/3/5, fol. 167.  
 71 BL, Add. MS 30,158, fols 35r, 38v; SROI, C/2/10/3/1, fol. 116.

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