

Extracted below is Chapter 1 from *The Thames Watermen in the Century of Revolution* by Christopher O’Riordan.

For a serious study of the Waterman of the Thames, particularly in the early years of the Company, this book is the pre-eminent source of information.

Mr O’Riordan’s meticulous research has enabled many of us following in his footsteps to unearth a wealth of documentary evidence in the archives of the capital. The Waterman and Lighterman page on this website was inspired by Mr O’Riordan’s work. I for one am extremely grateful that Mr O’Riordan has published his work on the internet where it can be enjoyed by all.

A link is provided at the end of this chapter to the rest of the book.

Enjoy!

James Legon

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# 1 The Watermen

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## The Life of the River

The watermen were the taxi-drivers of olden times.<sup>[1]</sup> Their services were of great importance for the transportation of passengers in London and the Thames Valley area, both along and across the Thames. The poor development of the rural roads (they were often no more than a cart track) and the narrow, congested streets of the capital meant that the Thames was the most convenient highway in the region. And until the mid eighteenth century, London Bridge was the only one across the river below Kingston.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Thames of Tudor and Stuart times was crowded with traffic. Wenceslaus Hollar's depiction of the river (in his 'Long View of London' of 1647) is probably not an exaggeration. The watermen 'are very dexterous at steering clear of each other', a contemporary observer commented.<sup>[3]</sup>

Boats of all descriptions plied upon the river. Western barges carried London's corn supplies from the grain-growing regions of southern central England, while in the opposite direction came coal by sea from Newcastle. Lighters loaded and unloaded the cargoes of the great ships that could travel no further upstream than London Bridge. Once the supplies were brought ashore, wharfingers, porters and carters transported them to their destinations.<sup>[4]</sup>

Many rivers were arteries of trade. But the Thames was unusual in that it was also a major highway for passenger traffic. Its placid nature, and tidal character as far upstream as Teddington, made it an ideal, and often an effortless, conveyor for travellers. This was in sharp contrast to the turbulent, rock-strewn Seine through Paris, for example (where, moreover, the multiplicity of bridges reduced the need for watermen<sup>[5]</sup>). Even in Britain the Thames was almost unique as a passenger highway.<sup>[6]</sup> All classes of people availed themselves of its convenience, and many of the foremost institutions (Parliament and the royal palaces for example) were built upon its banks. By the 1620s the river had been made navigable, even for heavy goods traffic, almost as far as Oxford.<sup>[7]</sup>

A strict specialization of river trades was enforced. Only members of the Company of Thames Watermen were permitted to carry passengers on the river,<sup>[8]</sup> and these watermen were not allowed to transport cargo (apart from a reasonable amount of passenger luggage). One grievance voiced by the watermen was that hay and straw-boat men were illegally carrying passengers, thus stealing their trade.<sup>[9]</sup>

The authority of the Watermen's Company stretched from Gravesend in Kent to Windsor in Berkshire. The Company was founded by an Act of Parliament of 1555. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London were thenceforth required annually to choose eight watermen to be rulers of the rest. The rulers were to maintain order and regulation amongst the watermen. (See [Chapter 2](#) for details.)

## Boats and Barges

The watermen worked mainly in small boats. The classic craft was the *wherry*, a swift, agile sharp-bowed boat ('wherryman' was another name for watermen). This was of a standard length of 22½ feet, and could take up to five passengers. Normally a wherry was rowed by two men with long oars. But for cross-river passages and other short journeys it would be manned by a single waterman using short oars or 'sculls'; it was then known as a 'sculler'. Clusters of wherries were on hire at the plying places along the Thames. The larger lighthorsemen and tide boats carried seven and twelve passengers respectively.<sup>[10]</sup>

There were also barges (the analogue of buses) for transporting people *en masse* along the river. These had their designated routes and termini, and a bargemaster would wait until he had an economic complement of passengers before undertaking a journey. The most notable of the barge services was the *long ferry*, which plied between Gravesend and Billingsgate. Gravesend was the debarkation point for travellers from other lands, and the long ferry has been compared to the modern airport bus connecting Heathrow and Central London.<sup>[11]</sup> During the seventeenth century the old open barges were replaced by *tilt-boats*, boats having a 'tilt' or awning so that passengers could travel in more comfort.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Stairs and Plying Places

The places where boats were available for public hire were known as 'stairs' or 'pairs of stairs'. There were also private stairs for the use of, for example, Parliament at

Westminster or the City of London gilds. These stairs were often literally a flight of steps leading down to a wooden jetty which protruded into the river, where the boats would be moored. Here the watermen would ply their trade, often vociferously and very persuasively — competition among them could evidently be intense.[\[13\]](#)

Long-distance transport was available for specific destinations from particular wharves. Besides the long ferry, which plied with the twice-daily tide, 'great boats' were available twice-weekly at Queenhythe for Kingston, Windsor and other upriver destinations, while the Reading boat called weekly at Bull Wharf near Queenhythe.[\[14\]](#)

It was evidently the policy of the Watermen's Company to assign watermen to particular pairs of stairs as their workbase. This would have aided in the supervision of the watermen, a long-running requirement for this unruly body of river workers.[\[15\]](#) City regulations of 1634 laid down that watermen should be at their plying places by 5 o'clock in summer, 7 in winter.[\[16\]](#)

## London Bridge

London Bridge was one of the most outstanding features of the Thames riverscape. It was also a long-standing rival to the watermen's services. When the bridge was under repair after the fire of 1633, some watermen took advantage of its temporary closure to raise fares exorbitantly.[\[17\]](#) Though the great ships could not pass beyond the bridge, there was a small drawbridge at its centre which allowed small sailing vessels to pass through.[\[18\]](#) In addition, some boats appear to have had masts which could be lowered to pass under the bridge.[\[19\]](#)

The bridge was nevertheless an obstacle for river traffic. From early times it had had buildings upon it. More were added as time passed. To support the weight the pillars of the bridge had been built upon wide platforms extending into the river bed, and as time passed these were broadened to withstand the increasing weight. By the seventeenth century the flow of water under the bridge was very restricted as a result. On the one hand this slowed the flow of the Thames, increasing the likelihood of the river freezing over in winter, and provided the scenario for the famous 'frost fairs' on the ice. But it also meant that the passage of water under the bridge was rapid and turbulent. The act of navigating these 'rapids', known as 'shooting the bridge', could be a hazardous enterprise, and a number of people drowned in the attempt. More cautious passengers would disembark on one side of the bridge and rejoin their vessels on the other.[\[20\]](#)

## Conditions of Working

In earlier times when the country had been more lawless watermen had been forbidden to moor their boats on the south side of the Thames, for fear that 'malefactors' would use them to gain access to London.[\[21\]](#) Even in the seventeenth century travel at night was restricted. A Company rule of 1626 provided that no waterman (upon pain of imprisonment) was to carry a fare-paying passenger at any 'unlawful hour of the night' unless such a passenger was known to be 'of honest conversation'.[\[22\]](#)

For religious reasons Sunday labour was disapproved of, and legislation was passed to restrict it. An order of 1584 provided that any waterman working on Sunday 'before morning prayer be done' should be fined 12d, with limited exceptions for 'the time that the Queen's Majesty shall be at [the palaces of] Greenwich, Richmond or Whitehall'.<sup>[23]</sup> Similar conditions were laid down in the bye-laws of 1626 and 1663. Parliamentary legislation on the subject was introduced in 1641 but the bill, against the working of bargemen and lightermen on the Sabbath, does not seem to have been enacted. Legislation of the later seventeenth century sought to ban Sunday traffic altogether except in 'extraordinary circumstances', but it proved impossible to enforce. This was tacitly acknowledged in 1700, when the Watermen's and Lightermen's Act licensed forty watermen to work on Sundays between Vauxhall and Limehouse.<sup>[24]</sup>

It was a tough and independent life the watermen led, and also a poor one. Their character was correspondingly rude and unruly. All the legislation directed against this characteristic failed to stamp it out. Their lack of courtesy towards their customers was contrasted with the polite behaviour of other tradesmen. Nothing but a 'great frost' (i.e. a freeze-up of the river) could teach the waterman good manners, it was said. One writer spoke of gentlemen being baited by 'whole kennels of yelping watermen' at Westminster stairs, 'who are ready to tear them to pieces to have two pence rowed out of your purse'. But this description also illustrates the poverty of, and desperate economic competition amongst, the watermen. They were also renowned for their ready wit and riposte. Nobody got the last retort over a waterman, it was said.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Fares

Watermen's fares were first fixed by an Act of Parliament of 1515. But the Act of 1555, which founded the Company of Watermen, empowered the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London to set the fares from time to time as necessary.<sup>[26]</sup> In 1559 the City government accordingly drew up a table of fares. There were not many increases over 1515, in spite of the inflation which had occurred in the meantime. The next set of fares of which we have any knowledge was issued by the City in 1673, when fares were raised an average of three times over the 1559 levels.<sup>[27]</sup> Although the watermen protested vociferously over many issues, not one complaint appears to have been made about the level of fares in the intervening period — and this in spite of further hefty price-rises. This is an enigma.

A passenger could embark on a wherry as an individual, or hire the whole boat. In the sixteenth century the cost of the former was 1d, while the latter depended on the distance to be travelled. Cross-river fares were set at 1d. for a wherry (whole boat), or ½d. for a sculler.<sup>[28]</sup> On long-distance journeys the fare was 50 per cent greater if the wherry men had to row against the tide. The return journey from London to Greenwich, for example, was 8d. with the tide, but 12d. against it (1559 fares).<sup>[29]</sup> The 'luxury' tilt-boats were three times as expensive, per passenger, as the open barges (6d. as against 2d. in 1559).<sup>[30]</sup>

The watermen's service, like modern taxis, was not one that ordinary people could afford to use on a regular basis. Six pence represented a day's wages for a poor artisan or labourer. Many working people preferred not to pay even a cross-river fare, making a long detour via London Bridge if necessary.

## Numbers and Social Geography

There were, in the period of study, several thousand watermen working on the Thames. Accounts differ as to the precise number. There was a contemporary tendency (as to a lesser extent today) to exaggerate figures for the sake of drama or prestige. Observers seemed to agree, however, that there were in the region of 3,000 to 4,000 watermen.<sup>[31]</sup> An Admiralty census of 1629 recorded a lower figure, 2,426.<sup>[32]</sup> This may have been a more accurate account, but it may also reflect the decline in employment opportunities at that date.

The watermen were one of the largest of the London companies. But it is not certain, as Taylor claimed, that they were *the* greatest.<sup>[33]</sup> The membership of the weavers' and street porters' companies, for example, also ran into several thousands.<sup>[34]</sup>

The watermen generally lived close to the Thames, their source of living. The greatest concentrations were to be found in the City of London, where they lived in the poor riverside parishes, and across the river on the Bankside. According to the contemporary historian John Stow there were 3,000 in London, Westminster and the borough of Southwark, working 2,000 wherries and other small boats.<sup>[35]</sup> This figure may be somewhat exaggerated, but even the Admiralty census shows a great proportion were to be found in this region.

As the census shows, 877 watermen, over one quarter of the total, lived in the poor, populous Bankside district of Southwark.<sup>[36]</sup> They accounted for 25 per cent of the working population in this district.<sup>[37]</sup> In the Clink and Paris Garden areas, 420 watermen made up 40 per cent of the local trades. It has been suggested that the cross-river traffic engendered by the theatres, plus the freedom from impressment in the City militia, were the reasons why so many watermen settled in these areas.<sup>[38]</sup>

Neighbouring Lambeth contained 176 watermen. Concentrations were also to be found at Westminster (107), Greenwich (128) and Gravesend (121).<sup>[39]</sup> In Gravesend, out of 181 freemen in the year 1611, 46 were watermen.<sup>[40]</sup>

## Impressment ('The Press')

The watermen were used as a naval reserve, and their numbers were kept artificially high for that purpose. All members of the Company with the exception of the rulers were liable for impressment.<sup>[41]</sup> However, when a press came the pressmasters would always impress the apprentices first, and avoid taking the master watermen at all where possible. This ensured a supply of fit young men to the Navy while avoiding the social disruption which would have ensued from the conscription of heads of households.<sup>[42]</sup>

The Admiralty survey of 1629 provides details of the watermen's service in the Fleet. Many had made several voyages, while a few had sailed many times. The record was held by John Warden of Redriffe (Rotherhithe), aged 56, with 100 voyages to his credit, but this was exceptional.[\[43\]](#) Some watermen were simply classified as 'seamen'; their ranks (e.g. boatswain, quarter gunner) are recorded in the survey. But many others, including older men, had undertaken no service at all. This was especially true of the ruling elite, most of whom had never served.[\[44\]](#)

Many watermen, especially the royal watermen, were proud of their service to monarch and country. John Taylor the Water Poet, for example, boasted of the sixteen journeys he had made on naval vessels 'during the seven times at sea I served Eliza. Queen' — as a young man of course. Nevertheless the press was widely disliked amongst the watermen, and many would do all they could to evade it. 'Nothing makes [the waterman] fly from the river like a Great Press', said Taylor. The watermen usually evaded impressment by hiding in their masters' houses or going far from the Thames when a press was in progress.[\[45\]](#) But they could also on occasion resort to violence against the pressmasters.[\[46\]](#) There were of course penalties for such evasion.[\[47\]](#)

The watermen were rarely impressed for land service, and indeed they claimed a customary exemption from it. Occasional attempts to impress them into the army were met with vociferous protests, and were usually abandoned.[\[48\]](#)

As was the case with other companies, the pressmasters were themselves members of the Company, usually rulers.[\[49\]](#) Such men had the inside knowledge necessary to execute the press. Their procedure was to notify the watermen and pay them 'imprest money', amounting to several shillings, to cover the cost of their fares to Deptford, Gravesend or other place of embarkation.

The great naval campaigns against Spain and Portugal under Queen Elizabeth had provided much employment for the watermen. Every summer during her reign, half of them served with the Fleet.[\[50\]](#) The peace that obtained under James I was a major, perhaps the principal, cause of the unemployment amongst the watermen during his reign. Naval requirements dropped off sharply, and the Royal Navy came close to disintegration.[\[51\]](#) The government tried to provide alternative employment, and in 1624 passed an order requiring watermen to spend two years of their apprenticeship on merchant ships, and for one merchant crew member in ten to be a waterman. In spite of this, watermen were sometimes turned off ships in preference for professionally-bred seamen.[\[52\]](#) Only with the coming of the English Revolution did things improve. Under the Commonwealth in the 1650s naval activity greatly expanded, and there was much demand for watermen once more.[\[53\]](#)

## **Conflicts With Other Workers**

Conflicts with other interest groups were also blamed for the watermen's economic distress. In a tract written in 1614, John Taylor described how the watermen's numbers had grown since the time of Queen Elizabeth. The main cause was the great number of

theatre-goers crossing the Thames to the flourishing Bankside theatres. As a result, claimed Taylor, there were now 40,000 watermen with their dependents — a figure consistent with around 8,000 working watermen. This was probably a propagandistic exaggeration in support of the cause Taylor was supporting:

And now it has pleased God in this peaceful time that there is no employment at the sea, ... and the players have all (except the King's men) left their usual residency on the Bankside, and do play in Middlesex far remote from the Thames,[\[54\]](#) so that every day of the week they do draw unto them three or four thousand people, and the watermen were considerably under-employed as a result.

Taylor, acting for the watermen, took the case to the Privy Council, asking that the players be constrained to play on the Bankside. (In their reply, the players said that any of London's great institutions could just as well be moved Bankside for the same reason!) A Privy Council commission found the watermen's case justified in so far as the public good of this mass of working men was concerned. But before the matter was finally determined one of the commissioners died, and the chief commissioner was made Master of the Rolls, 'by which means the commission was dissolved, and we never yet had further hearing'.[\[55\]](#)

The rapid rise of the coach as a means of transport also caused difficulties for the watermen. During the later sixteenth century coaches were replacing the horse as a means of land transport, and by the early 1600s they were a serious rival to the watermen.

Against the ground we stand and knock our heeles,  
Whilst all our profit runns away on wheeles  
complained Taylor in 1622.[\[56\]](#) The watermen and the Water Poet expended much rhetoric against 'Hackney hell-carts' and petitioned the authorities against the coaches, pointing out their supposed disadvantages and the damage they were doing to the watermen's trade. But although the watermen won the occasional temporary 'victory', in the long run they were unsuccessful in preventing the spread of coaches. Bills against 'superfluous' and 'outrageous' coaches were introduced to Parliament in 1601 and 1614, only to be rejected by the House of Lords.[\[57\]](#) In 1636 the watermen obtained a royal proclamation against hackney carriages, but the following year it was practically nullified by an order licensing fifty of the coaches. Taylor, who had gone to 'much trouble' to obtain the ruling, was 'much abused' by some watermen who accused him of cozening them of their money.[\[58\]](#) Over the following decades the number of coaches increased steeply. The Cromwellian government licensed 200 in 1652, and when the watermen petitioned against coaches the following year the response was to increase the permitted number to 300. This may have been a riposte to the watermen's royalist petition of 1648.[\[59\]](#) Following the Restoration a proclamation was passed against coaches, but it was ineffective, and towards the end of Charles II's reign the allowed number was increased to 400. It was further increased to 700 in 1694.[\[60\]](#)

Thus the watermen had been totally defeated in their attempt to hold back the wheel of history, but this evidently did them no fundamental damage. Their numbers had increased greatly by the mid eighteenth century, and they found plenty of employment in the

greatly expanded navy of that time. The building of a number of bridges from 1750 onwards was a blow to them. But it was not until the nineteenth century that the improved roads, the steam packet on the river and the steam train on land finally put paid to the jobs of the thousands of oarsmen.

## **Social Position and Structure**

Contemporaries categorized society in three main classes of people. At the top were the 'better sort', the nobility and gentry, and the rich merchant elites of the towns. Below these came the 'middle sort', the landholding peasants (yeomen and husbandmen) and the mass of urban shopkeepers and handicraftsmen. At the bottom of the pile were the 'poorer or meaner sort', consisting of the landless labourers and paupers of the countryside and the unskilled labourers of the towns.[\[61\]](#)

In London, as in other cities and towns, the wealthy elite of merchants monopolized the municipal government. Below them, the City's population was divided into the masses of the middle ranks of craftsmen and traders, and the poorer sort of transport workers, building labourers and other menial occupations. The watermen themselves were usually classed among the poorer sort. But it should be noted that there was a certain amount of skill to the watermen's trade (watermen were required to have two years' rowing experience before being allowed to take charge of a wherry), and that the watermen had a guild-like structure, with a master-apprentice system, imitative of the guilds of the middle sort.[\[62\]](#) The watermen can be regarded as either the bottom rank of the 'middle sort' of London or as the elite of the 'poorer sort'.

A remarkable number of watermen appear to have been householders. A study by the historian Jeremy Boulton (based on the watermen of Paris Garden) shows that, whereas few watermen of apprentice age (below 25) were householders, the proportion rose to almost a half for those aged 25 to 30, and to four-fifths for those aged 30 to 34. All watermen over the age of 45 were householders. These are surprisingly high figures when compared to other contemporary groups.[\[63\]](#)

Among the mass of the poor watermen were some who were well-to-do, and a few who were even quite wealthy. These watermen possessed independent wealth in the form of land or other property,[\[64\]](#) and dominated the more select jobs: Company rulers and other officials, and appointments to royalty, nobility, the City government and the leading guilds. An account of the royal watermen follows. The ruling elite of the Watermen's Company will be dealt with in [Chapter 2](#).

## **The Royal Watermen**

The royal watermen, those serving the King, Queen and Prince of Wales, were not an elite owing their existence to the Company of Watermen, but rather to the requirements of the royal family. They existed long before the beginning of the Company.



Like so many things, the royal palaces were located by the banks of the Thames because of the convenience of transport the river afforded. The main residence of the Stuart monarchs was Whitehall, just downriver of the Westminster parliament. The old Tudor palace complex at Greenwich was also still in use. The Queen's House in Greenwich was a favourite of the consorts of both Charles I and II.

There were, in 1641, forty-four watermen serving the King and lesser numbers of Queen's and Prince's watermen.[\[65\]](#) The royal bargemasters were in charge. Two King's bargemasters were appointed jointly. The 'junior' of these (if he may be so called) was also, when there was a Queen, the Queen's bargemaster. The bargemasters were dignified with the gentry-style titles of 'esquire'.[\[66\]](#)

The bargemasters were paid an annual 'retainer'. In the earlier seventeenth century the King's bargemaster received £30 per annum, and the Queen's £20.[\[67\]](#) The bulk of the watermen's income was, however, earned for specific services. An 'invoice' of the Prince of Wales's watermen for 1641 shows their requests for payment for various services rendered. A short trip in a wherry cost 4s, while £1 8s. was the fee for a return journey in a twelve-oar barge from Lambeth and Whitehall to Sir Anthony Van Dyck's (presumably for the young Prince's portrait to be painted).[\[68\]](#)

The bulk of the royal watermen, including Taylor the Water Poet, seem to have lived at Whitehall. But some, including the King's bargemaster, still lived at Greenwich. A few others were scattered about elsewhere.[\[69\]](#)

The King's bargemastership was held in our period by the Warner family of Greenwich. Richard Warner the elder had been bargemaster to Queen Elizabeth and subsequently to James I's queen until both she and Warner died in 1612. Richard the younger was bargemaster to James I. Again, both monarch and servant died within months of each other, in 1625.[\[70\]](#) His son, Nowell Warner, had been appointed junior bargemaster in 1614 to replace Richard the elder.[\[71\]](#) Now he became senior bargemaster to Charles I. He was replaced as junior bargemaster by Robert Clarke, who thus served Queen Henrietta Maria. Thomas Sibson was the Prince of Wales's bargemaster in the early 1640s.[\[72\]](#)

There were a variety of royal barges, for grand ceremonial occasions and for more ordinary journeys. The King's ceremonial barge was richly decorated with arms and other ornamentation. The rowers did not occupy this barge, but towed it by means of a smaller one known as the 'leader'. In 1617 the Warners built a bargehouse on their own land to accommodate the barges. The royal government decided retrospectively to pay Nowell £30 per annum as a rent for this (thus doubling his income).[\[73\]](#)

When the Civil War came in 1642, the royal watermen divided between King and Parliament.[\[74\]](#) Nowell Warner himself was fiercely royalist. In 1641 he had already clashed with the revolutionaries in the Watermen's Company; in 1648 he became involved in royalist agitation and conspiracy. He and the other royal watermen were dismissed after the execution of the King in 1649, but a few were re-employed as

Commonwealth state's watermen ([Chapter 6](#)). At the Restoration (1660) all the surviving royal watermen were reinstated ([Chapter 7](#)). Nowell Warner lived another two years and was succeeded by his son John, who was bargemaster to Charles II for the remainder of his reign, and after to William III.[\[75\]](#)

## NOTES

### [abbreviations](#)

1. Analogy used by Walter Stern, in his article 'The Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the City of London: The Earliest London Transport Executive', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, V, no. 1, Oct. 1981, (pp.36-41), p.37.

### [Back to text](#)

2. Philip Howard, *London's River* (Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p.172. [Back to text](#)

3. The chaplain to the Venetian ambassador. Alan B Hinds, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Venetian*, XV (HMSO, 1909), p.102. [Back to text](#)

4. Parkes, p.109; ...\* [Back](#)

5. Cf. Humpherus, I, p.312. [Back](#)

### [abbreviations](#)

6. The Avon at Bristol was another rare example. Parkes, pp.110-11. [Back](#)

7. To Abingdon. Humpherus, I, pp.161-2, 211. [Back](#)

8. An exception was made for off-duty seamen. Humpherus, I, p.123, Act of Parliament of 1566. [Back to text](#)

9. Lords MSS, 3 May 1641, petition of the eight rulers of the watermen, annex, fos.6, 7. [Back](#)

10. Parkes, p.96; *Calendar of State Papers Venetian*, XV, p.102; cf. Humpherus, I, pp.\*. The Act of Parliament of 1555 specified that a wherry should be 22½ feet long and 4½ wide 'amidships'. Humpherus, I, p.103. [Back to text](#)

### [abbreviations](#)

11. Stern, 'Watermen', pp.37-8. [Back](#)

12. Broodbank, II, pp.395-8. [Back](#)
13. Parkes, p.99. See below in text. [Back](#)
14. John Taylor, *The Carriers Cosmography* (1637), unpaginated, last two pages. [Back](#)
15. In the revolutionary breakdown of 1641 complaint was made that 'watermen ply how and where they list'. Taylor, *Manifestation*, p.5. [Back to text](#)
16. Rep. 48, fo.233a, order no. 8. [Back](#)
17. PRO, PC 2/42, p.45. [Back](#)
18. Parkes, p.103. [Back](#)
19. See Visscher's print of London on Thames, 1616 (e.g. in Peter Jackson, *London Bridge* [1971], pp.34-5). (Hollar's *Long View* in *ibid*, pp.38-9.) [Back to text](#)

#### [abbreviations](#)

20. \*Suitable refs. to Jackson's book; Parkes, pp.103-5. [Back to text](#)
21. Humpherus, I, p.\*. [Back](#)
22. Humpherus, I, p.217. [Back](#)
23. Rep. 21, fo.35, 10 March 1583/4. [Back](#)
24. Humpherus, I, pp.239, 332, 335, 385-6, 424; Broodbank, II, pp.388-9. [Back](#)
25. Parkes, pp.98-100; \*?source for last sentence? [Back to text](#)
26. Humpherus, I, p.106. [Back](#)
27. Humpherus, I, pp.70-4, 110-114, 313-16. [Back](#)
28. Humpherus, I, p.113. [Back](#)
29. Humpherus, I, p.112. [Back](#)
30. \* [Back to text](#)

#### [abbreviations](#)

31. According to John Taylor the Water Poet, a leading waterman, there were in Queen Elizabeth's time 3,000 or 4,000 watermen plying their trade between Windsor and

Gravesend. (Taylor, *The True Cause*, p.6. What he says here is that every year under Queen Elizabeth 1,500 or 2,000 watermen, half the total number, served in the Royal Navy.) Statements of the mid-seventeenth century give similar figures. Taylor, writing in 1642, says there were 'at least 4,000' (Taylor, *Manifestation*, p.7) and a petition of 1648 states that the watermen were 20,000 'in family', which is consistent with a figure of around 4,000 working watermen (Lords MSS, 18 July 1648, watermen's petition. See the introduction to [Appendix 3](#).)

One other figure ought to be mentioned. Humpherus, writing under the year 1598, quoted the sixteenth-century London topographer John Stow as saying, 'There be forty thousand watermen upon the rolls [of the Company], as I have been told by one of the company; that they can furnish twenty thousand men for the fleet, and that eight thousand were then in the service' (Humpherus, I, p.153). I have not been able to locate this statement in Stow's *Survey of London* (1598; second edition 1603). However, the figures are plainly absurd for a time when the entire population of London was no more than about 200,000. They may safely be divided by ten. Cf. below, '[Conflicts with other Workers](#)'.

[Back to text](#)

32. SP 16/155, fo.85a. The original census on which this figure is based ([SP 16/135 \[4\]](#), fo.46v) gives a slightly higher figure, 2,453, but there are inaccuracies in totting up. See [Bibliography](#).

[Back to text](#)

33. Taylor, *The True Cause*, p.10. [Back](#)

34. \*weavers' ref? There were about 3,000 street porters in 1645. Stern, *Porters*, p.50. [Back to text](#)

35. Stow, *Survey* (1598), p.11 (p.12 in the 1603 edn.). [Back](#)

36. SP 16/135(4), fos.12b, 14a, 20a, 25b. The figures are given as follows: St. Saviours - 359; St. Saviours upper ground - 347; St. Olaves - 46; Battle Bridge - 25; Horsey Down - 100.

[Back to text](#)

37. Boulton, p.71. [Back](#)

38. Ibid., p.69. The Clink and Paris Garden were 'liberties' of London, having freedom from City tax and militia obligations. [Back to text](#)

39. SP 16/135(4), fos.29b, 38b, 8b, 7a. [Back](#)

40. Robert Pierce Cruden, *History of Gravesend* (1843), pp.283-4. [Back](#)

[abbreviations](#)

41. Valerie Pearl has pointed out that freedom of the Company of Watermen could not have automatically bestowed freedom of the City of London (as was the case with many other companies), because this would have made the watermen immune to impressment. Stern, 'Watermen', p.40 and note 31. However, watermen to royalty, noblemen, members of parliament, government officers, the Corporation of London and the livery companies were not impressed 'except on very urgent occasions'. Humpherus, I, pp.6, 156; cf. p.379.

[Back to text](#)

42. This policy went into reverse in the eighteenth century, when freemen were impressed in preference to apprentices. Humpherus, II, pp.\*. [Back to text](#)

43. SP 16/135(4), fo.10b. [Back](#)

44. See [Appendix 3](#) for many examples. [Back](#)

45. E.g. *CSPD 1653-54*, p.333. [Back](#)

46. E.g. Lords MSS, 3 May 1641, petition of Henry Russell. The immediate cause of the revolt of 1631-32 was a press, for a mere 83 men, to serve in the Thirty Years' War in Germany. See Chapter 3, section ['The Revolt of 1631-32'](#).

[Back to text](#)

47. These were laid out in various pieces of legislation relating to the watermen, including the Acts of Parliament of 1555 and 1603. It has even been suggested that the real purpose of the 1555 Act was to enforce a supervision of the watermen for the purpose of naval impressment! Broodbank, II, p.\*.

[Back to text](#)

48. Humpherus, I, pp.218-19, 246-7, 250, 317, 363; and see [Chapter 4](#). [Back](#)

49. E.g. Henry Russell in 1641, Richard Nutt, Edward Gollin and William Bromwich in 1657 and 58. Lords MSS, 3 May 1641, petition of Henry Russell; *CSPD 1657-58*, pp.401, 412; *1658-59*, p.406; for rulerships, see [Appendix 3](#).

[Back to text](#)

50. *CSPD 1603-10*, p.228; Taylor, *The True Cause*, p.5. [Back](#)

[abbreviations](#)

51. *CSPD 1603-10*, p.228; Taylor, *The True Cause*, pp.6-7; R McCaughey, 'The English Navy, Politics and Administration, 1640-49', New University of Ulster, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (1983), p.2.

[Back to text](#)

52. *CSPD Addenda 1580 - 1625*, p.661; *CSPD 1625*, p.81. Trinity House, who were responsible for recruiting seamen, opposed the use of watermen on merchant ships. G C Harris, *The Trinity House at Deptford 1514 - 1660*, University of London Historical Studies, XXIV (1969), p.251. Only five per cent of the crews of merchant ships were in fact watermen in the 1630s. R McCaughey, 'The English Navy, Politics and Administration, 1640-49', New University of Ulster, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (1983), pp.154-5.

[Back to text](#)

53. Chapter 4, subsection '[Naval service](#)'. [Back](#)

54. This was probably the result of the burning down of the Globe Theatre in 1613. [Back](#)

55. Taylor, *The True Cause* (c. 1614), pp.5-9. [Back](#)

56. Taylor, *An Errant Thief* (1622), quoted in Humpherus, I, p.208. [Back](#)

57. Humpherus, I, pp.156-7, 191. [Back](#)

58. *CSPD 1634-35*, p.69; Broodbank, II, pp.384-5; Taylor, *Commons Petition*, p.11. [Back](#)

59. See [Chapter 6](#). [Back](#)

60. Broodbank, II, p.385. [Back](#)

[abbreviations](#)

61. See Manning, *English People*, pp.104-5, for the London classification. [Back](#)

62. See [Chapter 2](#). [Back](#)

63. Boulton, pp.155-60. Boulton's survey is based on the admiralty muster of watermen of 1629 (SP 16/135[4]) and the Paris Garden sacramental token book of the same year (GLRO, P 92/SAV/305). The extremely high householding rates for older watermen could be partially explained if some older dependent watermen had been left off the muster. Boulton, pp.159-60.

[Back to text](#)

64. As can be seen from tax accounts. See [Appendix 3](#). [Back](#)

65. PRO, LC 3/1 (list of King's servants, July 1641), fo.12a. There were apparently 25 Queen's watermen in 1662 including the Queen's bargemaster. *CSPD 1661-62*, p.451.

[Back to text](#)

66. \* [Back to text](#)

67. *CSPD 1603-10*, p.135; *CSPD Addenda 1580 - 1625*, p.135. Cf. *CSPD 1627-28*, p.545; *CSPD 1660-61*, p.449.

[Back to text](#)

68. BL, Additional MS 32,476, fos.19-22. See Oliver Millar, *Van Dyck in England* (National Portrait Gallery, 1982), pp.102, 103.

[Back to text](#)

69. \*; SP 16/135(4), fos.5a, 9b, 13b, 16a 29a, 36b, 43a & b, 46b. [Back to text](#)

70. *Transactions of the Greenwich and Lewisham Antiquarian Society*, I (1905), p.391; Hasted, *The History of Blackheath Hundred*, ed. Drake (1886), p.100.

[Back to text](#)  
[abbreviations](#)

71. SP 39/4, no. 51, grant of the King's bargemastership to Richard Warner and his son Nowell, 1614.

[Back to text](#)

72. Nowell Warner and Clarke are first referred to as Charles I's bargemasters in the admiralty survey of Feb. 1628/9 ([SP 16/135\[4\]](#)), fo.4b. [\*Subs. refs] For Sibson, see the 'invoice' of the Prince's watermen of 1641 (BL, Add. MS 32,476, fos.19-22); cf. Lords MSS, 10 Oct. 1643, where the signatures of Warner, Clarke and Sibson appear on a document certifying that Joh Hart was one of the King's bargemen.

[Back to text](#)

73. [\*ch. 5, cspd etc;] Parkes, pp.106-8; *CSPD 1627-28*, p.545. [Back to text](#)

74. John Taylor, *Mad Verse, Sad Verse ...* (1644), p.\*. [Back](#)

75. Hasted, *The History of Blackheath Hundred*, ed. Drake, p.100. [Back](#)

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