

Nicholas Mayhew

The Brewsters of Aberdeen in 1509

In 1509 as part of the town's regulation of the price and quality of ale,¹ a list of all those brewing in Aberdeen was compiled, and entered into the Burgh Register. It was important that the town officials knew who was brewing, in order to enforce the regulations effectively. The list has considerable interest for students of the social, economic, demographic and gender history of the town, and seems worth publishing.

Aberdeen Burgh Council Register VIII, folios 1205-9

Broustaris

Curia Ballivorum de Aberdene tenta In pretorio eiusdem quinto die mensis Novembris Anno Domini Millesimo Quingentesimo nono

Evin quarter

The said Day thir ar the Names of the broustaris giffin be the officiar of the Evin quarter th^t [that] is to say Normond of lesly

The wif of Sandy Penny
the wif of Will Carduo flesß [flesher]
the wif of Malcum Crag
the wif of Johnne Raburne
the wif of Sandy Findlaw
the wif of Androu Bavne
the wif of Thome Riddaile
the wif of Nichole Bewmond
the wif of Alexander Nory
the wif of James Strathachin
the wif of Johnne Froster
Canny Dunde
the wif of Johnne of M'ray

the wif of Thome Towle margin: unfre
the wif of Sandy Couper Zoung margin: unfre
the wif of Androu Wricht
the wif of David Lambe
the nuryß of Mi^{ch} [or Meg] Litstar
the wif of Johnne Stevinsone eld'
the wif of Alexander Myrtonn'
the wif of Georg Barbour
Katherin Wrquhard
the wif of Johnne Cuk

folio 1206

The wif of Thome Findelaw smy^t [smith?]
the wif of Philip of Kelly
Mally Adamson
the wif of Androu Stevinsone
the wif of Thome Watson
the wif of David Criste
the wif of Will Bowak Wry^t
the wif of Wilza' Stile m'^{ch}and [merchant]
the wif of Androu Umfray
the wif of Syme of Ellone
the wif of James Ottirbur margin: unfre
the wif of Robert Piper
the wif of Sandy Tulidess

folio 1207

Crukit quarter

Thir ar the names of the broustaris of the crukit quarter eft'
[after] following giffin In in [sic] bill be Johnne Cuk officiar
of the said quarter

Fre

The wif of Johnne Piper
Mally Fif
the wif of Alexander Hay
the wif of Wilzeam Portar [interlineated]
the wif of Johnne Rohe
the wif of Patsy Artho'
the wif of Wilzeame Skene

NICHOLAS MAYHEW

Isabell Traill
the wif of Androu Haw
the wif of Richard Waus
the wif of Androu Naughtie
the wif of Wilzeame Ramsons
the wif of Alexander Tailzeour
the wif of Robert Flesß^r
the wif of Johnne Wschear
the wif of Wilzeame Belty
the wif of And^o Michelsone
the wif of Richerd Barnis
Jonet Henry
the wif of Thome Storour
the wif of Johnne Watsone
Katherin Skynner
the wif of Johnne Grey
the wif of Wilzeame King
the wif of Robert Barbo^r
the wif of Sandy Brabner
the wif of Johnne Bowar
the wif of Will Loremar
the wif of Johnne Loremar
the wif of Androu Stot
Agnes Kintor
the wif of Wilzeam Smytht
the wif of Androu Body
Marionn Fethnantyr
the wif of Gilbert M'nothe
Canny Waus

Unfre
the wif of Walter Murray
the wif of Johnne Vilzea' sen'
the wif of Donald Baxt' Zong'
the wif of Thome Dougles
Jonet Mar
Canny Gothrasone
Mally Logy
the wif of Patsy Rait

Kathewrin Fraß^r

folio 1208

Gren' quarter

Thir ar the names of the broustaris fre and unfre gevin In be
Androu Naughtie officiar of the grene quarter

Fre broustaris

The wif of Johnne Ray
the wif of Sandy Moresone
the wif of Johnne Wobst'
the wif of Alexander Rothe
the wif of Gilbert Litster
the wif of Johnne Red wobst'
the wif of Androu Fuches
Anny Stiklar
the wif of Thome Umfray
Marionn' Couper
the wif of Syme Flesß^r
the wif of Alexr' Malisone
the wif of Mathou Branche
the wif of Thome Stralothe
the wif of Alexd Couper
Mally Fergous
the wif of Alexand'Lamy'ton'
the wif of Gilbert Mureson'
the wif of Philp Belma'
the wif of And^o Tailzean'
the wif of David Couper
the wif of Sandy Donaldsone
the videw of Henry Lorne
the videw of Johnne Fechat
the wif of Davy Tailzeo^r
the wif of Alexd Slater
the wif of Wilzea' Slater
the wif of Johnne Syme
the wif of Thome Louson'
the wif of Wilzeame Slater
the wif of Wilzeam Wobst'

NICHOLAS MAYHEW

the wif of Will Sturgis

Unfre

the wif of Berryhill Slater'

the wif of Alexander Thekar

Mally Kintor

Magy Wry^t

the wif of Johnne Blak Fischear

Myt Couper

folio 1209

Futy quarter

Thir ar the names of the broustaris fre and unfre of the Futy quarter giffin In be Wilzeame Scrimgeour officiar of the samyne

Fre

The wif of Johnne Ramsay

the wif of David Brriß

the wif of Gilbert Paule

the wif of David Fynne

the wif of Richerd Wry^t

the wif of David Straloth

the wif of Wilzeam Rolland

the wif of Wilzeam Blinseill

the wif of Johnne Kern'ty

the wif of Richerd Redhed

the wif of Alexand' Burnat

the wif of And^o Lousone

the wif of David Steuart

the wif of C'stofer Prat

the wif of Patrik Reid

the wif of Alexand' Blair

the wif of Normand Lesly

the wif of Wilzeam Sc'mnger [Scrimgeour]

the wif of Johnne Fleß

the wif of Thome Lamy'ton' [margin: Futy]

the wif of Thome Tailzo^r

the wif of Johnne Cr'omy [?]

the wif of Johnne Mathouson'

Unfre

the wif of Johnne Couper

the wif of C'sty S'yinner [Skyenner?]

Mag Quhit

Bessy Luthonris

The maltman'

the wif of Gilbert Wellis

the wif of James Liddail

the wif of Wilzeam Parsonson'

the wif of Downy

Katryne Kynd

the wif of Thomas Towy

[The first letters of all names have been capitalized. All abbreviations have been rendered '. V and W have been left as in the MS. Z has been used for ʒ, and th for y.]

Women's history nowadays is very much in vogue, but even those who rather resent the current fashion usually admit that women's failure to appear much in historical writing before the 1970s reflected modern assumptions about what was important rather than the balance of surviving evidence. Women are to be found in the records, once historians begin to look for them.

Nevertheless, lists of women's names like the one published here are not common, especially in Scotland.² As always with rare Scottish medieval evidence, it is important to try to extract as much information as possible from such sources. In this case, the evidence can be analysed for what it tells us about brewing, about women, and about Aberdeen.

We should note to begin with that the brewsters are here usually named only as the wife of some named man, but sometimes they occur in their own name with no mention of a husband. Only two women in Green quarter were described as someone's widow. There was one nurse listed as a brewster in the Even quarter. Twenty-three women were listed in their own names, thirteen as free brewsters, and ten as unfree. It

seems likely that those women who appear in the list under their own names were brewing independently of any man.

Sharon Krossa has done a good deal of work on women mentioned in the Aberdeen Court records in their own names.³ In Scotland it was normal for women to retain their own names throughout their lives, though married women might also be known as someone's wife. Thus Agnes Strathachin, wife of Andrew Gardon, might be met in the records as Agnes Strathachin, or as the wife of Andrew Gardon, or in the full form employing both her name and her husband's, but she would not be listed as Agnes Gardon. The question is important since it may help us to identify independent women. For example, if the brewsters listed in their own names as opposed to their husbands', may be regarded as independent women, the 1509 Aberdeen list of brewsters may be compared with stent or tax rolls, which identify tax-paying heads of households. Those taxed are normally men, but women are encountered in such lists, in the absence of a living adult male in the household. Thus the 1408 Aberdeen tax roll contains 344 names of which at least 60 are women.⁴ Wives with living husbands were not listed at all, their husbands paying tax for their whole household, so the named women appear to be living independently, or like Meg Fernwale, Anny Modane or Mauld Cuykl, together with other women.

In Aberdeen in 1408 it seems that about 17% of taxed households were headed by a woman, whether spinster or widow. In the 1509 list of brewsters about 16% seem to be women without husbands, i.e. women listed in their own names rather than as someone's wife. In an Edinburgh survey of 1635 the figure was somewhat higher with 22% of households headed by women.⁵ Figures of this sort are broadly comparable with medieval and early modern English evidence.⁶

The demographic implications of working women in later medieval England have been much discussed by scholars.⁷ The Scottish evidence prompts two questions: what may be regarded as a normal proportion of households headed by women? and did it change over time? For example the work of Paul Bischoff on late thirteenth-century Lincoln seems to be

revealing significant numbers of unmarried women rather earlier than we have become accustomed to look for them.⁸ Since we also find them in strength in Sharpe's seventeenth-century Devon,⁹ and Flinn's late eighteenth-century Edinburgh,¹⁰ we may wonder how far the working woman may be thought of as a particularly later medieval phenomenon. Additionally, Grethe Jacobsen's work on Malmö tax lists of 1517-19, should also remind us that relatively constant numbers of female taxpayers, ranging from 15.9% to 13.5% in these years, actually conceals a very high turn-over amongst the women involved, since only about half of these women reappear from year to year.¹¹

There is a further, related question: what factors determined age at, and incidence of, marriage? In the seventeenth century men's wages have been found by Wrigley and Schofield to be a more important influence on age at marriage.¹² Pamela Sharpe's study of spinsters in Colyton in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates that although this was a time and place with more women's work and pay than was common elsewhere it seems to be associated with less and later marriage caused principally by falling men's wage rates and employment opportunities.¹³ Thus the numbers of female headed households and their effect on the birth-rate from place to place and in different periods need to be established with some care. It is possible naming practice in Scotland may help in this task.¹⁴

The 1509 brewsters list also compares interestingly with the Aberdeen Stent Roll of 1655, for which Siobhan Convery of Aberdeen City Archives has prepared a transcript. While all the brewsters of the early sixteenth century were women, except for the maltman, whose profession obviously explains his involvement, by 1655 only 10 of the 48 people earning money from brewing were women, and 30 of these brewers were located in Footdee. Widespread, domestic and overwhelmingly female brewing had given place to localized, specialized, and increasing male-dominated brewing. While women as wives or servants may still actually have been doing the work, it was men who were taking the profits.

Finally the brewsters' list of 1509 throws a shaft of light

onto the organisation of the burgh, which was divided into quarters, each with its own serjeant. The division between free and unfree townspeople was also carefully noted. Women could clearly enjoy the freedom of the town, either as wives or widows. It is not certain if a spinster could trade as free, but she could certainly bestow her inherited freedom on her husband, subject to the payment of the customary dues.¹⁵ Only free brewsters were permitted to brew the best ale, the unfree having to sell their ale for a lower price, which forced them to make it weaker. The brewsters' list thus contributes a good deal to our understanding of social, economic and gender issues in late medieval Aberdeen.¹⁶

Notes

1. For a fuller discussion of the Assize of ale in Scotland, see Elizabeth Gemmill and Nicholas Mayhew, *Changing Values in Medieval Scotland: a study of prices, money and weights and measures* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 48-53.
2. Elizabeth Ewan has found similar, longer, but slightly later lists for Edinburgh.
3. Sharon Krossa, PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1996.
4. P. J. Anderson, ed., *Charters and other writs illustrating the history of the royal burgh of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1890) 312-7, from ACR II,26. The women include one *uxor vicarii*. See also Grethe Jacobsen, 'Women, Marriage and Magisterial Reformation', in *Pietas et Societas*, eds. Kyle C. Sessions and Phillip N. Bebb (Kirksville, 1985), pp. 62-7 for priests, concubines and marriage.
5. Michael Lynch, 'The social and economic structure of the larger towns, 1450-1600', in *The Scottish Medieval Town*, eds. Michael Lynch, Michael Spearman and Geoffrey Stell (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 263, and p. 282, n. 13 where he notes lower numbers of women taxpayers in Edinburgh 1583, 6.67%, Aberdeen 1623 10.5%, 1637 8.96% and Sterling householders c.1550 18.7%. Clearly the exact purpose of the original list could affect the numbers of women recorded quite markedly.

6. See the evidence summarized by Judith Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside* (N.Y. OUP, 1987), p. 279, n. 10. At Brigstock in the partial rental of 1319 Bennett found eleven women out of 60 tenants, i.e. 18% (ibid. p. 164). C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1979), found 19.7% of households in the census of 1522 headed by a women. Laslett's study of 100 communities found slightly more widows, but fewer single women heading households, the overall total working out at 16.3% (*Household and family in past time*, eds. Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (Cambridge, 1972), p. 147). Erika Uitz, *Women in the Medieval Town* (London, 1990), p. 114, found a range from 8% to 38% for unmarried or widowed taxpayers in continental lists. So wide a variation probably reflects different taxation practice from place to place.
7. Mark Bailey, 'Demographic decline in late medieval England: some thoughts on recent research', *ECHR* XLIX 1996, pp. 1-19, critically summarizes the work of P. J. P. Goldberg, L. R. Poos and R. M. Smith.
8. Paul Bischoff, 'Women and the thirteenth century Lincoln market: stages of life, stages of capitalization', paper read to the Second Exeter International Gender History Conference, 15 July 1996.
9. Pamela Sharpe, 'Literally spinsters: a new interpretation of local economy and demography in Colyton in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *ECHR* XLIV 1991, pp. 46-65.
10. M. W. Flinn, ed., *Scottish Population History*, 1977, 283, cited by R. A. Houston in 'Women in the economy and society of Scotland 1500-1800', in R. A. Houston and I. D. Whyte, eds., *Scottish Society 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 122.
11. Grethe Jacobsen, 'Female migration and the late medieval town', in *Migration in der Feudalgesellschaft*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Albert Müller, p. 46, citing Leif Ljungberg, ed., *Lyder van Fredens Kämnräkenskaper för Malmö, 1517-1519* (Malmö, 1960).

NICHOLAS MAYHEW

12. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (London, 1981), p. 255, 263.
13. Pamela Sharpe, op. cit. See also her invaluable essay in bibliography, 'Continuity and change: women's history and economic history in Britain', *EcHR* xlviii 1995, pp. 353-369.
14. Houston, in 'Women in the economy and society of Scotland 1500-1800', R. A. Houston and I. D. Whyte, eds., *Scottish Society 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 139, n. 97, observes that the Scots practice gave way to the English between the late seventeenth and late eighteenth century.
15. ACR VIII, 19.
16. See also Nicholas Mayhew, 'The status of women and the brewing of ale in medieval Aberdeen', *Review of Scottish Culture*, forthcoming, and 'Women in Aberdeen at the end of the middle ages', *Fifth Mackie Symposium, Women's History: Scottish and International Perspectives*, forthcoming.