This article was downloaded by: [University of Birmingham]
On: 19 November 2014, At: 02:23
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,
UK

Scottish Geographical Magazine

Publication details, including instructions for authors
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsgj19>

The trade of Leith in the Middle Ages

M.C. March M.Sc.

Published online: 30 Jan 2008.

To cite this article: M.C. March M.Sc. (1914) The trade of Leith in the Middle Ages,
Scottish Geographical Magazine, 30:8, 428-430, DOI: [10.1080/14702541408554092](https://doi.org/10.1080/14702541408554092)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14702541408554092>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

THE TRADE OF LEITH IN THE MIDDLE AGES.¹

By M. C. MARCH, M.Sc.

I.—ARTICLES OF TRADE.

THE greatest difficulty in writing on the trade of the port of Leith in the Middle Ages lies in the scantiness of the information to be obtained. There were, of course, no "blue books"; all that is known of the articles of trade must be gleaned from lists of goods to be taxed on entering or leaving the haven, or from incidental references in the charters. In 1428 the tolls to be exacted from trading ships were established by James I., seemingly for the first time. This charter is merely a list of dues to be levied on boats *entering* the harbour, and the goods to be taxed were as follows:—

1. Wool.	9. Skins.
2. Hides.	10. Corn.
3. Meal.	11. Salt.
4. Coal.	12. Barley.
5. Malt.	13. Herring.
6. Tar.	14. Boards.
7. Bowstaves.	15. Planks.
8. Granary goods in general.	

Certain of these goods seem to stand out from the rest as of special interest. Thus *coals* are interesting because the charter is a record of their early commercial importance. *Boards* and *planks* point to the fact that the surrounding woods, which must have been still numerous at that date, were not sufficient to supply timber fit for building, although, as we gather from the description of the architecture of that time, the houses cannot have required large timbers for joists, etc. *Meal, barley and wool* are noteworthy as showing that the development of agricultural and pastoral industries in the surrounding country was not adequate to supply the needs of Edinburgh. This may have been due in part to the still wooded state of the country, and also in part to the frequent invasions of the English.

The list of imports is increased by a charter of 1454, in which Sir James Logan of Restalrig was requested to prevent goods from being unpacked in Leith. Although this charter refers to articles of trade in general, yet it includes a list of certain goods which had been thus unlawfully treated. These are:—

1. Wine.	5. Soap.
2. Iron.	6. Linen cloth.
3. Wax.	7. Flax.
4. Tar.	8. Boards.

Six of these articles (1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7) are not mentioned in the list of 1428, but they must have been commonly imported by 1452.

¹ See also p. 369.

In 1482 James III. rectified the charter of customs of James I., adding the following goods to the list of taxed articles :—

1. Lime.	10. Yellow dye weed.
2. Joists.	11. Ass (probably potash.)
3. Bowstrings.	12. Barrels.
4. Apples.	13. Onions.
5. Fish (salmon, stokfish, etc.).	14. Cheese and butter.
6. Salt meat.	15. Sail canvas.
7. Spears.	16. Vinegar.
8. Oil.	17. Woad.
9. Tallow.	18. Silk goods.

In this list kinds of wine are named for the first time, viz., Rhenish and Malvoisie, also the following skins, calf, goat, kid, rabbit, polecat, otter and badger. In this case it is not stated whether the taxes were on incoming or outgoing vessels, except in the case of coal and lime, where the tax was 2d. for each chalder (=about 8 quarters), whether coming or going, while the tax on white fish and herring leaving the port is 1d. a load. The skins mentioned are those of animals found in the country, and it is probable that these were exported. This was certainly the case in 1468, where the taxes are divided into those on incoming and those on outgoing vessels, as follows :—

Goods to be taxed on incoming vessels.

1. Wine.	10. Butter.
2. Meal.	11. Vinegar.
3. Pitch.	12. Onions.
4. Tar.	13. Apples.
5. Sail canvas.	14. Flax.
6. Soap.	15. Bowstrings.
7. Dry merchandise.	16. Woad.
8. Oil.	17. Yellow dye weed.
9. Iron chains.	

Goods to be taxed on outgoing vessels.

1. Salt.	4. Skins (polecat, otter, rabbit, etc.).
2. Smithy coals.	5. Hides.
3. Wool.	6. Cloth.

The mention of woad and yellow dye weed in the imports, with that of cloth amongst the exports, indicates that weaving was becoming an important industry, though wool was still an important export, since early in the sixteenth century there are several prices given for the freight-
ing of ships with wool and hides to Flanders and France.

A list of dues levied about the beginning of the sixteenth century adds a few more articles to the list of imports :—

1. Pepper.	5. Rice.
2. Alum.	6. Figs.
3. Ginger.	7. Raisins.
4. Almonds.	

No comparison can be made between the values of imports of this period and the present time, but it is possible to make a comparison in the kinds of goods which formed the principal imports then and those which are chiefly important now.

The following tables are averages made from the values of the imports for the years 1907-1912 inclusive.

Table A. *Imports whose average value is over £100,000 a year.*

N.B.—The figures are given in million pounds sterling.

Butter,	·2539	Iron,	·3012
Cheese,	·1972	Oilseed,	·1245
Grain,	2·8811	Oilseed cake,	·0624
Cotton manufactures,	·1119	Paper,	·1946
Flax,	·3314	Papermaking materials,	·1053
Glass,	·1550	Cotton seed,	·1740
Hemp,	·1141	Linseed,	·1343
Linen yarn,	·3716	Sugar,	1·6236
Manures,	·1949	Wine,	·1109
Margarine,	·1269	Timber,	·31022
Meat,	·1503	Wool,	·177511

Table B. *Percentage values of these imports.*

1. Grain,	20·203	12. Oilseed and cake,	1·311
2. Sugar,	11·492	13. Wool,	1·244
3. Eggs,	7·942	14. Cotton seed,	1·227
4. Linen yarn,	2·510	15. Glass,	1·08
5. Flax,	2·34	16. Meat,	1·0542
6. Timber,	2·178	17. Linseed,	·942
7. Iron,	2·112	18. Margarine,	·889
8. Butter,	1·785	19. Hemp,	·8
9. Cheese,	1·383	20. Cotton manufactures,	·784
10. Manures,	1·367	21. Wine,	·777
11. Paper,	1·364	22. Paper-making materials,	·738

From these figures it will be seen that of the eight most important imports, *i.e.* those above 1·5 per cent., five are mentioned in the early records of the trade of Leith. Of these five, two are articles of food, *i.e.* grain and butter, the remaining three are articles for manufacture and timber for building.

There is another point that might be noticed, and that is, that judging from tax lists, the imports far exceeded the exports in value. In 1912 the total exports amounted to £8,107,811, while the total imports reached the value of £16,531,420.

It seems, therefore, that the trade of Leith port to-day differs from the trade of Leith in the Middle Ages more in amount than kind. This is only to be expected, as Edinburgh, of which Leith is the port, has retained much of its old character as a military and educational centre, since it has not become a great industrial centre.

(*To be continued.*)