

## Horse Fairs in the Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon



*An extract from **History of the County of Warwick: Volume 3**  
Published by Victoria County History, London, 1945.*

Evidence of the economic relations of Stratford with the surrounding districts is afforded by the toll books of horse sales in the borough in the 17th and 18th centuries. The earliest of these, in 1602, (fn. 33) though only 12 sales are recorded, shows, in the places from which the buyers and sellers came, the importance of some of the principal roads going through or near the town: the road from Oxford to Birmingham; the Fosse Way, which crosses this road at Halford-on-Stour, 7 miles to the south of Stratford, and the Banbury road at Eatington, 5 miles to the east of it; and the road going out to the west, through Alcester towards Worcester.

At the fair on 24 Sept. 1646 there were no less than 217 sales of horses, (fn. 34) and at the fair only 10 days previously there seem to have been 141 sales; at the May fair in 1646 there were 58, and the undated record of another fair, held apparently about the same time, gives 74; (fn. 35) but at none of the 18th-century fairs of which the toll books survives were there more than 19. (fn. 36)

The toll books show that, like Coventry and unlike Warwick, Stratford was in the 17th century 'a town of common road'. (fn. 37) The fair of 24 Sept. 1646 attracted sellers from the heaths and open pastures of north-west Warwickshire, Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire, one of the great horse-breeding districts of 17th-century England, connected with Stratford by the Fosse Way.

One of these dealers, Arthur Dobbs of Atherstone, sold over £79 worth of stock, and another, John Alcocks of Wolvey, nearly £52 worth. Six dealers from Strettonon-Dunsmore sold between them 35 horses, colts, and mares for £128 4s. 4d., and the sales of 7 persons from North Kilworth realized £58 11s. 4d.

The principal buyers came from the west: from the forests of Arden and Feckenham, from the north Cotswolds, and especially from the middle Severn and lower Avon valleys and the thickly planted villages between Stratford and Worcester. (fn. 38) Some of these men too were dealing on a considerable scale; Thomas Hill of Norton-byEvesham bought a mare, 2 geldings, and 5 colts for £44 2s. 10d.; John Harris of

Fladbury, 7 beasts for £37 6s. 8d.; and the purchases of 6 persons from Severn Stoke came to £60 10s. 6d. There is, further, a marked connexion, which also appears in 1602, with the country to the south-east; the vale of Red Horse, the north Oxfordshire uplands, and the valley of the Swere.