

NOTE

Two thirteenth-century by-names: *Fukkebotere* and *Smalfuk*

Keith Briggs

Martlesham

The origin of the word *fuck* remains obscure (Lass 1995; Read 2002). The sexual sense is recorded only from about 1500, and there is no certain connection with the surname *Fuckebegger*’ (1287) or the Bristol field-name *fockynggroue* (c.1373; OED, s.v. *fuck*, v.; Coates 2007). OED suggests that the verb is cognate to Dutch *fokken*, one sense of which is ‘to strike’. The noun *fukke* recorded from 1465 in the sense of ‘some kind of sail’ may also be connected. A full survey of the various theories is given by Liberman (2008).

Given the extreme rarity of medieval usages of the word, every scrap of evidence is of great value. Thus I wish to bring attention to *Simon Fukkebotere* and *Willm’i Smalfuk* who both appear in a rental of c.1290 from Holy Trinity Priory in Ipswich. This rental was in fact privately published in 1847, but this scarce publication has been little used despite its importance as a social record of a major English town in the thirteenth century (Hunt 1847). I have examined the manuscript, which is in very good condition, and can confirm the readings (Suffolk Record Office, HD1/9/4). The document is dated to the early years of the reign of Edward I (so after 1272), but before 1291, when *Oliver de Ingham* mentioned in it was buried (Hunt 1847).

The interpretation of neither name is completely certain. *Fukkebotere* looks like a by-name of the characteristic ‘Shakespeare’ type (Seltén 1969), comprising a verb-noun pair, with *butter* as its second element. Medieval spellings of *butter* with -o- do occur and exactly the form *botere* is recorded c.1300 (MED, s.v. *buter(e)* (n.)). Here then *fukke* would

have the meaning ‘knock, strike, beat, hit repeatedly’, which has been suggested as the original sense of the modern verb (OED, s.v. *fuck*; Read 2002, 256). *Fukkebotere* is thus likely to mean ‘strike butter’, referring to the knocking of butter into blocks by a butter-monger. Parallels are provided by the surnames of *Harniet Hachebutere* 1148–79, which must mean ‘hack butter’ (Walker 1962, 260), and *John Slingebotere* 1297 (Gaydon 1959, 99).

Less likely is that *Simon Fukkebotere* was a boatman, and thus that a type of ship called *fukbōt* existed. There was a ME word *fuk(ke)* ‘sail’. The word *boater* is spelled *botere* in eight medieval records in MED (s.v. *bōter* (n.)). As Ipswich was a major port in the thirteenth century, and traded with the low countries, the Dutch origin suggested for *fuk(ke)* in OED is very plausible.

Smalfuk is more difficult. The second element could be a spelling of the common *Fulk* or *Fouk*. The related *Fulcher* has been given as the explanation of Nicholas *Fuker* 1234 by Read (Read 2002, 278). Alternatively, *Willm'i Smalfuk* might have had a boat with a small *fuk*-sail.

The only other early examples in OED are the surnames *Wyn(d)fuk'* and *Fuckebegger'*, both 1287. *Fukkebotere* and *Smalfuk* thus double the size of the thirteenth-century corpus, and at least *Fukkebotere* probably supports the correctness of the early sense ‘strike, beat’ for *fucke*.¹

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