

# Salt, wine and grain

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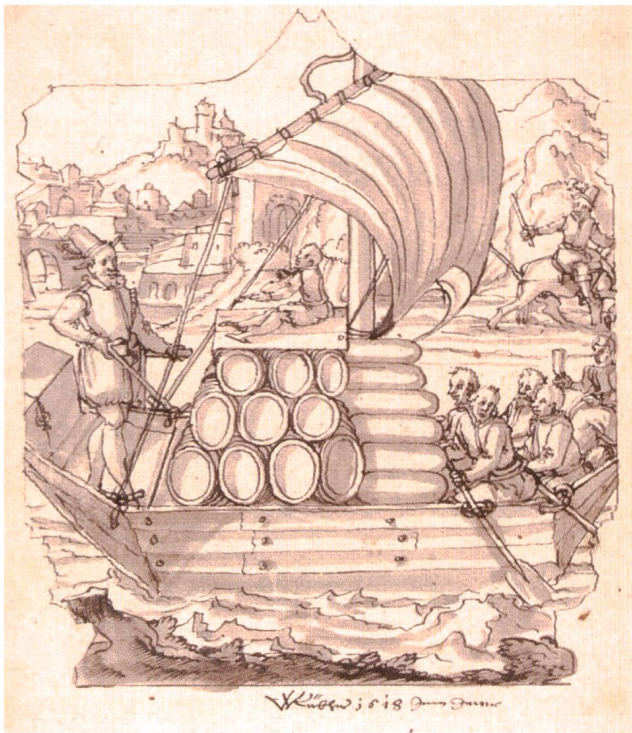
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Until the discovery of the Schweizerhalle salt deposit near Basel in 1836, Switzerland had no salt resources of its own worth mentioning; it was obliged to import huge quantities. In the Middle Ages salt was important not only for the diet of humans and animals, but above all for preserving food. The economy of central Switzerland in the late Middle Ages was based on intensive cattle rearing and the production of cheese for export. The salt most in demand came from the salt mines in the eastern Alps (Bavaria, the prince-bishopric of Salzburg and the Tyrol) and reached Schaffhausen via Lindau and Lake Constance. Just as important for central Switzerland was the supply of grain, purchased at the great southern German grain markets like Überlingen and Ravensburg, and dispatched to Schaffhausen by water. Schaffhausen provided salt and grain merchants with a large number of interim storage facilities and saw to the transport of heavy cargo around the Rhine Falls. From the entrepôt by Schlösschen Wörth below the Rhine Falls the cargoes of salt were transported onwards down the Rhine to what were then the westernmost territories ruled by Austria (the Black Forest, Breisgau, Sundgau and Alsace), and even to Bern via the Aare. But most of the salt and grain consignments left the Rhine at Eglisau and were carried from there by cart to Zurich and on to Lucerne by water and road. For the return journey across Lake Constance the boats were loaded with wine, which was produced in huge quantities in the city and in the Klettgau area to its west. As late as 1688 several square kilometres

within the city boundary were still planted with vineyards; their grapes ended up in one of the 74 wine presses known to have already existed in the city in 1482. Schaffhausen and its surroundings were able to produce tens of thousands of hectolitres of wine that was highly appreciated in the Allgäu, Bavaria and the Inn valley. On the journey upstream to Stein am Rhein the rowers were helped by horses supplied from the area around Schaffhausen, which used tow ropes to haul the ships with their cargoes of wine.



Salt ship returning upstream laden with wine barrels and bales of merchandise. The ship is being hauled by a man on a horse (Werner Kübler, 1618)

Schaffhausen owes its development as a trading city in the Middle Ages first and foremost to its location just above the Rhine Falls, which interrupted what was an important inland waterway in medieval times.

Round about 1500 the goods passing through Schaffhausen every year must have been worth a total of a million guilders. Salt accounted for about half the goods being transhipped.

Until about 1840 (in other words for around 700 years) the lively trade in salt and grain, plus the intensive production of wine for the return cargo, provided work and income for many of the inhabitants of Schaffhausen. When the salt trade from the eastern Alps collapsed with the opening of Schweizerhalle, the economy of Schaffhausen was plunged into the deepest crisis it had ever known, from which it only managed to recover through industrialisation (see Walk 2).

The "Lächen", or rapids, which stopped ships continuing downstream even before they reached the Rhine Falls, can be seen clearly on this view from the west. (Johann Conrad Friedrich, ca 1835)



Our walk starts at the *Freier Platz* by the landing place. This is where the cargo ships coming from Lake Constance ended their journey, since further progress was halted not by the Rhine Falls, but before them by the "Lächen", rapids a few hundred metres downstream. When the power station was built, the "Lächen" disappeared. Three quarters of the Freier Platz was once occupied by the oldest known salt warehouse; from 1350 to 1537 it was in the possession of the

Cistercian Salem monastery, which gave it its original name of "Salmansweilerhaus". The building complex was divided into two, and a distinction was made between the "Hofmeisterei" (the superintendent's quarters) and the "Wasserhof" (water yard).

### **The Salem monastery and salt**

The Cistercian Salem monastery ("Salmanswiler") had had a financial interest in the salt production at Hallein near Salzburg since 1201. It also owned half of a salt evaporation pond in Reichenhall in Bavaria. It had subsidiaries in Constance and Schaffhausen. In the upheavals of the Reformation period the monastery withdrew from salt production (1529/30), and in 1537 sold the subsidiary conveniently situated on the bank of the Rhine to the city of Schaffhausen which had previously leased it. For about 300 years the monastery played a significant role in the long-distance salt trade, mainly with the Switzerland of the time. The monastery was able to establish its own trademark: the words "Salmansweiler Scheiben" can be found on practically every late mediaeval list of salt tolls on the salt routes from Bavaria to Switzerland.

The fourth quarter of the Freier Platz, the eastern part, was once occupied by the "Paradieserhaus". This extremely imposing four-storey building, one floor higher than the "Wasserhof", with its steeply pitched roof and stepped gable, was

originally the residence of the Brümser family, one of the oldest families of Schaffhausen. At one point they held the "Schiffledi" (landing stage) in fief from the Allerheiligen monastery. In 1318 they donated the building to the "Paradies" convent of the Poor Clares in Schlatt, further up river. The convent had the building converted to a grain store, which provided it with a regular income from the so-called "Niederlage", the warehouse charge for transit goods, in this case the grain destined for central Switzerland. The "Paradieserhaus" passed to the city in 1574 and was by no means the only warehouse used for storing grain in transit.

All the buildings of Schaffhausen's salt port were still standing in 1835:

Between the Schweizerhof and Güterhof were the Wasserhof and Paradieserhaus (with stepped gable)  
(David Kölliker, ca 1835)



The "Kornhaus" (granary) located in the Herrenacker (which today houses the office of "Schaffhauserland Tourismus") and the "Haberhaus" (oat house) in the Neustadt also served the extensive grain trade with central Switzerland.

In the wake of the collapse of the salt trade with central Switzerland, the "Wasserhof" and "Paradieserhaus" were demolished in 1842/43. There followed a long dispute between the city and the canton about the use that the newly available

empty site should be put to. It appears that it took a "charivari" (a popular gathering with discordant music – an early way of exercising the right to demonstrate) and even a challenge to a duel between "worshipful gentlemen" before the townspeople got their demand accepted that the area should simply be left empty.



Adjoining the Freier Platz to the west is the imposing "Schweizerhof" building. Built in 1529 as the "Neuer Salzhof" (New Salt Yard) – probably on the site of previous buildings that had been torn down – it was later sometimes also referred to as the "Scheibenhof" (after the "scheiben", the casks of salt stored there). When the salt trade collapsed, the building was turned into a restaurant and renamed first "Schweizerhalle", then "Schweizerhof". Along with the storage space for salt in transit, the building also contained a number of apartments for officials. In front of this L-shaped building there used to be another one the other way round, the "Bindhaus", which was demolished in 1926. This house was where the yard's smith lived and had his workshop, where he and his employees repaired the casks or fitted them with new hoops.

**The port, Schaffhausen's economic centre**

The port, with its considerable turnover, mainly of salt, wine and grain, was the centre of Schaffhausen's economy. In 1404 the city took over supervision of the trade and of all the tolls charged on it. The salt trade was overseen by the yard master, who was often also a member of the Small Council, the government of the city-state. Up to six salt yard officials were responsible for the day-to-day management of affairs. All those in charge of the running of the salt yard had to take an oath, were liable for any losses incurred, and – under the Salt Yard ordinance of 1476 – had to lodge a considerable sum as security. This amounted to 200 guilders for the yard master and 100 guilders for each of the six officials. For each cask dispatched, they received three heller. If we remember that around 1520 about 40,000 casks of salt a year passed through Schaffhausen, that means that the officials were certainly among the employees with the highest income in the whole city. To deal with the volume they were helped initially by day labourers, later by so-called "leerer" (literally: "emptiers"), a profession in its own right. To ensure that the whole process ran smoothly, the watchman on the Munot had the task of announcing the arrival of all ships above a certain size by sounding his trumpet. If it was a cargo ship from Lindau, he had to hoist a flag as well.



Towards the end of the 18th century, the salt storage capacity was extended again with the construction of another large building. A tower (popularly known as the "backofen" or "baking oven" because of its shape) which stood at the eastern end of the "Paradieserhaus" to guard the harbour, was demolished, and the city ditch in front of it filled in. On the site thus created another imposing warehouse was built in 1787, the so-called "Neue Salzstadel" (New Salt Store), which was only re-named „Güterhof" (Goods Yard) after the collapse of the salt trade and as part of the creation of the Freier Platz (1842).



In 1849 a small tower was added to the western roof to house the clock from the "Brückentorturm", which used to stand between the „Bindhaus" and the "Wasserhof" and was demolished in 1842.

#### Tip

The ground floor of the recently renovated building now houses a restaurant, where the old one metre thick walls and huge oak pillars can still be seen. These pillars could still fulfil their original role: they are able to bear a weight of up to 400 tonnes.

We continue our walk up river along the façade of the "Güterhof". The waterfront where we are now standing was created artificially by building an embankment (in 1871 and 1886). The embankment was widened again when the power station was constructed in 1964. Before that time all the buildings lay directly on the Rhine, which made it easier to unload the ships. A few steps further on we get to the "Fischerzunft" (fishermen's Guild) (see Walk 4), whose members included the salt yard officials and the boatmen.

We continue along a street of terraced houses and after crossing a railway bridge we get to a piece of



land now used as a car park, where there was once a warehouse known as the "mittlerer Salzstadel" (Middle Salt Store). Adjoining the car park on the east is a small square, where there used to be a crane for unloading the casks of salt.

Just after this square is the only building in Schaffhausen whose name still indicates unmistakably the commodity that dominated economic life

here for 700 years: the "Salzstadel" (salt store). The long, narrow single storey warehouse was built in 1674 on the site of a previous building. This "Outer Salt Store", as it was then called,

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was the smallest salt warehouse in Schaffhausen; its purpose was to extend the storage capacity of the "Wasserhof" and "Salzhof" which were already bursting at the seams. Council minutes for November 1673 reported that casks of salt were having to be stored in the open, in a nearby cemetery. The city architect was directed to build the salt store without delay, and it was indeed completed by the spring of 1674. To the east of the Salzstadel is the "Steckenplatz", literally "stakes square". Intensive wine growing in the Schaffhausen region created a great demand for stakes for training the vines, which even Schaffhausen – known then as now for its extensive forests – was unable to satisfy completely. The shortfall was met by substantial consignments of timber from the Bregenz Forest, which were unloaded and stored here.

Next to it was the "Rossschwemme", where the horses were bathed which towed the ships back up the Rhine with a cargo of wine replacing the salt or grain that they had carried on their journey downstream.

We have now come to the end of our walk through Schaffhausen's pre-industrial economic history. To follow the onward route taken by the carts carrying the salt and grain, go from the *Freier Platz* along the *Vordergasse*, *Fronwagplatz* and Oberstadt to the "Obertor" (see Walk 6). Up until 1400 the "salt route" leading to the far side of the Rhine Falls led through the *Vordersteig* and via the *Stokarbergstrasse* and *Rosenbergstrasse* to Neuhausen. But by around the beginning of the 15th century, the quarry in the "Mühlernen" had been fully extracted, leaving room for a more direct route, the "Chatzensteig" (today: *Mühlenstrasse-Schaffhauserstrasse*).

We can follow this new route by taking trolleybus number 1 in the direction of "Herbstäcker". (The stop is outside the station. Departures every 10 minutes.) The trolleybus takes us down the historic salt route, and we get off at the "Neuhausen Zentrum" stop. A few steps further on in the same direction we get to a roundabout and then walk down the *Rheinfallstrasse* to a small park. The path through the park to the "Schlösschen Wörth" now follows the route of its historic predecessor, which is still today called "Scheibengasse" (Cask Lane). Wörth was formerly not so much a castle as a secure warehouse, where valuable cargo could be

#### Tip

A few steps further on through the small park is one of the few wine presses to survive within the city boundaries. (Kegelgässchen bus stop.) Every 10 minutes a bus goes from here to the station, where you can change to a bus for the Rhine Falls.



Transporting the salt down the "Scheibengasse" and loading it at the harbour by the entrepôt and toll point at the "Schlösschen Wörth" (Merian)

stored even overnight. A long jetty to the south of the building still indicates the location of the harbour where grain and, above all, salt were reloaded onto ships to be taken down to Eglisau.