

double-ended and stone-lined in order to permit carts to enter at one end and exit at the other. When the ponds are full they are about one metre deep at their deepest points. Here the ponds are known as ‘cart washes’ and this name points to the additional value of running carts through water, namely, to wash the wheels of surplus soil and mud. Although this description does not provide evidence of this practice in medieval use, the inherent principle, practice, and value concerning the soaking of wheels are the same.

The Chester accounts of the Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers for 1560/1 record payments for the maintenance and rebuilding of their pageant carriage: ‘payd the wrightes for settinge the wheles viij d., & Carriage forth of the water [viij d.] \j d. ob./’.⁸ In the Bowyers’, Fletchers’, Coopers’, and Stringers’ Accounts for 1571/2 payment is recorded ‘for ye carynge ye welles to the water and frome & ye berygh of ye caryge viid’.⁹ Further expenses are similarly recorded in the Smiths’, Cutlers’, and Plumbers’ Accounts for 1567/8: ‘to the prentis when we gat in our Cariage to drink viij d’.¹⁰ Each of these records of payment refers to the same process of placing the wheels in water. The purpose of taking the wheels to the water was to soak them so as to expand the joints between naves, spokes, felloes, and strakes (see below). Reference to payment for ‘when we gat in our Cariage to drink’ does not refer to payment for drink to the ‘prentice’; it refers to the process of soaking the wheels in water and is explained by the *MED* definition of *drinken*:

drinken v. 4(a) To absorb (a liquid), soak up; ~in, ~up; *ben dronken in*, be absorbed; also *fig.*; (b) of a liquid: to penetrate, be absorbed; soak (sth.); also *fig.*; *ben dronken in with*, be saturated with (sth.).

After spending the previous year in the ‘weuers howse’ (the place where the Smiths’ carriage was stored), and John Joanson’s ‘seller’ where the Coopers’ carriage was stored, the respective components of the wheels apparently dried and contracted in such a way as to loosen the joints. It needs to be remembered that these Chester carriages were stored by removing their superstructures from the axletrees. In turn, the wheels were removed from the axles. Dismantling of the Chester carriages was no doubt affected by the amount of space available

8. *REED: Cheshire including Chester* edited Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, 2 vols (University of Toronto Press, 2007) 1 107; *MED setting(e)* gerund 1(a) ‘The act of placing something in a place or position’.
9. *REED: Cheshire including Chester* 1 138.
10. *REED: Cheshire including Chester* 1 126.

in the cellars of individuals. However, prolonged exposure to damp earth could quite easily have encouraged rotting of carriage timbers. This is a different effect from the short-term soaking of wheels in water to create expansion of joints. Henry Best, a farmer from Elmswell in the East Riding of Yorkshire, describes in his *Farming and Account Books* (1641) methods of avoiding rot by partially taking apart his wains and carts. His motivation may not have been too dissimilar to that of the Chester guildsmen:

Soe soone as harvest is in, our stubble led and stackes thatched, the first lette weather or vacant time that commeth, wee fetch up a payre of oxen, and sette our servants to runne the waines under the helmes: and first of all they knocke off the shelvinges, and putte the shelvinges, and loadepinnes, and pike-stowers, of everie waine into her body; then doe they shoole [shovel] and carry away the dirte cleane from under the helmes; then do they putte on the oxen, and bringe the waines close to the ende of the helme, and there doe they dresse and make cleane the wheeles with a spade, before they runne them in, then doe they runne the first three waines in backwards with their arses first, soe that the hoppinge tree of the first standeth under the body of the seconde, and the hoppinge-tree of the seconde under the body of the third, then the fowerth and last waine wee runne her in with her nose first, bearinge her up and runninge her hoppinge tree into the body of the waine that standeth next her; then doe wee lift up the wheeles, and underpropp each wheele before and behinde with good bigge stones, to keepe them from the moysture and dampnesse of the earth; then doe wee take of [off] the wheeles of our two carts, and sette them close up by the bodyes of the waines, and the carts themselves wee sette them with their bodyes sidewayes, and lette them stande upon the axletree, and leane against the side of the waines, then doe wee fetch all our longe ladders, and putte them within the braces of the inside of the helme: we runne our wheele barrowes allsoe under the bodyes of the waines. The longe helme in the stack-garth will just serve for fower waines, and under this helme doe wee lye the bodyes or wheeles of our two carts, our longe styes lye allsoe under this helme all winter, and likewise our wheele barrowes. The helme in the foregarth will doe somethinge more then shelter three waines, and under this doe wee usually thrust in our three coupes.¹¹

11. REED: *Cheshire including Chester* 1 118, 126, 137–8; *Rural Economy in Yorkshire in 1641 being the Farming and Account Books of Henry Best, of Elmswell, in the East Riding of the*