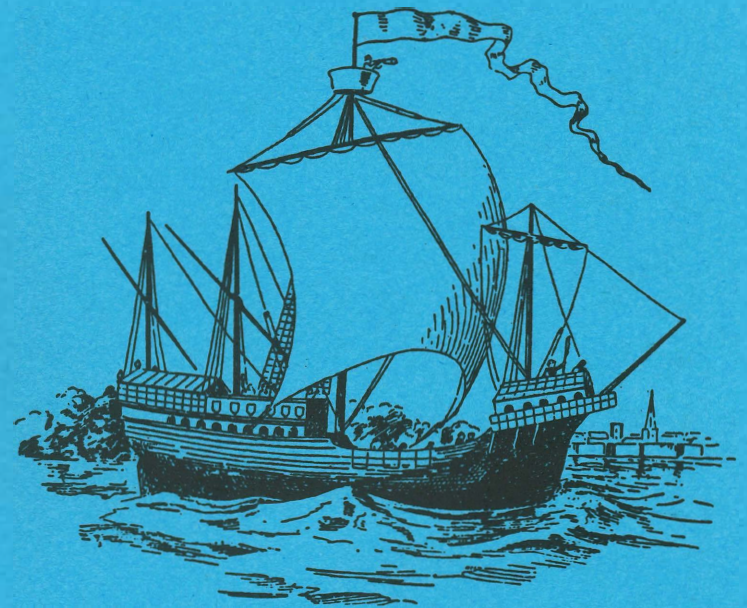


**BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
THE UNIVERSITY, BRISTOL**

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# **THE PORT OF BRISTOL IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY**



THE BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

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This is the second reprint of *The Port of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*. There has been a growing demand for material on the City Docks and this volume deals with the activities of city merchants during an important period.

There have been no alterations to the text, but a reproduction of an old map showing Bristol in 1480 has been added.

The publication of a pamphlet by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association does not necessarily imply the Branch's approval of the opinions expressed in it.

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*Cover Illustration:* A typical sailing ship at the end of the fourteenth century  
by Samuel Loxton

THE PORT OF BRISTOL IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

by JEAN VANES

The Bristol Merchant Venturers, writing to the Privy Council in 1598, stressed the natural advantages of their port, 'a Citie soe principall of this Realme, so auncient, so naturally and necessarily soited for . . . trades and fitt distribution at home'.<sup>1</sup> In 1584 the Bristolians claimed that the harbour was large enough for ships of all burdens to ride in and that the port had maintained as many ships and trained as many mariners as any port in the Kingdom except London.<sup>2</sup> From the Middle Ages all visitors were impressed by the size of the harbour. In the early sixteenth century, the Bristol merchant Roger Barlow remembered Bristol as 'a noble towne of grete trate and many shippes. . . . The shippes and botes comen into ij partes of the towne, the one is called the backe the other the keye'.<sup>3</sup> Leland and Camden were both much interested in the improvements made to the harbour in the thirteenth century, diverting the course of the River Frome to make a harbour and quay for great ships to supplement the Welsh Back and Redcliffe Back on the Avon where the river was inclined to be stony and which could then be used mainly for the coasting trade.<sup>4</sup>

Nearer the mouth of the Avon, about three miles from the town, was the anchorage of Hungroad, while in the Severn off Portishead was another called Kingroad, where the ships waited for the tide to carry them into the river or for a favourable wind to enable them to set sail.<sup>5</sup> Lighters and ships' boats plied constantly between these two roadsteads and the town, as well as to all the creeks and pills of Avon, Severn and the Welsh coast. A boat to Hungroad from the Quay cost 1d and to Kingroad 2d and the same for the return.<sup>6</sup>

From the later Middle Ages, the Bristol Channel was part of the 'Western Navigation' of small ships on the Atlantic seaboard, sailing the stormy coasts from Barbary to Iceland; to the Canaries and the Azores and the fishing grounds west of Ireland.<sup>7</sup> Like Chaucer's Shipman, the Bristol shipmaster could

1. Bristol Reference Library (B.R.L.) 25306, microfilm, Merchant Venturers' (M.V.) Book of Trade, f. 38.

2. British Museum (B.M.) Harleian MS. 368/106.

3. R. Barlow. *A Brief Summe of Geographie*, ed. E. G. R. Taylor, Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser. lxxix (1931) 47.

4. J. Leland, *Itinerary*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith (1910) v. 90-1, 93. W. Camden, *Brittania*, ed. R. Gough (1806) i. 86. E. Watson Williams, 'The Bakke of Bristowe', *Trans. Bristol and Gloucs. Arch. Soc.* (B.G.A.S.) lxxix (1960) 287-92.

5. See Map p. 8.

6. B.R.L. 25306 M.V. Book of Trade f. 168.

7. D. W. Waters, *The Rutters of the Sea* (1967) 3-43, 192.



'rekene wel his tydes,  
His stremes and his daungers him bisydes,  
His herberwe and his mone, his lode-menage.'

Bristol men seem to have been equally well versed in navigation. Nicholas Thorne left to the Grammar School an astrolabe, with charts, maps and instruments belonging to the science of astronomy.<sup>1</sup> In 1595 Thomas Neathway, master of the *Gabriel*, left his apprentice, Robert Trippett, 'my sea Chiste, sea apparel and all sea instruments.'<sup>2</sup> When William Colston's ship was seized at Flushing in 1586 many of the crew claimed to have lost 'sea-cards', compasses, 'and other things servinge to the navigacion', and one had had a 'sea-booke'.<sup>3</sup>

Most ships carried pilots who were paid in accordance with the responsibility they carried. John Smythe paid a ship's pilot 15d a ton on a cargo of wine which Robert Tyndall sent home from Bordeaux.<sup>4</sup> By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the pilot's lore was being recorded in the charts and rutters of the time and in the Bristol Channel the dangers were considerable. It has been described as 'a gulf with sands, islands and reefs, often swept by fierce and sudden north-westerly gales, chequered by furiously running tides and currents setting sometimes directly on to the places a ship should avoid, and a seaway of which the navigation has never been well known to foreign seamen....'<sup>5</sup> Near the Welsh coast steep banks and shifting sand meant that at one cast the leadsman might find 12 fathoms and before the next be fast aground. The ship-master, Evan Daniell, having lost the *Mary Christopher* on the shoals off the Welsh coast, pleaded that the ship 'was sore drevyn by the see and utterly distroyed and broken contrary to the Will of your Orator and nott by his negligens'.<sup>6</sup> To reach Bristol the pilot must set course between Steep and Flat Holmes and then avoid the treacherous 'English grounds' using as sea marks two mills standing on an island and a third on the mainland behind.<sup>7</sup> This was complicated by the range of the tides on the North Somerset coast which is greater than anywhere else in Europe, reaching 42 feet at Avonmouth at the spring tides.<sup>8</sup> Then

1. T. P. Wadley (ed.) *Notes or Abstracts of the Wills contained in the Volume entitled The Great Orphan Book and Book of Wills* (Bristol, 1896) 295 pp. 184-5. Public Record Office (P.R.O.) P.C.C. 18 Alen.

2. Wadley, 449, p. 280. P.R.O. P.C.C. 15 Drake.

3. B. M. Lansdowne MSS. 143/111/124-9. Also see W. L. Goodman, 'Bristol Apprentice Register 1532-1686. A Selection of Enrolments of Mariners', *Mariner's Mirror* (M.M.) ix (1974) 29-30.

4. Bristol Archives Office (B.A.O.) AC/B63 The Ledger of John Smythe, f. 70.

5. M. Oppenheim, 'Maritime History', *The Victoria History of the County of Somerset*, ii (1911) 245.

6. P.R.O. C1/404/1.

7. W. J. Blaeu, *The Sea Mirror* (Amsterdam, 1625) 61.

8. O. D. Kendall, 'Physiography', in *Bristol and its adjoining Counties*, ed. C. M. MacInnes and W. F. Whittard, 38.

'about Passis (Portishead) Point men do ankor in Kings Road which is between the point and the river of Bristow, neerest the river there is good clay ground in 8 or 9 fathom. They that are bound into the river are brought in by the Pilotes. Men may from thence also saile in alongst by the coast to the River of Severne, which is also like the River of Bristow, a fair river to sayle into'.<sup>1</sup> It was usual at Calais, and may have been at Bristol, to hoist a particular flag when waiting for a pilot.<sup>2</sup>

The river pilots were skilled mariners appointed by the town council. They lived at Shirehampton or at Crockerne Pill, on the opposite bank of the Avon and seem to have been responsible for the Hungroad anchorage as well as the 'Towyng and lodemanshipp of all Shippes barges and ballingars to be in the moost substanciall manner conveyed and brought from the porte of the said towne called kingrode unto hungrode or to the key of the said towne. And from the same key unto hungrode or kingrode forsaied'.<sup>3</sup> A city ordinance of 1551 shows that the Shirehampton pilots had the monopoly of pilotage within the river, except that the masters of Bristol ships might bring them into the river if they wished. The penalty for a ship's master infringing the monopoly was 20 ducats. Owners and masters of ships were commanded to obey the Water Bailiff and the pilots 'that be appoynted for the oversight of the Rode called Hungrode'.<sup>4</sup>

In 1577 the pilots, Matthews and Foster, were ordered to set up a pole at Crockerne Pill, near the low tide mark as determined by a jury of the Admiralty Court of Bristol to prevent woodbushes and other small craft from fouling the cables of larger ships anchored there. Mooring posts (hauled into place by teams of oxen) were also to be provided and frequently inspected and replaced.<sup>5</sup> Like most of the town officials, the pilots of Severn, Avon and Frome had to swear an oath on taking office, 'as well tending to the safe Conductinge in and out of shippinge, and the Preservation of the goodes therein laden, as to the maintenance and preservacion of the Portes and Rivers aforesaid'.<sup>6</sup> In 1601 the wages of pilots were 2s 6d for a ship under 60 tons; 6s 8d for a ship of 100-200 tons and 10s for a ship of over 200 tons.<sup>7</sup>

The office of Water Bailiff was also at times an important one for which ordinances had been laid down in 'the olde recordes of the

1. W. J. Blaeu, *op. cit.* 61.

2. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, (L.P.) eds. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R. H. Brodie (1862-1910) ii (2) 3549.

3. B.A.O. 04272, *The Old Ordinance Book*, f. 8v. G. E. Farr, 'Bristol Channel Pilotage', *M.M.* xxxix (1953) 2744 and Mr. McGrath's note pp. 303-4.

4. B.A.O. 04272, ff. 10v.-11.

5. B.A.O. 04026(10) Chamberlain's Accounts, ff. 153, 216.

6. B.R.L. 25306, f. 169.

7. *Ibid.* f. 168.

Chambre of the Toune.<sup>1</sup> His duties included collecting the prise of fish, corn and salt, as well as local dues on some other goods brought into the harbour. He should record and control shipping in the port and direct merchant strangers to their potential customers. He must carry out arrests of persons or ships only as directed by a warrant from one of the courts of the town. He was paid for each arrest according to the distance travelled and received £2 and a livery each Christmas.<sup>2</sup>

Ordinances laid down for the maintenance of the harbour and of the anchorage at Hungroad were very precise and were similar to those at other ports. They enjoined obedience to the Water Bailiff and the Pilots as representatives of the Mayor and Justices, 'Commyssoners of the Admyraltie of the said Citie.' The pilots arranged where ships were to be moored and placed the mooring posts so as not to obstruct the stream. The penalty for refusing to move when ordered was 100 ducats (at an exchange rate of 5s the ducat) 80 ducats to the Chamber of Bristol and 20 ducats to the bailiff or pilot presenting the case. Similarly, anchors were to be dropped only under instruction and their position marked. No sand or ballast was to be laden in the road except under the direction of the bailiff and pilots, nor was sand to be unloaded into lighters unless a sail was placed between ship and lighter so that none fell into the water to obstruct the passage of the river.<sup>3</sup> In September, 1571 John Cooke, lighterman, presented a Spanish ship riding at Kingroad for casting ballast overboard into the anchorage. The fine of £4 was paid by one of the local merchants freighting the ship.<sup>4</sup>

The harbour in the city was extensive but needed constant work in its maintenance. The Mayor's Audits show work continuing week by week to maintain the river banks, to keep the channel open and the bridges in repair. The 'New' Quay was stone-built and was often repaired, at the mid-century with stones from monastic buildings and several times with grave-stones.<sup>5</sup> The banks at St. Augustine's Back and around the edges of the Marsh were made firm with stakes sunk in the mud and the gaps filled with sticks, brushwood and rubble.<sup>6</sup> The slipways at St. James's Back, the Welsh Back, the Shambles and Counterslip had to be kept clear and mended and pitched at intervals.<sup>7</sup> In the winter time

labourers were paid an extra 1d a day for working in the water in cold or frosty weather.<sup>1</sup> One of the main problems was the silting up of the 'new' mouth of the River Frome. In the summer of 1569 it was necessary to trench the bank between the end of the Quay and Gib Taylor (the point at the confluence of Avon and Frome). The bank had then to be staked and piled with rubble and gravel to keep the river straight and to prevent the winter floods constantly invading the Marsh.<sup>2</sup> In November, work in the Frome still continued, mud and weeds at the Quay were removed and piles driven in to turn the force of the water and clear the mud-bank so that trows and barges could float there. Work continued throughout the winter and was still going on the following March. Summer 1570 saw repair work on the cranes and on the 'whirlygiges', or turnstiles, at the Back. The stonework of the bridges was newly pointed and the arches pinned. Eventually a stone buttress was built to divert the force of the water at the Quay.<sup>3</sup>

The problems of silting and the tidal range made Bristol an exception to an Act of 1559 which, in order to cut down the amount of smuggling, ordered that no vessel was to load or unload during the hours of darkness.<sup>4</sup> A petition from Bristol secured Letters Patent from the Queen in 1563 stating that 'the port of Bristowe is so dangerous and low of water, except it be at spring tides, that great ships laden cannot come nearer than four miles, because the water ebbs and flows suddenly for loading and unloading; whereby ships that before the statute might have been unloaded in four days cannot now be unloaded within 15 days.'<sup>5</sup> Loading was to be allowed in the port of Bristol between the hours of 4 a.m. and 8 p.m. but only on the Quay and the Back where it could be supervised by the Customs Officers. The limits of Quay and Back were very precisely defined: the Quay from the corner house occupied by John Popley near Frome Bridge as far as St. Clement's dock in the Marsh near Marsh Street Gate. The Back stretched from the conduit at Bristol Bridge to the northern end of the Marsh.<sup>6</sup>

A row of houses and storehouses lined the broad paved area of the Quay. There were cranes there and at the Back and iron ladders gave access to ships and lighters.<sup>7</sup> In summer 1577 John Batey, carpenter, rode to London to see how the new cranes had

1. E. W. Veale (ed.) *The Great Red Book of Bristol*, Bristol Record Society (B.R.S.) xviii (1953) 123-4.

2. B.A.O. 04272. f. 17. J. W. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association (1965) 20.

3. B.A.O. 04272, ff. 10v-11v.

4. B.A.O. 04026(9) ff. 85, 118.

5. *L.P.* xiii (2) 322.

6. B.A.O. 04026(1) ff. 60, 99.

7. B.A.O. 04026(9) ff. 33, 95, 104.

1. B.A.O. 04026(7) f. 391, 04026(8) ff. 31, 32, 34.

2. For example B.A.O. 04026(8) f. 391.

3. B.A.O. 04026(9) ff. 23-4, 28-9, 33, 40-1, 94-5, 99.

4. *Statutes of the Realm*, 1 Elizabeth, c. 11.

5. *Cal. Pat.* 1560-1563, p. 478, also in B. M. Harleian MS. 2185 ff. 42-3 and B.R.L. 25306 ff. 115-6.

6. P.R.O. E 159/340 Mich. 224 and d.

7. B.A.O. 04026(9) ff. 103-5. Wadley, 191, the will of William Tyndall.



been made for Queenhythe and returned with drawings so that similar ones could be set up at the end of the Quay wall for unloading timber there.<sup>1</sup>

Ordinances forbade the casting of soapers' ashes into the river and the cutting up of the banks and slips for shipbuilding and repairing<sup>2</sup> and, from time to time, the Council fined various people for throwing rubbish on the quays and obstructing the ships.<sup>3</sup> In 1557 the Chamberlain gave 1s each to two poor men 'that presentyd the Portingales for Castinge downe Duste over the keye contrarye to a statute.'<sup>4</sup> Keepers were employed for the Quay and Back whose duties were to keep the quays clear, to oversee the work of loading and to help to collect the town dues for the Sheriffs.<sup>5</sup> Each was paid 3s 4d a quarter<sup>6</sup> but the relative importance of the Quay and the Back in 1519 was shown by their profits of £66 13s 4d at the Quay but only £16 at the Back.<sup>7</sup> At the mid-century, when John Butler was wharf-keeper, Thomas Lewis complained that when Butler was craning 3 tons of sack into Lewis's boat for shipment to Carmarthen, one butt of sack 'by rashenes and for lack of goode order in bestowinge into the said boote . . . was brokyn and the wyne ran owte.' Butler replied that Lewis had loaded the balinger himself when he, Butler, was sick.<sup>8</sup> John Smythe also on one occasion lost a quantity of oil when a butt was dropped overboard into a lighter.<sup>9</sup>

On 27th May, 1598, a strong committee of merchants and ship-owners, William Ellis, John Hopkins, Rice Jones, John Whitson, Thomas James, John Barker and Mathew Haviland, was 'appoynted for setting of an Imposition upon all merchandizes brought to this Citie from beyond the seas for the chardges of keepinge the Ryver.'<sup>10</sup> Possibly as a result of this, 'Articles for preservacion of the Ryver' were read and confirmed on 12th June, 1599.<sup>11</sup> Early in the seventeenth century the Merchant Venturers took over the care of the Quay and Backs in return for the grant of anchorage, kannage and plankage, paying £3 6s 8d a year to the Council. By 1606 they declared that they had already spent £1,500 on the Quay and Backs and more was needed.<sup>12</sup> Throughout

1. B.A.O. 04026(10) f. 162.

2. B.A.O. 04272 ff. 21v, 23, 33v.

3. B.A.O. 04026(3) f. 153.

4. D. Livock (ed.) *City Chamberlains' Accounts in the 16th and 17th Centuries* B.R.S. xxiv (1966) 37.

5. H. Bush, *Bristol Town Duties* (Bristol, 1828) 57.

6. B.A.O. Book of F. F. Fox MSS. 100.

7. I. Leadam (ed.) *Select Cases in the Star Chamber*, ii. Selden Society xxv (1910) 142-65, esp. p. 163. B.A.O. 04721 The Great White Book, f. 56.

8. P.R.O. C1/1244/35-6.

9. B.A.O. AC/B 63 f. 179.

10. B.A.O. 04272 f. 65v.

11. B.A.O. 04264(1) Common Council Minutes f. 19.

12. B.A.O. 00352(3) the Merchants' lease of the quays. B.R.L. 25306 f. 43.

the sixteenth century, the citizens, whenever accused of charging illegal tolls in the port, for example by the citizens of Coventry and Tewkesbury, had argued the need to collect keyage from all ships for the maintenance of the harbour.<sup>1</sup>

It was quite usual for citizens to contribute to the maintenance of the quays, as John Smythe did in 1542,<sup>2</sup> and as he also lent money to a fund to abolish the various tolls on the quays, gates and markets, obviously a long-standing grievance, which provoked 'great unquietnes' among citizens and visitors alike and even 'great blasphemows othes.'<sup>3</sup> In 1546 a committee of Aldermen, including Smythe, William Chester, Nicholas Thorne, David Harris, Francis Codrington and William Carr was set up to organise the purchase of Lord Lisle's lands, Temple Fee and the lands of the Friars, with various other properties in and near the city, with money partly borrowed and partly raised from the sale of church plate. From the resulting income in rents the Council was able to announce the abolition of all these tolls.<sup>4</sup> Dues were also collected for the sailors' charities. A guild of St. Clement and St. George had been founded during the fifteenth century with a priest and an almshouse for 12 poor mariners. In 1595, a letter from the Privy Council urged the Mayor and Aldermen to help the Merchants' Company to collect the dues of 1½d a ton on goods and 1d in the £ of all mariners' wages. There was to be a school for sailors' children as well as the almshouse and a preacher at Shirehampton to minister to the sailors at Hungroad, especially those about to set out on the dangerous fishing voyages to Newfoundland.<sup>5</sup>

Bristol was an important centre for ship-building and repairs, as well as the rigging and victualling of ships preparing to set sail for foreign ports. Nicholas Thorne's bequests included £25 for 'making of a dam-head with stone to the dock at the Key, for the making and repairing of ships.'<sup>6</sup> There was also a graving place in the Marsh opening into the Avon,<sup>7</sup> and the Council in 1564 laid down a scale of charges for ships repaired or graved at the slip on the Back as well as regulations to prevent damage to the slip.<sup>8</sup> There were regulations also for the work of shipwrights and carpenters.<sup>9</sup> St. Clement's Dock in the Marsh at the end of the Quay was leased in 1543-4 to Thomas Harris who was building a storehouse 'over'

1. B.A.O. 04721 ff. 38-9v, 43 and v. P.R.O. E. 159/301 Mich. 18. P.R.O. Sta. Cha. 2/31/118. Veale (ed.) *G.R.B.* iii. 168-70, iv. 13-17, 20.

2. B.A.O. AC/B 63 f. 73.

3. B.A.O. 04721 ff. 60-61v.

4. H. Bush, *op. cit.* 57-60, 62-9. P.R.O. SP 1/83 ff. 161-2, SP 1/84 ff. 68-9.

5. F. B. Bickley, *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, ii (1900) 186-92. B.R.L. 25306, f. 39.

6. Wadley, 295 pp. 184-5.

7. B.A.O. 04026(13) f. 80.

8. B.A.O. 04272 ff. 21 and v.

9. B.A.O. 04272 f. 17.

it<sup>1</sup> and perhaps Nicholas Thorne intended his money to be used to restore it to service, but some years later it was apparently being filled with rubble.<sup>2</sup> In the seventeenth century there were two 'docks' in this area of the Marsh, which Latimer suggested might have been the depressions in the ground on the old bed of the River Frome, but the dock leased then by the Merchant Venturers was 101 feet long and 40 feet broad at the east end and at the end nearest the water was 73 feet broad.<sup>3</sup> Another dock to the south of this one was included in the agreement.

In the second half of the sixteenth century several ships were built in Bristol, some of them in the dock in the Marsh. The *Tiger* of 150 tons which received the royal bounty of 5s a ton in 1569 was built by a group of Bristol merchants 'at the porte of the same Cittie called the Key.'<sup>4</sup> In 1578 four labourers were employed to work for a day to cut the bank of rubble at the Quay to make room for the new *Toby* to set her keel. The rubble was to be taken to the 'overend of the old grete dock.'<sup>5</sup> The *Toby*, a ship of some 2-300 tons built 'new from the stocks' by Richard Young, Thomas Symons, John Hopkins and Giles Bitfelde, received the Queen's bounty in 1581.<sup>6</sup> John Greaves, Richard Young's apprentice, had seen the accounts of her building and declared later that she had cost Young £400 for his part of the building of the ship and fitting her out for sea.<sup>7</sup> In 1580 the *Minion* was built in St. Clement's Dock. The Mayor's Audits mention the 'engines' — 'pitched in the ground' there — which brought her upright.<sup>8</sup> The *Minion*, later to sail against the Armada, was a ship of 250 tons, built by Thomas Kelke, William Gyttons and their partners; 'both mete to be occupied in the trade of merchandize and also for our service when occasion shall require to the increase of the Navye of this our Realme of England.'<sup>9</sup> In a list of ships built in English ports between 1581 and 1594,<sup>10</sup> seven are included from Bristol; the *Toby* and the *Minion*; Thomas Pitt's *Unicorn*, 140 tons;<sup>11</sup> Thomas James's *Pleasure*, 240 tons;<sup>12</sup> Robert Kitchin's *Joseph*, 180 tons, and his *Gift of God*, 200 tons;<sup>13</sup> and finally there was a larger

*Unicorn* of 250 tons built by William Ellis, John Barker and their partners.<sup>1</sup> In 1592 a warrant was issued for a bounty to be paid for Edward Winter's ship *Exchange*, 140 tons, 'newly edified and builded' at Bristol.<sup>2</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that, although Bristol merchants bought ships in other ports, even in France, a good many were built in Bristol; that there were facilities in the port for building and repairing ships of a considerable size; that at least one dock, perhaps a mud dock for shipbuilding, was in use there for much of the century and that other docks or building and graving yards, some of them temporary, also existed on the banks of Avon and Frome.

Bristol was also a centre for the fitting out and victualling of ships. The ledger of John Smythe contains a brief inventory of his ship *Trinity*, 150 tons, compiled in 1539.<sup>3</sup> The total cost of the ship 'her hull, mastes, takle, sayles, iiij ankers, iiij cables' and all the 'monycions and abylymentes' was reckoned at £250. Timber for use in ship-building was sent to Smythe in Bristol from Bewdley in Worcestershire and from the Forest of Dean by John Sparke of Newnham. In 1543 Smythe bought a load which included 'a kelle and stem and stern post' for the ship and seven 'knees', the shaped timbers much used in ship-building. At other times he bought oars, cordage, a mainyard, canvas olerons for sails, anchors, gunpowder, boat hooks, a grapnel and other iron work, and also tallow and the special bittacle candles for the lantern which hung by the compass. Victuals for the ship are often mentioned: biscuit, wheat and beans, beer and cider, beef and fish. The Spaniards sometimes bought large quantities of biscuit in Bristol,<sup>4</sup> and Griffith Dee, baker, supplied bread called 'byskay' for a voyage to San Lucar.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the century new ovens were installed in Bristol for baking biscuit for the army in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Many brewers carried on their business in the St. James's and Redcliffe areas of Bristol. Thomas Howell, beer brewer, traded for some years in partnership with Thomas Ley, supplying beer and other goods to Bristol merchants as well as to visiting ships.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the century, William Walton claimed that Robert Stone asked if he could supply the beer for the *William* of Bristol, 'making her in a redynes to go to the seas in warlike sorte with letters of reprints graunted . . . against the

1. P.R.O. E 404/130, E 403/2559 f. 344.

2. J. R. Tanner (ed.) *Samuel Pepys' Naval Minutes*, Navy Records Society (1925) 409, 411-2.

3. B.A.O. AC/B63 f. 61.

4. J. R. Dasent (ed.) *Acts of the Privy Council of England* (1890-1907) (A.P.C.) i. 377-8.

5. P.R.O. C 1/871/13.

6. *Cal. S.P. Dom. Elizabeth* 270/15.

7. P.R.O. C 1/1001/69-72, C 1/1003/57.

1. B.A.O. 04026(3) f. 154.

2. B.A.O. 04026(7) f. 231.

3. J. Latimer, 'Notes on two Ancient Bristol Mansions'. *Proc. of the Clifton Antiq. Club*, ii (1889-93) 94.

4. P.R.O. E 404/117.

5. B.A.O. 04026(10) f. 218.

6. P.R.O. E 404/124, E 403/2559 f. 181.

7. P.R.O. Req 2/167/27.

8. B.A.O. 04026(11) f. 97.

9. P.R.O. 403/2559 f. 210. *Cal. S.P. Dom. Elizabeth*, 153/175-8.

10. P.R.O. SP 12/250/33, London ships listed total 25.

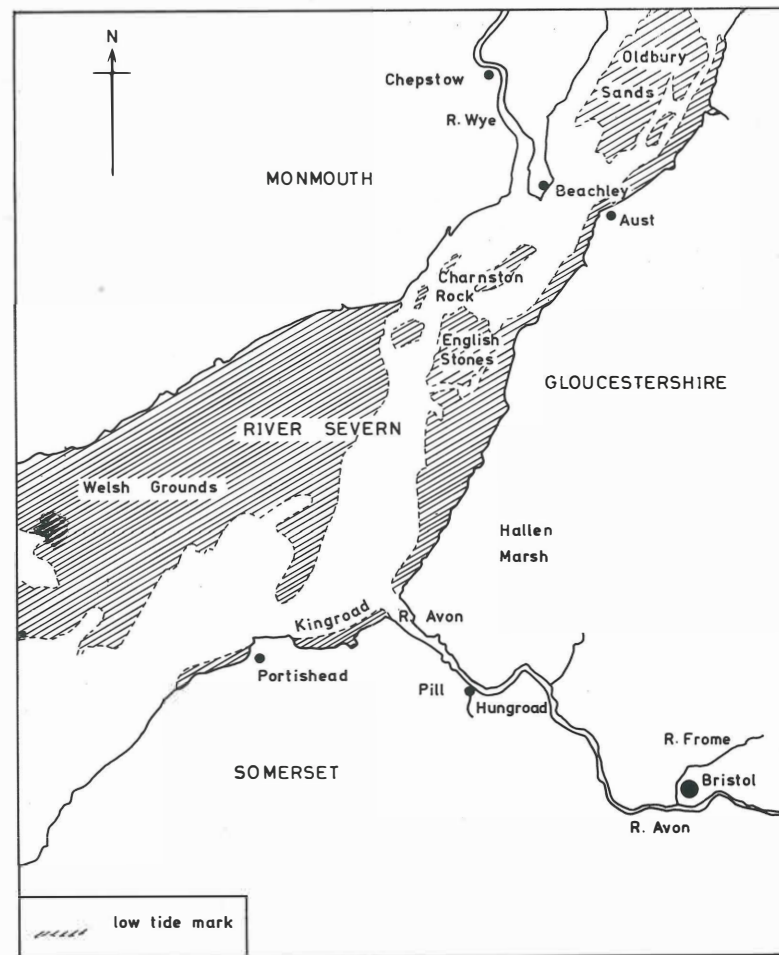
11. P.R.O. E 404/128, E 403/2559 f. 289v.

12. P.R.O. E 404/128, E 403/2559 f. 297v.

13. P.R.O. E 403/2559 f. 333v. See also B.A.O. 04026(11) f. 306.

kynges of Spaine and his subjectes.' Stone promised that the beer would remain good for eight months and he and a friend would supply it free in return for a share in the 'adventure to the seas in the said flybote in the said viage as vittellers.' However, the beer proved undrinkable and in four months it became stinking. The crew refused to continue the voyage and returned to port with no gains and the bread and other victuals still not consumed. Stone denied the charges and sued Walton for £56 3s 8d, the cost of the beer.<sup>1</sup> For Towerson's 1556 voyage to Barbary, the *Hart* and its pinnace were rigged and victualled at Bristol<sup>2</sup> and there are several examples of royal ships re-fitting there.<sup>3</sup> There were also many trained mariners and merchants who owned ships took mariner apprentices. William Spratt accepted four in 1537-8, probably when he was making up a crew for the *Nicholas*.<sup>4</sup> In 1509 the Bristol Council ordered owners of Bristol ships not to employ a master or mariners from any other town as long as there were Bristol men available<sup>5</sup> and at the end of the century a number of Bristol mariners were pressed for the Queen's service,<sup>6</sup> while in the early seventeenth century there were Bristol men in the service of the East India Company, 'they being all lusty men and good mariners.'<sup>7</sup>

Because of the heavy silting of the Rivers Frome, Avon and Severn, it became doubly important to remove wrecks from the roadsteads and channel as quickly as possible. In the Severn the attempt was rarely successful. When the *Peter* was cast away in 1576 off Portishead Point, laden with oil and wine, only four of the crew were lost but 'most parte of the goods (were) lost and taken awaie.'<sup>8</sup> Two ships belonging to the Spanish merchant Simon Ruiz tried to take refuge at Bristol from the storms of 1576. One gained harbour in safety, the other was wrecked.<sup>9</sup> No attempt seems to have been made to raise these wrecks but it is clear that a great effort was made to save the *Dominic* (renamed by then the *Mary Bonaventure*) cast away in almost the same spot on 24th July, 1581. Twenty-seven men were lost and a valuable cargo of spices and oils but the owners and the merchants freighting the ship combined to try to save the wreck and its cargo. The work was organised



BRISTOL and the RIVER SEVERN

1. P.R.O. Req 2/113/22.
2. R. Hakluyt (ed.) *Voyages* (Everyman's Library, 1967) iv. 95.
3. P.R.O. E 404/95, A.P.C. ii. 78, xxxi. 168-9.
4. D. Hollis, *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book, 1532-42*, B.R.S. iv (1948). See also W. L. Goodman, *M.M.* ix (1974) 27-31.
5. B.A.O. 04272 f. 3v.
6. A.P.C. xxi. 313.
7. *Cal. S.P. Col.* i. 682, p. 270.
8. P.R.O. E 404/120. R. Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, Camden Society, ns. v. (1872) 59-60.
9. H. Lapeyre, *Une Famille de Marchands: Les Ruiz* (Paris, 1953) 548, n. 172.



Glocestershire.

Bristow, is one of the greatest & famousst Citties in England,  
and standeth upon the River of Avon, to the westward of  
into the Severn. Over the River there is a famous Bridge of Stone,  
which is longer on one side by the London Bridge, & almost equal so  
long, although it is but a. d. c. c. lxx. So that one quarter of  
the Cittie standeth in Somersetshire. But the Bristolians will  
be a piece of them selves, & not accounted in any other shire.  
In the east end of the Cittie, is the Castell, which they confess to stand  
in Glocestershire. There is no Dungeon in all the Cittie, nor  
any Ditch, & cometh from any haven, but all cometh from  
the ground, neither is there any Castel in this shire, but  
all standeth. There is in the Cittie 20. houses of the  
noblesse, 10. are parish churches.

Chiltenham. standeth by Glocester marsh, 6. myles  
northwest from Glocester.

by Robert Halton, the City Chamberlain, while the Mayor, Thomas Rowland, set up a commission to see that the merchants paid Halton for his expenses. The total value of ship and cargo was reckoned at £1,900, of which about 25 people owned shares ranging from £15 to £130. Halton spent £86 5s 5d but, though some part of the cargo was recovered, it seems to have been very little and many of the merchants refused to pay their share of the costs. A commission, set up as the result of a petition from Halton's widow to the Court of Requests, decreed that payment should be made on pain of a fine of £200 but there is no record of a settlement and Maud Halton complained again to the Court that she had not received several of the amounts owing.<sup>1</sup>

Even greater efforts were expended when the great ship *Golden Lion* of 5-600 tons was sunk in the channel of the river at Hungrood. The ship had just returned from a voyage to Andalusia but was not fully laden when she came into Hungrood in 1578. She was not well moored and broke loose, driving upon the rocks, where her stern was held fast. Then, as the tide ebbed, she fell over and sank into the river, carrying with her a new hulk of 400 tons that was moored alongside. She still held 60 tons of sack and 200 tons of salt, of which most of the salt was lost. For a time the river seems to have been impassable, but the Mayor and the Council acted with great energy and persistence, commandeering lighters and ships' boats, casks and cables in an attempt to right her. The Mayor's Audits of the succeeding year record the continuance of these efforts and their failure. Mariners helped by trying to lash the *Lion* to other ships at low tide in the hope of floating her off as the tide rose. Advice was asked of the Privy Council, the Earl of Leicester and the Judge of the Bristol Court of Admiralty, Dr. Jones. Two Southampton men came with plans to raise her but they too failed. Many trees were cut down and 'engines' of some kind were constructed but the cables broke and on one occasion the barrel of an engine slipped and injured a Frenchman working there. It was not until the Spring of 1580 that hope was abandoned and the consent of the owners was secured to send ten carpenters to cut down the ship because of the delay and danger to navigation. All through a burning summer they worked there and the timbers were brought back to the city in lighters.<sup>2</sup>

The result of this incident was that Ordinances were passed by the Common Council to enable the Mayor to commandeer any equipment needed in an emergency, making a valuation, giving a

BRISTOL IN 1568. From W. Smith, *The Particular Description of England*, Sloane MS. 2596, f.77.  
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1. P.R.O. E 404/119, SP 12/136/35, Req 2/33/79, Req 2/67/73.

2. F. F. Fox (ed.) *Adams' Chronicle of Bristol* (1910) 116. Ricart. *Kalendar*, 60. B.A.O. 04026(10) ff. 286-99, 04026(11) ff. 21-34. A.P.C. xi. 112.



receipt and paying for any damage. Owners must help to raise sunken ships and pay their share of charges. Failure to do so entailed a fine of £20 for the first offence, £40 for the second and discommuning for the third.<sup>1</sup>

Some years later, the *Maryflower* burned at Hungrood, supposedly by the overturning of a candle. The fire was put out by the sinking of the ship which was later beached, rebuilt and named the *Pleasure*, apparently not the larger *Pleasure* which sailed with the Cadiz expedition.<sup>2</sup> In 1596 John Barrett was ordered to pay £11 10s 0d 'for Rearinge of a barcke called the *Beare*' which was sunk in the channel at Hungrood and at midsummer the Chamberlain noted that John Barnes owed £53 17s 10½d for raising and breaking up the wreck of the *Martha Barnes* sunk at St. Vincent's Rocks.<sup>3</sup> Barnes appealed to the Privy Council in October, saying that although he had given bonds for clearing the obstruction, the Mayor had put him in prison and prevented him from doing so.<sup>4</sup> In 1598 another wreck was raised, this time at Pill, and sold to defray expenses.<sup>5</sup> The City Fathers seem rarely to have lost sight of the importance to Bristol and its trade of the maintenance of the river, the harbour and the two main anchorages.

An estimate of the number of ships owned by Bristol men during each decade of the sixteenth century is shown in Table A. This information, gathered from many sources, is sufficiently accurate only to determine a general trend. Two things seem fairly certain; there was no disastrous decline in Bristol's shipping at the end of the century as the merchants claimed in their complaint to the Privy Council in 1598,<sup>6</sup> and the number of smaller ships in the port was greatly increased. The Bristol men explained in 1584 that small ships were cheaper to maintain and proportionately more profitable and 'can turn and wynde in narrow places.'<sup>7</sup> It is probable that they were more manoeuvrable, more heavily armed and could more easily escape from trouble in time of war and, if some were lost to pirates, privateers or Atlantic storms, the loss to the city was very much less. Table A can give only a slight indication of the wealth of the port since the sixteenth century calculation of tonnage was no more than a rough measure of cargo space and the tonnage of so many ships is unknown. No

account is taken here of foreign carriers or of transshipment from other English ports. A wealthy merchant community did not necessarily risk its capital in ventures at sea and Bristol men frequently freighted Breton and Spanish carriers. In the last decade of the century such trade as Bristol still maintained with Spain

TABLE A

**Ships owned by Bristol men during the sixteenth century**

	under 100 tons	over 100 tons	unknown	total
1501-10		5	28	33
1511-20	4	9	15	28
1521-30	1	8	21	30
1531-40	1	13	20	34
1541-50	2	12	21	35
1551-60	5	19	32	56
1561-70	36	11	21	68
1571-80	24	12	14	50 <sup>1</sup>
1581-90	44	13	24	81
1591-1600	64	17	30	111

was carried almost entirely in Scottish, Scandinavian, Baltic, Dutch and Breton ships.<sup>2</sup>

Most Bristol ships were owned by partnerships or by groups of shareholders. William Gittons and John Carr jointly owned the ship *Pheasant* and traded jointly, sometimes carrying their own goods, sometimes those of other merchants and making a fair profit, until Carr grew negligent and failed to pay his share of the expenses. Gittons declared that Carr owed him money, spent in preparing the ship for sea. Carr said that he was weary of Gittons, had given his share to his wife's brother and wanted to hear no more of it.<sup>3</sup> A long lawsuit arose from the joint ownership of the *Toby* and another about the *Phoenix*.<sup>4</sup> It was quite possible for a man to own shares in several ships or to own shares, for example of ¼ and 1/16 in the same ship and shares quite frequently changed hands. It seems that only in the 'golden' 1530s was it usual for a merchant to own the whole of a ship, such as William Spratt's *Nicholas*, Smythe's *Trinity*, Prynn's *Primrose* and Thorne's *Saviour*.

1. P.R.O. SP 15/22 f. 440 lists 53 ships belonging to the 'Port of Bristol' in 1572, but only 23 of these were owned by Bristol men, the rest were from Bridgwater and the various creeks.

2. P.R.O. E 190/1132/7-13, E 190/1133/1-3.

3. P.R.O. C 3/210/87.

4. P.R.O. Req 2/167/27, Req 2/286/52.

1. B.A.O. 04272 f. 41 and v.

2. J. W. Damer Powell, *Bristol Privateers and Ships of War* (Bristol, 1930) 40-2. P.R.O. E 404/128, E 403/2559 f. 297v. Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Salisbury MSS.* vi. 278.

3. B.A.O. 04026(13) ff. 80, 85.

4. *A.P.C.* xxvi. 270-1, 336.

5. B.A.O. 04026(13) f. 217.

6. B. M. Lansdowne MS. 86/13.

7. B. M. Harleian MS. 36a/106.



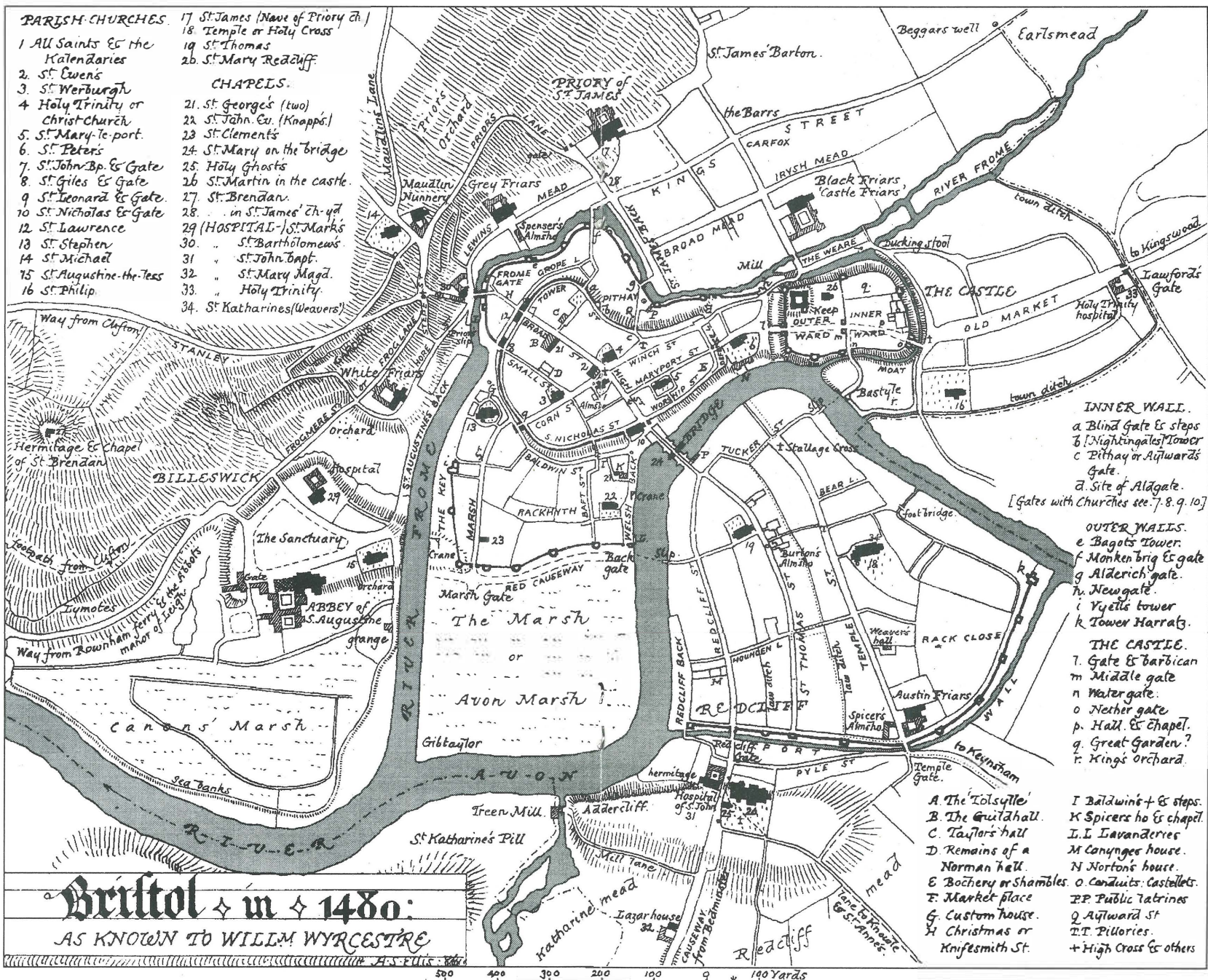
# PARISH CHURCHES.

- 1 All Saints & the  
Kalendars
- 2 St. Ewens
- 3 St. Werburgh
- 4 Holy Trinity or  
Christ Church
- 5 St. Mary-le-port.
- 6 St. Peter's
- 7 St. John Bp. & Gate
- 8 St. Giles & Gate
- 9 St. Leonard & Gate
- 10 St. Nicholas & Gate
- 12 St. Lawrence
- 13 St. Stephen
- 14 St. Michael
- 15 St. Augustine-the-less
- 16 St. Philip

- 17 St. James (Nave of Priory Ch.)
- 18 Temple or Holy Cross
- 19 St. Thomas
- 20 St. Mary Redcliff

## CHAPELS.

- 21 St. George's (two)
- 22 St. John Cu. (Knapp's)
- 23 St. Clement's
- 24 St. Mary on the bridge
- 25 Holy Ghosts
- 26 St. Martin in the castle.
- 27 St. Brendan.
- 28 in St. James' Ch. yd.
- 29 (HOSPITAL) St. Marks
- 30 St. Bartholomew's
- 31 St. John Bapt.
- 32 St. Mary Magd.
- 33 Holy Trinity
- 34 St. Katharines (Weavers)



**Bristol in 1480:**  
AS KNOWN TO WILLIAM WYRCESTRE



Often the apprentice of one of the owners sailed in the ship as purser, but it was understood that he must keep 'a true booke of accomptes and rekoninges' of all payments and receipts for each voyage and on his return 'to answere to ech parte owner his due,' and the book should be available for inspection by each owner at any time.<sup>1</sup> One such purser's book has survived. It is the account book of John Balsall, purser of the *Trinity* of Bristol, a ship of some 300 tons on a voyage to Spain and North Africa in 1480.<sup>2</sup>

Ship-owning had its problems, especially if, like Robert Elliott, the owner was 'unlernyd' and kept no record of transactions. His ship was chartered by Aras Fernandes, a Portuguese living in Bristol, to carry 30 tons of goods at 28s a ton to the Azores. The ship was ready to sail 15 days after her return from La Rochelle, but Fernandes did not lade her and Elliott lost his money. On another occasion he sent the *Bonaventure* to St. Mary Port in Spain 'in the vintage season . . . to seke her a ffreight.' There she was chartered by John Silk who agreed the charges with Elliott. The ship arrived safely and Silk received his goods but paid only part of the sum owing.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes it was the merchant who was defrauded. One Bristol ship, chartered to carry tin and leather from Cork to Rouen, sprang such a leak that they had to put in at St. Ives. The master refused either to go on or to put the man and his goods ashore but brought him willy-nilly to Bristol, where his tin was seized by the customer.<sup>4</sup>

Ships' masters could often be difficult. Some, like Richard Savery or Robert Avyntre, having command of good ships, staved with them but most seemed to 'sign on' for only one voyage. One master is recorded as having abused the owner in English and Spanish, broken his whistle over his head, demanded fresh meat, soft bread, grapes and pomegranates, ordered repairs and fresh tackle, missed a favourable wind and made his landfall in Wales instead of on the banks of the Thames.<sup>5</sup> Edmond Smythe refused to sail with the *Minion* until he had received a promise of four per cent of the value of the cargo.<sup>6</sup> The master was in complete charge of the ship and his name, with that of the purser or the cape-merchant, appeared on the charter-party. A cape-merchant hired the ship for a voyage and accounted to the owner for the whole freight, letting out shares then to other merchants.<sup>7</sup>

The form of the charter-party is almost identical in all countries of Europe throughout the century. The ports of origin and destination are named; the merchants freighting the ship and their precise cargoes are listed, sometimes with merchant marks in the margin; the amount and day of payment of the freight charge is noted and the amount of payment to the master. It was usual for the master to be responsible for local taxes, for securing the necessary safe-conducts and for pilotage at sea, but the merchant paid the river pilot, the costs of unloading and the taxes at the port of destination. Each merchant then added his seal and it became customary to break off one's seal when the freight was paid. John Smythe often records having done so, but this did not constitute a legal proof of payment.<sup>1</sup>

As the cargo came on board, bills of lading were drawn up describing the various bundles, with the merchants' names and marks as they appeared on each of the packs and bundles.<sup>2</sup> Merchant marks were used constantly and were essential to identify the separate items in the cargo.<sup>3</sup> Smythe used his normal merchant mark for cloth and leather, but had two other marks for lead, one a 'pounce' impressed in the metal with a marking-iron.<sup>4</sup> John Young had a gold signet ring of his merchant mark which he left to his son.<sup>5</sup> Three copies of the whole ship's lading were required with the details of each consignment and to whom it was to be delivered. One copy remained among the ship's papers, one was sent by land to the factor to whom the goods were consigned and one remained with the merchant as proof against the master if the goods did not arrive or were in bad condition, or to recover the value of any loss from the assurers.<sup>6</sup> Finally, before leaving port, the customs declaration had to be made and a cocket obtained from the customer and delivered to the searcher for checking.

When ships coming into the port had unloaded their wares, the sailors had been paid their 'windage', the allowance for their work in unloading the ship, and declarations had been made in the custom-house, the porters and hauliers carted the goods away to cellars and storehouses. Goods imported by strangers or by any trader not a burgess were all to be taken to the Back Hall, 'a place upon the backe of Bristowe called Spicers Hall.' This was a large mansion which had belonged to the great fifteenth century

1. P.R.O. C 1/219/6.

2. T. F. Reddaway and A. A. Ruddock, 'The Accounts of John Balsall, purser of the *Trinity* of Bristol, 1480-1', *The Camden Miscellany*, xxiii (1969) 1-28.

3. P.R.O. C 1/629/14, C 1/783/55-6.

4. P.R.O. C 1/778/36.

5. P.R.O. H.C.A. 27/7/90.

6. P.R.O. C 3/106/89.

7. P.R.O. C 1/297/48-51.

1. B.A.O. AC/B 63 ff. 60, 86, 88, 99, 189. P.R.O. Req 2/245/26.

2. P.R.O. SP 12/173/57-8, bills of lading for the *Minion* and the *Falcon* of Bristol, sailing to Middleborough and San Lucar respectively.

3. F. A. Girling, *English Merchant Marks* (1964) 11. A. E. Hudd, 'Bristol Merchant Marks', *Clifton Antiq. Club*, vii. 97-194.

4. B.A.O. AC/B 63 ff. 1, 222E, 290.

5. P.R.O. P.C.C. 69 Cobham.

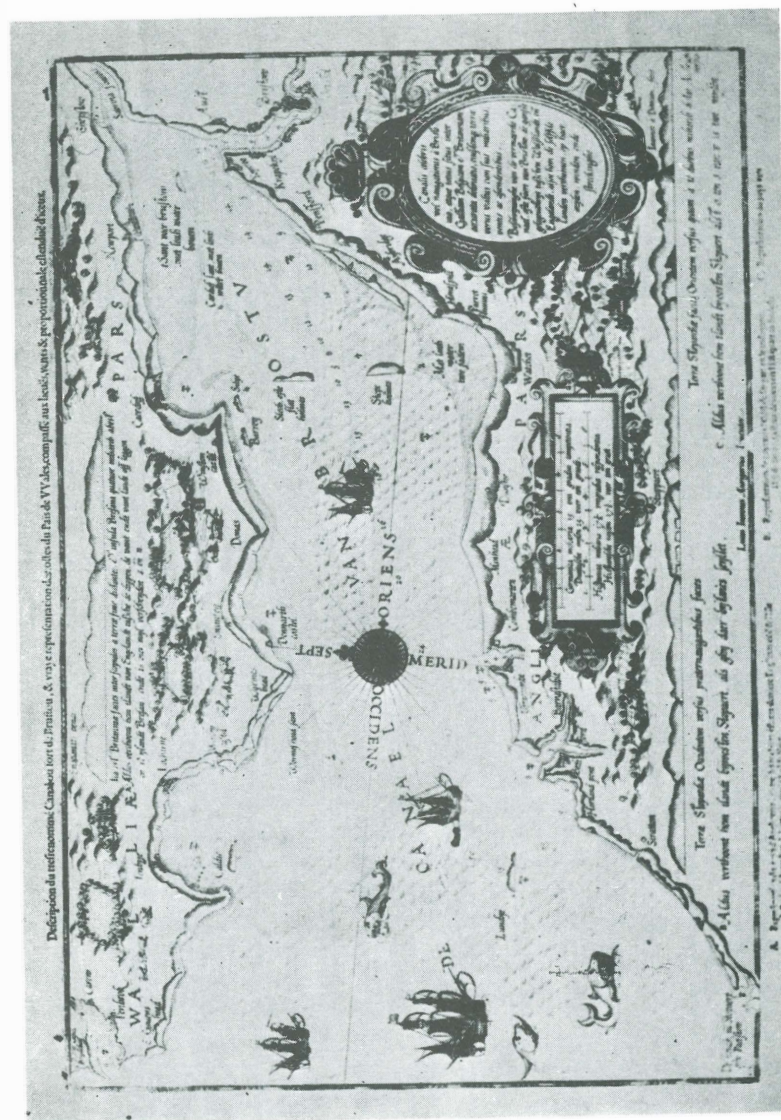
6. G. Malynes, *Consuetudo vel Lex Mercatoria* (1629) 117.

merchant, Robert Sturmy.<sup>1</sup> A fifteenth century set of ordinances for the Back Hall is set out in the Great Red Book, with a list of dues to be paid on various types of cloth, wool, iron, wines, oil, honey, wax, grains, madder, alum and bowstaves.<sup>2</sup> On 10th March, 1566, the Mayor, John Cutt, and the Aldermen and Council prepared a new and detailed set of ordinances. No one was to be in the Hall on Sundays during the time of Divine Service. If, when goods were brought for storage there, the warehouse, cellar and all the rooms were full, the Keeper was not to allow a burgess to house a stranger's goods, but was to hire more cellars or warehouses. No stranger could buy from another stranger there except at the time of the Fair, nor could a burgess bring a stranger to buy goods there which the burgess himself had brought. They must first be removed to his own cellars. No one might buy or remove goods between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m. in summer or 5 p.m. and 6 a.m. in the winter time. If merchandise was not sold after 40 days, then the owner was to pay storage rates by the month. The Keeper of the Hall was to provide porters to carry strangers' goods in and out and the owners were to pay for each 'burthen' 1d to the carrier and 4d to the porters at the gates. At fair-time both buyer and seller, if both were strangers, paid these rates. The Keeper was to have all empty casks for his own use. There follows a list of the main commodities of trade and the dues to be paid on each. For any 'Flanders wares, Rouen wares' or others not mentioned, the cost of storage should be agreed between the owner and the Keeper and if they failed to agree, the dispute should be settled by the Mayor.<sup>3</sup> The successive lists of commodities in these town records give some idea of the continuity of trade. Only in the early seventeenth century the appearance of new items, such as 'Chochenill', 'An-nill' and 'Indico', with sumach, campeche wood, Fernandobucke wood and Spanish hat wool shows the changing pattern of trade by then.<sup>4</sup>

These major provisions for the Back Hall were reinforced from time to time by the Council. On 7th December, 1514, they decreed that all cloth and other merchandise should be taken to the Back Hall for measurement and sale and a 'Common meter of Clothe . . . as well wullen as lynnyn' was sworn annually to measure the cloth 'trulie and indifferentlye.'

Four years later, they reiterated the order that all strangers'

1. J. E. Pritchard, 'Bristol Archaeological notes for 1906', *B.G.A.S.* xxx (1907) 157-60. K. J. Barton, 'Excavations at Back Hall, Bristol', *B.G.A.S.* lxxix (1960) 251-86.
2. Veale, *G.R.B.* ii. B.R.S. viii (1937) 57-60.
3. B.A.O. 04271, ff. 268v-266v, (entered upside-down).
4. Bush, *Town Duties*, 49-57, a book of rates c 1519; P. McGrath, *Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers*, B.R.S. xvii (1951) 164-6. a list of 1606; B.R.L. 25306 a list of 1620.



THE BRISTOL CHANNEL from Lucas Wagneer, *Le Nouveau Miroir des Voyages Marins de la Navigation de la Mer Occidentale et Orientale*, Amsterdam, 1605, Map xix.  
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ment was verbal only, so he had no remedy at Common law and he felt that the dispute was unlikely to be tried impartially at Bristol.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the bargains struck in the Back Hall between burgesses and strangers were made by the brokers. Fifteenth century regulations recorded in the Great Red Book laid down that there were to be two brokers chosen by the Mayor and Council. They were to be sworn to office by the new Mayor within three days after Michaelmas each year.<sup>2</sup> They were to act impartially between buyer and seller and were not to be dealers themselves. For each bargain they were to receive 2d in the £ up to £50 and after that 1d in the £, half to be paid by the buyer and half by the seller.<sup>3</sup> When George Meke and John Harrys were appointed in 1509 they were required to find sureties of £40 'truly to answer to all persons suche goods as shall come to their hands by reason of their said office of brocage.'<sup>4</sup> Fees were not to be given to the individual broker but were to be divided between them each month according to their accounts. Failure to keep accurate accounts with intent to deceive might result in dismissal or even imprisonment. The brokers should report to the Mayor any illegal bargain or the attempt of any merchant to engross any kind of merchandise.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the sixteenth century saw the last great age of fairs, so important to the travelling merchant of the medieval period. Like most commercial centres, Bristol had its fairs, attracting merchants with freedom from tolls during the days of the fair and providing facilities for the exchange of goods and the settlement of debts without the intervention of the somewhat cumbersome machinery of the Back Hall and the brokers. Some tradesmen still spent much of their time travelling to various fairs and markets, as did John Griffiths of Bristol, upholsterer, who left his wife Anne in charge of his business while he travelled in Wales. He may even have been the same John Gryffithe, coverlet weaver, who was in trouble with the bailiff at Bridgwater when he took his leather-covered cushions to sell there at the St. Matthew's Day fair.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Foxe bought wooden trenchers and dishes in Wales to sell, sometimes in Bristol where he lived and sometimes in other fairs and markets in the country.<sup>7</sup> To such men fairs were still all important and they performed a useful function. Foxe's trenchers may well have been among those exported from Bristol from

time to time and he, no doubt, carried various imported goods away from the fair to the surrounding countryside. For John Smythe the fairs had a different significance. Most of his trade was on a regular basis; the import of wine, iron, oil and dyestuffs through factors abroad and the export of cloth, leather and lead obtained from regular suppliers in the Somerset villages. For him the St. James' and Candlemas fairs were, with Lady Day and Michaelmas, mainly occasions for settling debts.<sup>1</sup> William Appowell also notes payments to merchants from Salisbury for French canvas and glass at St. Jamestide in 1558 as well as payments to men of Manchester and Devon.<sup>2</sup>

The St. Jamestide fair was the important fair in Bristol and was held on 20th July and for nine days afterwards. The Mayor often went to the fair on St. James' day, accompanied by the Aldermen in their scarlet gowns. Visiting merchants leased stalls or 'standings' for the fair, on which to display their wares,<sup>3</sup> and every kind of commodity was for sale. In 1533, John a Man, citizen and girdler of London, bought a white gelding for 17s 4d from the Vicar of Olveston.<sup>4</sup> Welsh friezes, Devonshire kerseys and Normandy canvas were brought for sale; bargains were made for the shipment of foodstuffs to Ireland and, at the end of the century, Benedict Webb, the Kingswood clothier, came to the fair to sell his wares and pay his debts.<sup>5</sup> When debts went unpaid at the fair, the defaulter might be arrested and imprisoned in Bristol.<sup>6</sup>

The Candlemas Fair at Redcliffe was clearly less popular, at least with the Bristol men. The charter which inaugurated an annual fair in the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe from 2-9 February was granted in September 1529. The fair continued for 13 years and then a petition carrying 629 names to the King's Council in the Star Chamber from the parishioners of Redcliffe, St. Thomas' and Temple complained that Henry White, Mayor of Bristol, had tried to stop the fair and prevent people from coming.<sup>7</sup> The Bristol men countered this with a strong petition from the Mayor, Aldermen and Council with the masters of the more influential guilds. Their main arguments were that whereas men from Ireland, Wales, Cornwall and Devon used to come regularly from Michaelmas to the middle of Lent with boatloads of fish, since 1529 they came

1. P.R.O. C 1/924/43.

2. B.A.O. 04272, f. 3v.

3. Veale, *G.R.B.* iii. B.R.S. xvi. 78-80.

4. B.A.O. 04272, f. 3v.

5. B.A.O. 04272, ff. 9v, 10 and v.

6. P.R.O. C 1/996/31-3, C 1/800/36-7.

7. P.R.O. C 1/983/34.

1. B.A.O. AC/B/63 ff. 66, 98, 159.

2. B.A.O. DC/A/6/3 f. 38. P.R.O. C 1/1304/56-7, C 1/613/15-16.

3. B.A.O. 04721 ff. 256-7, 04272 f. 20v. Rev. F. W. Potto Hicks, 'St James' (Bristol) Fair Leases', *B.G.A.S.* lvii (1935) 145-51.

4. P.R.O. C 1/722/5.

5. P.R.O. C 1/883/25, C 1/924/43, C 1/869/13, C 3/253/71. See E. Moir, 'Benedict Webb, Clothier', *Ec.H.R.* 2nd ser. x (1957-8) 256-64.

6. P.R.O. C 1/707/35, C 1/1027/7-9. Veale, *G.R.B.* iii. B.R.S. xvi, 2-55. Sanford D. Cole, 'English Borough Courts', *Law Quarterly Review*, xxviii (1902) 376-87.

7. *L.P.* iv. (3) g 5978(20). P.R.O. Sta. Cha. 2/33/51.



only to the fair to avoid payment of tolls. The Candlemas Fair was dissolved but less than six years later Bristol itself received the grant of a January fair to be held in Temple Parish for eight days beginning on the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, January 25.<sup>1</sup>

Coastal and river traffic, important at fair time, was also a large part of the normal work of the port. The Severn route was essential for the collection and export of the cheaper coloured cloths from Kendal, Lancashire, Shrewsbury and the Midlands. Much woad and other dyestuffs, iron and spices went northwards and many travellers from the North and Midlands appear in the Bristol records: Richard Sheppard of Manchester, chapman; Thomas Bright of Sheffield, 'hardware man', and Edmond Hancockes of Lichfield who, after what must have been a memorable meeting with Sampson Hammersley, merchant of Bristol, signed a wine bill to rival that of Falstaff—a total of £2 8s 9½d for claret and sack and 6d for a handkerchief!<sup>2</sup> The Severn was navigable as far as Shrewsbury and the Wye as far as Hereford. Wine and iron, unloaded there and at Bewdley, Worcester, Tewkesbury and the other river ports was distributed throughout Wales and the Midlands by chapmen and carriers.

From Bewdley and the Forest of Dean came timber and leather, especially calfskins; from Tewkesbury butter, malt, wheat and beans, and there was apparently a considerable coastal and export trade in apples and pears from Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.<sup>3</sup> From South Wales to the Redcliffe and Welsh Backs came butter, Welsh frieze and, at the end of the century, iron and iron wire and probably some of the coal exported in considerable quantities from Bristol. Port Books show a thriving trade with Bridgwater, Barnstaple and all the innumerable creeks, pills, rhines and narrow Somerset waterways then navigable.<sup>4</sup> From Padstowe, in 1596, came the ship, *Unity* with a load of 30,000 Cornish tile stones and 3 hogsheads of pilchards—a typical Cornish cargo.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes a Bristol merchant sent lead to Cardiff, Dartmouth or Plymouth for transhipment to France or to the Levant where there was a ready sale.<sup>6</sup> The *Unity* was a two-masted ship and well-equipped and armed, but the Severn craft included barges, picards, crayers, trows and woodbushes. The most usual was the trow, a large, often

unwieldy, flat-bottomed sailing barge, with a square sail and sometimes a square topsail on its mainmast. During Elizabeth's reign larger versions of some of these ships were built: two-masted picards and 'long trows' and these seem to have been regularly used for trading overseas, for smuggling or for raiding enemy shipping where larger ships would have been unsuitable.<sup>1</sup> Coastal trade was, therefore, in every way complementary to the overseas voyages from the port and it is clear that Bristol was the centre of a very wide and productive hinterland—and remained so in 1600 in spite of the increased competition of the Londoners.

Tables B, C and D give an indication of the prosperity of the main areas of Bristol trade throughout the sixteenth century. These figures are taken from the Exchequer records of the sums paid in each year by the customs officers. Those for Bristol are complete for the period except for two fairly short breaks. For the reigns of Edward and Mary, that is for 1547-1558, they are too fragmentary to be available for use, and for the years 1585-1590 the customs receipts of Bristol were 'farmed' by Walsingham and therefore no records for those years remain in the Exchequer. Thus it is possible to present detailed statistics of the export of cloth, the import of wine and the valuations for poundage which was levied on all miscellaneous commodities.<sup>2</sup>

The totals ought probably to be considerably modified by the incidence of smuggling and the corruption of officials in the port of which there is a great deal of evidence. The rates of duty were almost doubled in 1559 and the temptation to smuggle many commodities was thus very much increased.<sup>3</sup> In addition, during the second half of the century, in a time of increasing international tension followed by open war with Spain, the export of many of Bristol's main commodities of trade was either forbidden or allowed only on licence. These commodities included metal and metal goods; food such as corn, fish and butter; calf skins and timber and naval stores such as masts, oars and barrel staves. Trade to many foreign countries, such as the Netherlands, Russia, North Africa, Italy and the Levant was reserved to the Chartered Companies of Merchants, mainly Londoners, and Bristol men trading to these areas must either pay dues to the Londoners on their imports or smuggle them in. The port of Bristol consisted of 59 rivers, creeks and pills and it was quite impossible to police the whole and small boats were laden direct from the river bank, drawn up there on the mud. Many were the stories told in the

1 T. S. Willan, 'The River Navigation and Trade of the Severn Valley, 1600-1750', *Ec.H.R.* viii (1937) 68-79. P.R.O. E 159/354 Easter 2, 44, E 159/356 Easter 17, 18v. D. Burwash, *English Merchant Shipping 1460-1540* (1947) 127, 140.

2. See pp. 22, 24. Tables B, C and D.

3. T. S. Willan, *A Tudor Book of Rates* (Manchester, 1962) xxviii-ix.

1. P.R.O. E 163/12/2. I. S. Leadam, *Star Chamber*, ii. cii-cxxiv, 237-76. B.A.O. 04721 ff. 296v-297. B.A.O. 04026(3) ff. 193-4, 197. *Cal. Pat.* 1549-51, p. 188.

2. B.A.O. AC/B 63, ff. 168, 174, 196, 274, 290. P.R.O. C 1/994/23, C 1/1067/10, C 1/1087/62, 63, 65. B.A.O. 04444 ff. 9v, 30v, Sessions Minute Book. B.A.O. P.St. J.B./Book of MSS. 21(3).

3. P.R.O. SP 12/176/56. B. M. Lansdowne MS. 49/14.

4. P.R.O. C 3/168/90, Req 2/239/31, Req 2/262/3, E122/22/7, E 122/22/9 and E 190/1132/10 for example. M. Williams, *The Draining of the Somerset Levels* (1970) 65, 71. W. G. Hoskins, *Field Work in Local History* (1967) 60-2.

5. E. E. Rich (ed.) *The Staple Court Books of Bristol*, B.R.S. v (1934) 177.

6. P.R.O. E 190/1132/7.

Exchequer Court<sup>1</sup> about all the ways in which the Queen's Customs Officers were defrauded. An analysis of these accusations can give a very rough idea of the great increase in under-recording during the second half of the century and of the commodities in which the rate of smuggling was probably greatest.

**TABLE B**

**TABLE C**

(10 year annual averages)

Sept.	CLOTH EXPORTS	WINE IMPORTS
1490-1500	6515 cloths	2199 tons
1500-1510	3916	1632
1510-1520	3082	1668
1520-1530	2308	1381
1530-1540	2580	1654
1540-1550	2256 (1540-7)	1395 (1540-7)
1550-1560	no figures available	—
1560-1570	886	693
1570-1580	721	1034
1580-1590	723 (1580-5)	1375 (1580-5)
1590-1600	399 (1593-1600)	1279 (1594-1600)
1600-1603	246 (1600-1603)	1525 (1600-1603)

## CLOTH

It is likely that comparatively few cloths were smuggled, since, even in the later years, their export was not very highly taxed, so that the figures in Table B may well be allowed to stand as they are. The cloth trade rose to its peak in the last decade of the fifteenth century with an average export of over 6,500. Over 8,000 cloths were exported in 1495-6 and over 7,000 in 1489-90, 1491-2 and 1493-4. There is no doubt that Bristolians were carrying large quantities to Bordeaux and Bayonne at this time and were also building up their trade in Spain and Portugal. In the early years of the sixteenth century, the cloth export sank rapidly to less than half the earlier figure. The reason for this is hard to determine since Bristol men were still much in evidence in Bordeaux until 1511-12 and Henry VIII's first French war and these years after 1500 seem to have been a time of prosperity in the Spanish trade. War years are notable for generally low totals in all areas of trade and also for the appearance in the customs accounts of large numbers of foreign carriers.

During Elizabeth's reign, the cloth trade showed a marked decline. The effects of war, especially perhaps the loss of a number of ships, civil war in France; successive crises in Anglo-Spanish relations, and widespread fighting in the last decade of the century

all had their effect. By this time there was no elasticity in the trade. The competition of the London market attracted not only the Wiltshire broadcloths, Lancashire cottons, Welsh friezes and Shrewsbury cloths of Bristol's traditional trade, but even quite a large quantity of local Gloucestershire and Somerset coloureds. It is possible that much English cloth was unsuitable for the main areas of Bristol's trade, which lay in southern rather than in northern Europe. Broadcloth was perhaps too heavy for the luxury market and the cheaper, coarser friezes and coloureds were meeting the competition of an officially-supported home industry, certainly in France. Kerseys were always in demand in Italy and the Levant but, until late in the century this was not an important trading area for Bristol and kerseys were not manufactured in Bristol's immediate hinterland. From whatever cause, Bristol could hardly claim to be a major cloth exporting town by the end of the century. There may even have been some truth in their plea to Lord Burghley in 1598 that trade was so bad that master clothiers were begging their bread from door to door!<sup>1</sup>

## WINE

The overall decline in the traditional major import—wine—was less marked. It was probably always worthwhile to smuggle wine and throughout the century considerable quantities were landed at Chepstow, in the territory of the Earl of Worcester and, therefore, free from Royal customs dues and, it seems, from the operation of the Navigation Acts. After 1559, with the duties much increased, the degree of under-recording is likely to have been even more serious. The highest average was again for the decade 1490-1500, but imports were high during many years in the first half of the sixteenth century. The 1530s in Bristol, as at Chester, seem to have been a 'golden decade' of stable trading conditions,<sup>2</sup> while the very low totals of the 1560s were probably the result of the wars in France, increasing hostility towards English merchants in Spain and economic problems—with possibly a poor market for luxury goods—at home. French and Spanish wine imports continued to fluctuate, those of French wine being particularly low in the 1570s as war caused havoc and disruption in western France. Only by about 1600, when the French wars had ended, were there clear signs that the Gascon trade was picking up again, at which time, of course, most Spanish wine was still being imported, or at least, carried, by aliens. By that time, a trade to the Mediterranean and to the Atlantic Islands contributed a much larger amount of sweet wine to Bristol's total, a commodity rarely found in the port

1. Recorded in the Memoranda Rolls of the King's Remembrancer, P.R.O. E 159.

1. B. M. Lansdowne MS. 86/13.

2. D. M. Woodward, *The Trade of Elizabethan Chester* (Hull, 1970) 48.



the Levant, the Atlantic Islands and very occasionally to Guinea, as well as the appearance in the port of some Dutch and Scandinavian ships also show the widening horizons of Bristol trade. It seems that, although the Bristol cloth trade was suffering a very severe slump at the end of the century, the demand, especially from the Mediterranean area, for weapons and foodstuffs, enabled the Bristol merchants to maintain a comparatively steady level of trade during the war years of the 1590s when many of their traditional ports of call were closed to them and the whole nature and direction of their trade was threatened.

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