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England's Maritime and Commercial Networks in the Late Middle Ages

1. Introduction

England was on the edge of Europe, but tied to it by myriad links: political, diplomatic, dynastic, military, religious, ecclesiastic, intellectual, cultural, and commercial. As an island (or rather part of an island), England had to rely on the sea for all foreign contacts, except with Scotland, which was commercially of small importance and with which England was often at war. All other international contacts relied absolutely on maritime activity. This was underpinned by commercial shipping, which was, in turn, underpinned by England's large-scale exports of wool and cloth. Although England was a peripheral country to Europe, the extent of its direct and active commercial links serves to emphasise the scale and sophistication of developments in European trade by the end of the middle ages; it also illuminates the breadth of the available knowledge of Europe and of international affairs available not only in intellectual and political circles but also to people of lower ranks who travelled on a regular basis for commercial purposes.

The scale and extent of England's overseas commerce meant there were plenty of ships (English and foreign) to service all England's travel needs. Diplomats and royal messengers expecting to journey widely anywhere in northern Europe from Iberia to France, the Low Countries, Scandinavia and the Baltic would find plentiful commercial shipping on all these routes. They might take passage on a normal trading voyage or, being on the king's business, they might prefer to hire a whole ship. Royal administrators bound for Gascony or Calais had a similar choice. Military expeditions were a different matter. They had a narrower geographical focus to France, Flanders, or Iberia and a much greater demand for capacity. Even King Henry V, who kept a core of royal ships, did not have enough ships to transport an army. Again commercial ships were used. Kings arrested privately owned ships to be troop transports, temporarily pulling them out of the commercial networks, but using them on routes the masters and crews knew well. Churchmen en route to Rome or Avignon, scholars en route to universities, pilgrims to Rome or Jerusalem generally used the short crossing to the Low Countries or Calais, served by frequent sailings, before picking up land routes south and east. Here it was particularly easy for them to find a passage on a commercial vessel, but pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela had a service all of their own. By the fifteenth century there are arrangements which look like 'package tours' or even a 'ferry service' to La Coruña, as ship owners and masters bought licences to transport pilgrims directly from

English ports (mainly in the south and west) to Galicia. In the first half of the fifteenth century in busy Jubilee years (when St James's day fell on a Sunday and extra indulgences were offered) fifty or sixty English ships would take 2,000 to 3,000 pilgrims across the Bay of Biscay to La Coruña.[1] Although it was on the edge of Europe, England's commercial links were widespread, and all travellers to a variety of destinations could easily find commercial shipping on regular voyages with experienced masters and crews.

2. SOURCES

England's commercial networks are well documented in many records, English and non-English alike. Across Europe treaties and diplomatic documents, royal, princely and municipal records, notarial documents, lawsuits, literary references, tax impositions and private papers show the extent to which merchants moved around, and record the presence of English merchants abroad and of foreign merchants in England. England itself has few private commercial papers, unlike some of the rich private archives in, say, Florence and Prato, but its government was well organised and many official financial, judicial, and administrative records survive to allow a detailed study of the extent and structure of English trade. Among England's many records the customs accounts (which survive from the late thirteenth century in usable forms) are particularly useful for two reasons: they are national not just local accounts; and they offer the possibility of quantification on a national scale.

England's national customs system began with the taxation of wool exports in 1275. The system was steadily extended to include exports and imports by foreign merchants (1303), all cloth exports (1347) and finally (from the later fourteenth century) all goods including those of English merchants, at first intermittently then permanently under the tax of tonnage and poundage. By the fifteenth century, therefore, all England's foreign trade was liable to tax under one imposition or another. The trade was channelled through fifteen designated head ports, running from Newcastle in the north-east to Bristol in the south-west.[2] All exports and imports had to clear customs in these designated head ports and the customs collectors sent annual accounts back to the Exchequer. In the accounts the customs collectors recorded the names of the merchants liable for tax, the goods by amount and value, and the masters of ships involved. Some collectors also recorded the ships' names and home ports and sometimes their destinations and last ports of call.[3] At the Exchequer the accounts were audited and summaries were enrolled.[4]

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[1] W.R. CHILDS, *The perils, or otherwise, of maritime pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the fifteenth century*, in *Pilgrimage Explored*, ed. J. STOPFORD, York 1999, pp. 123-143 (at 130-131).

[2] In the thirteenth and early fourteenth century there were some changes to the designated ports, but the number settled at fifteen, some of which opened 'member' ports if trade was busy enough.

[3] THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, KEW, LONDON (TNA), E122 (King's Remembrancer's Customs Accounts) passim.

[4] TNA, E356 (Enrolled Customs Accounts) passim. These have been recently calendared by S. JENKS, *The Enrolled Customs Accounts (TNA:PRO E356, E372, E364), 1279/80-1508/9 (1523/1524)*, List and Index Society, London 2004-13.

Of course the records are imperfect. They have to be used carefully. Not all information is available at the same date; it is easier to trace the goods taxed by the piece (wool, cloth, wine) than goods taxed by value; problems of licences of exemption, farming of taxes, negligence, corruption and smuggling have to be considered. Moreover, although the enrolled summaries are nearly complete, the original particulars of accounts sent in from the ports survive less well and have many gaps. Nonetheless there is enough good evidence to map out a national picture of the range and scale of England's trading networks. While the riches of municipal and legal archives allow quantification for the trade of cities and relatively small areas elsewhere in Europe (as for instance when the temporary imposition of a tax on English cloth at Bergen-op-Zoom reveals the important information that between 10,000 and 21,000 English broadcloths were imported there in 1495-9)[5] the national picture is more completely quantifiable for England than for any other country in Europe. Here particular commodities by the piece and then all other commodities by value were burdened with consistent taxes all round the coast from Newcastle to Bristol.

3. PORTS

This national customs system concentrated England's overseas trade in certain centres (or nodes) more sharply than before. Most of the customs ports were chosen because they were already busy, but the government action in making them customs ports further enhanced their importance in the international network and drew trade away from neighbouring ports. From these head customs ports goods were distributed or collected by road, river, and coastal routes. Some ports, such as London, which was also a major political, administrative and religious centre, had a variety of economic interests, but others, such as Hull, overwhelmingly depended on the sea. The accounts show the relative importance of these English ports and thus those areas most exposed to foreign contacts and influence. London, unsurprisingly, was by far the busiest port. Four hundred and sixty two ships arrived in nine months alone in 1390; 215 arrived in 1480-1 with foreign-owned goods alone.[6] London also had the widest range of contacts from Iceland to the eastern Baltic and the Mediterranean. Its dominance grew throughout the Middle Ages from handling around one third of England's foreign trade [by value] in the early fourteenth century to nearly two thirds by 1500.[7] Other ports changed position over the years: Boston and King's Lynn on the east coast had been very important wool ports, but as the wool trade declined, Hull, Southampton, and Bristol became the largest re-

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[5] J.H. MUNRO, *Bruges and the Abortive Staple in English Cloth: an incident in the shift of commerce from Bruges to Antwerp in the late fifteenth century*, in *"*Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire*"*, 44, 1966, pp. 1137-1159 (at 1153, 1157).

[6] TNA E122/71/13; *The Overseas Trade of London. Exchequer Customs Accounts 1480-1*, ed. H.S. COBB, London 1990.

[7] M. KOWALESKI, *The Maritime Trade Networks of Late Medieval London,* in *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade Around Europe 1300-1600*, W. BLOCKMANS, M. KROM, J. WUBS-MROZEWICZ eds., Abingdon 2017, pp. 383-410.

gional hubs of the fifteenth century. The provincial ports received many fewer ships than London. Hull, for example, received 80 to 90 arrivals a year in the late fourteenth century, and this dropped to only 40 in the hard times of the late fifteenth century. Each provincial port had its own characteristics and geographical interests, which we can illustrate from the customs accounts. Hull's main activity was to northern, Baltic and Low Country ports, but it also sent a regular group of up to ten ships a year to Bordeaux for wine and a few Hull ships went to the Basque Provinces in the 1390s.[8] Southampton was the centre for Italian and Catalan ships that came to England. Bristol traded mainly in the Atlantic. Like Hull it sent ships to Iceland and Bordeaux; only very occasionally (as in 1468) a Bristol ship entered the Baltic;[9] but Bristol had strong exposure to Gascony and to Spain and Portugal, especially after 1453 when the Iberian trade took the place of the lost Gascon connections.

4. SHIPPING

Customs accounts are important for providing insights into English shipping, which was flexible and abundant. The total numbers and tonnage of English shipping are not clear, but certainly there were many hundreds of vessels of decent size available to service England's large and regular trade.[10] Impressments for the transport of troops show fleets of 150-200 frequently mustered (and for the Crécy campaign nearly 700 were used). In the 1300s England sent around 300 ships a year to fetch wine from Bordeaux. Some of these, even then, were capable of loading over 300 tons, although most loaded between 100 and 150 tons. In the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries most of the major ports could muster around twenty large ships in a decade and to these should be added hundreds more of smaller coastal and fishing ships (often under 10 but also up to 20 tons).[11] If needed, many of these could easily cross the Channel and North Sea for trade or as transports. Overall England's commercial shipping in the Middle Ages may at times have lain between 1,000-2,000 vessels, similar to the numbers in the Elizabethan shipping survey of 1582.[12]

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[8] TNA E101 (Exchequer Accounts Various: Bordeaux) passim; E122/59/23, 59/25, 159/11, 60/2.

[9] *Calendar of Patent Rolls (CPR) 1467-1477*, London 1900, pp. 101, 168.

[10] Data lists of English ships have been compiled by C. LAMBERT et al. in *The Merchant Fleet of Late Medieval and Tudor England 1400-1580*, available from the University of Southampton at www.medievalandtudorhships.org. Publication of the conclusions drawn from the data is due in 2019/20.

[11] For a discussion of the importance of coastal trade see M. KOWALESKI, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 224-32; for fishing fleets see W.R. CHILDS, *Fishing and Fisheries in the Middle Ages: The Eastern Fisheries*, in *The Commercial Sea Fisheries of England and Wales since 1300*, D.J. STARKEY, C. REID, N. ASHCROFT eds., London 2000, pp. 19-23 and M. KOWALESKI, *Fishing and Fisheries in the Middle Ages: The Western Fisheries*, in *The Commercial Sea Fisheries*, cit., 23-8.

[12] I. FRIEL, *The Good Ship*, *Ships, Building and Technology in England 1200-1520*, London 1995, pp. 32, 202.

Travellers on short routes to the Low Countries or Calais might have to wait only days for a ship to leave from their chosen port. Those travelling further might have to wait a few weeks, but would still have plenty of choice. They were able to travel with confidence, since the skills of the shipmasters and crews were honed through long and regular experience on the trade routes. The skills they developed have recently been analysed by Robin Ward and Maryanne Kowaleski, and a lively description of their abilities is in Chaucer's portrait of the Shipman in the Prologue to his Canterbury Tales, a man described as familiar with havens and harbours from Gotland to Finisterre.[13] Analyses of the customs accounts illustrate the patterns of shipping. Voyages took place all year round. Tramping voyages continued to occur, but the customs accounts show clearly that in the fourteenth century and even more strongly in the fifteenth century, the larger English ships were employed on a type of liner trade, with frequent and regular long distance return voyages between their home ports and Bordeaux, Lisbon, Seville, Iceland or the Baltic ports. Shipmasters were active on these long-distance routes for decades and some seem to have become specialists on certain routes. For instance John Brand of Hull skippered vessels for at least thirty years to Iceland and Bordeaux (1443-73),[14] and Henry Baillie of Hull, who was born in Stolp (modern Słupsk) in Pomerania, emigrated to Hull, and took an oath of allegiance to Henry VI in 1455, operated on the same routes for a similar period (1443-72).[15] These long-distance, regularly travelled voyages were relatively safe and an analysis of Bristol voyages shows a very low loss rate across the Bay of Biscay in the 1480s. To assess possible loss rates a run of unbroken accounts is necessary, preferably with stated destinations and last ports of call, and for routes with an established liner service, rather than a tramping trade. Bristol provides this for the two years 1485-7.[16] Although the relevant accounts cover only two years, they provide an interesting snapshot. They record 28 outward voyages to Lisbon, Seville, and Huelva by 16 different masters and ships. At the end of the two years eight of the outward ships had not yet returned, but five of these may be discounted as the outward voyages were so close to the end of the account in 1487 that their return could not be expected on that account (moreover of these five, at least three returned safely as the ships and masters appear in the next surviving account (1492-3). Of the remaining three ships (which sailed earlier and whose returns are not recorded within these two accounts), two at least returned at some time as they also appear in the account for 1492-3. They may well have been engaged on more complex voyages like that of the *Julian* of Bristol in 1453, which was freighted from Bristol to Lisbon, then to Ireland, Plymouth and either Harfleur

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[13] R. WARD, *The World of the Medieval Shipmaster*, Woodbridge 2009; M. KOWALESKI, *The Shipmaster as Entrepreneur in Medieval England*, in *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages, Essays in Honour of Richard Britnall*, B. DODDS, C.D. LIDDY eds., Woodbridge 2011, pp. 165-182; W.R. CHILDS, *The Shipman* in *Historians on Chaucer*, S. RIGBY, A.J. MINNIS eds., pp. 277-296 (at 288).

[14] TNA E101/194/3, 195/19; BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON (BL) Additional Ms 15524; TNA C61 (Gascon Rolls) 141 m. 5; W.R. CHILDS, *The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453-1490*, Leeds 1986, pp. 2, 18, 66, 73, 82, 89, 105, 139, 145, 153, 164, 185.

[15] TNA E101/194/3, 195/19; BL Additional Ms 15524; TNA C76 (Treaty Rolls) 141 m. 34; W.R. CHILDS, *The Customs Accounts of Hull*, pp. 13, 22, 28, 123, 127, 153, 170; *CPR 1452-61*, p. 204.

[16] TNA E122/20/4, 5, 7.

or Middelburg without touching again at Bristol.[17] Only one ship therefore is untraceable. If it was lost this would suggest a loss rate of 3.5%, no worse than rates for the 17th and even 19th centuries.[18] With experience of sailing the Atlantic from Iceland to the Iberian coasts, it is not surprising that some English ships and masters could be persuaded to explore the possibility of voyages to the African coast and that early forays towards Newfoundland are well documented.

5. CHANGING PATTERNS OF GOODS

Because customs accounts allow quantification, they show the movements in the relative importance of England's goods, ports, and overseas market areas, which are intimately linked. England's overseas markets changed from time to time according to what England had to offer as well as economic competition and political pressures. English exports included a range of agricultural good (grain, especially in the thirteenth to early fourteenth century, ale, bacon, firewood), fish, and minerals (tin and lead), but the major exports were wool and woollen cloths. These essentially dictated the structure and pattern of trade and there was a major shift from fleece wool to cloth in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Throughout the period most of England's wool went to the Low Country industries,[19] so England and the Low Countries were always very closely tied in commercial matters. Cloth, however, could be sold much more widely, pulling English merchants, ships and shipmen to markets all over northern Europe; thus, as cloth exports rose, so the reliance on Low Country markets lessened and the importance of other markets grew. Low Country entrepôts always remained convenient, but more distant markets could supply England directly with raw materials such as dyes and wool-oil, timber, copper and iron, and luxuries such as linens, furs and wines.

The shift between wool and cloth is clearly shown by the customs accounts.[20] Wool exports averaged some 26,600 sacks a year in the late thirteenth century and rose to average 34,700 sacks in the first decade of the fourteenth century, sometimes reaching over 40,000 sacks in a single year. This was the product of some 7,000,000 to 8,000,000 sheep. It demanded hundreds of ships for carriage to the Low Countries and brought into England some £225,500 of silver annually. With this scale of income England could afford to buy any goods it wanted from raw

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[17] E.M. CARUS-WILSON, *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages*, reprinted London 1967, pp. 106-108.

[18] Loss rates are quoted as up to 4-5% on certain routes in the nineteenth century: R. DAVIS, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, reprinted with corrections, Newton Abbot 1972, p. 87. The rate for Bristol was higher in 1610-1620 at 10% a year: P.V. MCGRATH, *Merchant Venturers and Bristol Shipping in the early Seventeenth Century*, in "Mariners' Mirror", 36, 1950, pp. 79-81. In comparison, loss rates on the East Indies run for 1783-92 were lower for both English and Dutch vessels at 2.8% and 3.3% respectively: P.M. SOLAR, *Opening the East: Shipping between Europe and Asia, 1770-1830*, in "The Journal of Economic History", 73, 2013, n. 3, pp. 625-661 (at p. 639).

[19] Some went through the Low Countries to other destinations (mainly Italy) and from the later fourteenth century perhaps 20% went to Italy directly by sea.

[20] Figures for wool and cloth exports are based on the data in E.M. CARUS-WILSON, O. COLEMAN, *England's Export Trade 1275-1547*, Oxford 1963.

materials (timber, iron, dyes) to the richest luxuries (silks, brocades, spices, wines). Wool exports temporarily dropped back in the 1310s and 1320s to the levels of the 1280s, recovered to a high level in the 1350s and 1360s (again sometimes reaching over 40,000 in a year), then dropped steadily away to average *c.* 8,000 sacks a year at the end of the fifteenth century. As wool dropped, exports of manufactured cloth began to rise. England had exported cloth for many years. In the thirteenth century English cloth had been bought in Italy and Iberia, but exports then declined in the later thirteenth century, presumably in the face of Flemish products. Despite Flemish competition, however, some cloth exports had continued into the fourteenth century and by 1347 the revival of exports was large enough and visible enough for the government to tax them. Thereafter we can trace their rise in the customs accounts. After a slow start after 1347, no doubt due to the disruption by the Black Death, exports rose quickly to reach 40,000 cloths before 1400 and, with ups and downs, nearly 60,000 in the 1440s and again in the 1490s. With this shift in exports, the pattern of English trade had to change. Flanders specifically forbade the import of English cloth and this encouraged English trade with other areas. Larger numbers of English merchants and ships went beyond the short hop to the Low Countries. And although the exports of cloth did not fully make up for the export of raw wool by weight until the beginning of the sixteenth century, the income from wool and cloth together continued to keep the English trade balance favourable throughout the fifteenth century.

The customs accounts do not tell us about the qualities and types of wool and cloth exported, but many other sources amplify our knowledge. English cloth was attractive. It varied in weight and type: a little top quality scarlet was produced, but most exports were in the middle broadcloth or lighter ranges. An important point to make is that much of English cloth was dyed and finished. The customs accounts, so useful for the scale of cloth exports, reveal relatively little about the final dyeing and finishing of the cloth. Sometimes they describe types of cloth (narrow cloths, blankets, russets, kerseys) and sometimes provenance (Guildfords, Exeter rolls, Coggeshalls), but mostly they simply describe the cloth by its three tax categories (*in grano*, *de dimidio grano*, and *sine grano*; that is whether or not any scarlet kermes dye, known as grain, had been used on the cloth). Some early writers on the cloth trade took *sine grano* to mean 'without dye', and thus believed that almost all English cloth exports were unfinished,[21] but this is not so. Cloth *sine grano* could be any colour (including dyed red with madder) but had no admixture of the expensive kermes dye in it.[22] The tax categories identified the cloth in this way, because it was assumed that the most expensive dye would only be used on the most expensive cloths, which could therefore bear a higher tax rate. English exporters paid 2s 4d

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[21] See for example G. SCHANZ, *Englische Handelspolitik gegen Ende des Mittelalters*, 2 vols Leipzig 1881, II, pp. 86-105; A. BEARDWOOD, *Alien Merchants in England, 1350 to 1377: their Legal and Economic Position*, Cambridge Mass. 1931, pp. 45-46, 162-5,168-9, 171-172, 174-176. The meaning of *sine grano* has long been corrected: E.M. CARUS-WILSON, O. COLEMAN, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 14-15; J. MUNRO, *The Medieval Scarlet and the Economics of Sartorial Splendour* in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson*, N.B. HARTE, K.G. PONTING eds., London 1983, pp. 13-70 (at pp. 60-3), (Pasold Studies in Textile History 2).

[22] For the expense of kermes see J. MUNRO, *Medieval Scarlet*, cit., pp. 39-52.

per cloth dyed wholly in grain, 1s 9d for cloth dyed partly in grain, and 1s 2d for cloths without any use of grain. Alien merchants paid at the rates of 3s 6d, 2s 7d, and 1s 9d.[23] The customs collectors recorded tax categories and were not interested in what colour the cloths were.

Many other records, however, reveal the English dyeing and finishing industries. English tax lists reveal not only dyers and listers but also fullers, walkers amd shearmen among English occupations and surnames,[24] and large amounts of woad, alum, kermes and madder were imported for the dye houses. We can see the range of colours in records of sales. For example, in 1394-5 in York 3,087 cloths were exposed for sale of which 83 % were dyed in blues, reds, and greens; 12% were specified a 'white' (but not necessarily unfinished) and the colours of 5% are not stated.[25] Law suits in 1458 over alleged illegal sales (by alien merchant to alien merchant) in London show that Simone Larcario of Genoa had purchased 132 cloths of assize in a wide range of shades of blue, green, red, tawny and grey; not one was undyed.[26] In a further 45 cases in 1458 over illegal credit sales by Englishmen to Italians, at least 613 (73%) of the broadcloths sold to them were coloured; the colours of the rest were unspecified – none was said to be white.[27] Finishing by napping and shearing could take place before or after dyeing, or indeed be done twice, and it is unlikely that dyed cloth was not fully finished, especially if it was exported to destinations without highly skilled cloth industries of their own. Only in the second half of the fifteenth century did unfinished exports grow, in accordance with agreements made in the Low Countries. Antwerp in particular became a major centre for exports of unfinished English cloth, and even Flanders finally permitted English cloth imports, provided that the finishing was done by its industries.[28] The export of unfinished cloth to the Low Countries brought strong opposition from English finishers. Legislation forbade the export of yarn and unfinished cloth in

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[23] E.M. CARUS-WILSON, O. COLEMAN, *England's Export Trade*, cit., pp. 14-15, 194-195.

[24] For example occupations at York in 1381 show 63 weavers, 14 dyers, 4 fullers (walkers) and 2 shearmen: C.C. FENWICK, *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, I-III, Oxford 2005, pp. 140-150.

[25] J. LISTER, *The Early Yorkshire Woollen Trade*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 64 (1924), pp. 47-95.

[26] TNA E159/235, Recorda Michaelmas mm. 16-21; Recorda Trinity mm. 21, 30-1, 33-4, 41, 43-4, 46-53, 54-5, 58, 61, 63; E159/236 Recorda Michaelmas mm. 18, 19, 20d, 25, 27-9, 32-40, 42, 44-6, 50-7, 60, 72, 86; Recorda Trinity mm. 5-6.

[27] TNA E159/235 Recorda Trinity mm. 21, 30-1, 33-4, 41, 43-4, 46-52, 54-5, 58, 61, 63; E159/236 Recorda Michaelmas mm. 18-19, 20d, 25, 27-9, 32-40, 42, 44-6, 50-7, 60, 72, 86; Recorda Trinity mm. 5-6. For the context of the prosecutions see W.R. CHILDS, *"To oure losse and hindraunce": English credit to alien merchants in the mid-fifteenth century*, in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth Century England*, ed. J.I. KERMODE, Stroud 1991, pp. 68-98.

[28] For the intimate connection of English unfinished exports and the Antwerp industry see H. VAN DER WEE, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries)*, 3 vols., The Hague 1963, II, pp. 70, 100, 133; J.H. MUNRO, *Bruges and the Abortive Staple in English Cloth: An Incident in the Shift of Commerce from Bruges to Antwerp in the Late Fifteenth Century*, "Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire", 44, Brussels 1966, pp. 1143-7; IDEM, *Medieval Woollens: the Western European Woollen Industoies and their Struggle for International Markets, c. 1000-1500*, in *The Cambridge History of Textiles*, ed. D. JENKINS, Cambridge 2003, pp. 228-386 at pp. 292-6; J. PUTTEVILS, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century: the Golden Age of Antwerp*, London 2015, pp. 4-5, 20-22.

1467 and 1487,[29] but it was hard to enforce the regulations against the English Merchant Adventurers who wanted to export unfinished cloth, believing that the industries in Antwerp were better able to judge the fashions and colour demands of the eastern Continental markets.[30] Other markets continued to buy finished cloth. Italian and Iberian purchases show the great range of colours and Iberian royal purchases indicate high quality. The royal household of Navarre in the early fourteenth century bought at least three shades of red, three of green, four of blue, and turquoise and violet as well as browns, blacks, greys and finished whites (suitable for clothing the queen and infantas and for a gift to the Bishop of Bayonne). The Castilian monarchs between 1492-6 also bought English reds and greens. Italian merchants in London in 1458 handled blues (plunket and blod), greens (grass green, gaudy green, green medleys), reds (red and crimson), grey musterdevilliers, and something called 'lion's skin'.[31] In the absence of private mercantile papers it is not easy to be sure of the relationship of the English ports and the production in their hinterlands. Was England's cloth industry producer- or consumer-led? Port and hinterland are, of course, intimately linked and it is most likely that what reached the market was a blend of the two. It is not clear which dominated, but ultimately producers could only prosper if they offered goods that sold. In some records it is clear that overseas merchants wrote to their agents to specify the cloth they wanted. In 1458 a Toulouse merchant ordered three pink and one red cloth of England of specified (finished) quality from his contact in Pau and in 1470 Juan de Medina wrote from Lepe to Juan Seboll, his partner in London, to say that if Seboll was going to send more cloths to Spain he should send musterdevillers, fine Bridgwater straits, good kersies, white russets and bright greens.[32] Similarly the exports of unfinished cloth to Antwerp at the end of the fifteenth century increased because the demands from Antwerp buyers were transmitted to English producers.

Many other patterns appear through the customs accounts. They show for instance the constant imports of industrial raw materials (dyes and mordants for the cloth industry, iron and timber) as well as luxuries (silks, spices, and wine) and small consumer goods (tiles, pots, locks, bells etc). They show the share of trade in the hands of English and foreign merchants and the share of trade carried by English and foreign shipping. English ships dominated few routes, except those to Bordeaux before 1453 and to Iceland for much of the fifteenth century. On all other routes they sailed alongside ships of other nations, which were also frequent visitors to English ports. The role that English ships played in different ports varied widely. Where customs collectors recorded homeports of shipping, as in Bristol and

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[29] Statutes 7 Edward IV cap. 3; 3 Henry VII cap. 12: *Statutes of the Realm*, A. LUDERS et al eds., 11 vols., London 1810-28, II, pp. 422, 520; J. OLDLAND *The London Fullers and Shearmen, and their Merger to Become the Clothworkers' Company*, in "Textile History", 39, 2013, n. 2, pp. 172-192 (at 178-179).

[30] J.H. MUNRO, *Medieval Woollens*, cit., p. 286.

[31] *Archivo General de Navarra. Catálogo de la Sección de Comptos: documentos*, J. CASTRO, F. IDOATE eds., 50 vols, Pamplona 1952-70, especially vols. 20-34 passim; A. DE LA TORRE, *Telas extranjeras en la Corte de los Reyes Católicos*, in *VI Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragon, 1957*, Madrid 1959, pp. 831-839; TNA, E159 (King's Remembrancer's Memoranda Rolls), 235 Recorda Michaelmas mm.16, 18, 19.

[32] P. WOLFF, *Three Samples of English Fifteenth Century Cloth*, in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe*, cit., pp. 120-125; *Calendar of Close Rolls 1468-76*, London 1953, no. 709.

Hull, these patterns of English and foreign shipping can be quite precisely plotted, where accounts record ships only by masters' names precise detail is lost (see Tab. 1).

Unfortunately London and Southampton are among those whose accounts rarely record homeports. Nonetheless, the names and cargoes allow a general picture to emerge and Professor Harding has estimated that up to 45% of shipping at London in 1390-1 might be from the Low Countries.[33] A rare account with homeports provides a sharper picture for London for 1480-1. The general pattern revealed in the customs accounts overall is as one might expect: ships of Holland, Zeeland, Germany and Baltic ports were particularly busy in English east coast ports while Iberians and Bretons were more frequent in the south-west and Italians used Southampton and London.[34] Foreign shipping movements in the accounts illustrate very well the extent and frequency of geographical contacts made in English ports but movements do not necessarily reflect the percentage of trade carried. Despite the level of foreign shipping and surges of foreign competition, English merchants held their own in cargo handling. They rarely handled less than 50 per cent of cloth exports and of inward and outward trade by value and often handled and carried over 60 per cent. [35] This is well illustrated by Hull, where local men supplied under 50% of shipping but controlled 60-80 % of trade (see Tab. 1 and 2).

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[33] V. HARDING, *Cross-channel Trade and Cultural Contacts: London and the Low Countries in the Later Fourteenth Century* in *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages*, C.M. BARRON, N. SAUL eds., Stroud 1995, pp. 153-168 (at 161-3).

[34] N.J.M. KERLING, *Commercial Relations of Holland and Zeeland with England from the late 13th Century to the Close of the Middle Ages*, Leiden 1954, pp. 222-3; J.D. FUDGE, *Cargoes, Embargoes, and Emissaries. The Commercial and Political Interaction of Egland and the German Hanse 1450-1510*, Toronto 1995, pp. 115, 117.

[35] E.M. CARUS-WILSON, O. COLEMAN, *England's Export Trade*, cit., pp. 75-111, 138-155.

Tab. 1. **Examples of shipping movements the late fifteenth century in English ports from north-east to west**

The totals are of movements (inward and outward). Percentages are of the legible ships; in most account the illegible names are few and it makes little difference to the percentages. Accounts cover full years (12 months) unless otherwise stated.[1]

KINGSTON UPON HULL[2]

Date	Total mvts & %	Eng/Ch.Is/ Ir vessels & %		Foreign vessels					
				LC	Hans.	N.Fr	Breton	Basque	Scottish
1464-'	112	39	35%	37	5	6	2	2	21
1466-/	125	45	36%	80	5	6	8	2	19
147-2	83	37	46%	46	0	0	0	0	0
148/-90	67[3]	36	54%	9	6	0	0	0	7

LONDON[4]

Date	Total mvts	Eng/Ch.Is/ Ir vessels & %		Foreign vessels						
				LC	Hans.	N.Fr	Breton	Basque	Portuguese	Venice & S. Sp.
1480-1[5]	424	155	37%	139	33	21	11	24	19	2

[1] Eng/Ch.Is/Ir = English/Channel Island/Irish; LC = Low Countries; N.Fr.= Northern French (Calais, Norman); Hans. = Hansard.

[2] These accounts are printed in *The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453-1490*, W.R. CHILDS ed, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 144, Leeds 1986, pp. 65-120, 151-77, 202-24.

[3] 3 ships illegible.

[4] London petty custom accounts for 1470-1, 1472-3 and 1477-8 (TNA E122/194/19, 20, 23) survive and record 384, 398, 322 movements respectively. The tunnage and poundage account for 1487-8 (TNA E122/78/7) and the petty custom account for 1490-1 (TNA E122/78/9) show similar numbers. Unfortunately none of these accounts record the homeports of vessels. It is therefore impossible to compile accurate tables, but the masters' names indicate the rising Iberian trade: 38 vessels appear to have Basque masters and 9 have Portuguese masters in 1487-8; in 1490-1 the numbers are 85 and 13 respectively.

[5] *The Overseas Trade of London, Exchequer Customs Accounts 1480-1*, H.S. COBB ed., London Record Society 27, 1990. This petty customs account (TNA E122/194/24) is an exception in recording home ports of shipping, but (as a petty custom account) it does not record English- and Spanish-owned inward cargoes which did not pay this tax. Thus some English and Spanish inward vessels may also escape the record.

SOUTHAMPTON[6]

Date	Total mvts	Eng/Ch.Is/ Ir vessels & %	Foreign vessels					
			LC	Hans.	N.Fr	Breton	Iberian	Venice/Genoa
1464-5[7]	175	>>>	<<<	2?	>> 18	<<	18	20
1487-8[8]	111	>>>	<<<		<<<	<<<	17	15

BRISTOL

Date	Total mvts	Eng/Ch.Is/ Ir vessels	Foreign vessels			
			Gascon	Breton	Basque	Portuguese
1485-6[9]	178	133 74%	0	0	39	4
1486-7[10]	175	141 80%	2	0	28	1
1492-3[11]	186	131 70%	0	8	36	8

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[6] Southampton accounts do not record home ports. It is often difficult to separate English, French, and Low Country ships by masters' names and impossible to suggest percentages. Italian and Iberian identification is secure.

[7] The account covers 1 year 5 months: printed in *The Port Books or Local Customs Accounts of Southampton for the Reign of Edward IV*, D.B. QUINN and A.A. RUDDOCK eds., 2 vols. Southampton Record Society 37-38, Southampton 1937-8, II pp. 203-15.

[8] TNA E122/142/10.

[9] TNA E122/20/5: 3 ships unnamed or illegible.

[10] TNA E122/20/7: 10 ships unnamed or illegible.

[11] TNA E122/20/9: 3 ships unnamed and probably English.

Tab. 2. Examples of percentages of inward and outward cargoes owned by English merchants in the late fifteenth century

KINGSTON UPON HULL[1]

Date	Cloth exports in whole cloths of assize			Value of exports in ££			Wool & fell exports in sacks			Wine imports in tuns			Value of imports in ££		
	T	E	E%	T	E	E%	T	E	E%	T	E	E%	T	E	E%
1464-5	880	760	86%	1239	1055	85%	227	227	100%	658	412	63%	2496	1640	66%
1466-7	374	326	87%	1108	806	73%	886	886	100%	301	265	88%	2294	1539	67%
1471-2	840	839	100%	1483	919	62%	666	666	100%	632	631	100%	2292	1881	82%
1489-90[2]	887	793	89%	869	551	63%	358	358	100%	0	0	-	2225	1038	47%

6. GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF ENGLAND'S TRADE NETWORK

In the thirteenth and early fourteenth century England's direct trade network was already wide. Whether goods were handled and carried by English or foreign merchants and ships, the network of direct contacts stretched from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, but undoubtedly at this period the Low Countries dominated. By c. 1400, with the growth of cloth exports, England's trade was more evenly spread, English activity had increased beyond the Low Countries, and by the end of the fifteenth century there was a perceptible shift to the west. It may seem that English merchants and seamen were unadventurous in the thirteenth century, because their trade was so closely focussed on the Low Countries. And why should it not be? That was where English wool sold best and it also housed the great entre-pôt of Bruges and the lesser ports of the Scheldt estuary, from which English merchants could obtain goods from all over the then known world. English ships and merchants could, therefore, make a good living just shuttling back and forth across the relatively risk-free Narrow Seas. However, there had always been some merchants who ventured further and as English exports moved from wool to cloth in the fourteenth century, so more merchants joined them, expanding especially into the Baltic Sea and Iberia, where they were well placed to benefit from the late-medieval Iberian economic expansion. In the last two centuries of the middle ages, therefore, England's regular direct maritime contacts were with very diverse places, from undeveloped Iceland to highly sophisticated Italy.

As well as this overall geographical expansion of English activity, England's trade network was also constantly shifting emphasis internally in response to economic and political pressures. To illustrate these short and medium term changes within the overall expansion, we need to look at England's contacts from north to south in a little more detail. To the immediate north was Scotland, but Anglo-Scottish trade was thin because of the Anglo-Scottish wars and Scotland's French alliance. Even in the 1460s, after the end of the Hundred Years War, relatively few Scottish ships came into English ports, preferring their well-established trade in the Low Countries.[36] Across the sea, Scandinavian links with Norway, Denmark, and Gotland remained from the Viking period. Scandinavian trade was still strong in eastern ports in the early fourteenth century, when ships of Trondheim and Bergen came to Hull and Lynn with stockfish, timber, butter and skins. English ships and merchants also sailed the route, but found themselves under increasing pressure from Hanseatic (especially Lübeck) expansion into Denmark and Norway in the late fourteenth century and Bergen (where Hanse merchants held a privileged position) became uncomfortable for the English. By c. 1400 some English merchants went directly to Iceland for their stockfish and the fifteenth century became known as Iceland's 'English century'.[37] Other English merchants, however, remained at

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[36] For example, a number of Scottish ships came to Hull in 1465-67, but rarely in other years: W.R. CHILDS, *The Customs Accounts*, passim.

[37] E.M. CARUS-WILSON, *The Iceland Trade*, in *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth century*, E. POWER, M.M. POSTAN eds., London 1933, pp. 133-182; G.J. MARCUS, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic*, Woodbridge 1980, pp. 125-154; W.R. CHILDS, *England's Icelandic Trade in the Fifteenth Century: the Role of the Port of Hull*, in *Northern Seas Yearbook 1995*, P. HOLM, O. JANZEN, J. THOR, eds., Esbjerg 1995, pp.

Bergen, especially those of King's Lynn who also worked extensively with Lübeck merchants. Anglo-German trade was also longstanding. Until the thirteenth century this had been mainly via the Rhine or through Hamburg, but as German merchants moved along the southern Baltic shores, so direct Anglo-Baltic trade increased there for timber, osmund, iron, copper and potash. Much of this trade was in Hanseatic ships until the mid to late fourteenth century, when (in the 1360s and 1370s) the English made a determined effort to expand into the Baltic and settled especially in Gdańsk. By the mid-fifteenth century, however, Hanseatic protective regulations (and some violence) had curtailed English activity in Baltic trade. Many fewer English ships and merchants sailed there, although English cloth exports continued to do very well, largely in the hands of Hanseatic merchants.[38] Further south, all the Low Country provinces attracted English trade. Flanders absorbed much wool, although it rejected English cloth; Holland and Zeeland took cloth (some to pass into Germany) and increasing amounts of wool for their developing cloth industry; Brabant likewise imported and transferred English cloth and Antwerp became a considerable centre for finishing English cloth at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century.

At Bruges, then Antwerp, and at smaller ports such as Middelburg, Bergen-op-Zoom, and Dordrecht English merchants bought in return all types of goods, some brought long distances from Scandinavia, Germany, Poland, Iberia and Italy and others produced in the Low Countries or nearby: linens, madder, onions, garlic, beer, tiles, pots, Liège metal work. Although England had to look further afield for cloth markets as exports rose, the Low Countries nonetheless remained a major focus for the English. To the south and west, France was much less important to England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because trade was severely curtailed by the Hundred Years War. The capture in 1336 of Calais (which became England's wool staple from the 1360s) gave England a foothold on French territory and Henry V's conquest of Normandy reopened trade directly across the Channel, but in the late middle ages England's only important trade destination in France was Bordeaux in English Gascony. Gascon wine had attracted over 300 English ships a year to Bordeaux in the early 1300s (one third of the total shipping there at that time), but the beginning of the Anglo-French war had cut Bordeaux's wine exports by two thirds. This remaining trade, however, was dominated by the English. English ships carried between 70 and 85 per cent of Bordeaux's wine exports, and if ships of Wales, Ireland and Bayonne are included then ships of English territories exported 80-94 per cent.[39]

The end of the Hundred Years War badly disrupted this trade again when England lost Gascony in 1453 and radically altered trade routes in the Channel and Bay

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11-31, (Fiskeri- og Søfartsmuseet studieserie 5); A. Agnarsdóttir, *Iceland's 'English Century' and East Anglia's North Sea World* in *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, D. BATES, R. LIDDIARD eds., Woodbridge 2013, pp. 204-216.

[38] T.H. LLOYD, *England and the German Hanse 1157-1611*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 48-9, 50-172. See also S. JENKS, *England, die Hanse und Preussen. Handel und Diplomatie 1377-1474*, I-III, Köln 1992, passim.

[39] TNA E101/184/19; 185/7,11; 188/12; 191/3; 192/1; 194/3; 195/19; BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON, Additional MS 15524.

of Biscay. But the political changes and subsequent truces brought compensation in the form of increased trade with Normandy, Brittany, La Rochelle and Castile. The re-opening of Anglo-Castilian trade was particularly important. Anglo-Iberian trade had been strong in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Much was with the Basque Provinces and dominated by the Basques, but the activity of English merchants grew in the mid-fourteenth century (somewhat earlier than it did in the Baltic). There is evidence for English activity in Castile 1311 and 1338, but it increased in the 1350s and English merchants were busy in Lisbon and Seville by 1369.[40] Trade with Castile, however, faded thereafter when Castile became an ally of France in the Hundred Years War in 1369. Some trade could continue during truces and Italian ships that called at Andalusian ports continued to bring southern goods, but it was not until the end of the war and the new treaty with Castile in 1466 that England's trade with Castile took off once more. In the 1480s and 1490s Basques flooded into London and an English 'colony' resident in Seville began to rival that in Lisbon. Anglo-Portuguese trade, already long-standing by the mid-fourteenth century, had benefitted from the Anglo-Castilian difficulties. It supplied many of the southern goods the English wanted (oil, kermes dye, fruit and wine); and the marriage of Phillippa of Lancaster to João Aviz and subsequent Anglo-Portuguese alliances secured the trade. From the later fourteenth century English merchants established a permanent resident group in Lisbon.

On all these more northerly routes, of course, English ships sailed alongside those of other nationalities from all over Europe; only in their captive markets at Calais and Bordeaux did English merchants and ships dominate. Further south, however, the picture was different. As yet, the route into the Mediterranean was rarely sailed by English ships. Direct contacts were strong, regular and frequent, but largely handled by Italian ships and merchants, supplemented by those from Barcelona and the Basque Provinces. Italy as a historical, geographical and intellectual entity was very familiar to English people,[41] but so also were the legal and political independence and varied commercial offerings of individual city states. The term 'Italy' was used alongside specific references to Italian cities. For example, in Chaucer's time merchants from Florence,[42] Lucca, Genoa, Milan, Venice, Pisa, Pistoia, and Bologna might be found in London, and Chaucer was comfortable describing Dante as both 'the grete poete of Ytaille' and 'the wise poete of Florence'.[43] An

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[40] *CPR 1307-13*, p. 375; *ibid. 1338-40*, p.1; W.R. CHILDS, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Manchester 1978, pp. 31-3; EADEM, *Trade and Shipping in the Medieval West: Portugal, Castile and England*, Porto 2013, p. 110.

[41] G.B. PARKES, *The English Traveler to Italy. The Middle Ages (to 1525)*, Rome 1954, pp. 567-8.

[42] For discussion of the Datini business in England see H. BRADLEY, *The Datini Factors in London, 1380-1410* in *Trade, Devotion and Governance. Papers in Later Medieval History*, D.J. CLAYTON, R.G. DAVIES, P. MCNIVEN eds., Stroud 1994, pp. 55-79.

[43] W.R. CHILDS, *Anglo-Italian Contacts in the Fourteenth Century*, in *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, ed. P. BOITANI, Cambridge 1983, pp. 65-87 at p. 69; *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, lines 1125-6, and *The Monk's Tale*, line 2463, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. BENSON, Boston 1987, pp. 120, 248; *A trade policy*, in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth centuries*, ed. R.H. ROBBINS, New York 1959, p. 170.

anonymous writer of verses on 'A trade policy' in the mid-fifteenth century included 'Italy' in his list of markets for English cloth:

> 'Prus-londe, florence, venyse and Iene,
> Melane, Catelony and all ytally.

The use of 'Italy' was not only a literary convention. The imposition of a tax on aliens resident in England in 1488 included every 'Venycian, Italyan, Januez, Florentyne, Mylener, Cateloner, Albertyn, and Lombard'; exemption from tunnage and poundage duties in 1488 was granted in response to a petition of 'mercatorum nationis Italiae, Venetorum vocatorum 'Venitians', Januensum vocatorum 'Janueyes', Florentinorum vocatorum 'Florentynes', Lucansium vocatorum 'Lucans'; and Professor Fusaro has drawn attention to the sense of unity and cooperation which could occur among the city states themselves when abroad.[44]

A few individual English ships and masters can be traced in the Mediterranean from the late fourteenth century and a few English merchants travelled on the ships of Genoa, Venice, or Savona, even before the well-known expeditions of Robert Sturmy of Bristol took English merchants and ships into the Mediterranean,[45] but it was not until the sixteenth century that English ships became familiar there. Nonetheless in the early fourteenth century the anonymous author of *The life of Edward II* wrote rather oddly of large numbers of Englishmen in every country around the Mediterranean, well known for deceit and non-payment of debts;[46] but perhaps he meant pilgrims and churchmen?

Commercial networks of course extended beyond maritime areas into hinterlands, but it is not usual to find English merchants beyond the ports. It is true that Danzigers complained of English merchants travelling down the Vistula to Krakow (when they should go no further than Torun); probably more went into Flanders and northern Germany, given the intensity of activity in the Low Countries; possibly some English merchants went further into Gascony; but there is little evidence of merchants beyond Lisbon and Oporto, nor of ventures within Castile once trade was re-opened, unless merchants needed to seek help from royal courts. On the whole most English merchants did not go far from the coasts.

The documentary evidence for the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries shows a clear picture of steady geographical expansion of English commercial activity but within this general expansion, there were constant shifts of emphasis with short and medium term adjustments, as the above brief survey shows. The main pressures for these changes were changing commodities, economic competition, and political al-

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[44] *PROME*, parliament of November 1487, C65/125, m.8; *Foedera, conventiones, litterae et cuiuscumque generis acta publica ... ab anno 1101 ad nostra usque tempora*, I-X, ed. T. RYMER, The Hague 1739-45, V. iii. 188; M. FUSARO, *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean. The decline of Venice and the rise of England 1450-1700*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 29-34.

[45] S. JENKS, *Robert Sturmy's Commercial Expedition to the Mediterranean (1457/8)*, Bristol 2006 (Bristol Record Society 58).

[46] *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. W.R. CHILDS, Oxford 2005, pp. 108-111.

liances and wars. The relationships of each of these with the others and with other general and local pressures in individual markets were complex, but nonetheless, in broad and simple terms, it is possible to see that the most important pressures varied in different areas. In the north economic competition became the main problem. English ships and merchants, who had successfully followed the Hanse into the Baltic in the mid-fourteenth century, were then curbed there in the fifteenth century by Hanse protective restrictions (which sometimes spilled into violence); similarly the privileged position of the Hansards in Scandinavia gave them a competitive edge, which helped push the English into the direct Icelandic trade. Further south, in the Low Country trade, the most important overall pressure was probably the change in England's exports. Political pressures in Anglo-Flemish relations and the Burgundian take-over were clearly very important, but the shift from wool to cloth lessened the centrality of Flanders and made Holland, Zeeland and Brabant (especially Antwerp) more attractive, both as markets in themselves and as transit points to inland Europe. Further west politics and war played a particularly influential part. The Hundred Years War had had great influence on Anglo-Gascon and Anglo-Castilian trade and its end effectively re-orientated England's western trade. A major re-alignment took place with the loss of Gascony in 1453 and the new Anglo-Castilian treaty in 1466. The shift from Gascon to Iberian trade is especially clear at Bristol, where the customs accounts specify destinations of exports. There in the late fourteenth century nearly 50 per cent of cloth exports went to Gascony and 24 per cent to Iberia, evenly split between Castile (during truces) and Portugal; at the end of the fifteenth century 84 per cent went to Iberia (two-thirds now to Castile) and only 6 per cent went to Gascony.[47]

For England's future trade the shift was extremely important as the whole of the Iberian Peninsula was re-opened to English activity, as were commercial opportunities there, just as Atlantic expansion began to take off in earnest in the 1480s.

Despite gaps in the records and changes in emphasis in the markets over time (as noted above), it is possible to make educated estimates for the overall importance of England's trading areas. On the whole the results are unsurprising. In the thirteenth to early fourteenth century England's overseas trade was widely spread but undoubtedly the Low Countries dominated; by the fifteenth century, however, with the growth of the cloth trade, the trade was more evenly spread.

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[47] TNA E122/15/8; 16/2, 5, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19-23, 26, 28, 30, 34; 18/39; 19/11, 13-15; 20/1, 5, 7, 9; 40/12; 161/31. See Table 3.

Tab. 3. Destinations of cloth sent from Bristol in the late fourteenth and late fifteenth centuries[1]

Date	Total	Destinations									
		Gascony		Spain		Portugal		[Iberia]	Ireland		Other	
1370s[2]	11443	5549	48%	948	8%	1896	16%	[24%]	1692	15%	1329	12%
1380s[3]	12310	6640	54%	1282	10%	1611	14%	[24%]	1472	12%	1305	10%
1390s[4]	22332	9396	42%	2627	12%	2004	9%	[21%]	5378	24%	2926	13%
1460s[5]	4353	1207	28%	650	15%	1860	43%	[58%]	169	4%	466	11%
1470s[6]	15043	2816	19%	5727	38%	3240	23%	[61%]	1376	8%	1758	12%
1480s/90s[7]	17749	1152	6%	10730	60%	4328	24%	[84%]	1268	7%	273	2%

[1] The accounts are incomplete and cover only a few years within each decade. The numbers of cloths are, thus, only a fraction of total exports, but the percentages show the relative importance of the markets. The shift from Gascony to Iberia after 1453 is marked.

[2] TNA E122/16/2, 15/8, 16/5, 16/9 (1376-80). In these accounts 18 cloths were sent to Brittany and 1,310 (12%) were not assigned a destination.

[3] TNA E122/16/11, 16/13, 16/15, 40/12 (1380-83, 1386-7). In these accounts 540 were loaded for Genoa, 44 for NW France and 721 were not assigned a destination.

[4] TNA E122/16/19-21, 16/23-24, 40/17, 17/1 (1390-92, 1398-9, 1399-1400). In these accounts 957 cloths were loaded for NW France, Flanders and Prussia and 1969 were given no destination.

[5] TNA E122/19/1, 19/3, 19/4, 19/6. In the 1460s accounts are poor and none covers a full year. Of the 'other' cloths 449 were sent to Bristol's out-ports for onward transport.

[6] TNA E122/19/7-8, 19/10-15, 18/39, 161/31. Of the 'other' cloths 972 were sent to Bristol's out-ports for onward transport.

[7] TNA E122/20/1, 20/5, 20/7, 20/9. Of the 'other' cloths 158 were sent to Bristol's out-ports for onward transport.

Map 1. **England's regular trade routes in the 15th century**
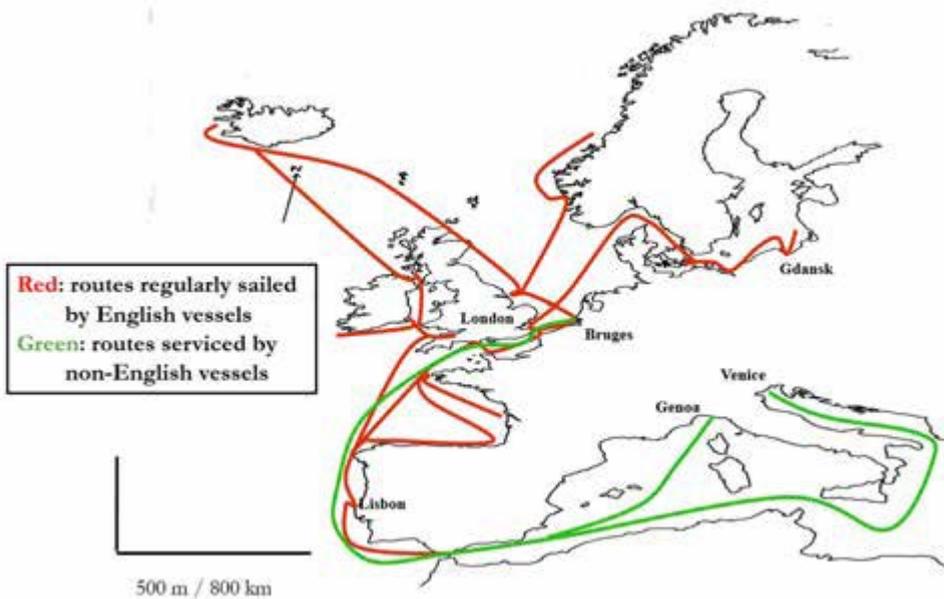
Eastward trade nonetheless remained very important because the Low Countries always took some 80% of English wool and at least 20 to 25% of English cloth went eastwards to the Low Countries, the Baltic or inland Germany (often in the hands of Hanse merchants). Westward and southward trade, however, became increasingly significant. Gascony always supplied some 90 per cent of England's wine. Italian ships by the mid fifteenth century often loaded 20 per cent of English wool and up to 25 per cent of English cloth exports for the Mediterranean (and also sent wool and cloth overland). Iberian trade had ups and downs, but grew in importance at the end of the fifteenth century, when Castilian merchants alone could export 10-15 per cent of England's cloth,[48] (to which must be added Portuguese exports and English exports to Iberia).

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[48] W.R. CHILDS, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, cit., pp. 89-91.

Map 2. **Areas of regular direct contact for English shipping in the 13th and 15th centuries**
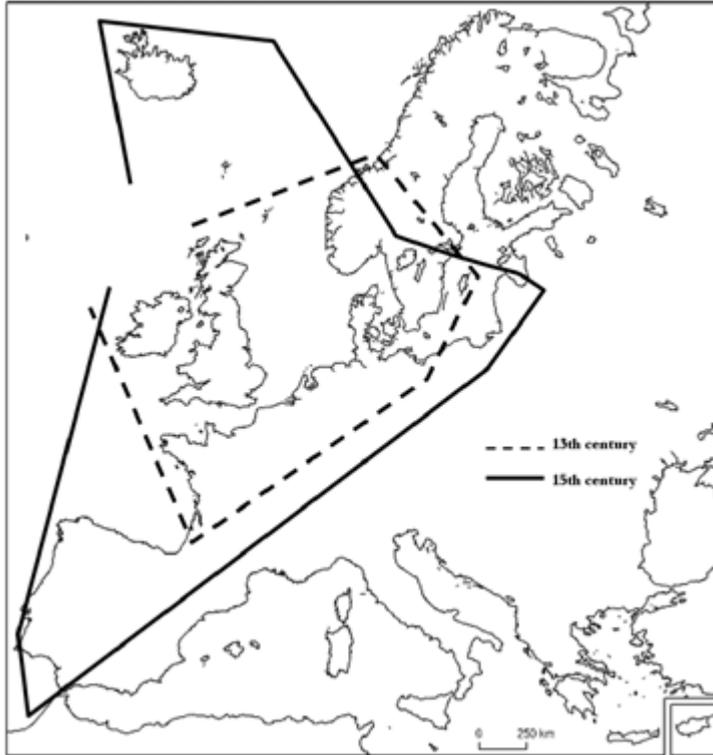
7. IMPACT? INFLUENCES? INTEGRATION?

With a maritime network so widespread, constant and yet diverse, England can illustrate many of the themes proposed for discussion at the Prato 2018 conference, whether on practical organisational matters such as free trade or protection, on economic matters such as complementary markets, or more intangible matters of cultural exchanges and influences. To make comparisons we need to look beyond England (as this conference invites us to do), but here I will draw attention to a handful of topics from the English perspective.

The movement of people took places at all levels of society. The international exchange of 'high culture' that shaped much of English history took place among the higher ranks of society at court or within the church and universities and generally involved a smallish number of people. In these connections, however, commerce was important in that commercial ships carried the people, their ideas, books and luxury life-styles. Moreover, kings, nobles, diplomats and churchmen were accompanied by retinues, escorts and servants, thus regularly bringing lower ranks into the travelling class. Pilgrimage spread travel further down the social ranks and

military expeditions, rather intermittently, also brought thousands of Englishmen to France, Flanders, and Iberia. The movement of people was, however, even more integral to trade, and it was trade that arguably gave England its most regular and socially widespread connections abroad. Year after year hundreds of merchants and probably thousands of seamen moved between ports, staying for longer or shorter times, sometimes emigrating, marrying, bringing up families. Despite some brief flurries of anti-alien sentiments, port towns were cosmopolitan places.[49] Immigrants and visitors worked within broadly familiar commercial structures, but would have to learn to adapt to the variations in laws, regulations, practices and procedures of the ports they visited. They would both adapt to and absorb local practices, food, and styles, and take their own social practices with them.

1. Organisation

England's trade was strongly regulated. English kings imposed a national customs system and legislated on weights, measures, and qualities. They favoured regulation in order to protect their own trade income; after all they drew up to half their regular revenue from trade duties. They also legislated on who might handle exports, not always in favour of English merchants. It was the king's choice whether to favour English or foreign merchants, whichever best protected royal revenue. In 1303 the *Carta Mercatoria* favoured foreign merchants in return for extra customs duties[50] and at various times in the fourteenth century wool exports were placed in the hands of foreigners, but there was no sign in England of merchants surpassing royal power. English kings might consult them and might be influenced by merchant groups such as the Londoners, the wool exporters, the Italian companies, but the actions they took all served royal interests; they kept the regulation of international trade firmly in their own hands. Close contact between different regions does not seem to have radically altered political or legal structures to produce compatible systems in which the merchants worked. Although England used what it called 'law merchant' in urban courts and in royal courts where applicable, but this was not part of a pan-European code (except perhaps in the principles of speed, fairness and acceptable forms of proof), it was rather an adaption of common law courts to accommodate merchants' needs.[51] An exception might be in the common use of

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[49] For an overview of English port towns see M. KOWALESKI, *Port towns: England and Wales 1300-1540*, in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, 600-1540*, ed. D.M. PALLISER, Cambridge 2000, pp. 467-494.

[50] *English Historical Documents* vol. III *1189-1327*, ed. H. ROTHWELL, London 1975, no. 91.

[51] The text of the English *lex mercatoria* found in Bristol's *Little Red Book* has been edited and translated in M.E. BASILE, J.F. BESTOR, D.R. COQUILLETTE, C. DONAHUE JNR, *Lex Mercatoria and Legal Pluralism. A late thirteenth century treatise and its afterlife*, Cambridge Mass. 1998. For further commentaries see J.H. BAKER, *The Law Merchant and the Common Law before 1700*, in "Cambridge Law Journal", 38, 1979, pp. 295-322; C. DONAHUE JNR, *Medieval and Early Modern Lex Mercatoria: an attempt at the Probatio Diabolica* in "Chicago Journal of International Law", 21, 2004, pp. 21-37. For its working in London courts see *Calendar of Select Pleas and Memoranda of the City of London A.D.1381-1412*, ed. A.H. THOMAS, Cambridge 1932, pp. vii-xli (where Thomas still assumes the context of a pan-European law merchant, although he does not offer exempla).

the judgments of Oléron, which were widely known in the shipping world of northern Europe,[52] but most merchants simply became adept at operating within the legal structures of the foreign country they were in. Just as they adapted to local currencies, weights and measures, they learnt how to use local systems rather than to copy or change them. As for business organisation, although English merchants were exposed to Italian business practices, they developed no great companies like the Italians, instead organising through small family businesses and partnerships more appropriate to its scale of trade. Nonetheless, English merchants were capable, on occasion, of raising great financial sums, as did William de la Pole and other financiers for Edward III.[53] They were also used to co-operative action through the Company of the Staple and (later) the Company of Merchant Adventurers. At the Staple they elected their own mayor, agreed their own regulations, and finally took over the financing of the Calais garrison from the Crown.[54] English merchants freely used credit, drew on Italian bankers if necessary, and adopted double entry book-keeping through Spain, calling it accounting in the 'Spanish method'.[55]

2. Commercial interdependence

Commercial interdependence between England and its markets was widely visible. Bi-lateral interdependence was particularly strong on some routes, notably to Gascony and Flanders. England imported some 90 per cent of its wine from Gascony before 1453, sending in return cereals, fish, and (later) cloth. It rarely exported less than 80 per cent of its wool to the Low Countries, taking in return at first cloth and then a wide miscellany of general goods. In both areas political interests were also important, and trade was inextricably entwined with political relations between England and France. But, when political relationships turned sour, as when England lost Gascony in 1453, the complementary products often ensured that trade continued, although temporarily disrupted. England's Icelandic trade was similarly bound up with one major commodity – the import of stockfish – and the dominance of English merchants there led to the fifteenth century there being described

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[52] A. CORDES, *Lex Maritima? Local Regional and universal maritime law in the Middle ages*, in *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade*, cit., pp. 69-85. For a detailed discussion of the Judgements of Oléron see K-F. KRIEGER, *Ursprung und Würzeln des Roles d'Oléron*, Quellen und Darstellungen zur Hansischen Geschichte, Hansischen Geschichtsverein, neue Folge, Bd 15, Köln 1979. The best discussion in English of the origins and stemma of the Judgements is still in P. STUDER, *The Oak Book of Southampton of c. 1300*, I-II, Southampton 1910-11, II, pp. xxix, lxxi, 54-101.

[53] E.B. FRYDE, *William de la Pole. Merchant and King's Banker (†1366)*, London 1988.

[54] For the operation of the Calais Staple see A. HANHAM, *The Celys and their World*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 224-51; T.H. LLOYD, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1977, pp. 225-57; J.H. MUNRO, *Wool Cloth and Gold,* Toronto 1972, pp. 127-53. For the development of the Merchant Adventurers, who were heavily dominated by the London Mercers, see E.M. CARUS-WILSON, *The Origins and Early Development of the Merchant Adventurers' Organisation in London as shown in their own Medieval Records*, in "Economic History Review", 4, 1933, n. 2 reprinted in *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, London 1967, pp. 143-182; A. SUTTON, *The Mercery of London. Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 235-349.

[55] *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, ed. J. VANES, London 1974, p. 17

as 'the English century'. Elsewhere trade links were less dominated by one com-
modity, but profits from England's cloth secured the goods it could not produce
itself. Geographical imperatives coloured these trade routes. Forest products and
metals came from the Baltic; iron from the Basque Provinces, and kermes dye, olive
oil, cork, fruits, and wines from southern Iberia. Although both England and Cas-
tile produced wool for Flanders, this seems to have been no problem, probably be-
cause the Castilian wool was introduced to take the place of English wool, rather
than pushing it from the market.

Wider interdependence is especially clear in the cloth industry. The English in-
dustry had excellent supplies of domestic wool, but relied on Portugal and Andalu-
sia for kermes dye; on Picardy, then Lombardy, then Toulouse for woad; on Iberia
for wool oil, and (despite English deposits) on distant Asia Minor for alum. This
pan-European inter-connection is even clearer in the Low Country cloth industries,
which similarly depended on international supplies including even raw wool. Both
England and Flanders then depended on international sales of their cloth, and
might copy products to suit their markets: English cloth makers copied French
styles with their chalons in the thirteenth century and their musterdevilliers in the
fifteenth.

3. Immigration

The movement of people is integral to trade, and the movement of Englishmen
abroad and foreigners to England as both visitors and immigrants is easy to find in
many records. Trade was arguably the most important activity that exposed the
largest groups of 'ordinary folk' to regular and widespread foreign influences. Many
merchants and seamen were temporary residents in other countries, but visits were
regular and frequent, year after year, and could last weeks or even months. Alt-
hough turn-round times in ports could be short, charter-parties for large ships on
major routes usually allowed for up to a month in port for loading and unloading,
and ships might be delayed even longer by weather or the need for repairs. In these
cases those aboard had plenty of time to absorb local customs and language, espe-
cially as some were regular visitors. Bristol's shipmasters and seamen, for instance,
were particularly familiar with Bordeaux, Lisbon and Andalusian ports. Similarly
those from Hull regularly sailed to Iceland and Bordeaux. They came to know not
only the seas, but the customs and people of the ports where they frequently
stayed. Some merchants, factors and junior partners stayed longer, sometimes mar-
rying abroad. Some emigrated for life. In England, Italian merchants were deeply
embedded in London parishes; and regulations on hosting and the taxation of al-
iens in England show the range of foreigners living here in the fifteenth century.[56]
In Portugal English merchants were resident in Lisbon, some staying long enough

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[56] H. BRADLEY, *The Views of the Hosts of Alien Merchants 1440-1444*, London 2012 (London Record
Society 46); J.L. BOLTON, *The Alien Communities of London in the Fifteenth Century. The Subsidy Rolls of 1440
and 1483-4*, Stamford 1998; J. LUTKIN, *Settled or fleeting? London's Medieval Immigrant Community Revisited*,
in *Medieval Merchant and Money. Essays in Honour of James L. Bolton*, M. ALLEN, M. DAVIES eds., London
2016, pp. 137-155.

to be granted tax exemptions and the right to bear arms in the city; and in London Bartholomew James, a well-established London merchant, described himself as 'born in Lisbon of an English father'.[57] To the east, John Kempe of King's Lynn spent years in Gdansk, where he married and had a daughter before bringing his wife home to meet his parents in 1431.[58]

4. *Social and cultural practices*

These exchanges made ports very cosmopolitan places and social and cultural practices could easily spread, but how deeply did they become imbedded? The easiest influences to find are in material matters. Societies on both sides of the North Sea, for example, used similar food, clothes and fashions. The English began to drink beer and then to make it. They wore Flemish hats, built in brick, bought memorial brasses in the German or Flemish style in East Anglia, and at Ipswich Low Country influences are visible in its urban dramas. But how far artistic influences relate to trade is difficult to say. Flemish influences in English manuscript illuminations are clear from c. 1340-1370, but before then French and Italian influences were more important.[59] In the reverse direction and to Scandinavia, we can see reflections of English style in the octagon and choir of Trondheim cathedral and English-influenced painted altar frontals elsewhere in Norway;[60] English alabasters still grace Holar Cathedral, and traces of English romances can be found in fifteenth century Iceland.[61] Changing artistic styles undoubtedly had something to do with ease of contact, but how much did it depend on trade? Memorial brasses could be imported, but manuscript illuminators were highly trained specialists who had to migrate. Language influences similarly raise questions. The greatest linguistic impacts in England came from invasions by Vikings and Normans, and many of the English merchant class would have spoken some French as well as English. Commercial influence was minor in comparison with that, but it did introduce new words. Imports brought their names with them: Baltic timber brought with it clapholt, righolt, and wainscot;[62] Italian ships in Southampton brought words for handling cargo (stives, barkroll, arigon, pewtrelle) which were regularly used in local

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[57] P. DE AZEVEDO, *Comercio anglo-português no meado do sec. XV* in "Academia das Sciências de Lisboa Boletim da Segunda Classe", 8, 1913-14, pp. 53-66; TNA PRO31/8/153; *CPR 1441-6*, London 1908, p. 435.

[58] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. and ed. B.A. WINDEATT, Harmondsworth 1985, Book II, chapters 1-2, pp. 265-69.

[59] L. DENNISON, *Flemish Influence on English Manuscript Painting in East Anglia in the Fourteenth Century*, in *East Anglia and its North Sea World*, cit., pp. 315-35.

[60] D. KING, *Medieval Art in Norfolk and the Continent: an Overview*, in *East Anglia and its North Sea World*, cit., pp. 82-118 (at 89-118).

[61] I am indebted to Maryanne Kowaleski for information on the English romances.

[62] W.R. CHILDS, *Timber for cloth: changing commodities in Anglo-Baltic trade in the fourteenth century*, in *Cogs, Cargoes and Commerce: Maritime Bulk Trade in Northern Europe 1150-1400*, L. BERGGREN, N. HYBEL, A. LANDAN eds., Toronto 2002, pp. 181-211 (at 189-90).

accounts;[63] all ports show macaronic language in their customs accounts.[64] Many of the greatest intellectual and cultural influences that shaped English history tended to take place at the higher political, ecclesiastical and intellectual levels. All that commerce did here was to provide the means of transport for people, manuscripts and books.

8. CONCLUSION

England, as an island, depended on the sea for all its international contacts except those with Scotland. These contacts were underpinned by a large and flexible fleet of commercial shipping, which was itself underpinned by England's thriving exports of wool and woollen cloth. England's direct commercial networks stretched all over Europe. In the northern seas English ships and merchants were very active in the network, in Iceland, Scandinavia, the Baltic, the Low Countries, France and Iberia, always, of course, alongside other nationalities. Further south, England's direct maritime contacts with the Mediterranean were largely in the hands and ships of Italians, supplemented by Catalan and Basque activity, although a few individual English merchants and ships can be found there before the sixteenth century. Through its trade England was thus exposed to many international contacts. There were, of course, many other important channels of contact through court and church, but arguably commerce was the most important of all, providing not only the means of transport for all social ranks, but also (through seamen and port workers) drawing the largest numbers of the lower ranks of society into contact with other people and lands. English ports were thus exposed to a wide range of influences, yet one can ask how quickly this brought change. Although English ports were exposed to a wide range of influences, change beyond the material world was slow. Fashions, new goods, new words could be quickly adopted, but the structures of law, politics and language remained more stable. The commercial classes, after all, were a minority of the population and change beyond the material world moved more slowly.

One final point must be made. This overview shows England at the centre of its traditional commercial network – one that had been in existence for centuries; but all this was about to change. Atlantic exploration, predominantly by the Iberians, was already opening new routes to west Africa and the Atlantic Islands. By 1480 sugar already came directly to Bristol from Madeira (although not yet in Bristol ships);[65] Bristol merchants were sponsoring voyages into the North Atlantic;[66] and English ships were even rumoured to be seeking Andalusian pilots for West

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[63] A.A. RUDDOCK, *The Method of Handling the Cargoes of Medieval Merchant Galleys*, in "Historical Research", 19, 1941-3, pp. 140-148.

[64] For an overview of how language might change and its time-scale, see A. NESSE, *Trade and Language: How did Traders Communicate across Language Barriers?* in *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade*, cit., pp. 86-100.

[65] TNA E122/19/14, 20/5.

[66] G.J. MARCUS, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic*, cit., pp. 164-168.

Africa.[67] Once these new Atlantic routes became regularly sailed the whole shape of England's (and Europe's) trade networks would change.

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[67] W.R. CHILDS, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, cit., pp. 168-169.