

SOMERSET'S SIXTEENTH CENTURY MARITIME TRADE.

Duncan Taylor

In May 1504, a Bridgwater merchant named Dennis Dwyn fell seriously ill in Bordeaux where he was arranging the purchase and shipment of woad and wine for carriage to Bridgwater aboard his ship *The Garbiel*.¹ Dwyn's condition was sufficiently serious for him to draw up his will, and as was appropriate for an eminent and wealthy merchant who had served as a bailiff of Bridgwater, he took care to specify generous legacies to the Hospital of St John at Bridgwater, to St Mary's church in the town, and for the upkeep of the town's bridge, with the hope that 'the inhabitants of the said town of Bridgwater should beseech our Redeemer for his soul'. Dwyn was equally generous in his benefactions to the various religious orders in Bordeaux, and to the church of St Peter in that city whose priest was a witness to his will. Dwyn was however not English by birth, but Irish. He had continued to conduct business in Ireland and at his death had debts owed to him by a Limerick merchant.² The compass of Dwyn's trading relations typifies the close association which existed between Somerset, Ireland and France at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The prosperity of Dwyn and the legacies he was able to bequeath mirrored the prosperity which such trade brought to the Somerset port towns during this period. By the end of the century it was not only the liturgy and ornamentation of St Mary's church in Bridgwater which would have been unrecognisable to Dwyn, nor only the Order of Friars in Bridgwater and the Hospital of St. John which had long since disappeared. So too had much of the overseas trade which Somerset had enjoyed in former times.

Our knowledge of Somerset's maritime trade during the Tudor period is founded upon three principal sources. Firstly, and most importantly, are the detailed overseas 'particular' customs accounts. These do not survive from every year in the sixteenth century by any means, but a good sample is available from across the whole period.³ The second source is the coastal customs accounts which began to be systematically compiled from the mid-century. The earliest for Somerset which has a specific date is from 1550/51, although there are some which are earlier but undated.⁴ A much smaller sample of these survive, and there is only one full, and one part year which match to the overseas accounts for the same year.⁵ It has long been recognised that customs accounts are an incomplete source for understanding flows of trade for the simple reason that they capture information only about goods which were both liable to duty and which were declared.⁶ Bridgwater is fortunate in having a third source of data in the form of accounts kept by the water bailiffs of the town, who recorded income and expenditure relating to their handling of a range of goods at the quayside in Bridgwater itself.⁷ The water bailiffs' accounts can therefore be used to

substantiate and corroborate the information contained in the customs accounts. A good sample of these survive, but they are not consistently compiled, and the information which the earlier accounts contain often lacks sufficient detail or precision to enable them to be directly linked to the customs accounts. There are two water bailiff accounts, for 1540/41 and 1544/45, which correspond to the same full years as the overseas customs accounts; and one year, 1597/98, for which the complete trio survives of overseas customs, coastal customs and water bailiffs' accounts.⁸

Somerset's Ports

Tudor customs administration required that a chief customs officer, known as a 'Customer', be stationed at various head ports around the country. Bridgwater was the head port for an area which extended from the River Axe in the East, to Porlock Bay in the West, and the customs records refer to this area as the Port of Bridgwater. The customs records for Somerset were further divided into two parts: those relating to Bridgwater, and a separate listing for the sub or 'member' port of Minehead. The part of the accounts relating to Bridgwater referred to a wider area than just the physical harbour in the town itself however, and encompassed both Comwich and the mouth of the River Axe. 'Bridgwater' thus confusingly referred to the customs jurisdiction of virtually the whole coast of Somerset; to the coastal area in the vicinity of Bridgwater, and to the town itself. Care must be taken to distinguish the three meanings and for the purposes of this study, 'Somerset' will be used to describe the geographical jurisdiction of the head port; the 'port' of Bridgwater will describe the wider geographical area proximate to the town; and the 'harbour' of Bridgwater will refer to the moorings and quay immediate to the town.

Although the accounts for Somerset distinguish between Minehead and Bridgwater, these were clearly not the only potential landing places on the Somerset coast, and a 1559 survey prepared for the Exchequer provides an overview of other harbours.⁹ Porlock bay is described as being suitable for forty or fifty ships to ride awaiting the tide, but as lacking a safe quay and not being suitable for beaching vessels; Dunster Haven is found to be 'not fytt nor mete to charge nor dyscharge'; and Watchet, is similarly unsafe 'for that shippes can nott have no safe cominge in nor good lyenge'; the nearby cove at Kilve was considered to be completely unsuitable for the handling of goods as 'yt ys verye dangerous to comm yn or goe'; Comwich is mentioned along with Bridgwater as being 'most mete', but nearby Highbridge is 'not mete'; finally, Axwater, whilst being both a safe and good river is nevertheless considered to be an unsuitable place for the loading and unloading of goods, particularly corn and leather, in view of the proximity of Bridgwater, and the difficulties presented by the surrounding terrain. It is notable that the authors of this report were the Customer and Controller of Bridgwater who were the two principal customs officials, and that they lay stress on the unsuitability of Axwater for the handling of

corn and leather as these were goods which were subject to strict export restrictions. Their assessment of the suitability of the harbours surveyed seems to have been drawn up with a view to endorsing the present arrangements and deflecting any further interest on the part of the Exchequer into their management of the customs administration, rather than being a strictly accurate description of conditions at the places mentioned.

Contrary to this report, the customs records make quite clear that goods were handled at harbours other than Bridgwater and Minehead. This continued to be the case even after 1559 when customable goods were required by statute to be handled only at the officially designated quays at Bridgwater and Minehead where they could be subject to the close supervision of the customs officers. In 1531 there were singular instances of ships recorded at Huntspill on the lower reaches of the Parrett, and at Highbridge, and there were a significant number of entries recorded for Comwich in 1528/9.¹⁰ Axwater does not feature consistently but it does nevertheless have recorded trade throughout the century, and often to a significant degree: handling 17% of declared overseas trade in 1528/9; and 50% in the part year accounts for 1589/90 for instance.¹¹ A commission of enquiry in 1565 described Axwater as being 'hawnted with vessels byinging in victuals, salte, wyne, coole and wood...but little frequented withe other marchandyse'.¹² Axwater (sometimes written as Exwater) has previously been interpreted as referring to the mouth of the River Axe, immediately to the south of present day Weston-Super-Mare, in the vicinity of Uphill.¹³ A license for the export of beans granted in 1543, which specified that shipment be made through the ports of Uphill and Bridgwater, provides further evidence that Uphill was an active port, as does the customs clerk's list of costs in 1588 which included charges for his journeying to Uphill with his horse.¹⁴ A Privy Council order in 1565 however, listed Axbridge rather than Axwater as a recognised port, so the location may have been further inland.¹⁵ Whatever the precise location or remit of Axwater, it was clearly a recognised port, and the assumption must be that for the years when it does not feature in the customs accounts its returns were subsumed in those of Bridgwater itself, rather than being distinguished separately. The same was presumably true of Comwich.

Given that trade entered in the Bridgwater section of the accounts included a wider area than just the town's harbour, it seems likely the same would have been the case with the Minehead entries. There is no recorded trade in the Somerset customs records for Watchet, Porlock, Dunster Haven or Kilve during the sixteenth century, but the commission of enquiry in 1565 described Watchet, Dunster Haven and Porlock as places 'where small botes have and doe use to come in with salte, wyne, wood and coole'.¹⁶ This is substantiated by a case bought in 1634 concerning the right of the Wyndhams to collect fees for the landing of salt at Watchet. 'Old Roger Laby' attested shortly before his death at the age of eighty, that since time immemorial he had paid the lord's bushel when bringing salt from Minehead, and

that others had done likewise from Bristol 'and other portes neare'.¹⁷ Likewise, Thomas Luttrell claimed a fee for the landing of goods at Dunster Haven and Porlock, a right he was unlikely to have sought to maintain if there was no trade at those places.¹⁸ Although the Minehead customs accounts do not show goods arriving at Dunster, those at Bristol show coastwise shipments of cloth being sent to Dunster in 1551 aboard the *Falcon* of Minehead, and in 1544/45 the Bridgwater water bailiffs listed charges for lading iron, millstones and wine on several occasions 'which went to Watchet'.¹⁹ Trade nominally listed under Minehead may therefore have encompassed these more minor locations. Not all trade was liable to customs of course, but it should by now be clear that although the customs accounts nominally listed trade under either Minehead or Bridgwater, this does not mean that overseas and coastal trade was necessarily confined solely to those particular harbours.

In broad terms the port of Bridgwater accounted for about two thirds of declared overseas trade by value, and Minehead one third until the middle of the century. There was then a sharp gain by Bridgwater which handled over 80% of declared trade in 1560/61, and over 90% in 1583/4, leaving Minehead with just 5% in 1597/8. This can partly be attributed to the problems that Minehead encountered with the maintenance of its harbour. The burgesses' mid-century petition to the crown leaves no doubt that they considered this the prime reason that trade was 'nowe so slowe and for want of ... trafike' that if it was not repaired forthwith dire consequences would follow including 'the dysplasyn of a hondryd seefaryng poor men from there howssys to fyere they knowe not'.²⁰ A commission of enquiry in 1565 reported that 'the saide creeks of mynehed are decayed by a parcoke whiche hathe encreased within the weare with stones for the amendement whereof the inhabitants of mynehed are bounde by their charter and doe yerely travel thereupon'.²¹ In 1570 Thomas Luttrell sought to raise funds from his tenants and neighbours for the construction of a new quay, and references to problems with the town's harbour continue until the end of the century.²² Although the number and size of ships using the harbour in the later half of the century was not great - for example only 16 were recorded in 1598, the largest of which was 20 tons - ships did nevertheless continue to use it.²³ A commercial, as well as a physical reason for the decline of the town's trade is therefore a possibility and this will be considered further below.

Trading Destinations

Figure 1: Principal European Trading Locations.



The majority of the sixteenth century customs accounts for Somerset do not give a specific identification for the destination or the origin of the ships which they list. They do however indicate the 'home' port of the vessel concerned. Using this information along with some common sense assumptions as to the likely origin of

cargoes, it is possible to reconstruct the geographical reach of trade routes with a high degree of confidence for nearly all imports, and for the majority of exports. There was a frequent cross channel traffic to and from the southern Welsh ports of Cardiff, Swansea, Newton, Mumbles, Barry, Neath, Milford, Haverfordwest, and Aberthaw. These close cross channel relations are illustrated by the Combwich merchant, David Cornysshie who traded in fish, wine and cloth with Ireland, but also had landholdings in Neath, and raised oxen and sheep in Wales during the early decades of the century.²⁴ There was also a more occasional coastal trade with Bristol, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple, but there are no records of boats trading further up the channel to or from Gloucester and Chepstow. Trade across the Irish sea was mainly confined to the south eastern Irish ports of Dungarvan, Youghal, Wexford, Cork and Waterford. This trade was unevenly distributed however, with Bridgwater enjoying a strong and enduring relationship with Wexford above all others. It is notable that in this respect Bridgwater differed from Bristol which undertook a much larger share of its Irish trade with Waterford.²⁵ Turning to the south, Somerset's trade was with Breton ports including Le Croisic, Quimperle, Morbihan and Penmarch, and further south still with the French ports of La Rochelle, St John de Luz and Bordeaux. The majority of Iberian trade was with San Sebastian in northern Spain, and with Aveiro in Northern Portugal.

Exports

Agricultural Commodities.

Somerset was primarily an agricultural and cloth producing region, and its exports reflected this. The most frequently occurring and consistent entry in the accounts is for the export of beans, for which Bridgwater was renowned. Leland observed in his journey through the southwest made between 1535 and 1543 that:

‘There is a great plenty of benes in this quarter and inward to the landes. And of these benes there is yn a manner a staple at Bridgwater when corne is dere in the partes beyond the sea.’²⁶

This is confirmed by occasions when ships loaded with cloth at Bristol, and then sailed to Bridgwater to take on beans and wheat, such as the *John* returning to Pasajes in 1542.²⁷ Other agricultural commodities exported were wheat, barley, malt and hops.

The timing of the carriage of exports was largely determined by the schedule for imports, rather than the other way around. That is to say the export of beans did not follow any seasonal pattern based on their harvest or agricultural cycle. But along with other exports they were loaded onto ships which were sailing to fetch imports,

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or alternatively onto ships which were returning after having delivered imports. For instance a half of all the exports of beans listed in the customs accounts sampled occurred in February and March. This was due to the fact that vessels which had brought in fish during February were reloaded for their return journey, and that this was also the time of year when ships commenced their outward voyages to Spain, taking with them cargoes of beans and cloth. There was a similar spike in exports in response to the arrival of wine in December and January following the autumn grape harvest.

Table 1. Overseas Customs : Exports of Agricultural Commodities

	Beans (weys)	Wheat (weys)	Barley / Malt (weys)	Hops (c)
1506/7	438	-	13	-
1510/11	730	5	4	-
1528/29	132	-	-	1
1541/42	242	28	21	11
1560/61	352	-	15	3
1583/84	148	25	1	-
1585/86	21	-	1	-
1597/98	4	-	5	-
Total	2067	58	60	15

Table 1 shows that foodstuff exports for 1528/29 were considerably lower than those for 1510/11, but this may be explained by an exceptionally bad harvest in that year rather than a lack of demand. Conversely exports for 1541/2 were higher due to the requirement to provision English troops campaigning in Ireland; many entries in the account make specific reference to these shipments being for the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to this end. The high figure for 1583/4 is explained both by a year of good harvest, and also by the revival of healthy overseas trade following the lifting of a Spanish embargo of English trade. Both 1586 and 1597 again suffered poor harvests, but also hostilities with Spain were renewed in 1585. Despite these fluctuations the customs accounts nevertheless demonstrate a clear and dramatic fall in agricultural exports between the opening and close of the century.

This information must however, be considered in the light of the customs duties levied, which were doubled in 1558, and subsequently tripled for some products including beans. Moreover, a license was required to export a range of products including most foodstuffs. Licenses were neither cheap nor easy to obtain, being awarded by the crown as a form of political patronage for onward sale to merchants by the licensee.²⁸ Licenses were granted to Sir Edward Baynton in 1531 for instance, to buy beans in Brentmarsh and export them through Bridgwater and to three men in 1557 to supply the inhabitants of Waterford with wheat, malt and rye.²⁹ But the incentive to export goods without resource to a license was strong, and raising the

customs tariff also raised the incentive to evade duty. It is known that such evasion was widespread elsewhere in the country, and there is some evidence that the practice was rife in Somerset as well.³⁰ A study of John Smythe, a leading Bristol merchant who began his trading career in Bridgwater, and is described in Chancery cases of the period as 'late of Bridgwater', has found that all of his exports of beans from Bristol were illegitimate to some extent, with as little as one fifth of the actual cargo being declared.³¹ In 1547 Smythe arranged to load a delivery of butter 'at Wyngod's pill by Rooksbridge in Bryntmarche' on the Axe; a cargo for which he neither had a license nor made a declaration to customs.³² Similarly, a case brought in 1549 against John Newport, a leading Bridgwater merchant, alleged that he conspired with the Controller of customs in the accepting of bribes to allow the export of unlicensed beans and wheat to Spain and Ireland.³³ The existence of this case does not in itself prove that John Newport was engaged in customs evasion, since such allegations were often made by speculating informers for their own financial gain.³⁴ However, such an allegation must have been made against a background that would allow it some credibility and it cannot have been totally implausible.

The customs records show that beans were exported through Axwater, which accounted for half of the declared loadings for this product in the half year returns for 1589/90, although usually considerably less than this.³⁵ Axwater lacked a permanent customs official, and a comment attached to a list of expenses incurred by the customs clerk in 1590 makes clear that the Customer's authority was not well established there,

'My charges 8 days at Exwater with my hors amongst unrewly men which hav almost cost me my lyff as it is well known that no man willingly will deale there but Jonne in *person*, for that no man else will do it.'³⁶

It seems highly unlikely therefore that Axwater's returns would have been a full and fair reflection of trade from that port, and the likelihood would seem to be that this was a major centre for illicit trade.

The association of beans with Axwater may be a reason for their relative absence from the Bridgwater water bailiff's accounts along with other agricultural exports. However there is one instance in March 1598 when the bailiffs' accounts record the loading of four and a half weys of malt 'to the Irish boats', which can be matched with the overseas customs accounts where they are entered as three weys aboard two Wexford craft: 50% more was loaded than was declared to customs.³⁷ This is the only definite corroboration of evasion of customs for agricultural goods, but it makes clear that such evasion took place even at the officially sanctioned quay where the customs officials were resident

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From the limited available coastal accounts there are indications that coastal trade was also important: 95 weys of beans were shipped to south Wales in 1550/51; 9 in 1561/62; and 7 in 1585/86.³⁸ The sample is too small to draw wider conclusions but for 1561/62 one third of the seaborne shipments of beans from the county were ostensibly for domestic destinations, and for 1597/98 domestic shipments exceeded overseas shipments.

Cloth

It was cloth, not beans, however which was Somerset's biggest declared export in terms of value, and the customs accounts reflect the rich variety of this manufacture. Dunsters, Bridgwaters, Tavistock Blues, White Moltons, Taunton Reds, Bristol Frieze and Devonshire Dozens, as well as the standard broadcloth are amongst the types listed.

The customs duties on cloth varied according to the type being exported. Some cloths were liable for a tax known as poundage which was based on their notional value; whilst other cloths paid duty at a fixed rate based on their size. The size of the fixed rate cloth, or cloth of assize, was set by statute at 24 yards long by 12 yards wide, but in practice many cloths were smaller than this prescribed size, and were therefore charged proportionally less: Bridgwaters for instance paid half the standard cloth rate, and Dunsters paid one quarter. Since the cloths exported were of different types and sizes, and were valued by different methods, it is no easy matter to determine overall changes in value or volume over the century.³⁹ In order to avoid any confusion with actual quantities or values shown in the customs accounts the following table uses a base year index of 100.

Table 2: Overseas Customs: Index of Cloth Exports

Year	Index
1506/07	100
1510/11	74
1528/29	252
1540/41	93
1541/42	191
1544/45	150
1560/61	69
1583/84	31
1585/86	18
1597/98	5

The decline in Somerset's cloth trade through the local ports is less exceptional when considered in the national context. This is because London accounted for an

increasing share of this trade, and by 1559/60 handled 93% of all cloth exports on a national basis.⁴⁰ Bristol, for instance which had exported around 7,000 cloths at the end of the fifteenth century was reduced to exporting a few hundred by the end of the sixteenth century.⁴¹ Moreover, the overall market for cloth shrank in the later century.⁴² The Somerset exports recorded in the customs accounts examined here differ from the national picture however in that national cloth exports peaked in 1551, rather than in the late 1520s.⁴³ It must be remembered though that these figures are not necessarily representative of the region's overall cloth exports, as Somerset clothiers also exported through south coast ports, such as Lyme.

Neither should a decline in exports be interpreted as a straightforward indicator of regional economic decline. Towards the end of the century, in response to changing market conditions, Somerset clothiers adopted new manufacturing techniques, and switched to making lighter cloths for which there was greater demand in southern Europe.⁴⁴ The end of the century shows shipments of these 'new draperies' such as that made in 1588 by the Taunton merchants, Thomas Gybons, Thomas Davey and Thomas Fysher who shipped 24 pieces of bayes and 30 pieces of sayes to La Rochelle, or by James Quirke who shipped Manchester Cottons (which were neither from Manchester nor cotton) from Minehead to Bayonne in 1597.⁴⁵ The new draperies were considerably more labour intensive to produce and were reported as needing the employment of three times the number of those required to produce the equivalent amount of the old broadcloths.⁴⁶ This added value product was also more profitable, and the declining volume of cloth exported through the Somerset ports, whilst detrimental to the economy of the ports themselves, was not therefore necessarily detrimental to the economy of the wider county. An allied later sixteenth century development was the creation of a new industry in the manufacture of felt hats made apparent by the importation of 'hat wool' from Spain starting in the 1580s, and a small export of hat felt to Wexford in 1592.⁴⁷ The later century importation of increasing amounts of wool from Wales is also notable in this respect.

Thirty four separate merchants were listed trading cloth in 1506/7, and 58 in the busiest year 1528/29. Even more were involved in other branches of trade, and a defining feature of the customs accounts is the sheer number of individuals engaged in commerce, often for a small amount, and many appearing only once. Some of these were undoubtedly crew members such as 'the 'pursser off the same ship' charged by the water bailiffs in 1505/6 for use of the crane to offload Gascon wine, for which he was charged separately from the main cargo.⁴⁸ The occupation of other small traders is indicated in the later customs accounts and included bakers, masons, glaziers, yeomen and clothiers.⁴⁹ Although many were involved, the cloth trade was however dominated by a small group of powerful and wealthy men; the top three merchants accounted for nearly one third of all cloth exported in 1528/9, and nearly half in 1540/41. Since cloth was being exported in exchange for foreign goods, it follows that these men also dominated the import trade. Thus John Newport, several

times mayor of Bridgwater, was alone responsible for 12% of all trade entered in the customs accounts for 1540/41. Likewise Richard Godbeare, who was a bailiff in 1588 and mayor in 1592, accounted for 14% of all declared trade in 1583/4. The focus of these rich merchants' trade was overwhelmingly with continental Europe, to which they shipped cloth and grain, and from which they imported high value commodities such as wine, iron and oil, and luxury items including spices and other exotic products. War with Spain, and changes in the overseas demand for cloth in the later decades of the century, were thus to present major challenges to the financial position of this echelon of society.

Metals

A third arm of Somerset's overseas trade was in the export of iron and lead. Iron was regularly shipped to southern Ireland in the first half of the century, with over two thirds of the trade being carried aboard Wexford registered vessels as part of their return cargo. This was never a large trade however, and became insignificant in the second half of the century. Lead was mined in the Mendips and is recorded being loaded at Axwater. The loss of a Venetian ship called the *Lyon*, carrying a cargo of lead in 1547 'afore Unspill' (Huntspill) suggests that it may also have been loaded on the lower reaches of the river Parrett.⁵⁰ This appears to be the only instance of a Mediterranean based vessel trading in Somerset during the whole of the century. The *Lyon* of Venice does not appear in the 1546/47 customs accounts however, so an alternative explanation could be that it was driven into the mouth of the Parrett and wrecked whilst en route from elsewhere in the Channel. The lead from the foundered ship can subsequently be traced being shipped to Bristol in 1551.⁵¹

There is only one instance of lead in the water bailiffs' accounts so it does not appear to have been handled through the town's harbour. This single instance was in 1540/41 when a charge was made for the storage of lead 'cum frone mochenny' (Muchelney), which had presumably formed part of the fabric of the recently dissolved abbey.⁵²

Table 3 shows that lead exports were more consistently maintained than those for iron, and increased in the 1580s. Comparable full year figures are not available after 1585/6, but exports in the surviving parts of the customs records were as follows: for 1588/9, 10 tons; for 1589/90, 11 tons; and for 1591, 6 tons. Lead was in high demand for the manufacture of ordnance, and Mendip lead, which was of poor quality, was especially suited to this purpose.⁵³ It is therefore highly likely that the increased tonnages in the 1580s, whilst nominally being bound for La Rochelle and St John de Luz, were in fact bound, either directly or indirectly, for Spain in contravention of a government embargo. Customs officers at Bristol were said to have been paid large bribes for allowing similar exports.⁵⁴

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A total of 15 tons of lead was also shipped coastwise to Bristol in 1551 and 12 tons to Barnstaple in December 1585, for transshipment overseas to La Rochelle, indicating that there was a significantly greater export trade than suggested from a reading of the overseas accounts alone.⁵⁵ Goods ultimately intended for export were as much as 60% higher than those recorded in the overseas accounts in 1585/6.

Table 3 Overseas and Coastal Customs : Exports of Iron and Lead (tons)

Year	Iron (overseas)	Lead (overseas)	Lead (coastal)
1506/07	-	6	-
1510/11	1	2	-
1528/29	3	2	-
1540/41	4	1	-
1541/42	8	2	-
1544/45	2	-	-
1550/51	-	-	15
1560/61	-	-	-
1583/84	-	18	-
1585/86	-	19	12
1597/98	-	-	-

Exports of manufactured metalware were of very low value and do not show any development over the period: export of *cuttes*, believed to be knife blades, are a feature of the 1540 accounts; as was *battery*, which was copper or brassware, in the 1560/61 accounts. Brass pots are shown outbound to Ireland in the 1592 accounts, but these may have been re-exported items rather than of local manufacture.

Miscellaneous Exports

Other exports included a variety of types of different tanned hides and animal skins which in 1540/41 amounted to 10% by value of exports, but were usually considerably less, and for several years none were declared at all. The key word here is *declared*, as both high profits and strict export regulations in this trade provided strong incentives to avoid official channels, as has been demonstrated to have been the case at Bristol.⁵⁶

Hemp and saffron were locally produced agricultural products which formed a small but important part of trade in the middle of the century. Hemp was exported only to Ireland, and regularly formed part of a typical Ireland bound cargo in the accounts sampled from 1528/9 to 1560/61. In 1528/9 hemp exports amounted to 3% of all

declared exports by value, and in 1540/41 6%, but by 1585/6 this figure had fallen to less than 1%.⁵⁷ The decline in hemp exports may have been due to the rise of a domestic hemp-based rope manufacturing industry, as rope exports rose whilst those for hemp fell. Exports of rope were worth only £1 compared to £30 for hemp in 1528/29, but by 1560/61 were of equal value.

Saffron was also exported only to Ireland where it was used as a dye; yellow being the colour of fashion amongst the native Irish.⁵⁸ £50 worth of saffron was exported in 1528/9, but only £6 by 1544/5, and the trade seems to have all but ceased by 1560/61 with just 2lbs being shipped, and none thereafter. Confirmation of the expansion of the south Somerset earthenware industry towards the end of the century is provided by earthenware pots which appeared as a new export in 1590.⁵⁹ A total of 187 dozen bound for Wexford are listed in the incomplete accounts which survive between 1590 and 1598. Ireland was also the destination for re-exported luxury goods such as silk, and a range of dyestuffs used in the Irish cloth industry.

Imports

Fish

A variety of types of preserved fish from Ireland formed the biggest single import category by value, and are the most frequently occurring entry in the customs records during the first half of the century. In descending order these comprised herring, hake, salmon and clames. The exact nature of clames is unclear and it has been suggested that they may have been oysters.⁶⁰ Trade in oysters was referred to in a petition drawn up by the burgesses of Minehead, and in a list of harbour charges for the town, so this is a possibility.⁶¹ However, clames were valued individually rather than by weight or volume, and the valuation used was the same as that for porpoises in the Bristol customs records, so this is an alternative explanation. White herring were cured by pickling in barrels, and the preliminary part of this process was undertaken at sea aboard the fishing boat which accordingly set sail with supplies of salt and casks. Red herring were dry salted and then smoked, a process which was necessarily land-based. It is interesting to note that red herring were carried only by Wexford registered craft and the processing of red herring would therefore seem to have been a speciality of that region.

Prior to 1550, all overseas fish imports without exception were from Ireland, and many small craft, often with a cargo comprising only fish, are a defining feature of the pre 1558 accounts. At the end of the fifteenth century Minehead was the leading port for handling these imports, not only for Somerset but for the whole of the southwest.⁶² However this position was by no means consistently maintained: in 1506/7 Minehead's share of the county's fish imports was 29%; in 1510/11, 70%; and in 1528/29 just 4%, before rising again to 57% in 1544/45. The association of

Minehead with these imports may be explained by the presence of a resident Irish community in the town, which Leland had observed 'is exceeding ful of Irish menne'.⁶³ Axwater also seems to have had a significant Irish community in the later century, as in 1587 a separate section in the customs accounts was drawn up for 'The Irish in Exwater', and in 1589 separate returns were again prepared for the English and the Irish in the port of Bridgwater.⁶⁴ It is notable that virtually all the craft entered in customs for Axwater were from Irish ports.

The profile of merchants trading with Ireland differed from that of those trading with the continent. The latter was dominated by small group of wealthy individuals, who do not appear listed as the master of any ship, and whose trade was not confined to any one vessel. Their commercial activities were one step removed from the physical shipments involved. In contrast those trading to Ireland were frequently listed as the master of the ship on which they freighted goods, and they often had a close association with one particular vessel. They appear to have been much more immediately involved with the practical and physical transacting of their trade, which was in any case of lower value. Merchants associated with the Irish trade often shared a surname indicating that they operated in joint familial groups, widely defraying costs and risks, rarely shipping cargoes under sole ownership, and never of significant value. By contrast figures such as John Newport were prepared to undertake the risk of being sole shippers of valuable cargoes such as that of wine, salt and rosin entered in customs in November 1540.⁶⁵ The continental trade in high value products such as wine, iron and woad, required substantial working capital and incurred high transport costs aboard larger vessels. By contrast the capital requirements for participation in the fish industry were not high, and consequently barriers to entry were low and the trade was characterised as one with many merchants each having a low market share. Whereas the three largest cloth exporting merchants controlled nearly half of the cloth trades in 1540/41, the three largest shippers of fish accounted for slightly under a quarter of this trade, with the majority of merchants having less than 2% market share.

Imports of fish were highly seasonal. Half occurred in the month of February just prior to the Lenten Fair at Bridgwater, when fleets of Irish boats arrived either together or in close succession, in response to consumer demand at this busy time of year. Minehead, however, imported the majority of its fish in November, suggesting a different pattern of demand.

In the first half of the century overall trade with Ireland was shared almost equally between Irish and English ships. These often had small cargoes, and sometimes these were very small, such as that of a few pounds weight of salt fish and two mantels brought by the *Margaret* of Youghal in June 1511.⁶⁶ Given the volume of trade across the Irish Sea it is surprising that no Bridgwater craft were recorded trading to

Ireland. Rather the English carriers were represented by Minehead ships which accounted for half of all fish imports in 1510/11 and in 1544/5 for instance.

The second half of the century saw major supply side changes in the fish industry which impacted upon both the Minehead and Irish carriers. As far as Minehead was concerned it led to a substantial reduction in the town's merchant fleet and to the amount of trade conducted through the port. In contrast to the two ships and one bark belonging to the town later in the century, Andrew Teage and William Donnel, (said to be aged 80 and nearly 100), could remember details of the 32 craft which had used the quay before 1559.⁶⁷ From the Irish perspective the changing pattern of trade resulted in the consolidation of the lead which Wexford had begun to gain over other Irish ports: Wexford craft accounted for approximately a quarter of the declared trade freighted to Somerset aboard Irish vessels in 1510/11; over a half in 1541/2; and by 1585 these were the only Irish ships trading to Somerset.

Although the majority of Irish trade was therefore carried on either Minehead or Wexford ships, it is interesting to note that they do not appear to have been in competition with each other. So far as the trade in fish was concerned, Minehead ships freighted to Minehead but not Bridgwater: and Wexford ships traded with Bridgwater but not Minehead. Enduring commercial and family relationships must have played a part in this mutually beneficial arrangement. This affiliation seems to have broken down however by 1560/61 when Wexford ships appeared for the first time at Minehead, accounting for a quarter of the trade through the port in that year; more even than was carried aboard Minehead registered craft.

The fishery harvest, then as now, was subject to annual variations caused by water temperatures and migration patterns, and this may explain some of the differences between the types of fish in different years shown in table 4. This and table 5 express overall trade by value, but in order to make a meaningful comparison post-1558 values have been rebased in line with those prior to the 1558 re-rating.

Somerset's Sixteenth Century Maritime Trade

Table 4: Overseas Customs : Fish Imports (£ rebased to 1506/7)

Year	Clames	Cod	Hake	Herring	Salmon	Salt Fish	Total
1506/07	-	-	62	393	31	13	499
1510/11	4	-	128	502	11	30	675
1528/29	31	-	162	347	41	256	837
1540/41	8	-	91	171	52	9	331
1541/42	13	-	114	137	18	5	287
1544/45	12	-	76	136	100		324
1560/61	12	11	-	171	-	11	205
1583/84	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1585/86	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1597/98	-	160	-	69	-	-	229

Table 5: Coastal Customs : Fish Imports (£ rebased to 1506/7)

Year	Clames	Cod	Hake	Herring	Salmon	Salt Fish	Total
1550/51	-	3	-	-	-	-	3
1561/62	-	1	-	49	2	2	54
1585/86 (part)	-	43	-	-	-	-	43
1597/98	-	42	-	-	-	-	42

Changes in the method of recording are the most likely explanation for the striking absence of Irish fish imports liable to duty in these figures between 1562 and 1597. The reason for this would seem to be a law enacted in 1563 which aimed to stimulate the English merchant fleet by suspending certain duties on imports of sea fish caught by Englishmen sailing in English ships.⁶⁸ Further confirmation that the lack of fish represents an administrative rather than a real phenomenon is provided by the water bailiffs' accounts which recorded quantities of herring continuing to arrive in the intervening period.⁶⁹ Irish boats also continued to appear inbound in the customs records, although only declaring items such as hides and skins, and many more appear outbound only. Moreover, these ships followed the same seasonal pattern as previously suggesting that they were continuing to supply the same pattern of demand associated with the Lenten Fair.

Despite the apparent change in recording, the overarching theme described in tables 4 and 5 is one of a shift from the long established pattern of maritime trade which had been centred around the importation of Irish preserved fish. From the mid 1560s

onwards two factors challenged the dominance of Irish sourced fish and of the Irish merchant-carriers engaged in this trade.

Firstly, new sources of supply are apparent with the increasing exploitation of the West Atlantic cod fisheries. The first record of fish from the New World occurred in 1550 when six hundredweight of 'newlande' fish were recorded at Minehead.⁷⁰ In 1560/61 23 hundredweight of fish '*de nova terra*' were recorded inbound at Bridgwater; in 1585/6 85 hundredweight; and by 1597/8 imports had risen to 358 hundredweight.⁷¹ Not all of this trade is apparent from the overseas customs accounts as the development of the western Atlantic trade led to more fish being traded coastally because the larger ships engaged in the trade berthed at larger ports before dispersing their cargo. Of the 358 hundredweight recorded in 1597/98 for instance, just over one fifth were coastwise shipments from Plymouth and probably Bristol.⁷²

A second factor, which is related to this, is the development of a domestic fish-salting industry during the later half of the century, which would have reduced the demand for overseas imports. Although two discrete sets of data cannot be taken to represent a trend, it is notable that there were no herring recorded in the coastal customs accounts for 1550/51, but ten years later there were several inward shipments recorded from Ilfracombe, Bristol and Milford, which at pre-1558 values were worth £50.⁷³ Some of these are specifically referred to as 'Welsh herring', perhaps to distinguish them from the more usual Irish herring. Growth in the domestic fish industry was also driven by climatically induced changes in the migratory patterns of herring which began to appear off the north Devon coast from the 1580s.⁷⁴ By the beginning of the seventeenth century smoke houses were established at Lynmouth in north Devon, which was the centre for a substantial fish industry, and which attracted seasonal workers from Minehead amongst other places.⁷⁵

Overall the customs accounts show that fish imports fell by approximately a half between 1506/7 and 1597/8 on a like-for-like basis, and at the close of the century stood at less than a third of their peak. If coastal imports are factored in then the decline is slightly less severe but nonetheless still substantial. What cannot be quantified however is the extent to which domestic production contributed to overall fish supplies and so compensated for the decline in imports.

Other goods imported from Ireland included a type of heavy garment known as a mantel, which was imported in the early decades of the century. These amounted to less than 2% of declared imports by value in any one year however, and had become insignificant by the 1540s. Irish frieze, a loosely-woven woollen cloth, was also imported in the middle of the century, but again not in significant amounts. Ireland also exported a range of domestic animal skins including calf, lamb, cow and goat,

and also wild animal skins including deer hides and the pelts of otter, marten and fox. Along with fish, recorded Irish imports tailed off sharply in the later part of the century.

Wine

The continental European import with the highest overall value was wine. Shipments of Iberian and French wine were substantial and regular imports throughout the century. The water bailiffs' accounts give an indication of the ultimate destination of some of these: to towns such as Bruton, Axbridge, Milverton, Stowey, Cannington, and Petherton; and to 'my lord of Glastonbury', 'my lord justys', and the abbot of Neath.⁷⁶

Wine was shipped following the Autumn grape harvest, with about half arriving in the two months of December and January. Somerset ships accounted for over a third of this traffic, and Spanish and French ships accounted for a further tenth prior to the 1580s. After this political conditions disrupted the established patterns of trade and more circuitous means were employed to ensure supplies of this and other continental products. In 1592 for instance, *The Black Falcon* of London arrived at Bridgwater from Dungarvan with a cargo of olives and olive oil, followed in the same month by the Bridgwater ship, the *Gyste*, which had ostensibly sailed from St. John de Luz in southern France with a cargo of iron and Spanish wool.⁷⁷ Such use of third party ports was a common tactic to circumvent prohibition on trading with the enemy.⁷⁸

The profile of the merchants engaged in the wine trade was substantially the same as that of those engaged in the cloth trade, where a few wealthy merchants dominated the business. This became increasingly the case as the century progressed: in 1506/7 the top three merchants accounted for one third of declared wine imports; by 1528 this had risen to two thirds; by 1541 nearly three quarters; and by 1560 over nine tenths.

Somerset's Sixteenth Century Maritime Trade

Table 6 : Overseas and Coastal Customs: Wine Imports (tuns)

Year	Overseas	Coastal
1506/07	81	-
1510/11	153	-
1528/29	62	-
1540/41	58	-
1541/42	70	-
1544/45	32	-
1560/61	43	-
1561/62	-	36.5
1583/84	123	-
1585/86	2	6
1597/98	69	0

Table 6 shows that apart from a peak in 1510/11, wine imports were reasonably stable during the first half of the century. The figure for 1544/45 was adversely affected by war with France which disrupted supply, and the partially complete accounts which survive from 1587 to 1590 suggest that similar problems must have been caused by the outbreak of hostilities with Spain. Likewise, improved trading relations with Spain between 1571 and 1584 following the lifting of its embargo on English trade may account for the high imports in 1583/5, which included an exceptionally large single shipment of 45 tuns from *Andorlory* (Andalusia?), and a further 33 tuns aboard Bridgwater ships bound from Seville. The two tuns recorded two years later could be the result of further hostilities with Spain again disrupting supply. This low figure is somewhat offset however by six tuns which were recorded in the partially surviving coastal accounts for the same year.⁷⁹ Similarly, 31 tuns were shipped coastwise to Bridgwater from Bristol and Barnstaple, and a further 5½ tuns to Minehead from Bristol, Barnstaple, Tenby and Milford in 1561/62; nearly as much as were entered in the overseas accounts for the preceding fiscal year.⁸⁰

A comparison of the water bailiffs' accounts with the overseas and coastal records for 1597/98 shows that even the combined overseas and coastal customs records may be misleading as to the actual underlying quantities which were landed at Bridgwater, since the wine entered in the customs accounts does not appear to have been necessarily destined for the harbour itself. Of the 70 tuns in the overseas and coastal accounts, only 45¼ tuns appear to have been unloaded at the quayside in Bridgwater.⁸¹ In particular a substantial cargo of 46½ tuns, which entered inbound from St Lucar aboard the *David* in April 1598, is not reflected in the bailiffs' accounts. Similarly, in 1540/41 the bailiffs' accounts record the unloading of around 20 tuns compared to 58 shown in the overseas customs accounts.⁸²

Such a discrepancy could be accounted for by exemptions being granted from the bailiffs' charges either to certain groups of people, or at certain times of the year.⁸³

The prime candidates for such an exemption would have been the burgesses and mayor, but this seems unlikely as they are shown as having paid the same charges as others listed in the accounts. The church or local nobility are other possible candidates but charges are listed against merchants in connection with these parties, such as the four tuns of wine sent to 'my Lord of Glastonbury' in 1530, or the charge made to the Prior of Taunton the same year, or a charge to the 'Bishop of Bath' in 1550.⁸⁴ Nor was there any interruption in the sequence of charges made for goods during the time of the Lent or St James' Fairs; the 1587 accounts specifically record a charge made during 'the fayer week'. In the absence of an immediate administrative explanation then, a physical explanation might be that the balance was offloaded elsewhere. For instance ships such as the *David* may have cleared customs at Bridgwater, perhaps at Comwich, before proceeding further up the Bristol Channel. Such multi-port dealings become apparent in the later century when record keeping became more exact, and there are many examples of outbound ships which loaded part of their cargo at Bridgwater before proceeding under bond to either Bristol or Barnstaple to complete their loading; likewise some ships arrived at the port having already loaded part of their cargo elsewhere which was consequently in bond.⁸⁵ However, the *David* was not issued with a certificate for onward transport of its cargo and does not appear outbound in the coastal accounts, nor indeed inbound at Bristol which would have been the most likely destination for such a cargo. The conclusion must therefore be that the balance of the cargo was offloaded elsewhere in the port on this occasion.

Paradoxically, as well as showing imports of wine which were declared to customs but were not unloaded at the quayside, the bailiffs' accounts also show some imports of wine which were unloaded at the quayside, but which had not been declared to customs. Wine was recorded in the bailiffs' accounts arriving from Cardiff in December 1597 for instance, but the earliest entry for wine in the relevant customs account was not until February 1598.⁸⁶ Although both shipments were from Cardiff, they were of different quantities and in different ships and so were clearly unrelated. In total sixteen shipments of wine amounting to 30 tuns appear in the bailiffs' accounts which cannot be correlated to the customs accounts for 1597/98. Some of these may have been internal movements within the port, from Comwich to Bridgwater harbour for example, which would not have required customs certification. But others are clearly described as coming from Wales and were theoretically liable to coastal customs control.⁸⁷ It would therefore seem to have been a straightforward case of smuggling when George Pawle and Henry Shircombe shipped two tuns of wine to Bridgwater aboard the *Lyon* of Cardiff in December 1598 without declaring it to customs. And yet the following April, Nicholas Wastell, shipped one tun aboard the same ship which he did declare to customs, so evasion was by no means a universal practice.

The underlying commercial reality was therefore considerably more complicated and opaque than the customs records suggest. It appears that some ships arrived from overseas with large cargoes and cleared customs in the port of Bridgwater, but did not necessarily unload their entire cargo, if any at all at the harbour. On the other hand, some small coastal shipments which entered the harbour did so without clearing customs.

Salt

A similar reasoning applies to salt which was used for the preservation of fish and meat, but also in the manufacture of cheese and butter, and in the tanning industry. It was consequently a staple import, the level of which may be taken as an indicator of the vitality or otherwise of these activities. The data from the overseas accounts is summarised in table 7.

Table 7: Overseas and Coastal Customs: Salt Imports (tons)

Year	Overseas	Coastal
1506/07	243	-
1510/11	419	-
1528/29	319	-
1540/41	501	-
1541/42	197	-
1544/45	119	-
1560/61	263	-
1561/62	-	29
1583/84	154	-
1585/86	39	25
1597/98	48	15

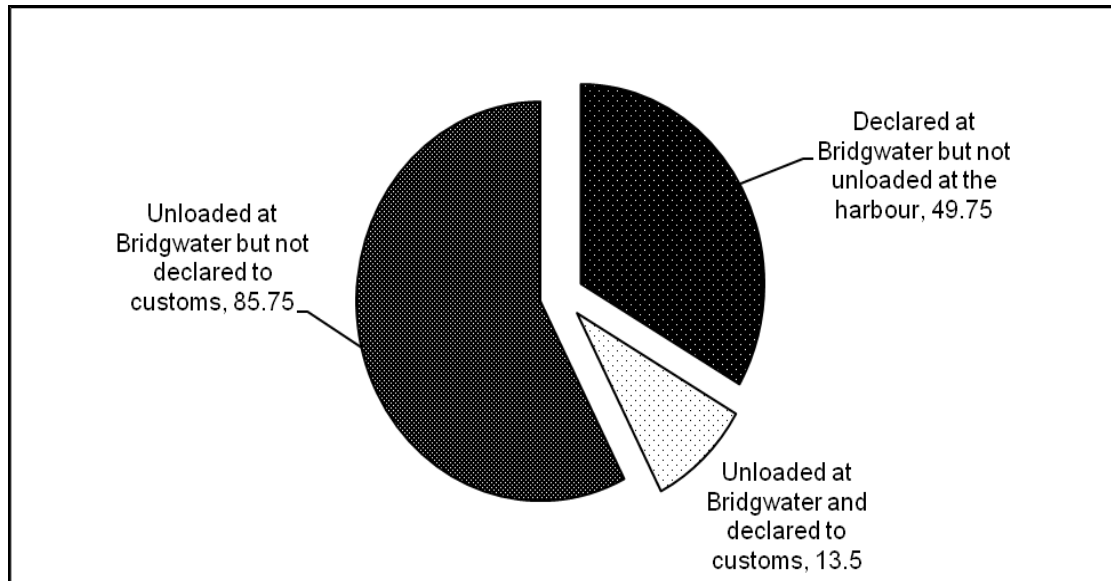
Salt was shipped from Brittany, Portugal and Spain, and was adversely affected by hostilities with France in 1545/6 and with Spain in 1585/6, as were the shipments of wine described above. The coastal customs accounts record 29 tons in 1561/62 coming from Barnstaple, Padstow, Milford and Carmarthen; 25 tons in 1585 from Fowey; and 15 from Bristol and Plymouth in 1597/88.⁸⁸

The water bailiffs' accounts contain references to a cellar at Combwich from which salt was collected, and to the shipment of salt from Combwich by lighter to the harbour at Bridgwater.⁸⁹ This may account for the wide difference in the quantities recorded in the bailiffs' and customs accounts, as it appears that salt cleared customs at Combwich, and was unloaded there before being transhipped to smaller boats for passage up the Parrett. Thus in June 1545 two ships from Aveiro, the *Trinity* and the *Rysse Magnor*, were recorded in customs with 50 tons and 30 tons respectively.⁹⁰

No more than 12 tons of this is definitely identifiable in the water bailiffs' accounts and it arrived at the harbour aboard lighters in several shipments over a period of weeks.⁹¹ Similarly a Bridgwater ship, the *Vantage*, entered 25 tons in customs on 9 March 1598, of which 12 tons were recorded inbound by the bailiffs over the remainder of the month.⁹² The *Vantage's* salt could have been called off to Bridgwater from Comwich over a much longer period, perhaps even months, and whilst the later entries do not indicate that the salt is from the *Vantage*, this does not rule out the possibility that it could have been. Likewise, trade could have been conducted from Comwich to places other than just Bridgwater itself of course, and Comwich may have been the base for a wider coastal trade such as that described by Old Roger Labey at Watchet. Equally, ships such as the *Trinity* and *Rysse Magnor* may have only offloaded part of their cargo before proceeding further up the channel.

The majority of the water bailiffs' accounts contain several different sub-accounts, and goods entered can appear more than once: for unloading, for weighing, for crantage and for carriage for example. Furthermore, quantities are not always given, or where given are not always exactly described, for example 'a load'. It can therefore be difficult to ascertain precise information, but it appears that approximately only one third of the salt declared to customs for the port of Bridgwater can be traced as having been unloaded in the town's harbour for 1540/41 and 1544/45. The 1597/98 bailiffs' account contains more definitive information, and the relevant figure of 28% can be calculated with a greater degree of confidence.

Having said this, many shipments of salt were recorded in the bailiffs' accounts which were not recorded in customs. The 1597/98 coastal account includes entries for Spanish salt, from both Bristol and Plymouth, with a note that they have the necessary certification proving that they have paid custom at those ports. However, the great bulk of salt entering the harbour at Bridgwater did so free of such certification and control. In 1598 for example, seven tons from Bristol, three tons from Cardiff and one ton from Newport were recorded being unloaded at the harbour which are absent from the relevant coastal accounts.⁹³ Unlike these particular shipments, the majority of entries in the bailiffs' accounts do not identify the originating port. Such shipments were both numerous and small, yet their combined total was significant, and in 1597/98 amounted to substantially more than the total tonnage recorded in the customs accounts: a total of 63 tons was entered in the combined customs accounts, but just over 99¼ tons in the bailiffs' accounts.⁹⁴ In other words, as illustrated in Figure 2, during 1597/98 the harbour at Bridgwater received 99¼ tons of which 13½ tons had been cleared through customs, and 85¾ tons had arrived without custom. Again the figures for earlier years are harder to deduce, but that for 1544/45 can be conservatively estimated to be approximately 75 tons received at the harbour, of which 39 tons was entered in customs, and 35 tons not.⁹⁵

Figure 2: Imports of Salt 1597/98 (tons)

The most likely explanation for the shipments which were not recorded in customs is that they were of domestically produced salt. These would not necessarily have required customs certification as they had neither paid duty, nor were likely to be exported. Although some believed that domestic salt, which was produced by boiling, was weak and inferior to that produced by evaporation in southern Europe, it was also known to be purer and less likely to be contaminated by foreign matter, and was therefore more suitable for the preservation of perishable foods.⁹⁶ Boats were recorded in the water bailiffs' accounts bringing non-dutiable salt from Cardiff, Newport and Aberthaw, and this is consistent with there having been salt works operating along the south Wales coast in the sixteenth century, including one on the Gower peninsula.⁹⁷ Another possible source of domestic supply would have been from the Cheshire brine pits from whence it was shipped down the Severn. It seems therefore that domestic supplies of salt had to some extent been substituted for those from overseas by the end of the century.

Thus whilst the overseas customs accounts show a 60% fall in imports of salt from the middle to the end of the century, the water bailiffs' accounts show that they actually rose by 33% at the harbour of Bridgwater. Bridgwater is unlikely to have been the only harbour in Somerset receiving cross channel shipments of salt in this way, and the volumes for the county as a whole may have recorded a similar increase. The rise in imports of salt could have been connected with the development of a domestic fish preservation industry as noted above, or it may also have been due to demand from other salt dependant industries, but whatever the exact destination,

the increase in imports makes clear that associated economic activity had increased rather than declined in the intervening period.

Iron

As well as a small export trade in iron already described, there was also a far larger trade in imports from northern Spain which are outlined in table 8.

Table 8: Overseas and Coastal Customs: Iron Imports (tons).

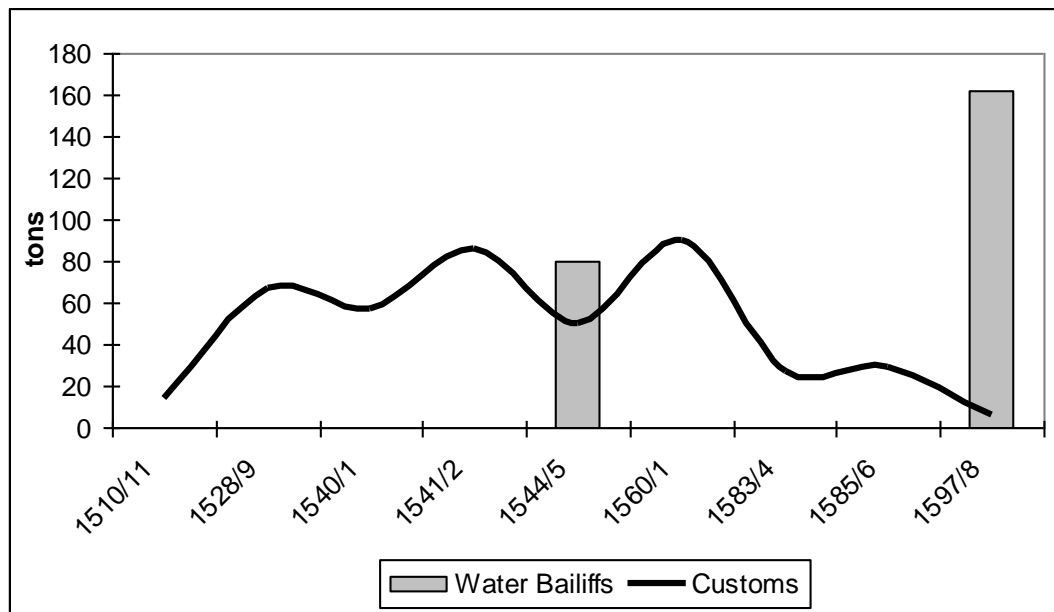
Year	Overseas	Coastal
1506/07	55	
1510/11	22	
1528/29	110	
1540/41	57	
1541/42	86	
1544/45	50	
1560/61	94	
1561/62	-	6
1583/84	27	
1585/86	29	
1597/98	0	6

Bridgwater and San Sebastian registered ships dominated this trade, carrying 65% of all shipments, and can be traced travelling southward with cloth and foodstuffs, and northwards with iron and other supplementary continental imports in nearly every year throughout the century. The Bridgwater registered *Mary Grace* in 1529 for example, departed in March with two weys of beans and five cloth of assize, and then returned in June with 28 tons of iron.⁹⁸ The seasonality of these imports was also pronounced, with two thirds arriving in the three month period May to July, a season when it has been suggested ships were not otherwise engaged in the transport of wine.⁹⁹ These round trips typically took four to seven weeks, and more than one could be made in the season. The *Penys* of San Sebastian, for instance, was entered at Bridgwater for 12 tons in April, 14 tons in July, and 16 tons in September 1561.¹⁰⁰ Coastal shipments do not appear to have been large, and were just 6 tons in 1561/62 and 1597/8, and the same amount in the partial year accounts for 1585/6.¹⁰¹

The water bailiffs' accounts give an indicative sample of the final destinations of this raw material: to the smiths at Yeovil, Long Sutton, Comeytrove near Taunton, 'Hatch', Petherton, Hemyock, Ilminster, Charlinch and many more regional locations, as well as to 'Hancocke of the forryst' (of Dean) and 'a man of the west country'.¹⁰² These records again reveal a large licit trade which is not apparent from a reading of the customs records. They also however reveal a substantial illicit trade.

The *Mary* of San Sebastian under Master Degas Delarew was a familiar ship in mid-sixteenth century Bridgwater, and was recorded inbound with iron, wine and woad, and outbound with cloth in 1541/2, 1544/5 and 1560/1.¹⁰³ John Newport, several times the town's mayor and its wealthiest and most prominent trader, was often listed as the sole or principal merchant freighting goods aboard this ship, and may have been its owner, or part-owner. In 1545 the *Mary* made three voyages to Spain returning on 17 March, 27 May and 12 August. In total the *Mary* declared 50½ tons of iron to customs during the year, of which 41 tons was attributed to Mr Newport, with the balance to two other prominent burgesses, James Boyse and John Hamond. There were no other imports of iron to the port in that year. The water bailiffs however record 69½ tons 'from the Spanyard' or 'from Degas' charged to Mr Newport and Mr Boyse, and possibly a further 20 tons depending on interpretation of an ambiguity.¹⁰⁴ In other words only three quarters to one half of the actual load was declared to customs.

Like the shipments of salt, these cargoes were brought to the harbour in lighters and smaller boats, but there is no specific indication that this transfer took place at Comwich. A reference in the 1529/30 bailiffs accounts however does refer to 18 tons which 'was dyssechargyd at cumdge'.¹⁰⁵ The later 1597/98 water bailiffs' accounts also make references to iron being transferred to the harbour in lighters, but in contrast to the earlier records, they provide evidence of a flourishing trade in iron from south Wales. One of either the *Lyant* of Cardiff, or the *Angell* of Cardiff made a regular monthly run with five to ten tons of iron each time.¹⁰⁶ This was then transferred into Robert Demond's lighter, and purchased by Alexander Hill who paid a charge for its passage under the town bridge. The trade described in the water bailiffs' accounts totals 162 tons, and far outstrips that in the customs accounts, where only six tons were recorded. This suggests that Welsh iron had largely replaced Spanish iron by the end of the century, and it is interesting to note that in 1589 the first instance of iron specifically identified as being Welsh was listed as an export to Ireland. The rise in the production of Welsh iron may account for the decline in exports of iron from Bridgwater to Ireland in the second half of the century (noted earlier), since the likelihood is that these would have been shipped directly from Wales to Ireland rather than through Bridgwater. Not only is this consistent with the supply side difficulties of obtaining supplies of Spanish iron in the later decades of the century, it is also consistent with the introduction of blast furnaces to Wales after 1560, and the resulting increase in production using Welsh ore.¹⁰⁷ Although lacking the high carbon content and strength of Spanish iron, this was nonetheless suitable for the manufacture of agricultural implements and everyday goods, such as those which would have been produced by the regional smiths appearing in the water bailiffs' accounts.

Figure 3: Imports of Iron

Taking the information from the 1544/45 and 1597/98 bailiffs' accounts therefore, it can be seen in figure 3 that whilst the customs accounts indicate a decline in iron imports for the whole of Somerset (from 50 to six tons over the period), the actual amounts recorded through the harbour at Bridgwater approximately doubled, rising from between 70 and 90 tons in 1544/45 to 162 tons in 1597/98.

Miscellaneous Goods

Woad, which was imported from Toulouse and the Azores, was used to produce a blue dye for the cloth industry, and was one of the most expensively valued item in the customs accounts. An illustration of its high worth is that just two out of the 80 ships entered inbound in the customs account for 1506/7 freighted woad, but the 12 tons they carried comprised nearly 10% of all declared imports by value for that year. This figure rose to just over one quarter of all declared imports for 1528/29, when an exceptionally large 93 tons were imported. Unlike other commodities, imports of woad did not show a substantial fall over the course of the century: 29 tons were imported in 1560/61; and 34 tons in the partially surviving accounts for 1588/89 when the *Lyon* of Bridgwater returned from the Azores with woad and sugar.¹⁰⁸ There were also two valuable coastal shipments from Bristol in 1562 which totalled 8½ tons, which again indicates the importance of the coastal trade.¹⁰⁹

Given the high value of woad, any evasion of duty would clearly have had a significant adverse affect on customs revenue; the water bailiffs' accounts are again illuminating in this respect. The customs accounts recorded the *Mary*, under the mastership of Degas Delarew, arriving in March 1545 with 14 half bales and six

hundredweight of woad, which equates to one ton.¹¹⁰ This was entered against two merchants, John Newport and James Hay. The previous customs entry for woad was in January and the next was not to be until November, and no other merchants were shown to be shipping woad aboard the *Mary* on this occasion. The bailiffs' record baring two tons, rather than one ton, to Mr Boys 'from Degas', and one ton to Mr Newport in this period.¹¹¹ This discrepancy of two tons represents a declaration to customs of just one third of the actual cargo. Likewise on 28 August 1598 one of the town's burgesses was charged by the water bailiffs for landing two tons of woad. However, there was only one entry for woad in that year's customs, which was for a coastwise shipment from Barnstaple on 29 August, and this was for half this amount.¹¹² Moreover, Mr Godbeare appears in the same set of bailiffs' accounts charged for landing three tons of woad in January 1598, an amount which was not declared in either the overseas or coastal customs accounts. In total for the year, five tons were landed at Bridgwater, against the one ton declared to customs.

Other important imports associated with the cloth industry were: brazilwood used to make a red dye and no doubt used to manufacture the cloth described as cardinal exported by William Godbeare in 1588; alum, a mordant used to fix dye; and oil and soap which were used in the cloth finishing process.¹¹³ Imports of alum show a peak in 1528/9 along with those for woad, and exports of cloth, but oil and soap were more evenly distributed across the century. The combined value of these commodities amounted to only 1 to 2% of declared imports however.

Another southern European import was dried fruit which was imported throughout the century. The nature of the coastal trade can be traced in the arrival of 16½ tons of raisins at Bridgwater from Barnstaple in January 1561, followed by the despatch of five tons of raisins the following month to Bristol.¹¹⁴ Pitch and tar were imported from Spain and used in the ship building industry and for treating sheep. Pitch was a relatively low worth commodity, and was valued at one third the customs' rate for oil, or one fifth of that for woad. It is surprising therefore that John Newport declared less than half the pitch he freighted aboard the *Mary* in 1544/45.

Coal

There are very few recorded entries for coal in the customs accounts, but it is apparent from the water bailiffs' records that this was an important trade which accounted for much cross channel traffic. In 1505/6, 32 tons were recorded against the bearing and measuring account, and in 1529/30, 19 tons. The 1540/41 accounts separate these two categories and it is not clear if the 31 tons shown in the measuring account are additional to, or form part of, the 33 tons in the bearing account. It is clear however, that in 1597/98 over 90 tons were landed, or approximately three times the tonnage compared to that at the beginning of the century. The provenance of the coal is indicated by its carriage in boats principally from Newport and

Aberthaw. Coal increasingly replaced wood as a fuel during this period, and as well as being used for domestic heating, it was burned in local industrial processes as diverse as lime-burning, brewing, dyeing, pottery and smithing.¹¹⁵ Somerset had its own coalfields and the limited instances of coal exported to La Rochelle and Oleron in the 1580s and 90s which specifically referred to 'smith's coal', suggest this may have been superior material capable of burning at higher temperatures.¹¹⁶ The Welsh imports were perhaps therefore of a lower quality to that produced locally and more suitable for domestic type use.

Stone and Wood

Another notable trade which is absent from the customs accounts is that in millstones and grinding-stones imported from the Forest of Dean. These are a frequent and recurrent item in the Bridgwater water bailiffs' records, and the trade was considered to be sufficiently important for the town to obtain a regional monopoly between 1562 and 1573.¹¹⁷ There is no indication of the value of this trade but its association with the mayor and senior burgesses in the bailiffs' accounts suggests that it must have been lucrative. These millstones, grinding stones, mustard stones, cotton stones and horse stones may be the stones referred to in the Exchequer commissions and Minehead petition noted earlier. However, these might have been referring to limestone for which there is record of regular trade from Wales in 1632, or indeed to building stone more generally.¹¹⁸ The absence of limestone and building stone from the bailiff's records however suggests that even if this trade existed at Somerset's more minor harbours, this was not the case at Bridgwater itself.

A similar explanation applies to the landing of cargoes of wood referred to in the same sources. The customs accounts do list a small number of imports of Irish boards and planks but there may well have been a wider, unrecorded cross-channel trade in these goods with harbours other than Bridgwater.¹¹⁹

Livestock

There is no mention of any trade in livestock in either the customs accounts or the water bailiffs' accounts, but the possibility that such trade took place cannot be entirely ruled out. It was not until the seventeenth century that livestock became a prominent import from Ireland, but a list of harbour charges for Minehead dated 1594, which had been in place since 'tyme out of mynde', included the charge for boats laden with cattle, sheep and horse.¹²⁰ Likewise, a petition drawn up by the town in the middle of the century referred to a trade in 'no small number' of cattle and sheep bought to the quayside from Glamorgan.¹²¹ Such petitions usually exaggerated their claims in order to bolster their case, in this instance for financial aid from the crown to repair the quay, but even though the trade may not have been great, it would nevertheless seem to have existed.

Finally, no survey of Somerset's trade would be complete without reference to cider and apples. Neither can be said to be plentifully represented, but apples were sent to Wexford and Cardiff in the 1580s, and also, along with cider, to Neath on one occasion in 1561.¹²²

Commercial Development

Although the Exchequer records indicate that some areas of overseas trade declined for economic and political reasons, the water bailiffs' accounts demonstrate that maritime trade continued and even increased in some essential commodities, as domestic supplies were substituted for scarce overseas resources. Thus imports of iron from Spain, which fell sharply during the 1580s and '90s, were initially offset and then exceeded by imports of iron from south Wales. By the end of the century the harbour at Bridgwater was importing more iron than ever before, although less than 4% of this was liable for duty. Likewise only approximately half of the imports of salt were liable to duty, and none of the increasingly important imports of coal. It was not so much overall maritime trade therefore which had suffered a severe diminution in the later years of the century, but rather that portion of maritime trade which was declared to customs. This had so diminished that in the last decades of the sixteenth century nil returns were entered in customs for several quarters, and in 1588 the customs clerk ended the accounts with the supplication 'God send better'.¹²³ The situation was so dire that in 1596 the customer resigned due to lack of trade to pay his fees, and Lord Burghley considered abolishing the post of customer at Bridgwater altogether when he learned that this officer had been paid nearly £25 more than he had collected in duty in 1594/5.¹²⁴ The decline in customs revenue at the port was confirmed the same year by the mayor, Mr Salmon, and four burgesses who petitioned Lord Burghley to request a replacement for the post of searcher following the death of the incumbent. Their petition emphasised that 'the trade of merchandise and the shipping of the town is for the most part decayed, having but one bark only'.¹²⁵ The searcher, as the name suggests, was the customs officer responsible for physically checking cargoes to make sure that they accorded with the declarations made to the customs clerks. The post had no fee, as the holder was usually recompensed by the receipt of half of the value of any illicit goods he discovered, or more usually by the acceptance of bribes to avoid making any such discovery. There was extensive collusion between local customs officers and a wealthy, ruling oligarchy at Bristol during this period.¹²⁶ Given the involvement of Bridgwater's mayor and burgesses in smuggling described above, an ulterior motive for their choice of searcher and for their emphasis on the low level of trade through the port cannot therefore be ruled out. Their testimony should not necessarily be taken at face value as a description of the underlying commercial reality at the port.

There was in any case one expanding area of commerce which occasionally handsomely compensated for the loss of regular trade and customs duties during the

later decades of the sixteenth century. The armed seizure of marine cargoes was by no means a new phenomenon, and was one in which Somerset's men had a long and ignoble history. In 1535 for instance a Frenchman sought recompense for the robbery of his ship *Isabel* by a party which included Richard Sarre from Minehead; in 1549 another Minehead man, Richard Cole, confessed to piracy, and around the same time Henry Moyle from Uphill was charged for seizing the cargo of a Scottish ship.¹²⁷ The distinction between those who engaged in the armed seizure of cargoes and those who undertook more normal mercantile methods was often not absolute. John Hille and John Capes were two Minehead merchants and shipowners who appear in the customs records trading regularly to Ireland, but in 1546 they were ordered by the Privy Council to make reparation for a Portuguese caravel and her cargo which they had seized.¹²⁸ Moreover, the crown's attitude towards such actions was not always clear cut and depended in large part upon who had been attacked.¹²⁹ Given this background, it was therefore a small step for Somerset's merchants to combine their normal trading activities with the capture of enemy merchant ships when the government extended the system of licensed raiding, or privateering, as part of the maritime response to war with Spain. The capture of the right ship could be staggeringly rewarding. In 1586, for instance, the *Jonah* from Antwerp was brought into Bridgwater with a cargo of sugar valued at £1,105.¹³⁰ This one cargo, claimed by Bridgwater aldermen William and Henry Jones, and Henry Michell, was worth more than five times the entire declared trade for the county during that fiscal year. There was clearly a strong incentive for merchants such as Richard Godbeare, mayor in 1592, to seek prizes like the *Conception* of Vila do Conde, which was seized in 1588 by the Bridgwater ship the *Lyon*.¹³¹ This was loaded with an exceptionally valuable cargo including 18 tons of brazilwood, and was altogether valued at £1,678. The complete customs records do not survive for this year, but for comparison the total of declared overseas trade for 1583/4 was £1,656. Not all prizes were so valuable and at the other end of the scale in 1591 the Bridgwater ship, *Diamond* brought the *Bonasperanto* with a cargo of small goods valued at £50 into Bridgwater.¹³² In the same year however, although not recorded in the customs accounts, the Bridgwater ship *Mayflower* captured a ship with a cargo of dyewoods, sugar, hides and pearls valued at over £2,000.¹³³

The customs clerk's plea 'God send better' made in December 1588 at the end of a quarter in which no customable goods had entered or left the port, must therefore be set in the context of the arrival in May that same year of the prize ship *Raynebowe*, with a cargo valued at £323, and in February of the *Conception*, described above, with probably the most valuable cargo ever to have entered the port.¹³⁴

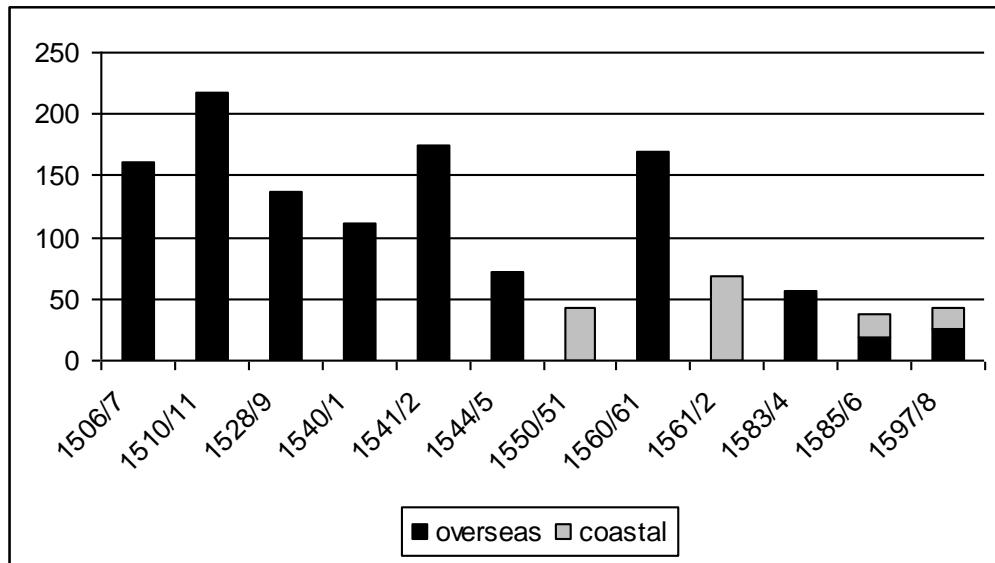
Figure 4: Overseas and Coastal Customs : Number of Shipping Movements.

Figure 4 illustrates that there were far fewer ships using the port in the 1580s and '90s than had previously been the case. This is however not indicative of the value of underlying trade since this could be dramatically affected by the arrival of prize cargoes. Moreover, such cargoes were also highly profitable for their (new) owners, for the simple reason that they had not been purchased at the market rate. The decline in shipping through the ports was not therefore symptomatic of general financial decline amongst at least some of Somerset's merchants.

It was not only merchants from Somerset who brought prize ships to the port of Bridgwater: in 1592 a group of wealthy Bristol merchants received the *Gray Honde* and her cargo of Newfoundland fish and oil at Uphill.¹³⁵ These merchants may have been attracted to Axwater by the absence of a permanent customs official; the customs clerk was evidently still having trouble keeping track of goods there in 1591 when he recorded a charge for payment to a man 'that came up from Uphill where the goods should have been removed'.¹³⁶ Alternatively they may have been exploiting differences in the customs duties charged at Bridgwater and Bristol. Although in theory a national rate was in place, in practice customs officers seem to have been able to exercise discretion in their assessment of the value of particular cargoes. A report to Lord Burghley in 1577 described how ships en route to Bristol entered for customs at Cornwall 'where her Majesites due is verye smale', and in 1594 Captain George Wattes was reported to have taken sugar from Bristol to Bridgwater 'because that he and his companye were verye hardlie dealte withal in Bristoll' by the customs officers.¹³⁷ Similarly, the master of another Bristol ship 'swore great oathes' that he 'would never bringe any prize to Bristoll but carry the same els where'.¹³⁸

Such trade was however irregular and uncertain, and it is this which explains the large variation in the customs revenue identified by Thomas Fanshaw in his report to Lord Burghley made upon the resignation of the customer in 1596.¹³⁹ Fanshaw found that over the previous six years the duties collected had varied between £91 and £9, and concluded that although the revenues could be small, it was better to have a customer in the post as otherwise the port would attract merchants from elsewhere to the detriment of the crown's overall revenue.

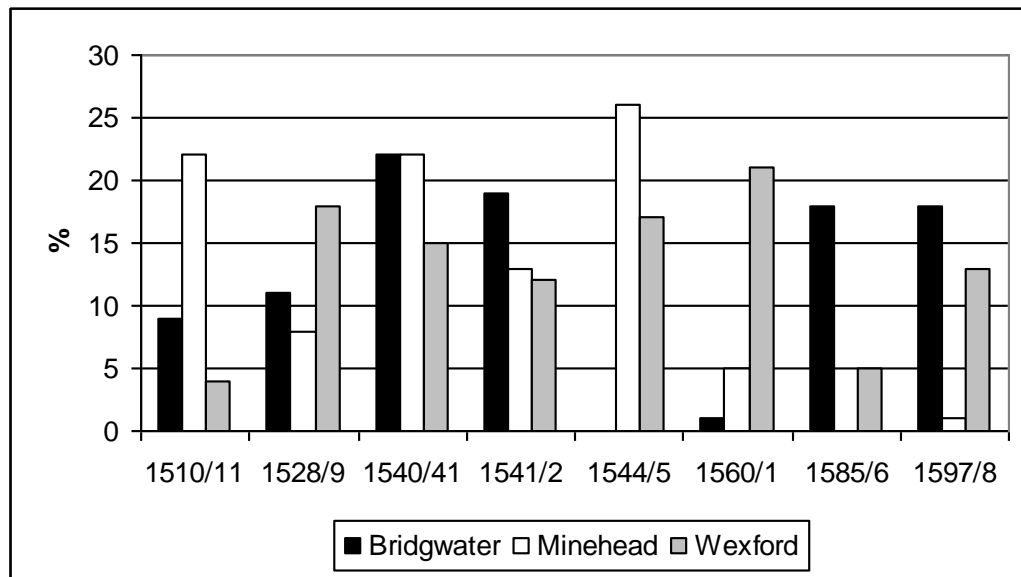
Whilst the decline in the Somerset ports' trade during the century may not have been as desperate as Exchequer records and some contemporary accounts suggest, nor as some historians have supposed, there had nevertheless been a fundamental shift in the long established patterns of trade. Imports of fish, so long synonymous with the Irish communities at Minehead and Axwater, were increasingly sourced from further west in the far Atlantic. Imports of iron, salt and wine had been disrupted to varying degrees by the wars with Spain, and the corresponding export trades in agricultural products had been similarly affected. Above all, cloth exports which had been the mainstay of Somerset's maritime trade had been reduced to a fraction of that pertaining at the opening of the century.

Somerset was not unique in this respect of course, and it has been argued that the commercial challenges of the later century were the spur which prompted English merchants to broaden their horizons, extending their trading voyages to the coasts of Africa and the Americas.¹⁴⁰ Unlike their Devonian and Bristolian counterparts, Somerset's merchants did not venture as far as the Caribbean, Virginia or Guinea, but neither were they entirely parochial in their outlook. Frobisher's 1578 expedition to northern Canada included the Bridgwater registered ship, *Emmanuel*, and in 1589 the Bridgwater ship *The Lyon* returned from the Azores with a cargo of sugar and woad, freighted under the names of William and Richard Godbeare and Thomas Gybbons.¹⁴¹ In 1598 *The Advantage* returned from Newfoundland with a substantial cargo of fish under the names of Richard Stradlinge, George Pawle and Philip Redibone.¹⁴² All of these merchants were at the forefront of society and held the usual town offices, but none of the craft in which they were trading was large even by contemporary standards. *The Emmanuel* was described as a buss, indicating it was a type of fishing vessel, whilst the *Advantage* was only 25 tons, and the *Lyon* 40 tons. In 1588 in response to a requisition order Bridgwater declared that it had no vessels over 50 tons, adding 'our harbour when we were best traded never, or very seldom, yielded any shipping of any such burden'.¹⁴³ Although the town's merchants had good reason for wishing to avoid having their ships requisitioned, their statement is borne out by the tonnages of vessels listed in the customs accounts, and by a survey in 1582 which listed the largest ship at 60 tons.¹⁴⁴ For comparison the *Jesus* of Northam in north Devon was 80 tons, and Bristol recorded ships of up to 350 tons.¹⁴⁵ This is significant as the development of more distant markets resulted in the building of larger ships which were better suited to trans-oceanic voyages, and as a

consequence between 1572 and 1582 the number of English ships of over 100 tons approximately doubled.¹⁴⁶ These ships, such as the 100 ton *Prudence* commissioned by Richard Dodderidge of South Molton in Devon for the Guinea trade, required large sums of capital, both for their construction and for the subsequent financing of their voyages.¹⁴⁷ Somerset's merchants do not seem to have lacked either the capital, or the entrepreneurial initiative, required to participate in this trend as evidenced by the passage of ships such as the *Lyon* to the Azores. What Somerset did lack, and what Devon had in abundance however, were the accessible, deep-water harbours which these larger ships required.

Although Bridgwater was Somerset's principal maritime port, its fleet had never been particularly significant. Even in terms of trade to the port itself, Bridgwater's ships never freighted more than a quarter of the value of declared trade. Figure 5 illustrates that in many years ships from the smaller towns of Minehead and Wexford carried as much, and sometimes more, than those of Somerset's main port.

Figure 5: Overseas Customs : Percentage Share of Declared Trade Freightied by Ship's Home Port



This can perhaps be explained by the more favourable maritime position of these towns, which have immediate access to the open sea, and perhaps therefore had a more extensive fleet. A survey in 1543 seems to support this as it lists four ships between 60 and 100 tons for the harbour at Minehead along with 77 seamen, but lists only 13 mariners for Combwich/Bridgwater and concludes that 'there is none other ship nor balinger belonging to Somersetshire'.¹⁴⁸ Bridgwater, by contrast, lies some ten miles from the coast along a narrow, winding waterway, navigable only at high tide, and goods were consequently often unloaded further downstream at Combwich, and then transferred to the harbour in lighters. The harbour at Wexford was impeded

by a sand bar across its mouth which dictated that only smaller ships could trade to the port. The high proportion of Wexford vessels trading to Bridgwater therefore provides further evidence of the need for smaller boats in order to overcome the restrictions imposed by the Parrett. Exeter, Totnes and Bideford were arguably faced with similar difficulties, but whether for reasons of geography, local politics or finance, Combrich failed to develop in the manner of the corresponding downstream settlements at Topsham, Dartmouth and Northam/Appledoore.¹⁴⁹

Neither was Minehead in a position to take advantage of the change in circumstances occasioned by the shift to larger ships. Both the share of trade passing through Minehead, and the share of trade carried aboard its ships, suffered a sharp downturn from the 1560s onwards as a result of the loss of the town's two principal sources of maritime trade, in cloth and in Irish-sourced fish. These factors were unconnected with the maintenance or otherwise of the quay but Minehead nevertheless does not seem to have been able to handle larger ships by the end of the period. The largest vessel listed in a 1572 survey was 30 tons and the customs do not record craft larger than 25 tons.¹⁵⁰ Despite the shelter afforded from westerly gales by the bulk of North Hill, Minehead remains in a much more exposed position than many ports along the Bristol Channel, and it did not again develop significant long distance trade until the construction of a new harbour in the seventeenth century.

The wealth which captured ships brought was ultimately no substitute nor sound basis for continuing commercial success. The trade of Somerset's ports had never been as great as that of Bristol to the north, or of south coast ports such as Plymouth. Even in 1510/11 when the overseas customs accounts recorded 217 vessels entering and leaving the ports, the majority of days witnessed no movements; for example only four ships entered at Bridgwater, and two at Minehead during the whole of the month of August in that year. By the end of the century, despite the vitality of the coastal trade, Figure 5 shows that Somerset's ports were far less busy than they had been at its opening. The physical restrictions imposed by Somerset's coastal geography had begun to impact on the ability of her merchants to engage in the wider oceanic trade, which was already greatly benefiting their counterparts in north Devon and at Bristol. Adverse changes in the distribution and marketing of cloth exports, the post 1560 decline in Irish trade, and the disruption to traditional Iberian markets as a result of war, all compounded these difficulties and forced Somerset's maritime trade to be increasingly domestically focussed.

- ¹ I am grateful to Dr. Evan Jones for suggesting this topic and for his continuing and invaluable help and advice.
- ² F.W. Weaver, (ed.) *Somerset medieval wills (second series) 1501-1530, with some Somerset wills preserved at Lambeth*, Somerset Record Society, (London, 1903), 64-8.
- ³ The accounts sampled here are: The National Archives (TNA), E122 26/25, 27/1, 27/10, 27/15, 27/18, 27/21, 27/24, 28/6, 29/24, 29/27, 29/3, 29/30, 29/31, 29/34, 29/41, 29/40, 29/39; E 190 1083/5, 1083/1, 1083/20, 1083/17.
- ⁴ TNA, E122 27/27, 27/28, 28/5, 28/7, 28/19, 28/20, 29/4; E190 1083/8, 1083/7, 1083/13, 1083/14, 1083/15, 1083/19, 1083/25, 1083/26.
- ⁵ TNA, E122 29/24 & E190 1083/8; E190 1083/19 & 20.
- ⁶ G. D. Ramsay, 'The smuggler's trade: a neglected aspect of English commercial development', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 2 (1952), 131-157; *Documents illustrating the overseas trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth century*, ed. J. Vanes, (Bristol Record Society XXXI, 1979), 86-122; N. J. Williams, *The maritime trade of the East Anglian ports 1550-1590*, Oxford 1988, 41-9; N. J. Williams, 'Francis Shaxton and the Elizabethan port books', *English Historical Review* 66 (1951), 387-95.
- ⁷ Somerset Record Office (SRO), D/B/bw 1432, 1434, 1435, 1441, 1448, 1438, 1464, 1460, 1474, 1575, 1576, 1579, 1476, 1477, 1478, 1481, 1482, 1483, 1484; SRO, DD/SAS/C/795.
- ⁸ TNA E190/1083/20, 1083/17, 1083/15, 1083/19; SRO, D/B/bw 1482.
- ⁹ TNA E178/1926.
- ¹⁰ TNA E122/200/1, 27/10.
- ¹¹ TNA E122/200/1, 29/34.
- ¹² TNA E178/1928.
- ¹³ W. Gresswell, 'Ancient Dumnonia', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* VI-VII (1901), 173-88.
- ¹⁴ *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic* (L&P For. & Dom.) Henry VIII 1543, XVIII, I, g 476 (18); TNA E122 29/34.
- ¹⁵ Acts of the Privy Council of England, New Series, 1558-70, 288.
- ¹⁶ TNA, E178/1928
- ¹⁷ SRO, DD/WY/23/11
- ¹⁸ Hilary Binding and Douglas Stevens, *Minehead: a new history*, (Minehead, 1977), 53.
- ¹⁹ TNA, E122/22/7; SRO D/B/bw/1438.
- ²⁰ SRO, DD/L/P/29/34.
- ²¹ TNA, E178/1926.
- ²² SRO, DD/L/P/29/34; Binding and Stevens, *Minehead*, 58-60.
- ²³ TNA, E190/1083/17, 1083/19.
- ²⁴ Weaver, (ed.) *Somerset medieval wills*, 230.
- ²⁵ During the 1540s for example, 58% of Bristol's Irish trade was handled by Waterford ships as against just 3% by Wexford vessels; the figures for Bridgwater are 1% in Waterford ships, and over a third in Wexford craft, D. Taylor, *The Overseas Trade of Mid Sixteenth Century Bridgwater*, MA Dissertation, University of Bristol 2006, 35.
- ²⁶ Lucy Toulmin-Smith (ed.), John Leland, *The itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543*. 5 vols., vol. 3., (London, 1906-1910), 168.
- ²⁷ TNA, E122/27/18.
- ²⁸ E. T. Jones, *The smuggler's trade*, forthcoming publication, Ch. 2.
- ²⁹ L&P Henry VIII Addenda. 1509-1537, 729; Calendar of Patent Rolls (Cal. Pat.) Philip and Mary 1557-8, 309.
- ³⁰ Ramsay, *Smuggler's trade*; Williams, *Maritime Trade*; Williams, 'Francis Shaxton'.
- ³¹ TNA, C 1/673/15; Evan T. Jones, 'Illicit business: accounting for smuggling in mid-Sixteenth century Bristol', *Economic History Review* LIV, no. 1 (2001), 17-38.
- ³² J. Vanes (ed.), *The ledger of John Smythe, 1538-1550*, (Bristol Record Society 1974), f. 266 (l).
- ³³ TNA E111/38.
- ³⁴ See G. R. Elton 'Informing for profit: a sidelight on Tudor methods of law enforcement' *Cambridge Historical Journal* 2 (1954), 149-167.
- ³⁵ TNA, E122/29/24.
- ³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ TNA, E190/1083/20; SRO, D/B/bw/1482.

³⁸ TNA, E122/28/25, 29/4; E190/1083/8.

³⁹ The approach adopted by Wendy Childs, and subsequently by other historians of the period, has been to value cloth of assize at a fixed rate of £2 for the period before 1558 in line with their likely commercial value. (Wendy Childs, 'Ireland's trade with England in the later middle ages', *Irish Economic and Social History* IX (1928), 18.) The problem of valuation over a wider time frame is that there was a revision of the Book of Rates in 1558 in which values for most goods paying poundage were doubled, whilst the fixed rate for cloth of assize increased nearly six fold. This level of increase did not reflect the rise in the commercial value of cloth in the intervening period, but was an ambitious attempt by the crown to maximise revenue from taxation of this leading export. The method that has been adopted for the following analysis for cloth of assize, and its derivatives, has been to adopt the valuation of £2 per cloth of assize throughout the century, but to revalue cloth which was subject to poundage to accord with the values contained in the pre-1558 Book of Rates. This methodology is cumbersome and crude, but it does produce a consistent basis on which cloth exports can be measured and comparisons made.

⁴⁰ L. Stone, 'Elizabethan Overseas Trade', *The Economic History Review, New Series* 2, no.1 (1949), 39.

⁴¹ E.T. Jones, *The smuggler's trade*.

⁴² K.G. Ponting, *A History of the west of England cloth industry*, (London, 1957), 51-9.

⁴³ D. Loades, *England's maritime empire: seapower, commerce and policy 1490-1690*, (Harlow, 2000), 54.

⁴⁴ Stone, 'Elizabethan overseas trade', 45; G. D. Ramsay, *The English woollen industry, 1500-1700*, (London, 1982), 14.

⁴⁵ TNA, E122/29/30; E190/1083/17.

⁴⁶ E. Kerridge, *Textile manufactures in early modern England*, (Manchester, 1985), 239.

⁴⁷ TNA, E190/1083/5; E122/29/39; Stone, 'Elizabethan overseas trade', 49.

⁴⁸ SRO, D/B/bw 1432.

⁴⁹ TNA, E190/1083/8.

⁵⁰ SRO, DD/X/SLO/II.

⁵¹ TNA, E122/28/5.

⁵² SRO, D/B/bw/1441.

⁵³ P. Ellis, 'Revenue from rocks', in Barry Cunliffe (ed.), *England's landscape: the west*, (London, 2006), 144.

⁵⁴ P. Croft, 'Trading with the enemy, 1585-1604', *Historical Journal* 32 (1989), 294.

⁵⁵ TNA, E122/28/5; E190/1083/8.

⁵⁶ Evan T. Jones, *Illicit Business*.

⁵⁷ TNA, E122/27/10, 27/15, 29/24.

⁵⁸ K. Longfield, *Anglo-Irish trade in the Sixteenth century*, (London, 1929); J. F. Lawrence, *A history of Bridgwater*, (Chichester, 2005), 77.

⁵⁹ J.R.L. Allen, 'Magor pill (Gwent) multiperiod site: post-medieval pottery, and the shipping trade', in *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary*, 10 (1999), 75-97.

⁶⁰ Longfield, *Anglo-Irish trade*, 233.

⁶¹ SRO, DD/L/P/29/41.

⁶² M. Kowaleski, 'The expansion of the south-western fisheries in late medieval England', *The Economic History Review, New Series* 53, no.3 (2000), 437.

⁶³ Toulmin-Smith (ed.), *Itinerary of John Leland*, 167

⁶⁴ TNA, E122 29/27 & 29/34.

⁶⁵ TNA, E122/27/15.

⁶⁶ TNA, E122/27/1.

⁶⁷ SRO, DD/L/1/55/1.

⁶⁸ Act 5 Eliz. C. II. Although the act did not specifically remove the liability of imported fish to poundage, in practise this seems to have happened as imports of Irish fish disappeared from the customs accounts until 1598 as illustrated in table 4. Moreover, when they were again recorded in 1598 the customs clerk specifically noted that the cargo of red and white herring and salmon was 'custom free' even though it was carried in a Wexford ship, the *George*.⁶⁸ The status of the merchant

concerned, Nicholas Welche, who was listed as English ('indigent') rather than foreign must have been sufficient to have qualified for the exemption from duty.

⁶⁹ SRO, D/B/bw/1579, 1478.

⁷⁰ TNA, E122 28/5.

⁷¹ TNA, E122 29/3; E190 1083/17.

⁷² TNA, E190/1083/15, 1083/20.

⁷³ TNA, E122/28/5, 29/4.

⁷⁴ T. Gray, 'Devon's fisheries and early-Stuart northern New England', in M. Duffy, S. Fisher, B. Greenhill, D. J. Starkey, J. Youings (eds.), *The new maritime history of Devon*, (Exeter, 1992), 140.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ SRO, D/B/bw/1435, 1438, 1441, 1482.

⁷⁷ TNA, E122/29/39.

⁷⁸ Croft, 'Trading with the enemy', 290.

⁷⁹ TNA, E190/1083/8.

⁸⁰ TNA, E122/29/4.

⁸¹ This figure is a total of the entries for landing, crantage and striking. It omits 12 tuns listed under cellarage which was a duplicate or additional charge for storage for wine which had already been entered under crantage; it also omits 10 tuns listed under lading which appear to be for the loading into smaller craft or carts for passage to places such as Stowey, West Newton and Langport.

⁸² SRO, D/B/bw/1441; TNA E122/27/15.

⁸³ H. S. Cobb found that large groups of merchants were exempt from payment of local tolls in Southampton in the mid Fifteenth century (H. Cobb, *The local port book of Southampton for 1439-40*, (Southampton, 1961), xxiv).

⁸⁴ SRO, DD/B/bw/1535, DD/SAS/C795.

⁸⁵ TNA, E122/29/24, E122 29/30, E122 29/ 31.

⁸⁶ SRO, D/B/bw/1482; TNA, E190/1083/20.

⁸⁷ The Tudor state had endeavoured to extend its authority in the matter of customs administration in Wales, and a unitary system of customs which accorded with that of England was theoretically in place by 1571. (W.R.B. Robinson, 'The establishment of royal customs in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire under Elizabeth I', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* XXIII, no. 4 (1970), 347-51.) However, whilst the shipments of wine which arrived in 1597/98 from Bristol were entered in the coastal customs accounts, as was appropriate for domestic shipments, those from Wales appeared under the overseas accounts with a note to the effect that they had to pay additional duty. The implication is that whilst wine arriving from Bristol had previously paid full custom, that from Wales had not done so.

⁸⁸ TNA, E122/29/4, E190/1083/8.

⁸⁹ SRO, D/B/bw/1438.

⁹⁰ TNA, E122/27/21.

⁹¹ TNA, E122/27/21; SRO, D/B/bw/1438.

⁹² TNA, E190/1083/20; SRO, D/B/bw/1482.

⁹³ SRO, D/B/bw/1482.

⁹⁴ The total of the *landing* charges in the bailiffs' accounts.

⁹⁵ TNA, E122/27/21; SRO, D/B/bw/1438.

⁹⁶ J. Collins, *Salt and Fishery*, (London, 1682); Thomas Lowndes, *A seasonable hint for our pilchard and coast fishery to the brine-salt proprietors of Great Britain and Ireland*, (London, 1748). A.R. Bridbury, *England and the salt trade in the later middle ages*, (Oxford, 1955), 1-21, 94-9, 116-17.

⁹⁷ SRO, D/B/bw/1482; P. F. Wilkinson, M. Locock and S. H. Sell, 'A Sixteenth century saltworks at Port Eynon, Gower', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 32 (1998), 18.

⁹⁸ TNA, E122/27/10.

⁹⁹ E.M. Carus-Wilson, 'The overseas trade of Bristol', in E. Power and E.M. Carus-Wilson (eds.), *Studies in English trade in the Fifteenth century*, (London, 1933), 215.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, E122/29/3.

¹⁰¹ TNA, E122/29/4, E190/1083/15, 1083/19, 1083/7, 1083/8.

¹⁰² SRO, D/B/bw/1435, 1438, 1441, 1482.

¹⁰³ TNA, E122/27/18, 27/21, 29/3.

- ¹⁰⁴ SRO, D/B/bw/1438. The ambiguity is whether references to 'your own boat' in relation to Mr Newport are references to *The Mary* or to a lighter employed in bringing iron from elsewhere. Given the quantity and timing of the 20 tons the likelihood is that the reference is to *The Mary* but this cannot be established with certainty.
- ¹⁰⁵ SRO, D/B/bw/1435.
- ¹⁰⁶ SRO D/B/bw/1482.
- ¹⁰⁷ H.R. Schubert, *History of the British iron and steel industry from c. 450 B.C. to A.D. 1775*, (London, 1957), 161.
- ¹⁰⁸ TNA, E122/29/3, 29/31.
- ¹⁰⁹ TNA, E122/29/4.
- ¹¹⁰ TNA, E122/27/21.
- ¹¹¹ SRO, D/B/bw/1438.
- ¹¹² TNA, E190/1083/15.
- ¹¹³ TNA, E122/20/30.
- ¹¹⁴ TNA, E122/29/4.
- ¹¹⁵ J. Hatcher, *The history of the British coal industry : before 1700*, vol. 1, Oxford 1993, 37-54.
- ¹¹⁶ Ellis, 'Revenue from rocks', 145-150.
- ¹¹⁷ R. W. Dunning (ed.), *The Victoria history of the counties of England : A history of the county of Somerset*, vol. 5, Oxford 1985, 219.
- ¹¹⁸ J. H. Bettey, 'The livestock trade in the west country during the Seventeenth century', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 127 (1984), 123.
- ¹¹⁹ TNA, E122/26/25, 27/1, 27/10, 29/3.
- ¹²⁰ SRO, DD/L/P/29/41.
- ¹²¹ SRO, DD/L/P/29/34.
- ¹²² TNA, E190/1083/8, E122/29/34, 29/4.
- ¹²³ TNA, E122 29/31.
- ¹²⁴ Calendar of State Papers Domestic (hereinafter C. S. P. D.) 1595-1597, CCLVII, 73.
- ¹²⁵ C.S.P.D. 1595-1597, CCLXI, 5.
- ¹²⁶ O. Dunn, *The petitions of Thomas Watkins against customer John Dowle, 1598-1600*, MA dissertation, University of Bristol, 2006.
<www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/Maritime/Sources/2006badunn.htm> March 2007.
- ¹²⁷ L&P For. & Dom. HVIII 1535, 281; C S.P.D. Ed. VI, 417; F. Hancock, *Minehead in the country of Somerset, a history of the parish, the manor and the port*, (Taunton, 1903), 241.
- ¹²⁸ L&P For. & Dom. HVIII 1546, 463.
- ¹²⁹ Loades, *England's maritime empire*, 85-7.
- ¹³⁰ TNA, E122/29/24.
- ¹³¹ TNA, E122/29/27.
- ¹³² TNA, E122/29/41.
- ¹³³ K.R. Andrews, *Elizabethan privateering: English privateering during the Spanish war 1585-1603*, (Cambridge, 1964), 260.
- ¹³⁴ TNA, E122/29/30.
- ¹³⁵ F.A. Knight, *The sea board of Mendip, an account of the history, archaeology, and natural history of the parishes of Weston-super-Mare, Kewstoke, Wick St. Lawrence, Puxton Worle, Uphill, Brean, Bleadon, Hutton, Locking, Banwell, and of the Steep and Flat Holms*, (London, 1902), 265.
- ¹³⁶ M. Oppenheim, *The Maritime History of Devon*, (Exeter, 1968), 50.
- ¹³⁷ J. Vanes, *Documents*, no. 23, 43-44., no. 34, 52-55.
- ¹³⁸ Ibid.
- ¹³⁹ C.S.P.D. 1595-1597, CCLVII, 73.
- ¹⁴⁰ A. Grant, 'Breaking the mould: north Devon maritime enterprise, 1560-1640', in T. Gray, M. M. Rowe, A. Erskine (eds.), *Tudor and Stuart Devon: the common estate and government. Essays presented to Joyce Youings*, (Exeter, 1992); K.R. Andrews, *Trade plunder and settlement: maritime enterprise and the genesis of the British empire*, (Cambridge, 1984), 62-3. Loades, *England's maritime enterprise*, Ch.2 & 3; Stone, 'Elizabethan overseas trade', 51-3.
- ¹⁴¹ TNA, E122/29/31.
- ¹⁴² TNA, E190/1083/20.

¹⁴³ Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury*, vol. 4, (London, 1892), 121.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, SP 12 CLVI 45.

¹⁴⁵ Grant, 'Breaking the mould', 121; For instance, The *Goulden Lyon* at Bristol in 1575 (TNA E190/1129/10).

¹⁴⁶ Stone, 'Elizabethan overseas trade', 52.

¹⁴⁷ Grant, 'Breaking the mould', 127.

¹⁴⁸ L&P For. & Dom. HVIII 1543, XVIII, I, 547.

¹⁴⁹ For the latter see Grant, 'Breaking the mould', 138.

¹⁵⁰ SRO, DD/FA/11/1.