

**The Merchants of York, Beverley, and Hull  
in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries**

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VOLUME I

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## SYNOPSIS

This thesis examines three main aspects of the merchant class of York, Beverley, and Hull: their economic activities, political dominance and social and religious concerns. It argues that in each town, merchants played a significant role, and as their commercial fortunes were affected by endogenous factors, so was their position within each town.

Chapter 1 gives a brief historical outline of each town's development, up to and including the period under study. Chapter 2 offers an overview of the fluctuating patterns of international trade, and of the changing fortunes of each town's investment in overseas trade. Within that context, chapter 4 focusses on individual merchant's business 'biographies', using them as a basis for a general discussion of the range and quality of the involvement of each town's merchant class in overseas trade. The second part of the chapter explores the evidence of capital accumulation by individuals, assessing the role of real estate, cash and credit in their enterprises. This analysis reveals the wide range in levels of commercial success to be found within the merchant class.

Chapter 5 looks at the degree to which merchants dominated the government of each town, highlighting the notable differences between them. It concludes that the merchant oligarchs of each were tenacious in defending their position, until their commercial failure inexorably lead to their political demise.

Chapter 6 offers insights into the ways in which merchants underpinned their commercial and political association through social networks. Inter-marriage, the poor survival rate of male heirs, household structure and family provision, all reflect a high degree of interdependence. The second section of the chapter concentrates on merchant benevolence and piety, concluding that their priorities were similar to those of other townsfolk and their religious beliefs as conservative.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Bev. Town Docs. A.F. Leach ed., Beverley Town Documents. Selden Society.
- Bronnen H.J. Smit ed., Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Handel met Engeland, Schotland en Ierland, 1150-1485.
- C.C.G. R.H. Skaife ed., The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York. Surtees Society.
- C.C.R. Calendar of Close Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office.
- C.F.R. Calendar of Fine Rolls.
- C.P.R. Calendar of Patent Rolls.
- C. Chart. R. Calendar of Charter Rolls preserved in the Public  
age first series of Hanserecesse, C.Koppman, ed., Die Recesse und ander Akten der Hansetage
- M.B. M. Sellars ed. York Memorandum Book, I-II. Surtees Society.
- Test. Ebor. J. Raine, snr. and jnr. eds., Testamenta Eboracensia, I-IV. Surtees Society.
- Y.C.R. A. Raine ed., York Civic Records, I-III. Yorks. Arch. Soc.
- Yorks. Deeds W. Brown et al. eds., Yorkshire Deeds, I-X. Yorks. Arch. Soc.
- Yorks. Fines W.P. Baildon ed., Feet of Fines for the County of York, 1327-47, and 1347-77. Yorks. Arch. Soc.
- York Freeman F. Collins ed., Register of the Freeman of the City of York, I. Surtees Society.
- Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy Bartlett, J.N., The Economy of York in the Later Middle Ages. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London (1958).
- Bartlett, Expansion and Decline Bartlett, J.N., The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages. Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xii (1959-60).
- Palliser, Tudor York Palliser, D.M., Some Aspects of the Social and Economic History of York in the Sixteenth Century. Unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1968.
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- C.P.R. Calendar of Patent Rolls.
- C. Chart. R. Calendar of Charter Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office.
- M. & M.A. M. Sellars ed., The York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers. Surtees Society.
- M.B. M. Sellars ed. York Memorandum Book, I-II. Surtees Society.
- Test. Ebor. J. Raine, snr. and jnr. eds., Testamenta Eboracensia, I-IV. Surtees Society.
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- Yorks. Fines W.P. Baildon ed., Feet of Fines for the County of York, 1327-47, and 1347-77. Yorks. Arch. Soc.
- York Freemen F. Collins ed., Register of the Freemen of the City of York, I. Surtees Society.
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Decline            Bartlett, J.N., The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages. Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xii (1959-60).
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Tudor York        Palliser, D.M., Some Aspects of the Social and Economic History of York in the Sixteenth Century. Unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1968.
- Palliser,  
Tudor York        Palliser, D.M., Tudor York (1979).

Hansetage

first series of Hanserecesse, C.Koppman,ed.,Die Recesse und ander  
Akten der Hansetage

**Manuscript Abbreviations**

Arch. Reg.	Archbishops' Registers in the York Registry.
Bev. Accts	Beverley Account Rolls.
Bev. Cart.	Beverley Town Cartulary.
Bev. Deeds	Beverley Corporation Deeds, Schedule III.
BRG 1; BRE 1 and 2; BRB 1	Hull Bench Books.
Dec. et Cap. Prob.Reg.	Dean and Chapter Probate Register, Minster Library.
GGB	Beverley Great Guild Book.
G.M.B.	Beverley Governor's Minute Book.
Prob. Reg.	Probate Registers in the York Registry.

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### Preface

The study of late medieval English towns has enjoyed considerable and increasing popularity during the last decade.<sup>1</sup> When this undertaking began in 1966, it seemed that only a handful of research students was interested in medieval social and economic history, and scarcely any paid attention to English towns and trade. (Life was lonely amongst the Customs Rolls in the Public Record Office!) Twenty years later and the subject has developed considerably both in terms of methodology and coverage of topics. Recently published work ranges from detailed descriptions of specific groups of townsmen, such as A.F. Butcher's 'The Origin of the Romney Freemen' and Heather Swanson's Building Craftsmen in late medieval York;<sup>2</sup> through microscopic analyses of the interplay of demographic and economic forces as in Butcher's 'Rent and the Urban Economy: Oxford and Canterbury in the Later Middle Ages';<sup>3</sup> to single town studies which blend demographic and topographic analyses with the fashionable concept of the community, such as Robert Gottfried's Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290-1539, published in 1982.

Medieval urban historians have taken advantage of the skills and ideas developed in other disciplines and the work of Charles Phythian-Adams, shows how successfully these 'borrowings' from historical geography, social anthropology and demography can be applied. In 1971 he gave a pioneering paper, 'Coventry and the Problem of Urban Decay in the Late Middle Ages', to the Urban History Conference which provided a

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1. See Alan Everitt's discussion of the rapid growth in urban studies in the 1960s and of the "new tools" utilised in them. A. Everitt, ed., Perspectives in English Urban History (London, 1973), introduction esp. pp. 2-3.
  2. Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xxvii (1974); Borthwick Paper no. 63, University of York (1983).
  3. Southern History, i (1979).

tremendous stimulus. Encouraging as it did, a more dynamic approach to urban economies. His Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages, published eight years later, provided a new kind of community study, which analysed the complex social structure of Coventry and the manner in which it was distorted by demographic pressures.

In their awareness of the wider national or regional context, of thematic links with other English and European towns of the period, and in their confident use of quantitative techniques, these examples reflect the departure from the long and honourable tradition of single-town studies, with their emphasis on constitutional developments, major political events, and topographical reminiscence.<sup>4</sup> It is no longer

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4. Antiquarian studies may be old-fashioned, but should not be scorned as the better ones provide a good general outline history, and much anecdotal and topographical detail. The following provided useful quarries to plunder. Editions of specific record sources are listed in the bibliography.

#### York

Francis Drake, Eboracum: or the History and Antiquities of the City of York (London, 1736); J. Croft, ed., Excerpta Antiqua: or, a Collection of Original Manuscripts (York, 1797) R. Davis, ed., Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York during the Reigns of Edward IV, Edward V, and Richard III (London, 1843); T. Widdrington, Analecta Eboracensia: or, Some Remaynes of the Ancient City of York, ed. C. Caine (London, 1877); G. Benson, Later Medieval York: the City and County of the City of York from 1100 to 1603 (York, 1919); R.H. Skaife, Civic Officials of York and parliamentary representation, 3 MSS volumes in York City Library.

#### Beverley

G. Oliver, The History and Antiquities of the Town and Minster of Beverley (Beverley, 1829); G. Poulson, Beverlac; or the antiquities and history of the town of Beverley (London, 1829).

#### Hull

T. Gent, Annales Regioduni Hullini (York, 1735); G. Hadley, A New and Complete History of the Town and County of the Town of Kingston upon Hull (Hull, 1788); J. Tickell, The History of the Town and County of Kingston upon Hull (Hull, 1798); C. Frost, Notices Relating to the Early History of the Town and Port of Hull (Hull, 1827); J.J. Sheahan, History of the Town and Port of Kingston upon Hull (Beverley, 1866).

possible to claim, as Susan Reynolds did in An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns, in 1977, that "few historians of medieval English towns have betrayed much interest in themes or problems which concern historians at large, or even historians of other towns". Her own book, itself a milestone in medieval urban studies, set out "to open up the subject to try to distinguish what is known from what is not, and to ... furnish a framework that is worth testing and even demolishing".<sup>5</sup> The fudging of contradictory evidence was to be a thing of the past, as was the over-confident handling of inconsistent data, or even the avoidance of the same. All evidence is now deemed to be relevant and the careful and precise description of it, often in quantitative terms, has become a priority.

Changes in methodology have been matched by a fierce debate over the significance of certain developments in late medieval towns. Decades ago, French and German historians produced syntheses of geographically and chronologically scattered studies, to describe the impact of urban developments on the economy and society, on institutions, on a regional, national, and even European scale.<sup>6</sup> English historians have been aware of the value of such an approach, but have generally more narrowly described a single aspect such as constitutional

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5. S. Reynolds, An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns, (Oxford, 1977) pp. v-vii.
6. F.L. Ganshof, Etude sur le developpement des villes entre Loire et Rhin (Paris, 1943); H. Pirenne, Les Villes et les Institutions Urbaines, 2 vols. (Paris and Brussels, 1939); H. Planitz, Die Deutsche Stadt in Mittelalter (Graz, 1954); J. Le Goff, 'The Town as an Agent of Civilisation', in The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Middle Ages, ed. C.M. Cipolla (1972); Edith Ennen, The Medieval Town, (Oxford 1979).

characteristics.<sup>7</sup> In 1976, Barrie Dobson presented a paper to the Royal Historical Society, 'Urban Decline in Late Medieval England',<sup>8</sup> which encapsulated notions about the fortunes of late medieval towns scattered in isolated studies. He identified markers of decline, which, taken together, convincingly supported the view of urban decline nationwide in the 15th and early 16th centuries. Since then the debate has raged;<sup>9</sup> focussing on the interpretation of taxation records, demographic and topographical evidence, contemporary claims of decay, and on the different pace and scale of decline throughout the English regions. Consensus would probably support the view that most sizeable towns experienced some economic setbacks but that the term 'crisis' has been inappropriately used in some cases.<sup>10</sup> Depending on their location and on their economic past, different towns' experience could range from stagnation to major contraction and deep recession.

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7. E.g. C. Gross, The Gild Merchant, 2 vols. (London, 1890); J.R.R. Green, Town Life in the Fifteenth Century, 2 vols. (London, 1894); J. Tait, The Medieval English Borough (Manchester, 1936). Notable exceptions include:- E.M. Carus-Wilson, Towns and Trade, in Medieval England, I, ed. A.L. Poole (Oxford, 1958); G.H. Martin, The Town (London, 1961); A.R. Bridbury, Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages, 1st edn. (London, 1962), chapter 5; J. Cornwall, English Country Towns in the 1520s, Ec.H.R., 2nd ser. xv (1962-3); C. Platt, The English Medieval Town (London, 1978).
8. Subsequently published in T.R.H.S., 5th ser. xxvii (1977).
9. C. Phythian-Adams, 'Urban decay in late medieval England, in Towns in Societies, ed. P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley (1978); S. Rigby, 'Urban Decline in the Later Middle Ages: Some problems in interpreting the statistical data', U.H.Y. (1979), pp. 46-59; A. Dyer, 'Growth and Decay in English Towns 1500-1700', ibid., pp. 60-72; C. Phythian-Adams, 'Dr. Dyer's Urban Undulations', ibid., pp.73-76; S. Reynolds, 'Decline and decay in late medieval towns: a look at some of the concepts and arguments', ibid., (1980), pp. 76-78; A.R. Bridbury, 'English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages', Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. xxxiv (1981); R. Tittler, 'Late Medieval Urban Prosperity', ibid., xxxvii (1984); A.R. Bridbury, 'Late Medieval Urban Prosperity: A Rejoinder', ibid.
10. D.M. Palliser, 'A crisis in English towns? The case of York, 1460-1640', Northern History, xiv (1978).

Most urban historians will comment en passant, on the significant role of trade, particularly long-distance trade, in the fortunes of the major towns, but tracing more specific links can be difficult, so the activities of one or two exceptional merchants have served to illustrate the general point.<sup>11</sup> Criticism of such studies is not intended, since it is through such close scrutiny that much has been learned about the scale, characteristics and techniques of individual businesses. Without the insights generated by the expansive discussion of Gilbert Maghfeld or the Celys, our knowledge of medieval trade would be even more sketchy.<sup>12</sup>

At the other extreme, a general approach has been the characteristic of studies of trade which have been concerned with trends in specific commodities, the mechanics of international trade, currency, or the English merchant community's fortunes overseas.<sup>13</sup> The domestic

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11. M.K. James, 'A London Merchant of the Fourteenth Century', Ec.H.R., 2nd ser. vii (1955-56). C.M. Barron, 'Sir Richard Whittington', in Studies in London History, ed. A.E.J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway (1969); J.N. Bartlett, 'Robert Holme Citizen and Merchant of York', Jnl. Bradford Textile Soc. xcvi (1952-53); E.B. Fryde, 'The Wool Accounts of Sir William de la Pole, St. Anthony's Hall Publications' (now Borthwick Papers), no. 25 (York, 1964); E.B. Fryde, William de la Pole. Merchant and King's Banker (died 1366) (1988); J. Donnelly, 'Thomas of Coldingham, merchant and burgess of Berwick upon Tweed (died 1316)', Scot. H.R. lix (1980).
12. A. Hanham, The Celys and Their World (Cambridge 1985)..
13. A.R. Bridbury, England and the Salt Trade in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford, 1955); E.M. Carus-Wilson, Medieval Merchant Venturers (2nd edn. 1967); E.M. Carus-Wilson & O. Coleman, England's Export Trade 1275-1547 (Oxford, 1963); W. Childs, Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages (Manchester, 1978) and 'England's Iron Trade in the Fifteenth Century', Ec. H.R. 2nd ser xxxiv (1981); A. Hanham, 'Foreign Exchange and the English wool merchant in the late fifteenth century', B.I.H.R. xlvi (1973), and 'Profits on English Wool Exports 1472-1544', B.I.H.R. lv (1982); J. Hatcher, English Tin Production and Trade before 1550 (Oxford, 1973); M.K. James, Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade (Oxford, 1971); T.H. Lloyd, The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1977); J.H. Munro, Wool, Cloth, and Gold: the Struggle for Bullion in the Anglo-Burgundian Trade 1340-1478 (Toronto, 1972); E. Power, The Wool Trade in English Medieval History (Oxford, 1941); E. Power and M.M. Postan, eds., Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century (1933); E.M. Veale, The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford, 1966).

economy is often forgotten as commercial historians focus their attention on alien rivals and the expansion and contraction of overseas markets.<sup>14</sup> A splendid integration of previously divergent traditions was accomplished in 1980 by J.L. Bolton in his The Medieval English Economy 1150-1500. He describes the character of the English economy and its separate elements, but he does so through the interplay between population, agriculture, domestic trade and urban expansion, within the context of developments in long-distance trade and overseas markets. Into this dynamic exposition, he has woven other important elements, often overlooked by 'urban' historians, such as the impact of war or of government policies on long-distance trade and hence on domestic production and urban economies. Bolton's purpose is to set each element of the medieval economy into its regional, national, and international context and the force of such a cosmic perspective compels the conclusion that medieval urban historians must also change their perspective. They should look further than single-town studies and at the interrelationships between different towns,<sup>15</sup> and at towns as one, albeit major, component in regional economies.<sup>16</sup>

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14. There are exceptions of course and three good examples are:-  
 O. Coleman, 'Trade and prosperity in the fifteenth century: some aspects of the trade of Southampton', Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xvi (1963-64); J.N. Bartlett, 'The expansion and decline of York in the later middle ages', Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xii (1959-60); R.H. Britnell, Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525 (Cambridge, 1986).
15. Some studies have already perceived this. E.g. R.H. Hilton, A Medieval Society: the West Midlands at the End of the Thirteenth Century (1966); L.M. Nichol, 'The Trading Communities of Totnes and Dartmouth in the 15th and 16th Centuries', unpublished Exeter M.A. thesis 1960); S.H. Rigby, 'Boston and Grimsby in the Middle Ages: Economic and Social Contrasts Between two Lincolnshire Sea Ports'. Paper presented to the Urban History Conference in 1980.
16. J.C. Russell, Medieval Regions and Their Cities (Newton Abbot, 1972) devoted an entire book to this theme.





Hence one justification for choosing three towns to study. The proximity of York to Beverley (30 miles), and of Beverley to Hull (10 miles), suggested that they would have some sort of relationship with each other. It was anticipated that they would have some links, at least via the wool and cloth trade, and because all three shared the same port facilities, those at Hull, and could be studied in one set of customs records. It was further anticipated that an instructive comparison could be made of the impact of economic change on the governments and politics of the three towns, because although all were boroughs, each had its own characteristics. York was a royal borough, of pre-conquest origin, which became a county of a a city. Hull was also a royal borough which became a county of a city, but it was one of Edward I's new, planned towns. Beverley claimed pre-conquest origins and it was a seignorial borough which belonged to the archbishops of York.<sup>17</sup>

Their geographical proximity meant that, to a considerable extent, all three towns were subject to the same economical and commercial pressures; and the distortions of regional and national variations would be avoided. However, their histories were very different, as were their economies and the size of their populations. Studying three towns at once has made it possible to identify the subtle as well as the obvious differences; thus giving some insight into those factors which most influenced their political, social and economic developments, as well as into the different relationships possible between individual towns and their region.<sup>18</sup>

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17. See below for a brief account of the early development of each town.

18. The scope of research is dictated by the nature and extent of surviving evidence and these particular towns were chosen, in part, because similar documentary evidence has survived for them all.

Merchants presented themselves as the obvious group to concentrate on, given that their entrepreneurship provided important links between town and county, town and town, the region and its overseas markets, and because they initially appeared to be the politically dominant group in each town.

The prospect of describing all the traceable merchants in three towns was challenging since historians have generally concentrated their studies of English medieval merchants on one or two outstanding individuals<sup>19</sup> or on small groups of exceptional merchants, usually the politically successful, as the representatives of the entire group.<sup>20</sup> Some historians have ignored the commercial and political life of merchants and have confined their discussions to their wealth and status as it appears in testamentary evidence.<sup>21</sup> It has been difficult then, to gain an overall impression of the pattern of trading activity within the merchant community, or of the social and political nature of that community.

The notable exceptions are Sylvia Thrupp's and Eleanora Carus-Wilson's studies of the merchants of London and Bristol.<sup>22</sup> Both were

19. See note 11.

20. E. Miller, 'Medieval York', in V.C.H. City of York, ed. P.M. Tillot (1961), pp. 100-06, 108-13; C. Platt, Medieval Southampton (1973), pp. 60-66, 92-105; E.B. Fryde, Some Business Transactions of York Merchants: John Goldbeter William Acastre and Partners, 1336-1349. St. Anthony's Hall Publications (later Borthwick Papers), no. 29 (1966).

21. P.V. McGrath, 'The Wills of Bristol Merchants in the Great Orphan Books', Trans Bristol & Glos. Arch. Soc., lxxviii (1951), seventeenth-century merchants; G.H. Nicholson, 'Bristol Merchants and their Wills in the Later Middle Ages'. Unpublished Birmingham M.A. thesis (1970).

22. Sylvia L. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (Ann Arbor, 1968); E.M. Carus-Wilson, 'The Merchant Adventurers of Bristol in the Fifteenth Century', T.R.H.S. 4th ser. xi (1928). For a later period, see W.T. MacCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640, (Cambridge, Mass. 1948) pp. 251-83.

interested in several aspects of the merchant community: its wealth, its social and its political status. Sylvia Thrupp explored, in addition, such things as the literacy, social attitudes, life expectancy, social cohesion, and political success of a large number of merchants in London, but she largely ignored their commercial ventures overseas. Eleanora Carus-Wilson on the other hand, was less interested in merchants as a social and political group than in the extent and characteristics of their overseas trade.

A second broad problem, which has scarcely been considered is the impact of the changing emphasis of England's export trade from wool to cloth, on urban politics; yet it must have had considerable significance.<sup>23</sup> The development of borough institutions has been extensively observed by historians, but not in conjunction with the change in England's trade. Government and politics in medieval English towns have been discussed traditionally in terms of constitutional developments<sup>24</sup> and of their oligarchic politics.<sup>25</sup> Some studies have explored urban oligarchies to reveal the existence of a cursus honorum in office-holding and of a dominant social or occupational group in control of

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23. Discussed in national terms in G. Unwin, 'The Estate of Merchants', in Finance and Trade under Edward III, ed. G. Unwin, (Manchester, 1918), pp.179-255; cf. H. Pirenne, Early Democracies in the Low Countries, (New York, 1971), pp. 17-19, 35.
24. F.W. Maitland, Township and Borough (Cambridge, 1898); J. Tait, The Medieval English Borough (Manchester, 1936); J.R.R. Green, Town Life in the Fifteenth Century (1896), II, Chapters 6-10; C. Stephenson, Borough and Town (Cambridge, Mass., 1933).
25. J.R.R. Green, Town Life, op. cit., I, Chapters 8-10; A.B. Hibbert, 'The Origins of the Medieval Town Patriciate', P. & P. 3 (1953); C.W. Colby, 'The Growth of Oligarchies in English Towns', E.H.R. v (1890).

political recruitment.<sup>26</sup> Invariably merchants formed this group, and were the agents of political as well as economic change, reflecting and encouraging both. A major argument in this thesis is that changes in the nature of the trade of merchants could bring about changes in the political life of their towns.

The Definition and Identification of the Merchants Studied

All social historians are familiar with the problems of deciding whom to include in a selected group, and at first, definition by occupations would seem to be fairly straightforward. However, as historians of the inventory-rich early modern period know too well, a person's claimed occupation and the activities reflected in his possessions can often be at odds. In that respect at least, the virtual absence of inventories,<sup>27</sup> probate or otherwise, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a relief. The goods bequeathed in the majority of merchants' wills, gave no indication whatsoever of the testator's occupation, and were similar to those of many other burgesses.

The merchant group was eventually defined as including those who described themselves or were described as merchant or mercer; drapers, vintners, spicers, and grocers<sup>28</sup> who were recorded as active in

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26. A. Rogers, 'Late Medieval Stamford: a study of the town council, 1465-1492', in Perspectives in Urban History, ed. Alan Everitt (1974), pp. 16-38; G.A. Williams, Medieval London: from Commune to Capital (1963), pp. 50-75.
27. Some inventories were drawn up and survive for this period, but were usually of the goods of ecclesiastical dignitaries or gentry, The inventory of John Talkan's goods and debts is a rare example of an 'unknown' layman's estate being so recorded. Test. Ebor. III, pp. 87-89.
28. For a discussion of grocers' and the wool and cloth trades see pp. 262-69 in Sylvia Thrupp, 'The Grocers of London: A study of Distributive Trade', in Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century, ed. E. Power and M.M. Postan (1933).

regional or overseas trade; and anyone else who could be identified as coming from York, Beverley or Hull, who were recorded as active in regional or overseas trade. By this means, the successful craftsman, venturing some of his profits in overseas trade, and the aspiring sons of yeoman or gentry families, using trade as an entree into urban politics, would all be netted. This two-pronged approach, definition by function as well as by description proved to be reasonably satisfactory, even though the final impression was of numbers of self-styled merchants, making wills, but not apparently engaged in recorded trade, and of other merchants active in trade and claiming residence in one of the three towns, but for whom no other evidence of a local existence has survived. The difficulties in describing regional and local trade will be discussed later.

As a point of departure, the merchants for whom wills or administration acts survived were listed.<sup>29</sup> For some this was their only moment of retrospective glory. Then merchants whose names appeared in the printed Calendars of Patent, Close, and Fine Rolls, and in Hanserecesse,<sup>30</sup> Bronnen<sup>31</sup> Urkundenbuch<sup>32</sup> and Lister<sup>33</sup>

29. J. Charlesworth and A.V. Hudson, eds., Index of Wills and Administrations in the Registers of the Archbishops of York, 1316-1822, Yorks. Arch. Soc. xciii (1937); F. Collins, ed., Index of Wills from the Dean and Chapter's Court at York, 1321-1636, Yorks. Arch. Soc. xxxviii (1907), and Index of Wills in the York Registry, 1389-1514, 1514-1553, Yorks. Arch. Soc. vi (1889), xi (1891).
30. G. von Ropp ed., Hanserecesse, 1431-76, 7 volumes (Leipzig, 1876-92).
31. H.J. Smit, ed. Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Handel met Engeland, Schotland, en Ireland, 1150-1485, 2 volumes (The Hague, 1928).
32. K. Hohlbaum, K. Kunze, and W. Stein, eds., Hansisches Urkundenbuch, 10 volumes (Halle and Leipzig, 1876-1907).
33. J. Lister, ed., The Early Yorkshire Woollen Trade, Yorks. Arch. Soc. lxiv (1924).

were added. Finally, those merchants who held more than minor civic office<sup>34</sup> were included on the assumption that the commercially successful were likely to be politically successful also. This assumption was subsequently qualified. Historians are also familiar with the repeated to-ing and fro-ing between documents and cumulative lists, as they try to gather in as many significant individuals as possible. Once the search of the Customs Account Rolls had begun, it became clear that identifying the home base of many of the merchants recorded therein, was going to be a problem. The names of those regularly listed alongside known York, Beverley, or Hull merchants were noted, and checked in a variety of sources and as will become apparent in Chapter 2, the merchants most likely to have been overlooked by this process, were those trading infrequently and on a small scale.

Identifying York men in the city's records was relatively easy. The Freeman's Rolls<sup>35</sup> have been printed, albeit with some omissions, but with an index. The rolls record the names of the mayor and chamberlains for each year and the sheriffs' names can be found in the exchequer returns which have also been published.<sup>36</sup> The list of bailiffs published in F. Drake, Eboracum was used, since constant checking against MSS revealed few errors. Occasionally a merchant might be identified as of York, only in an associate's will and this was also the case for Beverley and Hull. Lists of freemen's entry fines have

34. I.e. progressed from chamberlain to bailiff. See below, conclusion.

35. F. Collins, ed., Register of the Freeman of the City of York from the City Records, I, Surtees Soc. xcvi (1896). For a critique see R.B. Dobson, 'Admissions to the Freedom of the city of York in the Later middle Ages', Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xxv (1973).

36. P.R.O. Lists and Indexes, no. ix, List of Sheriffs for England and Wales from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1831 (Kraus reprint from the 1898 edn.)

survived for Hull from 1392 until 1502. The identification of the mayor and bailiffs of Hull was based on a series of witness lists on deeds recorded in the Bench Books, as well as on official enactments in the same source. The chamberlains' names were identified on the 62 account rolls which have survived, and from occasional references in the Bench Books.<sup>37</sup> Sheriffs were identified from the exchequer returns.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Beverley, it was possible to identify some or all of the twelve keepers for 83 out of the 200 years, from account rolls, deeds, the Great Guild Book, and the Governors' Minute Book.<sup>39</sup>

As an extra safeguard against individuals slipping through the net, the search took in anyone with the surname of an identified merchant, but unless he could be positively identified, he was left out of the analysis. Some merchants had such a close association with two of the three towns, that it was impossible to firmly attach them to either. These have been left with 'dual nationality'.

A repeat trawl through the major sources became necessary, once stray individuals emerged from the processing of wills, and at that point the inclusion of merchant's widows, although remarried, became obvious. It was found simplest to wait until the addenda list was of a reasonable size before the repeat search began.

In this way a group of c. 1,280 merchants in all was studied: 700 for York, for 254 Beverley, 330 for Hull. Although the list cannot claim to include all active merchants associated with the three towns, it must constitute a good cross-section of the occupation, more representative than the top one or two per cent, usually assumed to be

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37. See appendix 1.

38. See note 34.

39. See appendix 1.

typical. That a proportion of these merchants was not recorded in every major source and some appear briefly but dramatically in one source only, suggests that the sample contains a mixture of elite and lesser merchants, as was intended.



## CHAPTER 1 - SOURCES AND INTERPRETATION

Most medieval sources require a degree of circumspection, before assumptions are made as to their significance, and it is appropriate to elaborate some of the technicalities which should be borne in mind relating to the main classes of documents consulted for this thesis. They fall into three main groups: customs records, borough records, and probate records, but other single documents consulted, are listed in the Bibliography. Whatever the pitfalls, and however inconsistent the evidence may be, historians must nevertheless make what they can of the sources at their disposal, without imposing too absolute an interpretation. Scholars in social and economic history concerned as they are with long-term trends, have to balance impressions with quantifiable evidence. Numerical analysis is especially tricky for the medieval period, given the nature of the sources, but the basic quantification employed in sections of this thesis, has been done with a thorough awareness of the interpretive problems associated with specific sources. The following discussion should make that apparent.

#### Customs' Records<sup>1</sup>

To understand customs' records one must first understand the system which produced them. The authoritative description by N.S.B. Gras, The Early English Customs System, Harvard Economic Studies, xviii (1918), cannot be bettered for a detailed analysis of the evolution of the customs' administration and of the development of different customs and subsidy payments.<sup>2</sup>

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1. E. Carson, 'Customs Records as a source for historical research', Archive, 58 (1977).
  2. See also E.M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, eds., England's Export Trade, 1275-1547, (Oxford, 1963), pp. 1-4.

A brief outline, however, will ease the discussion of customs' records. Four main categories of officials dealt with all customs and subsidies and the King's Butler dealt with the custom on wine, but not the subsidy (tunnage).<sup>3</sup> The collectors of customs were appointed to record all shipments, to collect customs and subsidies and to deposit these in a chest, and to give receipts or cockets for moneys paid to them. They also received writs instructing them to transfer customs revenue to assignees<sup>4</sup> and the writs and receipts of such disbursements form their own minor group of customs' records.<sup>5</sup> They were assisted, in royal towns, by a tronnager who weighed the wool being shipped. Clerks were appointed to help the collectors to keep their accounts, but often collected the customs and subsidies themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The controller of customs acted as a check on the collectors and had to keep a counter roll of shipments which was sent with the collectors' rolls to the exchequer.<sup>7</sup> In 1390, Simon Grymsby of Hull was appointed controller of customs there and was instructed to write the rolls with his own hand, presumably to eliminate corrupt clerks.<sup>8</sup> The controller of wool kept one half of the cocket seal.

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3. N.S.B. Gras, The Early English Customs System (Harvard, 1918), p. 87.
  4. Ibid. p. 95. See also M. Mills, 'The Collectors of Customs, in The English Government at Work, ed. J.F. Willard, W.A. Morris, J.R. Strayer, W.H. Dunham (1947).
  5. E.g. E122/60/4, 9, 13-23.
  6. R.L. Baker, 'The English Customs Service, 1307-1343', Trans. Am. Phil. Soc. NS, 51, pt. 6 (1961), pp. 8-9.
  7. This relationship was explicitly acknowledged in a series of Hull collectors' accounts between 13HV and 3HV, which stated that the accounts had been seen and confirmed by the controller. E122/60/22, 24-31.
  8. C.P.R. 1388-91, p. 356.

Searchers were originally appointed in 1299 to search for false money. By 1303 they were possibly acting already against exporters of gold and silver coin, and by 1355 they were definitely doing so. Gradually their responsibilities came to include smuggled goods and they supervised the sale of such goods.

Finally the surveyor acted as supervisor over all customs and subsidies or as the controller of the searchers.<sup>9</sup> All four categories of officials were appointed by the Crown.<sup>10</sup> Locally appointed officials collected local customs.<sup>11</sup>

The oldest payment which these officials were responsible for collecting was the 1275 ancient custom (the new custom until 1303). It was paid by denizens and aliens on wool, woolfells and hides at the rate of 6s.8d. per sack.<sup>12</sup>

In 1303, the new custom (Carta Mercatoria) was introduced, but this was payable by aliens only. It included an ad valorem rate of 3d. in the pound. It was sometimes called the petty custom and soon after 1303, the part which related to wool, woolfells and hides was joined to the 1275 custom and they were collected together as 'the ancient and new customs',<sup>13</sup> and eventually as the great custom (temp. Richard II). Thus alien merchants paid 6s. 8d. (1275 ancient custom, plus 3s. 4d. (1303 new custom), but denizens paid only 6s. 8d. ancient custom.<sup>14</sup>

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9. Early English Customs, pp. 96-98; Alice Beardwood, 'Royal Mints and Exchanges', in English Govt. at Work, III (1950), pp. 53-55.

10. Up to 1294 collectors were selected by the townsmen; from then until 1303 they were appointed by the Crown; from then the appointment reverted to the townsmen again but after 1370 the Crown increasingly assumed responsibility. Baker, 'English Customs Service', pp. 7, 68.

11. Early English Customs, pp. 21-27, 153.

12. Ibid. p. 61.

13. Ibid., pp. 66-71.

14. Ibid. pp. 74-75.

In 1347, responding to an active export trade in cloth, Edward III imposed a cloth custom at differential rates. Denizens paid 2s. 4d. on a dyed, standard assize, woollen cloth, or 1s. 2d. on an undyed one, or 1d. on a single Worsted cloth, or 2d. on a double. Aliens paid 3s. 6d., 1s. 9d., 1½d., or 3d. respectively, in addition to the 2s., 1s. and 3d. in the pound for Worsted cloth demanded under the 1303 custom.<sup>15</sup>

Similar consideration occurred after 1347, as had occurred with the customs on wool, woolfells and hides so that the cloth provisions of 1303 merged with the 1347 custom and became known as the petty custom.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the permanent customs, temporary subsidies were imposed on wool, cloth and other exports and on all imports. There were two subsidies, tunnage and poundage, and they were levied at a specified rate per tun of wine and per pound sterling on other commodities.<sup>17</sup> The collection of subsidies was consolidated with the collection of customs. Thus a single account headed 'account of the great custom and subsidy on wool and woolfells' would include payments based on quantity, due under the 1275 and 1303 customs (the latter applied to aliens only), plus a payment based on the subsidy rate technically on value but effectively at a rate per sack. Apart from the infamous subsidy of 40s. per sack of 1340, the wool subsidy for denizens ranged from 6s. 8d. in 1322 and 1332, to 43s. 4d. in 1369, 1372, 1380 and 1381, and finally settled at 33s. 4d. by c. 1453.<sup>18</sup>

15. Ibid., pp. 72-73.

16. Ibid., p. 85.

17. Ibid., pp. 79-84.

18. Ibid., pp. 79-80. In the 15th century wool exporters could face extra payments if they did not send their wool to the Calais staple, either paying the same rates as aliens or Calais money, ibid., p. 602.

Similarly an account of petty customs and subsidy would include payments on cloth due under the 1303 and 1347 customs based on type and quantity, plus payments assessed ad valorem according to the subsidy rate per pound. Petty customs and subsidy accounts could also include accounts of tunnage and poundage on wine and miscellaneous goods. Increasingly in the 15th century, all four payments were collected together in one account, although the collectors usually recorded wool payments separately. They also kept the totals for each category separately and recorded them separately at the end of each account roll.

All the customs records consulted for this thesis, are in King's Remembrancer Particular Customs Rolls.<sup>19</sup> A more complete set, the Enrolled Accounts of the Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer has survived, but as they contain totals only of Treasurers' Remembrancer customs and subsidies received, their usefulness for this study is marginal. Furthermore, they have been abstracted and published in full elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> All the Particular Account Rolls which between 1307 and 1509 have survived for the port of Hull have been consulted and a full list is included in the bibliography. Not all the Hull rolls are listed together in the P.R.O. index and some are to be found in the miscellaneous section. A sample of rolls from Scarborough (often included in the Hull rolls), Newcastle, and Grimsby was also searched.

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19. W.R.Childs, ed., The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453-1490, Yorks. Arch. Soc. Rec. Ser. cxliv (1986), includes all of those for Hull within those dates. A variety of Particular Accounts are printed in Early English Customs, pp. 223-684. For further examples in print see H.J. Smit ed. Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Handel met Engeland, Schotland, en Ierland, 1150-1485, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1928); G. von der Ropp, ed. Hanserecesse, 1431-76, 7 vols. (Leipzig, 1876-92); C.Frost, Notices relating to the early history of the town and port of Hull, (Hull, 1827), appendix.
20. England's Export Trade, op. cit. This edition repeats much of the earlier discussion of the Enrolled Accounts by H.L. Gray, 'Tables of Enrolled Customs and Subsidy Accounts, 1399-1481', in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century (1933), pp. 321-330.

Customs records can be divided up into four main categories: collectors' and controllers' account rolls; searchers' accounts; writs and receipts; and miscellaneous items. For the purposes of assessing an individual's trade the last three categories have relatively little to offer. The receipts issued under the cocket seal sometimes supplement gaps in other sources and the receipts for the delivery of customs revenue occasionally note the bond of a named individual which was included.<sup>21</sup> The searchers frequently made a 'nil' return but from time to time they noted the details of an attempt to smuggle goods. They also presented accounts of the sale of forfeited goods and the names of the purchasers.<sup>22</sup>

The first category, the collectors' and controllers' rolls, are invaluable. They record the name of each vessel, the date on which it entered or left the port, its place of origin, and its master's name. The cargo was listed by ownership; thus next to the name of each merchant is a list of his goods. Wool was listed separately from woolfells and cloth from lead in export shipments, and miscellaneous imported goods were listed separately from wine so that a merchant's name might appear twice in one ship's cargo list. In the collectors' rolls the amount of customs and subsidy paid was recorded, whereas the controller recorded only the quantity or valuation of a commodity.<sup>23</sup> The controllments, do indeed provide a check on the controllers' account rolls as was intended. Where a check is possible, because both are complete for a single year, the accounts tally by 90% - 95%.<sup>24</sup>

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21. E.g. E122/60/4.

22. E.g. E122/60/35; 61/57.

23. See examples of both types in Early English Customs, pp. 435-39.

24. E.g. E122/62/9 and 10; 62/16 and 17.

Otherwise the controllment may be the only surviving account.<sup>25</sup>

Occasionally the rolls recorded only totals for each ship and not the cargos of individuals<sup>26</sup> or they mixed ship's totals with detailed cargo lists.<sup>27</sup>

As a consequence of the different customs and subsidies levied, each commodity was recorded differently. Exported wool and woolfells and hides were recorded by quantity; cloth by type and quality, or value; lead by quantity and value; miscellaneous exports by type and value. Miscellaneous imports were recorded by type, value, and quantity and wine by quantity and/or value.

As we have seen, the consolidation of customs and subsidies and their collection by the same collector, meant that a merchant exporting cloth and wool could be paying four rates at once on two different bases. His wool was assessed by quantity for the ancient custom and ad valorem, per sack for the subsidies. In the petty custom account rolls, his cloth was assessed only for the 1347 custom and so the cloth was recorded by type, usually straight undyed cloth from Hull, and by quantity, the number of pieces or occasionally a continuous strip measured in ells. In the customs and subsidy roll, cloth was assessed at the same customs rate together with the poundage subsidy,<sup>28</sup> and so the value of the cloth was recorded but not the quantity nor the specific type. This means that in a customs and subsidy roll the values per cloth cannot be calculated and in the petty customs roll, the value has to be estimated from average valuations calculated elsewhere. Occasionally, all the

25. E.g. for the petty customs 2-3 RII, E122/59/3 and for poundage 12-13 RII, E122/59/14.

26. E122/57/3, 4, 5 (6-8 EII), 10 (16-17 EIII); 60/38, 42 (4-6 HV).

27. E122/58/3 (8-9 EIII)

28. 12d. in the £ in 1433. Early English Customs, op. cit., p. 83.

goods being exported were lumped together so that it is not possible to isolate the value of different commodities.<sup>29</sup> However, it is always possible to differentiate between petty customs and customs and subsidy rolls, even when the heading or foot has not survived, by the form of entry and the amounts paid.

Two other problems arise in analysing Particular Customs Rolls. Not all rolls cover a complete year, the exchequer year from Michaelmas, but sometimes cover a three or six month period only.<sup>30</sup> Often in the 14th century the accounts for exports and imports have not survived for the same years,<sup>31</sup> but for successive or random periods. There is then, the possibility that any single merchant will fail to appear in the account rolls for a particular year because of the haphazard pattern of survival. However, part-year rolls became less common from the mid-14th century, and it rapidly became apparent that since a characteristic of the successful merchant was the frequency of his trading ventures<sup>32</sup> it was unlikely that his activities would be lost altogether. The most likely category of merchant to fall through the gaps in the rolls, was therefore the small-scale merchant, and the numbers in this category must always be underestimated.

Finally, what of the under-recording of the collectors and controllers themselves? Evasion of customs and subsidies was a major problem for the medieval exchequer.<sup>33</sup>

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29. E.g. on 1 June 7 EIV Nicholas Elys and others shipped goods to the value of £480 which included 80 lasts of barley meal, 70 lasts of beer, 200 ells of linen cloth. E122/60/10.
30. E.g. E122/60/2 which runs from Easter 2 HIV until 7 July the same year for the collection of a subsidy of 2s. per tun of wine and 8d. in the £.
31. See the full list in the bibliography.
32. See below, pp. 159-60.
33. England's export Trade, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-31; J.B. Blake, 'Medieval Smuggling in the North East', *Arch. Aeliana*. 4th ser. xliii (1965).



During the agreements negotiated between Edward III and the wool merchants in 1337, 1340 and 1341, an embargo was placed on wool exports by anyone other than official collectors. Smuggling inevitably occurred as merchants tried to evade legal restrictions on their private exports. It has been calculated that about 2,500 sacks were illegally exported in 1337-38.<sup>34</sup>

The involvement of merchants in smuggling is well illustrated by the case of a group of York merchants led by Henry and John Goldbeter, Thomas Gra, William Acastre and Walter de Kelstern and others involved in the wool collection. They were accused in their absence of illegal practices in 1340, but were clearly too useful to the king in other respects for serious steps to be taken against them. Thus in September 1341 Walter de Kelstern was appointed to a commission to search all the shipping along the Humber coast for uncustomed goods, and in November of the same year Henry Goldbeter was similarly appointed to search specifically for uncustomed wool,<sup>35</sup> the commodity he may well have been smuggling! John Goldbeter was caught in the act, fined £200 and then pardoned in October 1338. In 1341 his wool was arrested by the collectors of York, and he claimed that although it was loaded in a small boat at Selby he was not trying to avoid customs' payments. An inquiry was ordered but Goldbeter "procured the men on it" so a new one was summoned.<sup>36</sup> John Goldbeter was accused of smuggling wool again in 1346 and 1363. He was not always pardoned and was in the Fleet prison in 1346.<sup>37</sup>

34. E.B. Fryde, Edward III's Wool Monopoly of 1337, History (1952).

35. C.C.R. 1339-41, p. 655; C.P.R. 1340-43, p. 323; P.R.O., C. 76/16.

36. C.P.R. 1338-40, p. 191; 1340-43, pp. 212, 303.

37. C.C.R. 1346-9, pp. 187, 241; C.P.R. 1361-4, p. 342; 1364-67, p. 46.

Smuggling continued well into the 15th century and all sorts of gambits were used to avoid the royal officials. In 1417 Beverley merchants disguised wool by storing it in barrels, and York merchants were accused of by-passing the customers at Hull and secretly loading wool at Ravenspur. Hull merchants smuggled as well and in 1439 Robert Aunsell used John Goldbeter's small boat techniques to good effect at Patrington, downriver from Hull. Avoiding the staple was also a common practice. John Jackson of Hull, for example, shipped his wool straight to Vere from Hull and not to the Calais staple in 1475.<sup>38</sup> Wool was the most commonly smuggled commodity although other goods were sometimes smuggled. Nicholas Stubbs of Hull smuggled flour and other items in 1439, to the value of £33 6s. 8d., but was pardoned.<sup>39</sup> He served as a customs' official and illustrates one of the greatest difficulties facing the Crown in trying to prevent smuggling. The men with the necessary experience and local knowledge were the local merchants, and it was they who most often smuggled and it was they whom the Crown most often had to appoint. This may well explain the large numbers of 'Nil' returns from the Hull searchers. Merchants also acted as valuers of goods forfeited to the crown by smugglers, and some of their fellow merchants were usually the ultimate purchasers of such goods.<sup>40</sup>

Inevitably, this hidden and incalculable traffic distorts an individual's trading figures, as well as those for specific ports and for the nation.

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38. Bronnen I, pp. 589-90, 753, 1116.

39. C.P.R. 1436-41, pp. 294-95.

40. E166/61/57; E122/61/57.

The dates of the three periods in which overseas trading activity has been examined, were determined by the survival of the customs' accounts listed in the Bibliography. By good fortune, each period coincided with periods of significant national developments and demonstrated different characteristics. The first, 1306-1336, covers the years when wool accounted for the bulk of England's exports and denizens were beginning to replace alien merchants in handling the trade. The second, 1378-1408, covers the years when cloth was poised to overtake wool as the major commodity exported, and the third, 1460-1500, the years when wool had been eclipsed by cloth and the import trade had expanded and diversified.

Ending the first period at 1336, has the advantage of including all the substantial particular accounts of Edward III's reign (after 1333-34, E122/58/3, the extant manuscripts are almost entirely writs, receipts and records of seizures), and of excluding the years of the Edward's wool monopoly, 1337, and the years of his heavy borrowing from syndicates and from merchants of the wool company. As repayment of these royal loans was in the form of a reduction in the custom and subsidy payable on wool exports, it can lead to confusion as to what specific licences were for.

In the course of one of Edward III's loan-raising exercises between December 1338 and autumn 1340, a number of merchants from the three towns appeared, as it were from the woodwork, who had not been traced in any earlier customs' records. They were licenced to export wool, quit of custom and subsidy at £2 per sack, as the form of their repayment, and are listed in Appendix 1. Such extraordinary circumstances did not seem to warrant their inclusion as they were active in overseas trade on that occasion as junior and temporary partners in the syndicate headed by John

Goldbeter, William Acastre and Thomas Lindsey who in turn were collaborating with Walter Chiriton and Co. The activities of these syndicates have been described in detail by Professor Edmund Fryde and it seems reasonable to suppose that the money they raised for Edward III, was drawn in part, from a circle of lesser merchants who then had to become involved in the wool trade as the only means of recovering their loans.<sup>41</sup>

The final period was extended from thirty years to forty, in an attempt to net as many as possible of the rapidly disappearing Yorkshiremen, during years when the survival of particular customs' rolls was increasingly patchy.

Once the terminal dates of each period had been determined, only merchants active within them were included in the analysis of trade. The intention was to gain as firm an impression as possible, of the scale of a merchant's overseas' business. To that end, his trading outside the specific periods was also considered, so that a reasonably full picture of each individual could be obtained. It was apparent that it would not be possible to cover a man's life-time with any certainty, that his level of business would fluctuate, and that one could not always be sure of calculating even one year's trade due to the possibility of poor record keeping and to the partial coverage of some rolls. The inadequacies of the source apply to all merchants so erroneous interpretations are constant.

Even though a numerical analysis has been made, it must be borne in mind that calculations were made simply to confirm impressions for without some quantification of individual trading patterns and of the

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41. E.B. Fryde, Some Business Transactions of York Merchants, Borthwick Papers, no. 29 (1966).

numbers of merchants active, the discussion would have to be conducted in vague terms. It might have been sufficient to describe the changing pattern and scale of trade over time, but it soon became clear that the numbers of active merchants changed and it was decided to group the merchants for each period into categories, to determine if their relative numerical significance was also changing. This posed further problems since numbers imply an absolute certainty, which the sources do not warrant, and it may be that merchants from the three towns have been omitted because of the difficulty of identifying their home base. However, once again, the intention was to arrive at a firmer impression than would be possible without quantification. If any individuals have eluded the net, they would most likely be the less active and smaller scale merchants whose appearance in the customs' rolls was infrequent anyway. These omissions would not significantly qualify any conclusions about the changes in the relationship between the different categories, since the lesser merchants always constituted the largest group.

The details of some merchants have been omitted. John and Henry Goldbeter, William Acastre, Richard and William de la Pole have already been studied in extensive detail during the late 1330s and 1340s. The scale of their enterprises puts them into a separate category of super merchants, but they have been included as C category merchants in the numerical analysis.

#### Borough Records.

The records of successful medieval English boroughs usually contain some charters of privileges, the milestones on their route to autonomy, financial records, and some form of precedents' book. Financial records can include lists of the entry fines paid by freemen, rentals, collections of deeds, and chamberlain/treasurers' account rolls. The precedents' book was a compendium of significant borough regulations,

which occasionally developed into a book of regular record. There may be earlier versions of the precedents' book or the working papers of borough officials. The basis on which items were copied, must have been partly dependent on the chance survival of documents, on memory, and on the wishful thinking of borough councils, as they responded to their growing power with the demand that written records should be kept.

Of the three towns studied here, York's records were, not surprisingly, the most prolific and well organised. The main categories consulted are the freemen's rolls, which have a prefatory section of odds and ends; the memoranda books<sup>42</sup> and their successors, the house books;<sup>43</sup> and the 14 chamberlains' account rolls.<sup>44</sup> Unlike York there are no separate freemen's rolls extant for Beverley, but lists were recorded on the dorse of several chamberlains' account rolls, 16 of which have survived for the period 1344-1502. The paper cartulary, great gild book and governors' minute book are Beverley's memoranda and books of record.<sup>45</sup> A small collection of deeds completes the main Beverley sources. Like Beverley, Hull has no separate freemen's rolls, but lists have survived in three of the bench books,<sup>46</sup> Hull's precedent/record books. These also contain repetitive copies of borough regulations. An

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42. M. Sellars, ed. York Memorandum Book, 2 vols. Surtees Society, cxx (1911), cxxv (1914).

43. Not very satisfactorily edited by A. Raine, York Civic Records, I-III, Yorks. Arch. Soc. xcvi (1939), ciii (1941), cvi (1942).

44. R.B. Dobson, ed. York City Chamberlains' Account Rolls 1396-1500, Surtees Soc. cxvii (1980).

45. Extracts from all the Beverley sources appear in; A.F. Leach, ed. Beverley Town Documents. Seldon Society, xiv (1900); Report on the Manuscripts of the Corporation of Beverley. Hist. MSS. Comm. (1900). M. Bateson, ed., Borough Customs, 2 vols. Seldon Soc. xviii (1904), xxi (1906).

46. Hull Corp. BRG 1; BRE 1; BRE 2; BRB 1.

unrivalled series of 56 chamberlains' rolls have survived in Hull and the city has a good collection of deeds.<sup>47</sup>

Of these records, the precedents' or memoranda books present the most serious problems of interpretation and these concern repetition of items and dating. Successive generations recorded earlier regulations more than once, but whether or not this was pro forma is unclear. The problem of dating earlier entries in the Beverley cartulary, the York Memorandum book and the Hull Bench Books is usually overcome by referring to the witnesses to enrolled deeds, or the names of borough officials usually recorded to date the item. Dates for office-holders can be derived elsewhere, but great care must be taken as the terms of different offices did not always coincide. Thus in York the mayor and chamberlains eventually began their year on 3 February, but the bailiffs' and then sheriff's term began on 29 September.<sup>48</sup>

The records of each town have been used to establish the political careers of merchants, their official responsibilities and the nature of the governments in which they were active.

#### Probate Records.

There is an excellent collection of wills preserved in the York Diocesan Probate Registers, which begin in 1389. They contain the copies of wills which were proved before the Diocesan Exchequer Court,<sup>49</sup> in which the archbishop had jurisdiction over testamentary matters. The

47. K.M. Stanewell, Calendar of the Ancient Deeds, Letters, Miscellaneous Old Documents etc. in the Archives of the Corporation, Hull (1951). The account rolls for 1321-34, and 1464-65 have been edited, together with a selection of rentals in R. Horrox, ed. Selected Rentals and Accounts of Medieval Hull, 1293-1528, Yorks Arch. Soc. Rec. Ser. cxli (1983).

48. See below, pp. 278-83.

49. See C.I.A. Richie, The Ecclesiastical Courts of York, (Arbroath, 1956), pp. 13, 19 for a fuller discussion of this court.

grant of probate was also recorded, together with the will, and a note of the granting of administration acts. The commencement of a new register at York was most likely undertaken in response to the increase in the number of wills being registered. There is no evidence of an earlier register, and wills had previously been enrolled in the general registers of the archbishop, possibly when probate had been administered by him in person, or following a visitation by himself or his Official.

Such wills continued to be enrolled in the registers after 1389, and several of the Beverley and Hull wills are of this kind. The other probate court, the peculiar court of the Dean and Chapter of York Minster, kept a separate register.<sup>50</sup>

It has been said recently that wills constitute a class of record where casualties have been heavy, and the undoubted relationship between the number which have survived and the numbers which were originally written poses a problem. Incomplete registration, exceptional manuscript losses, and wholesale damage may account for the small numbers of wills which have survived in some dioceses for the period before 1500<sup>51</sup> but where there has been a good survival rate, as in York,<sup>52</sup> there is a steady increase in the number of wills proved each year between 1389 and 1500.

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50. The Probate Registers and the Archbishops' Registers are in the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, and the Dean and Chapters' collection of wills are in the Minster Library, York.

The following MSS abbreviations have been used; probate registers - Prob. Reg., Archbishops' Registers - Arch. Reg. Printed indexes have been published by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series. Wills in the York Registry, 1389-1514, vi, (1889); Dean and Chapter Wills, 1321-1636, xxxviii (1907); Wills in the Registers of the Archbishops of York, 1316-1822, xcii (1936).

51. A.K. McHardy, 'Some Late-Medieval Eton College Wills', Jnl. Eccl. Hist. xxviii (1977), pp. 387-88.

52. The high survival rate in the York Diocese was probably due to the greater formality and clerical efficiency which existed in archiepiscopal administrations.



Various explanations of this rise in the numbers of extant wills have been offered. Many wills which dealt with small estates were perhaps never proved because the beneficiaries were in agreement and the executors thought that it would be a waste of money to pay the probate fees.<sup>53</sup> It might be that there were fewer sizeable estates in the fourteenth century and thus fewer wills, but this would be difficult to prove or disprove,<sup>54</sup> since many wills disposed of very small sums of money and property but left the size of the residue unspecified.<sup>55</sup>

Will-making seems to have been a habit acquired by the newly wealthy, merchants and craftsmen in particular, towards the end of the fourteenth century and once adopted by them it became fashionable. A person newly accumulating possessions becomes concerned about their eventual disposal. A similar concern emerged with regard to real estate, and the desire to exercise more control over that, hastened the development of the use in the early fifteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

It must also be remembered that York, Beverley and Hull, as elsewhere, experienced a growing concern about provisions for a proper burial, as reflected in the emergence of religious guilds<sup>57</sup> and a

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53. McHardy, 'Eton College Wills', op. cit., pp. 387-8.

54. In fact, in so far as the size of estates can be calculated from testamentary evidence (see p.213), most large cash bequests made were by merchants before 1450. V.C.H. York, p. 105.

55. For example, Prob. Reg. IV f. 181 (Bennington); V. f. 8v. (Fisher).

56. M.M. Sheehan, The Will in Medieval England (Toronto, 1963), p. 279; J.N.W. Bean, Decline of English Feudalism, 1215-1540 (Manchester, 1968), pp. 104-05, 148-55.

57. W.R. Jones, 'English Religious Brotherhoods and Medieval Lay Piety: the inquiry of 1388-89', The Historian: A Journal of History, 36 (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 646-59; B.A. Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the lights: later medieval English parish guilds', Jnl. Med. and Ren. Studies, 14 (1984), pp. 21-37.

renewed interest in spiritual benevolence in the early fifteenth century. Even if a testator did not reflect the impact of Lollard teaching in the phraseology of the religious preamble to his will<sup>58</sup> he may have been encouraged to involve himself more immediately in choosing how to invest his portion in his spiritual future, as well as in his family's future.

Testamentary law might also have encouraged will making in the 15th century (the position vis-a-vis intestacy did not change from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century). In the Northern Province of the church, as in London,<sup>59</sup> wills were subject to the custom of legitim, whereby personal property was divided into three parts. This system of legitim recognised the rights of the wife and children to two thirds of the testators' estate, one third to the wife, the other third equally divided between the children. If either children or wife were sole survivors, then the estate was divided into two parts.<sup>60</sup> The custom did not apply to real estate and had evolved through ecclesiastical encouragement to testators to make provision for their souls and for their dependents. According to a decision by the lords in parliament in 1366, cases concerning legitim could not be dealt with in common law and so such cases became the responsibility of the church courts. In common law, the settlement of debts was always given priority.

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58. This discussed briefly in M.G.A. Vale, Piety, Charity and Literacy Among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480, Borthwick Papers No. 50, (York, 1976), pp. 14-15, Dr Vale concludes that wills cannot be used by themselves as evidence of Lollard sympathies.

59. Kay Lacey, 'Women and Work in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century London', in L. Charles & L. Duffin, eds., Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England (1985), pp. 34-36; F. Pollock & F. Maitland, eds., The History of English Law, II (2nd edition, 1911), p. 351.

60. T.F.T. Plucknett, A Concise History of the Common Law, 5th ed. (1956), pp. 743-45; W.S. Holdsworth, History of English Law, III (1909), p. 434.

In the event of intestacy, the same divisions were made, but the administrator, appointed by the court, had the disposal of the dead's part at his own discretion and it may have been as Blackstone believed, that the administrator had the use of the dead's part for himself.<sup>61</sup> From the late fourteenth century, it seems that more people were prepared to act positively to ensure that that eventuality would not arise.

Although the law regarding married women's rights in testamentary matters was still in the process of evolving during the late medieval period, women could and did make wills, albeit only with their husband's consent. A wife had legal control over her dowry, the cash or property which she brought with her on marriage; over her dower,<sup>62</sup> that portion allowed her on the death of her husband, for her life; over her *maritagium*, part of the dowry given to the husband and returned to the wife on his death; and over the morning gift made by her husband on the morning after the consummation of the marriage.<sup>63</sup> Married women could not legally devise property but once widowed, their status reverted to that of a single woman, a femme sole. In London married women did devise property but only when they had announced their intention to do so and had made an affidavit with their husbands in the Court of Hustings.<sup>64</sup> Other London customs relating to married women also obtained

61. G.D. Lamb, ed. Testamenta Leodiensia, Thoresby Soc., xix (1913), pp. vi-vii.

62. Robert Holme of York left his wife Margaret one third of all his lands and tenements, for her dower, 'as of right accustomed', in 1433. Prob. Reg. III f. 365.

63. Lacey, Women and Work in London, p. 31. In 1344 the Commons in Parliament supported the claims of a widower to act against his wife's executors if he had not consented to the probate of her will. Pollock & Maitland, English Law, II, p. 429.

64. Lacey, Women and Work in London, p. 41.

in York,<sup>65</sup> but it is not clear if the husband's formal consent gave them the right to devise property.

The majority (90%) of the wills consulted for this study, all copies, were proved before the Diocesan Exchequer Court in which the archbishop had jurisdiction over testamentary affairs. The remaining 10% were proved before the archbishop in person, or before the peculiar court of the Dean of Chapter of York Minster. *Each will was drawn up to a standard format: religious preamble, distribution of real estate and moveables, and the appointment of executors and naming of the residuary beneficiaries.* In one instance the disposal of property was by a deed of gift which was accepted for probate and enrolled in the probate register; William Marshall disposed of his estate to his wife thus in 1450.<sup>66</sup>

By the late fourteenth century, wills normally dealt with real estate as well as with moveable property.<sup>67</sup> Burgage property was freely devised in York, Beverley, and Hull, and was treated as though it were a piece of moveable property.<sup>68</sup> Inventories of goods are unusual before 1500, although the detail in some wills suggests that they may have been compiled with some form of list in mind. The standardised format

65. E.g. married women could register to trade like a single woman and acted like men in regard to debts and contracts Ibid., p. 45; Maud Sellers, ed., York Memorandum Book, II, Surtees Society, cxxv (1915), pp. 144, 145

66. Dec. & Cap. I f. 269.

67. The testamentum strictly dealt with personal property, chattels, money, and debts. The ultima voluntas dealt with real estate and had come to be regarded as a means of conveying instructions to feoffees in the 15th century. By the 14th century, both sections were usually contained in one document. Pollock & Maitland, English Law, II, p. 331. See also E.F. Jacob, ed. The Register of Henry Chichele, II, Canterbury and York Soc. xlii (1937), pp. xix-xxi for this development in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

68. M.B. II, p. 253; C. Ch. R. 1257-1300, pp. 475-76.

suggests that clerks were responsible for drawing up most wills,<sup>69</sup> and idiosyncratic comments or even conditions of inheritance, are rare.<sup>70</sup>

Wills are endlessly fascinating to read if it is remembered that they were as much a personal statement of the most general kind as they were instruments for the disposal of estates. Their interpretation, however, poses problems. Older children might have been omitted from a will because they had already received a settlement<sup>71</sup> and could legally claim no more from the estate.<sup>72</sup> Other property might not be included in a will;<sup>73</sup> property acquired after the will was drawn up would have to be dealt with in a codicil. The majority of the wills read, however, were proved within four months of being written; almost all within one year.<sup>74</sup> For this reason the year of probate has been used as the year of death.

69. Isabelle Cottesbrooke, in 1408, and John Petty in 1508, left money to the clerk who drew up the will. Dec. & Cap. I f. 145, II f. 76v. In smaller communities it is easier to identify scribes. M. Spufford, 'The Scribes of Villagers' Wills in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', Local Population Studies, No. 7 (autumn 1971), pp. 28-43.

70. Cf. R.B. Dobson, 'The Residentiary Canons of York in the Fifteenth Century', Jnl. Eccl. Hist. xxx (1979), pp. 159-60, where the individual phraseology of the religious preambles to the canons' wills is discussed.

71. For example, Thomas Gare of York gave his son all his property in 1427 in return for a life pension. Thomas was dead by 1435. York Corp. B/Y f. 47; R.H. Skaife, ed. The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York, Surtees Society, lvii (1872), p. 248. John Gregg of Hull made a settlement of cash, silver spoons and a lease on a house on his daughter in 1431. No mention is made of her in his will of 1437. BRE 1 p. 263. Cf. G.A. Williams, Medieval London: from commune to capital (1963), p. 316.

72. G.D. Lamb, Testamenta Leodiensia, op. cit. p. vii.

73. Dobson, 'Residentiary Canons', op. cit. p. 169.

74. E.F. Jacob found that Canterbury wills were proved within two months on average. Register of Henry Chichele, op. cit. p. xxv.

Debtors were supposed to have the first claim on an estate but testators usually relegated consideration of debts to the end of their wills, before they disposed of any residue. It is therefore not possible to know whether or not an estate could fulfil the bequests made.

Occasionally a merchant anticipated such difficulties. John Barden of York made arrangements in his will in 1396 to the effect that if property had to be sold, then it should be his manor of Kydall.<sup>75</sup>

The custom of legitim raises problems of interpretation.<sup>76</sup> Should it be assumed that the married male testator was disposing of only his third, the 'dead's part', in his will? There is some evidence to suggest that such indeed was the case. William Marshall of York, spoke of portions in his will of 1492, as being 'as is the custom of the city of York', and Thomas Gra of York left his wife Alice £10 out of his part, as well as 'the ascertained portion belonging to her by right'.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, Robert Flinton of Hull (d. 1491), asked that all his property (with exception of 2s. 2d. and some clothing), should be divided into two portions, one each for his wife and son,<sup>78</sup> as though such a division would not automatically be made.

It is impossible to resolve this ambiguity in most wills and so the figures given in this study are simple totals of the cash recorded in each will.

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75. Holdsworth, English Law, p. 350; Prob. Reg. I f. 100.

76. Real estate was not the subject of legitim. S.J. Bailey, The Law of Wills, 7th ed. (1973), pp. 12, 21.

77. Prob. Reg. V f. 424-25v., III f. 235. Thomas Aldestanemore of York, d. 1435, and John Dalton, jnr., of Hull, d. 1496, both specified bequests to be made from their own portions, ibid., f. 413, V f. 484. Margaret Blackburn, widow of Nicholas, jnr., in 1435 asked for her portion to be used to supplement one of the bequests in her husband's will if necessary, ibid., f. 417.

78. Ibid., V f. 401.

It should be noted that local losses have left us with virtually no wills registered in York between 1409 and 1425; none for 1470 and a few other years provide partial registration.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, a will was only a statement of intention, and in some instances a testator's ambitions may have exceeded his resources. Nonetheless, wills are one of the best sources available and if it is accepted that wills were at the very least an assessment by the testator of his own situation,<sup>80</sup> then the amount of cash and real estate disposed of, can be accepted as an indication of an individual's resources. Probate evidence then, has been used in correlating merchants' scale of trade, cash assets, and investment in land. It has also been used to explore something of the testator's perception of himself, his attitude towards his family, fellow burgesses, the church and society at large.

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79. Index of Wills in the York Registry 1389-1514, Y.A.S. Rec. Ser. vi (1880), Appendix I, pp. 199-202.

80. Joel Rosenthal, The Purchase of Paradise (1972), p. 81. See also Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, op. cit. pp. 6-7.

## CHAPTER 2 - THE THREE TOWNS

The 14th and 15th centuries were a testing time for many English towns and even those which had been advantaged by the grant of borough status were not immune to economic decay. The preceding two centuries have been dubbed the 'Golden Age' of towns and the proliferation of urban centres, while reflecting the expanding economies of several regions, did create rivalries and competition which reduced many centres to their former level of overgrown villages and small market towns by the early 14th century.<sup>1</sup>

It was not only competition from rural textile workers which undermined formerly thriving and prosperous regional capitals. Many experienced a series of demographic crises which seriously depleted their stock of skills. The entrepreneurial class was particularly fragile and towns had to adjust their economic aspirations as their access to long-distance trade changes, as their own merchant groups' were weakened by mortality crises, to changes in the direction and nature of overseas trade, and to the challenge of the superior financial resources of London. The 'spiral of decay'<sup>2</sup> resulting from a combination of events, has been elaborated many times.<sup>3</sup> What is difficult to establish is how far contemporaries, trapped in the mentality of growth, perceived any slackening of economic activity as decline.<sup>4</sup> In 1512 Henry VIII legislated to try to halt extensive urban

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1. Of 23 boroughs created in north-west Lancashire between 1066 and 1372, only four had retained borough status by 1500. R.P. Beckinsale, *Urbanisation in England to A.D. 1400*, in *Urbanisation and its Problems*, eds. R.P. Beckinsale and J.M. Houston (1968), 37.
  2. C. Phythian-Adams, in 'Coventry and the Problem of Urban Decay in the Later Middle Ages', an unpublished paper to the Economic History Conference, first used the phrase.
  3. See page 4, note 9 above.
  4. D.M. Palliser, 'A Crisis in English Towns? The case of York, 1460-1640', *Northern History*, xiv (1978).



decay, and by then over 50 major provincial towns, nine with populations over 4,000, were so affected. York and Hull were the subject of similar legislation in 1541.<sup>5</sup>

From the vantage point of a half millenium later, historians cannot agree about the scale of urban recession, nor about its effects on the economy as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Two things however are certain, many urban economies experienced a relatively sudden halt to the growth most had been enjoying up to the end of the 14th century, and the degree and pace of the recession, and subsequent recovery, differed from town to town.

The three towns discussed here, exemplify that variation of experience. York, the second city in England, enjoyed a tremendous expansion of its economy between 1340 and 1400 as its involvement in overseas trade and its production of textiles grew. Thereafter the city went into a recession, which deepened as the 15th century wore on, and the recovery did not commence until the mid-16th century with the re-establishment of the Council of the North, and the arrival of the Ecclesiastical Commission there.<sup>7</sup> Beverley, equally established as a manufacturing town, but more actively engaged in overseas trade than York in the early 14th century, declined as her neighbour Hull grew in importance as the outport for the Yorkshire textile industry. As York and Hull enjoyed a period of economic buoyancy in the late 14th century, Beverley was already slipping back into a lower level role as a local market centre. 'Decay' in Beverley's case, was perhaps

5. Statutes of the Realm, 3 HVIII c. 8, 32 HVIII c. 18.
6. A.R. Bridbury, 'English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages', Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xxxiv (1981); R. Tittler, 'Late Medieval Urban Prosperity', ibid. xxxvii (1984); A.R. Bridbury, 'Late Medieval Urban Prosperity: A Rejoinder', ibid.
7. D.M. Palliser, Tudor York (Oxford, 1979), pp. 260-64.

less severe, but harder to reverse with no obvious new economic stimulous, and as late as 1599, Beverley was still regarded as a town in trouble.<sup>8</sup> Hull, in contrast, was something of an upstart within Yorkshire, and although use was made of it as a port, by other merchants, its own direct involvement in trade did not really take off until the mid-14th century. Thereafter the town's fortunes were closely tied to fluctuations in overseas trade, irrespective of the nationality of the merchants involved. Recession hit Hull relatively late, was not so severe because there was no extensive manufacturing base to be undermined, and recovery was earlier. Hull experienced a short-lived expansion in the first decades of the 16th century, and a more sustained recovery in the second half of the century as commercial traffic increased once more. The three towns therefore provide useful contrasts and similarities of experience.

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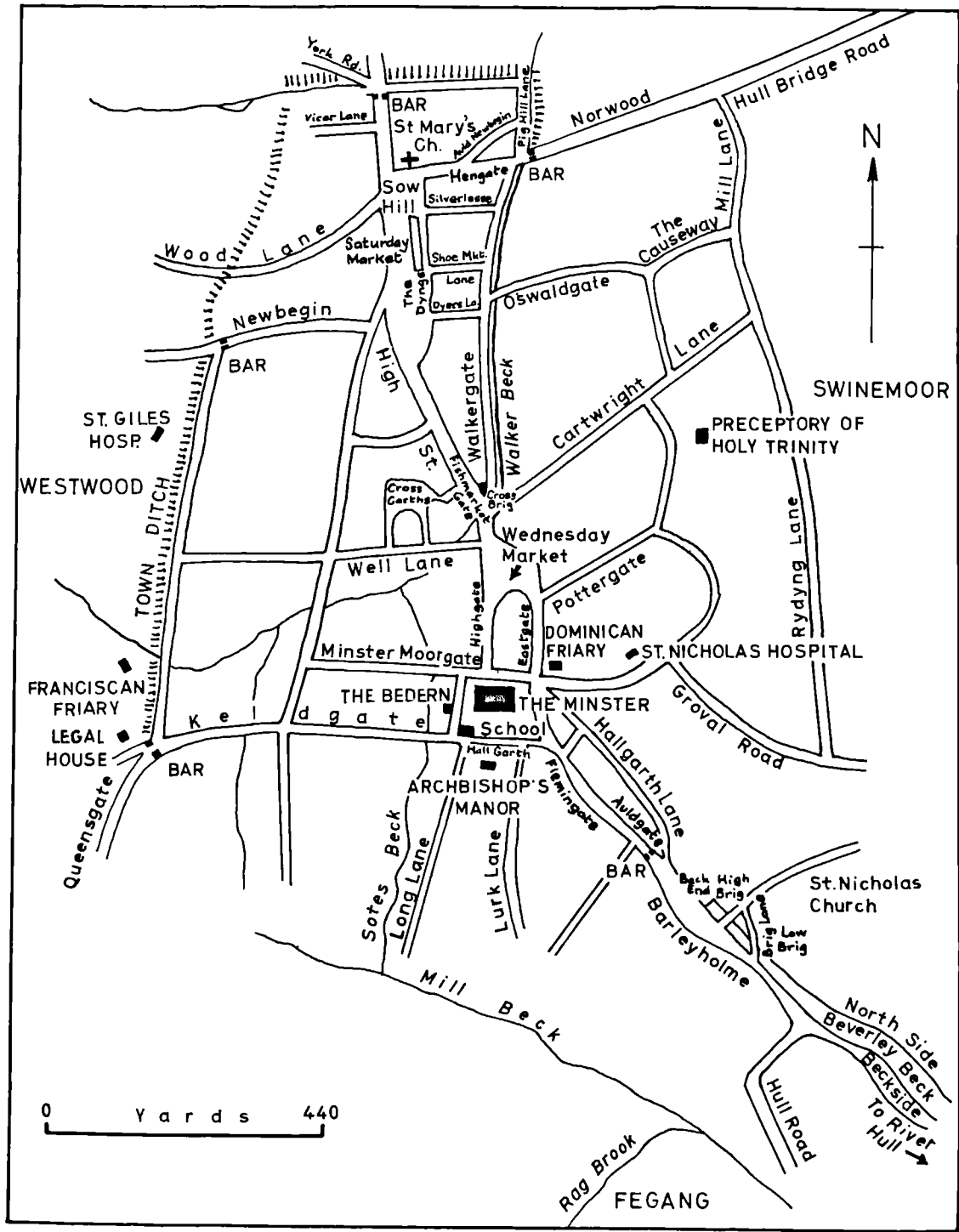
8. G. Poulson, Beverlac; or the antiquities and history of the town of Beverley (London, 1829) p. 338.

BEVERLEY

The community at Beverley grew up around the shrine of St. John of Beverley, bishop of York from 705 to 718. He was credited with a number of miracles during his lifetime, and after his burial in 721 his relics were credited with miraculous powers and his shrine at Beverley attracted pilgrims from far and near. It is not definitely established whether or not his place of burial was Beverley, but the connection was widely accepted. The minster's buildings and endowments were enlarged by the last three anglo-saxon archbishops of York and William the Conqueror issued a charter of privileges to St. John's.<sup>9</sup> The site of the town at the minster gates was not chosen for its military, administrative or commercial advantage, although it lies on the edge of the plain which extends from the foothills of the Wolds to the Humber. Beverley was not on any major road or waterway routes, and its initial expansion was due to the business generated by pilgrims to St. John's.

Ecclesiastical dominance persisted in Beverley until 1573.<sup>10</sup> The archbishops of York were lords of the town and had a manor house beside the minster from which they administered their extensive properties in the East Riding.<sup>11</sup> Their officials were directly involved in the government of the town in a supervisory capacity, and successive archbishops were extremely tenacious in protecting their prerogatives against the ambitions of the burgesses, and indeed against any Crown

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9. G. Poulson, Beverlac, I, 26-34; A. Raine ed., Historians of the Church of York, I. Rolls Series (1879), pp. liv-lix. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England. Supplementary Series: 4. Beverley. An Archaeological and Architectural Study (1982), pp. 7-9.
10. Grant of incorporation by Elizabeth I. Poulson, Beverlac, I, pp. 321-2.
11. E.g. Wetwang and Beverley manors. Cal. Inq. Misc. iv, 1377-8, pp. 212-6.



### MEDIEVAL BEVERLEY

*Reproduced by kind permission of N. Heard from his unpublished Hull thesis  
Beverley Minster and Government*

officials who intruded.<sup>12</sup> During archbishop Neville's long dispute with the chapter at Beverley Minster, he made Beverley the capital of the diocese.<sup>13</sup>

There were two small areas in the town free from archiepiscopal control; the Provost's Fee and the Chapter's fee, which although technically distinct, together constituted the lordship of the minster in Beverley. The canons of the minster owned several churches, the right to collect thraves from the East Riding, and an extensive and unusual right of sanctuary.<sup>14</sup> It is likely that the earliest commercial centre was around the site of the minster's ascension day fair, close to St. John's church, between Eastgate and Highgate. This site was subsequently built over after a new market place was laid out in the late 12th-early 13th centuries, just to the south of St. Mary's church.<sup>15</sup> Other evidence suggests an upsurge in the town's economy in the mid-late 12th century, quite independent of its role as a pilgrimage centre. The town received its first recorded borough charter in c. 1120 from archbishop Thurstan.<sup>16</sup> In the 1120s, Henry I extended the fair of the archbishop and the canons from two to five days, and at this time, the canons had three annual fairs; more than York. The shift of market activity from the south to the north of the town in the following century, brought changes to St. Mary's church. It underwent substantial enlargement and in 1269 a vicarage was instituted there, although St. Mary's did not become a parish church until the 17th century. Burgage

12. See below, p. 292.

13. K. Edwards, The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages, (Manchester, 2nd edit 1969) p.101.

14. Bev. Chapter Act Book, pp. xxxvii-xliii.

15. H.M.C. Beverley, pp. 17-8.

16. Early Yorks. Charters, I, pp. 90-1.

plots were laid out in blocks alongside the new market place and some, to the west of North Bar, were probably laid out on former cultivated open field ridges. In 1282, archbishop William Wickwane gave the town a hall, sited in the new market place. It was known as the Bishop's Dyngs, later simply as the Dyngs, and was probably a sort of guildhall with shops below.<sup>17</sup>

Beverley men must have been active in regional trade from early in the town's history; the expansion of its market facilities testifies to that. However, although the town had good access to the Wolds, there is little evidence that Beverley merchants were heavily engaged in exporting wool until the early 14th century. There is evidence though, that local woollen cloth, manufactured and finished within the town, brought Beverley a national reputation as a textile centre, at least from the end of the 12th century. Topographical evidence supports a 12th-century origin for Flemingate, which suggests the presence of Flemish textile workers in Beverley.<sup>18</sup> By c. 1209 the weavers of Beverley had acquired sufficient economic status to have purchased their own charter, which excluded them from many of the charter rights granted to the burgesses of Beverley. Textile production may have passed its peak by the end of the 13th century<sup>19</sup> but topographical evidence suggests further expansion of textile finishing in the early 14th century into Walkergate and Tenterlane.<sup>20</sup>

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17. H.M.C. Beverley, pp. 3, 21, 22, 55.

18. Ibid. 20, 25; D.M. Stenton, ed., The Great Roll of Pipe for the Fourth Year of King John, Pipe Roll Soc. N.S. 15 (1937) pp. xx, 65.

19. H. Heaton, The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries, 2nd edition (1965), pp. 3-4, 29-31; M. Bateson, Review of 'Beverley Town Documents', E.H.R. xvi (1901), p. 566; Bev. Town Docs., pp. xliv-li.

20. H.M.C. Beverley, p. 25.

Beverley Beck was the main route for water-born goods into the town, and it is likely that a trading community developed there at Beckside. St. Nicholas church was established there by c. 1190.<sup>21</sup> The council's concern to maintain trade and industry in the area was recorded during the 14th and 15th centuries in its regular orders to keep the Beck clear of debris and its banks consolidated.<sup>22</sup> There is no reason to suppose, in the absence of written records, that such concern had lapsed during the 13th century. After all, in the late 13th century, Archbishop Wickwane, appreciating the advantages to be gained from improved river communications, encouraged the community to canalise Beverley Beck. Beverley was thereafter better placed to serve as a collecting centre for wool and grain in southeast Yorkshire, and until it was superseded by Hull, enjoyed some success as an inland port.<sup>23</sup>

The number of streams running through the town provided water for a flourishing tanning industry, possibly power for corn mills, and the clay on their banks provided raw material for one of Beverley's older industries, tile-making.<sup>24</sup> Most industry was located at Beckside, and in addition to the tanners and tilemakers, there were boat-builders and textile workers there. On street-name evidence, the fullers had spread, at some time, along the banks of Walker Beck, but probably continued to

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21. Ibid. pp. 19, 30,31.

22. E.g. Bev. Town Docs. pp.23-4.

23. G. Oliver, The History and Antiquities of the Town and Minster of Beverley (1829), p. 85.

24. A.F. Leach, The Building of Beverley Bar, Trans. East Riding Antiqu. Soc., iv (1896). N. Heard, Beverley Minster, Government and Society. Unpublished Hull Ph.D. thesis 1952, Ch. VII. The tilers sought clay wherever they could find it. In 1345 the abbot of Meaux complained that they had been taking his soil from the banks of the river Hull, at Waghen. The Provost supported the townspeople. E.A. Bond, Chronica Monasterii de Melsa, III, Rolls Ser. (1868), p. 179.

employ traditional methods, as there is no evidence of water-powered fulling mills in Beverley. Excavated potsheards confirm the presence of potters in Pottergate in the 13th century.<sup>25</sup> Beverley seems to have had work for the usual range of medieval urban crafts in the building, provisioning and clothing trades, although the emergence of craft guilds was slow and evidence is patchy. In 1344 and 1366 twelve different craft guilds paid pavage. Therafter the numbers recorded fluctuated from 38 in 1390, 18 in 1430, 43 in 1467 (the maximum recorded), to 23 in 1498.<sup>26</sup>

Beverley retained a stronger involvement with agriculture than did York and many of Beverley's burgesses, merchants and craftsmen alike, held strips in the town's fields and pastured their sheep and cattle on the common grazing in the unpaved lanes within the town.<sup>27</sup> By 1300, the burgesses had grazing and other rights in 12,000 acres of common land around the town.<sup>28</sup>

The imposing physical presence of the minster and its staff and canons was only partly deflected by the two friaries, those of the Fransiscans and the Dominicans. They were small houses with annual incomes of £6 13s. 4d. and c. 17s. 8d. respectively in 1538-9.<sup>29</sup> The Dominicans were established by 1240, perhaps even by 1233, and the Fransiscans by 1267.<sup>30</sup> There is some debate as to whether or not two

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25. Bev. Town Docs. p. 22; H.M.C. Beverley, pp. 32-3.

26. B.A. Champion, The Guilds of Medieval Beverley, in P. Riden, ed., The Medieval Town in Britain (Cardiff, 1980), pp. 52, 62-5; Acct. Rolls, 1344, 1366; G.G.B. ff. 12, 26; G.M.B. f. 150.

27. Yorks. Fines, 1327-47, p. 39; Prob. Reg. II f.595; Bev. Accts. passim.; Bev. Town Docs., 19, 25-7, 47; see below,

28. H.M.C. Beverley, p. 34.

29. V.C.H. Yorks. III, pp. 263-5.

30. L.M. Goldthorp, The Fransiscans and Dominicans in Yorkshire, Yorks. Arch. Jnl. xxxii (1936), pp. 387-95; C.C.R.1261-64, p. 241.



other orders of friars came to Beverley, but it seems unlikely.<sup>31</sup>

There was however, a third religious house, the preceptory of the Knights Hospitallers which had been founded soon after 1201. It was one of the wealthiest in England by 1535 when it was valued at £164 9s. 10d. and its site dominated the east side of the town.<sup>32</sup> These religious communities enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with the townsfolk, generating demands for alms as well as for the services of the town. Perhaps more directly reflecting the needs of the laity were the eight hospitals, which the town supported,<sup>33</sup> and the two leper houses; one of which outside Keldgate Bar was empty by 1407.<sup>34</sup>

#### Economic Developments in Beverley.

In the early 14th century Beverley merchants were in the forefront as English merchants replaced the Italians as major wool exporters in Yorkshire, and were briefly dominant in that trade in the 1320s until they were overtaken in their turn by merchants from York. Thereafter Beverley's share in overseas trade declined as that of her closest rival, Hull, grew. Relatively few Beverley merchants were engaged in cloth exports and whereas the other two towns were expanding their overseas trading interests during the 14th century, Beverley did not do so to the same extent. A few Beverley merchants did trade with the Baltic and later with Iceland but no expansion occurred comparable with that of York

31. See H.M.C. Beverley, p. 52. It is unlikely that two friaries would have escaped the notice of Cromwell's commissioners. Most probably, this is a misunderstanding due to mis-reading wills.

32. V.C.H. Yorks. III, p. 261.

33. Five were in existence from the 15th century; three in the 14th. H.M.C. Beverley, pp. 53-54.

34. Ibid., p. 29.

or Hull<sup>35</sup> and the number of Beverley merchants active in overseas trade fell from 73 in 1306-36, to 43 in 1378-1408.

The fortunes of overseas merchants based in a town, need not always directly affect its domestic economy, but there is other evidence to suggest a decline in Beverley's fortunes. As early as 1377, the town objected to demands for a contribution towards the building of a barge for the Crown in Hull. Amazingly, royal officials accepted Beverley's argument that it was situated in a dry place, remote from the sea, and granted the exemption requested.<sup>36</sup> This plea may have been nothing more than an unwillingness to spend local money. Beverley was after all, the tenth most populous town in England with a population of c. 4,000, and there were at least 39 different occupational guilds active there in the 1390's.<sup>37</sup>

The gradual migration of Beverley merchants to Hull began in the late 14th century and such prominent early 15th-century Hull families as the Alcocks, Holmes, Hadelsays and Bromptons probably originated in Beverley. In 1407 the town was unable to maintain the important stretch of road between it and Hull bridge which was vital to its commerce and was indicted for that offence before the royal justices.<sup>38</sup>

Tension was evident in 1423 when Beverley successfully defended its privilege of national exemption from trade tolls in a dispute with York, and again, in 1428, in a dispute with Driffield.<sup>39</sup> Such edginess was symptomatic of economic pressure and further evidence corroborates the

35. See below pp. 136-9.

36. Poulson, Beverlac, p.133; C.P.R. 1374-7, p.428.

37. J.C. Russell, British Medieval Population, p.143; Bev. Town Docs. p.33.

38. Bev. Cart. ff. 18v.

39. Poulson, Beverlac, pp. 197-9; B.L. Lansdowne MS 896.

Beverley council's awareness of recession. In 1434 18 acres in the western suburbs outside Keldgate Bar, which had been built on, had reverted to common land and by 1435 it was claimed that three-quarters of the town was decayed. Some contraction of population had occurred since the development of those plots in the 13th and early 14th centuries.<sup>40</sup>

Population estimates for Beverley, are impossible to calculate during this period since the entries for the town in lay subsidies are usually intermixed with the rest of the East Riding. The record of the number of people purchasing their freedom is extremely patchy and no useable series can be compiled. However, a sizeable proportion of the town's income was derived from rents, which included as specified in the account rolls, council property, shop rents in the Dyngs, and income from leasing out the common grazing. Further income came from pavage payments, the sale of faggots from Westwood, leasing lime-kilns there, and from payments for entry to the freedom, which always included arrears. The survival of the account rolls is patchy, but it is possible to deduce that the council was rarely in deficit. Its income from rents began to fall after peaking in 1433, but by 1449 all other sources of income began to fall. The town council was quick to respond and cut expenditure from a total of £111 6s. 10d. in 1433 to £67 16s. 10d. in 1437. Expenditure crept up again but always averaged around £90 to £99 for the rest of the century, expenditure apparently being dictated by the income of the town.<sup>41</sup>

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40. H.Mss.C., Beverley, pp. 22, 23; Bev. Cart. ff. 21v.-22v.;  
H.M.C., Beverley, pp. 29-30.

41. See Appendix 2. The major area of savings were in  
(a) public works, mainly pavage which fell from £32 10s. in 1433 to nothing in 1437.  
(b) common (i.e. council) expenses which fell from £8 19s. 7d. in 1433 to £4 11s. 8d. in 1437.  
(c) cost of making the account which fell from £5 in 1433 to £1 4s. in 1433.

The worst year recorded was 1460 when the town failed to balance its budget and had a deficit of 16s.8d. That was exceptional and highlights the financial difficulties some towns faced as a consequence of the demands made upon them for lodgings, victuals, and for men during the Wars of the Roses. Beverley found itself acting as host to both sides<sup>42</sup> and found the demands for men and money to fight the Scots, and the rebels during the Wars of the Rcses, a constant financial drain, and said as much when asked for a loan by the Crown in 1435. The town provided and paid for 524 archers in 1436, a further 573 men in 1448, and paid for archers in 1462, 1466, 1469 and 1470. In 1469 the town had had to borrow the money to pay for the archers.<sup>43</sup>

Although a small number of men continued in the cloth manufacturing and finishing crafts in the 15th century, textiles never again played as important role in the town's economy as they had in the past. Other occupations were also facing a decline in their fortunes. In 1416 the coopers, joiners, pewterers, tanners, bowyers and fletchers combined to produce one pageant for the Corpus Christi play cycle because none of them could separately afford the cost, and other amalgamations occurred later in the 15th century for the same reason.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, Beverley's merchants had a decreasing share of the overseas trade of the region; perhaps the town was too distant from the expanding cloth industry of the West Riding to compete with growing competition from London merchants. Only 25 have been traced who were active between 1460 and 1500. In addition, Beverley was virtually

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42. Poulson, Beverlac, I, pp. 216-7, 226, 233-5; Acct. Rolls 1449, 1450, 1460.

43. B.L. Lansdowne MS 866; Bev. Cart., ff. 21v.-22v.; G.M.B., ff. 2v-3; 12-13, 73v.-78v., 123-125v., 147, 161v.-166v.

44. G.G.B. ff.27, 61, 75.

excluded from the profitable trade in lead which York, and more especially, Hull merchants were developing. The town became more dependent on its role as a local market, expanding annually with its great Spring Fair, which attracted traders from all over England.<sup>45</sup> Beverley never recovered its former position in international commerce, even though, in 1535, the council was disputing with Hull, their separate right to levy tolls upon each others' traders.<sup>46</sup> John Leyland wrote of the town "that is nowe much decayid" in the 1530s,<sup>47</sup> and Beverley was named in the famous preamble to Henry VIII's statute of 1535 which directed the owners of waste urban properties to rebuild them.<sup>48</sup>

As late as 1599, the town was still said to be suffering from chronic urban decay.<sup>49</sup> The proximity of York, and more particularly of Hull, had made recovery that much more difficult, and Beverley slipped into commercial stagnation.

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45. See below, Chapter 4, pp.172-7; Heard, Beverley Minster. op. cit., Ch. VII.

46. Poulson, Beverlac, I, pp. 284-5.

47. L.T. Smith, ed., The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543, I (1907), p.47.

48. Statutes of the Realm, 37 HVIII c.1.

49. Heaton, op. cit., p. 49; Poulson, Beverlac, I, p. 338.

HULL

In retrospect the location of Kingston upon Hull would suggest that the growth of a port there was inevitable. Standing at the confluence of the river Humber and its tributary, the river Hull, the town had excellent access to much of the north Pennine region and to the north midlands, via the extensive river system which ultimately flowed into the Humber. (See map, page 7)

The open sea was twenty miles downstream but the Humber's flow was too powerful for any risk of serious silting.<sup>50</sup> Reality was quite the reverse! The banks were exposed to erosion, and the council spent considerable sums of money over time on protective timber piling, and on a weir in the river Hull, to control the flow through the harbour. Dikes and embankments were needed additionally, to defend the low-lying townsite from flooding.<sup>51</sup> From time to time, Hull claimed that these commitments impoverished the city; on one occasion in 1396 when the Humber overflowed, the city was granted 100 marks annually for five years.<sup>52</sup> The river Hull provided a natural harbour, and as the region developed, vessels from all over Europe anchored there. In 1401 Hull was described as 'the key of the adjoining country and the whole county of York'.<sup>53</sup> Sir William Fortescue acknowledged the excellent communications afforded by the Humber and its feeder rivers when he wrote in 1451, 'The first river is the Humber, that comes up to York and so forth up into the country'.<sup>54</sup> Timber was carried to Lincolnshire via the Trent and

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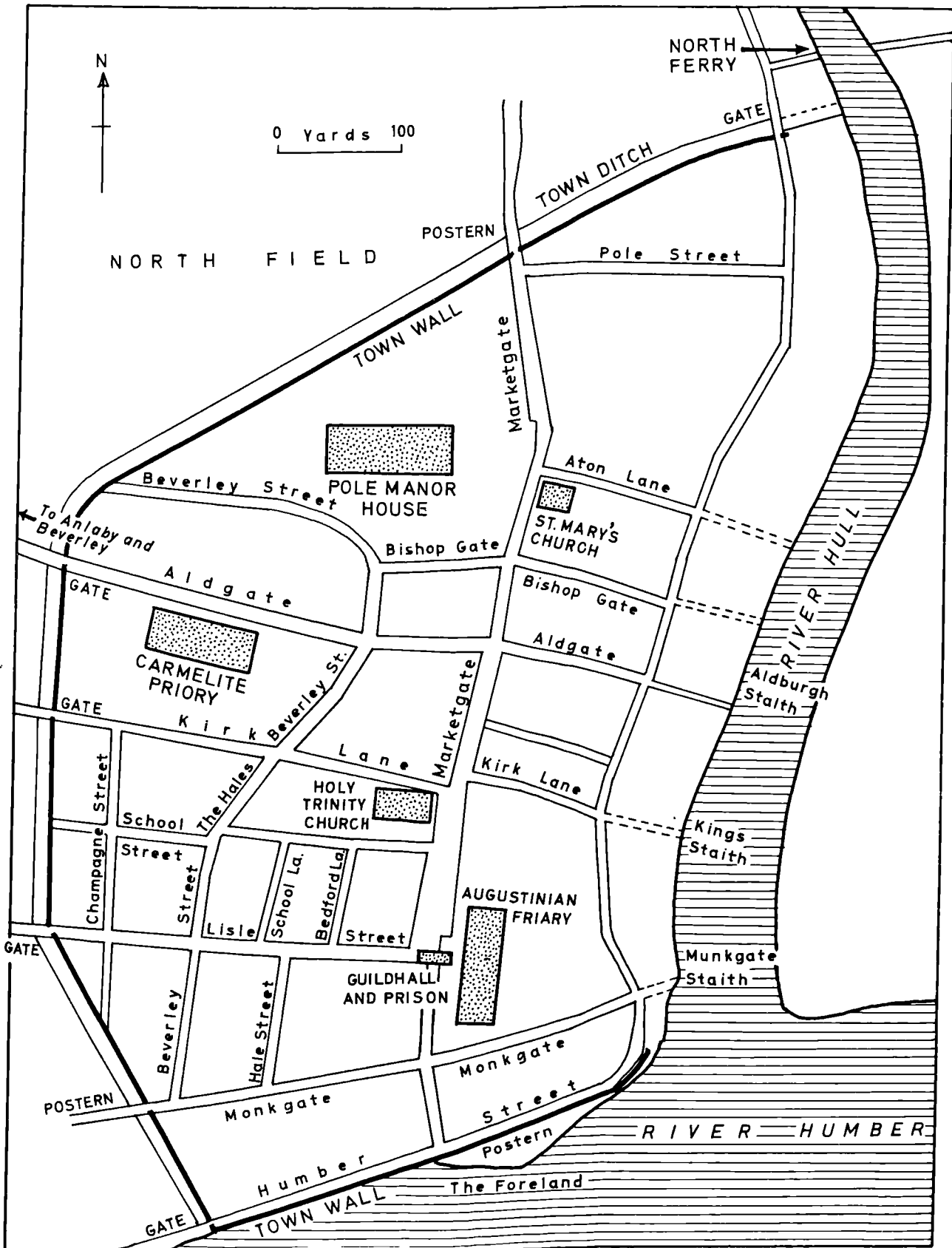
50. Cf. Chester on the west coast where the town's decline was blamed on the silting of the Dee. K.P. Wilson, The Port of Chester in the Fifteenth Century, Trans. Lancs. & Chesh. Hist. Soc. 117 (1966).

51. E.g. M479/13, 21, 22; V.C.H. Hull, p. 76.

52. Ibid., p. 78; C.P.R. 1396-9, p. 6.

53. Cal. Inq. Misc., 1399-1422, pp. 92-3.

54. Thomas, Lord Clermont, ed., The Works of Sir John Fortescue (London, 1869) I, p. 549, quoted in full in V.C.H. Hull, p. 1.



Medieval Hull

Foss Dike, and wool from the Wold back to Hull for export. Lead from Derbyshire could be transported with relative ease along the rivers Don and Trent, and the Yorkshire tributaries of the Ouse, brought first wool and later cloth and more lead into the Humber and thence overseas through Hull. The carriage of bulky goods was cheaper by water, even for land-locked destinations such as Fountains and Rievaulx Abbeys. Wine shipped into Hull, found its way to customers all over the north of England, and presumably the variety of manufactured goods and raw materials, imported in growing quantities from the late 14th century, were as easily distributed. Hidden from recorded evidence, was the coastal traffic from Hull. It is inconceivable that Hull did not act as an off-loading point for international cargoes bound for destinations further up the coast, at least in the early 14th century before Newcastle began to emerge as a serious rival. Certainly Durham Friory had goods transferred into Newcastle-bound ships, at Hull.<sup>55</sup>

The town of Hull grew from a small 'new' town, Wyke upon Hull planted in the late 12th century on a low-lying site close to the river banks. It was the creation of the abbey of Meaux, to serve as the port of embarkation for its wool<sup>56</sup> and by 1203-5, Wyke was the sixth largest port in England, assessed at twice the level of York.<sup>57</sup> As early as 1204 royal wine was being shipped into Hull, en route for York and during the 13th century, Hull was increasingly active in the export of wool, woolfells, and leather.<sup>58</sup> Regional and local commerce developed as

55. Ibid., p. 54.

56. For a fuller discussion of the town's origins see V.C.H. Hull, pp. 11-15, and R. Horrox, ed., Selected Rentals and Accounts of Medieval Hull, 1293-1528, Yorks. Arch. Soc. Rec. Ser. cxli (1983), pp. 1-4.

57. D.M. Stenton, ed., The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Sixth Year of the Reign of King John, Pipe Roll Soc., N.S. xviii (1940), p. 218.

58. V.C.H. Hull, p. 13.



overseas trade grew and by 1279 the town was sufficiently prosperous for the abbey to acquire the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair there.

Edward I selected the port as a site with growing potential for economic development, as he had selected sites for his other new towns in England, Wales and Gascony with an eye for the profits to be made. A valuation of Wyke was made and in January 1293 Edward acquired the port and the nearby manor of Myton from Meaux. At that time Myton was more valuable than Wyke but Edward set out to encourage the economic expansion of his town.

In July 1293 he ordered the sheriffs of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire to proclaim the town's weekly market and annual fair,<sup>59</sup> and had a ditch made around the town and a hall and chapel built for his officials. In 1297 he specified Hull as one of the nine English ports through which wool and leather could be exported and two years later he made the small community a borough. Edward also ensured that the new borough had adequate facilities and had a quay built on land he had bought alongside the River Hull for the purpose. King's Staith was finished in 1302.<sup>60</sup> New quasi-parish churches were built in c. 1300; St. Mary's and Holy Trinity. They were actually chapels dependent on Hessle but had certain parochial rights and were regarded as parish churches by the townspeople.<sup>61</sup>

A qualified judgement of the town's potential might be seen in the arrival of the Carmelite Friars in the 1290s, though the inducement of endowments by local benefactors, as well as by Edward I, was no doubt an

59. M. Beresford, New Towns of the Middle Ages (1967), pp. 176, 511-2; J. Bilson, Wyke-upon-Hull in 1293, Trans. East Riding Antiq. Soc. xxvi (1928), pp. 52-5, 69.

60. Ibid., p. 70; C.P.R. 1296-1302, pp. 68, 86-7.

61. V.C.H. Hull., pp. 287, 194.

equal attraction. The friary had to move to a new site in 1307, to accommodate the increase in its inmates and 'the great multitude flocking there to divine service'. The Austin Friars settled in the town ten years later; similarly encouraged by the usual endowment of a plot of land,<sup>62</sup> but scarcely by the town's burgeoning economy, since the hoped for expansion had not yet materialised. It is important to remember, that until Hull tapped into the traffic generated by expanding overseas trade, its economy did not keep pace with that expansion.

#### Economic Developments in Hull

An expansion in trade does not inevitably mean a commensurate expansion in a town's economy, and while trade through Hull increased in the 1310s and 1320s, the town's own economy did not begin to reflect this until the 1330s.

Those areas around Hull Street, Marketgate, Hale Street and Bedford Lane, already built up when Edward I acquired the town, continued to attract tenants, but by 1310 there were still empty plots on the west side of the town and along the Humber bank. Two thirds of Monkgate was untenanted in c. 1315 and one half of the rents which had been paid in 1293 could not be met. It was not simply that Edward's investment had failed to attract migrants to develop new areas, but there were insufficient means to maintain the settlement levels of 1293. As a remedy, plots were amalgamated and let at lower rents from 1317, and by 1320 at least, they were all tenanted. These amalgamations may partly explain why much of the property let by the town later, was unusually substantial. However, by 1320 not much building had taken place and it has been estimated that in real terms the income of the town had fallen by about one third between 1305 and 1320. When the town walls were built

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62. V.C.H. Yorks., III, pp. 269-70; C. Ch. R. 1300-26, p. 48.

in 1321, they enclosed little more than the site of Wyke upon Hull. Edward I's hopes of growth spilling over onto plots laid out to the west, had been in vain.<sup>63</sup>

During the next twenty years, Hull's economy took an upward turn. In 1331 the town was freed from the direct administration of the Crown through royal keepers, and was granted at a farm of £70 to the burgesses. They were free to choose their own mayor, and the first was very likely William de la Pole, merchant extraordinary.

Three years later, the town was granted the seal of Statute Merchant, a great asset for a commercial centre.<sup>64</sup> By 1347 pressure on properties in the Marketgate area had resulted in the subdivision of many plots.<sup>65</sup> Given its proximity to the staiths lining the river Hull, and that the weekly Tuesday and Friday markets were held all along both sides of the street,<sup>66</sup> such an increase in housing density confirms Hull's emergence as a thriving entrepôt.

The population grew from c. 60 households in the late 13th century to c. 2,500 <sup>people</sup> in the late 14th,<sup>67</sup> and building activity reflected a continuing prosperity. The most notable was probably the house of the de la Poles which they acquired with the manor of Myton and custody of

63. J.L. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 202; Horrox, Selected Rentals, pp. 5-8.
64. C.Ch.R. 1327-41, pp. 219-21, 308-9; For more on William de la Pole see E.B. Fryde, William de la Pole, Merchant and King's Banker (1988), and R. Horrox, The de la Poles of Hull, East Yorks. Local Hist. Series, no. 38 (1983).
65. Horrox, Selected Rentals, p. 9; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 73-4.
66. V.C.H. Hull, p. 407. Different trades grouped together along the street and in 1469 all market stalls were restricted to the southern end of the street. J.J. Sheahan, History of the Town and Port of Kingston upon Hull (2nd edition, 1866), p. 407.
67. J.L. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 203; V.C.H., p. 20; Russell, British Population, p. 141.

the town. It occupied a large triangular site between Marketgate, Bishopgate, and Beverley Street, and although probably built in 1297 was kept in good repair. It may have been added to after the de la Poles took it over in 1330, and was said to have been rebuilt by Sir Michael in the 1380s. The de la Poles were unique in Hull, and their wealth allowed unique beneficence. William founded the Charterhouse for the Carthusians in c. 1350, just to the north of Hull and it was re-established by Sir Michael de la Pole in 1377 with a hospital. The priory and hospital were separated in 1383; the hospital then to be known as God's House of Hull. A grammar school was built in the early 14th century, and probably stood on the south side of Holy Trinity.<sup>68</sup>

Building on both Holy Trinity and St. Mary's continued throughout the 14th century. In 1333 there was a Motehall at the south end of Marygate and although both churches and the public hall may have attracted the endowment of wealthy individuals, the development of the Dyngs, shops and stalls let by the council along the south side of Marketgate from the mid-14th century,<sup>69</sup> and of the weigh-house needed by 1343 and built by 1365, suggest a more general prosperity. The Weigh-house was rebuilt or extended in 1389 and in addition to housing the common beam, it provided storage facilities. It was being referred to as the woolhouse by the early 15th century, but in fact all sorts of things were stored in there.<sup>70</sup> Business was so brisk in the town that from 1395, drapers were restricted to selling only in the Dyngs.<sup>71</sup> During the course of the 14th century, Hull's own merchants became

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68. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 19, 77, 333, 348; H. Calvert, A History of Hull (Chichester, 1978), pp. 59-60.

69. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 76, 287, 408, 433; BRE 1 p. 188.

70. C.C.R. 1343-6, p. 93; V.C.H. Hull, p. 434; BRE1 p. 224; BRE 2 f. 18; M479 passim.

71. BRE 1 p. 161; BRE 2 ff. 66, 104, 108v.

increasingly active in overseas trade; their numbers trebled from 21 in 1306-1336, to 64 in 1378-1408.

A more direct response by the council to the expansion in trade, was its expenditure on improving and maintaining its port facilities; most particularly the staithes and the haven. The town rebuilt or repaired the common staithes, and controlled the conditions and physical extent of the private ones. It allowed new staithes to be built in 1375, and thereafter tried to stop them encroaching into the river channel. The haven itself had to be kept clear of rubbish and dumped ballast, and from time to time had to be dredged. Fresh water supply was a problem that grew with the population and in 1401 a 'ditch' was proposed to bring in sufficient water and stop people leaving the town in 'large numbers every summer of necessity'. A further commitment of the council was the maintenance of the embankments of the rivers, and enormous sums were spent, especially in the 15th century on piling and on building a weir.<sup>72</sup> Royal grants of pavage collected from 1300-70, and of murage, collected from 1321-1406,<sup>73</sup> went some way towards expenses, but as Hull channelled more and more goods in and out of the region, so its regional communications became more important.

The council ran two ferries, the North Ferry, across the river Hull at Drypool and the South Ferry across the river Humber. Sometimes the council farmed them out, but as can be seen from the town account rolls, it was still liable for repairs and for the purchase of new ferry boats; one for North Ferry in 1454-5 and several for the South Ferry in 1424-5, 1451-2, and 1468-9.<sup>74</sup>

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72. V.C.H. Hull, p 75-6; BRE 1 p. 150; M479/13, 21, 22, 36. See below for a fuller discussion.

73. C.P.R. 1292-1301, p. 514; 1354-8, p. 155; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 374, 412-3.

74. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 287-8; see appendix 2.

The scale of steady expenditure on its port and river facilities, was one of the major differences between Hull, and York and Beverley. Another was that Hull was unhampered by a tradition of specialised industrial activity. Like Beverley, there was some use regularly made by Hull burgesses of the pasture and meadow land to the north west of the town, but this was not matched by the development of leatherworking nor of textile manufacturing. Indeed, apart from tile-making, there is little evidence of any industrial activity in Hull in the 14th century. The tilery was most productive in the first half of the 14th century, and was still in production between 1390 and 1430. By then it was apparently being undermined by the production of cheaper bricks elsewhere and by the 1450s it had become a rubbish dump.<sup>75</sup>

Significantly, the earliest indications of guild formations were the foundation of religious fraternities; Our Lady in 1357, Corpus Christi in 1358 for merchants, and Holy Trinity in 1369 for shipmen.<sup>76</sup> Craft guilds certainly existed by 1412-13 and occasional regulations governing the appointment of searchers imply the existence of a tippers' guild in 1442;<sup>77</sup> weavers in 1454, and tilers in 1476.<sup>78</sup>

The entry of new burgesses by name was not regularly recorded until the late 14th century, and even then occupations were rarely noted. Not all men chose to become freemen and many preferred to pay a regular fine instead.<sup>79</sup> Of those who did take up the freedom, those involved in shipping and in the distributive trades far exceeded those engaged in

75. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 57, 58; M479/4-14.

76. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 56, 58.

77. BRE 1 ff. 16v. 17, 23v.

78. BRB 1 ff. 39(2), 105, 120; M479/56.

79. V.C.H. Hull, p. 56.

manufacturing.<sup>80</sup> Weavers were active in 1454 and 1459, and in the same year mention was made of drapers weaving in Hull.<sup>81</sup> Fullers were forbidden to make cloth in their houses in 1477 and were drying cloth on the town walls in 1482. Shearmen were using the same walls to stretch cloth on in 1482-4<sup>82</sup> and were in a guild with the fullers in 1498. The weavers had their guild ordinances drawn up in 1490.<sup>83</sup>

Shipping must have made some impact on the town's economy, but it is difficult to measure. From the town bench books, it is apparent that the council's ambition was to ensure that all goods were unloaded at Hull, before being sold,<sup>84</sup> and that they should be weighed in the town's weigh-house, certainly from the mid-14th century. Charges were laid down, for weighing and for storing goods in the weigh-house.

Only Hull men could weigh their goods elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> An official known as the brogger was appointed, to act as an intermediary between aliens and denizens in transactions, and an ad valorem toll, 'brocage' was collected.<sup>86</sup> Hanse merchants gained exemption from paying this in 1374.<sup>87</sup> The brogger was also associated with collecting the 'tolls in

80. Ibid., pp. 55-6

81. Ibid.; BRB 1 ff. 39(2), 66, 68.

82. BRE 2 f. 98v.; BRB 1 f. 130v.; M479/45-6.

83. M478/1-2.

84. BRE 1 p. 75; BRE 2 f. 13v. It was this requirement which provoked a dispute between York and Hull in 1463, and the mayor of Hull accused York merchants of buying aliens' goods before they had been landed. BRB 1 f. 141v.

85. V.C.H. Hull, p. 48; BRE 2 ff. 18-19v.; BRB 1 ff. 15 (2) v., 89, 90, 93, 122v., 128.

86. V.C.H. Hull, p. 47; BRB 1 f. 5; BRE 2 ff. 92v., 93 (1). BRG 1 f. 9v. M479/4.

87. C.C.R. 1374-7, p. 54.

the water' which presumably included port-duties imposed on ships in the haven in the 15th century, to cover costs of repairs to the staithes and jetties.<sup>88</sup> Not only the Hanse objected to paying local tolls, but others did so, most particularly the archbishops of York, who claimed the right to their own water bailiff as well as the right to take prisage of wine. The dispute dragged on for most of the 14th century.<sup>89</sup> In the 15th century it was men from the Duchy of Lancaster who claimed exemption, and their claim was upheld by Henry VII.<sup>90</sup>

The Lancastrians claim was based on the relative antiquity of their rights not to pay tolls throughout the realm, and Hull's right to collect tolls. Given the practice for successive monarchs to grant such exemptions especially to boroughs, a conflict of interests was inevitable when merchants from one town transacted business in another. York encountered similar problems with Londoners, and Hull found its burgesses being subject to tolls in other towns. Reciprocal agreements were the obvious solution and Hull concluded one with Scarborough in 1304, and 1455, and another with Dunwich in Suffolk in 1458.<sup>91</sup> The dispute with Southampton however was more fiercely pursued, with Hull insisting on tolls from Southampton merchants until Hull men were exempted in return.<sup>92</sup> The disputes with York and Beverley, concerned the conduct of business.

88. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 47-9; BRB 1 ff. 66v., 81, 111v.; BRE 2 ff. 18, 23, 27, 96v.; M479/21, 22, 35, 52-56.

89. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 44-5, 49-50; C.P.R. 1324-7, p.289; C.C.R. 1327-30, p. 51.

90. V.C.H. Hull, p. 46; BRB 1 f. 44; M479/43, 44.

91. V.C.H. Hull p. 46; BRE 2 ff. 44-44v; BRB 1 f. 40v.; Stanewell, Hull Deeds, D 426.

92. V.C.H. Hull, p. 46; BRB 1 f. 44.



Apart from these directly exploitative measures, the council tried to ensure that Hull men employed through the docks benefitted, by establishing rates for the porters and for the catchmen, who off-loaded goods into small boats for transporting to the shore. The porters' monopoly over carrying strangers' goods was also protected.<sup>93</sup> Just the presence of numbers of visiting merchants should have generated some income for the townsfolk. Aliens were cautiously welcomed, because of the competition they created and they were carefully supervised through the hosting system and constraints were imposed upon their business.<sup>94</sup> The virtual absence of traceable inns and alehouses, and the small percentage of the town's new freemen with victualling occupations, suggests that many visiting foreign and alien merchants lived on board ship or lodged with English hosts.

However it was generated, there are indications that Hull's prosperity continued well into the 15th century. The council indulged in several major projects, in addition to the weir and new ferry boats. In 1438 it received £20 to cover over the dike carrying the town's water supply and in 1449 lead pipes replaced the dikes.<sup>95</sup> Money was still available to build new houses and to repair property for council tenants, generally fairly wealthy individuals able to rent quite substantial properties.<sup>96</sup> The purchase of the county charter for Hull, cost at least £112 in 1439-40 (some payments going to the earl of Suffolk for his help), and made the corporation into a legal trustee.

93. BPG 1 f. 9v.; BRE 2 ff. 18v.-19v.; BRE 1 f. 141v.

94. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 50-1.

95. Ibid., p. 371; Prob. Reg. III f. 355. £100 for the conduit was left by Robert Holme, ibid., II f. 211.

96. Horrox, Selected Rentals, pp. 18, 22.

Several hospitals were endowed by this means,<sup>97</sup> suggesting a surplus in the economy. There had been hospitals previously: the *maisons dieu* of Kingston, and of Robert de Selby and Richard Ravenser, existed in 1344, and 1375 respectively, and the more permanent hospitals of John Bedford and John Gregg were founded in 1412 and 1438. But the flurry of endowments after 1440 suggests a fairly buoyant economy.<sup>98</sup>

By the 1460s however, indications were quite the reverse. In October 1463, Edward IV granted £40 out of the customs' income for the maintenance of the port and borough.<sup>99</sup> The council had to dig up its lead conduit in 1461 and 1467 to pay off debts<sup>100</sup> but from 1458-60, the amount owed to the council in decayed rents began to increase, partly due to higher rents being charged. The town's accounts, which had rarely been in deficit until 1439, were significantly so from 1445. The considerable expenditure on port facilities and on the ferries continued,<sup>101</sup> but the council tried to overcome some of its problems, and those of its international merchants, by financing ventures overseas. In 1465, seven shipments left Hull for Iceland in the name of the mayor and burgesses; they comprised mainly beer, butter, grain, and linen, worth £480, £150, £69, £26 13s. 4d., £21, £20, £18 6s. 8d.<sup>102</sup> This was one branch of overseas trade fraught with difficulties, and we have no idea if the experiment was repeated. Other, more obvious

97. M479/17; R. Horrox, The De La Poles of Hull (1983), p. 39; Horrox, Selected Rentals, pp. 15-6.

98. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 334-5. There may have been eight more *maisons dieu* in Hull at one time or another during the second half of the 15th century.

99. Hull C.R.O. M12.

100. V.C.H. Hull, p. 371; BRE 2 ff. 79, 79v., 95; BRB 1 ff. 87, 108v.

101. M479 passim, see appendix 2.

102. E122/62/7.

indices of economic decline have not been found. Hull's population trends are difficult to assess, but the impression of the 15th century is of stagnation. An estimate for the mid-16th century suggests a total of c. 2,600, scarcely any increase on population levels since the end of the 14th century.<sup>103</sup> It has been claimed that plague killed over 1,500 people in 1478. There is no local evidence for this, but the outbreak in 1537, clearly knocked back the population. Its severity however is not known.<sup>104</sup>

The town should have been particularly vulnerable to trade fluctuations and to the mid 15th-century recession, but in the event Hull's merchants were better placed than those of York or Beverley to survive the slump. More Hull merchants were active in trade in the late 15th century as had been in the late 14th,<sup>105</sup> compared to 64, although fewer traded on a large scale.<sup>105</sup> Unlike York and Beverley, Hull had immediate access to sea-going ships and did not have to pay extra carriage on goods being shipped up the Ouse or Hull in lighters; possibly an advantage of some importance during a recession.<sup>106</sup>

The community as a whole was more resilient, since its economy depended mainly on its port facilities, and men were employed by whoever was shipping goods. There was no large skilled artisan class directly engaged in textile production as in York and Beverley, so that the town

103. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 81, 157.

104. J. Tickell, The History of the Town and County of Kingston upon Hull (Hull, 1798), p. 133; J. Saltmarsh, Plague and Economic Decline in England in the Later Middle Ages, Camb. Hist. Jnl. vii (1941), pp. 35-40; V.C.H. Hull, p. 154.

105. See below, pp. 162, 169.

106. In 1337 wool cost 6d. per sack in carriage from York to Hull and in 1364, wine cost ½d. per gallon from Hull to Beverley. Fryde, Wool Accounts of William de la Pole, pp. 10-14; James, Wine Trade, p. 147.

was affected only indirectly in the short term, by the industrial depression in the established textile centres. In the long term the decline in cloth production in York and Beverley reduced the amount being shipped through Hull, a trend accelerated by the competition from merchants from the new textile centres and from the south.<sup>107</sup> Hull's economic recovery was well underway by the early decades of the 16th century. Hull merchants had begun to concentrate more on imports and on the export of lead and foodstuffs earlier than the merchants of York and Beverley and their trade prospered again until another recession hit the town in the 1520s and 1530s.<sup>108</sup>

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107. See below, pp. 177, 271-5.

108. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 132-3.

York

The medieval city of York was a direct descendant of the Roman colonia of Eboracum. It is probable that the site was occupied continuously from the first Roman settlement there in c. A.D. 71, through the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian invasions and up to the Norman Conquest.<sup>109</sup> Medieval York, like its Roman precursor, was situated on a dry sandstone ridge at the confluence of the Rivers Ouse and Foss. The central trading area was on the flattest part of the site, on top of the main Roman settlement whose street pattern was still evident in the Middle Ages. Roman and Viking expansion extended the manufacturing and trading area towards the River Foss and across the River Ouse. Post conquest, medieval suburbs sprawled north-west at Bootham, north-east outside Monkbar,<sup>110</sup> and south west outside Micklegate Bar.

York was an important junction in the Roman road system, and continued as such in the medieval period, ten miles east of the main north-south road route up the east coast. At a time when water was the most convenient form of transport, York was admirably situated to develop as a military and administrative centre, and as an inland port. The Ouse provided York's most important route for coastal communication, war-time expeditions and trade, through the Humber and into the main coastal routes and across the North Sea and the Channel.

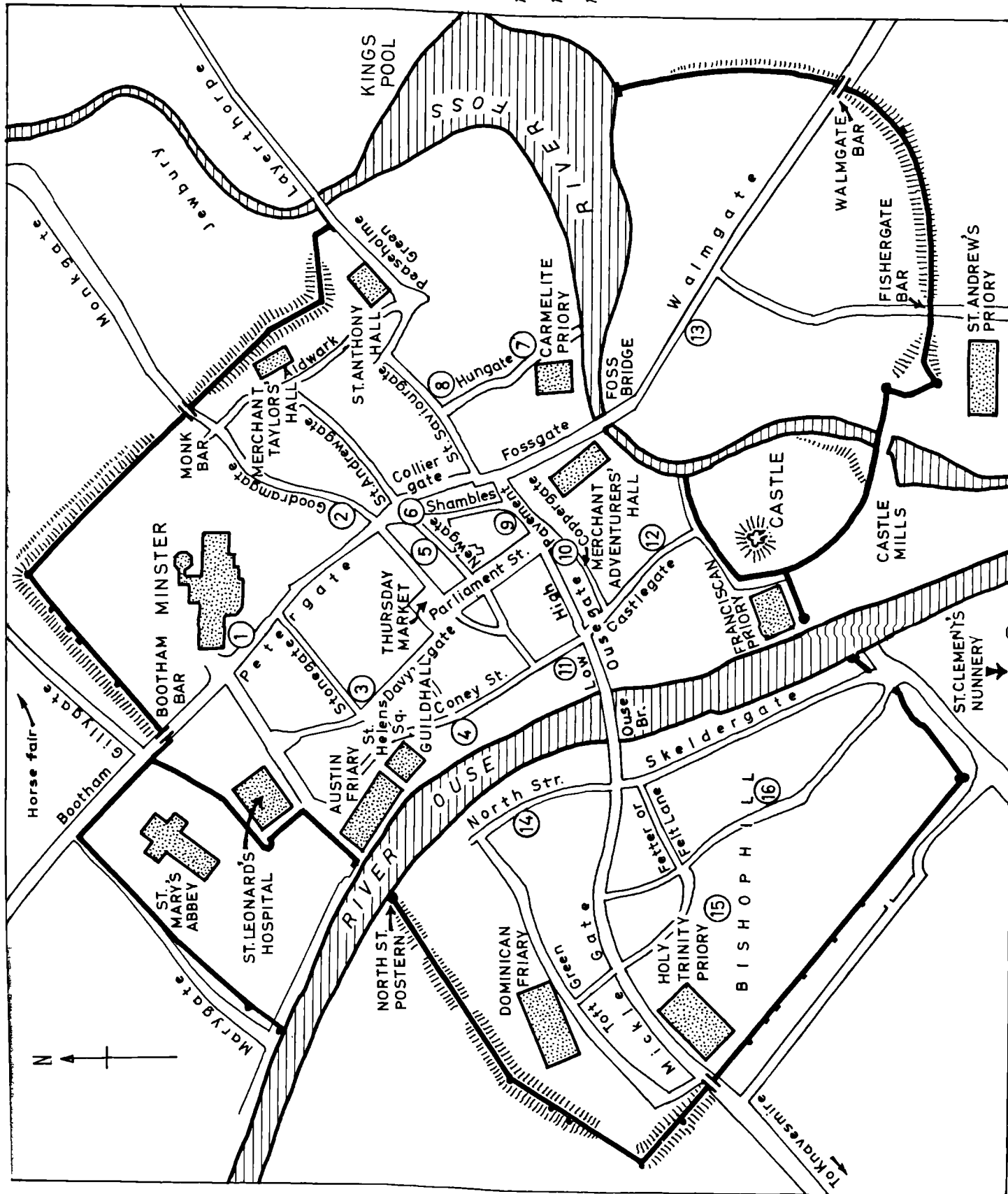
The Romans had originally established York as a military centre and in the medieval period the city's proximity to the Scottish border and access to the sea marked it as the obvious headquarters for military operations in the North. Every English king marching against the Scots

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109. V.C.H. York, pp. 2-3, 9-17.

110. M. Beresford and J.K. St. Joseph, Medieval England: An Aerial Survey (1958), pp. 158-9.

- 1 St. Michael le Belfry
- 2 Holy Trinity, Goodramgate
- 3 St Helen
- 4 St Martin
- 5 St. Sampson
- 6 Holy Trinity or Christ Church
- 7 St John Bap, Hungate
- 8 St. Saviour
- 9 St. Crux
- 10 All Saints, Pavement
- 11 St. Michael, Spurriergate
- 12 St. Mary, Castlegate
- 13 St. Denys, Walmgate
- 14 All Saints, North Street
- 15 St. Mary, Bishophill Jr.
- 16 St. Mary, Bishophill Sr.



Medieval York

halted at York, and from the 11th century a royal castle was maintained there. A second Norman castle, on the west bank of the Ouse, quickly fell into ruin. In addition to accommodating and sheltering monarchs and their forces on their way north, York often served as a collection centre for men and supplies and as a base for the offices of central government when the king was campaigning in the North, for example in 1298-1300 and 1303, 1316, 1318, 1319, 1322-3, 1327 and 1333-4.<sup>111</sup> Several Yorkshire merchants were employed from time to time as victuallers to the royal troops.<sup>112</sup>

Parliament met in York 13 times and in 1392, Richard II removed his government to York, as a punishment for the Londoners who refused to meet his financial demands. Otherwise, York's importance in the 14th century to the king in Westminster was mainly strategic<sup>113</sup> and the continuing hostilities with Scotland in the 15th century gave York the extra burden of supplying troops, money, and accommodation for a succession of armies.<sup>114</sup>

Such demands continued to be made throughout the 15th century, but from the 1440s began to take second place to the difficulties of achieving political balance between the Lancastrians and Yorkists. York was much engaged in giving gifts, taking advice and keeping a 'low profile', but in the 1460s was inevitably drawn into the civil wars physically, as both sides used the city as a base. The city survived the

111. J. Hutchinson & D.M. Palliser, York, (Edinburgh 1980), pp. 1-25; V.C.H. York, pp. 25-2, 54-9.

112. V.C.H. York, p. 100. Supplying the Crown could be unprofitable. For some of the difficulties involved, see C.J. Given-Wilson, Purveyance for the Royal Household, 1362-1413, B.I.H.R. 56 (1983), pp. 145-163.

113. V.C.H. York, pp. 54-6.

114. E.g. Y.C.R. I, pp. 34, 38, 42, 45-7, 59.

Wars of the Roses, to be drawn once more into national affairs through its partisan support of Richard III. This was unusual in the sense that, the council normally found itself unwittingly involved simply because York acted like a strategic magnet to invading Scots, and the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. A strategic location might generate commerce, but it could also bring unwelcome political attention,<sup>115</sup> which in turn made defences an expensive priority. The mayor and council were responsible for maintaining the city walls, which were neglected until danger threatened. In 1478 a mason was appointed to examine and supervise the maintenance of the walls, but in 1482 the walls had to be weeded at the instigation of the council. They were obviously still in a state of decay in 1487 because the council wrote to the king to ask for assistance in rebuilding the wall and the castle; the latter was technically a Crown possession. Citizens were encouraged to practise archery but when danger was imminent, as at the time of Lambert Simnel's rebellion, artillery had to be sent for from Scarborough, and knights were sent by the king.<sup>116</sup>

York had no formal role to play in the administration of the north until Richard III established his council in the north under the earl of Lincoln and in 1484 ordered that it should sit at least once a year in the city. The central location of the city, however, made it a natural host to the royal justices and to the sheriff of Yorkshire and it benefited from the regular visits of officials, lawyers and their clients with business in the royal courts.

The city was also the home of one of the royal mints, in addition to at least one other mint belonging to the archbishops, a role which further attracted royal officials and commercial activity.<sup>117</sup>

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115. Y.C.H. York. I, pp. 59-65.

116. Y.C.R. I, pp. 24, 63; II, pp. 9, 13.

117. V.C.H. York, 29-30, 62, 67-8.



York was equally important as an ecclesiastical administrative centre. Successive archbishops or their officials set out from York on their visitations across the Pennines and north to the border counties. The archbishops' ecclesiastical courts regularly sat in the city and attracted officials, lawyers and clients as did the secular courts, and generated business for the community. The officials who ran the archbishops' estates were based on York and in turn attracted minor officials and tenants with estate matters to settle.<sup>118</sup>

York's obvious importance, its spiritual tradition, and excellent communications attracted the major religious orders to establish themselves there. St. Mary's Abbey was established in the 1080s and became the richest Benedictine house in the north.<sup>119</sup> Another Benedictine house, Holy Trinity Priory Micklegate, was refounded in 1089, to house canons dependent upon the Marmoutier Abbey, France, while Benedictine nuns established themselves in St. Clement's Priory. The Gilbertines founded St. Andrew's Priory in 1200, and to these established houses were added the friaries in the 13th century. Only the four main orders remained in the 14th century; the Friars of the Sack had closed their house in Spen Lane by 1312. The Dominicans and Franciscans, established in c. 1227 and c. 1330, both set up their regional administrative headquarters in York, and the Franciscans controlled a sizeable wharf between their precinct and the river Ouse.<sup>120</sup> The Carmelites were in the city by 1253, originally near the horsefair and later in Stonebow Lane, and the Austin Friars built their precinct

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118. C.I.A. Ritchie, The Ecclesiastical Courts at York (1956) passim; V.C.H. Yorks. III, pp. 1-40.

119. V.C.H. York, p. 357; V.C.H. Yorks. III, pp. 107-8.

120. V.C.H. York, p. 357-65; Yorks., III pp. 283-296; L.M. Goldthorpe, Franciscans and Dominicans in Yorkshire, Yorks. Arch. Jnl. xxxii (1936), pp. 267-8.

between Coney Street and the Ouse during the 1270s and 1280s. All the major houses were located around the edge of the city as space would allow in the 12th and 13th centuries, as were the hospitals. The largest, and certainly the wealthiest of these was St. Leonard's, which had enjoyed royal patronage since the 11th century. Six other permanent hospitals were set up in the 14th and 15th centuries and numerous maisons dieu.

The impact of these institutions on the community was immeasurable. There were clear economic advantages, employment for the York inhabitants and customers for the city traders, but the religious orders also contributed to the cultural and spiritual life of the city, as well as catering for the sick, aged and poor. It would be out of place to describe the city as a medical centre,<sup>121</sup> but the amenities must have met regional as well as local needs. The presence of so many men and women in religious robes was no doubt taken for granted by the laity, but must also have been a constant reminder of the transience of life!<sup>122</sup>

Yorks most visible profile from the Vale of York, was to the north, and on that side the Minster heightened the impact with its impressive towers. On the same site as the Anglo-Saxon cathedral where King Edwin was baptised in 627 it had suffered destruction, rebuilding and alteration. The main work was finished by 1475. The Minster precinct also contained the archbishop's palace (part of its chapel survives today as the Minster Library), the Treasurer's house, the Deanery, Peter's

121. V.C.H. York, pp. 361-2, 363-5; R.M. Butler, Medieval York, Yorks. Architectural & Archaeol. Soc. (York, 1972), pp. 13-14. The Austin friars had a library of over 650 books, J. Hutchinson & D.M. Palliser, York, Bartholemew City Guides (1980), p. 51.

122. R.B. Dobson, Mendicant Ideal and Practice in Late Medieval York, in P.V. Addyman & V.E. Black, eds., Archaeological Papers presented to M.W. Barley (York, 1984), pp. 109-121.

Prison, the houses of the 36 prebendary canons, and across Goodramgate, the Bedern of the Vicars Choral. St. William's College for Minster priests was built c. 1460 at the east end of the Minster, adding to an already impressive ecclesiastical enclave.<sup>123</sup> The visual impact of the Minster and its environs can readily be imagined even in the 1980s, and the first sight of its towers looming over the walls, and houses, confirmed the utter distinctiveness of York within the rural north. For most lay country people, the Minster must have symbolised the secular authority, superiority and dominance of the city, as much as it reflected the spiritual leadership of the dean and chapter and the archbishop throughout the northern region. No wonder then, that hundreds of individuals made bequests to St. Peter's of York in their wills.

At a more immediate level, York's inhabitants found spiritual solace in their parish churches. These were numerous and some were ancient; there may have been as many as fourteen by the end of the 11th century, thirty-seven by the end of the 12th, and thirty-nine in 1428.<sup>124</sup>

Some of the religious houses became exceedingly wealthy<sup>125</sup> and powerful, and were ambitious to create and maintain areas of the city under their own jurisdiction. Disputes between these religious liberties, of which there were four by 1300, and the civic authorities,<sup>126</sup> increased the necessity for the city council to have its jurisdictional position defined. St. Mary's Abbey posed the most severe and constant threat

123. R.M. Butler, Medieval York, Yorks. Architectural and Yorks. Archaeological Soc. (1982), pp. 8-9.

124. V.C.H. York, p.365.

125. St. Mary's Abbey, for example, was the wealthiest Benedictine house in the north with revenues amounting to £2,085 in 1539. V.C.H. Yorks. III, p. 116; Valor Ecclesiasticus, V, pp. 4-11.

126. V.C.H. York, pp. 38-40, 68; C.P.R. 1307-13, pp. 317, 471; 1313-17, pp. 681, 692; Y.C.R. I, pp. 47, 64, 70-1, 100; II, pp. 147, 149-51, 152-3, 154, 155, 157, 159, 161, 166, 169, 170-3.

making it imperative for the city to obtain a succession of grants and charters in the 12th and 13th centuries, which gradually accumulated into substantial level of independence and prepared the way for the city's autonomous status as a county in its own right in 1396.<sup>127</sup>

The succession of charters and grants encouraged the city's expansion but were also a recognition of its prosperity. York's economy was based primarily on commerce and it served the region as a river port.<sup>128</sup> Although larger ships were off-loading at Selby by 1339,<sup>129</sup> both sides of the river Ouse at York were lined with staithes, and its markets<sup>130</sup> and merchants served the region as well as the locality, as distributors of imported wine, dyestuffs, spices and fruit and of the products of the city's craft industries. The town was well situated ~~C~~ with access to the fertile Vale of Pickering, a major grain producing area, and within easy access of the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Wolds, major wool producing areas. The Ouse and its tributaries made York a natural collecting centre,<sup>131</sup> particularly for wool, as the Crown acknowledged when York was made a wool staple in 1326 and in 1333. Other raw materials were traded through the city: lead from Richmondshire and Derbyshire, and hides. The granting of the right to register debts under

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127. V.C.H. York, pp. 21, 30-4; A. Ballard, British Borough Charters, 1042-1216 (1913), pp. 6, 204; W. Farrer ed., Early Yorkshire Charters, I (1914), pp. 171-2; C. Ch. R. 1300-26, pp. 187, 329; 1341-1417, pp. 333-4, 354-5.

128. In the first half of the 14th century, York even had customs officials appointed, V.C.H. York, p. 98.

129. Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 97.

130. V.C.H. York, pp. 484-91 describes the function and location of the many specialised and general markets in the city.

131. V.C.H. Hull, p. 43; V.C.H. York, pp. 97-8; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 96.

the Statute Merchant in 1283<sup>132</sup> further enhanced the city's role as a commercial centre.

Much of the raw material handled, the wool, and hides, were vital to other major elements in the city's economy; its textile industry and leather goods manufacture. The former seems to have passed its first production peak by the middle of the 13th century, when the latter provided greater employment. York continued to produce some cloth but increasingly in the 13th century, those engaged in the finishing processes and clothing trades, outnumbered the weavers. Nonetheless, York prospered and at the beginning of the 14th century was a flourishing town, with a substantial skilled work-force and a tradition of established craft guild organisation, poised for further economic expansion.<sup>133</sup>

The success of the city in attracting commerce and immigrants, inevitably created public health and housing difficulties. Even though there were still empty spaces inside the walls in the 13th century, such as Toft Green and St. Andrewgate, building encroachments were common. For instance, in 1246, a man actually built his solar partly over his neighbour's house! Others found a solution by infilling backyards or spaces between streets. Suburban overspill<sup>134</sup> speeded up, with St. Leonard's for example, building on its garden in Gillygate. The congestion of streets encroached upon by shops and booths, obstructed by dung heaps, pigsties, and industrial filth, created an appalling

132. T.H. Lloyd, The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1977), p. 115; C.C.R. 1279-88, p. 244; 1333-7, p. 13.

133. V.C.H. York, pp. 41-44; E. Miller, The Fortunes of the English Textile Industry during the Thirteenth Century, Ec.H.R., 2nd ser., xviii (1965), p. 69.

134. V.C.H. York, pp. 52-3.

atmosphere. The evolving city council recognised a responsibility and in 1301 issued regulations attempting to regulate food-supply, prostitution, and the conduct of physicians, as well as the control of sewerage, pigs and the provision of public latrines; '4 to each quarter of the city'.<sup>135</sup>

Problems multiplied in the 14th century. Population pressure led to more infilling between streets; Glovergail and Cook Lane are good examples of infill. Even the badly drained Marsh east of St. Saviourgate was exploited for houses and suburban sprawl was extended outside Bootham, Micklegate, and Monk Bars. In 1332 Edward III ordered the mayor and bailiffs to clean up the city streets, complaining that the stench in York was worse than in any other city in the realm. By 1368 'new' privies had been built on Ousebridge and were provided with an attendant and a night light!<sup>136</sup>

#### Economic Developments in York

During the 14th century York enjoyed a period of rapid expansion, mainly as a consequence of the success of its merchants in overseas trade, and of its textile industry. York merchants were active in exporting wool in the late 13th century. In 1324-5 they accounted for about 12.5% of wool exports through Hull and by the 1330s were beginning to compete with merchants from Beverley as well as from overseas. As the cloth trade expanded, York merchants overtook those from Beverley, dominating the denizen group by the 1370s and 1380s and becoming increasingly active in markets in the Baltic as well as in the Low Countries and Gascony. The number of York merchants active in overseas trade grew during this period,<sup>137</sup> an increase paralleled by an

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135. Butler, Medieval York, p. 6.

136. Hutchinson & Palliser, York, pp. 35, 47.

137. V.C.H. York, p.100; J.N. Bartlett, Robert Holme Citizen and Merchant of York, Jnl Bradford Textile Soc., 98 (1952-3), p.98. See below pp.169-70.

increase in the city's population mainly from rural immigration. In spite of the Black Death and visitations of plague in 1361, 1369, 1375, 1378 and 1390, York's population rose from c. 8,000 in the 1330s to c. 13,000 in 1377 when York was the second largest town in England.<sup>138</sup> The severity of mortality in the city is difficult to estimate: 11,000 were said to have died in 1391, but migrants flocking into the city from all over the north of England, made good the losses. Other factors indicate that the late 14th century was a period of increased prosperity for York. Income from rents was rising and recovered quickly after the Black Death and the number of men who could afford to purchase the city's freedom increased from an average of 35 a year in the decade 1301-11 to an average of over 100 in the decade 1361-71. More important was the resurgence of textile production in the city in spite of competition from new textile centres such as Wakefield, Halifax and Bradford. Between 1331 and 1371 the percentage of new freemen employed in the textile crafts rose from 2% to 15%. The York weavers had recovered sufficiently by 1346 to renew their original charter, having been in arrears totalling £780 on payments for it in 1309. In the second half of the 14th century 28% of new freemen were engaged in the textile crafts, a clear indication of their importance to the city's economy.

At the same time the number of men in other industrial occupations was increasing and more metal-workers, leather-workers, builders and carpenters, victuallers and men engaged in service industries, migrated to the city.<sup>139</sup> Over 120 different crafts were practised there, several,

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138. V.C.H. York, pp. 84-6; J.C. Russell, British Medieval Population (Albuquerque, 1948), pp. 142-3; V.C.H. Yorks. III, pp. 440-2.

139. J.N. Bartlett, The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages, Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xii (1959-60), pp. 22-6; V.C.H. York, pp. 44, 86, 88. V.C.H. Yorks. III, p. 442. P.J.P. Goldberg, Marriage, migration, servanthood and life-cycle in Yorkshire towns of the Later Middle Ages: Some York cause paper evidence, Continuity and Change, 1 (1986), pp. 141-169.

such as bell-founding, dependent upon regional demand.<sup>140</sup> There was considerable building activity in York at this time, several churches were extended or renovated and more perpetual chantries established<sup>141</sup> than in any other period.

By the 1390s York was enjoying considerable prosperity. Not only were more large, individual cash estates left by merchants, but the economy of the city was well-balanced with the textile industry generating wealth and employment in addition to that encouraged by international entrepreneurs.

This satisfactory state of affairs did not long continue. Even before the turn of the century there were indications that external events were affecting parts of the city's economy. Five parish churches had been closed by 1400, three in the impoverished Walmgate-Fishergate area.<sup>142</sup> In 1395, the bowyers' guild was ordering its members not to teach their skills to country-folk, and likewise the founders' guild were ordered not to employ rural out-workers. The weavers were complaining of outside competition in 1399 and although the Crown gave them the right to levy tolls from their rivals,<sup>143</sup> their anxiety heralded a decline in textile production which York was to suffer with other established centres. It may have been that the textile industry nationally had

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140. Bartlett, *Aspects of York Economy*, p.2; as ed. The Lay Poll Tax Returns for the City of York in 1381 (Hull, 1953), *passim*. At the same time, 79 of these specialised crafts were practised in the West Riding.

141. V.C.H. York, pp. 84-5; R.B. Dobson, *The Foundation of Perpetual Chantries by the Citizens of Medieval York*, in Studies in Church History, iv (1967), p. 29.

142. Hutchinson & Palliser, York (1980), p. 39.

143. M.B. I, pp. 53, 94; V.C.H. York, pp. 88-9; C.P.R. 1396-9, p. 509.



expanded too rapidly and confronted a dearth of skilled labour, but there can be no doubt that a severe decline in textile production was underway from the early 15th century in such centres as York and Coventry.

The decline was exacerbated by the response of the men in the textile crafts and by the city council which supported increasing anti-foreign legislation on the part of the guilds: legislation which raised the financial qualifications for entry into crafts and insisted on stringent controls over the men employed in them. Inevitably skilled men were attracted to less restrictive centres and complaints of rural competition in every area of textile production increased.<sup>144</sup> In 1417, the girdlers' guild was asserting its right to a monopoly within a 32 mile radius of York. By 1425 York fullers were alarmed by the extent of rural competition and in the 1470s legislation was introduced by the council forbidding the sale of cloth in the city which had been manufactured and fulled elsewhere.<sup>145</sup> Such restrictive practices had an effect on other crafts. If cloth manufactured elsewhere could not be handled in the city, all subsequent finishing processes were affected and dyers, shearmen, tailors and drapers felt the pinch.

By the 1470s the amount of cloth produced in the city itself had fallen, although certain craftsmen suffered less than others: the basic broad-cloth industry suffered a dramatic decline, but the coverlet and small-cloth makers, linen weavers and cappers maintained or improved their position. The majority of weavers were struggling and in 1478 they had the annual fee for their charter reduced from £10 to £5 on account of

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144. H. Heaton, The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industry (Oxford, 1920), pp. 34-7, 44, 50-2.

145. M.B. I, pp. 181-4; II, p. 159; Y.C.R. I, p. 20.

their poverty<sup>146</sup> and in 1486 were exempted from paying it on the grounds that if they did, it would so impoverish them that many weavers would have to move elsewhere.<sup>147</sup> The stock listed in the inventory of a York tailor in 1485, dramatically illustrates the weakness of the York textile producers and the strength of their competitors. It included several varieties of cloth from Halifax and Craven, and Irish freese. By the time the city reluctantly agreed in 1492 that 'foreign' drapers (Kendal men in particular were mentioned), could sell their cloth in the city under the supervision of the searchers of the York tailors' guild, such concessions were too late.<sup>148</sup> The decline did not affect all the finishing processes and in the late 15th century dyeing could provide a good enough living to enable two dyers to become mayor.<sup>149</sup>

The effect of the national and local textile slump was diverse, but the effect of other events was not. The whole city suffered as a consequence of the mid 15th-century trade recession and although York merchants continued to be active, few ever traded on the same scale as their late 14th-century predecessors. Plague hit the city in the 1430s, 1470s and 1480s<sup>150</sup> and in the 1430s carried off several wealthy and active York merchants.<sup>151</sup> This time the city's population did not recover quickly as it had in the mid 14th century. The number of new

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146. V.C.H. York, p. 89; C.P.R. 1477-85, p. 135; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, pp. 66-9.

147. W. Campbell, ed., Materials for the Reign of Henry VII, I, Rolls Series (1873), p. 462.

148. Test. Ebor. III, pp. 301, 306; Y.C.R. II, pp. 89-91.

149. Michael and William White.

150. V.C.H. Yorks. III, p. 442; V.C.H. York, p. 63; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 193; Y.C.R. I, p. 117.

151. At least 55 between 1431-40 and 18 in 1338-9. The median decadal mortality for merchants in the 15th century was 20. These figures are minima, and derive from the York probate registers.

freemen entering in the decades 1431-51 was 14% lower than it had been in 1381-1401, and the city's total population declined to pre-1377 levels reaching c. 8,000 in the 1520s.<sup>152</sup>

The city also suffered a continued drain on its resources during the Wars of the Roses, so much so that Edward IV granted York £40, later £50 out of the Hull customs to compensate.<sup>153</sup> The demands for men and money did not end with the civil war; for example, 80 men were provided for campaigns against the Scots in 1482; 300 for Richard of Gloucester against the Queen Mother in 1483; 80 against the Scots in 1497, and in 1493 and 1497 the city had had to ask the Ainsty for help in providing and paying for soldiers.<sup>154</sup>

The rate of decline accelerated after 1450 as the number of skilled men entering the city declined and the proportion of poor and unskilled increased. Some craft guilds were unable to pay the costs of producing their yearly pageant for the Corpus Christi plays and had to combine with other guilds in a similar plight.<sup>155</sup>

The pattern was not a simple one of universal decline. Pewterers increased in numbers between 1471 and 1500 while other metal workers taking up the freedom of the city decreased. Between 1451 and 1501, twice as many millers and seven times as many corn-merchants became freemen as had in the preceding fifty years. During the following fifty years, corn-merchants nearly doubled their rate of entry, while the number of new freemen millers fell very slightly. The percentage of new freemen entering the food trades as a whole increased their

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152. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, op. cit., p. 28; V.C.H. York, p. 84; W.G. Hoskins, *English Provincial Towns in the Early Sixteenth Century*, T.R.H.S. 5th ser. vi (1965), pp.4-5.

153. V.C.H. York, p. 60; C.P.R. 1461-4, p. 334.

154. Y.C.R. I, pp. 54-5, 74-6; II, pp. 102-3, 128-34.

155. Ibid. I, p. 115; II, pp. 36, 85-6, 104-5.

relative importance from 14% to 19%, even though the numbers entering fell from 402 in 1411-1441, to 332 in 1511-1541.<sup>156</sup> The varying pattern among textile workers has already been discussed.

Overall however, the whole city was finding it increasingly difficult to meet its financial commitments and the late 15th century was marked by York's repeated pleas to have its fee farm reduced and the arrears owed forgotten.<sup>157</sup> Although there were still a few very wealthy individuals in York, payment of the fee farm was made by contributions from all the burgesses. This problem was well understood by the commonalty, who acknowledged that the city's financial difficulties arose from the falling income of the burgesses who were then unable to pay their civic taxes, and the city consequently fell into debt.<sup>158</sup>

The citizens also found it increasingly difficult to pay separate royal taxes and subsidies because it was claimed in 1488, so many parishes within the city were in "such great ruin and decay". The council tried to have the assessed sum reduced and in 1492 tried to ensure that it was met, by reducing the contributions paid by some parishes, St. Saviour, St. Mary Bishophill senior, and St. Gregory, and increasing the amounts paid by others such as St. Mary Bishophill junior and St. Nicholas Mickelgate. Already six central parishes had had to combine to pay their contributions.<sup>159</sup>

Complaints about declining prosperity and increasing poverty are generally subjective and relative, but there can be little doubt that in absolute as well as relative terms, York was suffering a severe economic

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156. Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, pp. 39, 41, 43, 47.

157. *Y.C.R.* I, pp. 71, 101, 110, 116, 165-7.

158. *M.B.* II, p. 246.

159. *Ibid.* II, pp. 36-7, 81-2, 83-4.

depression. Income from rents provides a useful unbiased indicator of the course of this depression. The Vicars' Choral of the minster were extensive property owners in the city and their income from rents gradually fell from £160 in 1426 to £100 in 1456 to £68 by 1500. The corporation also owned property and its rent income, allocated for the maintenance of Ousebridge similarly declined from £129 in 1449 to £105 in 1453 to £72 in 1501.<sup>160</sup>

Paradoxically, there was something of a building boom from 1350-1475. The four major guildhalls, all substantially of stone or brick were built: Merchant Adventurers' started in 1356, Merchant Tailors' in 1400, St. Anthony's and St. Christopher's halls in the 1440s and 1450s. St. Christopher's doubled as the city's Guild Hall.<sup>161</sup> By 1475 the Minster was complete and most of the larger parish churches such as St. Martin's, Coney street, and All Saints, Pavement, were rebuilt or enlarged during the first half of the 15th century. Tiles became more extensively used, and more multi-storeyed houses were built, many of 3 and 4 storeys, replacing the more usual single or two-storeyed cottages. To a considerable extent, these 15th-century developments were fading ripples of the previous boom economy, for after 1475, no new building or improvements of note occurred, with the exception of St. Michael-le-Belfry rebuilt in 1525-36.<sup>162</sup>

In spite of its clear poverty, York continued to attract some immigrants but not the productive and useful craftsmen it needed. The incidence of vagabondage was generally more common; York's inhabitants

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160. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 28-30.

161. Hutchinson & Palliser, *York*, p. 39; E. White, *The St. Christopher and St. George Guild of York*, Borthwick paper, no. 72 (1987), pp. 3-4.

162. Hutchinson & Palliser, pp. 39, 44, 138; R.M. Butler, *Medieval York*, *Yorks. Architectural and Yorks. Archaeological Soc.* (1982), p. 8.

were driven to begging and the difficulties of providing for them was made worse by the incoming poor from rural areas. In 1482 the council was trying to avoid the responsibility of rural vagabonds by allowing them to stay for only one night in the city, and in 1492 was ordered to drive them away by Henry VII. In 1502 the city was again legislating against the vagabonds, beggars and idle persons who had been arriving in the city from the country in growing numbers.<sup>163</sup>

By 1500 York was clearly in the grip of a downward spiral of decay. The number of merchants active in overseas trade had declined and although a few were still active, the city had lost its former dominance in the handling of northern cloth, to merchants from London and the new textile centres. For example, York merchants had once supplied Durham Priory with cloth but had been replaced by merchants from Halifax and Leeds.<sup>164</sup>

Not only was much of the cloth produced in the West Riding exported via London, but woad and madder were increasingly purchased from London merchants. Even though dealings with rural textile workers undermined York's own manufacturing base, a few York merchants bought their cloth and supplied them with dyestuffs, teasels and other imported goods. But they were only a few, and the city's merchants as a group were superseded as distributors and financiers to the new textile centres.<sup>165</sup> In an attempt to get cloth of any provenance back into the city, the council petitioned in 1502 for and was granted the right to hold new

163. Y.C.R. I, pp. 55; II, pp. 86, 182.

164. Bartlett, Expansion and Decline, pp. 29-30; J.T. Fowler, ed., The Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham, III. Surtees Society, ciii (1901), pp. 616, 632, 636; Heaton, op. cit., p. 146.

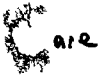
165. Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 68; C1/63/154, 355/70, 601/1, 782/11.

annual fairs in York for the sale of cloth amongst other items, which were to be toll free. The fairs were to be proclaimed throughout the new textile centres including Halifax, Skipton, Ripon, Pontefract and Wakefield and throughout the East Riding in an attempt to recapture some of the cloth trade. In 1506 the archbishop offered to invest money in the textile industry, if the council thought it would help revitalise cloth production in the city.<sup>166</sup>

The reasons behind the city's decline were more complex than its lost share in the cloth trade. The constant financial drain of royal demands for men and money, repeated attacks of plague and a decline in immigration, combined with the rapid decline of the city's major industry and a recession in overseas trade to produce urban decay on such a scale that York did not begin to recover until the late 16th century.

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166. Y.C.R. II, pp. 166, 172, 174-6; III, p. 18.

The different experiences of each of these three towns  are instructive. York and Beverley began the 14th century with many advantages over Hull; not least their centuries as religious and administrative centres, as textile producers and their early dominance of the region. They gained considerable profit early in the 14th century from the expanding wool trade, but Beverley found her share rapidly absorbed by Hull, York, and other merchants as the century progressed. For Hull and York, the expanding cloth trade brought growth in every sector: their populations increased, trade flourished, and wealth accumulated.

As the century turned, York and Hull began to feel the pressures of competition in a war-torn trade and ultimately lost control of the Yorkshire cloth trade to rivals from London and overseas. Hull, however, weathered the deepening crisis better than York, unhampered by a traditional reliance on textile and craft manufacturing, and maybe freer from the higher expectations of York. Hull recovered some of its modest scale of activity relatively quickly by exploiting its port facilities, while Beverley drifted into commercial oblivion.

York continued to dominate the region. It had been totally eclipsed as a major centre for international trade, but it remained the largest urban community north of the Trent, with a more sophisticated internal economy than any other northern town, and an influential position as a regional market. As home of the Council of the North and the Ecclesiastical Commission later in the 16th century, the city's changing economic base was firmly under-pinned, and York's prosperity was assured.



## CHAPTER 3 - OVERSEAS TRADE

While most historians agree that Europe enjoyed an expanding economy from c.1350 to c.1390 and then experienced a depression which lasted well into the 15th century, they do not agree as to the causes of that depression. The demographic explanation advanced by M.M. Postan and his neo-Malthusian followers has come under increasing attack from bullionists such as J.H. Munro and J. Day. They argue that the demographic repercussions of the Black Death throughout Europe were not the main causes of economic recession, but of greater significance was an acute shortage of precious metals and coins.<sup>1</sup> Even though liquidity crises were short-term, for example that of c.1395-c.1415, they cast a shadow over most of Europe until close to the end of the 15th century. In England the brief recovery due to minting policies in the 1420s, was soon overtaken by further monetary contraction between 1440 and 1460.<sup>2</sup>

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1. For the demographic arguemnt see for example M.M. Postan, The Economic Foundations of Medieval Society, in his Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 3-17; idem, Some Economic Evidence of Declining Population in the Later Middlè Ages, Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. ii (1950); J.Hatcher, Plague, Population, and the English Economy, 1348-1530 (1977). For the monetarist argument see for example, J.H. Munro, Bullion flows and monetary contraction in late-medieval England and the Low Countries, in J.F. Richards, ed., Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds (North Carolina, 1983), pp. 97-158; idem., Monetary Contraction and Industrial Change in the Late-Medieval Low Countries, 1335-1500, in N.J. Mayhew, ed., Coinage in the Low Countries (800-1500), British Archaeology Report, 54 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 95-161; J. Day, The Great Bullion Famine of the Fifteenth Century, Past & Present, (1978), pp. 3-54; E. Ashtor, A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages (1976), pp. 319-31. The critical issue would seem to be how well developed the agencies for credit transactions, banks and so forth were, to handle the rapidly growing use of credit to overcome many problems of long-distance trade, of which a shortage of coins was one. R. de Roover, The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank, 1397-1494 (Harvard, 1963), passim; R. de Roover, Banking, Business, and Economic Thought in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Chicago, 1974); P. Spufford, Handbook of Medieval Exchange, R. Hist. Soc. (1986), pp. xxx-xxiv.
  2. J. Day, The Great Bullion Famine, pp. 1, 18.

H.A. Miskimin has developed a compromise model, and it is one which incorporates some of both arguments. An immediate effect of the Black Death was to increase per capita wealth, much of it from inherited cash. A 'hedonistic spending spree' followed, with Northern Europeans buying luxury goods from the Far and Near East via the Mediterranean. Although northern raw materials were exported in return, the balance of trade was increasingly in deficit north to south. The drain of currency and bullion, especially gold, was irreversible and almost paralysed international trade.<sup>3</sup> The exploitation of Bohemian silver lodes helped to restore some liquidity from the 1460s, but was insufficient to make good the losses.<sup>4</sup>

Every region as directly integrated into the European market as was the East Riding of Yorkshire, found itself buffeted by forces beyond its control. The profits of long-distance trade were undoubtedly worth the risks, though it is unlikely that many provincial merchants realised that fluctuations in their own business might be a consequence of the increasing spice trade deficit experienced by 15th-century Venice.<sup>5</sup> Not all medieval towns were directly involved in overseas trade, although all were ultimately affected by the fluctuations of international commerce. Towns that were involved, like York, Beverley, and Hull, could find themselves either prospering from an expanding overseas market and advantageous exchange rate, or the victims of a shift or decline in

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3. Most recently his section in R. Lopez, H. Miskimin, A. Udovitch, England to Egypt, 1350-1500: Long-term Trends and Long-distance Trade, in M.A. Cook, ed., Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East (1970), pp. 92-106; Monetary Movements and Market Structure: Forces for Contraction in Fourteenth and Fifteenth-Century England, Jnl. Ec. Hist., xxiv (1964), pp. 470-90.
  4. J.H. Munro, Monetary Contraction and Industrial Change, p. 99; J. Day, The Great Bullion Famine, pp. 10, 11.
  5. Day, The Great Bullion Famine, p. 2.

demand abroad, of government foreign policy (or lack of one), or of the competition from rival merchants. The depth and nature of each town's participation was different, and it will be argued that those differences inevitably gave each a distinct history.

This chapter will outline the major trends in overseas trade in this period, by phases and commodities; the significant groups of alien merchants challenging denizens; and the impact of changes in the direction and scale of trade on York, Beverley, and Hull.

### I: TRENDS IN OVERSEAS TRADE

#### The Fourteenth-Century

Early in the 14th century, in the years following peace with France in 1305, English exports enjoyed a period of expansion. To all intents and purposes, wool was the only significant commodity which England has to sell abroad, although quantities of hides, corn, tin, and other minerals added to export cargoes from time to time.<sup>6</sup> Most of the wool was destined for the looms of Flanders and Holland, and a substantial amount was sold to the northern town of Italy for their textile industry.<sup>7</sup> The quality of English wool was unsurpassed throughout the 14th and 15th centuries; Italians paid twice as much for English wool as they did for Spanish in the 15th century.<sup>8</sup> Through the demand for wool alone, England was knitted into the northern European economy and the country's need for imported wine, woad and other dyestuffs<sup>9</sup> added a

6. J.L. Bolton, The Medieval English Economy (1980), pp. 193, 287-9.
7. E.B. Fryde, Italian Maritime Trade with Medieval England, in his Studies in Medieval Trade and Finance (1983), XIV, pp. 294-6.
8. Ibid., pp. 317-8.
9. M.K. James, Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade, ed. E.M. Veale (Oxford, 1971), pp. 9-10.

further vital connection. In the early 14th century, England was importing about 1/5th of the wine produced in Gascony; some 20,000 tuns annually.<sup>10</sup>

Virtually all of this trade was in the hands of merchants from other countries, and one of the most significant changes which occurred in the organisation of England's overseas trade between 1300 and 1500, was the partial replacement of alien merchants by denizens. The other major development in the pattern of trade, was the shift in the country's role from that of a producer and exporter of raw materials, to that of producer and exporter of textiles. The shift to an emphasis on cloth manufacture<sup>11</sup> had tremendous implications for the English economy and society; engaging as it did, more people in industrial processes and relationships, and generating more consumption of foreign imports to the greater comfort of the wealthy but sometimes to the detriment of English craftsmen.

This transformation took place against a background of complex and confusing international political manoeuvring and squabbling, with the country more often than not at war; with France, Burgundy, Denmark, the Hanseatic League, and even with itself.<sup>12</sup> All sides invoked embargoes

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10. Y. Renouard ed., Bordeaux sous les rois d'Angleterre (Bordeaux, 1965), p. 430; E.M. Carus-Wilson, La guède française en Angleterre: un grand commerce du moyen age, Revue du Nord, xxxv (1953). E. Kerridge, Wool Growing and Wool Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Times, in J.G. Jenkins, ed., The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain (1972), pp. 20-21.
11. Bolton, Medieval English Economy, pp. 178-9, 289-90; E.M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, England's Export Trade, 1275-1550 (Oxford, 1963), pp. 122-3, 138-9.
12. P. Dollinger, The German Hansa (1970); M.M. Postan, The Economic and Political Relations of England and the Hanse from 1400 to 1475, in E. Power, and M.M. Postan, eds., Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century (1966 edit.), pp. 91-154; N. Kerling, The Commercial Relations of Holland and Zeeland with England (Leiden, 1954); J.H. Munro, Economic aspects of the collapse of the Anglo-Burgundian alliance, E.H.R. lxxxv (1970), pp. 225-44.

on goods from time to time, and/or engaged in aggressive bullionist policies,<sup>13</sup> and frequently encouraged their merchants to commit acts of piracy against each other.<sup>14</sup> But international trade is an interlocking system, and no one nation could stand alone without eventually either capitulating or bribing allies. So that the feuding, while intense and bitter, was never to the ultimate economic collapse of a country, at least not as long as it had some commodity or expertise binding it into the system.

York, Beverley, and very soon Hull, were already important cogs in English overseas trade by 1300, serving as major collecting centres for northern wool.<sup>15</sup> York and Beverley also had a tradition of textile manufacture,<sup>16</sup> and since these three towns experienced directly the impact of the transformation of England's economy during the 14th and 15th centuries, it is to the different elements in that transformation that we must first turn. In the second part of this chapter, the fortunes of each town will be more specifically related.

## Wool

English wool exports peaked in 1306-7 at 41,573 sacks, the fleece of maybe 10,808,980 sheep.<sup>17</sup> At this date, the national trade was dominated

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13. J.H. Munro, Wool Cloth and Gold (Toronto, 1972) and for his more recent appraisal, Monetary Contraction and Industrial Change, pp. 95-137.

14. See below, pp. 187-9.

15. T.H. Lloyd, The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1977), p. 65; Bolton, Medieval English Economy, p. 195.

16. E. Miller, The fortunes of the English textile industry in the thirteenth century, Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. xviii (1965); H. Heaton, The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries (Oxford, 1920, pp. 2-4.

17. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, p. 41, calculated that 1 sack probably contained the wool of 260 sheep, p. 13n.

by Italian merchants but the Hanse accounted for 57% of all the wool shipped through Hull in 1304-5. First the Italians, as a result of a series of bankruptcies, and then the Hanse, lost their dominance of the wool trade. The early 14th-century policy of home staples was intended to deny aliens access to the major wool producers which they had previously enjoyed, and co-incidentally with the contraction of Italian finance, gave English merchants a temporary advantage. In 1304-5 aliens had exported 25,000 sacks and denizens 22,000 but by 1329-30 the relative positions were reversed with aliens accounting for under 10,000 sacks and denizens some 25,000. In Hull, alien merchants then accounted for only 13% of all wool exported.<sup>18</sup>

Even though the wool trade was subject to disruption from the hostilities which had broken out between England and France after 1313, Hull began to compete with Boston and London as a major port; fuelled by a group of dynamic merchants, mainly from York and Beverley. The outbreak of war in 1337 made all trade more uncertain, but at the same time Edward III had begun to squeeze even more money from the trade than was available to him from customs duties. The insatiable demands of his military ambitions in France, coupled with the monopolistic ambitions of some English merchants to exclude all alien merchants from the wool trade, led initially to the wool monopoly of 1337 and ultimately to the establishment of the Company of the Staple at Calais.<sup>19</sup>

In May 1336 writs were sent to twenty-two towns summoning representatives to a meeting with the king at Oxford. This began a series of merchant assemblies, through which Edward probably hoped to manipulate wool merchants into agreeing to a collective loan. Just when the

18. G. Unwin, ed., Finance and Trade under Edward III (1918), pp. 93-135; Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 99-143.

19. Ibid. pp. 144-92; Bolton, Medieval English Economy, pp. 194-5.

idea of the monopoly was floated is difficult to determine<sup>20</sup> but it is clear that Yorkshire merchants were summoned to almost all the subsequent assemblies. Four Beverley merchants and William de la Pole represented Yorkshire at the second assembly in June 1336; three Beverley and two York merchants with William and Richard de la Pole at the third in September.<sup>21</sup>

Only Newcastle in the far north was asked to send representatives<sup>22</sup> and only one merchant from another northern town, Thomas Silkeston of Pontefract, was personally summoned.<sup>23</sup> In 1336/7 the Yorkshire men constituted almost 20% of the 37 merchants summoned but as Edward tried to broaden the basis of his negotiations, more merchants were summoned and in 1337-8, the Yorkshire contingent constituted only about 5%<sup>24</sup>

Not all the Yorkshire merchants were eager to give their advice to the king and on 10 November, 1342 Walter de Kelstern of York was peremptorily summoned to attend the council for that purpose on 1 December on pain of punishment.<sup>25</sup>

20. Unwin, Finance and Trade, p. 182; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 146.

21. Lords Report on the Dignity of Peers, iv, pp. 459, 464, 524, 560. There were few Hull merchants trading in wool in this period and the de la Poles were their only representatives until two were others summoned for August 1340. No other Hull merchants were summoned until two in 1343 and again in 1348 when four were summoned. Until the council of 1340 there were usually more Beverley than York merchants summoned but thereafter the York merchants outnumbered those from anywhere else in the north.

22. Ibid., p. 524.

23. Ibid., pp. 511, 514, 520.

24. Ibid., pp. 464, 491-2, 555.

25. C.P.R. 1341-3, p. 700.

G. Unwin, E.B. Fryde and T.H. Lloyd amongst others, have described the details of the agreement concluded between Edward III and the company of merchants led by William de la Pole of Hull, and Reginald Conduit of London, whereby the merchants, appointed as royal purveyors, would collect 30,000 sacks of wool. The wool was to be shipped to the Low Countries in three batches and the merchants were to pay Edward III three instalments of 100,000 marks as a cash advance against the profits from the sale of the wool. Edward III was trying to create a royal monopoly; exploiting the credit-worthiness of those merchants appointed purveyors, since they were to acquire the wool on their own credit. Any other merchant could join in the collecting, but they could not insist on their buying on credit and might have to pay cash. In effect, they had little choice since any wool could be taken. Prices were to be those agreed at the September 1336 assembly at Nottingham, and arrangements were made covering payment of expenses. The king and the merchants were to share the profit equally.<sup>26</sup>

Merchants from the three towns, with their local knowledge and contacts, were vital to the success of the operation in Yorkshire. On 30 July, 1337 eleven Beverley, four York and one Hull merchant were appointed deputy royal collectors of wool, and Henry Belton and Henry Goldbeter of York were appointed soon after. Collectors were given a specific quantity of wool to acquire, usually 400-500 sacks in a given area.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, some 48 Yorkshire men made private contributions as independent collectors; many of them like John de Acome of York,

26. Unwin, Trade and Finance, pp. 186-93; E.B. Fryde, Edward III's Wool Monopoly of 1337, History, N.S. xxxvii (1952); Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 147-8; Bolton, Medieval English Economy, pp. 196-7.

27. C.P.R. 1334-8, p. 485; C.C.R. 1337-9, p. 148.



appearing as wool merchants for the first time in the records.<sup>28</sup>

In the event, the whole enterprise turned into something of a fiasco. Edward, desperate for cash, wanted more than had been agreed. The wool fleets left Hull, Newcastle, Ipswich and Boston in September/October 1337, but carrying less than their quotas. They arrived in Dordrecht where Edward's envoys compelled the merchants to accept £2 per sarplar and entered into 317 obligations for payment of each merchant's share of the profit, minus the £2 and the ancient custom of 6s.8d. per sack which had not yet been paid. Not only was there a shortfall in the amount of wool collected, by some 20,000 sacks Edward III estimated, but at least 2,500 sacks had been smuggled.<sup>29</sup>

It has been argued that Edward's actions at Dordrecht were perfectly justifiable, and maybe they were, but many merchants suffered severe losses. They were faced with unpaid suppliers at home, and had royal bonds in lieu of their profit. Many small merchants, unable to survive long periods without cash, sold their bonds to wealthier merchants, no doubt at a loss. As a consequence, the numbers of merchants drawn into subsequent wool collections was far smaller.<sup>30</sup>

The Crown used every means known to it to redeem these bonds, the Dordrecht bonds, other than by direct cash redemption. Merchants were usually given the right to export wool at half the official subsidy until the debt was cleared. This was hardly a satisfactory alternative to direct payment, as embargoes on wool export frequently interrupted the course of trade, and in any case, further heavy investment in wool was required to finance new ventures to redeem the debt. Income from lay

28. See Appendix 3; C.C.R. 1337-9, p. 430; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 177.

29. Ibid., pp. 148-50.

30. Ibid., pp.175, 182.

and ecclesiastical subsidies were also used by the Crown. On 9 May, 1338 Henry Belton and other Yorkshire merchants were assigned £6,000 from the subsidies of the 1/10 and 1/15 for the 1,000 sacks they had collected and shipped from Yorkshire, but on 22 May payment had still not been made and was to be recovered through the system of reduced customs payments on their exports. Many of them had still not been repaid in 1344.<sup>31</sup>

The ramifications of the collection and the arrangements for payment rumbled on for years. Not only did merchants suffer financially, but some of them had borne the brunt of royal anger at the inefficiency of the collection. Richard Brigenhall of York was withdrawn as a collector in December 1337, having been ordered in October to speed up the operation. Under this sort of pressure from the Crown and faced with possible financial losses, some merchants reacted violently. The sheriff of Yorkshire, sent to enquire into the wool collection in 1338 was assaulted by Thomas Holme, Adam Tirwhit and Thomas Waghen, all eminent merchants and keepers of Beverley.<sup>32</sup>

Edward made several more attempts to collect the wool. In the February parliament he was granted the remaining 20,000 sacks, and for these the purveyors were given royal letters obligatory. Since they were awaiting their payment from Dordrecht, their credit was exhausted. Edward held another assembly of merchants in March 1338, but by then he had entered into an agreement with the Bardi and Peruzzi, Italian financiers, for them to advance him the cash and to dispose of the remaining 20,000 sacks. Only 2,500 sacks were collected so a further order was made in July 1338 for the rest. This time everyone in the

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31. Appendix 3; C.C.R. 1337-9, pp. 365, 429-431; 1343-6, p. 402.

32. C.C.R. 1337-9, pp. 270, 271, 426; C.P.R. 1338-40, p. 179.

country who was a tax payer, clergy and laity alike, had to contribute wool. The clergy objected and offered cash instead, and inevitably, non-wool producers had to purchase the wool to make a contribution in kind! By September 1339 only 12,354 sacks had been collected and in October Edward once more went to parliament for money.<sup>33</sup>

In March 1340, the commons offered him one ninth of lamb, fleece, and grain in sheaf from the 1340-1 yield, and 1/10th and 1/15th from non-agricultural population, on condition that he did not raise the export subsidy on wool again without their agreement.<sup>34</sup> Edward III agreed to their condition regarding subsidies to take effect from Whitsun, 1341. By June, he was bankrupt again, and persuaded parliament to grant him another loan of 20,000 sacks, to be collected concurrently with the grant of the ninth. Edward was to buy the wool at Nottingham prices and sell it to the merchants at 13s. 4d. less. The buyers were to pay the money, plus a duty of 40s. per sack to the Crown representative overseas. Several merchant M.P.s must have run out of parliament that day, scarcely able to believe their luck. Syndicates were formed to buy the wool on the agreement that the purchase price was to be set against earlier loans. It meant the best chance of redeeming their Dordrecht bonds, they had been offered. At least 13 different syndicates agreed to buy 9,000 sacks, leaving the rest for Edward's overseas creditors and allies.<sup>35</sup>

The 1340 loan was the least successful of all Edward's attempts to raise money from wool; given that less than half the expected quantities were collected. The following year discussions continued,

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33. Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp.151-4.

34. Ibid., pp. 155-6.

35. Ibid., pp. 157-8; Bolton, Medieval English Economy, p. 198.

intensified by the government's disregard for its agreement to open trade up after Michaelmas 1340, and by its increase in the export subsidy during May. Parliament finally agreed to a tax of 30,000 sacks of wool, not another loan, to be collected through county quotas.<sup>36</sup> As might be expected, this tax generated many compromises and contradictions, but despite the delay in its collection it was the most successful. Edward III however, had finally learned his lesson; that it was virtually impossible to make a sufficient profit from a state monopoly and at the next merchant assembly in July 1342, it was agreed that trade should once more be open to all.<sup>37</sup>

Eventually Edward III and a representative group of merchants agreed that payment to the Dordrecht bond holders was to be through an allowance of 20s. per sack exported during the year following midsummer 1343 and an allowance of 6s. 8d. per sack exported during the following two years, 1344-6.<sup>38</sup>

Whether any of the 'ordinary' merchants made a profit out of their dealings with Edward III, is impossible to discover. For the regular wool merchant it would have been equally impossible for him to have kept out of the morasse. Above all, medieval merchants needed a constant flow of business, and anyone not involved in the wool monopoly and loans, would have been excluded from trading except under licence, during the ban which lasted from August 1336 until 1342.<sup>39</sup> Even then, it was only possible to export wool to the staple, then at Antwerp.<sup>40</sup>

36. loyd, Wool Trade, pp. 158-9.

37. Ibid., pp. 166, 173-4.

38. Ibid., p. 194.

39. M.M. Postan, Credit in Medieval trade, Ec. H.R., 1 (1927-8), p. 261; Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 179, 183.

40. Lifted for about 5 months in 1339, ibid., p. 180.

Partly as a consequence of the failure of the wool collections, and partly because of the excessive burden placed upon merchants by government demands for bullion deposits to be made against exports,<sup>41</sup> measures were agreed upon from time to time, which eventually led to the formation of the Company of the Staple and the establishment, in 1363, of the staple at Calais; permanently from 1399. While these developments were extremely important to the conduct of the wool trade, and Yorkshire merchants were associated with them, none played a particularly significant role.<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, Yorkshire members of the Staple participated in collective loans to the Crown, and one or two, most notably John Thrisk, served as Mayor fo the Calais Staple in the fifteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

#### Wine

Meanwhile of course, Edward's desperate need for cash and his fiscal policies, in addition to the physical disruption trade suffered as a consequence of war, were affecting other commodities, notably wine. Before the preliminary skirmishes and the beginning of the Hundred Years War, England had been importing 20,000 tuns, about one fifth of Gascon production and a significant quantity of this came through Hull.<sup>44</sup> War pushed up costs, and disrupted shipping to such an extent that exports fell by  $\frac{3}{4}$  between 1335-6 and 1336-7, and by the 1360s, exports from Bordeaux totalled only 30,000 tuns. The price in England had

41. L.F. Salzman, English Trade in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford, 1931), p. 22; Rot. Parl. II, p. 87, III, p. 67; Fogdera, III, p. 150.

42. Salzman, English Trade, pp. 292-6; E. Power, The Wool Trade in English Medieval History (Oxford, 1931), pp. 97-9; LLOYD, Wool Trade, pp. 193-256.

43. See Appendix 4.

44. James, Wine Trade, pp. 98-100.

doubled from £3 to £5-£6 per tun.<sup>45</sup> Trade with Toulouse, the main Gascon centre was disrupted. It was to a considerable extent, reciprocal. Woad, as well as wine were exchanged for cloth and it was a considerable advantage to the English to have a commodity to exchange, since credit in the woad trade was long term to accommodate the two year cycle from planting to harvest.<sup>46</sup>

### Cloth

It is even harder to be precise about cloth exports in the early 14th century than it is about wine, since cloth was not subject to regular customs duty until 1347. Previously, only aliens had paid duty on exports. There was still some cloth imported into England in the 1320s, less in the 1330s, and virtually none in the 1340s. Exports must have been substantial in the 1340s to attract Edward's fiscal attention. England's recovery in cloth exports was through the production of cheaper fabrics and straits (narrow cloths), and not the traditional, high quality Lincoln scarlets or Beverley blues of the thirteenth century. Subsequently, broadcloths reappeared so that as the cloth industry recovered, it was more widely based to include a greater variety of cloths. In the mid-14th century 15%-20% of exports were the medium-priced worsteds, but the cloth shipped out through Hull was almost all unfinished; broadcloths and straits, which became most popular with the Hanse in the late 14th century, and worsteds in the form of single and double sets of bed hangings.<sup>47</sup>

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45. Ibid., pp. 15, 140-2; H.A. Miskimin, The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe, 1300-1460 (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 133-4.

46. P. Wolff, English Cloth in Toulouse, 1380-1450, Ec.H.R. 2nd ser., ii (1950), p. 296.

47. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, pp. 199-200; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, pp. 11-13; N.S.B. Gras, Early English Customs, pp. 66-73. According to Postan, straits were not included in the general cloth custom and so were more popular with the Hanse, Relations of England and the Hanse, p. 145.

The take-off for English cloth was in the late 1350s and 1360s. Between 1350 and 1368, cloth exports grew at a national rate of 18%. It was not simply that cloth was paying export duty at a lower rate than wool, nor that the wool trade was still reeling from the consequences of Edward III's woolmongering, as exports in 1353-4 had reached 44,914 sacks.<sup>48</sup> In the aftermath of the Black Death in England, as food prices began to fall, domestic consumption probably picked up.<sup>49</sup> At a time when wool was increasingly subject to control by a diminishing number of merchants, determined to monopolise the trade, the cloth trade was more accessible to larger numbers of individuals. Many were involved in the different stages of its production. The increased spending power post Black Death could find an outlet through investment in trade and in cloth it could begin on a very small scale;  $\frac{1}{2}$  cloths were recorded as the total shipment of some individuals. Overseas, the Gascon economy began to recover, and provided a market for English cloth,<sup>50</sup> which proved to be a commodity which travelled well. Wool was more or less confined to those countries which were tooled up to process it, just as in the twentieth century, not all countries are able to purchase and process crude oil, but most welcome oil-based products.

Clearly there is no single explanation, and even Edward III's attempts to lure Flemish textile workers to settle in England, have to be taken into account.<sup>51</sup> By the mid 1360s, English cloth exports were posing a serious threat to Flemish textile towns and their demand for

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48. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 297; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, p. 47.

49. Miskimin, Early Renaissance Europe, p. 135; J. Hatcher, Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530 (1977), pp. 33-4, 50.

50. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 290.

51. E. Lipson, A Short History of Wool and its Manufacture (1953), p. 57; Gras, Early English Customs, p. 117.

wool began to fall. English textile producers benefitted from a dip in wool prices so that even the brief recovery of the wool trade in the later 1370s could not long deflect cloth exports from a steadily upward trend. Wool prices fell in the 1380s, due to overproduction: a further advantage to textile producers. It is important not to over-emphasise the success of the cloth trade versus wool. Although it was growing more rapidly, and 40,000 cloths per annum were going to new overseas markets, sufficient wool was still being exported in 1400 to make the equivalent of 80,000 cloths.<sup>52</sup>

The intrinsic value of the wool was of course less, and its transport overheads were higher.<sup>53</sup>

#### The Fifteenth Century.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the pattern of north European trade had become more complex and sophisticated. While English cloth was now handled throughout Europe, English merchants generally travelled no further than their traditional markets in the Low Countries, and France. Nonetheless, the export of cloth greatly encouraged a two-way trade with Europe, and the late 14th century witnessed the arrival in England of an enormous diversity of goods; raw materials, luxury foodstuffs, and manufactured goods. These were the early days of a

52. Miskimin, Early Renaissance Europe, p. 94; Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 199; T.H. Lloyd, The Movement of Wool Prices in Medieval England, Economic History Review Supplement No. 6 (1973), p. 20. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, p. 16 estimate that one sack of wool was sufficient to manufacture 4-4½ cloths of assize.

53. Dr. E. Miller has calculated from Fryde, ed., The Wool Accounts of William de la Pole, that in 1336-7 around 9% of the cost of wool for export from Hull, bought in Lincolnshire was attributable to transport, packing, and warehousing. The proportion rose to c. 14% where Shropshire wool was shipped via London. I am grateful to Dr. Miller for this information. In the 1470s, the cost of transporting wool from the Cotswolds to London was about 2% of the purchase price. A. Hanham, The Celys and Their World (1985), p. 119n.



general import trade which became increasingly significant during the 15th century.<sup>54</sup> English merchants were also engaged in carrying goods between other countries, and in re-exporting goods, and this was another aspect of trade which subsequently increased.<sup>55</sup>

Probably by the end of the first decade of the 15th century, and certainly by the end of the second, it was apparent that the commercial expansion of the late 14th century was over. Contraction in European trade generally, the re-opening of war with France, and frequent disputes with the Hanse and their Danish allies unsettled trade. Cloth exports fell to 30,000 per year, and wine imports staggered between 3 and 18 thousand tuns of non-sweet wines. Wool exports levelled off at between 10,000-15,000 sacks, but declined dramatically after 1430, as the direct consequence of government bullion policies.<sup>56</sup>

#### Wool

Ever since Edward III's imposition of a bullion deposit against wool exports in 1340, successive governments had tried to use the wool trade as a means of attracting coin into the country, while restricting the flow of English coins out. The staple at Calais and its mint were used to attract bullion as a source of revenue to pay the garrison there. England was not a debasing country, compared with continental countries after the Statute of Purveyors in 1352, and therefore English coins were popular because of their high specie content.<sup>57</sup> There was a

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54. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, pp. 287, 301, 318.

55. See below, p.175. English merchants for example, shipped corn from Danzig to Gascony, Postan, Relations of England and the Hanse, p. 140.

56. Miskimin, Early Renaissance Europe, p. 96; James, Wine Trade, p. 57; Bolton, English Medieval Economy, pp. 294, 299.

57. Ibid., p. 298; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 184; Salzman, English Trade, pp. 14-24, 99.

a continuous struggle for bullion in the late middle ages and whereas the dukes of Burgundy pursued aggressive debasement policies from the 1380s up to the 1470s,<sup>58</sup> the English government tried to ensure new supplies of bullion by demanding it as part of the purchase price paid by aliens, especially for wool. In 1429 and 1430 the Bullion and Partition Ordinances were passed. Effectively they ended the use of credit in the purchase of wool at Calais and the whole price had to be handed over in gold or silver. The seller then had to deliver one third of the price in bullion or foreign coins to the mint.<sup>59</sup>

Eileen Power described this as the killing of the goose that laid the golden egg, and indeed the effect was catastrophic. The smaller English merchants were ruined since they received proportionately less for their sales and could not afford to wait for payment. They lost the 'banking' facilities of the Staple and their main customers, Dutch and Flemish merchants found it difficult to pay for wool outright, and not on credit, and the bullion requirement compounded their difficulties.<sup>60</sup>

The Ordinances were repealed in 1444, but meantime trade had been halted for nearly four years up to 1439 by the duke of Burgundy's angry reaction to them. There was a brief upsurge in 1439-40, but thereafter exports were running at 8,000-9,000 sacks per year. Efforts were made to strengthen the Ordinances in 1445 and 1463, but provoked further protective bans by the duke of Burgundy between 1447-52 and 1464-7.

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58. J.H. Munro, Wool Cloth and Gold, passim.

59. Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 261, 270-1, 273; Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 298.

60. Power, Wool Trade, pp. 102; M.M. Postan, Private Financial Instruments in Medieval England, in idem, ed. Medieval Trade and Finance (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 49-51. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 299.

The bans did not work effectively because too many people were already dependent on shipping and handling English cloth, but the Burgundian bans did account for sudden fluctuations in England's pattern of exports.<sup>61</sup>

The wool trade never recovered. Normal credit transactions were not allowed until the late 1470s, and although the remaining Staplers could fix high prices to suit themselves, they ruined their main customers and opened up the European market still further for English cloth. Eventually, textile workers in the Low Countries found employment finishing English cloth, and re-exporting it to the Baltic.<sup>62</sup>

The 1420s and 1430s were critical for England's overseas trade. Cloth overtook wool as the major commodity, and in spite of Burgundy's bans, exports between 1437-1467 rose to 60,000 per year. As the sales of English cloth went up, so European demand for wool went down, even though the mid-century glut brought wool prices down, from an average of £5 10s. per sack to £5. Thereafter, cloth maintained an uneven, but overall rise in exports; falling by one third to an average of 40,000 cloths per year between 1450 and 1470, and rising once more to 60,000 in 1489-90 and to 90,000 in 1509-10.<sup>63</sup>

#### Competition From Alien Merchants.

While the steady expansion of the cloth trade was undoubtedly beneficial to England's economy, it disguised a real weakness in the country's trading position; namely the inability of English merchants

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61. Bolton, Medieval English Economy, p. 299; J.H. Munro, An economic aspect of the collapse of the Anglo-Burgundian alliance, 1428-1442, E.H.R. lxxxv (1970); Munro, Industrial Protectionism in Medieval Flanders: Urban or National? in H.A. Miskimin, ed., The Medieval City (Yale, 1977) pp. 247, 249.

62. Bolton, Medieval English Economy, p. 300.

63. Ibid., p. 293; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 306; Lloyd, Wool Prices, p. 20; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, pp. 97-113.

to control much more than 60% of the country's trade.<sup>64</sup> Alien merchants sought profitable ventures wherever they could be found, and while trade had been relatively free and accessible in the 13th century, it became increasingly regulated and restricted in the 14th.

### Wool

The Flemish and then Italians had dominated wool exports in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, but after the 1320s English merchants successfully took over. All wool exports were given to alien merchants between 1352 and 1356, but thereafter the wool trade became a less attractive proposition to alien merchants, given the higher export duties they had to pay, and the connivance of the English government with its own merchants in the formation of the Staple. From the late 1370s, alien exports dropped to a mere trickle, although Italians continued to buy wool from time to time. Whereas aliens had accounted for 45% of all wool exports in 1306-7 (18,839 sacks), their exports fell to a mere 11% (1,468 sacks in 1399-1400).<sup>65</sup>

### Wine

All imported goods and cloth however, were tempting commodities for venture capital during the 15th century, and merchants from the Low Countries, Italy, France, Spain and the Hanseatic League, competed, posing a challenge to English merchants.

To a considerable extent, external factors worked against the English. The wine trade was especially vulnerable to physical disruptions during the Hundred Years' War, and the volume of imports never regained the levels of the early 14th century; 15th-century imports amounting to maybe half the volume. The slight recovery, and

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64. Bolton, Medieval English Economy, pp. 306-7.

65. Power, Wool Trade, pp. 51-4; V.C.H. York, pp. 100-1; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 205; T.H. Lloyd, Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages (1982), p. 199.

stability of wine prices in the early 15th century, gave way to a decline, apparent even before the loss of Bordeaux in 1453 which drastically cut the amount of wine available. Prices in England went up from an average of £5 10s. to £7 a tun, and, in part due to the civil war in England, the trade remained depressed until the Treaty of Picquigny in 1475.<sup>66</sup> The consequent recovery was not massive; imports only rose to over 10,000 tuns in 1489-90 and 1499-1500, but more importantly most of the wine was being shipped by alien merchants. Out of the 310 ships engaged in the Bordeaux trade in 1482-3, only 47 were English and the majority were small carvels from Brittany. In an attempt to rectify this imbalance, Henry VII ordained in 1485, that the wines of Guienne and Gascony could only be carried to England in English, Welsh, or Irish ships. This and a subsequent statute of 1488, did help to increase the numbers of small English shipments, but it is clear that the decline in imports was beyond the influence of the English Crown and the competition was over the share of the carrying trade.<sup>67</sup>

#### The Hanse

The commercial guerrilla warfare, which characterised English and Hanse relationships from the late 14th century reflected a rather more complicated situation than obtained in the wine trade.<sup>68</sup> Along Hanseatic trading routes came increasing quantities of copper and iron from Sweden, stock fish and cod from Norway, herrings from Skania and later Iceland, grain and timber from Prussia and Poland, minerals from Hungary, wine from southern Germany, salt from France and Portugal, fur

66. James, Wine Trade, pp. 47, 58; Bolton, Medieval English Economy, pp. 289-90, 306.

67. James, Wine Trade, pp. 49-50.

68. Postan, Relations of England and the Hanse, op. cit.

from Lithuania, and tar from Russia. There was generally an imbalance in the value of trade along this east-west-east axis, with the east providing more valuable raw materials and the west cheaper manufactured goods. In 1368, one third of the Danzig ships trading in the west, returned home in ballast. By 1400 the demand for Baltic and east European goods, in particular corn, wood, and wax,<sup>69</sup> was such that the Hanse were overstretched as the shortage of ships became acute, and had to allow foreign merchants, especially the Dutch, in to Prussia to freight out the goods. As a result of their competitive carriage rates, retail prices in Prussia dropped between 1379-1400. The Hanse however, could not easily tolerate foreign merchants carrying their cloth directly into Hanse markets, nor could they accept foreigners being granted reciprocal trading privileges in Hanse towns, which would have allowed the foreigners freer access.

Cloth was the most important commodity imported by the Hanse. In 1368, it comprised  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the total imports into Lubeck, for example, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total trade. Throughout the 14th century, more cloth was exported by the Hanse through Boston, than through any other English port,<sup>70</sup> and for all the east coast ports Hanse trade was dominant.

In the second half of the 14th century, East Coast commerce was directed increasingly at the Baltic markets, and the nature of Anglo-Hanseatic relations was therefore of some importance to Yorkshire merchants.

English merchants had once been welcome in Hanse towns and from c. 1350 could be found selling cloth in Elbing, Danzig and Stralsund, and buying timber, grain and copper there. As they expanded their

69. P. Dollinger, The German Hansa (1970), pp. 213-4; Miskimin, Early Renaissance Europe, pp. 123-4.

70. Dollinger, Hansa, pp. 201, 216, 218, 243.

interests, renting shops and houses they aroused antagonism and were forbidden to trade outside the towns, to trade with foreigners or to charter Hanse ships.<sup>71</sup> From the late 14th century, English merchants were barely tolerated in Danzig or Lubeck and thereafter the relationship between the Hanse and England was extremely fraught. Much English resentment was due to the privileged position which the Hanse had enjoyed in England since the late 13th century, exemplified by their trading posts at Boston, Lynn, and Hull and the autonomous Steelyard in London.<sup>72</sup> During the course of the 14th century the term Hanse, came to mean a league of towns rather than of merchants.<sup>73</sup> The Hanseatic League greatly strengthened the position of individual merchants.

Their determined defence of their exemptions and advantageous rates of customs duties, coupled with strong resistance by the Prussian towns focussing on Lubeck, against the English trading directly with the Baltic, was at the heart of worsening Hanseatic - English relations. That the Hanse were divided between Prussian and southern interests should have been to the advantage of the English, Cologne remained open to English traders longer than any other Hanse town,<sup>74</sup> but the situation was beyond control and required a more astute and determined political commitment than the English government could muster. Intense commercial rivalry, set against shifting political alliances, flaring

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71. Ibid., p. 73.

72. Ibid., p. 94; G.D. Ramsay, English Overseas Trade during the Centuries of Emergence (1957), pp. 99-100.

73. Dollinger, Hansa, pp. xix-xx; Lloyd, Alien Merchants, pp. 139-44

74. Postan, Relations of England and the Hanse, pp. 131, 133. Even Danzig retained some commercial links until 1468.

hostilities,<sup>75</sup> and internal strife, meant that most agreements and negotiated treaties were virtually doomed from the outset.

At his accession Richard II refused to confirm the Hanse charter of privileges, because of pressure from English merchants. He set out conditions to try to ensure that only those merchants who were eligible, got Hanse privileges. Agreement was finally reached, but the Hanse were now to pay extra additional tonnage and poundage on imports and on kersey exports. In 1385 the English fleet attacked some German ships and the Grand Master broke off relations. The Wendish towns in the League were more conciliatory and let English merchants into Stralsund. Constant complaints against the English, however, led to their goods being seized in Stralsund in 1388, and Richard II retaliated with seizures of Hanse goods in England. Negotiations were begun, agreement reached that the English could settle in Danzig with their own governor, and would be able to sell retail, but in contrast, Hanse merchants continued to be harrassed in England and in 1398 the Grand Master revoked the earlier agreement.<sup>76</sup>

Richard II's reign, a relatively peaceful twenty years, demonstrated the impossibility of either negotiating authority to make agreements hold at grass-roots level. Piracy and smuggling were endemic amongst the merchant community, and governments actively encouraged the former when it suited them.<sup>77</sup> Official records are full of claims

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75. For instance, the war between the Hanse and the Dutch meant that the Hanse closed the Sound, to the detriment of the English merchants also, and in 1468, it was English action against the Danes, allies of the Hanse, which united the League. *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 133.

76. Dollinger, *Hansa*, pp. 73-4.

77. Salzman, *English Trade*, p. 275 cites the example of the Christopher of Hull en route from Bordeaux in 1415, which was captured by the Genoese, ransomed back by the Company of the Staple, and given back to her owners with partial compensation for the lost cargo. Complaints about similar losses were made to parliament routinely, *Rot. Parl.* II, p. 311, IV, pp. 85, 103. See below p.188.



for compensation, for the loss of goods in foreign markets, the loss of goods at sea, and indeed for the loss of ships at sea.<sup>78</sup> Such claims could drag on for years and years; involving as they did the acceptance of merchant law, and the tricky problem of deciding which jurisdiction to submit your claim to.<sup>79</sup> The complications which could arise, when individuals resorted to the most popular form of recovering compensation, namely having the goods arrested of another merchant from the same country, is clearly exemplified in the case of Henry Damel of Hull. In 1308 his ship was attacked by a Frisian merchant, while it was in Hamburg, and ashes, flax, boards, pitch and tar worth £65 were stolen. He had the goods of a Jacob de Fandermouth arrested, to the value of only £50, but Fandermouth claimed that as permission to make the arrest had been given by the bishop of Utrecht, and he was not under the bishop's jurisdiction, his goods should be released.<sup>80</sup> Damel had not made a very good choice! One gets the impression that the formal, legal machinery of each trading nation, was solemnly processing claims of theft, piracy and so on, while individual merchants continued to attack each other in ports and market places!<sup>81</sup>

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78. E.g. in 1406 the merchant community was given tonnage and poundage and a grant from the subsidy on wool to maintain a body of soldiers. They could keep all the prizes captured, except ships of notables which had to be handed over to the king. Rot. Parl. III, p. 610.
79. Lloyd, Alien Merchants, pp. 143-4. For the problems involved in suing on the continent and the delays which occurred see S.B. Chrimes, ed., Fortescue's De Laudibus Legum Anglie (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 131-3, 207-10.
80. C.C.R. 1307-13, pp. 68-9, 211. See also Walter de Kelstern of Beverley using this procedure in 1310. Ibid., pp. 150, 228, 238, 247, 278.
81. Bolton, English Medieval Trade, pp. 309-11; for Yorkshire examples see C.C.R. 1337-9, p. 327; 1392-6, pp. 17, 300, 324; Bronnen, I, p. 472.

There was all of this intransigence and more after the turn of the 15th century. Tension mounted during the first two decades and twice the English government imposed tonnage and poundage payments on the Hanse, in 1422 and 1431, provoking a fierce reaction. Total commercial war was becoming a serious possibility. In 1434-6 the Hanse sent a large delegation to England led by Heinrich Vorrath, which produced a compromise treaty in 1437, sufficiently favourable to the English to provoke an instant rejection by the Prussian towns.<sup>82</sup> From then until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1475, there was a succession of clashes between England and the different Hanseatic groups. Civil strife in England and the absence of firm government, encouraged piracy and irresponsible behaviour as a matter of government policy from 1442. For instance, members of the royal council owned ships amongst the privateers which attacked a fleet of 110 Flemish, Dutch, and Hanse ships in the Bay of Burgneuf in May, 1449. The attack was repeated in 1458, and when the English government seized Hanse goods in London ten years later, all the Hanseatic towns, with the exception of Cologne, began a vicious sea war against the English. Utrecht was signed, granting a restoration of Hanse privileges, mainly because Edward IV was indebted to the Hanse for providing the ships for his re-invasion of England in 1471. Thereafter the English were firmly excluded from direct trading with the Baltic.<sup>83</sup>

It has been argued that for a government, heavily dependent upon income from customs duties, to lose access to the major trading areas of the Baltic, and even more importantly, the Rhine, was incompetent folly. But the rivalry over the Baltic which initiated the hostility, involved

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82. Postan, *Relations of England and the Hanse*, pp. 114-20.

83. Ibid., pp. 122, 127-130, 135, 146.

a relatively small number of merchants from the East Coast ports; Hull, Lynn, Boston, Yarmouth. While the war raged, Londoners directed their energies towards the Low Countries, and supported the war policy for a time.<sup>84</sup>

In any case, those Hanseatic merchants still trading in England concentrated their efforts in London, not re-appearing in the East Coast ports in significant numbers again until after the Treaty of Utrecht.<sup>85</sup> But the lengthy hostilities inevitably unsettled trade. In some respects it is easy to measure the effects. Cloth exports as a whole fell in the first two decades of the 15th century, picked up again in the late '30s and slumped again in the late '40s. The 1450s and 1460s marked a doldrums. Depression in exports meant anxiety for cloth producers, and in the early 70s the 'clothworkers of Gloucester' reflected a widespread desire for peace and put pressure on the government to negotiate. By 1468, only the Cologne merchants were left of the Hanse. English merchants could not compensate for the decline in cloth exports, even though their exports did increase after 1468. English cloth continued to find its way to Baltic countries by various routes and was carried by other nationals through the Low Countries and Cologne, and through Frankfurt, Nuremburg and Breslau. Similarly, imports of Baltic raw materials continued to reach England, but their prices naturally rose.<sup>86</sup>

The Treaty of Utrecht, 1474, confirmed all the privileges of the Hanseatic merchants in England, though an attempt to get a reciprocal

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84. Bolton, English Medieval Economy, pp. 310-1.

85. Dollinger, Hansa, p. 243.

86. Postan, Relations of England and the Hanse, pp. 135-6.

restoration of English privileges foundered. It was a triumph for the Hanse but it also brought relief to many parts of England as direct trade links were restored, albeit under Hanse control.<sup>87</sup>

For the provincial East Coast ports though, the treaty meant defeat. The inroads achieved in the Baltic region in the 14th century were as nought. The Hanse domination of the region excluded virtually all other nationals. Even though Hanse merchants did return to ship through Hull in the last quarter of the 15th century, they were few in number, and the main thrust of their commerce was directed through London.

#### **Iberian Merchants**

Other nationals involved in English trade were of less direct significance to Yorkshire. Spanish and Portuguese merchants rarely ventured up there but some Yorkshire merchants did trade directly with Spain and Portugal. Hull merchants were active on the pilgrim run to Corunna through the 14th and into the early 15th century. Some obtained licences to export corn and peas to Portugal in the 1360s.<sup>88</sup> More often, Spanish iron and wine, and Portuguese raisins, figs and oil were imported either via Bayonne in the 14th century or increasingly through the Low Countries in the 15th.<sup>89</sup> Castilian merchants traded directly with Hull in 1465, but their commerce focussed on London and the ports of the South and West.<sup>90</sup>

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87. Dollinger, Hansa, p. 309.

88. Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 140; W. Childs, Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Middle Ages (Manchester, 1978), p. 179; V.C.H. Hull, p. 65.

89. Ibid., p. 30.

90. E122/62/7; Childs, Castilian Trade, pp. 178-9, 224.

### Italian Merchants

Italians from Genoa, Venice, and Florence settled mainly in London and Southampton, and bought good quality Cotswold wool for the Italian textile industry and cloth from Southern England to trade off to the Spanish and Muslims, who re-exported it to North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>91</sup> English merchants rarely aspired to compete on those routes, and John Taverner who was granted a licence in 1449, to trade beyond Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean was unusual.<sup>92</sup> Italian trade peaked between 1390 and 1400, but Italian merchants continued to bring dyestuffs, alum, sweet wines, spices and other goods from the Levant, to both England and the Low Countries.<sup>93</sup> Yorkshire was supplied either from London, by London grocers for example,<sup>94</sup> or from the Low Countries. The Italians never enjoyed the protected status of the Hanse and their apparently infinite financial resources, made them especially welcome to European governments. Their profits on trading were very high compared to those achieved by English merchants, but much of it was due to the high prices paid for imported north European goods in the Mediterranean. As royal bankers and financiers, the Italians were unrivalled in England.<sup>95</sup> The Genoese invested in textile production in the Salisbury region, and maybe elsewhere. More pertinent for Yorkshire merchants, was the easier access Londoners had to Italian financiers for loans, and the redemption of bills of exchange.<sup>96</sup>

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91. E.B. Fryde, *Italian Maritime Trade with Medieval England* (c. 1270-c.1530), in his *Studies, op. cit.*, XIV, *passim*, and pp. 318, 329.

92. *Feodera*, V (2), p. 21.

93. Fryde, *Italian Maritime Trade*, pp. 311, 316, 321.

94. S. Thrupp, *The Grocers of London, A Study of Distributive Trade*, in E. Power and M.M. Postan, eds., *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (1933), p. 276.

95. Fryde, *Italian Maritime Trade*, *passim*.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 320, 328.

## II: York, Beverley and Hull and Overseas Trade.

By now something of the complex character of the relationships of the different elements in late medieval European trade will be apparent, and it is within that context that Hull's trade must be considered. It would be a mistake to assume that Hull's fortunes directly reflect those of the region as a whole, but the general trends which can be discerned do indicate periods of growth and recession in demand and in production.<sup>97</sup> What is particularly difficult to determine is the extent to which the merchants of different towns and areas within Yorkshire were trading solely through Hull or were also using other ports.<sup>98</sup>

Between 1300 and 1500, London expanded its share of overseas trade at the expense of the provincial ports, most dramatically the East Coast ports. Even in the 13th century, London was the major centre for trade and industry in England, and its rate of expansion was far greater than that of any other English town. In 1275 it ranked second to Boston in wool exports but by 1300, London's exports in wool exceeded those of every other English port, and continued to do so, except those from Hull in the 1430s.<sup>99</sup> As in wool, so in cloth; as the nation's exports grew from the middle of the 14th century, London accounted for an ever increasing share until by 1524-5 it handled 82% of all cloth exported. In almost all other commodities, the pattern was repeated,<sup>100</sup> and coupled

97. This section draws on the excellent survey in V.C.H. Hull, pp. 59-70.
98. In 1338 for example, William de Kelstern of Beverley was shipping wool through Boston, and Thomas de Holme of Beverley was shipping wool through London in 1343. C.C.R. 1337-9, p. 428; 1343-6, p. 155.
99. Bolton, Medieval English Economy, p. 254; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 64; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, pp. 40-72.
100. J.A.F. Thomson, The Transformation of Medieval England 1370-1529 (1983), pp. 48-9, 53-5, 57, 60-1; Bolton, Medieval English Economy, pp. 247-51.

with Antwerp's emergence as the major entrepôt in Europe, London's ascendancy was as significant to Yorkshire as was the transformation of the economy to cloth manufacturing. As we shall see, Yorkshire merchants faced competition from many quarters, but ultimately, it was from Londoners that the severest challenge came. The ascendancy of London may have been due as much to changes within the regions as it was the inevitable consequence of the changing pattern of European demand.<sup>101</sup> For the moment though, it will be simpler to concentrate on the observable changes in the overseas trade of York, Beverley and Hull merchants. Although the discussion has been broadly divided between the 14th and 15th centuries, some overlapping has been inevitable. In particular, trade with the Baltic and relations with the Hanse, have been treated as a coherent development in the 15th century section.<sup>102</sup>

#### The Fourteenth Century

Hull, or rather Wyke on Hull, was a significant port by 1200, and by 1300 was well integrated into the North European trade network, exporting wool to Flanders, Brabant, and Artois, and salt, over 2,400 quarters, worth £236 in 1304-5. The major imports included wine from France, mainly Gascony, and woad from Picardy and then Toulouse.<sup>103</sup>

#### Wool

While London was languishing as the second port in the wool trade in 1275, Hull was ranked third, but throughout the 14th century, remained a less active port than Boston; its greatest rival on the East Coast. In the late 13th century, Flemish merchants were the major

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101. R. Davies, English Overseas Trade 1500-1700 (1973), pp. 13-14; Salzman, English Trade, p. 332; H. van der Wee, The Rise of the Antwerp Market (1963), vol. II, pp. 122-3.

102. See below pp. 140-5.

103. V.C. Hull, pp. 13, 67-8.

dealers in wool in Yorkshire. But some Yorkshire merchants were involved. In the 1270s the Wiles family of Pontefract and its partner John de Settrington of York were exporting wool to Picardy and returning with woad for the region's textile industry. In 1275 exports were almost exclusively to Picardy, and the top four wool centres were, in order of importance, Pontefract, York, Doncaster, and Beverley. Hull merely served as the point of embarkation, or rather its predecessor, Wyke on Hull did so. Between 1297 and 1315 there were more alien merchants exporting through Hull than denizens, and although 2,100 individuals were involved, almost one quarter of the total wool exports were accounted for by a dozen merchants, eight German and four English. During the same period, Yorkshiremen constituted the largest group of English merchants; those from Beverley numbering at least 70, and those from York at least 56. The few traders associated with Hull, were probably sailors since their shipments were very small, irregular, and always in English ships.<sup>104</sup>

During these eighteen years Beverley merchants traded on a larger scale, and more frequently than those of York, and three of the four Englishmen with exports totalling over 1,000 sacks, came from Beverley. They were John de Cottingham, 1,184 sacks, Richard Tirwhit, 1,109 sacks, and Walter de Kelstern, 1,244 sacks. The fourth 'super' merchant was John Metal of Pontefract who exported 1,282 sacks. Even in the boom year of 1306-7, the level of York's exports was no higher than those of merchants from Barton-on-Humber and Pontefract. Although fewer in number their individual trade was greater than the York merchants could achieve. In the early 14th century, few London merchants appear in the Hull customs rolls, and the scale of their trade was small and

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104. Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 54, 65, 129.



dwindling. York merchants were still relatively unimportant in 1324-5, when they exported less than 200 of the 1,300 sacks exported by denizens, even though by that date, English merchants dominated the trade.<sup>105</sup>

In spite of its poor showing in the wool trade, York was chosen as one of the eleven home staples set up in 1326, which were intended to exclude alien merchants from exporting wool.<sup>106</sup> York of course, had a strategic and administrative importance which Beverley could not emulate, and was a natural choice. After all, there is no reason to suppose that Beverley men took their wool through Beverley. It was simply that their entrepreneurship was more developed at this time than was their York counterparts'. Yet York merchants had also been suppliers to the Crown. In 1303 they sold cloth and fish to Edward I, and in 1316-17 and 1322, several York merchants were licensed to buy victuals in Norfolk, Lincolnshire, and Nottinghamshire, for the Crown, and to transport them to York and Newcastle. One Beverley merchant, Thomas Waghen was similarly employed, as were Walter and John Helleward, Hugh le Taverner, and Robert de Upsale of Hull.<sup>107</sup>

The choice of York as a staple, could have been a misfortune for Beverley men. It meant that all wool had to be transported to York, weighed and packed there before being shipped down the Ouse. The heated debate about the retention of home staples versus an overseas staple, between king and the merchants of different towns, not only involved York representatives, but in January 1328, reached a climax at a meeting in the minster chapter house in York. The York men naturally preferred

105. Ibid., pp. 129-30.

106. Ibid., p. 115.

107. V.C.H. York, p. 100; C.P.R. 1313-17, pp. 376, 540-53; 1317-21, p. 597; C.P.R. 1321-4, pp. 86, 109.

the retention of home staples, but in the end the government abolished all staples in April 1328. An illegal staple was set up in Bruges by a confederation of merchants, seven of whom came from Yorkshire. In 1328 there had been a strong resistance to home staples by a group of merchants led by William de la Pole of Hull, but their opposition could not prevent the government ending the illegal Bruges staple and introducing home staples once more from April 1333 until March 1334.<sup>108</sup> York once more was selected, and this time royal customers collected export duties there, and not at the port of loading. This posed a direct challenge to Hull, where the customers usually operated, but was short-lived. From 1334, the staple wandered to and fro between various towns in Europe, mostly in the Low Countries, and when home staples were introduced once more in 1353-4, Hull was selected as well as York. By then Hull had its own community of merchants active in overseas trade.<sup>109</sup>

Beverley merchants then, and to a lesser extent, those from York, were prominent amongst the Englishmen who superseded the Flemings and Italians as wool exporters through Hull in the 1320s and 1330s.<sup>110</sup> The Beverley men were still dominant amongst the participators in Edward III's wool monopoly, in so far as it is possible to be confident of the numbers involved and the value of their shares. From the lists of those

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108. Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 120-1. Five Beverley and two York merchants were involved in the illegal staple at Bruges, out of a total of forty-two merchants. They seized the goods of a merchant who would not comply with their attempted monopoly. C.C.R. 1330-3, pp. 466-7, 498, 519. They were therefore not "the bulk of the confederation", as Lloyd claimed, Wool Trade, p. 120, since there were 7 from Coventry, 6 from Northampton, 4 from Ludlow included in the rest. Ibid.

109. Lloyd, Wool Trade, pp. 207-8; Salzman, English Trade, pp. 293-4.

110. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, pp. 43, 122-3; B.F. Waites, Monasteries and Medieval Development in North-East Yorkshire, London M.A. thesis, 1957.

granted repayment through exports at a subsidy of 20s. per sack instead of 40s. per sack, the relative position of the merchants from York, Beverley, and Hull can be seen. Twenty-seven Beverley merchants accounted for £5,302 8s. 4d., 20 York merchants accounted for £5,136 1s. 4d.; and 3 Hull merchants accounted for £2,298 19s.5d. of which £2,039 12s.7d. was owed to William de la Pole.<sup>111</sup> A number of Yorkshire merchants formed syndicates to assist with, and to take advantage of, the parliamentary grants to the Crown of 20,000 and 30,000 sacks of wool in 1340 and 1341. For some merchants it must have been the only course open to them in hopes of recovering some of their lost capital. In 1340, for example, Thomas Tirwhit of Beverley and Hardelph Barton of Hull bought 500 sacks for the Crown in Nottinghamshire, and Walter de Kelstern and Henry Goldbeter of York and Walter Frost of Beverley contracted to buy 1,500 sacks in Yorkshire. In 1341 Nicholas Scoreby of York, Robert Stut of Hull and Thomas Berwick of Pocklington collected almost 500 sacks in June, and William Acastre, John Goldbeter and William Skelton, all of York, collected over 800 sacks in July.<sup>112</sup>

Henry Goldbeter, Walter de Kelstern, John Randman and William and John Luterington, all of York, lost £701 13s. 4d. of wool at Dordrecht. On 2 June 1340 they agreed to pay a royal debt to John de Hanonia, of a further £701 13s.4d. and to receive £3,218 13s. 4d. in repayment from the 1/9 collected in the Isle of Axholme and West Riding of Lincolnshire. By 14 January, 1341 they had received only £66 6s. 8d. and the assessors of the subsidy were again ordered to pay them. They had still not been satisfied by July 1342<sup>113</sup> when the Crown ordered their repayment from the customs of London, Boston and Hull. Their

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111. C.P.R. 1337-9 pp. 424-34. The names of the merchants from York, Beverley, and Hull can be found in Appendix 1.

112. C.P.R. 1340-3, p. 103; PRO C76/1 5, 16.

113. C.P.R. 1338-40, p. 542; C.C.R. 1339-41, p. 601; 1343-4, pp. 153-5.

experience was probably typical of many merchants. Henry Goldbeter was involved in at least five other syndicates and in another with Kelstern, Randman and Luterington, which purchased wool for the Crown in 1341.<sup>114</sup> His brother, John Goldbeter, was also involved in several syndicates, as were William Acastre, Thomas Gra and Thomas Lyndesey. E.B. Fryde<sup>115</sup> has discussed the activities of these and several other York merchants and their dealings with the London syndicate of Walter Chiriton.

One of the curious features of this eventful and breathless period in the history of the wool trade, was the appearance, as though from the woodwork, of merchants who otherwise did not appear in other records as active in overseas trade. At least eighteen merchants from York, Beverley and Hull emerged thus, and it may be that the urgency of the royal collections, or the temptation of possible profit, drew in merchants more usually engaged in local business.<sup>116</sup> But given the absence of customs rolls between 1343 and 1351, when the customs were farmed and of Particular Rolls for Hull from 1335 until 1346 and then until the end of the reign, it is difficult to dismiss them altogether as monopoly opportunists.<sup>117</sup>

They were certainly not in the same league as Henry Goldbeter, who acted like a royal agent in these collections, or as William de la Pole, whose skillful financial footwork earned him a fortune. He was atypical. Few of his contemporaries, were able to exploit commerce to the same extent so that he successfully created a reputation which enabled him to set up deal after deal after deal, with scarcely any

114. C.P.R. 1341-3, pp. 256-9; Lloyd, Wool Trade, p. 183.

115. E.B. Fryde, Some Business Transactions of York Merchants, Borthwick Papers, No. 29 (1966).

116. Appendix 1.

117. See bibliography.

substantial collateral. He was a true capitalist who almost outwitted even Edward III.<sup>118</sup>

It is difficult to gain any impression of the relative strength of merchant activity between the three towns in the 1340s, 1350s, and 1360s. All the customs were farmed between 1343 and 1351, and there are no accounts available nationally for those years. The records for Hull thereafter are mainly a miscellanea of receipts and returns of seizures until 1378-9.<sup>119</sup> Sometime during the intervening decades, the York merchants grew in numbers and scale of business to outnumber those from Beverley by 204 to 43.<sup>120</sup> It has been estimated that in 1398-9, the value of their wool exports was about £6,100 compared to cloth exports worth about £1,225.<sup>121</sup>

As can be seen from Table 1, for most of the 14th century wool continued to be shipped through Hull at between 3,000 and 5,000 sacks a year, exceeding 6,000 sacks between 1305-9, 1330-4, and 1355-9. Exports fell dramatically to below 2,000 sacks a year in 1429-39, for the first time since records began in 1279, and as a direct consequence of the imposition of the Bullion and Partition Ordinances in 1429/30, and continued to decline thereafter. After 1410 no aliens exported wool through Hull except for 30 sacks in 1447-8, but a small number of Yorkshire merchants maintained their interest until the end of the 15th century because wool was still a valuable export commodity.<sup>122</sup>

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118. E.B. Fryde, *The Wool Accounts of William de la Pole, and, The Last Trials of Sir William de la Pole*, in *Studies*, nos. IX, XII; R. Horrox, *The de la Poles of Hull*, East Yorkshire Local History Soc. No. 38 (Beverley, 1983).

119. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Exports*, p. 11; see the list in the bibliography.

120. See below, p. 169, Table 5.

121. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 27.

122. See below, p. 173.

Table 1. Wool export: Denizen and Alien, 1280-1509  
(quinquennial figures)<sup>a</sup>

	<u>Denizen</u>	<u>Sacks exported</u> <u>Alien</u>	<u>Total</u>
1280-4	..	..	15,443
1285-9	..	..	17,742 <sup>b</sup>
1290-4	..	..	8,138 <sup>b</sup>
1295-9	..	..	14,741
1300-4	..	..	22,711
1305-9	12,648	22,353 <sup>b</sup>	35,001
1310-14	6,781 <sup>b</sup>	5,135 <sup>b</sup>	25,994
1315-19	2,138 <sup>c</sup>	2,055 <sup>c</sup>	16,193
1320-4	1,598 <sup>c</sup>	1,085 <sup>c</sup>	16,399
1325-9	10,325	4,688	15,013
1330-4	27,976	3,665	31,641 <sup>d</sup>
1335-9	16,451	3,275	19,726 <sup>e</sup>
1340-4	14,931	2,618	17,549 <sup>f</sup>
1345-9	..	..	.. <sup>d</sup>
1350-4	4,634 <sup>b</sup>	8,859 <sup>b</sup>	19,669 <sup>d</sup>
1355-9	0 <sup>b</sup>	11,707 <sup>b</sup>	31,824
1360-4	8,217 <sup>b</sup>	933 <sup>b</sup>	26,513
1365-9	17,602 <sup>e</sup>	819	18,421
1370-4	12,317 <sup>e</sup>	5,215 <sup>e</sup>	22,207
1375-9	16,475	639	17,114
1380-4	14,450	819	15,269
1385-9	15,783	1,892	17,675
1390-4	20,824	1,838	22,662
1395-9	19,602	1,101	20,703
1400-4	14,806	12	14,818
1405-9	18,668	64	18,732
1410-14			16,271
1415-19			20,283
1420-4			23,090
1425-9		all denizen	19,412
1430-4			10,310
1435-9			4,167
1440-4			16,262
1445-9	4,727	30	4,757
1450-4			9,400
1455-9			5,621
1460-4			1,487
1465-9			3,303
1470-4			1,979
1475-9		all denizen	3,223
1480-4			1,813
1485-9			886
1490-4			1,007
1495-9			1,484
1500-4			1,814
1505-9			1,750

<sup>a</sup> Based on Eleanora M. Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, England's Export Trade, 1275-1547. The figures are usually for full years ending at Michaelmas in the years stated; in 1280-94 they mainly run from Easter to Easter.

<sup>b</sup> 2 years only. <sup>c</sup> 1 year only. <sup>d</sup> 3 years only.

<sup>e</sup> 4 years only. <sup>f</sup> Customs farmed.

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The commitment of Yorkshire merchants to the wool trade is reflected in the steady stream of men who acquired property and other attachments in Calais. Richard Wood and John del Gare, both of York wanted to be buried in Calais in the 1390s.<sup>123</sup>

Virtually all the wool exported through Hull, eventually went to the Low Countries, to the cloth manufacturing towns of Artois, Brabant and Flanders, and it is evident from a scattering of references that Yorkshire merchants were resident there, but fewer seem to have acquired property. John de Helmesley of York, asked to be buried in Durdrecht in 1383, Henry Tutbak, also of York, left 6s.8d. to St. Mary's, Hareleve in Brabant in 1398. Peter Upstall left property in Brabant in 1430.<sup>124</sup>

It is not possible to distinguish the types of wool, nor the precise area of its provenance once it had arrived at Hull to be shipped. The customs rolls do not contain those details. It was a mixture of rough wool from Pennine and upland sheep, derived for the most part from Holderness; Craven, near Skipton; Spaldingmoor, to the south-west of Market Weighton; Cleveland; Richmond, and Blackmoor,

*in the southern part of the North Yorkshire Moors*

Better quality wools came from Sherburn-in-Elmet; Burghshire, a region west of the River Washburn; Ripon; Ryedale; 'Walde' which could refer to several parts of the Wolds;<sup>125</sup> and occasionally wool from the

123. Gare and Wood, Prob. Reg. I, ff. 58v., 61.

124. Dec. and Cap. I f. 76; Prob. Reg. II f. 663v; III f. 4.

125. P.J. Bowden, The Wool Trade in Tudor and Stuart England (1962), pp. 36-7; E. Kerridge, Wool Growing and Wool Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Times, in J.G. Jenkins, ed., The Wool Textile Industry in Britain (1962), pp. 19-20; J.H. Munro, The 1357 Wool-Price Schedule and the Decline of Yorkshire Wool Values, Textile History, x (1979), pp. 213-4.

Lincolnshire Wolds.<sup>126</sup> The poorest quality wool was usually cheaper than the mean price for inferior wools nationally, but the better quality wool, most noticeably that from Fountains Abbey, was usually more expensive than the mean price for superior wools nationally.<sup>127</sup> Since merchants purchased their wool from all over the region, perhaps concentrating in the North and East Ridings,<sup>128</sup> these price differences are not much help in arriving at a price applicable to sacks exported through Hull. To ensure consistency in estimating the turnover of individual merchant's trade, the schedule compiled by Dr. Lloyd has been used in the main.<sup>129</sup>

#### Cloth

In Yorkshire, as in the rest of England, the expanding cloth trade attracted growing numbers of merchants and Hull's cloth exports rose from a few hundred cloths in 1359-60 to over 5,000 in 1389-90. (See Table 2.) Thereafter Hull lagged behind London and the south coast ports and exports remained at 2-3,000 cloths a year, until the volume of trade began to fall off as relations with the Hanseatic League degenerated into war. From 1460, the trade was in decline, apart from

126. William de la Pole was exporting Lincolnshire wool. E.B. Fryde, The Wool Accounts of William de la Pole, Borthwick Papers, no. 23, p. 9. His Yorkshire wool was acquired from Swaledale, ibid. Richard Russell of York bought Lyndsey wool in the early 15th century, Prob. Reg. III ff. 439-40.

127. Munro, Yorkshire Wool Values, p. 212.

128. Robert Colyson of York, left money in 1450, to the poor of 22 parishes where he had made purchases, to make up for any losses they may have incurred in their dealings with him! The parishes were: Tadcaster, Kirkby, Saxton, Sherburn, Brotherton, Pontefract, Ledesham, Kypa\*, Swillington, Whitekirk, Berwike-in-Elmet, Bramham, Dighton, Spoforth, Harwood, Knaresborough, Ripley, Hampswthwait, Stanlay, Pately Bridge, Ripon, and Nunmonkton. Prob. Reg. II ff. 378-80, and Test. Ebor. II, p. 217.

129. See Appendix 4.



Table 2. Cloth Export: Denizen and Alien, 1350-1509(quinquennial figures)<sup>a</sup>

	Cloths exported			
	Denizen	Hanse	Other alien	Total
1350-4	62	0	112	174
1355-9	888	0	655	1,543
1360-4	1,550	338	434	2,322
1365-9	5,633	977	926	7,536
1370-4	3,970	588	241	4,799 <sup>b</sup>
1375-9	2,327	83	477	2,887 <sup>c</sup>
1380-4	14,417	1,578	347	15,342
1385-9	12,327	1,689	198	14,214
1390-4	17,095	1,537	361	18,993
1395-9	17,522	1,199	229	18,950
1400-4	11,343	2,206	363	13,912
1405-9	6,129	2,449	526	9,104
1410-14	7,928	2,288	215	10,431
1415-19	7,502	4,110	219	11,831
1420-4	10,522	880	133	11,535
1425-9	17,839	141	60	18,040
1430-4	15,560	286	131	15,977
1435-9	11,600	1,324	423	13,347
1440-4	13,644	603	32	14,279
1445-9	16,109	119	59	16,287
1450-4	10,359	801	46	11,206
1455-9	9,745	634	38	10,417
1460-4	5,960	1,005	17	6,982
1465-9	3,368	484	130	3,982
1470-4	3,274	0	109	3,383
1475-9	9,291	1,757	270	11,318
1480-4	9,586	3,117	224	12,927
1485-9	3,209	854	128	4,191
1490-4	6,266	1,316	143	7,725
1495-9	6,298	3,089	321	9,708
1500-4	11,755	3,743	503	16,001
1505-9	6,915	2,649	478	10,042

<sup>a</sup> Based on Carus-Wilson and Coleman, op. cit. The figures are usually for full years ending at Michaelmas in the years stated.

<sup>b</sup> 4 years only.

<sup>c</sup> 3 years only.

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an upswing in the 1470s, but even before then, it was clear that exports of cloth would not match the value of the trade lost through the collapse of the wool trade.<sup>130</sup>

The cloth which was produced within the region, from predominantly short wool, was mainly broadcloths and straits, a narrow cloth half the size of the broadcloth,<sup>131</sup> and one which could be fulled in the traditional way. Dr. Bartlett estimated that straits comprised only about one sixth of the cloth exported through Hull in 1391-2, and that of the cloth brought for aulnage in York between 1394-5, barely one tenth was not broadcloths. The records of the tapiters in York, suggest that worsteds were not a major item of production until the late 15th century.<sup>132</sup> If they were manufactured earlier, they were in the form of single and double sets of bed hangings, and were most likely made from the long wool of Lincolnshire.<sup>133</sup> Single and double 'beds' and occasionally coverlets were shipped through Hull. Almost without exception, all cloths were described as 'sine grano', which implies that they were not finished, although not necessarily that they had not been dyed with grain.<sup>134</sup> These cloths were also being made by textile workers in

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130. See Tables 1 and 2. Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, p. 135, and below p. 145.

131. I.e. 12 yds. by 1 yd. Statutes of the Realm, II, pp. 403-4.

132. Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, pp. 72-3.

133. R.A. Pelham, *Medieval Foreign Trade, Eastern Ports*, in H.C. Darby, ed., An Historical Geography of England Before 1800 A.D. (Cambridge, 1936), p. 253; C. Inq. Misc. Chancery, 1307-49, no. 1628.

134. J.H. Munro, *The Medieval Scarlet and the Economics of Sartorial Splendour*, in N.B. Harte and K.G. Ponting, eds., Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe (1983), pp. 13-70.

the West Riding, in direct competition with workers in Beverley and York.<sup>135</sup>

The initial phase of England's expansion into cloth manufacturing has attracted little attention, but it has been suggested that one explanation for the increased out-put, was simply an improvement in productivity following the loss of labour in the black Death.<sup>136</sup> In many areas this meant increased mechanisation; water-powered fulling mills, and by the 15th century, gig mills (for raising the nap on cloth).<sup>137</sup> The swifter flow of water in the Pennine region, clearly lent itself to such developments, but there is no technical reason why the flow on the slower lowland rivers could not have been increased.<sup>138</sup> There were water mills in York, but they were used for grinding corn, and although there was at least one water mill, and several horse mills in and around Beverley, archaeological opinion discounts their use in fulling.<sup>139</sup> In York, the evidence of the freemen's rolls, suggests that in York at least, increased production depended on an increase in manpower, as the rate of entry of new fullers was strikingly higher than for any other group of textile workers, including weavers. Between 1341-51, only two fullers became freemen compared to the fifteen between 1351-51, a sevenfold increase; whereas twenty weavers became freemen between 1341-51, and forty-four between 1351-61, just over twice as

135. Heaton, Yorks. Woollen and Worsted Industries, pp. 47-79.

136. A.R. Bridbury, Medieval English Clothmaking An Economic Survey (1982), p. 65.

137. Kerridge, Wool Growing and Wool Textiles, p. 22.

138. For instance, a weir was constructed at Chester, on the River Dee, to increase its flow to power water mills. B. Harris, Chester, Bartholemew City Guides (1979), p. 135.

139. V.C.H. York, pp. 506-8; RCHM Beverley, p. 33.

many.<sup>140</sup> York made up much of its losses of skilled labour in the decades following the Black Death, but successive visitations of plague or other epidemic diseases, probably kept the supply of labour depleted well into the 15th century in spite of a flurry of freemen admissions following crisis years. One consequence was an expansion in employment opportunities for women, well recorded from the 1370s, suggesting that skilled men were scarce.<sup>141</sup> The reliance on manpower instead of on mechanical fulling,<sup>142</sup> partly explains the higher unit cost of urban cloth compared to rural cloth, and it may have been that York and Beverley craftsmen would have made more broadcloths, and worsteds had easier fulling been easily available. While trade was expanding in the late 14th century of course, production throughout the region was up,<sup>143</sup> and all cloth seemed to find a ready market. Once the recession began to bite early in the 15th century, the cheaper cloths had the advantage over the more expensive in the mass market, and York and Beverley's textile producers were undermined by their rural competitors. York tapiters and linen-weavers made something of a comeback later in the 15th century, supplying the luxury end of the market.<sup>144</sup>

140. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 22.

141. P.J.P. Goldberg, *Female Labour, Service, and Marriage in Northern Towns during the later Middle Ages*, *Northern History*, XXII (1986), pp. 19, 28-32; *idem*, *Mortality and Economic Change in the Diocese of York, 1390-1514*, *Northern History*, XXIV (1988), pp. 41-2, 45-6, 51-2.

142. Cf. Colchester, where mechanical fulling has been credited with the successful expansion of the town's textile production in the second half of the 14th century. R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 67-8.

143. Heaton, *Yorks. Woollen and Worsteds Industries*, pp. 60, 75; Goldberg, *Mortality and Economic Change*, p. 50.

144. See above pp. 80-1; *V.C.H. York*, p. 89.

Most of the cloth produced in Yorkshire was destined either for the Low Countries or for the Hanseatic customers in the Baltic region, but it is not possible to estimate how much went where. Some was an essential component of the exchange trade with Gascony, especially useful when there was a shortage of currency, so that cloth was exchanged directly for woad or wine. Some cross-shipping of other commodities occurred; for instance Yorkshire men carried Baltic corn and timber to Gascony and Portuguese figs to Normandy.<sup>145</sup>

### Wine

Wine was the third main strand of the region's overseas trade. (See Table 3.) Between 1325 and 1350, Hull's wine imports ranked second or third in England. During that period corn was the largest single export to Gascony, and merchants also shipped out ale, peas and beans, in years of bad harvest.<sup>146</sup> The scale of the trade into Hull is harder to estimate during the second half of the 14th century, but from records of alien cargoes wine imports seemed to be falling. The war with France was immediately detrimental to the trade even though piracy was never on the same scale as that of the Hanse and their allies. An important consequence was that denizens began to ship more wine than aliens.<sup>147</sup>

That wine was an essential staple in Yorkshire is clear from licences granted to individuals to take money out to Gascony to buy wine. For instance Walter Box and other vintners of Hull, and Robert de Selby and others of York were granted a licence to take £50 in cash in 1364, for that purpose. A certain urgency on the part of both producers and

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145. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 65-7; E 101/128/31, E 122/159/11.

146. E.G. Roger Swerd and Walter Helleward of Hull, C.P.R. 1334-8, p. 345; Walter Frost of Beverley, C.P.R. 1364-7, p. 323; Y. Renouard, ed., Bordeaux sous les rois d'Angleterre (1965), p. 431.

147. James, Wine Trade, pp. 26-7.

Table 3: 1. Wine Import: Denizen and Alien, 1323-49<sup>a</sup>

	<u>Number of ships laded</u> <u>by denizens</u> <sup>b</sup> <u>(prisage)</u>	<u>Tuns imported</u> <u>by aliens</u> <u>('new custom')</u>
1323	10	471
1325	..	206
1326	..	476
1327	4	141
1331	..	303
1333	3	508
1334	7	1,474
1335	6	895
1336	11	
1337	9	167
1339	10	839
1340	24	76
1341	16	461
1342	18	409
1343	13	520
1344	22	..
1345	23	..
1346	10	..
1347	8	0
1348	11	100
1349	5	0

<sup>a</sup> Based on Marjorie K. James, 'Non-Sweet Wine Trade of England during 14th and 15th Cents.' (Oxford D. Phil. thesis, 1952). The figures are usually for full years ending at Michaelmas in the year stated.

<sup>b</sup> Perhaps with an average lading of 100 tuns: James, thesis p. 102.

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Table 3:2. Wine Import: Alien, 1350-95<sup>a</sup>

	<u>Tuns imported</u> ( <u>'new custom'</u> )		<u>Tuns imported</u> ( <u>'new custom'</u> )
1350	10	1365	69
1351	145	1367	0
1352	0	1368	132
1353	43	1371	0
1354	131	1372	0
1355	181	1379	104
1356	300	1380	50
1358	155	1381	0
1359	0	1382	0
1360	0	1393	35
1361	174	1394	40
1362	449	1395	43
1364	39		

<sup>a</sup> See Table 3:1, note a.

Table 3:3. Wine Import: Denizen and Alien, 1405-1509

(Quinquennial figures)<sup>a</sup>

	<u>Tuns imported</u> ( <u>tunnage</u> )		<u>Tuns imported</u> ( <u>tunnage</u> )
1405-9	4,800	1460-4	1,409
1410-14	7,587	1465-9	2,253
1415-19	6,637	1470-4	2,219
1420-4	2,713 <sup>b</sup>	1475-9	2,500
1425-9	2,792 <sup>c</sup>	1480-4	2,277
1430-4	3,924	1485-9	2,008
1435-9	3,747	1490-4	1,725
1440-4	5,185	1495-9	2,484
1445-9	6,306	1500-4	3,016
1450-4	3,087	1505-9	2,963
1455-9	1,788 <sup>c</sup>		

<sup>a</sup> See Table 3:1, note a. The figures for 1500-9 have kindly been supplied by Prof. P.H. Ramsey.

<sup>b</sup> 3 years only.

<sup>c</sup> 4 years only.

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buyers was evidence whenever a truce was declared during prolonged fighting. Heavy buying followed the truce of 1389; Hull and London imported 8,000 tuns (nearly one third of the total for the country), even though prices had risen as a consequence of the war.<sup>148</sup> French wine frequently made up the entire cargo of ships entering Hull; 9 out of 15 ships in 1391-6 and 16 out of 21 in 1398-9. Other items in their cargoes included Spanish iron, imported via Bayonne, and Portuguese figs and raisins. Imports from the Baltic into Hull were trans-shipped on to Gascony; timber, flax, herrings and corn for example.

By the 1390s, England had become an importer of salt mainly from the Bay of ~~Burg~~<sup>o</sup> ~~neuf~~ in southern Brittany, although often trans-shipped from the Low Countries. In 1398-9, 723 quarters worth £132 were shipped into Hull, and whole shiploads occasionally arrived. Similarly, whole shiploads of woad sometimes arrived, by then mainly woad from Brabant, and about 400 tuns were imported in 1383-4 and 1391-2. Iron was also becoming a more common item in cargoes from the Low Countries, listed in amongst the salt, wine, and woad. It was produced either in Spain, or Sweden, and in spite of such an enormous geographical disparity, was collected in the Low Countries for shipment on to Hull. Some iron was imported direct from Spain, but the traffic in high quality osmunds from Sweden was increasingly subject to disruption. It has been estimated that iron accounted for 7% by value of the goods imported into Hull, which paid petty customs and poundage, in 1398-9. Alan Wilcock of Hull, left quantities of Spanish iron, as well as lead as bequests in his will in 1408.<sup>149</sup>

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148. See Box and Selby for the names of the others. C.P.R. 1364-7, pp. 16-17; James, Wine Trade, pp. 29-30.

149. A.R. Bridbury, England and the Salt Trade in the Later Middle Ages, (Oxford, 1955), pp. 124, 170-2; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 40, 67-8, and see above pp. 21-2. Prob. Reg. II f. 575v.



### Separate Towns, Separate Fortunes

The merchants from York, Beverley and Hull had quite different experiences as three distinct groups, each from the other. As overseas trade through Hull increased during the 14th century, more Hull men became active. Few had been involved in Edward III's monopoly, and one only was prosecuted for buying underweight wool in 1361,<sup>150</sup> but a Hull merchant had been trading in Hamburg in 1308 and others had been licensed to purvey victuals in 1319, 1321, and 1322, and were active in the coastal trade. John Bedford, for example, was shipping goods worth £60 to Newcastle in 1316 when his ship was blown off course onto the Norwegian coast.<sup>151</sup> In 1347-8 Durham Priory had 8 tuns of wine, purchased in Hull, sent by sea to Newcastle, and was using the same route in 1504-5.<sup>152</sup> Hull men were also increasingly engaged in direct trade with Europe, especially in exporting grain and peas. Walter Helleward and Roger Swerd shipped wheat, peas and beans, 400 qts. in all, to Gascony in 1336: John Helleward and John de Barton, wheat and corn in 1347. Adam Pund and Richard Santon of Hull, shipped grain to Portugal in the same year.<sup>153</sup> By the 1380s and 1390s, the number of Hull merchants active in overseas trade had overtaken those of Beverley, numerically. More than thrice as many can be found active in 1378-1408 as had been in 1306-36. They did not, however, match York based

150. Adam Pund see B. Putnam, ed., Yorkshire Sessions of the Peace, 1361-4, Yorks. Arch. Soc. c(1939), pp. 13-15, 84-5.

151. See p. 25 above; Henry Damel, C.C.R. 1307-13, pp. 68-9, 211; 1313-18, p. 326.

152. J.T. Fowler, ed., Extracts from the Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham; II, Surtees Soc. c(1899), p. 545; III, Surtees Soc. ciii (1901), p. 658.

153. C.P.R. 1334-8, p. 345; 1345-8, pp. 216, 281, 282; C.C.R. 1349-54, pp. 34, 59.

merchants, either in numbers, or in the scale of their shipments. (Table 5.)<sup>154</sup>

So much for Hull: what of Beverley? By 1361, when a group of merchants were prosecuted for buying wool at measures below the statute weight, only six Beverley merchants were prosecuted, and their purchases had been confined to the East Riding. A handful of others, from Malton, Rydale, Pocklington, Sutton, and Stockton-on-the-Moor, were also prosecuted.<sup>155</sup> It seems likely that either the Beverley merchants were more circumspect, or that already, their businesses had begun to contract. Maybe the Black Death had decimated their ranks and the greater attractions of York diverted immigrants away. The situation between the three towns was fairly fluid and there was always a certain amount of coming and going of families between them. Tirwhits and Kelsterns for example, can be found trading from both Beverley and York in the 1330s while in 1469 a Beverley mercer had a shop in Hull.<sup>156</sup>

Of the men presented in 1361, those from York outnumbered all other groups. Twenty-seven, including a butcher, had been buying wool in the North and East Ridings.<sup>157</sup> It may well have been that York's larger textile industry was beginning to attract more wool, as well as more immigrant craftsmen. Certainly the numbers of new freemen shot up between 1351 and 1361, especially in the crafts associated with textile production, and although much of that in-migration was triggered by the Black Death, it is significant that York proved to have the greater pull.

154. See below p. 169.

155. Putnam, Yorkshire Sessions of the Peace, pp. 13-16, 84-5.

156. See Appendix 4. Wm. Hewitt, Prob. Reg. IV f. 137.

157. Putnam, Yorkshire Sessions of the Peace, pp. 13-16, 84-5.

York certainly had the more bouyant economy compared to Beverley's and enjoyed a boom during the second and third quarters of the 14th century, directly related to its increased textile production and its expanding international trade. As a group, merchants based in the city enjoyed considerable prosperity.<sup>158</sup> Their numbers quadrupled~~ed~~ and several became extremely wealthy as will be discussed in the following chapter. Every aspect of the city's economy flourished in what turned out to be York's swan song as the second capital city in England. York had served the region as a market for centuries, and continued to do so, supplying the major religious houses in the north, such as Fountains and Rievaulx Abbeys, and Durham Priory with wine, spices, basic necessities, cloth and so on; and of course acting as the focus for internal and intra-regional trade in corn, stock cattle, all manner of foodstuffs, cloth and lead, as well as in imported spices, fruit, dyestuffs, timber, pitch, wine and manufactured metal goods. These imports, extended the range of the city's commercial impact into the midlands, Pennines, and north of England, just as York merchants' participation in the wool and then cloth trade, carried the city's reputation abroad.<sup>159</sup>

By the 1380s and 1390s, York was at its medieval peak, and at its closest to resembling one of the smaller European regional capitals. York merchants dominated the denizen group trading through Hull, accounting for over half the wool and cloth exported through Hull, and a third of the miscellaneous imports and wine. Dr. Bartlett has estimated that in 1398-9, York merchants were responsible for a turnover of at least £10,387 out of a total trade turnover through Hull that year of some

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158. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 20,22.

159. V.C.H. York, pp. 88, 98, 99; Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 19, 22-7.

£25,000, and at times outnumbered those from any other English town trading in Prussia. However, he mis-identified several merchants and his figures should be adjusted downwards by 10%.<sup>160</sup>

Beverley on the other hand, was already beginning to slip into obscurity; the number of overseas merchants remained relatively static, even though a disproportionate number were extremely wealthy and her merchants were second only to York in Prussia in the 1380s. The town continued to serve the immediate region as a market but as far as overseas trade was concerned, Beverley merchants played a diminishing role, with the occasional successful individual highlighting the smallness of the Beverley group as a whole.<sup>161</sup>

### III: The Fifteenth Century

As the 15th century opened, it was already apparent that the boom was coming to an end. Beverley was already losing the contest with York and Hull, but in the 15th century, merchants from both these towns experienced a serious contraction in their overseas interests. The overall value of Hull's export trade declined from its late 14th century peak of over £390,000, falling dramatically in the decade 1427-37 to £270,000 and reaching its lowest value of £100,000 in the decade 1457-67. Export values remained fairly constant thereafter, but rose again temporarily to £200,000 in 1497-1507. In the course of the 15th century trade through Hull declined by an estimated 75%.

The two major factors external to each town which contributed to that decline were the loss of access to Baltic ports as a result of English-Hanse hostility, and the competition with Londoners for trade. York's commercial competitiveness was further undermined by demographic

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160. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 26-7; for a full discussion of the figures see below p. 172.

161. See Table 5 below, p. 169.

crises and the failure of its textile manufacturers to compete with rural rivals.<sup>162</sup>

### The Hanse and the Baltic

Even though it involves back-tracking, the development of trade with the Baltic, and increasing hostility between the Hanse and Yorkshire merchants during the 14th and 15th centuries will be discussed in a single section here.

The English need for Baltic raw materials, especially timber and grain, was as important as the Baltic states' demand for cloth was in generating commerce between the two regions.<sup>163</sup> In the early 14th century a dozen or more Baltic cargoes might reach Hull in a year, and timber was inevitably one of the commodities. In 1304-5, over 25,000 boards and wainscots, about 600 empty barrels, over 4,500 troughs, bowls and boxes, 660 lances, and 7,950 bowstaves were shipped into Hull. That timber and wooden items, continued to be a regular and important commodity can be seen from an equivalent set of figures for 1401, when 18,000 wainscots and boards, 2,000 spars, 11 masts, 70 bowls, tables and boxes, 2,000 arrowshafts, and 7,680 bowstaves were imported. Other persistent items were Swedish iron, pitch and oil, and fish. Herrings have been estimated to have been worth over one third of Hull's imports, excluding wine, in the late 14th century, and to them can be added stockfish.<sup>164</sup>

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162. V.C.H. York, pp. 88-9; Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 27-8; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 66, 70.

163. Grain was especially necessary during the dearths of 1417 and 1439, and timber was in such demand, that it was sometimes imported in the form of Danzig-built ships. Postan, *Relations of England and the Hanse*, p. 140.

164. V.C.H. Hull, p. 61; E 122/55/20, 60/2.

For the first 60 years of the 14th century, most of the Baltic trade was in the hands of aliens, although one or two Hull merchants had penetrated the Eastland as early as 1308, when Henry Damel had his ship laden with ashes, flax, tar, boards etc., seized on his return voyage. Hanse merchants were certainly active in Hull by the 1310s when one complained of ill-treatment there and new regulations concerning prosecutions for debt in Hull, were published in Stralsund and other Hanse towns.<sup>165</sup> During the second half of the century, more Yorkshiremen ventured into the Hanse territory, and at first were not unwelcome.<sup>165</sup> In 1364 six Hull merchants obtained licences to export cloth to Prussia and Eastland, and in the 1370s a York bowyer shipped wine to Prussia in exchange for wheat and rye. Subsequently he sent six men to Prussia to make bows and send them back to York.<sup>167</sup> Once the English began to claim reciprocal privileges in Hanseatic towns, and to open up retail businesses and to rent property,<sup>168</sup> tensions arose. The Hanse were forbidden to ship goods in English vessels and by 1370 had almost entirely ousted the English from the Skania fairs. English insistence that the Hanse should pay more customs and subsidies on their imports and exports and the attack on German ships in 1385, led to reprisals.<sup>169</sup> The goods of English merchants were seized in Prussia, and of these 33 came from York claiming goods worth £1,636 lost; 12 came

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165. C.C.R. 1307-13, pp. 68, 211; V.C.H. Hull, p. 61.

166. Dollinger, Hansa, p. 73.

167. V.C.H. Hull, p. 61; C.P.R. 1361-4, pp. 497, 500, 517; 1364-7, pp. 35, 92; V.C.H. York, p. 102.

168. Several York merchants, asked to be buried in Danzig; John Dunnock in 1389 and Thomas Fenton, in 1395, and, more surprisingly, given the date, John Briscoe in 1444. While this is not strong evidence for the residence of these men in Prussia, they were there long enough to make their wills! Prob. Reg. I ff. 2, 89; II ff. 72v.-73.

169. Dollinger, Hansa, pp. 73-4.

from Beverley, claiming goods worth £306 lost, and only 11 came from London claiming £386. A single merchant from Hull, John Parker claimed damages.<sup>170</sup>

The speed of Yorkshire penetration into Prussia at least, is well evidenced by these figures. The York group in particular, were the strongest contingent from any English town. What was to become a feature of Anglo-Hanse hostilities, privateering, began soon after and in July 1387, William Terry, John Tutbury, Peter Stellar of Hull, and Walter Were of Grimsby were licensed to find and equip one ship, one ballinger, and one barge at their own expense, to arm themselves against the 'king's enemies'. An embassy was dispatched to Prussia, to negotiate for peace, and included a York man Thomas Gra.<sup>171</sup> Undoubtedly the Hanseatic towns were an important market for Yorkshiremen, but it must be remembered that they were often to be found attacking the ships of rivals, and as often without licence to do so.<sup>172</sup> Sir Francis Drake

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170. Hanse Urkundenbuch, V, p. 409; Hansetage, III, pp. 405-7, 412-4.

171. C.P.R. 1385-9, p. 339; V.C.H. York, p. 103; M.B. II, pp. 1-6.

172. William Terry and John Tutbury obviously enjoyed this sort of thing. In 1402 they did capture a ship en route for Scotland, laden with rye, and in the same year, Terry, and other Hull merchants William Pund, and John Liversege paid 13 marks for a licence to act in defence against the men of Friseland. The same year he and John Tutbury captured a Dansk ship en route for Berwick, but it had a letter of protection (!) and they were ordered to return the goods. The claims were still being debated in 1404. SC8/217/10802; SC8/254/12686; C.P.R. 1399-1401, pp. 352, 533; 1401-5, p. 55; C.C.R. 1402-5, pp. 1-2, 42, 56, 256. Tutbury and Terry seized the goods of a Lubeck merchant, which they were ordered to return, but they still had 500 nobles in 1406. They captured a Scottish ship in 1412, but Tutbury suffered in his turn when his ship was abandoned by the rest of the wine fleet when it was attacked in 1415, by Spanish pirates! C.P.R. 1405-8, p. 302; C.C.R. 1405-9, p. 60; Rot. Parl., IV, pp. 85, 103. Privateering was impossible to regulate. Robert de Holme was licensed to fit out two Hull ships in May 1436, for four months. Within a year, his own arrest was ordered because he, and other owners and masters of Hull, had captured a Dutchman by mistake for a German! C1/11/196; C.P.R. 1429-36, p. 510; 1436-41, p. 87.

Merchants were encouraged to become directly and physically involved partly because of the possibility of taking a prize;

clearly came from a long English tradition of swash-bucklers!<sup>173</sup> Hanse exports from Hull began to contract in the 1370s, expanding again after the peace was signed in 1408. The recovery was short-lived however, and during the 1420s and 1430s, Hanse exports fell to a mere trickle in some years. Merchants from York and Hull, and Beverley, complained regularly of harrassment, piracy, and seizures in Norway as well as Danzig, and on the high seas.

In 1422, fifteen merchants from York, Beverley and Hull lost goods shipped from Danzig and in 1438 a group of Hull and York merchants were plundered of goods by Danes in the Sound, said to be worth over £5,000, of which the Hull men claimed about £2,100. Hull merchants responded with their own acts of piracy. Another cargo involving Yorkshiremen was plundered in the Sound in 1468; including the goods of 11 past and future mayors of York. The naval war of the 1460s and 1470s damaged the commerce of both the Hanse and English, and exports of cloth through Hull fluctuated violently, until 1470-4 when Hanse exports ended.

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Note 172 contd. William Pund and William Page of Hull, received £20 as their share of a prize ship C.P.R. 1385-9, 412, and Robert de Selby captured a ship in 1377, deliberately to recover some compensation for his own goods pirated at sea by Normandy merchants. Three years later he captured another ship en route for Scotland, and could expect to keep  $\frac{1}{3}$  for himself, as Henry IV agreed with William Terry in 1400. C.C.R. 1374-7, p. 494; 1377-81, p. 414; C.P.R. 1399-1401, p. 352. As often they were drawn into hostilities because the government ordered individuals to press men for service at sea, to arrest ships for naval service (the fleet of 700 ships in 1346, contained 217 from the east coast ports, G.V. Scammell, English Merchant Shipping at the end of the Middle Ages, Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xiii (1961), p. 339). E.g. Hugh Clitheroe, Nicholas Ellis, and Robert Bennington, merchants of Hull, C.P.R. 1452-61, pp. 172, 404, 178. See also Salzman, English Trade, pp. 275-7, where he discusses generally the impact of warfare on shipping; from the use and extra cost of convoys, to the losses consequent upon having your ship pressed into service (like Robert Biset of Hull, who was trying to get his returned in 1386, but no sooner had he done so than it was blown off course onto the Danish coast where its cargo of herrings was stolen! C.C.R. 1385-9, p. 167; C.P.R. 1381-5, p. 505).

173. K.R. Andrews, ed., English Privateering Voyages to the West Indies 1588-95, Hakluyt Soc. 2nd ser. cxi (1956), pp. 16-28.



English merchants exported as much in five years as they had previously exported in one and the number of Baltic cargoes reaching Hull, testified to the impact on the overall pattern of trade. Four arrived in six months in 1452, three in six months in 1465, and none in two months in 1473. Denizens even lost out in the carrying trade, as English ships were banned.<sup>174</sup>

Following the signing of the treaty of Utrecht in 1474, and concessions made to the Hanse merchants, especially in Hull, trade did pick up for the next decade. Cloth exports achieved the levels of the early 15th century and imports of wax rose sharply. Disputes inevitably re-emerged, mainly concerning attempts by Hull merchants to have the Hanse business activities confined to port, and away from the hinterland. The Hanse complained and the Yorkshire men responded with their own lists of grievances. Roger Bushell of Hull, for example, was attacked in Danzig and in 1499 itemised the restrictions imposed on his trade by the easterlings.<sup>175</sup> The Hanse undermined other areas of the region's trade. Lead had been growing as an export commodity from the early 15th century, and by 1471-2 constituted 74% by value of all Hull exports excluding wool, cloth, and hides. Joint ventures mounted by the Hull corporation accounted for most of the lead shipped in 1473, and Hull merchants regularly handled more than did the merchants from York, or indeed, Beverley. By the 1490s, however, the Hanse had come to dominate the trade; in 1492-3 they accounted for £585 worth of the total £1,342 of lead exported and in 1496-7 they shipped all £825 worth.<sup>176</sup> The Baltic was to all practical intents and purposes, closed to the English by the

174. V.C.H. Hull, p. 62; V.C.H. York, p. 103; Hanserecense, 1431-71, II, pp. 64-5.

175. V.C.H. Hull, p. 63.

176. V.C.H. Hull, p. 67; E 122/62/7, 19.

1490s, and the merchants of Yorkshire found themselves left with the minimal wool trade to Calais, intense competition for business in the Low Countries, and a rapidly disappearing trade in wine, woad, and other commodities, collected in Low Countries from France and Spain for transshipping to England.

### Wool

The 15th century witnessed the collapse of the export trade in wool through Hull. Following the Bullion and Partition Ordinance of 1429/30, exports fell from just under 2,000 sacks per year in 1429-39, to about 200 sacks per year at the beginning of the 16th century.<sup>177</sup> Despite such a dramatic decline, a small group of merchants, mainly from Yorkshire, continued to invest in wool: about 12 in 1465, 26 in 1473, and 10 in 1489-90.<sup>178</sup> Although the value of wool exports fell, total exports through Hull were still more valuable than total cloth exports: £16,155 to £4,495 in 1430-1 and £3,330 to £1,260 in 1471-2.<sup>179</sup> Profits could still be made in wool (although the Celys thought Yorkshire wool was not worth exporting) and it is noticeable that several of the few wealthy merchants active in the second half of the 15th century, were wool staplers. Indeed, it could be argued that access to Calais and its mints, was a very important element in the credit options open to merchants and that without it, provincial credit was undermined.<sup>180</sup> A diminishing band of Staplers continued to be active in trade, and to some fell the ultimate honour of serving as Mayor of Calais Staple;

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177. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, England's Exports, pp. 59, 68-70.

178. E 122/62/19; 63/8.

179. Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 135.

180. Hanham, The Celys and Their World, p. 112; M.M. Postan, Private Financial Instruments in Medieval England, reprinted in idem, Medieval Trade and Finance (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 49-51.

Richard Russell, John Thrisk, and Richard York.<sup>181</sup> Throughout the first half of the 15th century, merchants from York especially, continued to own property in Calais and several bequeathed rents from Calais properties in their wills.<sup>182</sup> John Kelk of Beverley and his son William also owned rents there in 1407-8<sup>183</sup> and Thomas Brompton of Beverley, owned a woolhouse there in 1436. John Aldestonemore of York, left wool in Calais to be sold when he died in the same year,<sup>184</sup> and Robert Alcock of Hull, one of the few active wool merchants shipping through Hull in the later 15th century, left unspecified goods to be disposed of in Calais in 1484.<sup>185</sup> As late as 1520, Robert Harrison of Hull was leaving £10 to St. Mary's in Calais.<sup>186</sup>

#### Wine

Between 1400 and 1450, Hull was once again the second or third largest port for French wine imports, and the export of grain to France continued. Following the truce of 1444 in Aquitaine, 36 ships took 13,000 tuns of wine from Bordeaux to Hull between September 1444 and February 1445.<sup>187</sup> Ships of varying sizes were used to speed the wine to

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181. V.C.H. York, p. 104. In 1450, the company of the Staple made one of several loans to the king, and those being repaid through reduced customs on their exports through Hull, included Nicholas Bedford, Hugh Clitheroe, John Marshall of Hull, William Stokton, John Thrisk, William Bracebridge, Richard Lematon, Richard Wartre of York, and John Brompton, and Edmund Coppendale of Beverley. C.P.R. 1446-52, p. 323; 1452-61, p. 211.

182. E.g. Thomas Holme, 1407, Prob. Reg. III f. 255; Thomas del Gare, II ff. 110v.-11.

183. Kelks, ibid., III f. 263; Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 15.

184. Prob. Reg. III ff. 406-8, 475.

185. Ibid., V f. 229b. John Russell of York, had similarly left unspecified goods there in 1443, ibid., II f. 68.

186. Power, Wool Trade, pp. 102-3; Prob. Reg. IX f. 112.

187. R. Boutruche, La crue d'une société: seigneurs et paysans de Bordelais pendant la guerre de cent ans (Paris, 1947), p. 402; Bev. Cart. f. 1.

Hull; for example, in 1435 two Hull ships, the Petit Gabriel, 50 tuns, and the Grand Gabriel, 133 tuns, were used, and in 1459, the Anthony of Hull carried 650 tuns.<sup>188</sup> A feature of the wine trade during the 15th century was the increasing capacity of ships, best exemplified by the huge Italian carracks and galleys, trading out of Southampton. Eventually of course, these economies of scale gave the Italians unbeatable advantages, to the detriment of the East coast ports.<sup>189</sup>

After the military defeat in Gascony in 1453, wine imports plunged; recovering slightly after the Treaty of Piquigny was signed in 1475-6, but languishing thereafter (See Table 3). Eight Yorkshire merchants, including one from Bridlington, were licensed to trade at Bordeaux in 1483, and although the tunnage of their ships ranged from 300 to 50 tuns, it is not possible to estimate the quantities of wine they imported.<sup>190</sup> It could not have been very great. Woad and other dyestuffs, salt and wine still came to Hull, but increasingly via the Low Countries.<sup>191</sup> Trade with northern France did begin to increase from about 1460; between 1460 and 1499, 6 ships from Dieppe and 1 from Rouen were recorded trading in Hull.<sup>192</sup> Imports included fruit, salt, miscellaneous manufactured goods, Baltic commodities such as wax, pitch, timber, and fish, and iron. Although iron imports through Hull have

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188. Renouard, Bordeaux sous les rois d'Angleterre, pp. 554, 556.

189. E.B. Fryde, Italian Maritime Trade, op. cit., pp. 308-313.

190. F. Michel, Histoire du commerce et de la navigation à Bordeaux, I (Bordeaux, 1867), B.L. Harl. MS. 1433 f. 78v.

191. James, Wine Trade, p. 48; Bridbury, Salt Trade, p. 124.

192. M. Mollat, Le Commerce Maritime Normand à la fin de moyen Age (Paris, 1952), pp. 97, 134-43, 145. There had been several merchants from Yorkshire active in Rouen, 1419-22, including Richard Rolleston of Beverley, William Alkbarowe of York, John Bedford, John Fitling, John Tutbury, Robert Shakles, John Grimsby, and William Malton of Hull. A.D.S.M. Tabellionage de Rouen, ff. 214, 438v., 314, 336v. I am grateful to Robert Massey for these references.

been estimated to have accounted for 18% by value of all goods paying petty customs in 1471-2, that was more a reflection of Hull's overall decline in trade than of any increase in the quantity of Spanish or Swedish imports. Curiously a draper of Hull, Thomas Wood made bequests of Spanish iron as well as of gold cloth in his will in 1491.<sup>193</sup> English exports were concentrating on coal, lead, and cloth.

Yorkshiremen did venture further afield than continental Europe, seeking commercial opportunities in Iceland, but this was never a very large part of Hull's overseas trade. Icelandic fish had possibly been imported into Hull, via Norway, from the late 14th century, but by the 1420s there was a direct trade, with Yorkshire merchants carrying food-stuffs and manufactured goods to Iceland. After complaints about the behaviour of some Hull men in 1425, English merchants were banned from Iceland, and once more had to trade through Bergen. Worsening relations between Denmark and Norway in the 1430s affected trade.<sup>194</sup> York and Hull merchants complained of losing goods worth £5,000 in 1432, and in 1436 one York and eleven Hull merchants had uncustomed goods on a Hull ship arrested on its way to Iceland; which suggests the prohibition was flouted. The trade was controlled by licence by the 1440s, and at least eleven Hull merchants obtained them between 1442-1470.<sup>195</sup> During the 1460s, and 1470s, at least one ship left Hull for Iceland each year, and sometimes more,<sup>196</sup> but as relations between England and Denmark deteriorated in the second half of the century, the risk of attack by

193. V.C.H. Hull, p. 68; Prob. Reg. V ff. 402v.-403v.

194. V.C.H. Hull, p. 59; E.M. Carus-Wilson, The Iceland Trade, in Power and Postan eds., Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century, pp. 163-7.

195. C.P.R. 1436-41, pp. 294-5; Iceland Trade, p. 169; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, pp. 113-4.

196. E 122/62/7, 19.

the Danes' allies, the Hanse, increased.<sup>197</sup> By the end of the 15th century the Icelandic trade had greatly declined. 149.

### Domestic Disputes

Part of the response of English merchants to the accumulation of concessions by the Hanseatic merchants, and the need to concentrate their own negotiating powers, was to organise themselves, loosely at first, into an 'English Nation'. By 1391, the 'nation' at Danzig was tightly organised, electing its own governor and acquiring privileges from the Grand Master of the Teutonic order, the Hanse. From such localised beginnings the company of merchant venturers evolved, and was paralleled by the establishment of individual mercers and merchant adventurers companies in English towns in the early 15th century.<sup>198</sup> That at York was made incorporate by charter in 1430 and had developed from a religious fraternity whose objectives were, ostensibly social and spiritual. The Company was empowered to buy land to relieve the poor members of their craft, a prescient aim,<sup>199</sup> and it seems likely that the decline in overseas trade had encouraged the mercantile group to formalise their association for their own protection. It was, however, to no avail in the long term.

In addition to Hanse competition Yorkshire merchants faced the threat of enterprising Londoners coming north and squeezing the local merchants out of profitable trade in lead and cloth. A final straw was the Londoners' achievement of a monopolistic position in England's export trade by excluding Yorkshire men from the government of the national company of Merchant Adventurers.

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197. E.g. five Hull merchants were attacked by Hamburg ships, as they sailed to Iceland. *Iceland Trade*, pp. 177-82.

198. E.M. Carus-Wilson, Medieval Merchant Venturers (paperback edit. 1967), pp. xx, xxix-xxxiii.

199. M. Sellars, ed., The York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers 1356-1917, *Surtees Soc.*, cxxix (1918), pp. v-x.

Early in the 15th century the merchant adventures<sup>f</sup> of York, and Newcastle, took defensive measures against the London adventures<sup>f</sup>, by keeping their stalls and everything to do with their cloth sales away from the 'southerners' at the foreign marts.<sup>200</sup> The merchants of York, Beverley, Hull, Scarborough and Whitby joined forces in 1478 to appeal to the Crown against the refusal of the Londoners to elect a Northern governor of the company as well as a Southern governor. They claimed that the Londoners had the advantage over northerners just as they had at the cloth fairs, as a result of locating the northerners' stalls at the periphery of the market and so emphasizing the poorer quality of northern cloth. The letter from the York Company is redolent of a sense of bitter injustice, especially as it pointed out that the governor of the English Company, John Pickering, accepted dues paid to him by all English merchants to act on their behalf.<sup>201</sup> Edward IV issued a proclamation ordering fairer treatment, but to no effect and in 1495 the York merchants were trying to establish a maximum for the fees to be charged to them in Bruges, Antwerp, Barow, and Middleburg. Two years later Yorkshire merchants may have collaborated with other non-Londoners in petitioning against charges imposed on them overseas by the London adventurers.<sup>202</sup> By then it was too late, and indeed it is doubtful if the provincial merchants would have gained any advantage from political pressure however concerted.

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200. E.M. Carus-Wilson, *The Origins and Development of the Merchant Adventures Organisation in London as shown in their own Medieval Records*, Ec.H.R. iv (1933), pp. 169-70; Feodera, VIII, p. 464.

201. Sellars, ed., M. & M.A., pp. 75-9; Y.C.R., I, pp. 66, 133-4, III, pp. 22-4; V.C.H. York, pp. 103-4, 130; Heaton, Yorkshire Woolen Industry and Worsted Industries, p. 155; Salzman, England's Trade, p. 333; York M. & M.A., pp. 65, 74-80.

202. M. & M.A., p. 87; N.J. M. Kerling, Commercial Relations of Holland and Zeeland with England (1954), p. 155.

## CHAPTER 4: MERCHANT ENTERPRISES

The merchants of York, Beverley, and Hull may first and foremost be regarded as an economic group. The nature of their enterprises gave them a distinctive perspective compared to more inward-looking townsmen. The range of their expertise was impressive given the limited communications of the day, and although our knowledge of this is derived almost entirely from the records of a Londoner, Gilbert Maghfeld, and a Cotswold family, the Celys, much of their knowledge and skill must have been found in most medieval merchants.<sup>1</sup> Juggling several forms of credit, handling complex and inter-locking deals, assessing distant markets, manipulating fluctuating currency exchange rates, and confidently pursuing actions through the courts of London and of foreign towns, all reflect the particular attributes developed by long-distance merchants.

It is possible to distinguish the overseas merchants simply through their appearance in the records of international trade. But commerce was a flexible and fluid activity, and many local merchants must have been drawn into overseas ventures from time to time, just as many international merchants probably engaged in domestic trade. It is impossible to assess the latter because there are no direct records. It might be possible through an analysis of recorded debts, and although such a study is planned, it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, the search net was perforce spread more widely, to include not only declared merchants and mercers, identified in borough records and wills, but spicers such as Thomas Barton, Robert Belton and Robert Hancock, drapers such as Richard Acastre, Thomas Askham, and John Braithwayte, and occasional vintners such as William Ayrton all of York.

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1. M.K. James, *A London Merchant of the Fourteenth Century*, Ec.H.R., 2nd ser. viii (1955-6), pp. 364-76; A. Hanham, The Celys and Their World (1985), p. 16 and especially Part II.



Just as mercers dealt in more than mercery, so drapers, spicers, grocers and vintners might venture into long-distance domestic and international trade. Their preference tended towards particular types of goods, the drapers generally concentrated on cloth, but the vintner William Ayrton, exported cloth as well as importing wine.

In this chapter the focus will be on the economic options open to merchants: overseas trade, ship-owning, domestic enterprises, the exploitation of credit, and investment in real estate.

## I: Trade

### Overseas

To enable a study of the complete range of overseas trading activity, and to establish the changing fortunes of different groups of merchants, as many as possible of those shipping through Hull, who can be identified as York, Beverley, or Hull men, have been included. It is not claimed that all the merchants from those three towns have been traced since identifying Hull and Beverley merchants is difficult, given the absence of complete freemen's rolls, but using contextual links, the majority of very active merchants must have been gathered, and those omitted were most likely the least frequent shippers. Another difficulty was the existence of merchants in all three towns with the same surname; thus Broun, Ferriby, Frost, Holme, Upsale and Waghen for instance appeared in York, Beverley and Hull at some time or another and sometimes contemporaneously, while William de Burton must have been one of the most common names in later medieval England. Throughout the individual bibliographies, care has been taken to indicate uncertainties. The activities of merchants have been investigated during three contrasting periods: a period of expansion 1306 and 1336, a period of peak prosperity 1378 and 1408, and a period of trade recession and urban stagnation 1460-1500. Although the material has been quantified, conclusions are to some extent speculative given the patchiness of the sources.

The individuals under consideration and included in the tables, are those for whom evidence of involvement in overseas trade has been found, even though they may have been described elsewhere as mariners or drapers or even as apothecaries, as in the case of Laurence Swattock of Hull. The three widows Elena Box and Alice Day of Hull, and Marion Kent of York have also been included since they continued to trade after their respective husbands' deaths. Marion Kent indeed, traded for three years from her husband's death in 1470, and she invested in at least 16 ventures mainly exporting lead and cloth. The border around the core of full-time merchants, was fairly deep, particularly from the mid-14th century on, and suggests that a variety of individuals occasionally invested in a single shipment.

These trading individuals have been sub-divided into three groups, according to the annual value of their trade. D includes those rarely engaged in business with an annual turnover exceeding £25; 'ghosts' who appear peripherally once in the records; and others for whom indirect evidence suggests participation in trade, such as Ralph Randolph of York, who left money to the friars of Danzig in 1393 but left no other surviving evidence of a connection with trade. C comprises those with an annual trade worth £25-£50, B of those with an annual trade worth £50-£100; and A of those with an annual trade of over £100. (See Table 4.) Inevitably incomplete records may have pushed some individuals into the wrong category, but as one of the characteristics of trade was that its value was reflected in its frequency, and large merchants had more annual shipments than did smaller merchants, it is unlikely that more than a small number of merchants have been wrongly categorised. The value of goods rather than bulk alone has been used, to make possible comparisons between the fluctuating values of shipments of wool, cloth, wine and miscellaneous goods in the three periods. Extra weight has been given to years for which we have complete figures.

The higher the value of a commodity, the better it absorbed high overheads; thus the more expensive cloth and wool cost the same to transport, store and retail as did cheaper alternatives, but these costs constituted a smaller proportion of the former. This is why Cotswold wool continued to be in demand in Europe into the 16th century whereas its inferior cheaper rivals were less so. It is impossible to estimate the value of a sack of wool once it had been cleaned and packed ready for shipment, unless its individual price was recorded, and a shipment of several sacks probably included many different qualities of wool.<sup>2</sup> York merchants purchased wool from the Swale, Ure and Nidd valleys, from Byland, Helmesley, Rievaulx, and Thirsk, and from the Lincolnshire wolds. For this reason, it is impossible to calculate the percentage customs and subsidy payments added to the price, so the prices used to give an indication of the turnover in a merchant's wool trade are those national and regional averages listed by T.H. Lloyd. This may mean that shipments through Hull have been over-valued, since northern wool was generally cheaper, but the error will have been constant.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the cloths exported through Hull were probably woollen broadcloths, but since the customs' officials calculated all cloths in terms of broadcloths, it is difficult to distinguish the straits, i.e. narrow cloths. When the distinction was made, as in the Particular Roll covering December 1391-September 1392, less than 1/6th of the cloth was described in ells or dozens of straits. Worsteds do not appear in all

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2. A. Hanham, The Celys and their World (1985), pp. 111-147. On varieties of quality and price within one region see J.H. Munro, The 1357 Price Schedule and the Decline of Yorkshire Wool Values, Textile History, (1979), pp. 211-219; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 160; and see above p. 127.
  3. T.H. Lloyd, The Movement of Wool Prices in Medieval England, Ec. H.R., Supplement No. 6 (1973), pp. 40-4.

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the customs rolls and so may have been underestimated nationally, as James Campbell has argued. It is doubtful if they were manufactured locally in Yorkshire on a significant scale before the 1470s, although equivalents, bed covers and hangings, were exported via Hull throughout the 15th century. Even during the late-14th century peak though, single and double beds exported might have been worth £60 p.a., compared to the average £4,800 worth of broadcloths. The stray references to York merchants exporting worsteds, come from Hanse records and the origin of the cloth not given. For example Richard Bawtry and others exported 25 worsteds in 1404 as part of a largely broadcloth cargo and Richard Fasset, 20 pieces in 1407, again as part of a largely broadcloth consignment.<sup>4</sup>

Cloth values, given in the customs rolls, were generally about £1 10s. for a single cloth, sine grano, although they were £1 13s. in 1383-4. Bolton has a value of £1 15s. as a national average between 1421 and 1461. Unless a specific value was recorded, the value of an individual's cloth trade has been estimated using £1 10s. as the average price in the 15th century.<sup>5</sup>

Wine imports are difficult to value, since the type of wine is rarely specified, and might have come from the west or north of France, from Spain or Portugal, or from the Rhine, and prices varied according to the pressing. Pilotage varies according to the type of ship, time of year, weather and distance. Thus in the early 1330s, pilotage from the River Gironde to Hull cost between £1 and £1 6s.8d. During Edward II's reign pilotage to Hull cost 6s.8d. and by Edward III's reign had risen

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4. E122/59/2, 8, 23, 159/11; Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, pp. 73-76; J. Campbell, *Medieval Norwich*, in M.D. Lobel, *Atlas of Historic Towns. Norwich*, (1975), p. 16; *Hansetage*, V, pp. 331-2; *Hanseakten*, p. 236.

5. E 122/58/9, 66/2; Bolton, *Medieval English Economy*, p. 292; unusually and specifically white cloths were valued in 1430-1 at £1, those without grain at £1 6s.8d. E 122/61/32; Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, pp. 71-8, 345.

to between 13s. 4d. and £1. If a ship stopped anywhere en route, local pilotage was charged. Freight costs also varied: from Bordeaux to Hull wine cost 6s. 8d., 8s. and 10s. a tun to ship in 1333-5, and in 1414 cost between 16s.8d. and £1. Costs increased in times of war. The extra costs of sailing in convoys added 2s. per tun in 1360 and 1369 and increases occurred at other times too.<sup>6</sup>

Wine was sold retail in York at about £5 per tun during the 15th century, rising to £8 during a period of scarcity in 1458-9, following the loss of Bordeaux. M.K. James suggests an average price of £5 per tun of red wine in the 1430s, but both she and Wendy Childs price French and Spanish wine at £4 a tun in the 1490s, whereas Hull prices remained at between £5 and £5 9d.<sup>7</sup> As a rough multiplier for individual merchant's wine imports, £5 per tun has been used. The value of miscellaneous imports and of lead, and of exported foodstuffs was recorded, and requires no amendments.

Commodities had to be carted to and from ships at the port of embarkation of course, and weighed once more, and stored there. It is impossible to generalise about such costs, since so many variable elements were involved: labour rates, size of cart, numbers of horses, the hiring of equipment for pack-horses and so on. Occasional, specific references provide clues however, but these can only be illustrative. We do know, from the case of a greedy vintner, who sold wine in Beverley in 1364 at 12d. a gallon, that he should have allowed only ½d. on his purchase price of 8d. per gallon for transport from Hull.<sup>8</sup>

William de la Pole paid 6d. per sack carriage from York to Hull in 1337 and 10d. per sack from Nottingham to Hull in 1339. His total costs

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6. James, Wine Trade, pp. 25-7, 126, 140-5; M.B., I, p. 172.

7. Ibid., pp. 66, 67, 69; Childs, Anglo-Castilian Trade, p. 63.

8. James, Wine Trade, p. 147.

from Hull to Flanders were 6s. per sack in 1337 and 5s. in 1339. It has been estimated that the transport, packing, and warehousing of wool purchased by him in Lincolnshire and shipped from Hull in 1336-7, comprised 9% of the total cost, and c.14% of the cost of Shropshire wool shipped by him from London.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1470s the cost to the Celys of transporting wool from the Cotswolds to London was about 2% of the purchase price.<sup>10</sup> Agents' commission had to be added to these overheads and this must in part account for the more than doubling of the purchase price of wool in Yorkshire of £4-£6 in 1337 to a selling price of £12-£14 in Flanders.<sup>11</sup> Precise information on commission rates is rare but in 1417 when John Warde, a spicer of York contracted with William Esseby to buy goods for him in Flanders, Esseby's commission was to be £1 in every £20.<sup>12</sup>

There are other technical problems involved in trying to calculate total overheads and purchase prices to set against the final profits on a transaction,<sup>13</sup> and further justify using point of embarkation quantities and values to indicate trends in the scale of trade.

Once the average annual value of each merchant's trade had been estimated, they were placed into one of four groups which were designed

9. E.B. Fryde, The Wool Accounts of William de la Pole, Borthwick Papers, no. 25 (1964), pp. 10-14. The estimate of costs was kindly supplied by Edward Miller.
10. Hanham, The Celys, p. 119.
11. Munro, 1357 Price Schedule, p. 212; W. Cunningham, The Growth of English Industry and Commerce During the Early and Middle Ages, 5th edition, p. 636.
12. Smit, Bronnen, II, p. 945; M.B. II, p. 55.
13. E.E. Power, The Wool Trade in the Fifteenth Century, in E. Power and M.M. Postan, eds. Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century (1933), pp. 70-1; A. Hanham, Foreign Exchange and the English Wool Merchant in the Late Fifteenth Century, B.I.H.R. xliv (1973), pp. 160-175, and Profits on English Wool Exports 1472-1544, ibid., lv (1982), pp. 139-147.

to reflect the clustering of merchants once ranked, as well as the wide range of different levels of trading activity. Division into more categories was rejected because it did not refine, but confused a fairly basic analysis. The absence of import figures for early-14th century merchants, means that they may have been undervalued. Each merchant has been categorised when possible, but those for whom only a single passing reference to overseas trade has been found, have been placed in group D.

Category D comprised 33% of the total sample of 57 merchants trading in the early 14th century, and included a wide range of businesses. One of the most typical was Richard Brigenall of York, who sent at least 1 shipment of wool each year for 4 separate years between 1320 and 1333,<sup>14</sup> with an average value of £20. Some wool shipments were surprisingly small and William Birkyn of Hull shipped wool worth £2 10s. and £3 in 1311-12 and 1320-1 respectively. John Humbrecolt of Beverley was typical of those merchants operating on a larger scale in category C, and the value of his wool exports ranged from £35 to £50. Also his wool was sent in 2 or 3 separate shipments each year and not in one shipment as was common with very small merchants. Similarly John de Kelstern of York exported in only 2 years: wool worth £28 in 1320-1 and wool worth £12 in 1332-3 but each was a single shipment. The average annual value of a merchant's business sometimes obscured an occasional boom year. Thomas Holme of Beverley, for example, exported wool in 7 separate years with an average annual value of £30, but in 1306-7 he sent 7 shipments of wool with a total value of £200. Thereafter his exports never again exceeded £40.

B category comprised 25% of the early 14th-century merchants. Typical of the group was Thomas Waghen of Beverley who was exporting wool regularly between 1306 and 1326, and usually sent several shipments

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14. See Appendix 4 for details of each individual's trade.



each year, with annual values ranging from £25 to £130. Thomas Redenese, of York, expanded his business between 1298 and 1313. Prior to 1306 his annual trade did not exceed on average £50, but in that year his exports increased to £105, and remained up at about £80 in 1313. In contrast, John de Thornton of York's business gradually declined from £140 in 1308-9 to £24 in 1320-1.

The really large merchant businesses were clearly recognisable and their group, category A, comprised 22% of the early 14th-century merchants. William de la Pole is probably the best known example of a successful merchant<sup>15</sup> and although no other Yorkshire merchant has been discovered who could rival de la Pole, several individuals did have impressive export businesses. William Kelstern of Beverley exported wool regularly between 1312 and 1333, and in only three years sent fewer than 5 shipments. The average annual value of his exports was between £200 and £400 but annual figures ranged as high as £639 in 1321-2 and as low as £42 in the following year. Walter de Kelstern also of Beverley, possibly William's cousin or brother, had his best years between 1306 and 1325 when he only once exported wool worth less than £350 in 18 years of trade. In 1308-9 his exports were worth £1,160 but after 1323 his business tailed off although he was active in the 1337-8 wool collection. (N.B. There may have been some confusion after 1312 with a Walter de Kelstern of York). Other examples of major exporters were Richard Allerton and Henry Belton of York, and Richard Tirwhit of Beverley.

In the early 14th century hardly any cloth was exported but by the late 14th century the situation had changed. Cloth had supplanted wool as the major export commodity, Hanseatic trade had taken off and the Baltic had become a major market for English cloth, supplying a variety

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15. See E.B. Fryde, The Wool Account of William de la Pole, Borthwick Papers No. 25 (1964).

of goods in return. Post-Black Death European commerce was enjoying boom conditions, consequently in Yorkshire the volume of trade and the number of active merchants had increased. Group D had almost trebled in number and constituted 46% of all merchants. Although the number of merchants in group B had trebled, they constituted a slightly smaller proportion - 19% - of all merchants. Similarly, although group A had increased in numbers, it constituted only 14% compared with 22% in the early 14th century. (See Table 4.)

In addition to the dramatic increase in active merchants, the other striking feature of late 14th-century trade was the amazing variety of commodities imported back to England from the Low Countries' international fairs in particular. English cloth travelled well and held its value, and although few English merchants penetrated far into Europe, the demand for cloth stimulated enterprise in miscellaneous imports. Whatever reached the Low Countries, from the Far and Middle East or from the Mediterranean or the Baltic, found its way into cargoes shipped to Hull. This was not an exclusive trade as was the wool trade, and merchants in every category could be found importing.

D category was the largest by far, and included many merchants who appeared only once in the records. Merchants in D group rarely exceeded one export shipment a year and very few had more than one import shipment either. Henry de Preston of York, for example, exported one shipment of cloth worth £16 in 1395-6 and imported one shipment of miscellaneous goods worth £11 1s. 4d. In 1401-2 he again had one export and one import shipment worth £15 and £11 13s. 4d. respectively. John Carleton of Beverley exported and imported regularly between 1387 and 1397 but in only one year did he have both outgoing and incoming shipments.

Generally the C and B group merchants were engaged in both exports and imports, sending and receiving several shipments each year. Robert

TABLE 4

**THE MERCHANTS OF YORK, BEVERLEY AND HULL  
AND OVERSEAS TRADE IN THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES**

	1306-1336					1378-1408					1460-1500				
	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total
No. of merchants in each category	52	31	39	35	157	142	65	60	44	311	144	43	24	15	226
Ditto as percentage	33	20	25	22	100%	46	21	19	14	100%	64	19	10	7	100%

D includes those merchants with an annual trade turnover worth £ 0 - £ 25.  
 C -ditto- £25 - £ 50.  
 B -ditto- £50 - £100.  
 A -ditto- Over £100.

Louth of York was typical of group B and traded regularly between 1383 and 1401. He generally exported 2 or 3 shipments of cloth each year and imported 2 or more shipments of mixed goods. Imports and exports for one year rarely balanced. He exported cloth worth £39 and imported goods worth £28 in 1395-6. The difference was larger in 1398-9 when his cloth exports were worth £43 1s. 4d. and his imports only £7 11s. 8d. Although cloth had replaced wool as the major export commodity, it is interesting that most of the wool still exported was by groups A and B, and generally comprised the most valuable part of their trade. There was no practical difference between wool exporting staplers and other merchants; one or two such as Thomas Gra of York traded entirely in wool, but most wool exporters engaged in the cloth export trade as well, and in importing wine and miscellaneous goods. John Topcliff of York, for example, exported both cloth and wool, as did many of his contemporaries in group B (such as William Pound of Hull). He also imported herrings, wine and miscellaneous goods. His wool shipments were always more valuable than his cloth shipments; in 1390-1 he exported cloth worth £15 and wool worth £107; in 1391-2 he exported cloth worth £22 and wool and fells worth about £168. His imports were generally small and in 1391-2 his one shipment of mixed goods was worth £2 1s. but his one specialised shipment that year contained herrings and wine worth about £95.

Group A merchants in the late 14th century were again easily identified by the value of their trade and the frequency of their shipments. Although some merchants sent all their cloth in one big shipment, Robert Holme of York, for example, sent one shipment worth £83 in 1390-1, most merchants in this group sent many shipments each year. As in group B, wool usually constituted the most valuable part of their trade. Richard Aglyon of Beverley's cloth export, worth £310 4d., in 1383-4, was excep-

tional even for him, and his cloth exports were usually worth £50 or less and his wool exports were only once less than £100. A small number of merchants exported only one commodity. Thomas Gra of York apparently concentrated on exporting wool between 1378 and 1390 and William Terry of Hull exported only cloth between 1383 and 1401. The same William Terry was something of a specialist importer also, and the most valuable part of his imports was wine. In 1389-90 he imported miscellaneous goods worth £3 6s. 8d. together with 56 tuns of wine, and in 1398-9 he imported herrings worth £4 6s. 8d. and 22 tuns 1 pipe of wine. John Liversege was another Hull merchant who specialised in importing wine but on a smaller scale and they reflected the Hull merchants' dominance at this time in the wine trade through Hull.

Generally speaking the value of goods imported was less than that of goods exported and this also applied to the trade of individual merchants, excepting those who imported wine on any scale. Some annual imports of mixed goods, nonetheless, were very large. Robert Holme of either York or Beverley imported £724 worth of goods in 1383-4 and Robert Ward of York imported £339 worth of goods in the same year. The overall scale of a group trading in the late 14th century was impressive and more valuable than in the early 14th century. John Gisburn exported over £1,000 worth of wool, a little cloth in 1378-9, and £782 worth of wool in the following year. His protagonist in 1381,<sup>16</sup> Simon Quixlay, never matched such enormous figures for one year, but for 6 out of 8 years between 1378 and 1392 the annual value of his trade never fell below £222. The major difference between the two was that Quixlay exported mainly wool and had an active import trade, whereas Gisburne exported cloth as well as wool and imported infrequently. Robert Holme

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16. V.C.H. York, pp. 81-2.

of York's activities have been described elsewhere,<sup>17</sup> but must be treated with caution as a contemporaneous Robert Holme of Beverley was similarly active in trade and the records rarely differentiate between them. Robert Ward of York provides a more reliable example of an outstandingly active merchant of the period. He traded regularly between 1378 and 1401, exporting cloth and wool and importing mixed goods, particularly woad. For the six years for which both import and export figures have survived, the annual value of his trade was as follows:-

	<u>Shipments</u>	<u>Total value</u>
1383-4	19	£556 and 10 pipes wine
1389-90	11	£289
1391-2	32	£1,118
1395-6	7	£92
1398-9	10	£74 and 1 pipe wine
1401-2	12	£334.

In addition, the annual value of his exports in five other years never fell below £360. For other, though less prodigious enterprise see his brother Thomas and Nicholas Blackburn snr, and John Hoveden of York, Richard Aglyon and William Rolleston of Beverley.

By the 1460s and 1470s the situation had changed once more. Hull's trade between 1467 and 1487 was worth only about £120,000 compared with £400,000 between 1407 and 1417, and alien merchants, particularly the Hanse, had increased their share by over 50%<sup>18</sup> The numbers of indigenous merchants trading through Hull had fallen, and those identified from York, Beverley and Hull totalled 226, a fall of 85 since the late 14th century. Each group had decreased in numbers and although their

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17. J.N. Bartlett, *Robert Holme Citizen and Merchant of York*, Jnl. Bradford Textile Soc., xcvi (1952-3).

18. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 28; V.C.H. York, p. 105.

relative relationships had not changed, the degree of difference between them had changed. Group D constituted 64% of all merchants, group B constituted 9% and group A constituted only 8%. Clearly far fewer merchants were able to maintain a high annual turnover and certainly fewer merchants achieved the level of activity of Robert Ward.

Between 1408 and 1460 the international situation had changed to the detriment of the East Coast ports: access to the Baltic was perilous and restricted and Burgundy had been lost to the French. Merchants from each of the three towns reflected these developments in their trade; importing less wine and exporting less cloth.

By the mid 15th century merchants were increasingly diversifying their commercial interests. The wool trade had traditionally been a one-way trade, with merchants shipping back most of the cash they received or financing other merchants' imports. It was already clear by the late 14th century, that many wool staplers based in Yorkshire were not following that pattern, although the Cely family did. Diversification was the major trend in the late 15th century for staplers such as John Thirsk of York, John Swan of Hull, and William Brompton of Beverley. Although it has been argued that it may have been more profitable in the 15th century for a wool merchant to re-invest in the Calais Staple, recovering maybe a net profit of 20% (38%-43% on the best wool),<sup>19</sup> it is clear that few Yorkshire men chose that option and to disregard their own import trade. Their imports and those of their fellow 'general' merchants, included not only wine, but dyestuffs and teasels for the new textile centres, and spices, fruit and manufactured goods for domestic purchases.

Within groups C and D the same characteristics were evident as in the early and late 14th century; goods were sent in one or occasionally

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19. E. Power, The Wool Trade in English Medieval History (1941), p. 56; Hanham, The Celys and Their World (1985) pp. 245-7, 399-400.

two shipments a year and the merchants in the group concentrated on the export of cloth and import of miscellaneous goods. A few merchants did deal in more specialist commodities. Robert Bennington of Hull, for example, exported lead regularly between 1461 and 1472, and imported more wine and stockfish than mixed goods. The quantities were usually very small and his 1466-7 trade was typical when he exported lead worth £1 13s. 4d. and imported stockfish worth £8. A small number of groups C and D merchants exported wool, which was no longer a major export commodity. John Dalton of Hull was one of the more active merchants in this trade and shipped wool worth £10 in 1469-70, £26 in 1471-2, and £32 in 1473. More group D merchants were importing wine than had previously been the case and about 25% imported some wine, albeit in such small quantities as one pipe. This increased diversification among the smaller merchants may well have been a necessary reaction in the face of alien competition.

Compared with the figures for the late 14th century, the number of merchants in group B was reduced by almost two thirds. Again, with the exception of a few merchants who exported wool only, the story is one of diversification. There was less dependence on the export of cloth and on exports generally. Exports included more lead and foodstuffs, and less cloth. None of the group exported cloth only and even William Tod of York, a relatively big cloth exporter, regularly exported quantities of lead. In 1464, for example, he exported 12 undyed cloths and lead worth £16 13s. 4d., and in 1471-2 he exported 21 undyed cloths and lead worth £26 13s. 4d. Henry Williamson of York exported 8½ undyed cloths and beer and victuals worth £6 8s. 4d. in 1461, and leather worth £6 and 29 undyed cloths in 1471-2. Such mixed exports suggest that merchants in group B could no longer depend on cloth as their staple export. Increasingly their imports were surpassing their exports and they were apparently settling more into the role of general goods importers than of



primarily exporters. Thomas Neleson of York, for example, traded regularly between 1460 and 1472 and exported cloth, lead and wool worth £210 and imported goods worth £364 and 6 tuns of wine. A few merchants did depend on wool and Thomas Lokton, of York, exported wool only between 1466 and 1471, shipping over £200 worth in 3 years. Group A merchants, John Marshall and John Thrisk, also of York, and John Swan of Hull were also wool only exporters, and it would seem that if a merchant could ship in sufficient quantities his exports could depend totally on wool, whereas even the biggest cloth exporters had to export other goods. It must be remembered though, that each of these staplers, had a significant investment in imports even though on customs evidence at least, their trade was balanced in favour of their wool exports. Were their unimported profits financing the import trade of others in the region?

The number of merchants in group A had diminished dramatically to 15. They were also diversifying exports and investing more in imports. John Kent of York exported goods worth c. £289 between 1460 and 1467 but his imports were worth £533 and 25 tuns of wine. The biggest shipments of the group tended to be imports rather than big wool exports as in the two earlier periods. John Wood of Hull, for example, imported miscellaneous goods worth £313 6s. 8d. in three shipments in 1470-1. Moreover, while each of them regularly had an annual turnover in excess of £100, no individual reached the scale of trade that had been a characteristic of the late 14th-century group. The nearest was probably Thomas Beverley of York, whose average annual trade was worth just over £250 for three separate years between 1460 and 1473. None of the group depended solely on cloth exports and John Gaunt, who exported 150 undyed cloths and only £7 6s. 8d. worth of lead and leather in four years between 1464 and 1473, was exceptional. (Marion Kent in group C, was more typical of the big cloth merchants in that she also exported lead of approximately the same value as her cloth exports).

TABLE 5

**THE MERCHANTS OF YORK, BEVERLEY AND HULL  
AND OVERSEAS TRADE IN THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES**

Table 5.1		1306-1336					1378-1408					1460-1500				
YORK	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	
Number of town's merchants in each group	23	15	12	8	58	95	48	37	24	204	55	20	11	8	94	
Ditto as percentage	40	26	20	14	100%	47	23	18	12	100%	58	21	12	8	100%	

Table 5.2		1306-1336					1378-1408					1460-1500				
BEVERLEY	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	
No. of town's merchants in each group	21	10**	22**	24	78	22	14	10	7*	43	19	2	2	1	25	
Ditto as percentage	27	14	28	30	100%	51	10	23	16	100%	80	8	8	4	100%	

Table 5.3		1306-1336					1378-1408					1460-1500				
HULL	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	D	C	B	A	Total	
No. of town's merchants in each group	8	5	6	2	21	25	13*	13	13*	64	70	21	11	6	108	
Ditto as percentage	38	24	29	9	100%	40	20	20	20	100%	65	19	10	6	100%	

D includes those merchants with an annual trade turnover worth £ 0 - £ 25.  
 C -ditto- £25 - £ 50.  
 B -ditto- £50 - £100.  
 A -ditto- Over £100.

\* includes 1 Beverley/Hull merchant      \*\* includes 1 Beverley/York merchant

An analysis of the distribution of each category of trade between the merchants of the three towns, adds another dimension to the discussion. The evidence in Table 5 reveals that Beverley was most active in trade in the early 14th century, when the town dominated the wool trade. In three customs rolls between 1306 and 1311, Beverley merchants outnumbered those of York and in 1306-7 Beverley merchants exported more wool than those of York. Wool exports by the York merchants, on the other hand, exceeded those of the Beverley men by 37 sacks in 1311-12, and this small margin was maintained certainly until 1325-6. A document of 1338<sup>20</sup> acknowledging royal debts to Yorkshire merchants after the 1337 monopoly and granting repayment against the subsidy on wool exports however, shows Beverley still to be the dominant trading town. It lists 38 merchants from Beverley, 11 from York and 1 from Hull. The Beverley men were responsible for loans totalling £7,661 4s. 1d.; the York men for £3,556 15s. 3d.; and the solitary Hull man, William de la Pole, was responsible for £4,362 11s. 1d. The expansion of the cloth trade, at the expense of wool exports, changed this situation.

By the late 14th century the number of Beverley merchants had almost halved whereas there were more than three times as many overseas merchants active in Hull and York, compared with the early 14th century. York's dominance was clear, although Hull's trade was expanding fast.

It is possible to further refine this analysis by aggregating this information on each identified merchant on a town by town basis and thus creating a series of statements of the relative value of trade between each town in commodity terms. (See Tables 6 and 7). This is not an entirely satisfactory method, since prominent individuals could be

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20. E 122/177/33.

TABLE 6: COMPARATIVE TRADE FIGURES1391-2 Wool and Cloth Exports from E 122 59/23, 24

	WOOL	CLOTH
YORK	1,515 sks	v. £2,387
HULL	16 sks.+ 2,758 fells	v. £317
BEVERLEY	156 sks.+ 2,033 fells	v. £297

1398-9 Cloth Exports and Imports from E 122/159/11

	CLOTH	WINE (non-sweet)	MISC. IMP.
YORK	v. £986	432 tuns	£764
HULL	v. £144	200 tuns	£112
BEVERLEY	v. £97	16 tuns	£120

fortuitously missed by the choice of year. However, it does give rather more precise views of the trends which developed between 1376 and 1500 than is otherwise possible. Following Dr. Bartlett's choice, the fairly full records for 1393-4, 1398-9, 1466-7 and 1471-2 have been scrutinised. In the process it became apparent that he had claimed quite a few merchants for York, who were Beverley or Hull men. The error is quite understandable, since there is no reason to suppose that there might be more than one branch of a family with the same surname, nor indeed several men with exactly the same name as in the case of the 5 Robert Holmeses! As a consequence some of his estimates must be revised so that York's share of wine imports in 1383-4 and 1398-9 was  $\frac{1}{4}$  and not  $\frac{1}{3}$ : of cloth exported it was worth £986 and not £1,225: of miscellaneous imports £764 and not £980.<sup>21</sup> Wool has been omitted because it was not included in the tonnage and poundage ledger; the source used for 1398-9. Table 6 confirms the relative position of the three towns as suggested by the merchant count, particularly the pre-eminence of York in every branch of trade, and conversely, Beverley's demise.

Most remarkable is the evidence of Beverley's failure to move into the cloth trade to compensate for a shrinking wool trade. It may have been that the magnetic pull of York in its zenith, or even the attraction of an expanding Hull within the relative openness of the cloth trade was too tempting, and Beverley was beginning to be seen as an economic backwater. The broadening base of cloth merchants evident in York and Hull was absent in Beverley and most of the bigger merchants were still investing in wool. Even more significantly investment in

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21. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 25; *Aspects of the York Economy*, pp. 353-378.

TABLE 7: COMPARATIVE TRADE FIGURES 15th century1430-1 Cloth exports from E 122/51/32

YORK	£1,869
HULL	£140
BEVERLEY	£9 10s.

1466-7 Exports and Imports from E 122/52/9, 10

	Exports				Imports	
	CLOTH	WOOL	LEAD	MISC.	WINE	MISC.
YORK	v.£318=57% (212 sg)	282 sks.=87%	£2	£42	79 tuns 26%	£1,105
HULL	v. £75=24% (50 sg)	111 sks.=13% + 4,232 fells	£225	£720	39 tuns 13%	£83
BEVERLEY	Nil	43 sks.= 7% + 6,000 fells	Nil	Nil	9 tuns 3%	£32

1471-2 Exports and Imports from E 122/62/16,17

	Exports				Imports	
	CLOTH	WOOL	LEAD	MISC.	WINE	MISC.
YORK	v.£593=47% (395 sg)	145 sks.=28%	£371	Nil	302 tuns 48%	£1,161
HULL	v.£342=27% (228 sg)	55 sks.=12% + 5,576 fells	£489	£329	168 tuns 27%	£256
BEVERLEY	v. £76=6% (51 sg)	51 sks.= 8%	Nil	Nil	1 pipe	£65

N.B. The percentages are of the total exports of a given commodity by all merchants, denizen and, alien shipping through Hull in that year, as appended to each customs roll.

the wine trade was minimal. Low investment in the cloth and wine trades persisted into the next century.

In Table 7, Beverley's withdrawal from international trade by 1466-7 is starkly revealed, although a comparison with 1471-2 suggests 1466-7 might have been an unusually bad year. Only one merchant had an annual turnover in excess of £100 and another 2, trade worth over £50. Beverley's strength was still in the wool trade, but some merchants were investing in cloth exports in 1471-2 and had doubled the value of their miscellaneous imports. No traceable Beverley merchant exported lead, foodstuffs or general commodities, and the almost complete absence of wine in Beverley cargoes is notable. Beverley's contraction was the inevitable result of being squeezed between two geographically advantaged neighbours. Beverley's physical location, which had once served the Wolds so well, had now isolated the town from the increasingly lucrative trade in lead.

For it was that trade, as well as early and collective investment in general exports which marked Hull out from its neighbours, accounting for the increase in the number of its merchants, at a time when those from York and Beverley were decreasing. The river system which bypassed Beverley, brought Derbyshire and Yorkshire Pennine lead via the Trent, the Aire, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe and Ouse, straight to Hull's quays. In 1465-6 fourteen Hull merchants exported lead worth £612: six York merchants lead worth £296. Though the value had fallen in 1466-7, the trend was well established, and Hull's superiority in lead exports was maintained into the 1470s, until eventually Hanse competition following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1474 wrested the trade away.<sup>22</sup>

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22. V.C.H. Hull, p. 67; Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 19.

Another notable difference in Hull was a surge of collective enterprise in the 1460s and 1470s. In 1463 Hull was granted £40 a year from the customs in the form of free trade for its burgesses.<sup>23</sup> Most likely this was a strong stimulus and the mayor and corporation sponsored 7 shipments worth £721 in 1465; generally made up of barley, honey, butter, and items such as hats, kettles and so forth destined for Iceland.<sup>24</sup> Several private consortia were formed, mainly by A and B merchants and that trade alone accounted for exports worth £480 in 1466-7. The consortia, following the council's short-lived example, also concentrated in exports of general merchandise, though some did import wine. In 1466-7, Edmund Coppendale, William Eland, Nicholas Ellis, and Thomas Etton, jointly exported £480 worth of victuals: in 1469-70, Robert Alcock, William Brompton and John Whitfield imported 32 tuns and in 1470-1, Brompton, Whitfield, Robert Bennington and Thomas Patrington collaborated in exporting £200 worth of beer, barley, butter, linen, bonnets etc., and Brompton, Robert Alcock, Roger Bushell, and John Ricard a similar cargo worth £240 in the following year. These were all prominent Hull citizens as well as successful merchants, and some financed several collective enterprises. Three consortia in 1469-70 exported £60, £80, and £240 worth of goods. Thomas Alcock belonged to two of them, to two more importing wine in the same year, and to another exporting £48 worth of victuals in 1470-1. His brother Robert belonged to exporting consortia in 1469-70, Brompton's in 1471-2 and to two wine importing consortia in 1469-70.<sup>25</sup> There is no sign of

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23. C.P.R. 1461-7, p. 289.

24. E 122/62/7.

25. E 122/62/9, 10; 62/12; 62/13, 14, 15; 62/16.



equivalent collective investment in either York or Beverley in this period, even though it was possible through the York Merchant Adventurers' Company. The impact of a subsequent grant in 1484 of £60 from the Hull customs may explain the existence of several consortia ventures in 1489-90 when Lawrence Swattock, Ralph Langton, Henry Mindram and other Hull merchants, plus Richard York (of York?) jointly exported 29 cloths and goods worth £80 10s.; 14 cloths and goods worth £16; and without Richard York exported 15 cloths and goods worth £66; while a second group of Edward Baron, John Armstrong and others exported 9 cloths and goods worth £18.<sup>26</sup>

One other feature of Hull's trade during the late 15th century is worth observing, and that is the tendency of its burgess mariners, and shipmasters, with easy access to ships, overseas ports and buyers, to venture small sums in trade on their own behalf. For instance men such as William Bank and Robert Bennington, Henry Stable and Robert Stevenson. Some never did more than export a single cloth, but it was all profit to the merchant community. Some did subsequently build up a respectable business, though not all were as fortunate as Robert Michelson. In 1449 a man of that name, his father (?) had had a share in the Margaret of Hull and Robert became a burgess of Hull as a mariner in 1463, and imported about £12 worth of wine and goods the following year. In 1466-7 and 1470-1 his turnover was about £15-£20 and in 1471 he received a £5 annuity from the Hull customs for his service to Edward IV which was increased to £10 for life in 1485. Michelson was still active as the master of the Peter of Hull in 1489-90, with a share in a consortium exporting 14 cloths and goods worth £16.<sup>27</sup>

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26. M. & M.A., pp. 40, 68, 72-3, 195; C.P.R. 1476-85, p. 455; V.C.H. Hull, p. 42; E 122/63/8.

27. BRB 1/11; E 122/62/5, 63/8 and see biography in Appendix 4.

What of York's late-15th century trends? Tables 6 and 7 attest to a continuing dominance in both the cloth and wool trades, as well as in wine and miscellaneous imports. Indeed its wine imports almost quadrupled between 1465-7 and 1471-2. York merchants were slower than their Hull neighbours to move into lead as an alternative export commodity to cloth, but by 1471-2 was beginning to catch up only to be overtaken like every other denizen, by the resurgent Hanse in the 1480s. Unlike Hull merchants, men from York never did invest heavily in the Iceland trade and export mixed cargoes. The apparent upturn in York's fortunes was shortlived and by 1525 the value of its trade was £2,502.<sup>28</sup>

Indications of decline and eventual eclipse by London, were visible in the 1470s. Of all the percentages calculable, probably the most telling is the fact that in 1466-7 and 1471-2, 20% of the wool trade and 52% of the cloth trade were in the hands of merchants not from York, Beverley or Hull. The wool must have been carried by other English merchants,<sup>29</sup> some of the cloth by the Hanse and other foreigners in 1466-7 but not the Hanse in 1471-2. (See Table 2.) Similarly 60% of the wine trade was in the hands of others in 1466-7 but this had fallen to 25% in 1471-2.

The overall pattern of change in overseas trade as it affected the merchant groups of each of the three towns is fairly clear, but what of the impact on relations between them? While the merchants from each town may have been united in their opposition to the infiltration of southern and alien merchants into northern markets, there was still antagonism between them. As commercial competition became more intense

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28. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 31.

29. Hanham, *The Celys and Their World*, pp. 243-5 points out that the London wool trade was also shrinking by the 1480s. In 1488 only 9 merchants, 4.3% of London shippers, exported over 200 sacks.

so did inter-town hostility. It was particularly apparent in Hull's insistence on treating merchants from York and Beverley as it would any other foreigners. In 1448 for example, Beverley and Hull were disputing the claim of Beverley merchants to the right of toll-free passage for their goods through the haven of Hull into the Humber.<sup>30</sup> This dispute was settled amicably but in 1487 regulations passed by the Hull council to protect the employment of Hull men servicing ships in the port were specifically directed against Beverley men.<sup>31</sup>

The hostility between York and Hull merchants was more difficult to appease since they were competing for the same business, whereas Beverley merchants were slowly being pushed out of international trade. Merchants from both York and Hull sought an alternative to the Baltic in trade with Iceland. It was conducted under licence from the mid 15th century and in the late 15th century York men were complaining that Hull merchants were engaged in illegal trade with Iceland, to the detriment of the York men.<sup>32</sup> In 1463 there were fears in York that Hull was allowing York merchants to complete transactions with foreign importers in Hull, to the damage of York city, but by 1508, the fear was that Hull was refusing to allow York men to deal direct with foreigners and was imposing extra heavy local duties on York merchandise.<sup>33</sup>

30. Both York and Hull, along with other commercial centres, passed regulations such as hosting orders, to control the activities of aliens residing or trading in their midst. Attention to these intensified as commerce contracted. V.C.H. York, p. 105; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 50-2; A.A. Ruddock, Alien Hosting in Southampton in the 15th century, Ec. H.R., xvi (1946), pp. 30-7.
31. W. Brown, ed., Yorkshire Star Chamber Proceedings, I, Yorks. Arch. Soc. xli (1909), p. 151; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 68.
32. V.C.H. York, pp. 104-5; J. Tickhill, A History of the Town and County of Kingston-upon-Hull (Hull, 1878), p. 107.
33. Carus-Wilson, Iceland Trade, p. 169; C1/17/111; V.C.H. Hull, p. 51, M. & M.A., pp. 119-20.

By the mid 15th century, and possibly earlier, there was little that the Yorkshire merchants could do to prevent their share in overseas trade from dwindling. Some continued to export cloth, wool, lead, and foodstuffs, and to import a range of raw materials and manufactured goods, but they no longer dominated the export of the region's cloth, nor indeed the supply of northern beef to the southern counties. In both they had been supplanted by others, mainly Londoners, whose access to superior financial resources and predominance in the Low Countries, enabled them to undermine most provincial long-distance enterprise.

To a considerable extent, each town's group of merchants was equally vulnerable to the collapse of the wool trade, exclusion from the Baltic markets and consequent down-grading of their financial resources. They all suffered from the loss of Burgundy and the growth of the port of London in every branch of trade, but there were some differences in their collective experiences. Beverley had already undergone a similar consequence of central-peripheral focussing, when it began to lose ground to Hull late in the 14th century. York's contraction was all the more dramatic because the city's merchants had once equalled those of London: whereas the Hull group, always less ambitious in the scale of their enterprise, suffered less.

#### **Shipowning.**

Whatever the cargo or nationality of its owner, the continuation of overseas trade benefitted the owners of the ships employed. Although a large number of ships from the Low Countries, and a declining number of Hansard ships plied for trade between Hull and the continent, local shipping competed successfully, accounting for between 30% to 40% of shipping in the 14th and late 15th century. Of 138 sailings in 1398-9, 47 were Hull ships with an occasional vessel from neighbouring places

such as Beverley, Hedon, Grimsby or York<sup>34</sup> and of 89 sailings in 1471-2, 32 were Hull ships.<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen, notably in Hull, some merchants began their trading operations as master or owner of a ship. Although within the Cely context, shipowning was seen as a possible liability,<sup>36</sup> a ship was an asset to set against loans but as a working outfit could provide a useful source of income. There is no evidence of extensive shipowner-ship amongst the merchants of Beverley<sup>37</sup> and York during this period, although a handful of ships were registered in both ports.<sup>38</sup> The merchants of both were therefore dependent upon others for the carriage of their goods and increasingly this meant Hull owners, amongst whom could always be counted some overseas' merchants.

How the profit from a voyage was shared can only be a matter for speculation, but it is clear that each share-holder was expected to pay an equivalent share of the overheads. John Thom of Hull left his share in the George to his son Robert in 1453, on condition that Robert pay 'all the costs that belong to my part of the ship if it gets home safely'.<sup>39</sup> A share could be as little as the 1/32nd part which Joan

34. V.C.H. Hull, p. 68; W. Childs, ed., The Customs Accounts of Hull 1452-1490, Y.A.S. Rec. Ser. cxliv (1986), p. xxii.

35. E 122/62/17.

36. Hanham, The Celys and Their World, p. 397.

37. Only John Brompton of Beverley, who owned a  $\frac{2}{3}$  share. Prob. Reg. II f. 86v. 15th Century English Trade, op. cit., p. 237, for the emergence of such a group in Bristol. Even in the 16th century no Exeter merchant was wealthy enough to own a whole ship. W.G. Hoskins, The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter, Elizabethan Government and Society, eds., S. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield, C.H. Williams (1961), p. 170.

38. E.g. Childs, Customs Accounts of Hull, pp. 58, 93, 101, 106, 110.

39. Prob. Reg. II f. 292v.

Gregg held in 1438, but  $\frac{1}{4}$  was more common.<sup>40</sup> In 1349 Nicholas Stut of Hull owned  $\frac{1}{4}$  share in the Goodyear and another share in the Allhalowcog; in 1396 Robert Shackles inherited  $\frac{1}{4}$  share in the Katherine from Peter Stellar, and later had a share in the Anthony with Nicholas Ellys and others.<sup>41</sup> In 1449, six Hull ships were owned by six different partnerships,<sup>42</sup> and it is clear that a share of any size was still regarded as valuable however complicated the agreement attached to it might have been. Individuals did own whole ships: Roger Swerd of Hull owned La Marie in 1335, Robert Selby of Hull, La Hallehalugh in 1364<sup>43</sup> and some owned several at a time: in 1401 John Tutbury owned the Gabriel and the Saviour and in 1433 he owned the Jacob, the Peter and the Coganne.<sup>44</sup> Shares and entire ships changed hands through inheritance or purchase or as payment for a debt. Ownership of a ship could be fragmented by division, as was the Goodyear in 1342 when Robert Stut divided it between the beneficiaries of his will, or united under one owner by purchase or inheritance.<sup>45</sup> Thus Robert Shackles had a share in the Anthony, then owned it outright in 1436, had lost it by 1445 (it was not mentioned in his will). By 1451 Richard Bille of Hull owned the whole of the Anthony in addition to the Trinity which Robert Bisset had once owned and in his will of 1401, had instructed to be sold.<sup>46</sup>

40. Hull C.R.O. D 81; Prob. Reg. III f. 556.

41. Prob. Reg. I f. 98v.; P.R.O. C1/19/43. For other examples see Prob. Reg. II f. 555; C.C.R. 1396-9, p. 165.

42. BRB 1 f. 11.

43. C.P.R. 1334-8, p. 345; 1364-7, p. 15; and also C.C.R. 1374-7, p. 387; P.R.O. C1/11/196.

44. C.P.R. 1401-5, p. 55; Prob. Reg. III f. 372; see also C.P.R. 1429-36, p. 510; Hull C.R.O. D57A; P.R.O. SC 8/254/12686.

45. Hull C.R.O. D 57A.

46. C1/11/196, 19/43; Prob. Reg. II ff. 119, 233v.; III f. 52v.

A ship could change hands many times, but stay within the Hull circle. The Katherine for instance, was owned by Henry Selby in 1364, by Peter Stellar in 1396 when he left a  $\frac{1}{4}$  share to Robert Shackles, and sold by Bisset's heirs in 1401.<sup>47</sup> \*

Sharing profits was offset by sharing overheads, and as ships were often wrecked or seized at sea, the total loss was spread amongst the shareholders. Otherwise, one merchant carried the entire burden, and William Crathorn, one of the rare York ship-owners, calculated in 1440 that the loss of his ship for 17 months cost him £200 at least.<sup>48</sup>

Merchants sometimes bought captured enemy vessels from the Crown. In 1387 Walter Frost of Hull bought the captured St. Mary of Sebastian for £100 from the Crown. Nearly 100 years later, in 1471, Robert Alcock bought another Spanish ship for £66. Unfortunately no tonnages were recorded.<sup>49</sup>

It may be that living as they did amongst the ships, Hull merchants simply had more chances to buy into a ship more readily than did their York and Beverley counterparts. Whatever the reason, part or total ownership gave them access to an alternative to trade which may have been a significant advantage to Hull merchants as the 15th-century recession deepened; not least in domestic water-borne trade.

Coastal trade accounted for an unmeasurable but crucial proportion of many ports' business. For many merchants it may indeed have been the bulk of their trade. Hull was an established port of call for ships from Europe, London, and other East Coast ports, en route for Newcastle, Berwick, and possibly Iceland. They carried wine, salt, and

47. C.P.R. 1364-7, p. 15; Prob. Reg. I f. 98v.; II f. 52v.

48. Hanserecesse, 1431-71, Pt. II, pp. 542-5.

49. C.P.R. 1385-9, p. 308; 1467-77, p. 267.

other imported commodities. Durham Priory often purchased wine in Hull in the 14th century and had it shipped up to Newcastle and Hartlepool, and in 1504-5 bought and shipped eels, wainscots and other items in the same way.<sup>50</sup> Ships from Lynn and Yarmouth carried grain and herrings to Newcastle<sup>51</sup> and Newcastle sent salt, salmon and coal down the coast to London. Coal was the mainstay of Newcastle's coastal trade, and quantities of coal were regularly exported from Hull, presumably having been off-loaded from Newcastle ships. The amounts were usually small, but on occasions did exceed 100 chaldrons.<sup>52</sup> Trade up and down the East Coast slumped badly after 1450, and although Yarmouth was an exception, Hull was not. Later though, during Henry VII's reign, Hull and Lynn both made spectacular recoveries: there was an increase of 300% in poundage collected in Hull between 1485 and 1505, and it was briefly the pre-eminent port on the East Coast in terms of value of shipping.<sup>53</sup> Yorkshire merchants must have taken a share of this coastal trade. William Gaunt of York, for example, together with some Prussian merchants, was shipping goods from London to Hull when they were pirated by Newcastle men in 1453, and in 1455 and 1459 he was trying to recover a debt of £80 from a Newcastle man.<sup>54</sup> But even the trans-shipping of

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50. Durham Accts., II, p. 516, 545; III, p. 658.

51. G.V. Scammell, English Merchant Shipping at the end of the Middle Ages: Some East Coast Evidence, Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xiii (1961), p. 229.

52. Scammell, English Merchant Shipping, p. 329; Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 139; E 122/61/32, 64/10.

53. Scammell, English Merchant Shipping, pp. 329-330.

54. C.P.R. 1452-61, pp. 174, 264, 453. Links with Newcastle went back a long way. Geoffrey Hanby of Hull was owed £14 10s. by a Newcastle man in 1368, and Nicholas Blackburn, eventually a York merchant, was exporting wool from there in 1396, with Thomas Gare and Richard Russell of York in 1399, and with John Aldestonemore and John Sampson of York in 1410-1. C.P.R. 1339-41, p. 38; E 122/106/26; Bronnen, I, pp. 503, 543. The widow of John de Bedford of Hull, may have come originally from Newcastle as she left property there in 1459, Prob. Reg. II f. 418.



goods came to be dominated by Londoners and by the mid 16th century, wine, hops, prunes, woad, madder, iron, and pitch were being carried to Hull in London ships.<sup>55</sup>

### Smuggling and Piracy

Avoiding the payment of customs and subsidies, or exporting wool to ports other than the staple, might be seen as a way of cutting costs during a depression. However, merchants tried all manner of ways to avoid payments to the Crown throughout the period, perhaps regarding them as an unjust imposition by an unsympathetic government, which they had a duty to evade.

Smuggling<sup>56</sup> was such a continuous and important activity that the Crown appointed searchers to every port of significance in England. Even though it is not possible to calculate smuggled goods as a proportion in estimating export totals, numerous incidents illustrate the strength of the temptation merchants faced. During the agreements negotiated between Edward III and the wool merchants in 1337, 1340 and 1341, an embargo was placed on wool exports by anyone other than official collectors. Smuggling inevitably occurred as merchants tried to evade legal restrictions on their private exports. It has been calculated that about 2,500 sacks were illegally exported in 1337-8.<sup>57</sup>

Yorkshire merchants were not averse to smuggling and their involvement is well illustrated by the case of a group of York merchants led by Henry and John Goldbeter, Thomas Gra, William Acastre and Walter de Kelstern and others involved in the wool collection. They were

55. Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, p. 178.

56. J.B. Blake, *Medieval Smuggling in the North East*, Arch. Aeliana, 4th ser. xliii (1965).

57. E.B. Fryde, *Edward III's Wool Monopoly of 1337*, History (1952).

accused in their absence of illegal practices in 1340, but were clearly too useful to the king in other respects for serious steps to be taken against them. Thus in September 1341 Walter de Kelstern was appointed to a commission to search all the shipping along the Humber coast for uncustomed goods, and in November of the same year Henry Goldbeter was similarly appointed to search specifically for uncustomed wool,<sup>58</sup> the commodity he may well have been smuggling! John Goldbeter was caught in the act, fined £200 and then pardoned in October 1338. In 1341 his wool was arrested by the collectors of York, and he claimed that although it was loaded in a small boat at Selby he was not trying to avoid customs payments. An inquiry was ordered but Goldbeter "procured the men on it" so a new one was summoned.<sup>59</sup> John Goldbeter was accused of smuggling wool again in 1346 and 1363. He was not always automatically pardoned and was in the Fleet prison in 1346.<sup>60</sup>

Smuggling continued well into the 15th century and all sorts of gambits were used to avoid the royal officials. In 1417 Beverley merchants disguised wool by storing it in barrels, and York merchants were accused of by-passing the customers at Hull and secretly loading wool at Ravenspur. Hull merchants smuggled as well and in 1439 Robert Aunsell used John Goldbeter's small boat technique to good effect at Patrington, downriver from Hull. Avoiding the staple was also a common practice. John Jackson of Hull, for example, shipped his wool straight to Vere from Hull and not to the Calais staple in 1475.<sup>61</sup> Wool was the most commonly smuggled commodity although other goods were sometimes

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58. C.C.R. 1339-41, p. 655; C.P.R. 1340-3, p. 323; C 76/16.

59. C.P.R. 1338-40, p. 191; 1340-3, pp. 212, 303.

60. C.C.R. 1346-9, pp. 187, 241; C.P.R. 1361-4, p. 342; 1364-7, p. 46.

61. Bronnen, I, pp. 589-90, 753, 1116.

smuggled. An entire cargo of the Katherine, destined for Iceland from Hull, was discovered to be uncustomed, and contained mainly beer, butter, barley and other victuals. At least half a dozen prominent Yorkshire merchants were involved including Nicholas Stubbs of Hull who smuggled flour and other items to the value of £33 6s. 8d., but was pardoned.<sup>62</sup> He served as a customs official and illustrates one of the greatest difficulties facing the Crown in trying to prevent smuggling. The men with the necessary experience and local knowledge were the local merchants, and it was they who most often smuggled and it was they whom the Crown most often had to appoint. This may well explain the large numbers of 'Nil' returns from the Hull searchers. Merchants also acted as valuers of goods forfeited to the crown by smugglers, and some of their fellow merchants were usually the ultimate purchasers of such goods.<sup>63</sup>

Piracy posed other problems since government policy varied according to the changing diplomatic situation. The Crown was heavily dependent on merchant shipping to provide transport for troops and to serve as war-ships; thus ships were requisitioned in times of war to the inconvenience of their owners. Robert Bisset, a Hull merchant, complained on 26 July, 1386 that his ship had been taken in the Thames for the king's service, had been captured, then re-captured, and left in Sandwich for him to recover.<sup>64</sup> In c. 1379 a group of York and Hull merchants lost £9 worth of wool when the Crown seized the ship which was carrying it, for military purposes.<sup>65</sup>

62. C.P.R. 1436-41, 294-5.

63. E 166/61/57; E 122/61/57.

64. C.P.R. 1385-9, p. 167.

65. SC8/114/5653.

Commonly, merchants from every nation regarded themselves as legitimate defenders of their own country's interests and sometimes it is difficult to separate aggressive actions taken to compensate for general losses suffered at the hands of aliens, from officially approved privateering. Merchants of each country were liable for the acts of their fellow countrymen, in the eyes of all merchants, and any French, Danish, Hanse or whatever merchant's goods were legitimate prey for an English merchant seeking redress for fraud or defaulted debts, and vice versa. In 1377 for instance, Robert de Selby of Hull captured a Norman crayer in the Thames in reprisal for his goods, taken at sea by Normandy men. He was granted the ship and cargo as compensation after paying £140 to the Crown.<sup>66</sup>

Capturing the ships and/or cargoes of England's enemies was a common practice and one which the Crown might condone. In 1343 Roger Swerd of Hull, (mayor in 1358) killed a man when he attacked and pirated the cargo of an alien ship (no nationality recorded), but was pardoned by Edward III. The Scots and their allies were a favourite target: Robert de Selby of Hull captured a Lubeck ship en route for Scotland which he was ordered to restore in October 1380.<sup>67</sup>

Random privateering gave way to official action during times of war when the Crown formalised the merchants' hostility by granting some of them licences to fit out ships and to 'defend the realm'. A group of Hull merchants, William Terry, Peter Stellar, John Tutbury grasped such opportunities eagerly. In 1387 they equipped a ship, a ballinger and a barge at their own expense to sail against the Scots. In 1398 Terry and Tutbury, plus William Pund, John Liversege, and John Waghen were ordered

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66. C.C.R. 1374-7, p. 496.

67. C.P.R. 1343-5, p. 214; C.C.R. 1343-6, p. 349, 1377-81, p. 414.

to assemble barges and boats to arrest the pirates who 'patrol the seas and attack merchants', and in 1402 they did capture a ship en route for Scotland. Such licences were granted on condition that any prize was shared three ways between the king, the soldiers on the ship, and the owner.

William Terry of Hull received such a licence in June 1400 to take his ship the George to sea, and another in March 1402 to take the George and the Janet, plus 40 mariners to serve the king.<sup>68</sup> He and John Tutbury, several times mayor of Hull, illegally captured a Danish vessel which had a letter of protection. They were ordered to restore the goods, but bided their time and the dispute was still unsettled in February 1406.<sup>69</sup> In such circumstances the temptation for a northern merchant to harass and capture the laden ships of his rivals must have been tremendous and was clearly a risk worth taking. John Tutbury was also "defending the realm" in the English Channel when he helped to capture 2 enemy ships in 1412.<sup>70</sup>

Open hostilities between England and the Hanse disrupted international trade between all the northern countries, and encouraged quite blatant acts of piracy. In 1432 Hugh Clitheroe and others of Hull captured a Danish ship and simply shared out the cargo between themselves thereby attracting the Crown's attention. In May 1436, John Bedford and Robert Holme of Hull got licences to fit out ships for war, and almost immediately attacked an Amsterdam ship, aided by Robert Shackles<sup>71</sup> and three other ship-owners. They seized the ship and goods

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68. See above p. 143; C.P.R. 1385-9, p. 339; 1399-1401, p. 352; 1401-5, p. 55; SC8/254/12688.

69. C.P.R. 1401-5, pp. 1, 2; 1405-8, p. 302; C.C.R. 1402-5, pp. 42, 56, 256.

70. C.C.R. 1409-23, p. 376.

71. Bedford and Shackles served as mayors of Hull.

worth £200 under the pretence that they did not know it was Dutch and therefore no enemy of England. The Dutchman set sail to escape but the 'Hullers' boarded him 'in manner of war'.<sup>72</sup>

Such dubious acts it must be remembered, were in accord with the times so there was no contradiction in being accused of piracy one moment and holding high civic office the next. In any case, hostilities were not all one-sided. Not surprisingly, English merchants were themselves subject to piracy. In 1384 William Burton, William Holme and William Tickhill, William Fisshe, John Swan, John de Gisburgh, William Bell and others of York, John Arnald of Hull and Roger de Gouton of London, freighted a ship with goods in York to the value of £1,000, which was seized off Great Yarmouth en route for London. The Dieppe and Crotay ships and men involved, took the ship and cargo back to Dieppe, and the Yorkshire merchants obtained writs to the sheriffs of London, Southampton, Plymouth and the bailiff of the Thames to arrest the goods of Frenchmen to the equivalent value. A year later in March 1385, they were still pursuing the action, having spent money on sueing through 2 parliaments and negotiations at Calais in vain.<sup>73</sup>

John Tutbury's ship was abandoned by the wine fleet in 1415, when it was attacked by Spanish pirates.<sup>74</sup> In 1426, two separate groups of Yorkshire merchants lost cargoes; Robert Holme, Thomas Gare, William Ormeshead, and Richard Scoles had their wool shipments in the earl of Warwick's ship when it was seized.<sup>75</sup> Three years later John Bedford

72. C1/11/196; C.P.R. 1429-36, pp. 357, 510.

73. C.C.R. 1381-6, pp. 366, 373, 536.

74. Rot. Parl. IV, 85, 103.

75. C.P.R. 1422-9, p. 385. The other loss was incurred by Thomas Mayne of Beverley, who was granted the right to export 600 wool fells free of subsidy in compensation. Ibid., p. 349. *W. J. F.*

lost a ship en route to Boston,<sup>76</sup> which offers some explanation of his eagerness to become a licensed privateer in 1436. William Cockerham of Beverley was attacked by Prussians in 1439, on his return from Iceland, and he and his companions lost £1,300 worth of fish.<sup>77</sup>

1440 was a disastrous year for York. Ten merchants had their goods detained in Denmark and William Crathorn had his ship detained for 17 months. He estimated that he lost £140 worth of goods and £200 from the loss of his ship in trading. Richard Anson, Ralph Forne, John Henryson and John Thorn of Hull were captured en route for Denmark and compelled to serve aboard their own ship. When they finally reached Denmark, their licence to trade was out of date and they were out of pocket by at least £660. Two other Hull merchants and a York merchant were captured when they went ashore in Stralsund to deliver a cargo and had to pay £24 to be released.<sup>78</sup> Danger did not only come from aliens. William Gaunt, who was shipping goods from London to Hull, was pirated by Newcastle men in 1453.<sup>79</sup>

The English government never had the resources to combat piracy at sea, whether by denizens or foreigners, and equally could offer very little protection to English merchants travelling abroad. Henry Mindram of Hull, for instance, had to make his own arrangements to be ransomed from French captivity in 1473; his own brother got the money together after Henry had signed a bond guaranteeing repayment on his return!<sup>80</sup> Merchants had to travel overseas or employ an agent. In the late 14th

76. C1/11/97.

77. C.P.R. 1436-41, p. 270.

78. Hanserecesse, 1431-76, Part II, pp. 542-5.

79. C.P.R. 1452-61, p. 174.

80. C1/48/408; see also C.P.R. 1467-77, p. 368; SC8/26/1275.

century, several York merchants died abroad, and were buried in Danzig, Calais, and Durdrecht. It is clear that some had developed close ties with their temporary homes, and left money for masses in foreign churches, as did John Briscow of York in 1444, who was buried in the Dominican friary in Danzig, and left the friars £1 3s.4d. for masses in addition to £1 to All Saints, Pavement in York. John Milner alias Tutbag of York, left money in 1438 to his sister's children 'overseas' as well as 6s. 8d. to an Antwerp man.<sup>81</sup> Had she or Tutbag married a foreigner?

Other merchants invested in overseas property, in so far as Calais was overseas. John Kelk of Beverley for instance, left rents there in 1407, and Thomas del Gare of York left two properties and £10 worth of rents there in 1445.<sup>82</sup> More commonly merchants died with goods unsold overseas: Henry Tutbak of York in 1398, William Spencer of York in 1400. Some specified in their wills who was to sell such goods. Thus John Russell of York wanted Richard Lematon of York and Philip Best of Calais to sell off his goods in Calais in 1443, and in 1484 Robert Alcock of Hull asked that his son-in-law John Dalton should sell his goods and liquidate his assets in Calais to the greatest profit.<sup>83</sup>

Local bonds must have been strengthened, as Yorkshire merchants sought mutual support in foreign towns and this is clearly born out by the way they clustered around the beds of dying countrymen to witness each other's wills. Two York dyers were amongst the witnesses to John de Helmesley of York's will in Durdrecht in 1383; six York merchants witnessed Thomas Fenton's in 1395, and in 1443 John Ince, John Gaunt, Richard Scotton and Richard Bothe of York, witnessed fellow York

81. Prob. Reg. II ff. 72v.-73 (Briscow); III f. 526 (Tutbag).

82. Prob. Reg. II ff. 110v.-11 (Gare); III f. 263 (Kelk).

83. Prob. Reg. II f. 68 (Russell); III f. 36 (Spencer); V.f. 229 b (Alcock).



merchant John Briscow's will in Danzig.<sup>84</sup> In the end though, who was responsible for ensuring that a copy of the will was delivered to the executors back home?

#### Co-operation.

Merchants were above all pragmatists, and obviously used each other when and as much as was necessary.

Joint ventures had been common since the early 14th century, particularly in dealings with the Crown during and after the 1337 monopoly agreement.<sup>85</sup> Adam Pund and Alan Upsale of Hull were licensed to ship wool together to Flanders in 1349,<sup>86</sup> and Walter Frost, Geoffrey Hanby and Henry de Selby of Hull were similarly licensed in 1364 and chose to import wine under the same licence. In 1384 William Tickhill, John Hoveden and Robert Talkan, all of York, were shipping herrings together.<sup>87</sup> William Sallay of York and Robert Cross of Hull shipped figs from Algarve to Harfleur as a joint venture in 1394-5.<sup>88</sup> In the early 15th century William Cockerham of Beverley was trading in Iceland with John Richards of Hull, William Thorpe of Newcastle and William Abbot of Lynne. William Brompton of Beverley and Thomas Alcock of Hull petitioned jointly for a licence to trade with Iceland in 1455<sup>89</sup> confirming their later collaboration in consortia in Hull. Most of the evidence for collective shipments and business relationships emerged in

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84. Dec. & Cap. I f. 76v. (Helmlesley); Prob. Reg. I f. 89 (Fenton); II f. 73 (Briscow).

85. E.B. Fryde, Some Business Transactions of York Merchants, Bothwick Papers, no. 29 (1966).

86. C.P.R. 1349-54, pp. 34, 59.

87. Ibid., 1361-4, p. 491; 1381-5, p. 505.

88. C.C.R. 1382-6, p. 324.

89. Bronnen, II, p. 715; C76/149 m.8.

legal proceedings and disasters which had involved royal officials. The evidence of the customs rolls is more ambiguous, but men who constantly exported and imported goods in the same ships must have developed some business relationships.

Wool exporters in particular shipped together in the wool fleets, which sailed with the seasonal shearings, seeking protection in large numbers. The exporters usually divided their wool between several ships, especially at the beginning of the export season. On 4 October 1396, for example, William Bridd, John Topcliff of York, Thomas Caldbeck, William Rolleston, Richard Aglyon of Beverley, and Hugh Clitheroe and Geoffrey Upstall of Hull divided their wool between the same five ships, and for four of them that sailing constituted their total wool export for the year 1396-7.<sup>90</sup>

Wine fleets offered the same opportunities for co-operation, but no clear pattern of joint shipping has been discovered. In any event, when losses were threatened, each merchant looked after his own interests as John Tutbury discovered in 1415 when Spanish pirates attacked the wine fleet and his ship was sacrificed by the rest.

The same general principle operated in all mercantile dealings. Merchants depended on each other's services as sureties for loans, and as agents at home and abroad. In 1433 Nicholas Blackburn, jnr, of York used the Calais agent of William Marshall, also of York, to sell £54 worth of wool for him, and earlier John Bolton of York had as his contact in Calais another Yorkshire merchant, John Brandesby.<sup>91</sup> It is unlikely that regional affinity was much of a defence when arrangements went awry between the merchant and his agent. In December, 1415 William

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90. E 122/52/26.

91. C1/16/592, 44/227.

Warde, a York spicer authorised William Eseby to buy £68 worth of Flemish goods for Warde for a 5% commission. The agreement made it clear that the transaction was to be at Warde's own risk. Eseby bought the goods and duly shipped them in the Hulke, but en route from Zeeland to Hull the ship was wrecked. Warde would not reimburse Eseby for his labour or the capital he had expended, and Eseby brought an action which resulted in an inquisition being held in York in March 1416, by the order of the king. Apparently not daunted by his experience with Warde, Eseby continued to act as an overseas' agent, and three years later appeared once more before the York council. This time he was trying to recover £23 2s. from Richard Eton/Heaton, agent of Robert Tup of Hull. Eseby had acted as Eton's pledge in a bond agreed with Jaques Weit a burgess of Bruges, and Weit unable to find Eton, was demanding payment from Eseby.<sup>92</sup>

Partnerships did not always work smoothly, and most of the evidence of their existence is derived from legal actions taken by one party against the other. In c. 1440 Gilbert Bedenall of Beverley sued William Pakone with whom he had been in partnership for 6 years, for the profit accruing from their joint business, claiming that Pakone had kept it all for himself.<sup>93</sup>

Although it has been possible to describe the varying fortunes of the merchant communities of York, Beverley, and Hull in overseas trade, we cannot gauge the extent to which individuals could resist the buffeting of external events, although some were clearly more resilient than others. Their choices were perforce limited. When the European markets were bouyant, business boomed. The commercial attrition of the

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92. M.B. II, pp. xxiv-v, 55, 56, 87-9.

93. C1/9/382.

Hanse encouraged some to take up arms themselves, or to expand their interests in the Low Countries, or to seek alternative markets in Iceland for the short time it was politically possible. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1474, gave the Hanse unbeatable advantages over denizen merchants, and their influence once more waxed to the detriment of the Yorkshire men. It is evident from the cargoes coming into Hull in the late 15th century, that the loss of Burgundy had led some to import Iberian and Rhine wines, though the south coast ports had immeasurable advantages over those of the east coast.<sup>94</sup>

As we have seen, the most immediate option was to diversify increasingly into general merchandise, and this is what most of the active late-15th century merchants did. A few profited from the trade in lead, before that too was taken over by the Hanse. A handful persisted in trade with the Calais staple, maybe because it was highly profitable, or maybe because they had few competitors.

The range of markets and commodities shipped by Hull and York merchants has been described elsewhere, and a similar pattern was followed by the Beverley men, though few of them ever became lead exporters. Most of these Yorkshire merchants traded in everything and anything, and their ventures all over northern Europe, to Iceland, and occasionally to the Mediterranean, witness their determination to find markets for their wool, cloth, coal, lead, cereals and beans, beer and butter.<sup>95</sup> On their return they imported an enormous variety of raw materials: iron, copper, salt, timber, pitch, tar, dyestuffs, soap, oil, nuts, fruit, fish, wine, and equally varied manufactured articles such as damasks, canvas, linen, straw hats and kettles. Some items were re-

94. W. Childs, Anglo-Castilian Trade in the later Middle Ages (Manchester, 1978), pp. 60-1.

95. V.C.H. York, pp. 103-4; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 55-68.

exported to Iceland. Hull merchants even carried pilgrims to Spain in the early 15th century.<sup>96</sup> The few very prosperous merchants in the late 15th century did tend to specialise, exporting lead and cloth rather than victuals. However, even William Brompton of Hull, a prosperous Stapler, joined a consortium of three middling merchants in 1470-1 to export bonnets, linen, beer, barley, butter, and other items worth £200 and alone was importing soap and herrings.<sup>97</sup>

#### Internal Trade.

Logically, the shift from major commodity trading to miscellaneous general trade, could have drawn overseas merchants into domestic trade. This is a difficult area to explore, but some impressions can be drawn. As the principal wool purchasers in the region we must assume that they maintained their own contacts with wool suppliers, even if agents supervised the actual collection. Such contacts were vital to wool merchants and must often have been the most important asset a man could bequeath and cherish. In 1396 Robert Holme of York left 100 marks to the heads of poor families in those parishes where he had purchased wool. Similarly in 1435 Richard Russell of York left 20s. to be distributed among the householders from whom he had bought wool on the Yorkshire Wolds and a further £10 for such householders in Lyndsey. Robert Collinson, also of York, in his will of 1456 went so far as to ask the poor of many West Riding parishes to forgive him if he had ever made a profit in his dealings with them.<sup>98</sup>

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96. C76/110 m. 16.

97. E 122/62/13.

98. Prob. Reg. I, f. 100; II, f. 380; III, ff. 439-40.

There is also evidence of merchants involved in overseas trade dealing direct with cloth producers, and taking cloths in person to be stamped by the ulnagers at York. Between 1473 and 1475 York merchants paid ulnage on 2,346½ cloths,<sup>99</sup> and in this way hoped to keep a foothold in the cloth trade even though their cloth producers were no longer in the city itself, but in such growing centres as Wakefield and Halifax. For example, John Braithwait had 19 separate lots of cloth stamped between September 1394 and August 1395, and Thomas del Gare, who exported at least 214 cloths in 1391-2, regularly brought cloths for stamping.<sup>100</sup> Even at this point in the cloth trade some merchants were tempted to evade the charge for having cloths stamped. In 1432 and 1434 William Girlington of York was caught selling cloth in his shop which he had fraudulently stamped with his own seal.<sup>101</sup> Some merchants who brought large quantities of dyed cloths for stamping may have acted as the middlemen, 'clothiers', between the weaver and dyer. Robert Ward, for example, had 66 dyed cloths stamped between October 1394 and August 1395.<sup>102</sup> The number of dyers remembered by Robert Holme of York in his will suggests he acted as middleman, and so probably did Robert Collinson of York, who made bequests to textile workers. Similarly in 1439 Robert Clynt of York left money to the fullers and dyers in York and suburbs and in Tadcaster who had worked for him.<sup>103</sup> An unidentified group of Hull merchants paid ulnage on 295 cloths between 1471 and

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99. J. Lister ed., Early Yorkshire Woollen Trade, Y.A.S. lxiv (1924), p. 103.

100. Ibid. passim: E 122/59/19.

101. Bartlett, Aspects of the York Economy, p. 416.

102. Lister, Early Yorks. Woollen Trade, pp. 52, 75, 76, 88, 91.

103. Prob. Reg. I ff. 100v.-103v. (Holme); II f. 380 (Collinson), 567-568v. (Clynt).

1473.<sup>104</sup> Hull of course had no substantial textile manufacturing of its own and, being further away from the West Riding textile centres than York, could not hope to emulate the level of contacts.<sup>105</sup> This may in part explain why it was that Hull merchants moved earlier into the export of foodstuffs and lead in the mid 15th century.

It is difficult to assess internal trade because few customers can be individually identified, but we do know that many of the religious houses in the north of England used York and Hull as shopping centres, and made many purchases from merchants from all three towns. In the first half of the 15th century Durham Priory bought most of its cloth in York; in bulk if green or a blue medley was available.<sup>106</sup> Likewise Thomas Bracebridge and Thomas del More of York acted as purchasing agents for the archdeacon of Richmond.<sup>107</sup>

The major religious houses purchased wine in particular. Alan Staveley of York supplied the Minster<sup>108</sup> but most institutional purchases were made from several merchants and in varying quantities. For instance, in 1458-9 Fountains Abbey bought 1 hogshead from Thomas Brereton of York for £4 8s.4d.; 3 hogsheads from William Wells of York for £4; and £2 14s. worth from Thomas Hawthorn of Hull. Maybe it was policy to 'shop around'. Fountains also bought from Ripon merchants and

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104. Early Yorks. Woollen Trade, pp. 34, 35, 103.

105. In spite of these difficulties, a John Langton, probably of Hull, was supplying Archbishop Savage with large quantities of cloth for liveries in the late 15th century. J. Raine ed., Historians of the Church of York, III, Rolls Series (1984), p. 370.

106. R.B. Dobson, Durham Priory 1400-1450 (1973), pp. 62, 261; Durham Acct. Rolls, III, pp. 616, 632, 636.

107. Test Ebor., III, p. 20.

108. Ibid., IV, p. 86; V.C.H. Hull, p. 54; N. Morimoto, English Wine Trade and Durham Cathedral Priory in the Fourteenth Century, Nagoya Gakuin University Review, 10 (1973), pp. 57-146.

borrowed money from them,<sup>109</sup> and Durham made purchases from Hartlepool and Newcastle merchants as often as they did from Yorkshire men. Indeed in the 14th and 15th centuries, Newcastle and Hartlepool merchants dominated the Priory's supply of French wine, and though it has been argued that London supplied more exotic wines,<sup>110</sup> York merchants were selling the Priory Malmsey in 1412-13 and Spanish wine in 1414-16.<sup>111</sup>

Wine was only one of the more 'up-market' commodities supplied to the religious. Thomas Barton of York for instance, supplied at least two canons in York Minster with spices and their debts to him were listed in their wills. Another York spicer, Roger Belton supplied York canons with medicines in the 1450s.<sup>112</sup> The account rolls of Fountains and Durham reveal an extraordinary range of imported basic goods as well as luxuries bought throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, mainly in York. The list includes bitumen, wax, oil, iron, salt, vinegar, raisins, Cyprus sugar, ginger, aniseed, stockfish and for feast days, eels, lampreys, perch, fresh salmon and swans.<sup>113</sup>

As far as general trade was concerned, both Durham Priory and Fountains Abbey used a variety of suppliers and during the 14th and 15th centuries had bought miscellaneous items in York and Hull<sup>114</sup> but also bought goods at Boston's fair, wine and Spanish iron at Newcastle, fish,

109. Mem. Fountains, III, p. 88.

110. Dobson, Durham Priory, pp. 14, 265; Morimoto, Durham Wine Trade, pp. 75-92.

111. Durham Acct. Rolls, III, pp. 609, 611. Indeed, Durham bought some wine directly from Hull merchants at the port. Ibid., I, p. 151; II, pp. 488, 494, 516, 545; III, pp. 613, 619.

112. V.C.H. York, p. 99; Test. Ebor., III, pp. 114, 142-3.

113. Durham Acct. Rolls, II, pp. 516, 537, 551, 566; III, pp. 653, 655, 656; Mem. Fountains, III, pp. 45-6, 70, 72, 89, 112.

114. Durham Accts., pp. 653, 655, 656, 658, 692; Mem. Fountains, III, pp. 10-11, 26-9, 45-6, 70-2, 88-9, 104, 110-2, 145, 147, 156.



wax, and oil at Scarborough, and spices, figs, raisins, fish and cloth from Ripon men.<sup>115</sup> The merchants from York, Beverley and Hull then, never had a clear monopoly in general trade in the region, but had marked advantages as the importers of many of these items.

Gentry households were as might be expected important customers, although the evidence is scanty. Lady Elizabeth Clifford, who died in 1424, bought wine from John Pettyclerk of York, and owed another of her suppliers (of what we do not know), John Souerby of York, £6. Similarly the countess of Northumberland (so described) owed John Brompton of Beverley £104 6s.8d. when he died in 1444.<sup>116</sup>

In the 15th century there is some evidence that both religious houses and gentry households found it difficult to settle their accounts in cash. Fountains Abbey was settling accounts in a mixture of wool, lead and cash in the 1450s. The chaplain of Lord Scrope of Bolton preferred to settle a debt to John Metcalfe of York, for £14 with 12 fothers of lead.<sup>117</sup>

How far any of the town-based merchants were involved in the food trade is also difficult to determine. That they had the expertise is apparent from their enterprises as army and Royal Household victuallers.<sup>118</sup> Merchants from all three towns worked in the Crown's service in this way. John Barton of Hull was procuring corn for the Crown in the east Riding in 1335-6 and was a royal purveyor in

115. Ibid., pp. 111-2, 144, 150, 156, 196; N. Morimoto, English Wine Trade and Durham Cathedral Priory in the 14th Century, Nagoya Gakuin University Review, 10 (1973), pp. 67-146, and her Purchases of Cloth by Durham Cathedral Priory, op. cit., pp. 357-422; Dobson, Durham Priory, p. 261.

116. Test. Ebor., IV, p. 298; III, p. 87; Prob. Reg. II f. 86v.

117. Mem. Fountains, III, p. 76; P.R.O. C1/148/2.

118. For a discussion of this see V.C.H. York, p. 100.

1338-9.<sup>119</sup> John and Walter Helleward were both victuallers for the Crown in York and Newcastle in 1321. Walter acted as a victualler in 1319 and again in 1322 with Robert Upsale and Thomas de Yafford of Hull and Thomas Waghen of Beverley.<sup>120</sup> John Southcoup of Hull shipped 63 tuns of wine and 10 tuns of flour from Bordeaux to Newcastle for the Crown in the early 14th century.<sup>121</sup> In spite of the risk of being political scapegoats, as in 1343, when the dililitary payment of loans by northern merchants was used to explain Balliol's invasion,<sup>122</sup> royal victualling still attracted individuals in the 15th century. Nicholas Blackburn of York and John Liversege of Hull were victualling Berwick in 1405 and in 1416 Blackburn and John Lofthouse of York undertook to supply the royal household with fish. Thomas Barton of York was licenced for victualling Berwick in 1448 and it would seem that the responsibility for supplying Berwick was inevitably sold to Yorkshire merchants, when Newcastle men were insufficient.<sup>123</sup>

Although the examples of exported foodstuffs are numerous, very little is known about the movement of foodstuffs from the area of production to the ports. Yorkshire and the north midlands region were well supplied with an extensive network of navigable rivers, and the merchants of the three towns were equally well-placed to take advantage of such communications for internal trade as well as for their export of wool and lead. For some journeys merchants had to use carriers; William Bedale of York, for example, made use of a carrier to move goods from

119. C.C.R. 1333-7, p. 543; 1337-9, p. 91.

120. C.P.R. 1317-21, p. 376; 1321-4, pp. 86, 109.

121. SC8/75/3702-4.

122. C.C.R. 1343-6, p. 87.

123. C.P.R. 1405-8, p. 30; 1316-22, p. 52; 1446-52, p. 150.

Carnforth, Lancs. Some merchants such as John de More and Peter Upstall of York were independent: their wills included the trappings for packhorses.<sup>124</sup>

No evidence has been found of the sort of personal contacts which existed between merchant and wool supplier, existing between merchant and food producer. Some form of regular contact must have existed in the interval between those periods when merchants had to act as royal purveyors, to make possible the increased investment in the export of foodstuffs in the 15th century. John de Ryse of Beverley had to obtain a licence to buy corn in 1356 and Stephen and Adam Coppendale, also of Beverley, had to obtain a licence to buy corn and to sell it in London in 1371, but it is difficult to estimate how unusual such a procedure was.<sup>125</sup> John Toty, a baker of Penrith, owed William Ormeshead of York £23 in 1441, and the money could well have been owed for corn, as York began to develop as a grain centre from the 1450s.<sup>126</sup>

The regular flow of lead to merchants for export probably also depended on contacts with suppliers. Marion, widow of John Kent of Hull, continued his business after his death and may have inherited his contact with a Miles Radcliff of Rilston, as she inherited Radcliff's debt to the business of £8 worth of lead. John Gisburn of York must have been sure of his suppliers when he agreed to obtain 17½ fothers of lead for the roof of New Hall, Oxford, being built by the bishop of Winchester.<sup>127</sup>

124. *Ibid.* 1422-9, p. 366; Prob. Reg. II f. 633v. (Upstall); III f. 10 (More).

125. *C.P.R.* 1354-8, p. 406; 1370-4, p. 54.

126. *Ibid.* 1441-6, p. 7; Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, p. 50.

127. *Ibid.* 1381-5, p. 50; 1476-85, p. 84.

Although it is not possible to establish precisely which areas of internal trade Yorkshire merchants were active in, it is possible to trace the geographical range of their transactions from the numbers of debts recorded between themselves and merchants from other parts of England, who may have acted as their middle man or for whom they played a similar role. Beverley merchants were owed money by men from Wakefield and Lincoln, and John Humbercolt acted as a mainpernor for a London woolmonger.<sup>128</sup> Hull's debtors were more widespread, and came from Newcastle, Whitby, Grimsby, Lincoln, Chesterfield, Southampton, Cheshire and London, including a debt to Robert Holme acknowledged by Ubertinus de Bardes in 1424-5.<sup>129</sup> The debtors of the York merchants were equally widespread, and came from Whitby, Snaith, Hedon, Yarm, Bolton-on-Deerne, Doncaster, Pontefract and other places in Yorkshire;<sup>130</sup> and from Newcastle, Penrith, Lancaster, Coventry, Burton-on-Trent and Newark.<sup>131</sup> York merchants also had increasing number of debts with London merchants in the 15th century, a reflection of the growing interest of Londoners in northern trade.<sup>132</sup>

Of all the merchants whose business connections were reflected in their wills, Robert Holme snr, of York had the most extensive network of relationships. In his will dated 1396,<sup>133</sup> he released four men from

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128. C.C.R. 1330-3, p. 606; 1333-7, pp. 58, 728; C.P.R. 1385-9, p. 573; 1452-61, p. 185.

129. C.P.R. 1358-61, pp. 38, 112; 1388-92, p. 259; 1408-13, p. 341; 1418-22, p. 95; C.C.R. 1405-9, pp. 226, 487; 1429-35, p. 371; D 454.

130. C.P.R. 1446-52, p. 293; 1452-61, pp. 384, 447, 456; 1461-7, pp. 9, 410, 431.

131. C.C.R. 1318-23, pp. 106, 131, 133; C.P.R. 1436-41, pp. 216, 457, 458; 1441-6, pp. 7, 18; 1456-61, p. 241; C47/86/21/538.

132. C.C.R. 1447-54, p. 352; C.P.R. 1436-41, p. 322; 1452-61, p. 132; 1461-7, pp. 315, 322, 502.

133. Prob. Reg. I, ff. 100v.-103v.

their debts, including a man from Grantham and a man from Holme; made bequests to possibly five dyers, including one from Pontefract; and made further bequests to the families of 3 Beverley merchants, and to a Londoner and a man from Wakefield. Since he exported both cloth and wool in large quantities, these must reflect something of his network of contacts. Although Holme's interests were those of an exporting merchant, he generated a certain amount of domestic employment for such men as dyers, and a number of merchants engaged mainly in internal trade.

Dealings between merchants of the three towns were also reflected in their debts. For instance Simon Quixlay and John Hoveden of York owed Robert Garton, also of York, £210 17s. 2½d. in 1398. Francis Buk and John Green of Hull owed Edmund Coppendale, also of Hull £42 12s.4d. in 1452.<sup>134</sup> Debts between the three towns were also common and in 1441 Thomas Sanderson of Hull bound himself to John Bedale, John Calton and William Caterick, all of York, for 100 marks.<sup>135</sup> At his death in 1421 Thomas Frost of Beverley was owed 105 marks by Thomas Skipwith, also of Beverley, jointly with Richard Bedford of Hull. Thomas Wilflete of Hull was indebted to Robert Johnson of Beverley for £6 13s. 4d. in 1472.<sup>136</sup>

#### Competition with London.

The most important element in examining the fortunes of the merchants from the three towns, was the impact of London on the region's economy. The ripples of demand from the capital's growing population and expanding economy were spreading throughout England. In the main it

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134. C.C.R. 1396-9, p. 416; BRB 1 f. 25.

135. York C.R.O. B/Y f. 86.

136. Arch. Reg. XVIII ff. 384v.-385 (Frost); Prob. Reg. V f. 99 (Johnson).

was demand for exportable commodities such as wool and cloth and for foodstuffs such as corn and beef for London's own consumption.<sup>137</sup> Londoners had been drawn into provincial trade from earliest times. The growth of their importance however, was imperceptible. In 1275, Fountains Abbey was selling its future wool collections to Italians through London agents, and in 1313-14, Durham Priory was selling some of its wool to a London merchant.<sup>138</sup> Stimulated by the focussing of English commercial enterprise through the capital, Yorkshire merchants inevitably engaged in commerce with Londoners, transacting business through agents there and in person. (Some indeed died while on business there: for instance, John Yarom of York in 1347 and John Grantham, also of York, in 1392). Robert and Thomas Holme of York were joint creditors in 1385 to a London merchant, William de Ashbourne, and in 1381 Thomas was owed money by a dyer from Kingston-upon-Thames. Robert named a William Savage of London as one of his executors.<sup>139</sup> John Humbrecolt of Beverley acted as a surety for a London woolmonger in 1388-9 while another Robert Holme, of Hull, regularly traded in London. In 1425 he registered a £10 debt there, owed to him by Ubertinus de Bardes, and in 1435, another Hull man John Haynson, witnessed a deed of Holme's drawn up in London.

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137. For the growth of London's demand for meat from the late 14th century, see G.A. Rosser, *London and Westminster: the Suburb in the Urban Economy in the Late Middle Ages*, in J.A.F. Thomson, ed., *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988), p. 52.

138. H.E. Wroot, *Yorkshire Abbeys and the Wool Trade*, *Miscellanea*, Thoresby Soc., xxxiii (1935), pp. 14-5; N. Morimoto, *Purchases of cloth by Durham Cathedral Priory in the 14th Century*, *Nagoya Gakuin University Review*, 12, no. 3 (1976), p. 412.

139. *C.C.R.* 1377-81, p. 523; 1385-9, p. 111; *Prob. Reg.* I ff. 45v. (Grantham), 103 (Rob. Holme); *Arch. Reg.* X f. 320.

Merchants looked for business wherever they could, without any apparent sense of disloyalty to their regional compatriots nor any apparent awareness that dealing with Londoners might eventually undermine the region's established centres. Thus in 1453, William Gaunt of York was shipping his goods in a London vessel.<sup>140</sup> The intrusion of Londoners into the north, is most clearly revealed in the evidence of registered debts and it is apparent that as overseas trade through Hull declined, transactions between Londoners and Yorkshiremen increased. More purchases were made from Londoners, ranging from wine to pepper and fish.<sup>141</sup> William Aylesbury of Ripon owed a London mercer £11 in 1382; Simon Grimsby of Hull was being sued for debt by a Londoner in 1408-9 while in the same year John Frauncys and John Fitling, both also of Hull, owed money to London fishmongers.<sup>142</sup> The inventory of a York chapman, Thomas Gryssop, drawn up in 1446, recorded several debts, including 30s. 6d. to a London spicer and 40s. to a London cap-maker.<sup>143</sup> He was but one of a growing number of northerners indebted to London merchants. Debts of this kind were recorded throughout the 15th century<sup>144</sup> but the involvement of Londoners soon developed beyond simple transactions between Yorkshire merchants and themselves. The grocers of London were particularly successful, establishing themselves as suppliers of dyestuffs to textile workers in York and Beverley, as well as other places in Yorkshire. In one year alone, 1444-5, two London

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140. C.P.R. 1385-9, p. 573; 1429-35, p. 371; C.C.R. 1435-41, p. 40; 1452-61, p. 174.

141. Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, pp. 177-8; C1/59/112.

142. C.P.R. 1381-5, p. 171; C.C.R. 1405-9, p. 487; C.P.R. 1416-22, p. 95; C1/10/149.

143. Test. Ebor., III, pp. 101-5.

144. E.g. C.P.R. 1436-41, p. 322; 1452-6, p. 132; 1461-7, pp. 315, 502; 1467-77, p. 383; 1494-1509, p. 3; C.C.R. 1447-54, p. 352.

grocers, Thomas Phillips and Robert Mildenhall had nearly £400 of debts from York dyers, merchants and spicers, enrolled in York. That year a further £84 was owed to other Londoners, including debts owed by merchants from Hull and Doncaster, and chapmen from Durham and Lancashire.<sup>145</sup>

In return the London grocers took back considerable quantities of cloth; 20-30,000 cloths from the provinces between 1400 and 1450.<sup>146</sup> As a port London was increasingly favoured by other merchants. Thus York coverlets were being exported through London by Hanse merchants in 1420-1. By the 16th century, West Riding cloths were regularly exported by that route.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, much of Norwich's cloth was exported via London from 1450. Customs records testify to the growing dominance of the port of London in overseas trade: 66% of all wool and 82% of all cloth exports went through London by 1524-5. Not only was a sizeable proportion of Yorkshire cloth and wool exported via London, but Londoners were supplying a range of imported goods in return.<sup>148</sup> Thomas Gryssop's inventory mentioned above, listed an enthralling variety of goods, many obvious imports but also London purses, coffers, belts, and glasses.<sup>149</sup> Could York craftsmen no longer meet local demand for these items or were their products unfashionable and/or too expensive?

The growth of London's own food market, generated demand throughout much of England, and towards the end of the 15th century, the Yorkshire

145. York C.R.O. E39, pp. 278, 284-5, 288, 295.

146. Thrupp, London Grocers, pp. 264, 276; Bolton, English Medieval Economy, p. 302.

147. Gras, Early English Customs, pp. 120, 459, 469; Heaton, Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries, p. 186; V.C.H. York, p. 104.

148. Campbell, Norwich, p. 16; J.A.F. Thomson, The Transformation of Medieval England 1370-1529 (1983), p. 60.

149. Test. Ebor. III, p. 101-5.



merchants saw their dominance of food purveyance to the south slipping away. By 1505 butchers from London and the home counties began to appear alongside London grocers and haberdashers as debtors seeking sanctuary in Beverley Minster.<sup>150</sup> The record does not tell us who the creditors were but the inference must be that business had drawn the Southerners north. The merchants from York, Beverley and Hull were thus facing competition not only in exporting their region's textiles and northern beef, but also in meeting its need for imported goods.

Other rivals appeared from Leeds and Halifax, usurping the role of the York merchants, in particular as suppliers of cloth to Durham Priory during the last two decades of the 15th century.<sup>151</sup> The merchants from York, Beverley and Hull then, never had a clear monopoly in general trade in the region, but it may be that northern rivals were slightly more acceptable because there can be no doubt that to contemporaries in York, their real enemies were Londoners.<sup>152</sup> As their business expanded, the city council passed regulations in an attempt to limit the damage they were inflicting. From the 1480s London merchants were allowed to sell goods in York to York citizens only, and in 1506 several London freemen, including 3 grocers, 1 mercer, 1 merchant, 1 merchant tailor, 1 draper, 1 goldsmith, and 1 brewer, had invoked the support of London city council to be allowed to trade toll free.<sup>153</sup>

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150. B.L. Harl. MS 560; J. Raine, ed., Sanctuarium Dunelmense et Sanctuarium Beverlacense, Surtees Soc., V (1837), pp. 115, 118, 122, 170-81.

151. V.C.H. York, 90; Durham Accts. III, pp. 616, 632-3, 636, 649, 652, 656.

152. V.C.H. York, pp. 88-90, and above pp. 43-4.

153. M.K. James, The Non-Sweet Wine Trade of England During the 14th and 15th Centuries, Oxford D. Phil thesis (1952), p. 310; Y.C.R. I, p. 38, III, p. 23.

Other evidence confirms the deeper penetration of the north by London investment. From the late 14th century, Londoners began to acquire real estate. In 1404 Thomas de Leycestre, a London grocer, hired two York men as his rent collectors in York. Were these rents part of a debt settlement? Robert Kelam, another Londoner, hired a rent collector and agent to look after property he had acquired by marriage to a York widow.<sup>154</sup> It must have been increasingly apparent to Yorkshiremen that London's financial resources were superior to those of the provinces given the many indications of the spread of London credit into the region. Inter-city Yorkshire men, setting up in business in London added to the credit drain; using inherited Yorkshire property as surety to raise capital in the south. Given the visible decline of three major northern towns, the decision by some, to migrate was rational. A reverse migration was apparent as some Yorkshire merchants abandoned their provincial independence and went to live in London. Whether or not they were the more able, as has been claimed for London-bound Southampton merchants in the early 16th century,<sup>155</sup> cannot categorically be asserted. However, some men from commercially 'privileged' backgrounds, did leave. William Bracebridge for instance, son of a York alderman, served as a sheriff himself in 1455 and moved to London to continue his business as a merchant of the Staple. William, the merchant son of Robert Brompton of Hull, is another example, and was settled in London by the early 16th century.<sup>156</sup>

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154. M.B. II, pp. 9-10, 269.

155. A.A. Ruddock, London Capitalists and the Decline of Southampton, Ec.H.R., 2nd ser. ii (1949), pp. 137-51.

156. Yorks. Deeds, IV, p. 161; there is a lot of evidence of northerners' familiarity with London. For instance John Gregg of Hull left money to St. Bridget's in Fleet St. in 1437, Prob. Reg. III ff. 555v.-6v. Stephen Coppendale of Beverley owned property in London in 1487, ibid., V f. 271. The daughter of a Hull apothecary, Laurence Swattock, married a Londoner in the late 15th century, ibid., ff. 410v.-411. Hull merchant Alex Wharton, wanted to be buried there in 1506, ibid., VI f. 216.

London's commercial tentacles were long, and without the equivalent credit resources, provincial merchants found it difficult to compete in international or even inter-regional trade, especially during a time when there was a bullion and coin famine. The nature of provincial debt/credit arrangements made Yorkshire merchants particularly vulnerable. The way in which they used land, trade and credit to finance their enterprises, is the subject of the next section.

## II: Cash, Credit, and Land.

An examination of merchant enterprise must include some consideration of how merchants exploited different resources. There are many questions which cannot yet be fully answered. What precise role did land and rents play in their businesses? Did merchants try to accumulate land for reasons of social ambition? Was land seen as a short or long-term investment? Was there any preference for rural or urban property? Did successful overseas traders invest in land? To what extent was there a correlation between large cash estates, scale of trade, and land-ownership, or were the three mutually exclusive?

Nationally, rural rents fell after the Black Death and remained depressed well into the 15th century; dropping even further in the north-east at least in the mid-15th century. Urban rents did not begin to slide in York until the late 14th century and until the mid-15th century in Hull. Ideally, one would like to be able to correlate individual's estates, cash savings, credit and property investment, to determine how far these varied in the different contexts of different periods. There are many reasons why such an exercise would be unconvincing, although it has been crudely attempted here. The most important is that the surviving evidence is not chronologically consistent and is both dynamic and static. What we know of merchants' estates and enter-

prise is derived from information recorded during their lifetimes and at death. It is both a series of indications of the scale and nature of commercial activity, of credit operations, and of investment in land and rents, and a partial over-view, frozen in the individual's last will and testament. An individual's fortunes can fluctuate during his life-time and a merchant dying at his commercial peak would leave a more ambitious will, than a young man or a commercial failure.

The additional problems of describing and evaluating each element, cash, credit and land, are discussed as each is explored below: measuring individuals' trade has already been discussed. In this section, the wider merchant group has been studied: that is merchants, including those apparently not engaged in overseas trade, and specialist traders such as spicers and drapers. Their inclusion helps to compensate for the paltry evidence of internal trade. However unsatisfactory the data and problematic its interpretation, it must nonetheless be remembered that the essence of each merchant's business was the interplay between cash, credit and land on the one hand, and trade on the other. At the very least, this study reveals the range of options to be exploited; what was possible if not what was typical.

#### CASH.

Inevitably in trying to assess and rank individual merchants, wealth becomes an important index. The most obvious, and in some ways the easiest measure, is the size of cash estates at death recorded in probate records, but there are several important observations which should be borne in mind. The first is to consider what the will is evidence of. It presents a frozen statement of account, but at what point in a person's career was it drawn up? At the commencement before a young merchant had had the time to establish his business? In the

middle when the expenses of rearing a family were perhaps still high, but profits were accumulating? In old age, when significant provision for children had already dispersed assets, but capital was diminishing without being replaced? Or at any other intermediate stage?

Adding up the cash bequests in a will can rarely be more than approximate, and bequests of 1d. to each prisoner in the Kidcote in York, or to each leper or whoever, can never be multiplied accurately and have simply been noted as 1d.x? Silver and gold items were not given a value and few merchants were as precise as John Brompton of Beverley, who noted the exact weight in ounces of each gold and silver item he bequeathed in 1444.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, silver spoons, goblets, bowls, servers, gold rings and bracelets and so forth were valuable assets and have been noted in the tables of wills in appendix 5.

The absence of detailed inventories<sup>158</sup> means that we must rely upon each merchant's assessment of his worth. Estates at death were customarily divided into three parts, one of which was the testator's to dispose of as he pleased.<sup>159</sup> It is not clear from the majority of wills,<sup>160</sup> if only that one third was being disposed of, or if the merchant was disposing of the entire estate. If the former were the case, then some adjustment would have to be made to take account of the two thirds of the estate not mentioned, and a multiplier of three used

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157. Prob. Reg. II f. 86v.

158. John Talkan of York's estate was one of the few inventoried in the early 15th century. His household goods were worth £118 16s. 3d. and his debts £22 9s. 3d. Test. Ebor. III, pp. 87-9.

159. See above p. 33.

160. Exceptions were Thomas Aldestanemore of York and John Dalton of Hull, who explicitly stated in their wills that certain bequests were to be made from their own portions. Prob. Reg. III f. 413; V f. 484.

on the cash totals of each will. However, in this study the totals have been left unadjusted, for greater clarity.

Cash bequests in medieval wills were made on the understanding that debts would have to be recovered by legatees<sup>161</sup> or that some real estate would have to be sold to pay the testator's debts. John Barden of York made arrangements in his will in 1396, that if property had to be sold to meet the provisions of the will, his manor of Kydall should be sold and his future son-in-law, John Moreton, should have the first option on buying it. William Ormeshead, also of York, made provision in his will dated 1437, for the sale of his property to be supervised, and William Burgh of Hull explicitly stated in his will in 1460 that property was to be sold to clear his debts.<sup>162</sup> This sort of understanding could mean that in discussing cash bequests in isolation from real estate, a false distinction is being made. However, most of those wills which listed real estate made it quite clear that individual properties were being bequeathed in addition to cash bequests.

It is assumed that the testator's belief that his estate could satisfy the provisions of his will was justified, then cash bequests can be used as an indicator of relative wealth. The merchant may, of course, have lost all sense of proportion in trying to ensure his salvation with grandiose funeral arrangements beyond his means, but this seems unlikely considering the care which the average merchant showed in settling his affairs.

Other assets such as iron, cloth, mercery, livestock, as well as ships pose further difficulties. Shipownership has been discussed

161. E.g. Thomas Frost of Beverley left his daughter Margaret £40, of which £30 had to be recovered in debts. Prob. Reg. V f. 271v. See below, p.226 for bequests of debts.

162. Prob. Reg. I f. 100; II f. 423v.; III ff. 503-504v.

above, and although it clearly reflected the accumulation of capital, once the investment was made, the real value of owning a ship was the steady income derived. The capital value cannot be estimated.

The value of a merchant's stock in trade, or the return expected on a venture, are equally impossible to estimate. Several merchants did refer to ventures as they were drawing up a will. Richard Bille of Hull left stockfish waiting to be shipped from Iceland and John Aldestanemore of York left 300 bales of wool in Calais. In both cases the goods were to be sold by executors.<sup>163</sup> Some of John Harrison of Hull's bequests had to wait for the arrival of the 'hulks out of Dansk'. Other merchants left some of their capital tied up in commodities at home. John Kent of York left 17 ells of cloth, a useful legacy for his wife Marion, who carried on the business after his death.<sup>164</sup> Richard Sawyer a York mercer, bequeathed a lot of mercery, including bonnets in his ship in 1477. John Petty, a glazier and merchant of York, left some Normandy glass;<sup>165</sup> John Tutbury of Hull left iron and timber; Ralph Langton of Hull left salt;<sup>166</sup> Thomas Wood of Hull left iron and cloth of gold; Guy Maliard of Beverley left timber; and William Hewitt of Beverley left several lead cisterns.<sup>167</sup> All the commodities listed above were valuable and could either be sold outright or kept within a business.

More complicated was the arrangement made by John Harrison of Hull in 1526. He left cisterns of lead, horses and mares and an oil mill to

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163. Prob. Reg. II f. 233v., C1/10 296.

164. Prob. Reg. IX f. 328; IV f. 53.

165. Ibid., V f. 190; Dec. et Cap. II, f. 54.

166. Prob. Reg. III, f. 371v.-372v.; VII f. 22v.

167. Ibid., V ff. 402v.-403v.; 309v.; IV f. 137.

his son John. His widow Agnes was to receive half the oil produced from the seed Harrison left, but she was also to pay half the milling costs.<sup>168</sup> Son John benefitted twice!

Bearing in mind the inconclusive nature of the evidence, and the unknown values missing from estimates of individual's post mortem estates, some sort of analysis must still be attempted. Table 8 suggests a broad pattern of the distribution of wealth using cash bequests as an indicator. Wives and widows testamentary evidence has not been used, except to note those who left silver or gold items.

Few merchant wills survive from the early 14th century but following the general trend, more wills survived/were made from the later 14th century. There are almost no wills in the York probate registers from 1409 to 1425, and none at all for 1470 and in other years registration was partial.<sup>169</sup>

Several sizeable fortunes were left in the late 14th century, most of them belonging to York merchants. Robert Louth left £410, John Gisburn and William Vescy £300 each, and Robert Holme snr, a staggering £2,418. Holme's fortune was unsurpassed among merchants of the three towns.<sup>170</sup> In Beverley, only John Kelk came close and left over £500, and in Hull Robert Crosse left over £200 but the largest proportion of Crosse's estate was in urban and rural property.<sup>171</sup> At the other end of the scale, some merchants left surprisingly small amounts of cash ranging from the 4s. left by Stephen Coppendale of Beverley in 1413. An 'average' will at this level was that of Thomas Dickinson of Hull who

168. Ibid., IX f. 328.

169. F. Collins, ed., Index of Wills in the York Registry, 1389-1514, Y.A.S. Rec. Ser. vi (1889), Appendix II, pp. 199-202.

170. Prob. Reg. I ff. 15v.-16, 100v.-103v.; III ff. 265, 267v.-8v.

171. Arch. Reg. X ff. 322-322v.; Prob. Reg. III f. 263.



died in 1447 and left £1 12s. 6d. of which 2s. 6d. was for a friend and the rest was divided between his parish priest and other religious institutions.<sup>172</sup>

The largest number of wills inevitably fell within the lowest category, and could reflect impoverishment or prior arrangements. It is clear though, that the smallness of an estate did not deter testators for whom the major motivation was to ensure a proper religious settlement however tiny. Table 8 suggests that the largest estates continued to be fewer than any other category throughout the 15th century, except in 1420-60. One hesitates to make too much of these figures, but it may be that the crisis decade of 1430 carried off a larger than average number of merchants in their commercial prime. Nine York testators died in the 1430s leaving over £100, 3 of whom left £600+; Nicholas Blackburn snr, John Northeby, and Richard Russell. Blackburn's widow Margaret left over £500.<sup>173</sup>

In the second half of the 15th century mercantile cash estates of over £50 and £100 became even less common. Two York merchants left large estates: Richard Wartre left £523 in 1465 and John Gillyot jnr left £722 in 1509. Over half of Gillyot's money was spent on endowing a chantry.<sup>174</sup>

In Beverley fewer large cash estates were recorded. The most notable were those of the Bromptons, father and son, both staplers. Thomas predeceased his father John in 1436 and left about £500. John Brompton died in 1444 leaving £800 including £202 in debts,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a ship, and an exceptionally large amount of gold and silver items.<sup>175</sup>

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172. Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 354; Prob. Reg. II ff. 68, 258.

173. Prob. Reg. II ff. 605, 619-20; III ff. 415, 439-40.

174. *Ibid.*, IV ff. 115-7; VIII ff. 32-4.

175. *Ibid.*, II ff. 86-90v.; III f. 475.

TABLE 8: Cash Estates at Death      ( ) = overseas merchants

	YORK	BEVERLEY	HULL	TOTAL
<u>&gt;1370</u> silver/gold	0 (+1 wife)			
£100+	1		1(1)	2
£50+	2(1)		1	3
£20+	1	1(1)	1	3
-£20	1	1	10(4)	12
TOTAL	5	2	13	
<u>1370-1420</u> silver/gold	8	2		10
£100+	15(6) (4 x £300+)	2(1)	1(1)	18
£50+	14(6)	2(1)	1(1)	17
£20+	17(8)	2(1)	4(1)	23
-£20	27(19)	9(4)	6(6)	42
TOTAL	73	15	12	
<u>1420-60</u> silver/gold	12 (+4 wives)	1	6	19
£100+	17(10) (1430s 9 died 3 £600+)	2(2)	5(5)	25
£50+	12(3)	6	39(3)	57
£20+	17(7)	3(3)	1	21
-£20	143(7)	6(2)	20(9)	169
TOTAL	189	17	65	
<u>1460-1500</u> silver/gold	2	4	6	12
£100+	7(6)	3(1)	2(2)	12
£50+	7(4)		6(1)	13
£20+	9(2)	3(3)	6(3)	18
-£20	38(18)	12(1)	33(23)	83
TOTAL	61	15	47	

Hull had eight merchants who left over £100 after 1420, but none of them matched the Bromptons' estates. The largest were those of John Gregg, who left £174 in 1437 (his widow Joan left £240 a year later), Robert Holme who left £775 in 1449, Thomas Preston, who left £361 in 1451, John Swan £164 in 1476, and William Goodknapp who left £275 in 1504.<sup>176</sup>

Four tentative conclusions can be drawn. First that involvement in overseas trade did not automatically create sizeable accumulations of cash, although most of the large cash estates were left by international merchants. Indeed it could have been the necessity of keeping commerce continuous which ensured that capital did not always accumulate as disposable income. The testamentary evidence suggests though, that fortunes could be created from domestic trade also, even though we know little about it. In Hull for instance, one of the largest cash estates, that of John Garton (1456) belonged to a man who was probably a sherman and not a merchant at all.<sup>177</sup> The other three major cash estates belonged to overseas merchants Robert Holme, a stapler (1449), Thomas Preston (1451) and John Swan, another stapler (1476).<sup>178</sup>

In York, although several mid-century estates belonged to overseas merchants, Robert Collinson (1458) and Richard Wartre (1465) for example, <sup>179</sup> a draper Thomas Carr left £336+ in 1444, supplied cloth wholesale to Durham Priory and apparently made his fortune as a middleman in textiles.<sup>180</sup> John Radclyff, a merchant who died in the

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176. Ibid., II f. 235; III ff. 507v.-8; 555v.-556v.; VI f. 107.

177. Ibid., II ff. 327, 341; BRE 1 p. 252.

178. Ibid., II f. 211; 225; V f. 7.

179. Ibid., II f. 378; IV f. 115.

180. Ibid., II f. 79v.; Durham Accts. II, p. 616.

same year leaving £178, has not been traced in any records as active in any branch of trade, though he left debts to be recovered.<sup>181</sup>

Second the speed with which fortunes were dispersed in cash bequests had a dramatic impact. Some 1430 examples demonstrate this tendency which can be replicated: the estates of Nicholas Blackburn snr and his wife Margaret, Richard Russell, and John Northeby. The fate of all these estates was similar. John Aldestanemore left most of his to his daughter, brother and other close relatives, and for his soul. The bulk of Nicholas and Margaret Blackburn's bequests were also to close relatives, particularly grandchildren, and to religious institutions: their son and heir Nicholas benefitted very little (according to the testamentary evidence). When he died in 1448, 16 years after his father, he left only £19, and his grandson Richard left only £9 in 1513. John Northeby's two sons each received £200 and the rest of £724 went to friends and charity. When his son John died in 1438, six years after his father, he left only £31.<sup>182</sup>

Few merchant dynasties emerged in these three Yorkshire towns. The custom of legitim guaranteed division, and the poor survival rate of male heirs ensured the wider dispersal of a fortune several generations later. Piety could claim a large percentage of disposable income: as much as 76% in the case of William Wranby of York, who left £140 out of total bequests of £184, on religious projects.<sup>183</sup> The cases of the Blackburns, Northebys and Gillyots, cited earlier, demonstrate all these tendencies. Few widows continued to make their husband's capital work in commerce: Elena Box, Margaret Bushell and Alice Day of Hull, Marion

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181. Prob. Reg. II f. 91.

182. *Ibid.*, II ff. 123, 168v.-9, 605, 619-20; III ff. 415v.-6; VIII f. 105. See below pp. 343-5.

183. *Ibid.*, III f. 344.

Kent of York.<sup>184</sup> Only the latter continued to trade for any length of time. However, inter-marriage and the remarriage of widows must have helped to keep inherited capital within the merchant class, if not within individual families.<sup>185</sup>

Third, there was inevitably a delay between the period of entrepreneurial prosperity at the end of the 14th century and the deaths of that cohort of merchants and an overlap between the onset of recession in the early 1400s and the deaths of merchants still enjoying wealth created from earlier trading. Hence the clustering of sizeable estates in the 1390s, 1405-9, 1430s, and mid-1440s in York. In Hull the pattern was more random in that the largest estates were left in 1395 (Robert Crosse profiting from a property boom in Hull?), 1437, 1449, 1451, 1456, and 1476 but this may simply reflect the different impacts of mortality crises in both towns.<sup>186</sup>

Fourth, there seems to have been a notable decline in the numbers of very large cash estates in the second half of the 15th century. It has been suggested that this was due to a growing preference to invest in land,<sup>187</sup> as overseas trade declined and further consideration will be given to that argument when the nature and scale of mercantile property holding is examined below. More convincing perhaps, are the arguments of the bullionists, that it was a shortage of coin which, in addition to limited credit resources, may have sucked more cash into commercial ventures than had previously been the case.

184. See Appendix 4.

185. See below pp. 346-8.

186. Arch. Reg. X ff. 322-322v. (Crosse); Appendix 5.

187. V.C.H. York, p. 85; Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 28-30.

## CREDIT

Within the continuing debate as to the nature and causes of the economic recession which affected most of Europe from c. 1390, the demographers led by the late Michael Postan,<sup>188</sup> have come under increasing attack from bullionists, in particular John Day and John Munro. They have argued that the demographic repercussions of the Black Death throughout Europe were not the main causes of decline, but that of greater significance was an acute shortage of coins and precious metals which reduced the money supply.<sup>189</sup>

The most easily measurable impact was upon international trade which was simultaneously the mechanism which accelerated the flow of bullion out of northern Europe, through the Mediterranean and out to the Middle and Far East. Harry Miskimin has offered a compromise to the pure bullionist model; arguing that it was the hedonistic spending spree following the Black Death, which triggered the flow of luxury oriental goods into Europe and precious metals out, hastening the depression of the fifteenth century.<sup>190</sup>

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188. M.M. Postan, Some Economic Evidence of Declining Population in the Later Middle Ages, Ec.H.R., 2nd ser. ii (1950), pp. 221-46; idem., Medieval Agrarian Society in its Prime: England, in Camb. Econ. Hist., I (2nd edit. 1966), pp. 560-70; idem., The Medieval Economy and Society: An Economic History of Britain, 1100-1500 (1972), pp. 27-40, 224-46; with J. Hatcher, Population and Class Relations in Feudal Society, Past and Present, 78 (1972), pp. 24-37; J. Hatcher, Plague, Population, and the English Economy, 1348-1530 (1977).
189. J. Day, The Great Bullion Famine of the Fifteenth Century, Past and Present, 79 (1978), pp. 3-54; J.H. Munro, Monetary Contraction and Industrial Change in the Late-Medieval Low Countries, 1335-1500, B.A.R. 54 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 95-137; idem. Bullion flows and monetary contraction in late-medieval England and the Low Countries, in J.F. Richards, ed., Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds (North Carolina, 1983), pp. 97-158.
190. H.A. Miskimin, Monetary Movements and Market Structure: Forces for Contraction in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century England, Jnl. Ec. Hist. XXIV (1964), pp. 470-90; R.S. Lopez, H.A. Miskimin, and A.L. Udovitch, England to Egypt, 1350-1500: Long-Term Trends and Long-Distance Trade, in M.A. Cook, ed., Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East (1970), pp. 93-128.

In a situation where coins were increasingly hard to come by, international financiers and merchants evolved systems of international credit to increase the money supply as well as to facilitate currency exchanges. These were most effective when trade was flowing continuously. The most famous instrument of credit, the bill of exchange (later known as letters of credit), could be used like travellers' cheques, and similarly had to have an acceptable credit-worthiness in the international market-place. In the 15th century, a recognised and flexible bill of exchange on the continent, was one drawn up by a notary public. The strength of its credit thus assured, these negotiable bills could change hands many times before eventually being cashed. Merchants using these had to have access to notaries public, or to scriveners or an official empowered to enrol and seal bills, as well as to partners or investors who themselves had access to cash or secure resources. Both requirements could be affected by geographical location.<sup>191</sup>

The pioneering work of Professor Postan in 1927, uncovered many cases pleaded before the Lord Chancellor, concerning defaults on bills of exchange, so it is clear that their use had spread to denizens in the 15th century in spite of discouraging legislation. The English government, like its continental counterparts, legislated against the export of bullion and coins, but also saw the bill of exchange as a device to disguise the movement of coins overseas.<sup>192</sup>

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191. M.M. Postan, *Credit in Medieval Trade*, Ec. H.R. 1st ser. i (1927-8), pp. 234-61; idem. *Private Financial Instruments in Medieval England*, reprinted in idem., *Medieval Trade and Finance* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 29-64, esp. p. 34; P. Spufford, *A Handbook of Medieval Exchange* (1986), pp. xxxiii-xxxiv; A.H. Thomas, ed., *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls for the City of London, 1381-1412* (1932), pp. xxxvi-xl.

192. *Credit in Medieval Trade*, op. cit.; *Private Financial Instruments*, passim; J.H. Munro, *Bullionism and the Bill of Exchange in England, 1272-1663: A Study in Monetary Management and Popular Prejudice, in The Dawn of Modern Banking*, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of California (1979), pp. 169-215, esp. p. 198.

Yorkshire merchants employed and traded in bills of exchange from time to time as an ingredient of their international enterprises.<sup>193</sup> There were notaries public in York,<sup>194</sup> qualified to draw up bills, but there is no way of knowing how many were drawn locally. A decline in overseas transactions would in any case, obviate the need for such instruments, and perhaps more importantly, that very decline, would have had a negative effect on a merchant's credit rating unless he had other forms of security.

Without international credit, a greater proportion of an individual's cash would be sucked into his business, so that at some point, other credit arrangements must have been used (even barter in some instances). More rudimentary than bills of exchange, deferred payment or sales credit were commonly used between merchants. As has been said of eighteenth-century England, 'Trade credit was crucial to the functioning of exchange ... many firms had more of their assets tied up in credit than in capital.'<sup>195</sup> One of the best reconstructions which we have of a merchant's business, that of a Londoner, Gilbert Maghfeld, reveals how fundamental sales credits were, and that for merchants with a long-standing business association, they rarely settled their accounts in cash. If they did, it was for very small amounts. For a merchant like Maghfeld, operating within domestic and overseas trade, it was easier to keep the situation fluid and to pay off one supplier of goods

193. E.g. H.J. Smit, ed., Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Handel met Engeland, Schotland, en Ireland 1150-1485 (The Hague, 1928), II, pp. 1073-4. Cf. Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1413-37, pp. 11-12.

194. York City R.O. E39 p. 110; York Borthwick Inst. Prob. Reg. I f. 20 (will of Ann Durem); Postan, Private Financial Instruments, p. 34.

195. J. Hoppit, The use and abuse of credit in eighteenth-century England, in N. McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite, eds., Business life and Public Policy. Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman (1986), pp. 64-6.



with the unpaid balance owed to him from another. The art of commercial survival was to keep ventures and credit in a state of constant motion, and for an overseas trader like Maghfeld, he could use his credit abroad to satisfy domestic debts by transferring them to a third party, or indeed settling an overseas debt of one of his English creditors.<sup>196</sup>

Keeping things on the move was everything in trade but unfortunately the evidence which most frequently survives of credit operations is static and piecemeal: that of debts called in. Evidence of the importance of debts in the Yorkshire economy is quite extensive but not often detailed, because although many wills recorded debts to be recovered or to be bequeathed they did so only in general terms.

By custom, the payment of debts had priority in the execution of wills. By Edward IV's reign, debts of record took precedence over any others, in the administration of a will.<sup>197</sup> It was quite common for testators to further instruct their executors to settle debts before disposing of the residue. Some, like Robert Collinson of York, instructed that a house be sold to meet debts in 1456; others like Edward Grenely of Hull, specified in 1492 that goods were to be sold, whereas Richard Thuresby of York left £50 in 1402, £20 of which was to pay his debts. Some creditors arrived too late for satisfaction. In

196. M.K. James, *A London Merchant in the Fourteenth Century*, Ec. H.R., 2nd ser. viii (1955-6), pp. 364-76. See also A. Hanham, The Celys and Their World. An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century (1985), pp. 109-255, 398-430; Postan, *Credit in Medieval Trade*, pp. 255-6 for the Celys and the London scrivener, John Thorp's notebook, both demonstrating the importance of credit sales. P. Wolff, *English Cloth in Toulouse, 1380-1450*, Ec.H.R., 2nd ser. ii (1950), p. 294.

197. W.S. Holdsworth, A History of English Law, III (4th edit., 1935), pp. 586-7. Such was the strength of the custom, that it prevailed over compassion in the London City court in 1396, when the payment of a debt took precedence over provision for two minors even though complex legal formalities had been completed to effect that provision. Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1381-1412, p. 239.

1419 Robert Gaunt of York distrained in vain to recover £12 from the estate of John Rydding a dyer: other creditors had got there first!<sup>198</sup> Executors could be pursued by the deceased's creditors, so that debts could become an issue between two parties (and their heirs), long after the initiating parties were dead.<sup>199</sup> The more actively and widely an individual had 'invested' his money in lending in whatever form, the more difficult the resultant debts would be to collect.<sup>200</sup> The administration of the will of William Alcock a Hull merchant, was given to a court-appointed executor in 1435, a man not named in Alcock's will, because of the 'multitude' of his debts. John Radclyff of Hull, anticipated unenthusiastic executors, and in 1444 left 20s. to another merchant William Langthorn, provided that he collected Radclyff's debts. York merchant John Elwald, realistically referred in his will of 1505 to all of his debts '*which can be recovered*', and inventories regularly distinguished between debita sperata and debita desperata.<sup>201</sup>

Conversely, some creditors drawing up their wills, charitably released their debtors. Not all did so wholeheartedly. Robert Louth and William Bedale both of York, released those who could not pay, John Kelk of Beverley all debts under 40s., while Thomas Holme released those who could produce 'reasonable proof' that they could not!<sup>202</sup>

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198. Prob. Reg. III f. 245; V f. 501; VI f. 70; York City R.O. E39 p. 187.

199. E.g. C.P.R. 1388-92, p. 259; 1476-85, p. 293; M.B. I, p. 33; Yorks Deeds, II, p. 218; P.R.O. C1/15/193, 59/112, '64/1137; York C.R.O. E39 pp. 266-7, 281.

200. Robert Northwold, mercer of London, died c. 1374 leaving debts to be retrieved from Beverley, York, Ludlow, Oxford, Gloucester, Winchester and from a Lombard. Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1364-81, pp. 168-9. A debt did not have to be large to be exploited. In 1369 a debt of £6 13s. 4d. was assigned to 'divers persons', ibid., pp. 111-2.

201. Prob. Reg. II f. 91; III f. 403; Dec. and Cap. Wills II f. 43; Test. Ebor., III, pp. 49-50, 104, 141.

202. Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 15; Prob. Reg. III ff. 255-255v.; ff. 265-265v.

Some merchants took the opportunity of settling family obligations. Richard Wartre of York released his father-in-law John Moreton from a debt of £3 in 1458. John Kelk of Beverley was not so generous and in 1407 allowed his brother William only 63s. 4d. of a debt of 103s. 4d.<sup>203</sup>

Debts were bequeathed like any other chattels. Thomas Preston of Hull, d. 1451, left an obligation for £24 which John Richards of Hull owed him, to Joan Clitheroe; and to Thomas Bernard of Hedon he left an obligation from William Sage of Scarborough for £6 and a debt of £2 owed by Thomas' mother. He was clearly an efficient book-keeper. John Brompton of Beverley left £202 of debts in several portions to his son Nicholas, which included two from the countess of Northumberland.<sup>204</sup>

However stale or small, debts were still assets to be recovered and managed, whatever the inconvenience and cost.<sup>205</sup> Considerable perseverance was necessary. Agnes Brightwell of London lent her son-in-law £60 in 1406 and was eventually paid in a mixture of salt and cash in 1413. Delays must have been detrimental; hence the offer of a discount for early settlement made by William Skyrwyth of York to a debtor in 1427. However difficult and discouraging the exercise, recovering debts was an essential part of business. Failure to do so could result in commercial disaster, vide Gilbert Maghfeld,<sup>206</sup> or the disappointment of

203. Prob. Reg. III f. 263; IV ff. 115-7.

204. Ibid., II ff. 86v., 225.

205. In c. 1415 it cost John Talkan of York's executors £8 6s. 8d. to collect his debts and settle his estate: total value about £104. In 1451 Thomas Vicars' executors spent only 20s. on tracing and collecting his debts, and a further 20s. riding around to settle everything. Test. Ebor., III, pp. 87-9, 120-2. Cf. Bristol merchant Philip Vale, whose executors' expenses for settling debts and selling property in 1393 came to £7. Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1381-1412, pp. 208-215.

206. Ibid., 1413-37, p. 10; M.B., II, p. 160; James, A London Merchant, op. cit., pp. 369, 373-4.

legatees. Debts mentioned in probate records could be the result of deferred payments for goods or services, not always made clear in wills,<sup>207</sup> though expressly stated in some inventories. For instance the inventory of Hugh Grantham, a mason of York drawn up in 1410, itemised debts owed to him for the purchase of oats, barley, and cloth, as well as debts owed through obligations. A total of £85 17s. 10d. outstanding to him. In turn he owed £58 13s. 5d., mainly for deliveries of stone from his suppliers, and for loans through deferred payment or by negotiation.<sup>208</sup> Unfortunately that sort of balancing of debt accounts is not possible for the majority of testators. Rough calculations have been possible in a handful of cases, of the proportion of an individual's cash estate comprised of debts due to him. For the majority, debts accounted for between one and two thirds of their cash estates. In 1421 Thomas Frost of Hull left about £76 of which about £70 were debts owed to him. At the other end of the range, Robert Preston, also of Hull, left about £210 of which only £30 were debts owed to him.<sup>209</sup> In 16th-century Exeter, debts comprised 25%-50% of merchants' estates. It would be dangerous to assume that such negative assets were automatically realised; 40% of Richard Toky of London's assets were debts none of which could be recovered.<sup>210</sup>

The majority of debts mentioned in wills were probably either mutually acknowledged informal arrangements, what Postan called

207. E.g. Prob. Reg. II f. 21; f. 119v.; III ff. 415v.-416; f. 540; V f. 29v.; f. 99; f. 167.

208. Test. Ebor. III, pp. 49-50.

209. See also Brompton, 1444, c. £600, debts £200: Barley, 1468, £74, debts £53: Fisher, 1476, £13, debts £10. Prob. Reg. II ff. 86-90v. (Brompton); II f. 225 (Preston); IV f. 60 Barley; V f. 8v. (Fisher); Arch. Reg. XVIII ff. 384v.-5 Frost.

210. W.G. Hoskins, Exeter Merchants, op. cit., pp. 173-4; S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (1962 edit.) p. 109.

bills obligatory, or they were in the form of legal instruments; recognisances, bonds, obligations. Recognisances could be enrolled in the borough courts of Hull and York but no court rolls as such are extant and enrolments survive in disappointingly small numbers in the memoranda books of York and bench books of Hull. A fragment of a sheriff's court roll and precedent book for mid-fifteenth century York and miscellaneous deeds comprise the rest of the known local sources.<sup>211</sup> Nothing like the plentiful series of borough court rolls to match the London Letter Books, whose equivalents George Unwin envisaged piled temptingly high in provincial town halls, nor the 4,526 cases of debt heard in the mayor's court in Exeter between 1378 and 1388, which Marion Kowaleski has perceptively analysed.<sup>212</sup> Bountiful records in other towns implies that Yorkshire towns must once have had similarly extensive commercial transactions, and that the extant evidence is just the tip of an iceberg.<sup>213</sup>

What has survived in formal enrolments, is sufficient to indicate some of the characteristics of credit agreements. Some were designed to raise capital for a particular need and were explicitly loans. Thus in June 1404, Richard Bawtre a Scarborough merchant and three York merchants enrolled a bond for a loan of £79 13s. 4d. to John Craven, also a York merchant, which was to be repaid the following June.<sup>214</sup> No interest was

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211. Hull City R.O. BRG; BRE1, 2; BRB1: York City R.O. E25, 39; M. Sellars, ed., M.B., I, II and III; Yorks. Deeds and Feet of Fines for Yorkshire.

212. G. Unwin, London Tradesmen and Their Creditors, in idem., ed., Finance and Trade Under Edward III (1918), p. 19; M. Kowaleski, The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century, Medieval Studies, 46 (1984), p. 369.

213. A. Beardwood, ed., The Statute Merchant Roll of Coventry 1392-1416, Dugdale Soc. XVII (1939); City of London Letter Books, Recognisance Rolls, Guildhall Library.

214. M.B., II, p. 98.

recorded, but as usury was illegal, this was scarcely surprising. Loans were usually made for a fictitious sum which included both principal and interest.<sup>215</sup> Very likely registering a bond of this kind was also a way of registering the financial basis of a short-term partnership, with John Craven in this instance as the active trader.

All the recognisances enrolled set a date or dates for settlements, either in a single payment or in installments.<sup>216</sup> Sometimes one creditor would supply cash through several obligations to one person. Thus Cecily, widow of William Ferrour of Newcastle and daughter of a York painter, owed William Skyrwyth, a York clerk, six separate debts each of 40s. to be repaid on the 10th November in successive years from 1428.<sup>217</sup> Most of the recognisances enrolled in York and Hull, dealt with rounded sums of money; indicating, Postan argued, that they were instruments for loans rather than settlements of commercial transactions involving exact costs.<sup>218</sup>

The entering into agreements for loans was a useful mechanism for raising capital and for making surplus capital work. The importance of keeping a record was obvious: John Stockdale of York had a debt book which was mentioned in his will in 1507, and others must have kept at least a loose file of bonds and deeds as Richard Wartre of York had in

215. R.H. Helmholz, *Usury and the Medieval English Church Courts*, *Speculum*, 61 (1986), p. 365; Postan, *Private Financial Instruments*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

216. In general the debt/loan was divided into equal portions and repaid at annual or six-monthly intervals. E.g. *M.B.* II, p. 274; York City R.O. E 39 pp. 106, 108, 267.

217. *M.B.*, II, p. 160. It may be that she was meeting obligations from her father's estate. For other examples see *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 114; York C.R.O. E39 p. 267 and cf. *Cal. Mem. Rolls City of London 1382-1412*, p. 239.

218. *Private Financial Instruments*, p. 38.

the early 15th-century. Better still of course were the 4 bonds and 1 acquittance which Walter Randolph delivered to John Middleton in 1394, together with 5s. in coins, assorted mercery, and 34 lbs. of onion seed!<sup>219</sup> Lack of written evidence of a debt could prejudice its recovery, and could result in non-payment, even when the debt was recognised by the debtor.<sup>220</sup> If it was not, others might be summoned to the creation of the obligation: John Radclyff of York lost a bond between Pavement and Coneystreet in 1420 but witnesses were called in to testify that Radclyff had agreed to pay Thomas Farnlay £12 6s. 8d. and so he paid up!<sup>221</sup> Although a debt might be formally enrolled, the recovery of the acquittance or indeed of the record, was not necessarily straightforward. What sort of chaos prompted the York council's decision in 1371 that the Statute Merchant Roll should be kept in the council chamber on Ousebridge, and that as each mayor was responsible for the rolls of their year in office, their executors would inherit that responsibility after his death?<sup>222</sup>

Enrolment did not guarantee repayment, though it must have been better than nothing, and many creditors had to take their case to the royal courts in London: King's Bench and Common Pleas in particular. The consequent legal trail left behind as much inferential evidence as the local enrollment of recognisances provide direct evidence. The Patent and Close Rolls are full of writs supersedeas to local sheriffs, to prevent them implementing judgements of outlawry brought against the absent party in actions of debt. Likewise they are full of pardons to

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219. Prob.Reg. IV f. 116; VI f. 185; M.B., II, p. 13.

220. P.R.O. C1/289/10.

221. M.B., II, pp. 94-5.

222. Ibid., I, pp. 12-3.

individuals for 'not appearing to answer' pleas of debt in the royal courts. Usually these were bald statements that A owed B £x, but they do indicate the geographical flow of credit.<sup>223</sup> The occasional surviving petition to the Chancellor, is much more informative, and can convey the aggrieved feelings of the parties and the complexities of their transactions.

There are hints that local pressure sometimes operated powerfully in favour of local men in debt disputes and this may have been one reason for using the royal courts. In the middle of the 15th century a Nicholas Elerton was complaining that although he had brought a successful action for debt against John Northeby of Hull, he had been prevented from gaining satisfaction by 'subtle and strange means' and could get no remedy in Hull. However, Chancery judgements were not invincible either. John Spicer, possibly of Beverley, won an action against Thomas Etton of Hull, but when he went to Hull to deliver the writ, Etton took counter action against him in the local courts and had Spicer imprisoned. Spicer had to petition the Lord Chancellor for another writ to be released.<sup>224</sup>

Quite apart from the universal problem of enforcing payment of a debt/loan, recognisances, bonds, and bills of obligation were very difficult to transfer and this limited their usefulness. The appointment of a third party, an attorney, was a legal requirement if you wanted to effectively assign an obligation to someone else and though fairly easy for the first transfer, became increasingly difficult thereafter as a series of dependent documents became necessary.<sup>225</sup> The

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223. E.g. C.P.R. 1429-35, p. 354; 1446-52, p. 198; 1452-61, pp. 384, 456; 1467-77, pp. 9, 431.

224. P.R.O. C1/17/95, 64/439.

225. Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1381-1412, pp. xxxii-iii; Postan, Private Financial Instruments, pp. 40-9.



internationally negotiable bill of exchange had an equivalent in England; a sort of Co-op Visa card to the American Express card. The remedy was to register the debt/loan under Statute Merchant or Statute Staple. Under the statute of Acton Burnel, 1283, the debtor practically signed a judgement against himself in the event of defaulting on payment and these provisions were strengthened by the Statute de Mercatoribus in 1285. In those towns such as York and Hull which were granted the right to hold the seal of Statute Merchant, there were supposed to be statutory registries wherein debts could be enrolled. After 1362, the Statute Staple extended to everyone, the right to have debts registered in those towns where a mayor of the staple was appointed. Both York and Hull were granted that facility.<sup>226</sup>

Effectively this legislation had created a debt of record, statutory recognisances acceptable nationwide, relatively easily registered and recovered. Statute Merchant and Statute Staple bonds had the strength of bills of exchange within England and should have offered an attractive alternative to the less formal arrangements already described. They were not impregnable however. As autonomous documents, they could be and were stolen, since possession alone was sufficient title unless challenged. Another difficulty (apart from sloppy archival practice as in York), was the failure of the enrolling authority to cancel debts paid and the neglect of the debtor to recover the bond from the creditor. It was not until the reign of James II that creditors were obliged to cancel debts.<sup>227</sup>

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226. H. Hall, ed., Select Cases Concerning the Law Merchant, II, Selden Soc., XLVI (1930), p. xi ff. III, Selden Soc., XLIX (1932), pp. xvi, xxviii, xxix; T.F.T. Plucknett, The Legislation of Edward I (1949), p. 138; C.C.R. 1279-88, p. 244.

227. Ibid.; Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1381-1412, pp. xxxv.

What is difficult to establish is how popular these statutory recognisances were. They did not replace the traditional system of informal agreements enrolled in local courts, and maybe that was adequate for most debts, as Hubert Hall believed.<sup>228</sup> The Yorkshire certificates for Statute Merchant in the Public Record office have yet to be examined, but there is some patchy evidence of the use of the seal in York which suggests that statutory bonds met a particular need and were accepted as superior to other bonds.

During the Peasants' Revolt, the 'rebels' in Beverley extorted bonds from some of the town's establishment; Statute Merchant bonds. From the tone of the petition asking for this damage to be remedied, it is apparent that the injured parties regarded these bonds as irredeemable without the king's direct intervention. These were 'rebels' with financial acumen. Statutory bonds seem to have been used for extra security in a particularly large or complex deal. For instance one to the abbot of Furness in 1418 for £200 from Robert de Eare was enrolled in York; another in 1393 to the bishop of Durham for 200 marks from Adam Pund was enrolled in Hull. Scarcely run-of-the-mill debts.<sup>229</sup>

Religious institutions, as customers and as suppliers of wool, were well placed to supply cash loans or sales credit to merchants. The latter was a characteristic of the wool trade and could be for very large sums of money. Thomas Holme of Beverley for instance, owed Durham

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228. Hubert Hall thought that the volume of cases concerning enrolled obligations which were recorded in the Close and Plea Rolls, in the Miscellaneous Book of the Exchequer and in Kings and Commons Bench Plea Rolls, suggests that statutory recognisances did not supersede traditional enrolments for the repayment of trade debts and loans. Sel. Cases, III, p. xii.

229. C.P.R. 1381-5, p. 87; II, p. 30; Hull City R.O. D248.

Priory £174 10s. in 1331 and with his son Richard, bought 100 sacks of wool from Meaux Abbey in c. 1550, to be paid for within 10 years. In the event, Meaux could not supply 55 sacks, and granted the Holmes Sutton Grange for 40 years in lieu, but in the post-Black Death situation, that arrangement proved to be unsatisfactory and Meaux had to agree to an annual cash payment. Unfortunately, the record does not reveal if and when the Holmeses made full account for the wool purchase, but according to the Meaux chronicle, the Holmes family received almost four times their initial outlay of £240.<sup>230</sup> In 1334 John de Womme of York, together with Bardi and Peruzzi merchants, owed archbishop Melton £1,000, most likely sales credit on a wool purchase.<sup>231</sup>

In 1393 John de Beverley of York paid the final instalment of a debt of £106 which he owed to the Carmelite Priory in York. Such debts were not confined to the locality: in 1368 William Savage of York and three others owed the dean of St. Stephen's Westminster £300. These instances were fewer after 1400 although Richard Louth of York was indebted to the prebendary of Fridaythorp in 1437 for £100.<sup>232</sup>

Another form of financing ventures could be obtained from the York Mercers' and Merchant Adventurers' Company. It acted as a sort of shipping agent, and used ships, probably its own, to carry collective cargoes to overseas ports. In return merchants paid an appropriate sum back to the company, out of which overheads were then paid. The earliest record of the activities of freighting managers is from 1578, but there is no reason to suppose that the system which operated in the

230. Durham Accts., II, p. 515; E.A. Bond, ed., Chronica Monasterii de Melsa, III, Rolls Ser. (1868), pp. 85, 144-5.

231. C.C.R. 1333-7, p. 315.

232. Yorks. Deeds, I, p. 219; C.P.R. 1364-8, p. 467; 1436-41, p. 102.

15th century was very different. Several accounts of voyages have survived from the 15th century, including those for ventures in Iceland by William Tod and John Ferriby in 1475.<sup>233</sup>

In Hull the Corpus Christi Guild, a religious guild for merchants, made loans to members, but not for overseas ventures. The Guild of the Virgin Mary, on the other hand, was financing ventures to Iceland and to the Low Countries in the mid 15th century.<sup>234</sup>

Using credit was a risky but necessary part of most people's lives but it was essential for commercial enterprise and led to a variety of reciprocal arrangements. The most common was to act as a pledge for another merchant's loan. When a loan was negotiated, the borrower had to find mainpernors or pledges who stood as surety against payment. A wealthy and successful businessman, with the confidence of his creditor, might not always need pledges, but a relative newcomer or someone with neither property nor reputation, or someone seeking an exceptionally large loan, would be dealt with according to the solvency of his pledges. In this way your choice of pledges could influence the size of the loan you could command, just as much as the viability fo the venture did.<sup>235</sup> Yorkshire merchants often stood as pledges for each other and occasionally for merchants from distant parts of England and even from overseas.<sup>236</sup>

Within the region loan arrangements reflected many political and social ties. Marion Kowaleski has traced a network of relationships

233. M. & M. A, pp. 40, 68, 72-3, 195.

234. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 58-9; Toulmin-Smith and L.T. Smith, English Guilds, E.E.T.S. Orig. Ser. 40 (1870), pp. 156-7, 160-1.

235. Postan, Private Financial Instruments, p. 31; Hall, Select Cases, III, p. xxix.

236. P.R.O. C1/289/10; York City R.O. E39 pp. 128, 172, 187, 205-7.

focussing on Exeter in the late 14th century, which involved the civic elite standing as pledges for the local gentry in debt and land suits, and vice-versa, as well as providing the same support for merchants from other Devon towns and for each other.<sup>237</sup> There is some evidence that similar networks operated in the north. For instance, in May 1398 Thomas Holme had to find mainpernors to stand surety for £1,000 which was an unusually large sum required for no stated reason. Robert Gare of York was one of those who acted for Holme, and later in the same year he acted as co-mainpernor for 100 marks, a more usual sum, for a John de Wallington.<sup>238</sup> In 1439<sup>239</sup> Hugh Clitherowe of Hull and John Paull of Holderness acted as joint sureties for £2,804 for a Richard Wastenes of Stowe.<sup>240</sup>

The Crown sometimes required sureties for its victuallers and for farmers of royal subsidies. Nicholas le Sauser of York was victualling for the Crown in 1316 and was also standing surety for several other York merchants who were similarly engaged. John Barden of York and Sir Thomas Clifford stood as sureties for the farmers of the cloth subsidy in Yorkshire, Cumberland, Westmorland and Northumberland in 1381-2; and Simon Quixlay of York stood surety for John Quixlay who was farming the

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237. Kowaleski, *Fourteenth Century Exeter*, *op. cit.*, p. 366. Cf. late 14th-century Colchester where only 14.5% of the pleas of debt heard before the borough courts were brought by outsiders, and there was no 'symbiosis' of the town and countryside. R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 107, 157.

238. *C.C.R. 1396-9*, pp. 305, 398, William Savage of York and Thomas Frost of Beverley were co-mainpernors for Holme.

239. *C.P.R. 1436-41*, p. 429.

240. For further examples of loans and pledging between the three towns see *C.C.R. 1392-6*, p. 133 (Santon of York); *1402-5*, p. 286 (Grimsby of Hull); *Memorandum Book*, I, p. 73 (Alkbarow of York); *P.R.O. Treaty Roll 5 HVI m. 9* (Etton of Hull). For an example of rural gentry indebted to a York merchant see *Memorandum Book*, II, p. 274 (Neleson).

cloth subsidy in 1384.<sup>241</sup> Robert Acastre of York, however, held the same farm from February 1363 until 1371 without surety because he was 'sufficient'.<sup>242</sup>

Mainperning was not without its risks. The pledges were legally liable for the loan and their goods could be distrained in the event of the debtor defaulting. In c. 1455, a Hull merchant John Green, stood as surety for a York merchant Thomas Ward, for £225 the price of a cargo of wine purchased from 4 Bordeaux men. Payment was to be made only when the wine had been delivered to a third party, Richard Anson (a prominent Hull merchant), and the spoilt wine discounted. The wine duly arrived, 17 tuns 1 pipe were not good, but Green delivered the full £225 in a sealed packet to the common clerk of Hull to hold. When it was delivered to Ward, the wine was under by 6 tuns, and he paid only a percentage of the agreed price. The Bordeaux men sued for the full £225 against John Green in the court of Common Pleas, claiming that the obligation was made in London, not Hull, and Green counter-petitioned, claiming that the transaction had been completed in Hull and that no-one in London knew the whole truth of the matter!<sup>243</sup> Mainperning was not to be undertaken lightly.

From the pledges point of view, a major advantage of registering a loan/debt under Statute Merchant, was that the pledges were not liable, if the debt could not be met from the debtor's goods and chattels. That alone should have encouraged greater use of statutory bonds, but maybe arrangements were not quite as simple as that. From time to time in the York borough records, there were enrolled gifts of goods from one indiv-

241. C.C.R. 1313-17, pp. 541-2; 1381-5, pp. 94, 575.

242. Ibid., 1360-4, p. 518; 1364-8, p. 281; 1368-74, p. 172.

243. P.R.O. C1/16/163, 164.

individual to another, or to a small group of trustees. The terms always referred to all the grantor's goods but rarely mentioned a consideration.<sup>244</sup> Was this a legal way of evading distraint upon your goods for your own or someone-else's debts? In 1424 Peter Bukcy granted all his goods and the debts owing to him at home and abroad, to his son John and another York merchant Thomas Esingwold. Peter delivered 1d. to John and Thomas in the name of seisin for greater security. Was he planning a trip overseas and wanted to settle his affairs quickly? Was the gift permanent? Peter did not die for another 8 years. Similarly Richard Auncell of Hull granted all his goods and chattels to a London merchant Thomas Rikes in 1453, but did not die until 1465.<sup>245</sup> Such gifts of good may have been pledges against the repayment of a loan, which if repaid, meant that the goods never changed hands. Sometimes such grants were to other merchants, to act for the debtor in settling his debts. Thus John Bilton of Hull granted all his goods to 2 other Hull merchants, expressly for them to pay off his debts. Alternatively, he may have been winding up a partnership with them. Grants were sometimes a straight exchange for an agreed sum: John Doddington of York granted all his goods to Henry Percy and others in 1421, 'for a certain sum of money'. In 1432 William Hovingham, a York butcher granted all his goods to John Edmondson and two clerics on October 10th, and on December 13th testified before the mayor that the grant had been without fraud or evil intent.<sup>246</sup> The implication that others might be dishonest was made explicit in a statute of 3 Henry VII, which claimed

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244. E.g. M.B., I, pp. 187, 204, 215, 236, 245; II, pp. 34, 39, 112, 218; III, pp. 6, 7, 38, 52, 102.

245. Ibid., III, pp. 53; Prob. Reg. II f. 612; C.C.R. 1447-54, p. 465; J.C. Wedgwood, Biographies, p. 12.

246. (Bilton) Hull C.R.O. BRE 1 p. 263; M.B., III, pp. 102, 105.

that such gifts were made 'to thentent to defraude ther creditors of their duties'.<sup>247</sup>

One positive advantage of these gifts was the gaining of essential time before the bailiffs pounced: time for another deal to be completed, for a ship to come in,<sup>248</sup> or to recover other assets, even debts. Gaining a breathing space could be even *more important for the heir* of an entrepreneur's estate. Death was a time of reckoning when the flow of a business stopped and creditors and partners wanted settlement. Maybe this consideration was what lay behind Robert Louth of York's gift of all his goods to his son. Nicholas Louth was re-enfeoffed in 1439 after Robert's death, by the trustees chosen by his father: Guy Fairfax, esq., Thomas Cleveland, clerk, and John Bolton and William Bowes, aldermen.<sup>249</sup> Even though his son would eventually have to accept liability for his father's debts as his executor, the delaying tactic would gain him time. A similar phenomenon was occurring in London, where increasing numbers of such gifts were enrolled in the mayor's court from 1413.<sup>250</sup> Was this a consequence of growing indebtedness?

That individuals routinely had recourse to debts as a form of loan is clear. Given the propensity to register debts in some form, and of the greater likelihood of negotiating pledges in a busy market, towns

247. Statutes of the Realm, II, p. 513. Quoted in Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1413-37, p. xx.

248. See for example 1428 the case of John Davy of Exeter who promised to settle a debt 'immediately after a certain ship ... should chance to arrive at any port in England'. C. Gross, ed., Select Cases Concerning the Law Merchant, I, Selden Soc., XXIII (1908), p. 117. John Harrison of Hull made bequests in his will in 1526 contingent upon the arrival of the 'hulks out of Dansk'. Prob. Reg. IX f. 328.

249. M.B., III, pp. 121-2.

250. Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls City of London 1413-37, pp. xix-xxiii; Ibid., 1437-57, pp. xxii-xxviii, 1; Ibid., 1458-82, pp. 147-179 for an appendix listing such gifts.



can be seen as a focus for financial services. The addition of international commerce as in York, Beverley, and Hull enhanced that role and in theory when trade was bouyant, credit should have flowed from urban purchaser to rural producer and vice-versa. Unfortunately there is as yet insufficient local evidence to provide a precise chronology of changes in volume, or the direction of the flow of credit. However, although the evidence is patchy it provides strong hints as to the geographical distribution of debtors and creditors involved with the merchants from these three towns, and it was much as one might expect. There was a scatter throughout the north of England from Cumberland to Lincolnshire, with the highest concentration in Yorkshire, confirming a regional rather than purely local area of influence.<sup>251</sup>

The strongest discernible drift of debts was to the south, out of the region to London,<sup>252</sup> confirming suspicions that one of the reasons for the failure of provincial merchants to exploit their own region was they were financially undermined by Londoners. Their presence in the north was not new; after all Fountains Abbey was selling wool futures through its London agent in 1274.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, in the 14th century there were Londoners buying Yorkshire wool and cloth and shipping it out through Hull.<sup>254</sup> Occasionally, Yorkshire men collaborated with

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251. Lancaster, C.P.R. 1436-41, p. 458; Richmond, Ibid., p. 217; Burton-on-Trent, Ibid., p. 216, 1441-6, p. 18; Penrith, Ibid., p. 7; Lincolnshire, 1452-61, p. 11; Coventry, Ibid., pp. 264, 453; Chesterfield, York City R.O. E 39, p. 288.

252. C.P.R. 1405-9, p. 226; 1413-29, p. 82; 1436-41, p. 322; C.C.R. 1447-61, p. 132; 1461-7, p. 502; 1494-1509, p. 3.

253. H.E. Wroot, Yorkshire Abbeys and the Wool Trade, Miscellanea, Thoresby Soc. xxxiii (1935), pp. 14-5.

254. E.g. Reginald Aleyne between 1391-3, C.P.R. 1391-6, p. 398. Hostilities between the Hanse and the East Coast ports in particular, probably accelerated the carriage of Yorkshire cloth via London. In 1420-1 for instance, Hanse merchants were exporting York coverlets through London. N.S.B. Gras, The Early English Customs System (Cambridge, Mass. 1918), pp. 120, 459, 469.

Londoners; for instance a Hull merchant John Fitting and William Holgryn, fishmonger of London, were partners in a deal in 1417, and it may be that collapsed partnerships were hidden in the increasingly frequent actions for debt brought by Londoners against Yorkshire merchants. Hindsight enables an appreciation of the long-term impact, but it is doubtful if William Savage<sup>255</sup> who stood as a pledge for a Londoner, shipping wool from Hull to London in 1392 thought it bizarre. Merchants riding the tide of success would not understand that encouraging London merchants and credit north would eventually undermine local entrepreneurship, just as they did not see that buying cloth from rural producers in the early 15th century, eventually would damage their fellow townsmen's textile industry. The significant difference in the 15th century was the growing scale of transactions involving Londoners as we have seen.<sup>256</sup>

#### Land.

Although a major motivation for acquiring land was to ensure a future income for a merchant's wife and children after his demise, and the continued support of any spiritual provision he might have established, that was, in a sense, marginal to the commercial considerations which lay behind that acquisition.

The role of land-ownership in the medieval economy was complex. Agricultural property could generate income through rents and through direct demesne farming and most discussions of land in the economy have concentrated on rural estates, especially those of major religious institutions such as Bolton Abbey, Durham and Canterbury Priors. Analysis has concentrated upon estate management, crop yields, and

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255. C.P.R. 1392-6, p. 22.

256. See above, pp. 206-9.

fluctuating rents.<sup>257</sup> Urban estates are harder to identify; that of the Vicars' Choral in York being something of an exception.<sup>258</sup> However, the exploitation of a discrete estate by an institution was quite a different matter to the use made of real estate by an individual.

The acquisition of land could indicate surplus capital seeking a relatively static long-term investment. It might have been seen as security against trade fluctuations, if not against a general recession in the economy. No doubt some merchants tried to build up rural estates to satisfy ambitions and to ease their eventual transition into the gentry.<sup>259</sup> But even in those instances, capital tied up in land had to play some part in the overall enterprise of the individual merchant. It still had to make an economic contribution to his business. As will

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257. F.R.H. Du Boulay, The lordship of Canterbury (London, 1966), R.B. Dobson, Durham Priory 1400-50 (Cambridge, 1973); C. Dyer, Lords and peasants in a changing society. The estates of the bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540 (Cambridge, 1980); H.P.R. Finberg, Tavistock Abbey. A study in the social and economic history of Devon, 2nd edn (Newton Abbot, 1969); B. Harvey, Westminster Abbey and its estates in the middle ages (Oxford, 1977); R.H. Hilton, The economic development of some Leicestershire estates in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Oxford, 1947); S.F. Hockey, Quarr Abbey and its lands, 1132-1632 (Leicester, 1970); I. Kershaw, Bolton Priory. The economy of a northern monastery, 1286-1325 (Oxford, 1973); E. King, Peterborough Abbey 1086-1310 (Cambridge, 1973); E. Miller, The abbey and bishopric of Ely (Cambridge, 1951); M. Morgan, The English lands of the abbey of Bec (Oxford, 1946); F.M. Page, The estates of Crowland Abbey (Cambridge, 1934); J.A. Raftis, The estates of Ramsey Abbey (Toronto, 1957); E. Searle, Lordship and community. Battle Abbey and its banlieu 1066-1538 (Toronto, 1974); R.A.L. Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory (Cambridge, 1943). On the last estate, a number of studies by M. Mate have supplemented and modified Smith's work, notably 'The estates of Canterbury Cathedral Priory before the Black Death', Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History, 8 (1987), pp. 3-31, and 'Agrarian economy after the Black Death: the manors of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 1348-91', Ec. H.R., 2nd ser., xxxvii (1984), pp. 341-54.

258. Fully described in F. Harrison, Life in a Medieval College (1952).

259. S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (1962 edit.), pp. 272, 279-287. Cf. 16th-century Exeter where, although it was not uncommon to invest in land, few could afford to purchase enough to make the social jump. W.T. McCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640; the growth of an English town (1958), p. 261.

be seen, few Yorkshire merchants acquired large estates outright. The majority held scattered parcels of land, assorted tenements, and rent charges, that is limited assignments in rents.<sup>260</sup> It is not even clear that every half manor, close, messuage, or assigned rent, was actively sought by individual merchants, and it may have been that some of these were inherited, acquired as marriage settlements, or even received in settlement of a debt. So to ascribe an attitude or deliberate policy to all merchants, regarding real estate, is probably misleading.

The evidence for mercantile property interests is of two types. The first is contained in testamentary records and is problematic for all the expected reasons discussed above. There are however, some particular and additional problems associated with real-estate. Sale values of properties were rarely given, although the value of rents sometimes was. John Fitling's estimate that 12 messuages and gardens of his in Hull, were worth £30 in 1434 was unusual. The portmanteau term 'all my lands and tenements in York/Beverley/Hull' might have described a single property or extensive holdings. Also, it is clear that property was not always mentioned in probate records, when other evidence, such as expected *per annum* income from lands assigned to endow a chantry, suggests an individual did own some property.

Sometimes not all land was included: thus there was no reference to a garden in John Gyll of Hull's will, but 11 years after his death his widow sold one to pay for his obits.<sup>261</sup> (She may have acquired it subsequently.) Inevitably therefore, the historian is assessing a possibly partial statement of uncertain economic values, at a random point in an individual's career.

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260. London merchants had a similar pattern of land-holding. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 119, 122.

261. Prob. Reg. III ff. 384v.-5; VI f. 175; D561.

The second type of evidence is even more difficult to assess, since it is that of separate deeds, charters, final concords, and bonds which have randomly survived, usually as isolated documents.<sup>262</sup> They cannot be used to estimate the size of an individual's property. They can be used to survey the type of property merchants had, location, approximate scale (1 as opposed to 10 tenements), and sometimes the transmission of property within or outside the family. Lastly, they can be used to suggest ways in which property was used as security in raising credit; as a dynamic rather than a fixed asset which allowed the financial exploitation of property beyond the obvious and final cash return from selling.

#### Urban

Apart from those who mentioned no property in their last will and testament, most merchants referred only to the house they lived in or to one or two additional properties. For instance John Fribois of York, who died in 1362 left the tenement with its shop, in which he lived in Petergate, another tenement in the city and a croft near Monkbar.<sup>263</sup> Nicholas Blackburn snr left only his house in North Street plus rents in the Shambles and Needlergate in 1435, but the following year his son was assessed as having land worth £15 per annum.<sup>264</sup> In Beverley Thomas Gervays left 2 tenements and a garden in 1388: Thomas Frost his house plus a garden and orchard in Newbiggin in 1421.<sup>265</sup> Robert Stut of Hull left 3 tenements in Monkgate and Kirklane in 1347.<sup>266</sup>

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262. Early Yorkshire Charters; Yorkshire Deeds; Yorkshire Feet of Fines; York Memorandum Book.

263. York C.R.O. B/Y f. 110.

264. Prob. Reg. II f. 605; E179/217/42.

265. Arch. Reg. XIV f. 18v.; XVIII ff. 384v.-5.

266. Hull C.R.O. D57A.

Middling property holders can be represented in York by Richard de Acastre who died in 1399. He left properties in Micklegate, Petergate, a garden and an empty plot in Fishergate and rents in Skeldergate. He also left at least two tenements in Selby. Another who owned property on a similar scale was William Bowes snr, who left 7 properties in the city in 1439 in addition to his house in Peaseholme.<sup>267</sup> In Beverley his equivalent was John Carleton, who in 1401 owned his house in Newbiggin, 4 properties in Beckside including 2 shops, and in addition held 2 selions in the town fields. A slightly different sort of estate was left by John Brompton in 1444. He left a messuage in Hull, as well as 3 in Beverley, and 4 empty plots near Norwood.<sup>268</sup>

Robert de Preston of Hull, died in 1347 and left one tenement and 6 cellars in Hull, in addition to a house at Southferry, just outside the town. Adam Pund, died 1369, was also typical of the middling property owner, and left his house in Pole Street, which had 2 cellars, and 6 other messuages.<sup>269</sup> Cellars were a common feature of houses in Hull and were probably large, wine-storage cellars to be worthy of mention. In 14th-century Hull, empty burgages were still available, and it was not uncommon for merchants to rent them. Thus Gilbert de Bedford rented 6 such plots from the Crown in 1357. He also had 2 shops and land in the town fields.<sup>270</sup> In 1451 John Bedford left 7 properties in Hull, held land in the town fields and owned property in Beverley, on the Wolds and in Lincolnshire.<sup>271</sup>

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267. Prob. Reg. III ff. 56, 582.

268. Ibid., II ff. 86-9v.; Arch. Reg. XVI f. 141.

269. Arch. Reg. X ff. 322-322v.; D 126.

270. BRE 1 pp. 23, 132, 138.

271. Prob. Reg. II ff. 220-222v.

At the top of the scale were men like Ralph Horneby, a draper active in overseas trade who died in c. 1379. He was probably a first-generation immigrant (free in 1351) who bought some land in his native Hornby-in-Cleveland in 1368. Nine messuages and 26 shops were assigned to his chantry in St. Helens's, Stonegate in 1379 and in 1428 it was said that at his death he owned 34 messuages in York, a 6s. rent and the advowson of the perpetual chantry of St. Michael in St. Helen's.<sup>272</sup> William Holbeck was a 15th-century equivalent of Ralph Horneby; owning 29 properties at his death in 1477. Others were Thomas Neleson who left 13 properties in York in 1484 as well as extensive rural holdings, and George Kirk who left 19 properties in York in 1513.<sup>273</sup>

As in York, it is easy to identify major merchant landowners in the other two towns. John Sleford of Beverley left 20 properties in 1449, in addition to his house in Barliholme: 15 were in the Beckside area and one was outside West Bar. As far as testamentary evidence shows, he was the only 14th-century merchant with that scale of investment in real estate. None were found in the 15th century but John Armstrong, a tailor/drapery, died in 1504 leaving 15 tenements and messuages, and 6 maison dieus; three of the houses were rented to weavers, who may have supplied him with cloth. He also left several small properties leased from the archbishop of York: 4  $\frac{1}{2}$  acres, 3 closes, and 2 messuages in Woodmancy and Weel within 5 miles of Beverley.<sup>274</sup>

Inevitably the de la Poles were the landowners par excellence in Hull. In 1381-2 the family's properties were returning £67 annually in rents from Hull and £8 from Myton.<sup>275</sup>

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272. Yorks. Deeds, II, p. 276; C.P.R. 1377-81, p. 375; C.C.R. 1422-9, pp. 420-1.

273. Prob. Reg. V ff. 22, 170, 213; VIII f. 117.

274. Ibid., II f. 184; VI f. 117.

275. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 82, 85.

Two other Hull 14th-century merchants had large property interests, though not on the same scale as the de la Poles, nor indeed on a par with Ralph Horneby of York. Adam Tutbury acquired at least 16 properties in Hull between 1366 and 1390, ranging from empty land near the river Hull, to the lease of a brewhouses, and the acquisition of another merchant's entire property in Beverley Street, in 3 separate portions over 2 years.<sup>276</sup> In addition he acquired rents worth £12 6s. 3d.<sup>277</sup> Tutbury's property may have been dispersed before his death, but Robert Crosse's was not, and his final estate was more impressive. In 1395 he left at least 18 properties in Hull in addition to extensive rural holdings and shops and houses in several other towns including London and Scarborough.<sup>278</sup> Eighteen years later, John Sanderson left a house in Hull Street, 13 other properties in Hull and 2 gardens outside. His son Thomas sold 10 messuages in 1448, probably for cash at the beginning of Hull's first decade of economic slump.<sup>279</sup>

John Haynson, who died in 1458, left 13 properties. His was the last large urban estate to be left by a Hull merchant in the 15th century. The urban property of the de la Poles, which was valued at £102 a year in the late 15th century,<sup>280</sup> now provided an incidental income for an absentee landlord. The most typical late 15th century mercantile properties in Hull were the small estates like that of Haynson's former apprentice, John Green. He died in 1468 and left 2

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276. D 123, 124, 127, 128A, 128B, 133A.

277. D 121, 122, 128A, 131, 136, 160.

278. D 179.

279. Prob. Reg. III ff. 608-9; D 369, 382.

280. Prob. Reg. II f. 393; V.C.H. Hull, p. 85.



tenements in the Fishmarket and his own house. Similarly John Dalton left three properties, two of which he had bought just before he wrote his will in 1492.<sup>281</sup>

During the middle ages, merchants often lived in houses which incorporated a shop, as John Fribois did, but it is not clear how many used such retail outlets themselves. Some certainly had interests in other shops which they leased out. Ralph Horneby's 26 shops in York were exceptional, certainly when compared to the 3 shops which William Selby left to the city in 1427, or Robert Holtby's  $\frac{1}{2}$  shop which he devised in his will in 1438;<sup>282</sup> John Asseby more unusually owned 2 shops in Richmond in 1459.<sup>283</sup>

In Beverley only a handful of references to shops owned by merchants have been found: John Carleton owned 2 shops in Beckside in 1401. As in Hull, the council owned shops: the Dyngs was purpose built with shops in front of living space and either could be let. Thus Robert Jackson was renting 6 shops in the Dyngs from the council for 58s. 8d. in 1449 and Robert White 2 shops there for 13s. 4d. in 1494.<sup>284</sup>

Four of Robert Crosse's Hull properties included shops, and there is evidence that Hull merchants had shops incorporated into their houses and rented out shops more often than their York or Beverley counterparts. The council was the largest shop rentier in Hull and, for example, rented 10 shops to Walter Helleward in Kirklane in 1351, and 2 shops and 1 cellar to Peter Stellar in 1384. Simon Grimsby was renting

281. Prob. Reg. IV f. 235; V f. 484.

282. Dec. & Cap. I ff. 227-9; Prob. Reg. III f. 542v.

283. *Ibid.*, II ff. 396v.-7v. See also III ff. 27v. (Smyth), 275 (Spencer); Dec. & Cap. I ff. 227-9 (Selby).

284. Arch. Reg. XVI f. 141; Acct. Rolls 1449, 1494.

a tenement and shop from the earl of Suffolk in 1390.<sup>285</sup> The more frequent occurrence of shops and cellars in Hull property dealings probably reflects the Hull merchants' involvement in retails as well as wholesale trade. It was a more cosmopolitan town and would expect numbers of short stay shopkeepers. It is interesting that none of the 15th-century Hull merchants invested in shops.

Merchants were in all forms of revenue generating investment. One or two Beverley merchants owned or leased mills: William de Wilton a mill on the Beck in 1400 and Thomas Manby a horse-mill in 1402.<sup>286</sup> In Hull Thomas Ferlay and John Whitfield owned mills in 1463 and 1479 respectively, and John Harrison left both his oil mill and a supply of seed when he died in 1526.<sup>287</sup> Similarly, Ralph Langton of Hull who leased the salt-house in High Street from the city council, left 20 weys of salt in 1501.<sup>288</sup> One York merchant acquired a source of raw material, Stapleton quarry. Thomas Holme bequeathed the remaining years of his lease on it to his nephew in 1406.<sup>289</sup>

Property in other towns was not uncommon in York merchants' wills throughout the period, and was most often in other market centres in the region. Hull, Beverley and Ripon were the most usual locations of other urban properties, followed by Selby, Malton, Scarborough, Whitby and Pontefract. Property of York merchants was also to be found further afield in Berwick, Newcastle, Yarm, Preston, Newark and London,<sup>290</sup> while

285. BRE 1 pp. 144, 163; CQ 1, f. 5.

286. Prob. Reg. III ff. 74v.-5; Arch. Reg. XVI f. 141.

287. Prob. Reg. II f. 479v.; V f. 148v.; IX f. 328.

288. BRB 1 f. 177; Prob. Reg. VI f. 22v.

289. *Ibid.*, III f. 225v. See Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 128 for a similar interest.

290. William Chimney is the only York merchant discovered whose will referred to property in London. Prob. Reg. VIII, f. 3.

a few owned or leased houses, rents and vacant plots in Calais.<sup>291</sup> Such properties may have been used as much as a trading base as an investment for rents, and individuals rarely owned more than one or two such properties. Oliver Middleton, who owned 4 tenements in Ripon was exceptional, and in any case had probably migrated from there.<sup>292</sup>

One of the major differences in 15th-century property owning in Beverley was an increase in property held in other towns. No 14th-century merchant<sup>293</sup> has been found who held urban property elsewhere, but several 15th-century merchants did. Inevitably Hull was the most common place, since water access from Beverley to the port was worsening. William Hewitt, died 1468, found it useful to have a shop there, as did Thomas Swanland, died 1469, who had 3 other Hull properties.<sup>294</sup> John Brompton, died 1444, left a messuage in Hull but his son Thomas, died 1436, left property in York, and a woolhouse in Calais. Robert Jackson left 1 tenement in Marketgate, Malton, in 1479, but surprisingly left no property in Beverley.<sup>295</sup>

Most of the Hull merchants' other urban property was almost entirely in York and Beverley, and generally consisted of one tenement or a rent. Adam Pund had a 4s. rent in Coneystreet, York, in 1368 and Ralph Langton owned a house there in 1502,<sup>296</sup> but he originated from York. John Day left unspecified property in York in 1470 and a jointly

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291. See above p. 146.

292. Prob. Reg. VI f. 130.

293. Except John Kelk, d. 1407, who left some property in Calais. Prob. Peg. III f. 263; Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 15.

294. Prob. Reg. IV f. 137; BRE 1 p. 262.

295. Prob. Reg. II f. 86v.; III f. 475; V f. 99.

296. D 126; Prob. Reg. VI f. 22v.

held property in Beverley.<sup>297</sup> Peter Stellar had a tenement and garden in Fishmarketgate in Beverley in 1396 and John Spencer, who originated there, left unspecified holdings in Beverley.<sup>298</sup> John Bedford's son inherited an 8s. rent in Newcastle from his mother. Robert Crosse's properties and rents in Balham, Fleet, Warwick and London were exceptional among merchants of all three towns. He also owned property in Scarborough.<sup>299</sup>

Some merchants retained a residual interest in property in their place of birth, which interestingly they had not sold on migrating to one of the three towns.<sup>300</sup> Robert Savage still owned a house in his native Tynemouth at his death in 1398.<sup>301</sup> Two other York merchants left property in the north: Richard Bagot left the house in Yarm in which his father still lived in 1476, and Sir Richard York left property in his native Berwick in 1498.<sup>302</sup> Ralph Langton of Hull retained extensive property in Northumberland at his death in 1502 and at the opposite end of the country, John Thompson of Beverley left property in Dunstable in 1505.<sup>303</sup>

#### Rural.

The majority of mercantile rural holdings were piecemeal and could not be expected to provide a completely alternative form of income to

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297. Prob. Reg. IV f. 79; C.C.R. 1468-76, p. 414.

298. Prob. Reg. I f. 98; II f. 489.

299. Ibid. II f. 418; D 179.

300. Cf. London merchants, many of whom held small properties throughout England as a result of inheritance. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 128.

301. Prob. Reg. III f. 17.

302. Dec. & Cap. I f. 332; PRO Prob. 11/11 f. 36.

303. Prob. Reg. VI ff. 22v., 146.

trade. Robert Collinson of York, for example, held properties in 20 different rural localities at his death in 1458, in addition to property in Knaresborough and Ripon. Richard Thornton, who died in 1473, left 1 tenement in Gate Helmesley, 1 messuage in Donnington, property in Over Helmesley, and 1 messuage and 4 acres in Water Fulford.<sup>304</sup> Most merchants simply listed their property generally by location unless a manor was involved, so that although the list of localities might in itself have been extensive, the acreage held may not have been. There is evidence that the numbers of mercantile rural estates were increasing toward the end of the 15th century, and that such estates were increasing in size, that is in the numbers of localities involved. For example, Thomas Neleson left property in 1484 in Hull, Cottingham, Doncaster, Halifax, Bolton-on-Dearne, Skelton, Brantingham, Poppleton, Riccall, Shirburn, Fenton, East and West Lutton, and elsewhere on the Wolds.<sup>305</sup>

The ownership of a manor(s) suggests greater viability as a manageable estate than do scattered holdings.<sup>306</sup> This seems to have been more common in the 14th than in the 15th century. Henry Scoreby, for example, sold Estantfield manor in 1338, and John Romondby sold Romondby manor in 1368,<sup>307</sup> and were both probably trying to raise capital during the 14th-century economic expansion. John de Acastre, on the other hand, who had extremely large urban holdings, bought the manor of Asthorpe, Lincs., from another York merchant, William Sallay, in 1372.

304. Ibid., II ff. 378-80; V f. 215.

305. Ibid., V f. 213.

306. Cf. 14th century London where merchants paid large lump sums for manors, especially those located within easy reach of the city. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 120.

307. Yorks. Fines, 1327-47, p. 127; Yorks. Deeds, I, p.146.

In the late 14th century John Barden and John Gisburn were leasing the manors of Hedelay and Raskelf (N.R.), respectively.<sup>308</sup> Thomas Gra, who died in 1405, in possession of the manor of Frampton, Richmond, was a member of one of the few established York families to survive in the city from the late 13th century. His family had once owned Skelton manor just outside York and his rural property was inherited.

Fewer York merchants had interests in manors in the 15th century. Brian Conyers was given Pinchingthorp manor by his brother, John, an established country gentleman in 1473,<sup>309</sup> the year Brian became a freeman of the city. Margaret, daughter of John Bolton, merchant of York, inherited 3 manors from her first husband Roger Salvayn in 1420, but her inheritance did not benefit her parental family but that of her second husband, Henry Gascoigne.<sup>310</sup> At the end of the 15th century two merchants only had manorial interests. Sir Richard York bought Sledmere manor in 1489 and by his death in 1498 he had acquired the rectory of Ryle, Lincs.<sup>311</sup> At the turn of the century Alan Stavely was leasing Acomb manor from the Minster.<sup>312</sup>

Even though a merchant such as John Gyllyot jnr<sup>313</sup> made massive purchases of rural property in the early 16th century, merchants were not regularly owning manors until the third decade of the century.<sup>314</sup>

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308. C.P.R. 1381-5, pp. 56, 518; V.C.H. York, p. 112.

309. C.C.R. 1405-9 p. 50; Yorks. Deeds, IX, p. 94; X, p. 127.

310. Prob. Reg. II ff. 212-3; V f. 398-9.

311. Yorks. Deeds, VII, p. 3; PRO Prob. 11/11 f. 36.

312. Test. Ebor. IV, p. 295.

313. Prob. Reg. V, f. 213; C142/25/113. I am grateful to David Palliser for the latter reference.

314. D. Palliser, Tudor York, p. 204. Cf. the successful 16th century Exeter merchants who could expect to hold the lordship of one or two manors and to possess farms in a half dozen parishes. W.G. Hoskins, Exeter Merchants, op. cit., p. 176.

The majority of rural properties held by York merchants were in the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire and in North Lincolnshire, within a 50 mile radius of York.

Beverley retained its common grazing and open fields and most of the Beverley merchants' rural holdings were selions and crofts in the town fields. Thus Geoffrey Humbercolt and his wife acquired 20 acres of land and 5 acres of meadow in Beverley in 1330, and Edmund Portington held a close and several ridges in 1463.<sup>315</sup> The keepers never had any difficulty in leasing out the town's grazing, often to themselves, and it would appear that Beverley merchants were still active in agriculture, albeit in a small way.<sup>316</sup> One indication of the continuing importance of their livestock, was William Holme's fight against Wartne/Priory for Beverley's rights of common in Saintgilescroft. He won in 1412.<sup>317</sup> Rural holdings outside the town were small but not as scattered as those of York and Hull, because they were generally fewer in number. John Armstrong, for example, left his 4½ acres, 3 closes, and 2 messuages in 2 villages within 5 miles of Beverley. Nicholas Ryse's rural estate consisted of only 2 separate holdings, 2 bovates in Wallington, and the remainder of Speeton Manor.<sup>318</sup> The majority of these sorts of holdings were in East Riding villages close to the town or a little further away, for example in Bainton, Sigglesthorpe, or Bilton.

The proportion of Hull merchants with rural estates remained fairly constant throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, with no increase in the numbers of rural estates after 1450 as in York. The holdings were as

315. Yorks. Fines, 1327-47, p. 29; Prob. Reg. II f. 595.

316. Bev. Accts. passim.

317. Yorks. Deeds, VII, pp. 22-3.

318. Prob. Reg. VI f. 117; Yorks Deeds, VII, p. 79; IX, p. 163.

scattered and piecemeal as were those of the York merchants. Richard Ferriby, died 1381, left property in Swanland, Whythstead, Rockcliff, Hovden, Paull Fleet and Reedness. The parcels of land were usually small, and Gilbert de Bedford's two holdings of 13 a. and 27 a. were slightly bigger than average.<sup>319</sup> One of the largest single holdings was Walter Dimelton's 59½ a. which he held of Durham Priory in Gateshead.<sup>320</sup> Several 14th-century merchants acquired manors; Walter Box bought Ackton manor (W.R.), in 1366, and in 1374 Walter Frost bought one half of Little Smeaton manor (W.R.), and property in 7 other parishes.<sup>321</sup> John Dimelton acquired a share in the lease of Myton Manor, including 1,700 sheep and lambs in 1382. No 15th century merchants held manors although John Spicer, died 1493, and Ralph Langton, died 1502, did have quite extensive rural estates.<sup>322</sup>

Much of the rural investments of the Hull merchants was within a radius of 10 miles around Hull, and places like Paull, Hedon, Bilton and Anlagby occurred frequently in property transactions. Although some merchants had property outside the East Riding, it was concentrated within the Humber region in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. The West Riding manors of Walter Box and Walter Frost, and Ralph Langton's property in Northumberland, were exceptional. Hull merchants' property interests were smaller than those of their York contemporaries. Rural investment was heaviest in the 14th century.

In addition to their investment in property in England, several merchants owned houses and sometimes commercial premises overseas. Most

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319. Test. Ebor. I, p. 119; BRE 1 p. 87.

320. W. Greenwell ed., Bishop Hatfield's Survey, Surtees Society, xxxii (1857), p. 88.

321. Yorks. Fines, 1347-77, pp. 119, 165. 183.

322. D 150; Prob. Reg. V ff. 450-451v.; VI f. 22v.



were in Calais and in the Low Countries. Robert and Thomas Holme of York, for example, jointly owned a property in Calais in the 1390s; John Kelk of Beverley bequeathed rents there to his son in 1407;<sup>323</sup> Thomas Brompton of Beverley owned a wool-house in Calais in the 1430s. Some overseas property was a legacy of migration, just as some rural English property was. Thus Peter Upstall of York left property in Harsyll and Brabant in 1430.<sup>324</sup>

It is only occasionally possible to state with certainty that estates were passed on intact. The York Thomas del Gares, father and son, provide an interesting example. Thomas snr, granted property in Coneystreet, Little Shambles, Nether and Over Ousegate, to his son in 1427, in return for a life pension of 20 marks. When Thomas jnr died in 1445, he left property in Coneystreet, Shambles, and Nether Ousegate, but had added more in Goodramgate, Patrick Pool, and an empty plot in Calais.<sup>325</sup> Other examples of the transmission of estates were those of John and William Kelk of Beverley. In 1407 John left a tenement in Newbiggin, one in Lairgate, and 2 others in Beverley in addition to 'rents in Calais'. When his son William died the following year he referred to the Newbiggin and Calais property, which was presumably his share of his father's estate.<sup>326</sup> Later in the century, Ralph Langton left one of the few Hull estates containing significant rural properties. He came originally from Northumberland, and in 1501 left a house in York, properties in Hull, land in Orde, Unthank, Northamshire (Northamshire) and Elandshire (Hallamshire), and fishing rights in the

323. Prob. Reg. III ff. 255v., 263; Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 15.

324. Prob. Reg. III f. 475; II f. 633v.

325. Ibid., II ff. 210v.-11v.; Dec. & Cap. II f. 47.

326. Prob. Reg. III f. 263; Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 15.

river Tweed. When his son John died in 1542, the estate was more or less intact as he had inherited it and he left property in Hull, land in Northhamshire, Hallamshire, Northumberland, and the fishing rights in the Tweed.<sup>327</sup>

In trying to set an overall balance of an individual's enterprises, assets are not always visible to the researcher, and sometimes were maybe not to the merchant himself. For example, the benefits of being a residuary legatee, may not have come to fruition for several generations or so. Thomas del Gare snr, of York, for instance, inherited 6 selions of land in Newland in 1426, from 3 generations back.<sup>328</sup> However, given the energy with which claims of disinheritance were pursued, medieval people were well-informed about possible expectations, however distant the relationships involved.

So far, most of the evidence examined is illustrative of a static situation, and yet it is clear that an individual could receive a life interest in a property, inherit outright, buy and sell, lease on a short, medium or long-term, several times during his lifetime and leave no sign of the frequency or scale of such transactions in his will.

The survival of an excellent collection of deeds in Hull<sup>329</sup> demonstrates just how active a property market<sup>330</sup> there was there, especially during the late 14th and the 15th centuries. Again, it is impossible to set a balanced account for any individual, but some such

327. Prob. Reg. VI f. 197; X f. 600.

328. Yorks. Deeds, IX, p. 129. See also Yorks. Fines, 1377-47, p. 129; C1/14/25, 15/86.

329. L.M. Stanewell, Calendar of the Ancient Deeds, Letters, Miscellaneous Old Documents Etc., in the Archives of the Corporation (Hull, 1951); R. Horrox, The Changing Plan of Hull 1290-1650 (Hull, 1978).

330. In London, property transactions generated enough business for brokerage to be profitable. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 128.

as Adam Tutbury, were engaged in a large number of property deals during their lifetimes in their own right as well as acting as trustees for friends. In Tutbury's case, his will of 1397 revealed nothing of the scale of his activities in property; it referred merely to 'property in Hull', and a messuage and garden which he left to the Corpus Christi Guild. As it happened, he had granted 'all his property in Hull' to a group of trustees, including his son and heir Lawrence.<sup>331</sup> Almost any sort of interest in real estate was valuable, however piecemeal, small and insignificant an individual property or rent might seem. It is likely that many investments were for a short-term only,<sup>332</sup> and in London there were examples of the same property being bought and sold repeatedly within the merchant class.<sup>333</sup>

From a business point of view, property could offer an income but what level of income could be generated? Where it has been possible to calculate outside London,<sup>334</sup> income from urban rents was rarely high<sup>335</sup> although Thomas Strykhill of York disposed of rents worth £25 in 1394. However, it is not clear if this was from his own property or that these were rents he had been assigned. Thomas del Gare, also of York, left 5 specified tenements in York plus 'lands and rents in Calais' in 1438.

331. Prob. Reg. III ff. 39v.-40; D 176 and see Hull biographies.

332. V.C.H. York, pp. 112-3.

333. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 128.

334. Some individual merchant's income from rent was considerable; as high as £80-£150 and a return of 6%-8% might have been expected in the 14th century, 5% from rural property in the 15th century. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 119-30, 122.

335. R.H. Hilton, Rent and Capital Formation in Feudal Society, in Second International Conference of Economic History (1962), p. 66; idem., Some Problems of Urban Real Property in the Middle Ages, in C.H. Feinstein, ed., Socialism, Capitalism, and Economic Growth, Essays Presented to Maurice Dobb (1967), p. 331; J. Langton, Late Medieval Gloucester: some data from a rental of 1455, Trans. Inst. British Geographers, n.s. 2, no. 2 (1977), p. 271.

From all or some of these, he anticipated an annual income of at least £10.<sup>336</sup> When John de Ake of Beverley set out to establish a maison dieu for 24 poor men in 1398, he endowed it with 2 messuages, 2 plots and a tenement in the centre of Beverley.<sup>337</sup> A single property might sustain a high rent. In 1444, Thomas Brompton of Beverley expected the rent from a single messuage in Hull to be a significant contribution to the education of his son Thomas, and in 1458, William Rolleston also of Beverley, was bequeathed an annual pension of £2 from one property in Eastgate.<sup>338</sup> Ideally, the rate of return of property investment should be known, but no such information has been obtained for Yorkshire merchants. Sylvia Thrupp, working from fuller records cites Ralph Honilane, a London vintner as typical of 14th-century merchants. He held 2 messuages worth £18 from which was diverted an annual rent of £5 to another citizen; 20s. to St. Giles hospital; 16% was allowed for repairs and he derived a clear £10. Other property he held, 2 cellars and 2 shops, were depreciating at a rate of 6%: a possibly artificially high rate set as a defence against creditors. Taking such aspects as depreciation as well as fluctuating property prices into account, Sylvia Thrupp estimated that when conditions were 'favourable', a return of between 6%-8% might be expected, falling to 5% in the 15th century when rural land values began to rise. Thomas Bataill for example, left 100 marks in 1445 to purchase a rent charge of 4 marks per annum.

The 1436 Lay Subsidy was based on the assessed income from real estate in York city and county. Ranked against other property owners in York, as they were in the 1436 lay subsidy, the 25 merchants were the

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336. Prob. Reg. I f. 70; II ff. 310v.-11v.

337. Yorks. Deeds, VII, pp. 26-32.

338. Prob. Reg. II ff. 86-90v.; 370-70v.

second largest group assessed (23%), after the 42 chaplains (39%). Merchants comprised 18% of those with incomes from land assessed at £5 per annum; 18% of those assessed at £6-£10; 47% of those assessed at £11-£20; and 33% of those assessed at £21+. John Bolton was quite exceptional; being assessed at £62. Unfortunately his will has not survived, so we cannot describe the scale, type, or distribution of his holdings.<sup>339</sup> By any standards though, his income from property was considerable.

Other stray references suggest that he was not an isolated example. By the late 15th century William Neleson and John Gilyot were said to be worth over £40 a year from their property, and Richard York's manor of Sledmore was said to be worth £30 a year.<sup>340</sup>

By London standards of course, the average Yorkshire merchant was not wealthy in terms of cash or landed income. The 1436 Lay Subsidy reveals that 145 London merchants were assessed at over £10, that is 73% of all citizens assessed at that level. Of those 84 (84%) were assessed at that level. Of those 84 (84%) were assessed at over £20 and 5 aldermen at over £100.<sup>341</sup>

On the basis of testamentary evidence some general trends may be tentatively suggested. There is little evidence of many merchants accumulating sufficient rural land or rents to enable their 'gentrification'. The early-14th century success of the Langton family was not often emulated later in that or the following century. The

339. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 119, 122-3; E179/217/42.

340. V.C.H. York, p. 113; Cal. Inq. Post Mortem HVII, II, pp. 95-6.

341. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 126; E179/238/90. M. Albertson, London Merchants and Their Landed Property During the Reigns of the Yorkists. Unpublished Ph.D. Bryn Mawr, (1932) pp. 63-4.

majority of investments in land, urban and rural was short-term.<sup>342</sup>

Although there was a noticeable increase in the numbers of York merchants owning manors, as well as scattered rural estates after the middle of the 15th century, this was not a pattern found amongst Beverley or Hull merchants. Leasing selions in their town fields offered one easy alternative, in addition to a scatter of small properties in their immediate hinterland.

Large urban estates at death were unusual amongst Beverley and Hull merchants, although others, such as John Armstrong in Beverley, and the de la Poles in Hull did amass considerable holdings. For the rest it may have been that short-term investment or speculation during their lifetimes was simply not reflected in testamentary records. There is enough evidence in York, however, to suggest that investment in urban property was still seen as worthwhile in the 15th century, in spite of falling rents, and that some merchants certainly diverted resources into houses, tenements and rents in the city. It may have been as an alternative to contracting overseas trade, though some individuals traded at the highest rate, accumulated large cash estates, and left sizeable interests in real estate. Examples of such men can be found in both the 14th and 15th centuries: Robert Preston of Hull, active in the early 14th century; John Kelk of Beverley, Robert and Thomas Holme of York in the late 14th century; John Aldestanemore of York, John Tutbury of Hull in the early 15th century; and Thomas Neleson, the John Gylyots of York, John Whitfield of Hull in the late-15th century. Others such as Robert del Crosse of Hull, or William Bedale and William Ormeshead of York, left large cash and real property estates, but did not appear as particularly active in overseas trade.

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342. V.C.H. York, pp. 112-3.

Many merchants may have taken the optimistic point of view that depressed property prices would always rise, eventually, and indeed maybe some merchants took advantage of falling rents to increase their investment.

Depressed rent levels throughout the region may have had the same effect: namely an increased urban investment in rural real estate. The picture may have been distorted by the absence of testamentary evidence for the 1410s<sup>343</sup> but the rush of wills consequent upon the epidemic years of the 1430s, should have counter-acted that. Indeed a number of middling and larger estates were left then, including those of John Aldestanemore, William Bowes snr, Robert Holme, William Ormeshead, and Richard Russell, so the increase after 1450 may well have been actual and not a distortion due to erratic evidence.

Another possible explanation is that merchants acquired rural property by accepting leases or rents as security against a deferred payment. Thus sometime between 1356 and 1367 Thomas Holme of Beverley and his son Richard, contracted to buy 120 sacks from Meaux Abbey for £240, but Meaux could only supply 65 sacks. So the Holmes were granted Sutton Grange for 40 years in lieu, but after 4 years of difficulties they handed it back. Some of the difficulties were no doubt due to labour shortages following the Black Death. The Holmes still required satisfaction, and instead of simply giving back the cash difference, Meaux agreed to pay Richard an annuity of 20 marks until the death of his son Richard, or the term of 36 years should Richard die before that. As it happened, Richard jnr drowned in the Humber after 22 years. His father had predeceased him and the 20 marks was then being paid, according to Richard snr's arrangements, to his other son John, Richard jnr's wife,

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343. Index of Wills: the York Registry 1389-1514, Y.A.S. Rec. Ser. vi (1889), Appendix II, pp. 199-202.

and only 5 marks to Richard jnr. John naturally claimed the entire 20 marks following his brother's drowning, and the abbey agreed on a compromise payment of 17  $\frac{1}{2}$  marks for the remaining 14 years. By then the abbey must have been regretting not paying back the balance of £110, because it calculated that the Holmes' family eventually received £645 more than its initial outlay of £240! Not all merchants were as astute but the incident serves to demonstrate how profit could be gained: that it was during a period of depressed rents, and wool prices is all the more remarkable.<sup>344</sup>

Another example from the early 14th century demonstrates how merchants regarded real estate in all its forms, as simply another element in a complex arrangement of cash, credit, and investment. In 1323 Thomas Durant, a York merchant, leased a rent of 23s. 3d. in Marketshire (Pavement) from John Easingwold. John was bound, under Acton Burnel, to pay Thomas 3 sacks of good wool worth £20 within 4 years or to allow Thomas the rent for 15 years. In addition, if the present tenant Walter Cottingwith died, Thomas was to have first option on any future disposal of the property. On the face of it, this was not an immediately profitable deal, but on the same day that he entered the lease, Thomas let the property to a fourth party for 27s. It would appear that Thomas was trying to build up his holding for in 1324 he acquired another release from Cottingwith, of a life interest in a second Pavement property.<sup>345</sup>

Merchants sometimes acquired property by accepting it as security against a cash loan. For instance a York draper Thomas de Kilburn did just that in 1382 when he accepted land in Little Ribstan from John Blom

344. E.A. Bond, ed., Chronica Monasterii de Melsa, III, Rolls Ser. (1868), pp. 144-5. See above p. 234.

345. Yorks Deeds, VIII, pp. 175-6.



against Blome's payment of 10 marks within 10 years. The defaulting debtor eventually forfeited the land. A better documented example was that of a London mercer William Causton, who acquired considerable rural property in the 14th century, as a consequence of lending money to locals on the security of their land.<sup>346</sup>

The attachment of rents until a debt was settled was a common outcome of legal actions, and was also employed in wills to ensure debts were paid post mortem.<sup>347</sup> It is clear that this was anticipated by Thomas Gare of York whose will proved in 1445 specified which properties' rents were to be used. The more famous Richard Cely enfeoffed land to the use of his in-laws until his debts to them were satisfied, and his widow Anne was instructed to sell land in Oxfordshire, and Northamptonshire to meet debts. Some York merchants, such as John Barden in 1396 similarly anticipated that property might have to be sold to pay off debts and specified which but on what basis is not revealed.<sup>348</sup> Others effected such settlements during their lifetime. Henry Belton paid off his debts to a fellow York merchant, by transferring a messuage in Coupmanthorpe to him in 1341.<sup>349</sup>

Juggling land and money could create a complex series of negotiations. A 14th-century Beverley merchant, William Lyndelowe, provides an excellent example. He clearly had existing interests in the village of Escrick, when he bought the manor in June 1341 for £36 13s. 8d.

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346. Ibid., X, pp. 139-40; Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 121: see also Gylyot P.R.O. C142/25/113.

347. Yorkshire Fines 1347-77, p. 64; Yorkshire Deeds, IX, p. 67; Hull City R.O. D126; Cf. Cal. Plea & Mem. Rolls City of London 1413-37, p. 142; Cal. London Letter Books, C, pp. 245-8.

348. Prob. Reg. I ff. 95v., 100-100v. (Barden); II ff. 210v.-211v.; Hanham, Celys, pp. 412, 414.

349. Yorks. Deeds, VI, p. 175. Similarly John Gudale of York acquired 8 tenements in Coliergate from Henry Warwick of Beverley. Prob. Reg. II f. 442.

Three years later, in May 1344, he assigned an annual rent of £40 derived from all his lands in Escrick to a John Bentlay. Presumably because he became indebted to Bentlay, Lyndelowe granted all his Escrick property to Bentlay the following year but the grant was to be void if certain conditions were fulfilled. Lyndelowe was to pay Bentlay's debt to Nicholas Trank of Northampton: £40 plus an indemnity of £80, as agreed in a Statute Merchant bond registered in London. He also had to pay an unspecified indemnity to Thomas de Ketrynham and John Randworth. By January 1347 a John de Neuton had acquired the estate and Bentlay and Lyndelowe were releasing all their rights to him!<sup>350</sup> Such a tale raises more questions than can be answered: had Lyndelowe over-reached himself in buying the manor? Had he bought it for cash or on credit? Had Bentlay been over-ambitious in his turn? To be as indebted as he suggests he had large scale ventures underway. It was not the final balance of either party's profits and losses which was important to their business, but the short-term advantages which investing in land brought them.

While the buying and selling of land and particularly of rents, should be seen as Professor Postan described it, as 'the mobilisation and de-mobilisation of capital',<sup>351</sup> there were other considerations which should not be forgotten. For many medieval people purchasing rent charges, was a way of securing an annuity, and merchant wills confirm that this was an important consideration. How else might an individual ensure an income for his dependents after his death? The clearest example of how a person regarded his real estate in terms of both outright ownership and long-term income, are the dispositions made by Thomas Gare. He apparently hoped to arrange his affairs so that his

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350. Yorks Deeds, IX, pp. 65-7.

351. M.M. Postan, Credit in Medieval Trade, Ec.H.R. 1st ser.; (1927-8), pp. 248-9.

widow Elizabeth would have a life interest in his property in York, plus £20 from his Calais property if she remained unmarried. Otherwise she has to have  $\frac{1}{3}$  of 'these lands'. After her death the property was to descend through the male line. At the same time, he wanted to ensure that his two daughters should have 100 marks each for their dowries, and so £10 a year was to be earmarked from the rents and farms on his property in York, the county, and Calais, and was to be in the custody of his widow presumably during the 12 years or so it would take for the dowries to accumulate. He was, in effect, making his property work like a slow release annuity scheme.

Another way of releasing capital was used by Richard Hebson of Beverley in 1399, who left his land to his fellow merchant William Rolleston on condition that he paid Hebson's widow and son £3.<sup>352</sup>

The most well documented area of mercantile exploitation of real estate, is its use as security against cash loans or credit. It was common practice to raise capital against the security of property: Londoners were doing it in the 1280s, and it was a way to utilise capital, which was otherwise trapped. Moreover, it did not seem to matter that the property involved was a scatter of small holdings, and as we have seen with Thomas Durant, a variety of manipulations of different levels of interest were possible. According to Sylvia Thrupp, 'a great many' 14th-century London merchants were raising loans against 'only small pieces of property, a few scattered holdings'.<sup>353</sup> Although the lack of comparable records for Yorkshire is frustrating, there is

352. Prob. Reg. II ff. 210v.-211v. (Gare); III f. 24. See also Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 119.

353. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 122, 126; G. Unwin, London Tradesmen and their Creditors, in idem, ed., Finance and Trade Under Edward III (1918), p. 32.

plenty of indirect evidence that land and/or rents were important elements in merchants' financial operations. Just the number of small properties disposed of in wills as well as the high levels of speculative dealing inter vivos, confirms that importance.<sup>354</sup>

Occasional references allow us to be more precise, and the patchy evidence relating to agreements made under Statute Merchant are particularly revealing. Like other bonds, they could be used in property deals to convert a fixed asset into working capital.<sup>355</sup> Statutory bonds gave individuals the firm option of raising a mortgage on their property. Simon Grimsby of Hull, for instance, owned land in Hull worth 40 marks a year and he borrowed 40 marks in cash from John Iwardy against the land, under the Statute Staple. But Grimsby over-reached himself, and enfeoffed a third party with the land, who subsequently refused to re-enfeof him, and Grimsby, under pressure to settle the debt to Iwardby, petitioned the Lord Chancellor for re-possession. A charge on a property was no impediment to its sale. In 1358 for example, Gilbert Maunby sold a property in Thirsk, with a charge of a debt for £80 registered under Statute Merchant still on it.<sup>356</sup>

It is difficult to create any sort of final account for individual merchants; to measure the value of each area of interest and how one area responded to another. Impressions of trade and to some extent, of investment in real estate, derive from records of dynamic and perhaps

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354. See Appendix 4.

355. Postan, *Credit in Medieval Trade*, pp. 248-9.

356. P.R.O. C1/44/89; *Yorkshire Fines, 1347-77*, pp. 64, 72. Statute Merchant bonds were also used in property deals to ensure that seisin of a property was achieved; the bond becoming enforceable if the contract was not fulfilled, like the penalty clause in a modern conveyance. Thus when Hugh Swynflete conveyed a property in Hull to William Ripplingham, they entered a Statute Merchant bond, which was to lapse once 'delivery of possession of the property' had been completed. Hull C.R.O. D301 and also D107, M.B.-II, p. 45.

unfinished enterprises, whereas the snap-shot of death-bed intentions emerges from static records. All are partial and incomplete. The testamentary evidence in particular, can only be properly evaluated against the age of the testator which is only known for about 330 merchants. Most of those merchants who did bequeath large cash estates, had high trade profiles, and left sizeable investments in property were mature men over 50. Several were over 70 when they died: Robert and Thomas Holme and Thomas Neleson of York, John Tutbury of Hull. Not all old men died wealthy. A merchant could have been successful in mid-life, and relatively impoverished in old age when perhaps the depredations of family settlements, and his own unproductive demands on his estate, left very little to dispose of when he finally died. Some like William Bedale and William Ormeshead of York and Robert del Crosse of Hull left extensive real estate and a lot of cash and plate but were apparently not active overseas traders. Conversely others such as Thomas Beverley, Nicholas Blackburn snr, John Carre and William Vescy of York, John Swan of Hull, had been highly successful in international trade and left large cash estates, but little, if any, traceable land.<sup>357</sup>

In this respect they were similar to many London merchants such as Simon Eyre, who left over £4,700 at his death, most of it invested in his business, but property which yielded only £10 per year and lived in a rented house. Such disproportionate investment was not at all uncommon amongst London merchants, even though there was such an active land market that it supported property brokers, and indeed led to some properties being resold repeatedly amongst merchants, purely as a form of speculative investment.)<sup>358</sup>

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357. See Appendix 4. Cf. 16th-century Exeter where W.G. Hoskins estimated real estate comprised only a small proportion of Exeter merchants' estates, *Elizabethan Merchants*, op. cit., p. 172.

358. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 127-8.

General assumptions about the positive correlation between overseas trade and capital accumulation as cash or real estate are difficult to establish. The fate of the two enterprises for which fairly complete evidence does survive, Gilbert Maghfeld's and the Cely's, should perhaps be taken as the norm.<sup>359</sup> Merchants invested in most projects from which they could hope to make a profit, but even the most financially agile and astute came to grief. As Alison Hanham has observed "a high proportion of the people amongst the Cely's business and family connections died in debt and poverty".<sup>360</sup> When an individual was closely linked with his business, as was the case with overseas trade,<sup>361</sup> the entire operation was vulnerable and was especially exposed by his death. Competitors could take advantage of many deaths and long-distance traders had long-distance competitors. The fortunes of leading merchants were ephemeral and even for those who retained some of the bounty of their life's work, living too long as it were, prejudiced their chances of directly transmitting their fortunes and business to another generation. The extremely poor rate of survival of male-heirs further reduced the opportunities for mercantile dynasties to emerge.

For instance, Thomas Holme of York died in 1406 aged 70 and left £60 plus extensive investments in property in Calais, Newark, Pontefract and elsewhere. He had no surviving children of his own, and made bequests to his nephews, Robert, son of the millionaire Robert Holme, and Thomas, son of the not very successful John Holme. The bulk of his

359. M.K. James, *A London Merchant in the Fourteenth Century, Ec.H.R.*, 2nd ser. viii (1955-6), pp. 364-76. Hanham, *Celys*, p. 405 et. seq.

360. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

361. *Ibid.*, 203. Sales credit had become such a common feature of European trade that newcomers needed letters of introduction to establish their credit.

considerable estate though was to be sold after his widow's death to provide for the hospital founded by his brother Robert. Another outstandingly large estate, dispersed because there was no single male heir, was that of John Aldestanemore. He died in 1435 aged 44, leaving £360 and an extensive estate. His daughter Agnes and her son John Holbeck shared most of the real estate with his brother Thomas and his heirs. Over £300 went on personal bequests of very large sums to members of his extended family: £40 each to his brother, nephew and niece, to his daughter Agnes, sister Katherine, kinsman Henry, £66 to his grandson Thomas Holbeck, £20 to his mother so that she might live independently, and £35 to illegitimate children/distant kinsmen. In plague-ridden York, his brother Thomas died within months of John and left £46, £30 to his widow.

Some achievers did successfully transmit their life's profits directly to a second male generation. Thomas Gare of York, for instance, engaged heavily in overseas trade, but also invested extensively in real estate in the late 14th century. His son Thomas, dying in 1445 aged 58, had emulated his father's international business but probably owned more real estate. He left two sons who have been traced no further. Another example is Thomas Carre, a York draper, who died in 1444 aged 59, leaving £336 and his 31 year-old son John. John was already well-established, and possibly in partnership with his father. Thomas left him £20, and his grandchildren money: £50 to his namesake Thomas and £20 to each of his three grand-daughters. Such generous bequests removed major financial responsibilities from John and when he died in 1488, at the ripe old age of 75, he left an estate of £145 and property in York. None of his children appear to have survived him, or else were too well provided for to attract bequests from their father. There are other examples of the second-generation inheriting

large estates: Thomas Beverley, Nicholas Blackburn, John Bolton, John Gilyot, Thomas Neleson, John Northeby, Richard Thornton, Richard York, all of York, and John Brompton of Beverley.<sup>362</sup> These however, were probably the exception. Death with no male heir could terminate a business, but different complications could arise if a merchant left several sons and/or daughters. His estate would be even more decimated as the custom of legitim demanded a tripartite division of the moveable estate. A long-lived widow could exhaust assets before they were returned to the next generation at her death. Her re-marriage was therefore preferable for the merchant class. Intermarriage compensated to some extent, by helping to keep cash, land, expertise and reputation within the merchant class; as evidenced by the fate of John Aldestanemore's estate, much of which was absorbed into another merchant's business via his daughter's marriage. It was as a class rather than individual dynasties, that they survived.<sup>363</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Although the balancing of individual's enterprises eludes the historian, some account of the fortunes of the Yorkshire merchants as a group can be offered.

As we have seen, the peripheral ports declined relative to the growth of the centre, during the 15th century, as London's share in overseas trade expanded.<sup>364</sup> To a considerable extent, this was due to the interplay between the three elements we have been discussing: cash, credit, and land. These were the basis of locally generated finance and although there was a range of credit options actively pursued by

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362. See Appendix 4 for all the examples cited.

363. See below pp. 343-8.

364. See above pp. 117-8.



provincial merchants they were local, small-scale, and too exposed to personal vagaries to supply adequate resources to compete with Londoners during much of the 15th century. The 'bullion famine' as such need not have been insurmountable within the domestic economy. The means of raising cash loans and credit, dependent as they were on personal and not the institutional resources of banking or finance houses, meant that provincial credit was especially vulnerable and it was the contraction in those resources which created credit-worthiness which was critical. That contraction was most likely a series of staggered short- and medium-term events in the 15th century. The first was the reduced involvement in international trade by Yorkshire merchants in the early 15th-century.<sup>365</sup> The flow of trade was interrupted, jeopardising overseas credit arrangements. Most particularly, the decline in wool exports through Hull, and the Yorkshire merchants' diminishing share of a nationally shrinking trade, closed off an important financial resource to all but a few.

One of these was the Calais Staple which played a central role as a foreign currency exchange and credit agency for wool merchants. According to Professor Postan, 'most had something in the nature of a current account with the [Calais] mint'. Warrants of payment and bills of mint were issued to merchants, either as part of the process of repaying loans to the Crown, or to allow merchants to draw credit abroad against their compulsorily deposited bullion and coin in the Staple. These Staple documents circulated between merchants in Calais and in other European centres like 'modern negotiable paper'.<sup>366</sup> As exports of

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365. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, pp. 27-30; above pp. 151-209.

366. M.M. Postan, *Private Financial Instruments in Medieval England*, reprinted in *idem, Medieval Trade and Finance* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 49-51.

wool through Hull plummeted from 4,250 sacks per year in the decade 1419-29, to 1,609 sacks per year in the following decade, so the trade to fuel the Calais Staple shrank and opportunities to employ Staple credit were no longer available as they previously had been.<sup>367</sup>

When the mint closed in 1442, merchants lending to the Crown via the Staple, received Staple 'debentures' or 'obligations of Staple', which changed hands like any other asset. There could be problems associated with these debentures, but they could routinely be used to off-set customs payments.<sup>368</sup>

Local alternatives such as rents and mortgages were affected by the demographic consequences of successive visitations of plague and famine-related epidemics in the region. They were mortality crises in the diocese of York in 1391, 1429, 1436, 1438, and 1458-9.<sup>369</sup> Rural and urban rents and land values were falling, most sharply by the 1420s and 1430s.<sup>370</sup> The harvest failure in the region in 1438-9 together with the erosion of epidemics, undermined demographic recovery during the first part of the fifteenth century. The 1438-40 crisis had a massive effect on the Northern economy, and in parts of Durham and North Yorkshire, rents fell still further.<sup>371</sup>

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367. A. Hanham, *Foreign Exchange and the English Wool Merchant in the Late 15th Century*, B.I.H.R., xliv (1973), pp. 160-75. O. Coleman and E.M. Carus-Wilson, England's Export Trade, 1275-1547 (1963), pp. 57-60.

368. Hanham, Celys, pp. 224-5, 231, 235.

369. P.J.P. Goldberg, *Mortality and Economic Change in the Diocese of York, 1390-1514*, Northern History, XXII (1988), pp. 41-2.

370. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline of York*, pp. 28-30; J.M.W. Bean, The Estates of the Percy Family 1416-1537 (1958), pp. 17, 36, 37, 41, C. Dyer, Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society. The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1546 (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 167-71, 374. A.J. Pollard, *The North-Eastern Economy and the Agrarian Crisis of 1438-40*, Northern History, XXV (1989)

371. Goldberg, *Mortality and Economic Change*, pp. 45, 49.

Thus rents as a source of cash income and as security for credit were contracting, and even the large institutions such as Fountains Abbey, were hit. In the 1450s it was settling debts with merchants by paying them in kind, either in lead or wool, as well as operating its customary system of delayed payments of 'old' debts.<sup>372</sup>

Another, more specific demographic element, was the high mortality amongst the merchant class of York at least, in the 1430s,<sup>373</sup> which dispersed any capital accumulated, interrupted businesses, froze the debt/credit flow of individual concerns and also brought to account a circle of financial partners.<sup>374</sup>

Credit was of course, only one of several inter-related elements which powered a region's economy, but given the historical importance of long-distance trade within Yorkshire, the financial failure of established local centres cannot be ignored. Finance was crucial and the region was rescued ultimately by the alternative credit and cash payments offered by Londoners, notably members of the Grocers' Company.<sup>375</sup>

372. Mem. Fountains, III, pp. 33, 76.

373. Merchant deaths in York from the probate registers:

1401-10	31	1461-70	10
1411-20	2	1471-80	17
1421-30	20	1481-90	28
1431-40	55	1491-1500	10
1441-50	26	1501-10	19
1451-60	23	1511-20	12

Although it is harder to measure merchant mortality rates for Hull, 5 of the wealthier merchants and their wives died in the 1430s.

374. J. Hoppit, The use and abuse of credit in eighteenth-century England, in N. McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite eds., Business Life and Public Policy. Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman (1986), p. 67.

375. S. Thrupp, The Grocers of London. A Study of Distributive Trade, in E. Power and M.M. Postan, Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century (1933), pp. 252-3, 270, 273-6.

The bullionist model might work at the macro level, but closer to the ground and away from calculations of mint yields, other explanations for local recessions must be sought. The international bullion famine should be seen within the regional context, as only one of several major long-term negative factors, which might have been circumvented; other things being equal. Local and international credit systems might have carried Yorkshire merchants through the catastrophe of their exclusion from Baltic markets, but the accumulated impact of demographic crises on provincial credit arrangements in the region, must have been as severe a setback. Even London merchants began to experience similar credit problems in the late 15th century. The Celys had to raise loans in the city as the falling rate of Flemish money against sterling in the mid-1480s made it harder for them to 'make over' sums to English merchants in the Low Countries. By then, the accelerating volume of trade going through London and the deeper pool of traders, carried the capital over that temporary crisis.<sup>376</sup>

However successful an individual merchant might have been, there can be no doubt that, as a group, the nature of their involvement in internal and overseas trade marked them out from their fellow townsmen. As key figures in urban commerce, they made a positive contribution to their own town's and to the region's economy. Material success could breed other ambitions and it was no coincidence that the push for access to political power in York in particular, came during the late-14th century peak of prosperity. The nature of government and its concerns will be dealt with in the next chapter.

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376. Hanham, Celys, p. 400; M.E. Bratchel, Italian Merchant Organisation and Business Relationships in Early Tudor London, Jnl. European Econ. Hist. 7 no. 1 (1978), pp. 26-7.

## CHAPTER 5 - MERCHANTS AND POLITICAL POWER

In 1982, Susan Reynolds reminded historians, that government by oligarchy was not automatically regarded as inimicable nor corrupt by contemporaries, and indeed that government was based on a consensus of shared ideals.<sup>1</sup> Inequalities of wealth were accepted, as was the notion that the rich would rule. Three principles underpinned the consensus: government was to be by good men, according to custom, and with the assent of the people. The system was accepted but if it should fail, then the corruption of those in office was responsible. The uneasy co-existence of these principles explains much of the tension in late medieval towns, and the sporadic outbursts of popular unrest in some. What is less clear is the extent to which town governments were becoming more or less democratic, that is whether or not the creation of common councils to replace burgess assemblies and tinkering with election procedures, resulted in more open or closed oligarchies.<sup>2</sup> Other questions might appropriately be raised. Were all oligarchies similar in structure? What factors determined their composition? If merchants were the dominant group, was their government acceptable to their fellow burgesses? Closer scrutiny of the events in York, Beverley and Hull, should provide some insights.

1. S. Reynolds, Medieval urban history and the history of political thought, Urban History Yearbook (1982), pp. 14-23; and An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns (1977), pp. 176-7. M. Kowaleski, The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century, Medieval Studies, 46 (1984), pp. 368-9, observed an acceptance of the Exeter oligarchs' natural right to rule.
2. E.F. Jacob, The Fifteenth Century (Oxford, 1961), p. 385; C.J. Hammer, Anatomy of an Oligarchy: the Oxford Town Council in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, Jnl. British Studies, xviii (1979), pp. 1-27; C. Platt, The English Medieval Town (1976), pp. 119-24, 190; P. Clark and P. Slack, English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700 (Oxford, 1976), pp. 128-9; S.H. Rigby, Urban 'Oligarchy' in late Medieval England, in J.A.F. Thompson, ed., Towns and Towns-people in Fifteenth-Century England (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 62-86.

The form of a town's charter did not necessarily affect the degree of open or closedness of its government, but it did influence the structure of government so that royal boroughs usually had a standard hierarchy of mayor, sheriffs or bailiffs, chamberlains and lesser officials. Seignorial boroughs were more varied, and might have variations such as 12 wardens or keepers; or the lord's steward or bailiff plus some burgesses.<sup>3</sup> Royal boroughs were not as open to direct manipulation by intermediate lords such as abbots, bishops and laymen but they were not beyond royal authority however large and powerful they might become. London and York both had their liberties suspended in the late 14th and early 15th centuries respectively, and in 1495, the York council was threatened with replacement by Henry VII if it could not govern the city.<sup>4</sup>

Structural oligarchies can readily be identified in many medieval boroughs and further qualifications can be added. Many oligarchies were plutocratic, some mercantile and the majority were probably self-perpetuating. The majority of English boroughs were governed by one of two systems: either an hierarchy of elected officials of which the most important were the mayor, or equivalent, sheriff/bailiff, and chamberlain/treasurer, plus one or more councils; or a council of twelve keepers/wardens who collectively fulfilled the functions of the elected officials plus outer councils.<sup>5</sup> In Hull and York, both royal boroughs,

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3. A. Ballard and J. Tait, British Borough Charters, 1216-1307 (1939), pp. xvii-cii; Reynolds, English Medieval Towns, pp. 115-6.

4. M. McKisack, The Fourteenth Century (Oxford, 1959), pp. 467-7; Y.C.R., II, pp. 115-6.

5. A.S. Green, Town Life in the Fifteenth Century (1894), vol. II, chapters 8-16; Platt, English Medieval Town, pp. 119-122; Reynolds, English Medieval Towns, p. 173. For single town studies see A. Rogers, Late Medieval Stamford: A Study of the Town Council, 1465-92, in A. Everitt, ed., Perspectives in English Urban History (1973); B. Wilkinson, The Medieval Council of Exeter, History of Exeter Research Group, Monograph no. 4 (Manchester, n.d.).

government was by hierarchy plus councils. Beverley was a seignorial borough, governed by 12 keepers or governors.<sup>6</sup>

#### YORK GOVERNMENT

The 1396 charter confirmed the basic structure of York's government; a standard hierarchy with a mayor, two sheriffs, three chamberlains, and a number of appointed salaried officials which included a recorder, sergeants of the mace, sergeants to the sheriff, a common clerk, and two bridgemasters amongst others.

The mayor was the central figure in the city's government,<sup>7</sup> and was so important that provisions were made for a deputy to serve should the mayor be away for any length of time.<sup>8</sup> His primary and comprehensive duty was to maintain the customs and liberties of the city and to keep it safe for the Crown. He received all royal letters and commands, jointly with the bailiffs and sheriffs on occasions, and after 1396 he acted as royal escheator in the city. The city's customs were protected by the vigilance of the civic officers and by the city's courts, in which the mayor played a key role.

He was elected, at least from 1343, to serve from 3 February and his actual election was on 15 January. From 1392 and possibly earlier, the retiring mayor nominated two or three aldermen, from whom the commonalty, that is all the burgesses, elected one to serve as mayor and he took his oath in the presence of the commonalty. In 1372 it was

6. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 29-37; V.C.H. York, pp. 70-2, 74, 77-8; A.F. Leach, Beverley Town Documents, Selden Society, XIV (1900), pp. xxi, xxiii. [Hereafter Bev. Town Docs.]

7. V.C.H. York, pp. 70-1.

8. E.g. In 1494 when the mayor, George Kirk, was summoned to London as a consequence of the riots in York, the council arranged for the aldermen to act as deputies for a week each until his return. Y.C.R. II, p. 115; House Book VII, f. 126v.

decided that no-one was to be elected who had held office within the last eight years, but the regulation was not kept, and after 1392 no-one was to be re-elected until all of the aldermen had served.<sup>9</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the degree of commonalty participation centred around the election of the mayor, and as a consequence of riots in 1464<sup>10</sup> Edward IV ordered that the procedure should be changed. The retiring mayor was to summon the searchers (all of the artificers according to 1489), of each craft on 14 January to order them to ensure that all their members should come to the Guildhall on election day, 15 January. The craftsmen were to nominate two aldermen (three in 1489), neither of whom had been mayor twice, nor had been mayor during the five (six in 1489) preceding years. The nominations were then to be handed to the mayor and the council, which included the recorder and common clerk. The mayor and council were to vote secretly and their votes were to be counted by the non-voting officials. The alderman with the highest number of votes would be declared on 3 February.<sup>11</sup>

Further unrest led to another change in procedure in 1473 whereby the crafts chose one alderman directly, who was to serve as mayor.<sup>12</sup> In 1489, perhaps as a consequence of a rising by the commons of the rural areas which evoked a response in York and led to the occupation of the city by the country rebels, the council petitioned the king to have the 1464 procedure restored. Henry VII agreed in December 1489<sup>13</sup> in time

9. C/Y, ff. 4, 9v.; M.B. I, p. 116; II, p. 255.

10. For all the riots noted hereafter see pp. 444-8.

11. C.P.R. 1461-7, p. 366.

12. Ibid. 1467-77, p. 416.

13. Dec. 12 5 HVII. Grant to the mayor and citizens of the city of York, on surrender of their letters patent dated 20 December, 13 Edward IV, and to put an end to dissensions, that the election of a mayor shall be made in form following:- The existing mayor shall on



for that year's election, and confirmed the procedure in 1492.<sup>14</sup> In 1494 the searchers of every craft 'and other citizens' met and wrote down 3 names. Further election riots occurred in 1504, moving the archbishop to advise the council to direct the guild searchers to ask the craftsmen what complaints they had and to present them in writing!<sup>15</sup> but there was no change in the election procedure until 1517, ironically as a consequence of jealousies amongst the aldermen. Thereafter an

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Note 13 contd. the eve of St. Maur, viz. 14 January, summon all the searchers of every mistery to warn all the artificers of their mistery to appear personally in the Gildhall on the next day for the election of a mayor. The artificers so met shall elect three aldermen, no one of whom has been twice mayor or once mayor within six years. These three names shall be presented in writing by the sheriffs and the common clerk of the city or any two of them, to the mayor, aldermen and council of the mayor's chamber, which done, the said sheriffs and clerk, or two of them, shall go to a fit spot to be appointed by the mayor, aldermen and council, and the mayor and every alderman and every other member of the council shall say secretly to the said sheriffs and clerk or two of them which of the then nominated aldermen he wishes to have as mayor, and the common clerk, in view of the sheriffs or one of them, shall make pricks or marks over the names as the electors give their votes; and he over whose name are the greatest number of pricks or marks shall be declared by the sheriffs and clerk or two of them to be mayor from the feast of St. Blaise following for one year. If the votes are equal the mayor shall select the one he wishes to have. If the mayor so elected die or leave or be dismissed from office, then the second of the three aldermen elected as aforesaid shall be elected mayor for the rest of the year, or the other one at the discretion of the twelve aldermen and council. The mayor so elected shall remain in authority until the feast of St. Blaise following, and on that day at about ten o'clock before mid-day in the Gildhall, he who is newly declared and elected to be mayor shall take the usual oath before all the citizens then present and that done, shall be mayor. Afterwards the said aldermen and citizens (conceives) there present shall swear to be aiding and supporting to him during his mayoralty in all that pertains to his office concerning the honour and utility or prosperity of the city. If any citizen attempt anything by word or deed against the form of this election he shall forfeit by that all his liberties and franchises in the said city, and further be punished at the discretion of the mayor and pay 10l. for the common utility of the city, if his goods and means permit, if not, then according to his means as estimated at the discretion of the mayor, aldermen and council. C.P.R. 1485-94, p. 297.

14. Y.C.R. II, pp. 50, 54-5, 104; House Book VII f. 22v.

15. Y.C.R., III, pp. 4-5.

election committee, composed of craft representatives and 28 senior searchers, were to nominate the mayoral candidates.<sup>16</sup>

Up to 1396 the mayor was assisted by three bailiffs. Their main responsibilities were to account for the farm of the borough, to maintain the assizes of bread and ale and market regulations, to empanel juries for the city courts, and to collect the issues of those courts. The bailiffs were elected for 29 September, to coincide with the Exchequer's financial year,<sup>17</sup> and at least from 1357 the bailiffs chose their own successors. The men chosen had to have two pledges each as security and once elected were presented to the mayor and commonalty for approval. The bailiffs chose their subordinate officials themselves.<sup>18</sup>

After 1396 when York acquired county status, the three bailiffs were replaced by two sheriffs, who became solely responsible for two new courts, a court in the Ainsty and a monthly county court. They were responsible for accounting for the farm of the city and for collecting the city's revenues; tolls, rents and court issues.<sup>19</sup> The sheriffs were elected on 21 September and took office on 29 September. They were elected by those 'to whom the election pertained', members of the council who deliberated in the inner chamber of the Guildhall while the mayor and commonalty waited outside to be told of the choice.<sup>20</sup> At least from 1418 the sheriffs were members of the twentyfour and remained as members after their year in office was ended. In 1494 it was made compulsory for sheriffs to have served previously as a chamberlain,

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16. V.C.H. York, p. 137, and see below.

17. V.C.H. York, pp. 71-2; C/Y, f. 313.

18. M.B. II, p. 259.

19. Ibid.; V.C.H. York, p. 72.

20. M.B. II, pp. 52, 74-5; House Book IX, f. 50.

probably as a financial ruse.<sup>21</sup> Their election was the key to the mayoralty since new aldermen were chosen exclusively from the twentyfour, and in 1504 some members of the commonalty asked to be allowed to nominate candidates but were refused by the mayor and council.<sup>22</sup>

The last important annually filled office was that of chamberlain. There were three chamberlains, increased to four in 1483, six in 1487, and reduced to three again in 1500.<sup>23</sup> Theirs was an invidious responsibility. Although they had no control over the collection of revenue; they were expected to meet the city's expenses and to balance the city's accounts at the end of their year in office. They were expected to be available at all times and after 1379 were fined if they refused to sit with the mayor to conduct business in the council chamber.<sup>24</sup>

There was usually a current deficit and the chamberlains had to meet day to day expenses out of their own pockets in anticipation of future incoming revenue. In 1484 it was decided that the out-going chamberlains were to be paid £140 in three installments by their successors, in recompense for personal losses, and that the incoming chamberlains should assume the debt themselves and pay their predecessor recompense as a matter of course. It was hoped that the problem of former chamberlains constantly petitioning the council for redress,

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21. House Book VII f. 109. See below, p.     and J.I. Kermode, *Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York*, Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. xxxv (1982), pp. 179-198.

22. M.B. II, p. 75; Y.C.R. III, p. 8; House Book IX, f. 19v. See p. ?

23. York Freeman, I, p. 207 et seq.; Y.C.R. I, p. 87.

24. M.B. I, pp. 33-4. For an excellently comprehensive description of their duties, see R.B. Dobson, ed., York City Chamberlains' Account Rolls, Surtees Soc. cxcii (1978 & 1979), pp. xxi-xxxii.

would be resolved. In 1487 two aldermen, two of the twentyfour, and four honest commoners, were set up as an auditing committee to examine the chamberlains' accounts,<sup>25</sup> retrospectively, since the 1470s.

In 1375 the chamberlains' election was moved from 29 September to 3 February to coincide with the mayoral election. They were chosen by the new mayor and council on that day and after 1475 election to the office was restricted to those men who had previously served as a bridge-master.<sup>26</sup>

The mayor and council were assisted by a number of non-elected officials, appointed by the council. There were three coroners; four bridgemasters, responsible for the upkeep of the Foss and Ouse bridges and for the collection of bridge tolls; keepers of the weights and measure; keepers of the city gates; six or seven common serjeants; city minstrels; and a bellman.<sup>27</sup> In addition the council was assisted by a common clerk at least from 1317 but his appointment seemed to be subject to royal supervision, since in 1476 Edward IV gave his permission to the council to appoint a new clerk and in 1485 the council sought Henry VII's approval of their appointment of a new clerk.<sup>28</sup> The common clerk's major responsibility was to keep the city's registers and presumably he had to supervise the enrolling of deeds and wills relating to York property.

Even before the aldermen and mayor became ex officio justices of the peace in 1392, York had decided to appoint a recorder in 1385. He was to be a man of good reputation and well-versed in law. These were

25. Y.C.R. I, pp. 89-90, House Book V, f. 6v., 17v.-18v.; VI, f. 92.

26. M.B. I, p. 16; II, pp. 246, 257.

27. V.C.H. York, p. 74; M.B. I, pp. 20, 151-4; II, pp. 260-1.

28. C.P.R. 1313-17, p. 692; Y.C.R. I, pp. 15, 134.

important qualifications, because the office acquired greater importance during the 15th century as the recorder was increasingly used to represent the city's interests in its discussions with the Crown. Both the recorder and the common clerk held office for as long as the holder fulfilled his duties satisfactorily, and until he wished to resign.<sup>29</sup>

Of the important officials noted above only the mayor, common clerk and recorder received an annual fee.<sup>30</sup> In 1385 the mayor's fee was raised from £20 to £40, perhaps in recognition of the numerous extra payments the mayor received, and in 1388 his fee was raised again to £50. The problem of extra payments was not solved and in 1392 it was established that his fee should not exceed the £50. It rarely did so thereafter although the commonalty still considered the fee to be excessive in 1490 when they asked for it to be reduced. The common clerk was receiving £7 13s.4d. in 1445/6 but could also expect to receive a pension after his term of office was ended. The recorder was receiving £1 6s.8d. in 1445/6 and in 1490 it was agreed, on the request of the commonalty, to reduce his annual fee to 20d.<sup>31</sup>

The officials listed above were responsible for putting into effect the orders of the council, on which the mayor, sheriffs, common clerk and recorder sat, as well as well as performing their routine duties. There had been some form of common council as early as 1301. It was the function of the council to assist, support and advise the mayor in all

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29. M.B. I, p. 40; House Book IX, f. 46v.; V.C.H. York, p. 74. For a discussion of the important part played by recorders in civic affairs, see R. Horrox, Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century, in R.A. Griffiths, ed., Patronage The Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England (Gloucester, 1981), p. 160.

30. The chamberlains received a fee from time to time. In 1445/6 they received 3s. 8d. each. Acct. Roll, 1445-6.

31. V.C.H. York, p. 70; Y.C.R. II, p. 54; Acct. Roll, 1445-6.

things, and superficially democracy prevailed since all decisions were made by 'the mayor and his brethren'. Occasionally the apparent amity was broken and in 1503 an alderman, William Neleson, reminded the current mayor that he would get his own back the following year if elected mayor himself. The mayor and council were trying to build on land near the common crane claimed by Neleson to be his.<sup>32</sup>

The council usually comprised the aldermen and the twentyfour, sometimes known collectively as the thirtysix, and an outer council of fortyeight which represented the commonalty. The record of one full council survives at which the twelve, the twentyfour and the fortyeight were present in 1379 to discuss the problem of chamberlains who neglected their duties. The representatives of the commonalty were generally summoned to vote at election time and to assent to decisions on matters of interest to the whole community; whereas the aldermen and the twentyfour were summoned to every council meeting.<sup>33</sup>

The twelve became known as aldermen after 1396 and in the 15th century two aldermen were associated with each of the six wards in the city. Aldermen served until they died or were too old or ill to attend meetings, and vacancies were filled by the remaining aldermen choosing a replacement from the twentyfour within four days. The twentyfour were, of course, excluded from these deliberations.<sup>34</sup> In the late 14th century the twentyfour were known as the probi homines, a term sometimes applied to the twelve, and certainly after 1418 membership was limited to ex-sheriffs. It seems unlikely that the twentyfour often had 24 members, as new members were recruited only from the office of sheriff,

32. V.C.H. York, p. 77; M.B. II, p. 256; House Book IX, f. 12v.

33. M.B. I, pp. x-xi, 33, 35.

34. Ibid., II, pp. 258, 261; House Book VII, f. 37v.; IX, f. 27v.

and numbers fluctuated above and below 24 depending on the supply of ex-sheriffs.<sup>35</sup>

Council instructions were executed through a system of ward and parish organisation. There were six wards in York in the 14th and 15th centuries;<sup>36</sup> Monkbar, Walmgate, Bootham, Coneystreet,<sup>37</sup> Castlegate and Mickelgate. Each had a constable whose duties included levying money for repairs to the walls, or for the wages of troops raised within the wards, and for opening and closing the city gates. In the 15th century two aldermen and other wardens were added to the constable, and wardmoot courts were held to hear presentments for common nuisances, and were responsible for the management of common lands. They covered parishes which lay outside the city walls and within the ward and in some respects they closely resembled manorial courts.<sup>38</sup>

#### HULL GOVERNMENT

Before Edward I bought the small village of Wyke-on-Hull from the abbey of Meaux,<sup>39</sup> and gave it borough status in 1299, it had been governed by bailiffs appointed by the abbey. After 1299 the borough was in the care of a warden, appointed by the Crown; six men held the office before 1331, all regular Crown servants.<sup>40</sup>

After 1331 the mayor became the central figure in government and he swore to uphold the customs of the town and to govern justly and humbly, and not to waste the income of the town. His main responsibilities were

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35. M.B. I, passim; II, p. 75.

36. V.C.H. York, pp. 76, 315; M.B. I, pp. 20, 35.

37. In the late 15th century Coneystreet ward was renamed Northstreet ward. House Book VI, f. 1v.; IX, f. 18.

38. V.C.H. York, p. 77; M.B. II, p. 261; Y.C.R. I, pp. 45-46, 58-9, 74-5; Cham. Book 1449.

39. Bilson, Wyke-upon-Hull, op. cit., p. 49.

40. V.C.H. Hull, p. 29.

to keep the borough for the Crown, acting as royal escheator after 1440, and to maintain law and order.<sup>41</sup> He was elected annually at least from 1434, by a secret ballot on 30 September. The full procedure was recorded for the first time in 1443. The aldermen nominated two of their number, one of whom was chosen by the burgesses as mayor.<sup>42</sup> From 1379, no senior official was to be re-elected within three years of each term in office,<sup>43</sup> but this restriction was either ignored or was impossible to implement with regard to the mayoralty, and it was ordered in 1440 that no-one should serve for two successive years. Provision was made from time to time for deputies to serve if the mayor was to be away for any long period.<sup>44</sup>

The mayor was assisted by the bailiffs whose major duty was to account for the farm of the borough and enforce the penalties imposed by the borough court. They were elected annually, on the same day as the mayor at least from 1434.<sup>45</sup>

In 1440 when Hull acquired county status, they were replaced by one sheriff, whose duties were to account for the farm of the city, to hold a monthly county court and to collect its issues, and to assist the mayor. (The latter duty was not always peacefully exercised.) According to the charter of 1440, those who had previously served as a bailiff were excluded from the shrievalty,<sup>46</sup> but one of the bailiffs in 1439-40, William Spencer, was elected the first sheriff. The sheriff was to

41. BRG 1, ff. 12, 13; C. Chart. R. 1427-1516, pp. 8-11.

42. BRE 1, p. 164; C.P.R. 1441-6, pp. 180-1.

43. BRE 1, p. 210.

44. BRE 1, p. 21; BRB 1, f. 5v.

45. BRE 1, p. 164; BRG 1, f. 12.

46. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 32-3; C. Chart. R. 1427-1516, pp. 8-11.



be elected by the burgesses from among themselves but by 1443 the nomination of two candidates was in the hands of the aldermen, and one candidate was chosen by the burgesses.

The town's financial affairs were the responsibility of two chamberlains, elected annually after 1443 from four nominees of the aldermen.<sup>47</sup> From 1356 they were expected to produce an annual account on pain of a 10 mark fine, and were supervised by four auditors annually appointed at least from 1452.<sup>48</sup>

The chamberlains and sheriff filled another office, that of bailiff of the Tripett. The city's responsibilities for the Tripett, an area to the north of Hull in which the city had been granted certain privileges by the Charterhouse, the house of Carmelite Friars, were exercised by four bailiffs. These were generally past or serving chamberlains, the sheriff,<sup>49</sup> and one other, and were regularly appointed from 1454.<sup>49</sup>

The elected officials were assisted by a series of minor officials and servants: three or four common serjeants; one coroner (two after 1447); common attorneys; a schoolmaster; ferrymen; minstrels; and a bellman.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, a common clerk assisted the council by keeping its records, and had been appointed from as early as 1321, when he presumably assisted the warden. After the mayor and aldermen were created justices of the peace in 1440, they appointed a recorder to advise them on legal matters.

47. See Appendix I, 2:ii; C.P.R. 1441-6, pp. 180-1.

48. BRE 1, p. 173; BRB 1, f. 23; BRG 1, f. 14.

49. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 33-4, 79; BRB 1, f. 37.

50. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 30, 32, 34; BRE 1, p. 206; BRE 2, ff. 13, 21-22v.; BRG 1, f. 14v.; BRB 1, ff. 24v., 56. M. 479 passim.

Of the officials so far described, only the mayor, common clerk and recorder, and some of the minor officials received a regular fee. In 1356 the mayor's fee was set at £13 6s. 8d. and was to be supplemented by the profits of the assizes of bread and wine. The sum fluctuated, however, and in 1409 it was £20; £33 6s. 8d. in 1448; and £20 again in 1451. The common clerk was paid very little in comparison: £1 6s. 8d. until 1444 and £3 6s. 8d. thereafter. The recorder was paid even less: only 13s. 4d. at first and £2 13s. 4d. when the fee was fixed in 1458.<sup>51</sup>

The sheriff was granted certain issues in lieu of a fee. In 1442 he shared the profits of the assizes of bread and wine with the mayor, and he collected money from the prisoners in the town gaol. He also fulfilled certain other functions such as that of a *justice of the sewers*, for which he received payment.<sup>52</sup> The chamberlains received no income for their services and indeed, from 1434, were expected to contribute £20, to be used for the town's benefit, eight days after being elected.<sup>53</sup> As in York, the chamberlains were expected to pay current expenses out of their own pockets, and retiring chamberlains regularly faced difficulties in persuading their successors to reimburse them.<sup>54</sup>

The mayor was advised by a council which had existed informally since the mid-14th century.<sup>55</sup> In 1351, for example, the mayor and bailiffs were assisted by the probi homines in approving craft legislation, and in 1356 the chamberlains were ordered not to make any

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51. M479/1/1, 6, 2/22, 25, 27; BRE 1, pp. 173, 205; BRB 1, p. 65.

52. BRE 2, f. 23v.; BRB 1, f. 81v.

53. BRE 1, p. 164; from 1440 the £20 was paid directly to the mayor, BRE 2, f. 14v.

54. BRB 1, ff. 17, 36, 81.

55. The earliest mention discovered refers to probi homines witnessing a quitclaim in 1339. BRE 1, p. 90.

payments or gifts without the assent of the mayor and six of the best burgesses. In 1379 it was decided that eight burgesses should be elected annually to assist the mayor and bailiffs, and of the eight elected in that year, three had served previously as mayor, one as a bailiff, one later served as mayor, and one, Thomas Swynefleet, was married to the niece of a former mayor, Geoffrey Hanby.<sup>56</sup>

In 1440 the 'best burgesses' were given formal status as a council of 12 aldermen, whose function was to advise the mayor, expressing only their own opinions, and giving honest advice as they would expect to receive as mayor in turn. If the mayor ignored their advice he could be fined. Aldermen served for life and from 1443 vacancies were to be filled by the burgesses choosing one of the two candidates nominated by the remaining aldermen.<sup>57</sup> The aldermen were associated in pairs with the six wards of the city.<sup>58</sup>

There was no formal outer council as in York and Beverley, from which aldermanic candidates were drawn, but from time to time an informal group was summoned, composed of those who had served as sheriff and as chamberlains, and those who were 'likely to serve' as chamberlains.<sup>59</sup>

Each of the six wards had constables who were expected to enforce council regulations, and they and specially appointed collectors collected taxes, and provided men and money for musters as required.<sup>60</sup>

Two other offices in Hull should be noted, although they were not separate full-time appointments. Four auditors were appointed annually,

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56. BRE 1, pp. 170, 173, 210, 271.

57. C.P.R. 1441-6, 180-1; BRE 1, p. 13, BRG 1, f. 13v.

58. E.g. BRB 1, ff. 10, 69-70.

59. BRB 1, ff. 67, 77v., 81.

60. BRB 1, ff. 8v., 15(i), 27, 69.

at least from the mid 1450s, and four bailiffs of the Tripett from 1454.<sup>61</sup> The auditors had all previously served as sheriff, or were respected men, past and future mayors. It is not clear how burdensome their duties were, whether or not they met more than once a year to supervise the chamberlains' accounting. Certainly some ex-sheriffs never acted as auditors and it may have been a tiresome duty. Some men acquired, on the other hand, a great deal of experience as auditors. Edmund Coppendale, for example, was an auditor at least 10 times, and first served one year after his term as sheriff.<sup>62</sup> Thomas Etton was another willing auditor and served at least 11 times.<sup>63</sup>

The four bailiffs of the Tripett were the sheriff, the current chamberlains or those of the previous year, and one other. Their duties were mainly concerned with the Tripett, an area owned by the Charterhouse, and were not sufficiently onerous to require separate officials.<sup>64</sup> The way in which the offices of the bailiffs of the Tripett were filled meant that a man could serve more than once, first as a chamberlain and then as sheriff. Thus Roger Bushel was a chamberlain and a bailiff of the Tripett in 1458-9, sheriff and a bailiff in 1461, and again in 1462.<sup>65</sup> This was a common pattern and some men also acted as a bailiff in between their terms as a chamberlain and sheriff.

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61. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 33-34. BRB 1, f. 32.

62. BRB 1, ff. 46, 59, 80, 95v., 107, 110v., 114v., 118v., 127v., 132.

63. Ibid. and ff. 65v., 72v., 113, 116, 120v., 129v., 142.

64. V.C.H. Hull, p. 34. BRB 1, f. 119v.

65. BRB 1, ff. 65v., 80, 82v.

## BEVERLEY GOVERNMENT

By 1306 Beverley had its own common seal and was governed by a council of 12 keepers and the archbishop of York.<sup>66</sup>

The bailiff of the archbishop's liberty in Beverley was appointed yearly.<sup>67</sup> His duties were diverse but his primary function was as the archbishop's agent and he had to do whatever his lord required in Beverley. He acted as supervisor to the reeve, who was responsible for dispatching supplies for the archbishop's use and for certain rents and farms, such as those for the water-houses in the bailiwick.<sup>68</sup> The bailiff was assisted by a clerk of the toll and a collector of rents in the vill of Beverley. There was also a receiver appointed by the archbishop and the bailiff audited his accounts before they were sent to the general receiver's office at York.<sup>69</sup>

The archbishop's bailiff, often drawn from the same families as the keepers, maintained the archbishop's jurisdiction in the town, and was responsible for the archbishop's court leet. During the 14th century there were often two bailiffs acting for the archbishop in Beverley, and they received all royal letters and mandates which were addressed to 'the bailiffs and men of Beverley'.<sup>70</sup> The keepers enlisted the bailiff's help and from time to time accounts of payments made to him were recorded as were payments made to the archbishop's receiver.<sup>71</sup>

66. GGB, f.6.

67. A.H. Thompson, ed., Archbishop Greenfield's Register, I, Surtees Society, cxlv (1931), pp. xxv-xxvi, 169, 218, 232.

68. Ibid. p. 172; IV, p. 277; V, p. 41.

69. Ibid. I, p. 195; V, pp. 37, 41.

70. E.g. Rot. Scot. I, pp. 217, 330, 350, 461; F. Grose, Military Antiquities, I (1786), pp. 10, 125; Bev. Cart., f. 2.

71. E.g. Bev. Accts. 1386, 1407, 1433. The bailiff did not only act in a supervisory capacity. In 1307 he collected the monies due to the collectors of the 1/30 subsidy, and three years later he was

Whatever the process of its evolution,<sup>72</sup> Beverley's civic government was well established by 1300. The town was governed by 12

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Note 71 contd. ordered to relax distraints he had made against Sir Hubert Fitzjohn for homages and reliefs due to the archbishop. In the course of the archbishop's dispute with the men of Hull, the Beverley bailiff was called upon to denounce as excommunicate all those infringing the archbishop's liberty in the water of the River Hull. Occasionally the bailiff received petitions on the archbishop's behalf and answered them as advised by his lord. Archbishop Greenfield's Register, op. cit. I, pp. 173-4, 196, 224, 265; V, p. 41.

72. The council of 12 had probably developed out of the Guild Merchant granted to Beverley by Henry I. The function of Guilds Merchant was to provide an organisation within the town for merchants, as their numbers increased during the period of commercial expansion of the 12th and 13th centuries. Guilds Merchant were quasi-democratic in that the aldermen of the guild were elected by all the members, but in practice this meant that the brethren voted for candidates nominated by a select group of wealthy or older members. Generally in a seignorial borough the guild afforded the only opportunity for discussion of communal affairs, and in so far as the welfare and prosperity of the town was largely dependent on its merchants, the interests of the guild and the town were the same. C. Gross, The Gild Merchant, I (1880), pp. 23-4; M.D. Lobel, Bury St. Edmunds (1935), p. 74.

As vills acquired free burgage and other burghal privileges, the inhabitants also acquired a greater economic and political identity of interests. Inevitably some form of representation was required so that the lord could deal with his burgesses collectively (M. Bateson, The Laws of Breteuil, E.H.R. xvi (1901), p. 344), and the most capable men acted in two capacities, as leading burgesses and as guild aldermen. In this way it was inevitable that the offices of guild and borough merged, as the officers of both were usually drawn from the same circle, and men held offices in both organisations at the same time. This is what happened in the borough of Wallingford, where the council and guild merchant became closely inter-related. N. Herbert, The Borough of Wallingford, 1155-1400. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Reading 1971, pp. 46-51.

This is probably what happened in Beverley. The form of government by 12 keepers may have been influenced by that of the Guild Merchant (A.F. Leach, ed., Beverley Town Documents, Selden Society, xiv (1900), p. xxvi), but although the keepers of the borough and the aldermen of the guild may have been the same people Poulson believed that the guild aldermen and keepers were synonymous, and therefore so were the guild and council. Beverlac, op. cit. I, pp. 53, 112.) The two were quite distinct. The council assumed the more important economic functions of the guild relating to commercial organisation, while the guild remained distinct from, and subordinate to, the council. In 1446 the merchant guild regulations were inspected by the keepers, along with all the other guilds' regulations and the council rented the old hanshouse from the guild, which by 1416 had acquired the title of the merchant guild of St. John. GGB f. 72v.; Bev. Accts. 1386, 1405, 1416.

keepers, later known as governors, under the bailiff appointed by the town's seigneur, the archbishop of York. Four attempts were made in the 14th century to introduce a triumvirate of an alderman and two chamberlains.<sup>73</sup> At least from 1345 the keepers were elected annually on 25 April by the burgesses with the assent of the retiring keepers and with the archbishop's representative present. Those elected were to be 'the most honest and wealthy men' and the burgesses could elect whomsoever they wished with that qualification.<sup>74</sup> In 1359 the keepers changed the procedure in the so-called Magna Carta which they issued, perhaps as a result of the election riots of 1356.<sup>75</sup> They severely limited the role of the burgesses by giving the retiring keepers the right to nominate 18 of the 'more sufficient men' of Beverley, excluding those who had served as keepers within the preceding three years, and the burgesses elected 12 as the keepers. Burgesses who absented themselves on election day were liable to a fine of 6d. and those who refused to hold office were liable to a fine of 40s.<sup>76</sup>

Hints that the system was being abused appeared in 1457, when members of the commons demanded that the elections should be conducted according to the customs of the borough as set out in the Magna Carta and on the traditional April 25th. Maybe the abuse continued, in spite of the keepers' approval of the demands in 1457, since the keepers sensed trouble and issued several law and order regulations in 1461,

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73. In 1382, royal orders confirming the re-institution of the government by twelve keepers, after the imposition of a triumvirate during the 1380-81 unrest, referred to two previous occasions when triumvirates had ruled. Bev. Cart. f. 18. An alderman and two chamberlains governed the town in 1385 and 1386, Account Roll 1386.

74. Bev. Cart. f. 31; GGB ff. 15v., 27.

75. Bev. Cart. f. 16; Poulson, Beverlac, pp. 126-8.

76. Bev. Cart. ff. 6, 16.

prohibiting unauthorised meetings in the Guildhall or the friaries.<sup>77</sup>  
 In the same year, the keepers decided to be called 'aldermen' or 'governors'. Rioting erupted during the 1465 election, but no reforms were introduced. By 1498, a new council, the thirty-six was mentioned for the first time, and the new keepers were being elected from 12 of its members, 12 others nominated by the retiring keepers and certain burgesses 'assisting in the Guildhall' (none of these 24 nominees to have served in the preceding two years), and 6 worshipful men who had not previously held office. The burgesses chose 12 new keepers from these 30 candidates.

Because 'the whole town' felt that the number of candidates was too large, the number was reduced to 18 in 1498 by excluding the 12 candidates with previous experience who were not members of the thirtysix. Once elected, the keepers swore to keep the town of Beverley until the next election day with all their ability, and not to spare any man unjustly because of friendship of consanguinity, nor to treat any man unfairly because of enmity or hatred. A burgess serving as keeper for the first time also swore to be faithful and true to the community of Beverley and to keep its counsel's secret.<sup>78</sup>

The duties of the keepers were fully described by them in 1345.<sup>79</sup>  
 A quorum of at least seven keepers could deal with any matters. In addition to the day to day running of the town, the keepers held their own court and were responsible for the town's finances. They received all the rents and income due to the community and paid out salaries and

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77. GGB, ff. 7v., 21.

78. GGB, ff. 7v., 21, 26.

79. Bev. Cart., f. 31.



expenses and whatever seemed to be expedient for the community. They could summon the burgesses and announce new taxes in the town as they thought fit, and if anyone objected he had to summon the rest of the burgesses to the Guildhall to discuss the matter and suggest an alternative. If the burgesses collusively refused to attend then the keepers could impose a new tax without their consent.

An audit day was held annually, at which the dues payable by the burgesses and collected in boxes, were presented. In 1457, on the request of the burgesses, the contributions of the crafts were to be accounted in the presence of the alderman and stewards of each craft, not later than two weeks after 24 June, under pain of a £10 fine. The ordinance was reiterated in 1460 and suggests that the keepers were often in arrears with their accounting. The incoming keepers had to accept the accounts of expenses given on oath by the retiring keepers without question, and as no one keeper was officially delegated to be responsible for the accounts, all twelve were equally responsible.<sup>80</sup>

The concept of collective responsibility applied to the other duties of the keepers as they shared out the most important functions between themselves, and were assisted by such minor paid officials as a common serjeant, a common clerk, a bellman, a town raker, sheep- and swine-herds.<sup>81</sup> The common clerk was elected annually, but the same man was often re-elected from year to year and was paid a fee of 40s. No fees were paid to the keepers but their expenses for specific duties were met, and those paying borough accounts out of their own pockets were reimbursed.<sup>82</sup>

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80. Bev. Cart., f. 16; GGB, ff. 21-21v.

81. GGB, ff. 9, 15v.; G.M.B. ff. 19v., 29, 30, 57v., 147, 152.

82. Bev. Accts. passim.

An outer council had emerged by the mid-15th century and a list of some of its members has survived for 1465 and 1467. It was composed of former keepers and the aldermen of 14 craft guilds and was known as the fortyeight. In 1465 there were 45 members present with the 12 keepers and only 17 in 1467. The names were simply listed and were not a record of attendance at any particular meeting in 1465 or in 1467. The fortyeight had to attend the Guildhall when summoned by the keepers and in 1467 the penalty for non-attendance was 6d.<sup>83</sup>

Another outer council, the thirtysix, had emerged in Beverley by 1498 when its existence was first recorded. By 1536 it comprised the 12 keepers and 24 'assistants'. It may have replaced the fortyeight, or, from 1498, there were three councils in all; the 12 keepers alone, the thirtysix incorporating the keepers, and the fortyeight. If a member of the thirtysix fell ill, died, or had to resign, the burgesses chose a replacement.<sup>84</sup>

In addition there was a group of men in the town known as the venerabiles or magnates whom the keepers consulted in 1443 over whether or not a keeper whose son had been accused of theft should be allowed to sit with the keepers. They may have been an informal gathering of members of the outer council, or men too old to belong to any council, or a precursor to the thirtysix. They may even have been the same men whom the council entertained to dinner on audit day in 1449, men described as the magnates of the town, but this seems unlikely as the council paid 5s. to the archbishop's auditor in 1520 on audit day,<sup>85</sup> and

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83. G.M.B. ff. 76, 191v., 206.

84. GGB, ff. 26, 27v.

85. Bev. Cart., f. 7v.; Bev. Accts. 1449, 1520.

he magnates of 1449 may well have been the archbishop's officials. The men consulted in 1443 may also have been officials of the archbishop resident in the town, but the use of the term venerabiles does imply that the men were old ex-keepers.

There were 14 wards in Beverley used for taxation purposes and 12 for military assessments. There was no association between particular keepers and wards and each ward had two constables and 4 sworn men who assisted in the assessment and levying of taxes, and were responsible for putting into effect council regulations at street level. On occasions when the wards were mustering men for active service with the town, the archbishop's bailiff assisted the keepers and ward constables.<sup>86</sup>

#### POLITICAL CONTROL

It is clear from the preceding description of the structure of government in each of the three towns that the complexity varied relative to their size and the nature of their economies. While there were smaller administrative units, these were in no way foci for popular representation. If burgess assemblies had ever been more than a gathering of the more influential men of each town, then the gradual exclusion of the assemblies from direct nomination, must be seen as part of a move towards greater oligarchy. It is however, impossible to discover exactly how burgess assemblies participated before they became merely assenters to the proceedings on election day,<sup>87</sup> and it is likely

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1. G.M.B. ff. 3, 7, 125v, 161v.

2. Cf. Newcastle, where after 'contempts and transgressions', Edward III suspended the borough's liberties. When they were restored in 1343, a complex electoral college was imposed. Mayor and bailiffs elected 7 discreet men, that 12 elected 4 of the commonalty who were sworn in and elected 8 of the better and more discreet citizens. That 12 elected 12 more and that 24 elected the mayor. Mayor plus the 24 elected the 4 bailiffs! R. Welford, ed., History of Newcastle and Gateshead in the 14th and 15th Centuries (1884), p.119.

that the mass of burgesses had always been open to manipulation. In York the craft guilds emerged as representatives of the whole body of burgesses, not just in taking an increasingly direct role in nominating a mayoral candidate after 1464 (briefly choosing the mayor themselves between 1473 and 1490), but also by acting with the council to ensure law and order on election days. Ultimately of course, the guilds provided the units of representation on the new common council and its election committee in 1517. Even though there were between 38 and 43 guilds in Beverley,<sup>88</sup> they do not appear to have played any formal role in the process of elections. Craft guilds were slow to emerge in Hull and apparently played no formal role in elections but 'worthy' burgesses, chosen by their fellows, assisted the common clerk in taking votes at civic elections. In 1458/9, the candidates themselves chose the men to go 'with the book' amongst the voters. The ballot was secret in Hull, and in 1456 burgesses had to be reminded to vote once only.<sup>89</sup>

There are several points to emphasise. First the supremacy of the aldermen in both towns as the pool of candidates for the mayoralty; in controlling the nomination of candidates to the major offices (the mayoralty and shrievalty in Hull and shrievalty only in York) and in directly appointing their own successors. Second, the greater degree of participation allowed to the burgesses of Hull in choosing between candidates for vacancies on the aldermen's bench and in electing one of the shrieval candidates by 1443, compared to the lateness, 1504, of the York burgesses in asking for a role in the nomination of their sheriffs.

88. B.A. Champion, *The Gilds of Medieval Beverley*, in P. Riden, ed., *The Medieval Town in Britain* (1980), pp. 52, 62-5; Acct. Rolls 1344, 1366; GGB ff. 12, 26; G.M.B. f. 150.

89. *V.C.H. Hull*, p. 36; BRE 1 p. 164; BRE 2 ff. 93 (i), (ii); BRB 1 f. 55v.

Third, the changes introduced in York were the result of continuous, targetted pressure from the burgesses whereas no equivalent unrest was recorded in Hull.<sup>90</sup>

Further comparisons between York and Hull can usefully be made before turning to Beverley. Self-perpetuation was clearly integral to the election processes in York and Hull, even though greater participation was possible in Hull, but how widely did the offices circulate?<sup>91</sup> Between 1300 and 1364, there had been only 14 mayors in York, some serving for several years at a time; the most persistent being Nicholas de Langton, jnr, who was mayor from 1322-33 and again from 1338-41. His father had been mayor previously and his son John was mayor from 1352-63. The Langtons derived most of their wealth from their rural estates and could be described as the remnants of the virii heriditarii, more common in York's government in the 13th century. Compared to the repeated mayoralities of the 14th century and possibilities of family dominance, the office circulated widely in the 15th century when 85 different mayors served.<sup>92</sup> They were increasingly more experienced in government (see table 6) and all but 3 of the mayors

90. The Hull records are curiously silent when it comes to popular protest. The changes introduced in 1379, were undoubtedly due to pressure to widen participation. Continued frustration may partly explain the involvement of Hull men in the troubles of 1381, but as the record notes only a few names in passing, it is not clear how far the town witnessed any violence, nor that the individuals were protesting about anything more than the government's tax demands. R.B. Dobson, *The Risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, 1380-1381*, in R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston, eds., *The English Rising of 1381* (1984), p. 117. However, at least £400 were demanded from Hull by the Crown between 1397 and 1400, twice the city's annual expenditure, but no disturbances were recorded. E. Gillett and K.A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (1980), p. 63; *C.P.R. 1396-9*, p. 181, *1399-1401*, pp. 209, 353.

91. This analysis is based on the tables of office holders in Appendix 1.

92. *V.C.H. York*, pp. 71-2.

TABLE 3 : MERCHANT OFFICE HOLDING

	C	CB	CBM	CM	B	BM	M	Total
<u>YORK :</u>								
14th century 1300-1396	29 (22%)	51 (40%)	10 (12%)	4 (6%)	5 (9%)	11 (14%)	8 (6%)	127
15th century 1396-1509	42 (22%)	49 (26%)	82 (44%)	2 (1%)	1 (0.5%)	11 (6%)	1 (0.5%)	188
<u>HULL :</u>								
14th century 1300-1400	1 (2.3%)	1 (2.3%)	2 (7%)	1 (2.3%)	10 (23%)	17 (38%)	11 (25%)	43
15th century 1400-1509	3 (4%)	15 (19%)	39 (49%)	0	2 (5%)	16 (20%)	4 (3%)	79
1439-1509	2 (4%)	13 (24%)	36 (65%)	0	0	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	55

C = Chamberlain:

B = Bailiff/Sheriff:

M = Mayor.

serving between 1400 and 1509 had enjoyed previous service; 70 as both chamberlain and sheriff 87%). Similarly 81% of sheriffs serving between 1397 and 1509 had already served as chamberlain.

The situation in Hull was noticeably different to that in York, in that repeated mayoralties were common in both the 14th and 15th centuries. Up to 1399, 31% of mayors had had two terms in office and between 1400 and 1509, 31% of the mayors served twice. Of the 14th-century mayors, 14% served 3 or more times, and 16% of the 15th-century mayors did so. An ordinance was passed in 1460, forbidding a man from serving two successive terms as mayor, but otherwise there were no objections to repeated mayoralties.<sup>93</sup>

A high proportion of Hull mayors had also had previous experience in office. Of 67 15th-century mayors, 88% had served as bailiff or sheriff, and 52% as both chamberlain and bailiff or sheriff. After 1440, when the information is fuller, the proportion is higher; 91% served as bailiff or sheriff, and 60% as both chamberlain and bailiff or sheriff.

Not only was repeated office-holding common in Hull, so was the willingness of individuals to serve in other minor offices, such as one of the four bailiffs of the Tripett, as coroner, and as one of the four auditors after their terms as chamberlain and sheriff.<sup>94</sup> Given the slightly greater participation of the Hull burgesses, the opposite situation might have been expected, but no objections to the oligarchy were recorded and elections apparently proceeded in Hull with none of

93. BRE 1 p. 21.

94. For these offices, see V.C.H. Hull, pp. 33-4; BRB 1 f. 32. Edmund Coppendale was an auditor at least 10 times, and first served one year after his term as sheriff. Thomas Etton was another willing auditor and served at least 11 times. BRB 1 ff. 46, 49, 65v., 72v., 80, 95v., 107, 110v., 113, 116, 120v., 127v., 129v., 132, 142.

the periodic outbursts experienced in York and Beverley. Recession affected Hull later than York and Beverley: not signifying in the town's records until the 1440s, whereas Beverley's economy was already slowing down by 1400 and York's by the 1410s.<sup>95</sup> Hull also had its accounts regularly scrutinised by four auditors,<sup>96</sup> which must have gone some way towards allaying suspicions of fraud and incompetence even though the auditors were generally former or future aldermen.

The dramatic difference between York and Hull might have been due to the more advanced political ambitions of the York burgesses and the legislation introduced to limit repeated office-holding. The push for wider circulation of offices began in York in the 1350s when the dynastic grip of John de Langton was challenged by the growing number of burgesses: new, wealthy merchants spawned especially by the expanding cloth trade.<sup>97</sup> The tension between the new entrepreneurs and the old guard continued into the 1381 revolt, but legislation passed in 1372 had opened up the mayoralty.<sup>98</sup> By the 15th century ambition or at least criticism of the oligarchy, had passed on to others and it was popular pressure in 1464, 1473, 1489, 1504 and 1517, which brought about change in the procedure for electing the mayor.

A simpler explanation seems more likely. Civic office was restricted to burgesses, maybe as few as 50 or even 22% of the adult males.<sup>99</sup>

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95. J. Kermode, *Merchants, Overseas Trade, and Urban Decline: York, Beverley and Hull, c. 1380-1500*, Northern History, xxiii (1987), p. 55.

96. BRB 1 f. 23.

97. For the figures see V.C.H. York, pp. 114-6.

98. C/Y f. 313v.; C.P.R. 1364-7, p. 208. In 1372 it was agreed that no-one should be re-elected mayor until eight years had elapsed since he had last served. M.B. I, p. 16.

99. Bartlett, *Expansion and Decline*, p. 22; J. Leggett, *The 1377 Lay Poll Tax Return for the City of York*, Yorks. Arch. Jnl. xlii (1971), p. 170.



Hull with a population of maybe 2,500 by the end of the 15th century compared with York's possible 8,000, simply had a smaller pool of eligible candidates to draw from.<sup>100</sup> Government could only continue in Hull if men served as mayor, sheriff, auditor, but rarely chamberlain, more than once or twice. A major constraint then was demographic, and not simply a difference in ambitions.

What of Beverley, with a population of 4,000 or so in 1377?<sup>101</sup> Although repeated office holding was common, it did not prevent the keepership from circulating widely. The relatively large number of men required each year, compared with the six or so required in York and Hull, meant that repeated office holding was inevitable in a town with a small population and at least by 1370, a man could be fined £2 for refusing office.<sup>102</sup> Of the 347 keepers identified between 1300 and 1502,<sup>103</sup> just over one half, 197, served once only, and just under half, 150, served as keeper several times. Eighty-eight served three or more times, the majority of them serving 3 to 5 times. In the 35 years between 1436 and 1470, when the names of keepers have survived for consecutive years, there were only a few occasions when the three-year restriction was abused.

100. In 1443 there were about 356 burgesses in Hull, BRG 1 ff. 16-19; comprising maybe 29% of an adult male population of 1,250. The population was about 2,500 in 1377 and in the mid 16th century. V.C.H. Hull, p. 157; J.C. Russell, British Medieval Population (Albuquerque, 1948), p. 141.

101. Russell, British Medieval Population, p. 141.

102. Bev. Town Docs., p. 11. William Morethwayte's career was typical of the active Beverley politician. Between 1441 and 1454 he was keeper 4 times, in 1441, 1445, 1449 and 1453, and each time he was elected over three years since his previous term in office. Roger Rolleston held office 8 times in all, 5 times between 1436 and 1470, and his elections did not break the three year restriction either.

103. All the following analysis is based on the list of keepers in Appendix 1.

One of the consequences of the restriction which is apparent between 1436 and 1470 was that groups of men regularly served together. For example, Thomas Wilton, William Cockerell, Roger Cockerham, Guy Bridekirk, John Ulceby, Ralph Ward and John Redesham served together as keepers in 1439 and again in 1443. That meant that in those two years over half the keepers were the same. William Northrop, Stephen Tilson and William Morethwayte served together as keepers three times in 1445, 1449 and 1453. Ralph Ward served with John Ulceby snr in 1439 and 1443, and with John Ulceby jnr in 1455. This continuity can be demonstrated several times during the 1436-1470 period, and reveals a continuity of government comparable with that of the aldermanic benches of York and Hull. It is remarkable how often the same individuals occurred within associated groups, and suggests that effective coalitions within Beverley's ruling elite were possible.<sup>104</sup>

It would appear that although access to the oligarchy was reasonably open to all burgesses, there was a recognised elite which constituted a core of experienced men within the 12, three or four of whom were keepers in any given year. An examination of the involvement of families, and not just of individuals, confirms this conclusion. Just as the names of certain men occur several times, so members of the same family appear regularly among the keepers. Forty-eight families produced more than one keeper between 1300 and 1502, and the involvement of some of these families lasted for a considerable period. The

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104. Richard Halitreholm, Nicholas Brompton, Robert Jackson and William Penycoke served together in 1438, 1441 and 1446. In 1450, Nicholas Brompton and Robert Jackson again served together, with William Mayn, Henry Tasker, Simon Sprotlay, Thomas White, Thomas Darlington, John Copy, John Graybarn and Edmund Portington. Four years later in 1458, all the 1450 keepers served again, with the exception of Robert Jackson, and four years after that, in 1462, the last four men in the group and Nicholas Brompton again served together. Hammer came to the opposite conclusion about the government of Oxford. *The Oxford Town Council, op. cit.*, p. 25.

outstanding example is the Coppendale family,<sup>105</sup> which was active in Beverley government for at least 150 years. Nine members of the family served as keeper between 1345 and 1465, six of them once only. The other three, Stephen, Thomas and John, served respectively 4 times between 1388 and 1408, 5 times between 1402 and 1422, and 7 times between 1437 and 1469. There were Holmes active in government for nearly 150 years between 1306 and 1433, but it was a common name and they were not necessarily all from the same family. Twelve families were active for over 40 years, some continuously such as the Tirwhits, 4 of whom served between 1344 and 1421, or the Slefords, 2 of whom served between 1399 and 1467. Some families were active sporadically, such as the Atkinsons, 3 of whom served between 1366 and 1502.

In addition to the long careers of some individuals like William Spencer, active for 33 years, or Thomas Swanland, active for 30 years, the persistence of an elite within the 12, and the continuing dynastic tradition of certain families, meant that the burgesses of Beverley saw the same names elected keeper time and time again.<sup>106</sup>

Dynasties were not usual in English towns and the persistence of family names was not always due to direct succession. Late- 15th and

105. Although there is no direct evidence to link the 14th-century Coppendales with the 15th-century family of that name, it was not a common name. The 14th-century family was extensive, with several branches, and it seems likely the 15th-century Coppendales were their descendants, as both had members active in overseas trade and local government.

106. Several of the men who served repeatedly were overseas traders. Nicholas Brompton, Roger Cockerham, Robert Jackson, William Penycoke, John Redesham, Simon Sprotlay and Thomas Wilton were all active exporters at a time when few Beverley merchants were surviving the mid-century recession. A handful of gentlemen served as keepers from time to time, and several came from families which had been or were to become active overseas traders. Roger Rolleston, for example, was the son of a merchant William Rolleston, and served as a keeper 8 times. William Cockerell, whose son became a merchant, served 4 times.

early-16th century Totnes, in Devon, , was invigorated by the recruitment of the country cousins of established families into the town.<sup>107</sup> In early-16th century Chester, there was a similar pattern of 'dynastic' office-holding, maintained by new arrivals from country branches of city families. Indeed several Chester mayors retained firm links with the county, deriving as much income from family estates as they probably did from trade.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps the existence of long-term dynasties in late-medieval towns has more to tell us about the nature of their economies than about their politics.

If the circulation of offices depended as much on the size of the population of a town as it did upon legislation, what determined the choice of one individual rather than another? Were merchants the automatic choice? Occupation, and therefore wealth, was clearly a factor, most particularly for members of the council and for men serving as sheriff and mayor. Quite apart from considerations of the expenditure expected on hospitality and generally maintaining oneself as befitted a senior civic official,<sup>109</sup> they had to be men who could afford to absent themselves frequently from their employment regularly throughout the year, and in the case of the mayor and sheriff, during each week to run the borough courts. Chamberlains attended council meetings rarely, and by invitation. But sheriffs, mayor and aldermen could be summoned in York as little as 14 times as in 1493-4, or as

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107. L.M. Nicholls, *The Trading Communities of Totnes and Dartmouth in the late Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries*. M.A. thesis, Exeter, 1960, pp. 134-5.

108. E.g. the Alderseys, Duttons, Mainwearings, Savages.

109. *V.C.H. York*, p. 72; Kermode, *Flight from Office*, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-190.

often as 54 times, as in 1493-4.<sup>110</sup> The mayor and aldermen, as in Hull, also served as ex officio justices of the peace. Craftsmen with day to day commitments were clearly less able to devote so much time to council business and it is no surprise to find many medieval town councils dominated by merchants. To judge by the number of times regulations were repeated in York, imposing fines for absence and late arrival, not eventhose with flexible occupations displayed a proper sense of duty!

Merchant domination can only be measured in terms of single offices rather than in terms of the proportion of merchant councillors.<sup>112</sup> Over 660 men held office as chamberlain in York between 1300 and 1509. As it was an office with little political power but with financial risks, it was open to anyone, and it is apparent that men of all occupations were elected as chamberlain. However, only 'suitable' individuals proceeded to the office of bailiff, and of the 186 bailiffs who held office between 1300 and 1396, almost one half, 88 men, were of the merchant group. Of these, 15 were drapers, 7 were spicers and 3 were goldsmiths. Butchers constituted the next largest group with 6 bailiffs. From 1396 to 1509 there were 249 sheriffs including those who died in office and their replacements. Of these 135 were merchants, that is including 11 drapers and 5 goldsmiths, and four others were butchers.

Nearly one half of the 15th-century sheriffs were merchants.

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110. House Books passim. It is difficult to estimate the frequency of council meetings in Hull and Beverley because the records of their proceedings were kept less regularly. In Beverley there was provision for a quorum of 7 keepers and the full council rarely met. Bev. Cart., f. 16; GGB, f. 31.

111. Y.C.R. I, pp. 8, 88, 142.

112. Cf. the council analysis for 14th- and 15th-century London. S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London, p. 79. The following analysis is based on the lists in Appendix 1.

The office of mayor was similarly dominated by merchants; of 122 who served as mayor between 1300 and 1509, five sixths, that is 107, were merchants. Of these, 4 were drapers, 4 spicers or grocers, 2 were goldsmiths, and one was a vintner.

In Hull such an analysis is beset with problems of identifying the officials for each year and of identifying their occupations,<sup>113</sup> and the following figures must be taken as extremely conservative. Of 178 identified men who served as chamberlain in Hull between 1300 and 1509, almost one half were merchants, that is 75. Of the 153 identified men who served as bailiff between 1300 and 1439, one third were merchants, that is 57. Merchant domination was more apparent in the offices of sheriff and mayor. Although only 38 of the 71 sheriffs who held office between 1440 and 1509 can be identified by occupation, 35 were merchants. Of 98 mayors who served between 1332 and 1509 71 were merchants, that is almost three quarters. The occupations of a further 23 could not be identified, but about one half of them were so regularly involved with merchants as to suggest that they were also merchants. In spite of the patchy evidence, it is indisputable that the merchant group of Hull dominated the most important offices in the town.

The extent of merchant participation in the government of Beverley is more difficult to establish because of the problem of identifying the occupation of Beverley men.<sup>113</sup> The occupations of only 73 keepers have been discovered of whom 56 were mercers or merchants, 6 were gentlemen, 7 were textile workers, 2 were yeomen, 2 were butchers and one was a baker. In very general terms, the composition of the keepers did reflect the economic importance of each occupational group in the town. The dominance of the mercantile interest is clear and the governing elite of Beverley, as of York and Hull, can justifiably be described as a mercantile oligarchy.

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113. See above pp. 29-30 for a discussion of the source problems.

So merchants, the more successful traders, and a handful of wealthy craftsmen were obvious choices for the higher offices. (Apparently anyone could become a chamberlain, although in the late 15th century some towns did try to ensure some competence, by insisting on previous service in a lesser office such as bridgemaster in York, from 1475, and levelooker in Chester, from 1541.)<sup>114</sup>

A reasonable income, and an occupation which left individuals free to attend their official duties, were obvious advantages and combined to prevent those who were too poor or too busy earning a living from being recruited into the governing elite. In addition, in York and Hull, certain occupations were considered to be infra dignitatem. Great emphasis was laid on the 'worship', that is the respectability and dignity of officials and council members, and extended beyond the prestigious symbol of the upturned sword and mace which the mayors of York and Hull were allowed to have carried before them in processions.<sup>115</sup> Each official was expected to conduct himself in the manner proper to his office; sheriffs to be accompanied by their officers, aldermen to wear correct gowns and to attend public processions.<sup>116</sup> The only recorded squabbles in the governing elite concerned financial dealings between officials and debated precedence in public processions.<sup>117</sup> The myth of a government composed of superior persons, was essential to its survival and ability to govern.

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114. M.B., II, p. 146; Chester City R.O., Assembly Book 1, f. 79v.

115. V.C.H. York, p. 69; C.Ch.R. 1341-1417, pp. 354-6, 358-60.

116. In 1419 York sheriffs were ordered to walk about preceded by a servant, and were not to walk "without dignity". M.B. II, p. 86. Similarly, in 1490 aldermen were ordered to attend Minster processions, and in 1500 were ordered to wear their 'correct' scarlet robes. Y.C.R. II, pp. 55, 145-6. For a wider discussion see C. Phythian-Adams, Ceremony and the Citizen, in P. Clark & P. Slack, eds., Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700 (1972), pp. 57-85.

117. In 1485-6, John Harper and William Tod were arguing over precedence in the council. Y.C.R. I, pp. 155, 170. See also Ibid. II, p. 148, for orders re precedence.

Accordingly councillors tried to ensure that men of common and vulgar occupations did not proceed beyond a certain level on the political ladder. This was not explicitly stated, but odd hints suggest that it was well understood. The keeping of an inn or hostelry seemed to be the most offensive occupation for a prospective office holder. John Petty was elected alderman in York in 1504, on condition that he took down his sign and stopped keeping a hostelry, but by the mid-16th century the prejudice against innkeepers and beer and wine retailers had faded.<sup>118</sup> In Hull the mayor, sheriffs and aldermen were forbidden to sell ale in their houses, and the mayor was further forbidden to sell foodstuffs in the market.<sup>119</sup> Similar regulations existed in other towns.<sup>120</sup>

In the 15th century there was a large proportion of butchers regularly serving as chamberlain, and less often as sheriff. Of the occupational groups which held office as bailiff/sheriff, the butcher's group is the only one out of the 4 largest occupational groups which did not produce a traceable alderman or mayor. The York butchers were articulate trouble-makers who were probably excluded because of fears that in positions of power they would rig prices in their favour.<sup>121</sup>

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118. Y.C. R. III, p. 10; House Book IX, f. 20v. D. Palliser, Tudor York, p. 107. W.G. Hoskins, The Age of Plunder (1976), p. 100, observed that occupations that were socially unacceptable in one period, became so at a later date.

119. BRE 2, ff. 13, 21-22v., 77v.-78.

120. For example a Norwich ordinance of 1415 forbade the mayor, sheriff or any alderman to keep a hostelry. F. Blomefield, An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk, III (1806), p. 129. I am grateful to David Palliser for this reference. As late as 1573 in Winchester a newly elected mayor was allowed to live in the east part of his house while his wife and servants ran his inn in the rest of the house! T. Atkinson, Elizabethan Winchester (1963), p. 63.

121. Cf. the London battles against the victuallers. G. Unwin, The Gilds and Companies of London (1908), pp. 129-37. R. Bird, Turbulent London of Richard II (1949), pp. 63, 66-8.



They created a monopoly in 1425, forcing prices up so much that the council had to intervene.<sup>122</sup>

In Beverley the situation was rather different. A minority of the keepers was regularly recruited from the merchant group and from certain families, such as the Coppendales, Ryses and Tirwhits, and although father-son relationships are difficult to establish, a dynastic tradition of office-holding was established and perpetuated. The existence of an elite within the oligarchy<sup>123</sup> made it possible for the remaining eight or nine keepers to be recruited from a variety of occupations as make-weights. Individuals with such occupations as butcher, baker, weaver, dyer and tailor held office as keeper from time to time. Whereas in York and Hull the sons of gentlemen generally became active merchants before embarking upon a career in local government,<sup>124</sup> in Beverley this was not necessary and gentlemen also occasionally held office as keepers.

Repeated recruitment from the same families did not occur in York after 1364 or in Hull, and no dynastic pattern of office holding emerged as it had done in Beverley. Relatively few sons followed their fathers

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122. The butchers were a continuing problem for the council. In 1379 there was a dispute with the butchers over payment of stallage and in 1382 the butchers refused to pay what they considered to be a new tax, Shameltoll. When the bailiffs distrained goods by way of payment, the butchers armed themselves with axes and regained their goods! In what seemed to be an act of malice, the council decided in 1480 that no butchers could pasture their stock within 6 miles of the city. Throughout the period, regular ordinances were passed to control the disposal of offal, and in this respect the butchers' trade was a constant health hazard. M.B. I, pp. 57-8, 121, 125, 132 and passim; Y.C.R. I, 33. Cf. Norwich where in 1508 an alderman-elect had to renounce his butcher's trade. W. Hudson & J.C. Tingay, eds., The Records of the City of Norwich (1906-10), II, p. 107.

123. See below, p. 305.

124. E.g. Brian Conyers of York, son of Christopher Conyers, esq., of Hornby, became free as a merchant in 1473. See Appendix 4.

into office, because relatively few officials had sons who survived long enough to hold office.<sup>125</sup> Of 69 merchant office-holders with traceable sons in late 14th- and 15th-century York only 28 had sons who held an office in their turn. In Hull, of 27 merchant office holders with sons, only 11 had sons who also held office. The majority of recruits into the ruling class, and thence into the governing elites of York and Hull, were first generation immigrants, or the sons of non-office-holding small merchants or craftsmen. This pattern continued in York, and in the 16th century perhaps as many as four fifths of the council were immigrants.<sup>126</sup>

#### THE CURSUS HONORUM

The fuller records available for York, allow the creation of about 320 individual merchant careers and it is possible to establish an impression of the average. Most became a chamberlain 10 years after becoming a freeman; bailiff or sheriff 2 to 3 years after that; an alderman within 6 years and mayor within a further 4 years. Thus most York merchants would expect to set out on their political careers at between 26 and 36 years old and to have served as mayor by the time they were 45.

Merchants with outstandingly successful careers in local government can easily be identified. They held each office earlier than average, and on occasions missed out offices. There were fewer high flyers than first impressions suggested and most of these were in the 14th century before the routine career pattern described above had become established.

Henry Belton, free in 1323, missed out the office of chamberlain, became a bailiff in 6 years and mayor 5 years later, when he began the

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125. See below, p.344 for the failure of the merchant group to produce male heirs into a second generation.

126. Palliser, Tudor York, pp. 94-5.

first of 4 consecutive years in that office. Roger de Moreton jnr, free in 1362, followed the same pattern and became a bailiff within 6 years and mayor 5 years later, but he was mayor for one year only. Similarly Simon de Quixlay, free in 1366, did not serve as a chamberlain and became a bailiff in 9 years and served the first of his 3 consecutive terms as mayor in 1381.

In the 15th century there were fewer merchants who missed one or both offices before serving as mayor, and William Frost, who became free in 1395 and mayor a year later for the first of 8 terms, was exceptional in many ways. His spectacular dominance of the mayoralty may have been due to the fact that he was already a well established overseas merchant, and a member of the prominent Frost family of Beverley and Hull. Nicholas Lancaster also served as mayor without previous experience of civic office, within 13 years of becoming a freeman in 1472. The rise of Nicholas Blackburn jnr was even more rapid and he was elected mayor only 7 years after becoming free in 1422. He had served as a chamberlain and a sheriff. Both Lancaster and Blackburn were sons of established York merchants, and may have owed their success to their fathers' reputations. Blackburn's father had served as mayor and died a very wealthy man leaving at least £600.<sup>127</sup> Lancaster's father was engaged in overseas trade but did not hold office. Sons who survived and followed their fathers into local government were uncommon but John Gyllyot jnr was another who had an exceptional political career, perhaps as a consequence of his parentage, and of his own financial success. He became a chamberlain in 1482, within one year of his entry, sheriff two years later, and mayor for the first time within 6 years. He left at least £700 and a large urban estate. His son Peter

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127. Prob. Reg. II, f. 605.

looked as though he might follow an unusual family tradition when he became a chamberlain in 1522, one year after he had become a freeman, but he died 3 years later without holding another office.<sup>128</sup>

It was not possible to predict a man's political future from his early career, although their parentage and wealth must have made some men, such as Nicholas Blackburn jnr, favourites for the mayoralty. The reasons why others were less successful are not so clear. The Brounflete brothers William and Thomas waited 30 and 26 years respectively to be elected chamberlain. Thomas did become a sheriff the following year in 1457, but died a year later. Both were active in overseas trade and William's average annual trade was worth over £50. John Carter, free in 1469, was elected a chamberlain 31 years later and died in 1505 without holding another office. In some families one brother had a successful political career and another did not; maybe by agreement. Thomas Aldestonemore waited 20 years before he was elected to the only office he held, that of chamberlain, while his brother John, free in the same year, 1412, served as chamberlain in 1418, as sheriff in 1421, and as mayor in 1427.

Not all sheriffs chose to take their automatic place in the twentyfour after their term of office, but for those who did and became aldermen, their promotion usually came within ten years and for 50%, within six years. Selection seems to have had little to do with ability or reliability since there were men whose attendance at council meetings was exemplary but they never became aldermen. William Tate, a tailor and sheriff in 1478, attended almost every meeting of council until 1503 but was not favoured with a seat on the aldermanic bench. Likewise Thomas Allen, a baker and sheriff in 1470 attended regularly

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128. Ibid. IX, f. 324.

until he was too ill in 1500. What impact one wonders, did the presence of a core of stalwarts have upon the city's politics, or were they mere committee fodder?

The absence of reliable records of freeman entry into Hull and Beverley make such a close analysis difficult, but the impression is that in Hull men were elected chamberlain within 10 years of becoming free, but election as bailiff or sheriff did not follow as quickly as in York; the majority waiting a further 10 years but 46% of the merchants traced became sheriff within 5 years. The mayoralty was achieved on average within 10 years, but there was no pattern to their subsequent terms as mayor, which could occur between 1 and 20 years later. Robert Chapman's was a typical career. Free in 1464, he was a chamberlain in 1474, sheriff in 1478, and mayor in 1487 and again in 1493.<sup>129</sup>

Many careers progressed in fits and starts but the high flyers moved rapidly from office to office. In Hull, Edmund Coppendale, free in 1450, was elected chamberlain one year later, sheriff two years after that in 1453, and mayor 6 years later in 1459. However, he was elected mayor for a second time in 1477, 18 years after his first mayoralty. William Goodknapp was another high flyer. He was free in 1488, elected a chamberlain in 1490, sheriff in 1493, and mayor for the first time in 1497. He was elected mayor for a second term in 1503, but was in Calais at the time and Robert Garner was elected in his place seven weeks later.<sup>130</sup>

The names of the Beverley keepers survive for consecutive years between 1436 and 1470.<sup>131</sup> Those who served several times could expect

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129. BRG 1 ff. 24, 26v., 27(a); BRB 1 f. 118v.

130. BRG 1 ff. 18v., 21, 23, 25v., 27, 28, 29v.; BRB 1 f. 146; M479/2/27.

131. See Appendix 1.

to hold office every four years or so until they died. Very few men were re-elected within 3 years of their preceeding term, and given the collective nature of Beverley's government, long-service with accumulated experience and consequent respect was the only goal. Since Beverley did not return M.P.s, there was not even the carrot of jaunting up to London, as there was for successful York and Hull men. 75% of York M.P.s had served as mayor and 75% of Hull M.P.s either had or would serve as mayor. Men from all three towns were liable to put on royal commissions of array, oyer and terminer, dykes and ditches throughout Yorkshire.<sup>132</sup>

Why did men seek civic office? Was it because they had higher ambitions or a strong sense of duty, a lust for 'worship' and respect?<sup>133</sup>

It will be apparent that to get close to the heights of civic power in York and Hull, a man usually had to wait until he was fairly old, by contemporary standards, and indeed, merchants as a group had a longer life-expectancy than the average (2/3 for whom entry dates and dates of death are known, lived over 30 years after becoming free, that is to an age of 52, and 1/5 for over 40 years).<sup>134</sup> Death most commonly occurred between the ages of 50 and 60. What is not so obvious is whether or not there was a particular regard for age, since those rapidly promoted were not hindered by their youth. The aldermanic bench was undoubtedly a

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132. See below, pp. 323-8.

133. In 14th-century Burgos, the ruling elite was allowed to wear and adopt an exclusive style of dress! T.F. Ruiz, *The Transformation of the Castilian Municipalities: the case of Burgos 1248-1350, Past & Present*, 77 (1977), p. 19.

134. Based on the assumption that men became freemen at 21-22. See Hammer, *The Oxford Town Council*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5 where he concludes that the biologically successful won the final prize; the alderman's scarlet.

repository of wisdom and clear thinking, and in Beverley there was a group of venerabiles,<sup>135</sup> who were consulted from time to time like the Delphic oracle. Probably, the 20-25 year wait to become mayor was necessary, while a man worked up his business to the state where he could maintain it through cursory supervision or had accumulated sufficient wealth to be able to spend much of his time governing.

Aldermen held office until death or until they were incapable of attending meetings. Instances of men serving as aldermen in York for another decade after serving as mayor were by no means rare. William Wells, Richard York, William Tod, William White, Michael White and George Kirk all sat as aldermen for at least a further 10 years after their first mayoralties, and George Kirk and the two Whites served as mayor for a second term.<sup>136</sup> As aldermen they wielded great power in selecting future mayors to join them from the twentyfour.

For some who did climb onto the aldermanic bench, respect became less intoxicating and their duties became onerous and wearisome. Robert Hancock and John Harper retired for reasons of illhealth in 1496, and in 1484 the council dismissed John Gyllyot, William Marshall and William Neleson for the same reason. John Tong, on the other hand, had to ask the council several times to be dismissed because he was 'broken by great sickness' before his request was granted in 1490.<sup>137</sup> By then he had been absent from all council meetings for two years.<sup>138</sup> When William Snawsell was given leave to retire in 1492, because he was 'greatly diseased and vexed with many and diverse sicknesses', John

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135. Bev. Cart., f. 7v.

136. See Appendix 4.

137. House Book VII ff. 19, 19v., 117v.; VIII f. 4v. William Tod retired through ill-health in 1503 and William White and John Elwald in 1506. Ibid., IX ff. 9v., 27v.

138. Ibid., VI ff. 133 et seq.

Newton, another alderman made the same request because he was 'so sick with the government that he might not come and show his mind'.<sup>139</sup> Was this due to the irascibility of age or increasing exasperation with colleagues of some years acquaintance?

Certainly in the late fifteenth century, when records are reasonably full, it is clear that the council did not welcome individuals who did not take their aldermanic responsibilities seriously. Attendance and punctuality at council meetings was a constant problem and the regularity with which ordinances were passed, imposing fines on non-attenders and latecomers of the aldermen and twentyfour alike suggests it was insoluble.<sup>140</sup> William Holbeck was persistently absent from meetings and was dismissed in 1476. His failings were compounded in the eyes of his fellow aldermen, by his removing his household to live outside the city walls, to the Friars' Tofts.<sup>141</sup> In 1500 Thomas Scotton was similarly dismissed for absenteeism, but he had been reluctant to become an alderman in the first place, and refused to take his oath until he was threatened with a £40 fine!<sup>142</sup>

It has been suggested that there was a scarcity of willing and able citizens to take on the burdens of office in the late 15th century, and

139. Ibid. VII f. 60; IX ff. 9v., 27v. William Chimney was summoned to take his annual oath in October 1503 and to bear the charges pertaining to an alderman, or else to pay a fine to be allowed not to attend council meetings. He was allowed to defer his decision until the next council meeting, and on 15 December, 1503, he asked to be excused from serving as an alderman, because he was too old and too sick. The council agreed to discharge him, 'having tender consideration for his great age ... he to take his ease and rest', on payment of £10! Ibid., IX f. 9.

140. E.g. M.B. I, pp. 34, 49; II, p. 199; Y.C.R., I, p. 8; II, p. 176.

141. House Book II ff. 2v., 4; VIII f. 99.

142. Y.C.R. II, p. 11.



that that can indicate a town in decline.<sup>143</sup> At the very least it has been argued, civic government came to reflect the diminution in the exceptionally wealthy and successful in towns, and had to rely upon the next rank in society.<sup>144</sup> Clearly there were fewer very wealthy individuals in the older centres, and so fewer of them in local government, but it is debatable that there was a fierce withdrawal from civic duty amounting to a flight from office.

This has been argued out more fully elsewhere,<sup>145</sup> and briefly it seems that in York at least, there always had been some men who avoided civic office, and purchased pardons and exemptions from doing so.<sup>146</sup> In the late 15th century, the numbers of exemptions purchased increased, but in suspicious circumstances. Burgesses from a variety of occupations paid sums ranging from £6 paid by a cook in 1492 for exemption for 6 years, to £2 paid by a goldsmith and a yeoman in 1499 for exemption for 8 years.<sup>147</sup> It seems likely, however, that the council was compelling men who were unlikely to be elected as sheriff, to buy exemption from that office. In 1451 the council gained parliamentary cancellation of all previous royal exemptions from holding civic office.<sup>148</sup> The

143. R.B. Dobson, *Urban Decline in Late Medieval England*, T.R.H.S. 5th ser. xxvii (1977), p. 20.

144. W.G. Hoskins, The Age of Plunder (1976), p. 100.

145. J.I. Kermode, *Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York*, Ec.H.R. 2nd ser. xxxv, pp. 179-198.

146. As early as 1420 regulations were passed forbidding aldermen to leave the city on election day, on pain of a fine of £80. In 1445 John Thrisk, who had already served as mayor twice, acquired a royal exemption for life from holding any civic office. C.P.R. 1441-6, p. 395.

147. House Book VII, f. 85v.; VIII, f. 41v.

148. The penalty for purchasing a royal exemption was a fine of £40. Rot. Parl. V, p. 225. However, in 1501 Anthony Welbourn, who had purchased a royal exemption, was elected sheriff but did not serve. House Book VIII, f. 115v.

individuals purchasing council exemptions were generally retiring chamberlains, who would not normally be expected to hold office as a sheriff for at least two years,<sup>149</sup> even if they did satisfy the wealth and occupation requirements. In October 1495, the council decided to raise the money required to pay off a specific debt of £62 14s., by compelling men, likely to be elected chamberlain or sheriff but unable to 'bear the office', to pay to be exempted.<sup>150</sup>

The majority of men buying exemptions were cooks, tapiters, fishmongers;<sup>151</sup> men unlikely to maintain the worship of the office, and when a reason was given for such exemptions, it was usually that the individual concerned was 'not able to bear office'. John Reg, a fishmonger, was said to be 'a small person and not of sufficient stature to occupy the office of sheriff'. The smallness described his economic standing and not his physical height! Thomas Chapman, a saddler, was similarly exempted 'unless he gain sufficient in years'.<sup>152</sup>

Few merchants were recorded as buying or being granted exemptions from office. Exceptions were Thomas Catour and Thomas Hardsang, who paid 5 marks and £20 respectively in 1495. Hardsang was said to be 'insufficient in goods and discretion',<sup>153</sup> and his lack of discretion in the eyes of the council may account for the unusually large sum he had to pay for exemption. Some merchants were allowed exemption without payment. Alan Staveley, who later served as sheriff and mayor, was exempted until he was 'able and sufficient in reason and discretion',

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149. See below, p. 313,

150. Y.C.R. II, p. 121.

151. See for example House book VIII, ff. 24v., 49, 136v.; IX, ff. 8v., 35v.

152. Ibid., IX, f. 50; VI, f. 100.

153. Ibid., VII, f. 138v.

whereas Brian Conyers was exempted until he had 'grown in goods and riches'.<sup>154</sup>

That 'riches' were essential for a man holding the highest offices is clear. Quite how much, is less so. It has been estimated that in early 16th-century York a man had to be worth about £80-£100 per year to be elected sheriff.<sup>155</sup> A man was expected to begin his year in office with a ceremonial 'riding' through the city and with a feast for the council; after which he took his oath.<sup>156</sup> He may also have had to pay £16 13s.4d. or twice that on taking up his office as his contribution to the 'liflod' of the city, or as security against the expenses of his office.<sup>157</sup> Once in post, sheriffs had to maintain the dignity of the office by dressing correctly, wearing their fur tippetts, and being accompanied by a serjeant in front, and an honest servant at the back, as required by a civic ordinance in 1419. Failure to observe these requirements could result in disgrace.<sup>158</sup> Hospitality and dignified conduct was expected of the mayor of York also, but he did receive a fee of £50 plus additional payments.<sup>159</sup> The sheriffs merely had their expenses covered if that, from fines.

There are no hints in the Hull and Beverley records, of expensive demands being made of office-holders. The Hull mayors and sheriffs were expected to proceed around the town with ceremony, like their York

154. Ibid., f. 109. Y.C.R. I, p. 25.

155. D.M. Palliser, Some aspects of the social and economic history of York in the sixteenth century, unpublished D. Phil. Oxford, 1968, p. 166.

156. Y.C.R. II, p. 179; House Book IX ff. 9v., 20 (ii)v.

157. House Book VI f. 29v. Bridgemasters also had to contribute to the 'liflod' on taking up office, ibid., IX f. 26, and chamberlains and aldermen had to make a payment when they took up office.

158. V.C.H. York, p. 72: M.B. II, pp. 86-7.

159. V.C.H. York, pp. 70-1.

counterparts, but the Hull mayor's fee fluctuated, generally it was £20, but he and the sheriff also received extra income from fines.<sup>160</sup>

It may be, that just as older towns like York were encumbered with the complex guild and labour restrictions of the past, they also had to carry obsolete expectations of civic behaviour which were equally financially draining. The mayor's feast in Coventry for example, was said to cost as much as half the yearly running expenses of his household.<sup>161</sup>

Just the same, town government did not collapse during the worst years of economic decline; there were still men willing to serve. Local power and prestige were considerable and tempting: so maybe to some, was the opportunity to serve in other capacities further afield.

#### FURTHER HONOUR AND GLORY

Once York and Hull had been granted their own commissions of the peace in 1396 and 1440 respectively, there was no longer the necessity for the Crown to appoint local commissions of oyer et terminer. These had regularly drawn on local men, and merchants had figured prominently, as commissioners of the peace, to enforce the statute of labourers or to inquire into specific complaints of assault and breaches of the peace. They continued to serve on county commissions.<sup>162</sup> Anticipating the 1396 charter, John Barden, John Gisburn, Simon de Quixlay and Robert Savage,<sup>163</sup> for example, were appointed J.P.'s. In Beverley, however,

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160. V.C.H. Hull, p. 31.

161. P.R.O. SP1/142 f. 66. This reference is from C. Phythian-Adams' unpublished paper, Coventry and Urban Decay.

162. C.P.R. 1313-17, p. 415; 1317-21, p. 85; 1350-4, pp. 332, 449; 1354-8, p. 497; 1364-70, pp. 266, 434; 1370-4, pp. 104, 355; 1377-81, pp. 47, 515, 572; 1429-36, p. 331; 1452-61, p. 609; 1476-85, p. 579; 1485-9, p. 186.

163. C.P.R. 1374-7, p. 554; 1377-81, pp. 503, 518; 1385-89, p. 296; 1389-92, p. 37; 1392-96, p. 84.

merchants continued to serve on commissions of the peace in the town throughout the 14th and 15th centuries,<sup>164</sup> and on pavage commissions<sup>165</sup> and merchants from all three towns served on commissions of array,<sup>166</sup> within their boroughs and in the county. They sat, apparently as equals with the gentry, on commissions of wallibus et fossatis, for weirs and obstructions in the Ouse,<sup>167</sup> and as royal subsidy collectors, mainly in Yorkshire.<sup>168</sup> Merchants were regularly appointed to serve as customs' officials, generally as collectors or controllers in Hull, sometimes in Grimsby, Scarborough, and Ravenser. Occasionally merchants were appointed royal butler in Hull.<sup>169</sup> The Crown found their specialist knowledge useful, even though individual merchants were guilty of smuggling, and appointed them ulnager or to commissions to enforce commercial regulations such as the collection of wool and cloth subsidies,<sup>170</sup> or to

164. C.P.R. 1350-54, pp. 232, 391; 1367-70, p. 418; 1429-36, p. 628; 1467-77, p. 637; 1476-85, p. 579.
165. C.P.R. 1385-89, p. 518; 1401-5, p. 227; 1405-8, p. 284; 1413-18, pp. 14, 275; 1436-41, p. 488; Bev. Cart. f. 24.
166. C.P.R. 1364-7, p. 432; 1370-4, p. 101; 1374-7, p. 502; 1377-81, p. 37; 1429-36, pp. 360, 470; 1461-7, p. 31; 1467-77, p. 407; C.C.R. 1476-85, pp. 398, 484.
167. C.P.R. 1330-34, p. 131; 1338-40, pp. 76, 144; 1350-3, p. 542; 1358-61, pp. 422, 583; 1377-81, p. 471; 1385-9, p. 471; 1396-8, p. 101; 1407-17, p. 427; 1461-7, p. 206; 1467-77, p. 354.
168. M.B.. I, p. 131; II, p. 76; C.C.R. 1334-8, p. 40; 1358-61, p. 348; 1361-4, pp. 302, 463; 1367-70, p. 394; 1370-4, p. 269; C.F.R. 1377-83, p. 58; C.C.R. 1385-9, p. 555; 1405-9, p. 302; E 179/217/42. Beverley men could only serve as tax collectors within the borough after 1401. Bev. Cart. f.2.
169. C.P.R. 1334-8, p. 166; 1345-8, p. 277; 1350-4, p. 658; 1401-5, p. 383; 1413-18, p. 10; 1418-22, pp. 175, 392; 1446-52, p. 60; C.F.R. 1327-37, p. 211; 1377-83, p. 169; C.C.R. 1330-3, p. 257; 1346-9, pp. 8, 219; 1389-92, p. 122; Lister, Early Yorks. Woollen Trade, Appendices II, III; W. Childs, ed., The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453-1490, Yorks. Arch. Soc. Rec. Ser. cxliv (1986), Appendix A.
170. C.C.R. 1339-41, p. 590; C.P.R. 1338-40, p. 393; 1350-4, p. 28; 1358-61, pp. 67, 162; 1377-81, p. 438; 1381-5, p. 244; C76/13.

enforce statutes against the export of bullion,<sup>171</sup> or to fight piracy.<sup>172</sup>

During times of war, merchants from York, Beverley and Hull, were appointed to collect money and suitable ships for the Crown,<sup>173</sup> and on one occasion in 1457, two Hull merchants were commissioned to press men into overseas service for the king.<sup>174</sup> Exceptionally merchant burgesses were sent on diplomatic missions by the king; John de Ripon of York and Stephen de la Gard of Beverley were sent to Flanders in 1336, and Thomas Gra of York was one of three ambassadors sent to treat with the Hanse in Prussia in 1388.<sup>175</sup>

All of these specific commissions were in addition to similar commissions given to the mayor and sheriffs of York and Hull *ex officio* and suggest a considerable range of local government responsibilities, beyond the purview of routine town government. They reflect the extent to which the Crown saw merchants as 'urban gentry'; men with the status to effectively fulfill the duties they were given,<sup>176</sup> and also the extent to which merchant burgesses were involved in the region around their urban strongholds. The division between town and country<sup>177</sup> was

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171. C.F.R. 1319-27, p. 257; C.C.R. 1354-60, p. 473; C.P.R. 1381-5, p. 198; 1391-6, p. 238.

172. C.P.R. 1358-61, p. 79; 1446-52, p. 316; 1429-36, p. 470.

173. C.P.R. 1370-4, pp. 227, 355; 1410-22, p. 72; 1418-22, p. 72; 1429-36, pp. 334, 510; 1446-52, p. 365.

174. C.P.R. 1452-61, pp. 172, 404.

175. C.P.R. 1334-8, p. 336; 1385-9, p. 453.

176. Other unusual commissions included merchants. In 1333 three Hull merchants were appointed to inquire into possible merchant collusion with the Scots! C.C.R. 1333-7, p. 35. Robert Gare of York was put on a commission enquiring into the debts of the late archbishop Alexander Neville in 1397, C.P.R. 1396-9, p. 311. In 1401 2 prominent York merchants were given responsibility for the inspection of the Castle Mills, Crown property. Ibid. 1401-5, p. 64.

177. R. Horrox, *Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century*, in R.A. Griffiths, ed., Patronage the Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England (Gloucester, 1981), pp. 155-6.

not so very great in the devolving of administration from the centre to the provinces, and maybe townsmen with the experience of local administration and commercial knowledge of distant markets, stood out as men of distinction and ability. What we cannot know, is how far merchants were inevitably the junior members of commissions with a mixed membership which included gentry and even local nobility.

As with civic office, individuals were uninterested in royal service, or grew tired or too old to continue to accept commissions. For example, Adam Coppendale of Beverley was granted a royal exemption at the age of 68 in 1383, and Thomas Holme and John Kelk also of Beverley were similarly granted in exemptions in 1336 and 1390 respectively.<sup>178</sup> York merchants sought and obtained exemptions from civic and some from royal offices also: Nicholas Useflete in 1438 and John Thrisk in 1445<sup>179</sup> for example. The reluctance of some individuals, and the exploitation by the York council, of the inadequacy of others is discussed in J. Kermode, *Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York*.<sup>180</sup>

Although by no means typical, three York merchants will serve to illustrate the range of royal commissions to which individuals might be appointed. William Frost, the York merchant appointed keeper of the city in 1405, was an experienced royal commissioner, and his appointments provide a good example of the range of royal duties given to some merchants. He was appointed to several commissions to survey the weirs in Yorkshire waterways,<sup>181</sup> and served as royal escheator in

178. *C.P.R.* 1334-8, p. 318; 1381-5, p. 31; 1388-92, p. 205.

179. *Ibid.*, 1436-41, p. 126; 1441-6, pp. 22, 395.

180. *Ec.H.R.* 2nd ser. xxxv (1982), pp. 179-98.

181. *C.P.R.*, 1396-9, p. 101; 1399-1401, p. 124; 1401-5, p. 273.

Yorkshire.<sup>182</sup> Twice he was appointed to commissions to inspect St. Leonard's Hospital for the Crown. In 1400 he was asked to raise loans for the king's journey to Scotland<sup>183</sup> and in 1401 was appointed with Thomas Gra to inspect the state of repair of the castle mills in York. Indeed he served the Crown so well that in 1404 he received a royal grant for life of 2 tuns of wine annually.<sup>184</sup> He was clearly a familiar and trusted servant of the Crown, an obvious choice for the difficult post of keeper in 1405, when the city paid the penalty for its support of Archbishop Scrope's rebellion against Henry IV.<sup>185</sup>

Thomas Gra was another York merchant much in demand for royal commissions. In 1371, 1379 and 1399 he was appointed to waterways' commissions.<sup>186</sup> In 1377 he was appointed to a commission of oyer and terminer in a case of trespass, and he was appointed to at least 8 commissions of the peace in the city,<sup>187</sup> and made a J.P. in 1380.<sup>188</sup> He also sat on inquiries into St. Leonard's Hospital for the Crown,<sup>189</sup> and was appointed to inquire into claims of destitution in Yorkshire occasioned by payment of the 1/10 and 1/15.<sup>190</sup> It is not surprising that when an embassy was sent to Prussia in 1388, to negotiate the

182. Ibid. 1388-92, pp. 60, 104, 121, 209, 298, 376, 457; 1399-1401, p. 450.

183. Ibid. 1391-6, pp. 79, 131, 356.

184. C.P.R. 1401-5, pp. 64, 406.

185. V.C.H. York, p. 58.

186. C.P.R. 1370-1, p. 111; 1377-81, p. 363; 1399-1401, p. 124.

187. Ibid. 1377-81, pp. 37, 572; 1381-5, p. 137; 1385-9, p. 254; 1388-92, pp. 139, 219, 343, 524.

188. Ibid. 1377-81, p. 503.

189. Ibid., p. 465; 1399-1401, pp. 270, 518.

190. Ibid. 1377-81, p. 459.



return of arrested English shipping, Thomas Gra was chosen as one of the three ambassadors.<sup>191</sup>

Appointment to royal commissions occurred less frequently in the 15th century and Nicholas Blackburn snr., for example, was not as much in demand as Thomas Gra had been, although he was one of the more regularly appointed 15th-century merchants. From his appointment as Admiral of the Seas north of the Thames in 1406, he was regularly appointed to commissions. In 1406 he was inquiring into forestallers in Yorkshire, and in the following year he was surveying the obstructions in the Ouse. In 1409 he was appointed to inquire into the illegal loading of boats by his fellow merchants, who were trying to avoid paying export subsidies, and in 1413 he was on a commission of oyer and terminer in Yorkshire.<sup>192</sup>

These were clearly exceptional men and the majority's experience of royal service was more limited. The highest accolade for many no doubt was to be elected to represent their borough in parliament. Beverley was only twice represented in parliament between 1300 and 1509: in February 1304/5 when John le Porter and Stephen Rote sat and in January 1306/7 when Robert de Scarborough and Thomas le Hirde sat. Beverley merchants though were present at Edward's councils of merchants, when Hull men were not.<sup>193</sup>

191. Ibid. 1385-8, p. 453. See also Ibid. 1334-8, p. 336 for a similar mission by John de Ripon to Flanders. The Crown found merchants particularly useful in this capacity. In 1431 and 1434 Henry VI appointed a Lynn merchant as one of his ambassadors to Bruges. I am grateful to Mr. E.C. Glover for this information. See also S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (1962), p.56.

192. C.P.R. 1405-8, pp. 171, 236, 473; 1408-13, p. 110; 1413-16, p. 65.

193. Return of the name of every member of the lower house, 1213-1702. Parl. Papers (1878).

However, unlike Beverley, Hull did return members to parliament, with increasing regularity from the 1330s. With the notable exception of William Eland, a lawyer and merchant, the majority of Hull's M.P.s already had or were to hold civic office and were merchants; 52% in the 14th-century and 75% in the 15th century. Several merchants were elected repeatedly: Adam Pund, William de la Pole, Walter Frost in the 14th century, Hugh Clitheroe, Robert Holme, John Fitling, Richard Anson, William Eland in the 15th.<sup>194</sup> Eland served 13 times between 1450 and 1484 and although never a city official, he was retained as counsel from 1447 to 1460 when he was made recorder. Uncertain political times may have encouraged the city to depart from its tradition in opting for Eland.<sup>195</sup> M.P.s were in effect chosen by the council which nominated four candidates from whom the commons chose two.<sup>196</sup>

In York, the process was less democratic with the aldermen and the twentyfour choosing two as M.P.s for ratification in the county court. The full council was rarely involved; attendance at the selection averaging 20 on ten occasions between 1419 and 1503.<sup>197</sup> As in Hull, the majority of York's M.P.s were drawn from the commercial elite of the city and although in the early 14th century, many sat for the city several times, none dominated the city's representation on the same scale as the Gra family from 1344. William served at least 14 times and his son Thomas at least 12. They were quite exceptional and no other M.P. served as often though some merchants were elected four or five times such as John Acastre and William Helmesley. There is no obvious

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194. Below, Appendix 1; V.C.H. Hull, p. 39.

195. Below, Appendix 4 (Hull); Horrox, Urban Patronage, op. cit., p. 159.

196. V.C.H. York, p. 39.

197. V.C.H. York, p. 79.

explanation for the Gras; Thomas was an overseas trader and prominent in royal service. After 1400 few men sat as M.P. and 75% were elected only once.<sup>198</sup>

If there was direct interference in urban politics, the selection of M.P.s would have been a prime target. There is no evidence that anyone other than the oligarchs of York and Hull was involved,<sup>199</sup> though their choices may have been made with an awareness of the advantage to be gained from choosing men favoured by powerful nobles. Miles Metcalfe and Thomas Wrangwish were both in Richard of Gloucester's affinity and sat as M.P.s for York, notably in 1483, and 1484.<sup>200</sup> Richard Anson gained favour with the Duke of York, acquiring office in the forfeited Stafford estate in Holderness in 1460 and was beheaded after capture at the battle of Wakefield for his loyalty. He sat as M.P. for Hull 5 times between 1439 and 1460 and it has been suggested that Yorkist favour helped his election.<sup>201</sup>

The advantages to individual boroughs in sending representatives to parliament are difficult to gauge. Their contribution to great matters must have been slight but on the other hand, M.P.s could perform some services and gain knowledge and contacts useful to a provincial community. Thus Hull's M.P.s sought advice in London in 1430-1 on the difficulties of trading with Iceland under Danish rule and help in 1441-2 on paying poundage on cloth. York M.P.s complained in 1382 about a dearth of grain, won a decision in 1391 that cloth shipped to Berwick

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198. V.C.H. York, p. 79; Below Appendices 1 and 4 (York).

199. M. McKisack, The Parliamentary Representation of English Boroughs during the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1932), passim; P. Jalland, The Revolution in Northern Borough Representation in Mid-Fifteenth-Century England, Northern History, XI (1975).

200. Below, Appendices 1 and 4; V.C.H. York, pp. 62-3.

201. Below, Appendix 4; Wedgwood, Biographies, p. 13; Horrox, Urban Patronage, pp. 155, 159.

was not exported, and in 1451 obtained the cancellation of letters patent by which men could be exempted from civic office. Given that both York and Hull conscientiously paid their members 4s. each day for attending parliament,<sup>202</sup> and that cumulatively this constituted a regular payment against each city's income,<sup>203</sup> then neither council was indifferent to the honour accrued.

#### CONCLUSION

The motives impelling individuals to seek public office will always be a mixture of vain-glory and acceptance of civic responsibility. Hierarchic systems of government create oligarchy and generate ambition. Urban government differed from national in that the highest levels were accessible to all burgesses in theory, though not all sought them.

Political oligarchies contain two elements; the ruling class or group, and the political or governing elite. The governing elite is composed of "those who occupy the positions of political command and ... can directly influence political decisions". Such an elite "undergoes changes in its membership over a period of time ... by the recruitment of new individual members ... sometimes by the incorporation of new social groups".<sup>204</sup> The governing elite draws its recruits from a much larger group, the ruling class, which in turn recruits from lower strata in society. In this way the level of wealth and stability of the ruling class has a direct influence on the continuity and stability of the governing elite through its provision of recruits.

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202. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 39, 64; Hull C.R.O. M479/13, 14; V.C.H. York, p. 79.

203. For instance York paid £83 4s. to its M.P.s in 1475 when the city's finances were in deficit. Hull, for some reason only paid its M.P.s between £10 and £20 throughout the 15th century. See below, Appendix 2.

204. T.B. Bottomore, Elites and Society (1964), pp. 11-12.

The ruling class in York, Beverley and Hull, as in most medieval English towns, was composed of several groups dominated by merchants. Within it were to be found ambitious immigrants, newcomers to the occupation of merchant, younger sons of the gentry, minor royal officials, and successful tradesmen and craftsmen. The class as a whole was probably recognised as a cohesive force<sup>205</sup> by those it excluded even though the political career prospects of each group differed, in that craftsmen were less likely to become mayor than merchants.

Notable differences are apparent between the three towns. Beverley's governing elite included more gentlemen and successive members of minor local 'dynasties'. In 15th-century York, offices circulated more widely through a larger group than had been so before the 1370s; ambitious pressure from 'new' merchants engendering constitutional as well as political change. Hull by contrast, accepted a higher degree of repeated office-holding, and a tighter oligarchy than either of the other two towns, due mainly to having a smaller population and slightly more democratic system of elections.<sup>206</sup> It may also have been that differences in wealth and life-style were less apparent in smaller towns, as Susan Reynolds has suggested.<sup>207</sup>

The government of medieval towns was complex, with responsibilities for many aspects of urban life, and there can be no doubt that the Crown

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205. Cf. London where it has been claimed, the merchants drew apart as a superior social class, Thrupp, Merchant Class of Medieval London, p. 29.

206. J.I. Kermode, Obvious Observations on the Formation of Oligarchies in Late Medieval Towns, in J.A.F. Thompson, ed., Towns and Townspeople (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 88-106. Cf. Exeter in the 14th-century where the "oligarchic pool remained small but not stagnant". Kowaleski, A Medieval Provincial Oligarchy, op. cit., pp. 379-80.

207. Reynolds, English Medieval Towns, p. 163.

depended upon the assistance of the merchant group in the three towns to fulfil a variety of local government duties. The two main responsibilities of medieval town councils; the well-being of their own burgesses and the good ordering of commercial life of the town sustained the quality of urban life. Although on occasions the council of the three towns proved to be inept in their handling of their own financial affairs, or of national crises which affected them, and although they were unresponsive to pressures for more democratic government, they did maintain a surprising degree of stability and efficiency.

As to why men sought civic office, one can only conclude it was a desire to be at the centre of things, and the consequent respect and status that brought.<sup>208</sup> There is no evidence of individuals embezzling civic funds or abusing their responsibilities, although there are strong suggestions that people believed it was so.<sup>209</sup> There is little discernible of any collective policies, skewed to favour the oligarchs' own commercial interests; though a constant theme was the need to maintain the calibre of the men in government and to the oligarchs of the three towns, and their commonalties, that meant plutocracy and not democracy. It was, of course, very much in the interest of merchants to concern themselves with civic affairs. As individual members of an expanding commercial community they also prospered. Service in local government could and did bring a man respect and status. In appointing merchants to local commissions, the Crown accorded them the same respect as it accorded to members of the local gentry, and was equally dependent upon both for the maintenance of law and order. Although the majority

208. Freeman Foster concluded that it was not motivation in terms of love of gain, F.F. Foster, The Politics of Stability: a portrait of rulers in Elizabethan London (London, 1977), p. 6.

209. Cf. London, where 3 aldermen were accused of exploitation in the Good Parliament, M.B. I, p.xv.

of merchants were satisfied with prominence in urban affairs, it meant that some could establish close links with the gentry on an equal footing through a common interest in local affairs as well as through business and marriage.

## CHAPTER 6 - MERCHANT SOCIETY

In 1948 Sylvia Thrupp completed her seminal study of The Merchant Class of Medieval London. It has yet to be surpassed and this dissertation merely complements her metropolitan analysis with a provincial one. More recently, Alison Hanham's richly informed insights into the Cely family, has pushed on our understanding of one merchant family in the Cotswolds,<sup>1</sup> and maybe by implication, our understanding of other families. To overcome the inadequacies of single family studies, a prosopographical approach has led to work on variously defined groups, Oxford and Cambridge graduates,<sup>2</sup> women<sup>3</sup> for example, and highlights the pitfalls and complexities of such studies. Although more evidence should ease the establishing of average patterns and trends, quantity can introduce further problems. At one level, confirming a particular tendency by reference to 1400 individuals, does make conclusions more convincing. Inevitably however, it is the telling single example, usually one which is exceptionally well and fully recorded, which indicates and elucidates key issues. Following those pointers, trawling through the wider group, reinforces what began as only an impression derived from a handful of examples. At the same time exceptions emerge, triggering another set of queries.

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1. Sylvia Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (1948); A. Hanham, The Celys and Their World. An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century (1985).
  2. R.B. Dobson, Recent Prosopographical Research in Late Medieval English History: University Graduates, Durham Monks, and York Canons, in N. Bulst and J-P. Genet, eds., Medieval Lives and the Historian. Studies in Medieval Prosopography (Kalamazoo, 1986), pp. 181-200 and in the same volume see L.R. Poos, Peasant 'Biographies' from Late Medieval England, pp. 201-214.
  3. M. Erler and M. Kowaleski, eds., Women and Power in the Middle Ages (Athens, Georgia, 1988): P.J.P. Goldberg, Female labour, service and marriage in the late medieval urban north, Northern History, 22 (1986), pp. 18-38; idem, Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life, in J.A.F. Thompson, Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century (1988).



To a great extent, social history is the art of balancing the numerous and 'average' against the unusual and idiosyncratic. Work on a single occupational group, like merchants, can only elaborate their social networks, attitudes, and priorities, and as Maryanne Kowaleski has recently reminded us, they are but one amongst many groups in medieval urban society.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, they were a dominant economic and political class, and historians cannot ignore their religious practices, public benefactions, social interaction and family structure.

#### Social Origins

Every class has a readily identifiable core and a more confused and hazy penumbra. Merchants were not socially exclusive. Their origins were geographically and occupationally mixed and retained an importance as can be seen from testamentary bequests to friends and family living elsewhere. It was a fluid class, constantly recruiting rural immigrants and upwardly mobile craftsmen to replace merchant families which could not naturally replace themselves. The failure of the majority of merchant families to produce male heirs who survived to maturity<sup>5</sup> was a fundamental characteristic of medieval towns and influenced family, commercial and political strategies.

Towns continually recruited migrants from their hinterlands. Migrants entered urban society at all levels and by retaining their social and economic connections with their rural birthplaces, they preserved important regional links.<sup>6</sup>

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4. M. Kowaleski, The history of urban families in medieval England, Jnl. Med. Hist., 14 (1988), p. 48.
  5. See below pp. 343-4; C. Platt, The English Medieval Town (1976), pp. 98-102.
  6. Cf. A.F. Butcher, The Origins of Romney Freemen, 1433-1523, Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. xxvii (1974), pp. 25-6; Platt, The English Medieval Town, pp. 96-8.

The majority of merchants whose external origin can be traced came from villages in the three Ridings and north Lincolnshire. Nicholas Blackburn snr of York was exceptional, in that he was an established merchant from another town, Richmond (N.R.). Thomas Glasyn, although not definitely an established merchant, migrated from Ripon. The most distant migrations were from Northumberland, Durham, and possibly Cumberland.<sup>7</sup> Yorkshire merchants moved south, notably to London like the sons of Thomas Bracebridge, and Robert Brompton, and Walter Pund's nephew. Few Southerners seem to have migrated north although they were increasingly trading in Yorkshire. John Thompson of Beverley may have come from Dunstable originally, and John Bosewell of York from Ipswich, but if they did they were rarities.<sup>8</sup>

Occasionally the sons of country gentlemen moved into one of the three towns, entered the freedom as a merchant and emerged into the governing élite. Thomas Danby of York, free in 1424, was a son of Robert Danby, esq., of Farnley. Brian Conyers of York, free in 1473, was a son of Christopher Conyers, esq., of Hornby. Alan Staveley of York, free in 1489, was a son of Miles Staveley of Ripon Park.<sup>9</sup> William Eland of Hull, free in 1450, may have been a member of the Eland family of Eland.<sup>10</sup>

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7. E.g. Robert Savage and Bertram Dawson to York from Northumberland, Patrick Lawe of York and Ralph Langton of Hull from Durham/Northumberland, Richard Bagot from Teesside to York, Robert Collinson, possibly from Cumberland to York. Prob. Reg. II ff. 76, 378-80; III f. 17; VI f. 22v.; IX f. 96; Dec. & Cap. I f. 332.

8. Yorks. Deeds, IV, p. 161 (Bracebridge); Prob. Reg. III f. 223 (Bosewell); VI f. 146 (Thompson); Hull C.R.O. D457 (Pund); D533 (Brompton).

9. Test. Ebor. II, p. 215n.; C.C.G., pp. 90n., 122n.

10. BRG 1 f. 20v.; W. Longstaffe ed., Tonge's Visitation, Surtees Society, xli (1863), p. 69; R. Horrox, Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century, in R.A. Griffiths, ed., Patronage, The Crown and The Provinces in Later Medieval England (1981), pp. 159-60.

Migration between the three towns was probably more common than the records reveal. Branches of Beverley mercantile families established themselves in Hull; for example the Coppendales, Bromptons, and possibly Alcocks, and the York Daltons were surely not the only family from their city to migrate to Hull. John Raghton of York looked as though he was planning to move to Hull. He was admitted to the freedom in 1405 but withdrew.<sup>11</sup> There was a Hugh Clitheroe in York in 1398, possibly the father or grandfather of Hugh Clitheroe, mayor of Hull in 1443, and Robert Chapman, once a York merchant, became a freeman of Hull in 1443-4. Common surnames derived from place-names make it impossible to decide whether individuals belonged to the same family or not. The famous Walter de Kelstern of York was possibly related to the Kelsterns of Beverley,<sup>12</sup> the Frost family who moved from Beverley probably had a branch in York and certainly William Frost of Beverley was living in York in his old age.<sup>13</sup> Robert Holme snr of York came originally from Holme-on-the-Moor and the contemporary Robert and Thomas Holmes of Beverley and Hull may well have come from the same village if not the same family, since Robert Holme of York took Thomas son of William Holme of Beverley as his apprentice.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally an alien merchant decided to settle in England and became naturalised. Peter Upstall and Henry Market, were aliens who settled in York, for example.<sup>15</sup> In any event, it

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11. BRE1, p. 244.

12. C.P.R. 1396-9, p. 363; Hull Acct. Roll 1443-4; Test. Ebor., II pp. 42n, 234n.

13. C.C.R. 1405-9, p. 316.

14. Prob. Reg. I ff. 100v.-103v. Similar connections were probably exploited by migrants to London. J.M. Imray, 'Les Bones Gentes de la Mercerye de Londres': a study of the Membership of the Medieval Mercers' Company, in A.E.J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway, eds., Studies in London History Presented to Philip Edmund Jones (1969), p. 169.

15. M.B. II, pp. 45, 185.

seems likely that most families kept a toe-hold in several places, and a dispersed family could provide useful local contacts as well as the occasional bed for the night.

The problems of setting up in business as a newcomer must have been daunting. Apart from the initial capital, the goodwill and respect of the established merchants had to be acquired and contacts with suppliers created. Migrants like Robert Holme of York, who came from the Wolds, had an immediate advantage in their local knowledge of wool producers. Others became apprenticed to established merchants and although apprentices were not allowed to trade for their own profit while indentured,<sup>16</sup> they were introduced to valuable contacts<sup>17</sup> as well as being taught the rudiments of trade. The custom can be traced most easily in Hull, where merchants who later rose to prominence, were apprenticed to prominent merchants! Nicholas Ellis, John Liversege, and John Ricard, later mayors of Hull, were apprenticed to Robert Shackles, a former mayor, who in his turn had been a servant to Peter Stellar. Ralph F(H)orne, later mayor, and Stephen Gildhouse, later sheriff, were both apprenticed to John Gregg, one of Hull's most wealthy early 15th-century merchants. Roger Bushel and Ralph Langton were typical of successful merchants who attracted, and doubtless needed, apprentices. They, like Shackles and John Gregg, each had at least four apprentices during their active lives.

Although not explicitly stated, the help given by an established merchant to a newcomer from his home town or village, must have been invaluable. Edmund Coppendale, a migrant from Beverley to Hull, took on a fellow townsman from Beverley, Thomas Brackenburgh, as his

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16. Y.C.R. I, pp. 163-4. Some London companies allowed apprentices to trade, Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 104.

17. Hanham, Celys, p. 203.

apprentice.<sup>18</sup> The opportunities of apprenticeship to a prominent merchant were probably the same in Beverley and York but the records of apprenticeships in both towns are sparse. The recorded instances in York reflect the Hull pattern. For example John Northeby, d. 1432, was a 'servant' of William Vescy, d. 1407, who was a big wool merchant. John Lincoln, sheriff in 1502 and Master of the Mercers' and Merchant Adventurers' Company in 1507, entered his freedom as an apprentice to John Ferriby, a former mayor. John Beesby jnr, sheriff in 1506, was an apprentice of Thomas Beverley, a former mayor,<sup>19</sup> and further examples can be cited.<sup>20</sup>

References to benefactors appear regularly in merchants' wills, and reflect the importance of good early contacts. William Frost, several times mayor of York, remembered two established merchants as his benefactors, Roger de Moreton and Roger Hovingham, and endowed a joint chantry in his own and their memory. Such was Robert Hancock of York's great affection for his master Thomas Barton that he wanted to be buried next to him.<sup>21</sup> Affection for other members of a master's household could develop, and the advancement of an apprentice through marriage to his master's daughter or even to his widow, was a possibility.<sup>22</sup> Only

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18. BRE 1 pp. 246, 252, 254, 256, 258, 265; BRG 1 ff. 23-26v.; Prob. Reg. III, f. 267. Other examples were William Alcock to John Sanderson, Nicholas Scoles to William Pund, John Snayton and John de Holm to John Tutbury BRE 1 pp. 241, 244-5, 253. John Dalton to John Swan, James Thomlinson to William Eland BRG 1 ff. 20v., 24.

19. York Freemen, p. 206; M. & M.A., p. 323; Prob. Reg. V f. 434.

20. John Yarum was servant to Thomas Siggeston, Robert Warde to Robert Holme, John Kent to Thomas Kirkham, John Langton to William Chimney. See Appendix 4.

21. C.P.R. 1391-6, p. 711; Prob. Reg. V f. 473.

22. Rich widows were not uncommon in 16th-century Exeter. W.G. Hoskins, The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter, Elizabethan Government and Society, eds. S. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield, C.H. Williams (1961), p. 167. See below, p.350 for the preponderance of widows relative to widowers.

One example of such a marriage has been discovered. Robert Harrison of Hull was an apprentice of John Dalton, and after Dalton's death in 1496 he married Dalton's widow, Katherine. Harrison had also enjoyed encouragement and help from Ralph Langton, a successful merchant mayor, and wanted to be buried at Langton's feet in Holy Trinity, Hull.<sup>23</sup> A similar relationship may have existed between Thomas Aldestonemore and another York merchant, John Gare, because Aldestonemore asked to be buried next to Gare if he died while in Calais.<sup>24</sup>

Friendly advice and introductions were of great advantage, but the major obstacle to most ambitious young merchants was the acquisition of initial capital. For some their inheritance was sufficient; others sold real property to raise cash; and others borrowed from established merchants or elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> As a group, merchants could provide the necessary financial support for their successors, and as members of the governing elite they occasionally showed sympathy to a young merchant by helping him to avoid the financial drain of civic office. Brian Conyers of York was excused from further office holding after his term as a chamberlain, until he was better established.<sup>26</sup>

In York it is possible to trace the emergence of several merchant families from other occupations. William Brereton became a freeman as a cook in 1396; one of his sons, Robert, remained in the same occupation,

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- BRG 1 f. 29; Prob. Reg. V ff. 483v.-5; IX f. 112; XIII f. 32a.
  - Prob. Reg. III f. 413.

E.g. John Romondby sold the manor of Romondby after he became free of York. Yorks. Deeds, I, p. 146; and see above pp. 233-5. The London mercers' and grocers' companies assumed that new shopholders would obtain their initial stock on credit. The grocers' company provided loans for that purpose from its funds. Londoners could also borrow from the Court of Orphanage. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 107-8, The Grocers of London, A Study of Distributive Trade, in Power and Postan, English Trade in the Fifteenth Century, p. 253.

Y.C.R. I, p. 25.

but another, John, became free as a merchant in 1430. John's son, Thomas, became a freeman in his turn as a clerk. The Jameson family also moved into the merchant group from another occupation. William Jameson had become free as a yeoman in 1456 and his son, Thomas, and grandsons, John, Thomas and Michael, all became merchants. In 1433 William Lancaster became a freeman as a clerk, his son John became a merchant, and his two sons Nicholas and Richard became a lawyer and clerk respectively in the 1470s although Nicholas was described as a merchant and clerk.<sup>27</sup> Dual occupation was not uncommon: George Essex of York was a merchant and apothecary, so was Lawrence Swattock of Hull. Moving in the reverse direction, Thomas Brownflete of York became a merchant although his father John had been an apothecary.

In Hull there was a noticeable tendency for mariners to move into the merchant class, by accumulating capital through small-scale trade or having shares in a ship. This may be a false impression though, since some men continued to be described as mariner, even though they were clearly trading regularly. Robert Michelson for instance, became free as a mariner in 1466. He had been trading on his own account since 1464. Similarly, William Bank was a mariner who came to own a ship. He traded in his own right and as a partner in a collective venture with several Hull merchants. He described himself as mariner just the same, in his will in 1505. What made him a mariner and not Robert Stut, who was a ship-owning merchant, is not at all clear. Perhaps the different nomenclature did not matter. However, it did to Robert Bennington, who became a freeman of Hull as a mariner in 1445, engaged in overseas trade and described himself in his will in 1460 as a merchant.<sup>28</sup>

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27. York Freeman, pp. 97, 143, 144, 175, 178, 200, 205, 211, 232, 237, 244.

28. Prob. Reg. VI f. 214 (Michelson); IV f. 181 Bennington .

Group Cohesion and Family Survival.

The cohesion of the group was maintained not only through common business interests and political ambition, but by a variety of social contacts of which apprenticeship or patronage could be a beginning. Just as an apprentice could advance through marriage to his master's daughter, so any young merchant could increase his opportunities by an astute marriage.<sup>29</sup> Advantages also accrued to the parent who could thus acquire a new business associate, or cash and property for investment, or gain a son-in-law or grandson as heir. When even the Celys 'did well to raise three sons to maturity',<sup>30</sup> the survival of male heirs was not to be taken for granted. Few families survived more than one or two generations in the male line. This was a common pattern. In Bury St. Edmunds, 75% of all families failed to produce male heirs for more than two successive generations.<sup>31</sup> Allowing for the probability of wills excluding eldest sons, it is remarkable, not that there were few male heirs, but how rarely families survived into a second generation through direct male issue.<sup>32</sup> Of course it would be impossible to discover conclusively if or why a family had disappeared, but if a merchant's grandson was active in trade, local government, or had moved out of town within the see of York, it would be surprising if his name did not occur in any of the sources checked. Sons have been firmly identified for 311

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29. For examples, see below p. 346. See also Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 106-7 on advantageous marriages and E. Power, Medieval People (10th edit. 1963), p. 126 for an arranged business marriage.

30. Hanham, Celys, p. 17.

31. R.S. Gottfried, Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis 1290-1539 (Princeton, 1982), p. 248.

32. A similar situation obtained in London. Thrupp, London Merchant Class pp. 200-4. Cf. 16th century Exeter where successive generations of families held office. W.T. McCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640 (1958), p. 36.



merchants: and circumstantially for a further 70. Of the 311 merchants from all three towns, only 42 had grandsons, by male descent, 5 great-grandsons, and 1 great-great-grandsons. Several families such as the Beverley Coppendales, Tirwhits, Ryses, and Holmes, and the York Holmes, probably survived into four or more generations but that assumption is based on the continuing appearance of men of wealth and status with those names and not on testamentary evidence. The numbers of sons a merchant had does not seem to have had any direct bearing on the numbers of generations his family survived. Robert Louth of York, d. 1407, had 6 sons, one of whom married twice, but no grandson has been traced to the family. William Bowes of York, d. 1439, had only one son but had 4 grandsons, and Thomas Neleson of York, d. 1484, with two sons and two daughters had eight grandsons through his eldest son William.<sup>33</sup>

Although many merchants acknowledged the existence of a bastard son or daughter, for example John Stockdale of York, d. 1506, had one of each, such children were normally excluded from any inheritance beyond a small cash bequest. The case of Robert Holme, snr, of York was exceptional, and his bastard son Robert inherited because he had no surviving legitimate son. Accepting a family responsibility, William Girlington of York left £4 in 1444, to the two bastard sons of his uncle John. Others acknowledged the mothers of their bastard children: John Goddysbuk of York for instance left £1 to Emmota by whom he had had a daughter, and John Selby left his son's mother a bowl.<sup>34</sup> It was not unusual to give two sons the same name, anticipating that one would die young, and ensuring that a traditional family christian name survived.

33. Prob. Reg. III f. 265 (Louth); ff. 580-3 (Bowes ; V ff. 212-3 (Neleson); IX f. 203 (Neleson).

34. Ibid., II f. 84 (Girlington); I f. 11v. (Selby ; ff. 100v.-103v. (Holme); III f. 276 (Goddysbuk): f. 365 (Holme .

Robert Fisher of Beverley and Robert Fisher of Hull were brothers, as were John Carleton senior and junior of Beverley.<sup>35</sup> This anticipation of the death of heirs is echoed in several wills. John Aldestonemore of York, who died in 1434, during York's worst decade of plague, prefaced almost every bequest in his will with the phrase 'if he/she should live'.<sup>36</sup> Many merchants had grandsons through their female heirs, but on that basis their families were absorbed into another, and did not continue the family name.

Nephews could, and often did, become an uncle's heir. Henry Pollington of Beverley, d. 1479, left the bulk of his estate to his nephew Robert since he had no son of his own to inherit. Similarly Thomas Holme of York made his nephew, Thomas, his heir in 1406.<sup>37</sup> Several families did not survive for reasons other than infertility. Induction into holy orders left a merchant heir-less after one generation. Stephen Tilson of Beverley's only son Thomas became a cleric. Two of Thomas Bracebridge of York's sons became clerics, one predeceased him, and the other migrated to London.<sup>38</sup>

The failure of male heirs had a major effect on the merchant group in each town. It prevented the formation of a dynastic oligarchy based on inherited wealth. Instead there was a steady flow of newcomers into the merchant group and thence into the governing élite. Even in Beverley the long established families provided only a small, if

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35. Ibid., I f. 38v (Carleton); V. f. 8 (Fisher).

36. Bartlett, *Aspects of the York Economy*, p. 193; Prob. Reg. II ff. 406-8.

37. Ibid., III ff. 255-255v. (Holme); V f. 147 (Pollington). Richard Russell of York dispersed his estate amongst his siblings, nephews and nieces. His daughter Ellen was well provided for through her marriage to John Thrisk III ff. 339-441.

38. Ibid. III ff. 487-90 (Bracebridge); V f. 138 (Tilson). See below p.381 for other merchants with sons who took holy orders.

powerful, minority of the keepers. The average mercantile business survived two generations at the most and the wealth of individuals was continually redistributed amongst other members of the merchant group in bequests and through marriage. The merchant group could not and did not depend upon the survival of individual families, but upon the collective strength of each generation. The inter-marriage of merchant families was more than the natural consequence of business association. It was the means whereby capital, investments, real estate and the goodwill of a business were retained within the group; whereby newcomers were accepted and assisted in their careers; and whereby the recruitment vital to the group's survival was most easily effected.

An astute marriage could rapidly advance the fortunes of an ambitious merchant. For example, William Stockton of York married the widow of Robert Collinson, Richard Wartre married John Moreton's daughter Alice, John Metcalfe married John Ferriby's daughter, and as Metcalfe was said to be 'comen lightly up' his marriage at least was clearly advantageous. Each of these was marrying into a successful merchant family, and each in turn obtained thereby a thriving business in trade.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult to convey the extensive and complex nature of the network of marriages which linked contemporary merchant families. It was a common feature of medieval towns, and in York, Beverley and Hull usually involved 2 or 3 families. Thus Adam Baker of Beverley, a merchant keeper active in the early 15th century married Elene, the sister-in-law of another merchant keeper, William Rolleston, and their daughter married a third merchant keeper, John Brompton. William Bowes snr of York married his two daughters Katherine and Joan to two other

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39. C.C.G., p. 29n.; Y.C.R. II, p. 156; Prob. Reg. IV f. 115 (Wartre); V f. 417 (Ferriby).

York merchants, Robert Louth and John Blackburn respectively. His son William married the daughter of a third merchant, Robert de Kirkeby. Hugh Clitheroe of Hull married Joan, the daughter of Robert Holme, another Hull merchant, and his sister Mary married two Hull merchants, John Thwayt and then John Scales.<sup>40</sup> Thomas Beverley snr of York married Alice, daughter of a fellow merchant Henry Markett, and their son John married Anne, daughter of John Ferriby also a merchant of York. Anne's sister Ellen married John Metcalfe of York, thus linking together four of York's mercantile families through the marriage of three merchant mayors and two merchant sheriffs.<sup>41</sup>

The appended family trees<sup>42</sup> detail the even more complex pattern of relationships which could be achieved. Through the marriage of their children, six contemporary and prominent York merchants were interconnected and through the marriage of their grandchildren, three more merchant families entered the relationship. Thus two generations of the Aldestonmore, Blackburn, Bolton, Bowes, Gascoigne, Holbeck, Kirkeby, Louth and Ormeshead families were united in a wide family circle. Even more extensive were the connections between Richard Thornton and two other York contemporaries, which extended to include three more mercantile families through the marriage of their grandchildren. When Richard Thornton's great-grandaughter Catherine married Bartholomew York, Thornton's group of relationships was added to those of the Yorks. The York family connections were not so extensive, but were with a number of lesser gentry families. The extent of intermarriage could bring families within unacceptable degrees of consanguinity. John

<sup>40</sup>. *Ibid.*, III f. 71v (Baker); f. 580 (Bowes); *C.C.R.* 1435-41 p. 40; D342.

<sup>41</sup>. Prob. Reg. II f. 70; V ff. 184, 417.

<sup>42</sup>. Appendix 6.

Beverley of York had to obtain a papal dispensation to marry John Ferriby's daughter Anne, to whom he was related in the third degree, although no marriage between the two families had recently taken place.<sup>43</sup> Intermarriage also united families of the three towns. For example Ralph Langton of Hull married his daughter Ellen to John Middleton of Beverley; John Bedford of Hull's daughter Ellen was married to Thomas Gare of York.<sup>44</sup>

The life-expectancy of merchants in this period is difficult to calculate, since the survival of dates of birth are rare. Instead, the date at which a man became a freeman must be used, but this also presents difficulties. Of the three methods of entry, by fine, patrimony, and through a completed apprenticeship, only the last was well documented. In Beverley the merchant guild insisted on a 7-year apprenticeship in 1446, and in the first ordinances of Hull guilds, recorded in the late 15th century, 7-year apprenticeships were the rule.<sup>45</sup> In York most apprenticeships were for at least seven years by the 15th century,<sup>46</sup> although the Curriers and Pinners required at least six years, and the Scriveners, five years. Only the Scriveners' ordinances recorded the age at which an apprentice should take up his indenture, and they insisted that a boy should be at least fifteen.<sup>47</sup> The minimum 5 years' service, meant that a scrivener's apprenticeship was completed at the age of twenty at the earliest.

43. Test. Ebor, III p. 196 n.

44. Prob.Reg. IV f. 96v.; II f. 220; C.C.G., p. 11n.

45. Bev. Town Docs. p. 92; Hull Corp. M 478/1-4.

46. M.B. I, pp. 54, 59, 71, 77, 80, 83, 89, 181.

47. Ibid., pp. 56, 87; II, p. 167.

It has been calculated that in late 15th-and early 16th-century London,<sup>48</sup> the average age of entry was twenty-two or twenty-three; and that in 16th-century York<sup>49</sup> it was at any age between twenty-one and twenty-six, and could be as late as thirty-five. There is a piece of evidence which supports the argument for an average age of twenty-two. John Hagg of York, became a freeman in 1471 and in 1471 he was said to be 'about 23 years old' when he served as a witness in a dispute in Bergen-op-Zoom.<sup>50</sup> Bearing the London pattern as a guide, it would seem reasonable to take twenty-two as the average age for taking up the freedom.

On the basis of that assumption, the merchants of York and Hull were reasonably long-lived. (There are too few entry dates to make any equivalent calculations for Beverley merchants.) Up to 1410, 70% of those for whom entry dates and dates of death are known, lived to an age of forty-five or over. In the 15th century where both dates are known for more merchants, 67% lived to forty-five or over and 20% to over 60. Death most commonly occurred between 30 and 40 years after entry, that is between the ages of fifty and sixty. By way of comparison, it is worth noting that Sylvia Thrupp has estimated that the median age of death for a group of 15th-century London merchants was forty-nine or fifty.<sup>51</sup> The Yorkshire merchants were not only longer-lived than their

48. The ages of mercers' and grocers' apprentices when they became freemen, ranged from twenty-one to twenty-six between 1463 and 1493. In 1491 the London grocers ruled that their apprentices could not become freemen until they were twenty-five or twenty-six. Sylvia Thrupp has calculated that the average age at entry was twenty-two or twenty-three. London Merchant Class, pp. 11, 93, 194.

49. D. Palliser, Tudor York, pp. 194-5.

50. Bronnen, II, pp. 1056-7.

51. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 194.

London rivals, but had a life-expectancy well over that of the average male at that time.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of the average longevity of Yorkshire merchants, they were usually survived by a wife. Of 442 merchants with named wives, only 91 (21%) survived their wives,<sup>53</sup> and of these 53 were known to have had more than one wife. Those with more than two wives were exceptional: 44 were married twice and 9 three times. These are conservative figures, derived from references to chantries or obits for previous wives and from strong references in other merchants' wills.<sup>54</sup> Twelve wives were known to have been widows on their marriages to the merchants studied, and ten others were known to have remarried after their merchant husband's death. Such occurrences are more difficult to trace for women than for men, and the numbers were probably higher. The evidence suggests either that female life-expectancy was much higher than that of men, or that men generally did not marry until some time after becoming free and they were established, and that when they did marry, their wives were younger than they.<sup>55</sup>

The pattern of remarriage of merchant widowers and widows reflected the cohesive nature of the merchant group. John Stockdale of York's wife Ellen had previously been married to William Hancock and Robert Johnson, both York merchants. Isabella, wife of Robert Gaunt of York,

52. According to J.C. Russell, the life-expectancy for the average male in the period before 1500 was about thirty. British Medieval Population (1948), p.374.

53. 10 out of 60 (17%) London aldermen outlived their wives 1448-1520. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 197.

54. The pattern in late 16th-century York was similar. Palliser, Tudor York, p. 122.

55. In London, merchants were generally between 21 and 26 and their wives 17 or over when they married. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 192-3, 196.

had four husbands, three of them merchants. Katherine Stellar of Hull, widow of Peter Stellar, a merchant mayor, remarried one of her husband's former associates, John Tutbury, who was also a merchant mayor.<sup>56</sup>

These marriages ensured that some of the working capital and assets of a merchant's business were retained for the merchant group, since wives traditionally inherited  $\frac{1}{3}$  of their husbands' estate. However, as we shall see below, some merchants tried to deter their widows from taking another husband, by imposing conditions on their inheritance. This pattern of remarriage within the merchant group was common, not only within each town but between the three towns. For instance, Thomas Gra of York married the widow of John de Colthorp of Hull and became a co-executor of her first husband's will. Thomas Helemesley of York married the widow of another Hull merchant, Richard Bille.<sup>57</sup>

One of the most interesting patterns of family connections which illustrates several of the features discussed above, was made through the marriages of one woman, Joan, to three established merchants. She first married John Dalton, a merchant mayor of Hull, and their son John's marriage united the families of Alcock and Dalton. After Dalton's death she married another Hull merchant mayor, John Whitfield, and their daughter married Henry Mindram, another wealthy merchant mayor of Hull. Joan's two groups of children, three by her marriage with John Dalton, and four by her marriage with John Whitfield, were united into one family of step-brothers and sisters. Finally she became the third wife of Sir Richard York, a merchant mayor of York, whose grandson Bartholomew married into the Thornton group of families.<sup>58</sup>

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56. Test.Ebor. IV p. 121 n.; C.C.G., p. 18 n.; Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 357.

57. C.P.R. 1401-5, p. 74; 1452-61, p. 181.

58. See Appendix 6.



It is difficult to trace the re-marriage rate of widows, and some did marry three or even four times. Re-marriage was not the sole alternative of course, and Dr. Jeremy Goldberg has suggested that while the employment situation in post-black death York was bouyant, many young women preferred to retain their independence and to delay marriage.<sup>59</sup> In 17th-century Salisbury, the pattern of re-marriage for widows apparently depended on the economy, and widows chose to remain unmarried when they could survive independently.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, it might have been that wealthy widows were pestered by unwelcome suitors. Isabel Green, the widow of John Green of Hull, was harrassed by one Robert Daveson who brought actions of debt and of trespass against her, because she claimed he had long wished to marry her. In the end, she went to Chancery for a writ against him.<sup>61</sup>

#### Family and Household

Re-marriage could create many problems, particularly since most involved widows with children. It is difficult to draw any precise conclusions as to the size of mercantile households, since stepchildren, other relations and friends, were included amongst beneficiaries, but no indication was given as to their ages (minors were often noted), nor their place of abode. It has recently been calculated that the average household in late-14th century York was probably between 3.91 and 4.58,

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59. P.J.P. Goldberg, *Marriage, Migration, Servanthood and Life-Cycle in Yorkshire Towns of the Later Middle Ages: some York cause paper evidence*, Continuity and Change, 1 (1986), pp. 141-69.

60. B.J. Todd, *The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered*, in M. Prior, ed., Women in English Society 1500-1800 (1985), pp. 54-93, esp. pp. 78-9, P.J. Goldberg, *Female labour*, op. cit., pp. 18-38, esp. 52-3: idem., *Marriage, migration, servanthood and life-cycle in Yorkshire towns*, pp. 141-63, esp. pp. 158-9.

61. P.R.O. C1/46/171.

those of poorer artisans being smaller.<sup>62</sup> Testamentary evidence suggests an average family size of three or four children, but of course in the absence of records of prior deaths, these cannot be regarded as completed families. Families of six or more were not uncommon.<sup>63</sup>

In discussing families and households, it is perhaps safest to talk of extended networks of responsibility as perceived by merchant testators. Such a network could encompass the children of a dead child, who were not necessarily living with their grandparent. Thus John Asby of York, included the five children of his dead son Thomas in his dispositions in 1459.<sup>64</sup> It has been claimed that it was very unusual for a married couple to accommodate adult relatives, but that if they did so it was most likely to be one son.<sup>65</sup> It is not clear whether or not a merchant's resident household did include his or his wife's parents, aunts, uncles, brothers or sisters although any or all of these, were part of an extended family network. Thomas Cliff of York, whose parents and brother survived him, simply recorded bequests to them in 1483 but gave no other details.<sup>66</sup> However, Richard Sawyer of York left 2s. a year to his sister Katherine Robinson towards her rent, so

62. P.J.P. Goldberg, *Female labour*, pp. 18-38.

63. In 15th-century Norwich, Tanner found the average size of families was 2.24 children. *Popular Religion in Norwich with special reference to the evidence of wills, 1370-1532*. Oxford D. Phil. thesis (1973), p. 58. Thrupp found families which ranged from 19 children down to 1 or 2, *London Merchant Class*, pp. 198-9. For the wider discussion of urban household size see also *idem*. *The Problem of Replacement Rates in the Late Medieval English Population*, *Ec. H.R.*, 2nd ser. xviii 1965 : J.T. Krause, *The Medieval Household - Large or Small?*, *ibid.*, ix 1956-7. P. Laslett and R. Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 197; Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 246.

64. Prob. Reg. II ff. 396v.-397v. (Asby).

65. H. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans* (1989), p. 7.

66. Prob. Reg. III f. 350 (Clyff).

she was clearly living elsewhere, as was Richard Bagot's father, who had remained in Yarm when his son migrated south. Richard left him a life interest in the house he was occupying at his son's death in 1476.<sup>67</sup>

In a society which regarded a man as 'venerable', once he was over 40 years old,<sup>68</sup> but in which merchants regularly lived to over 50, the care of 'elderly' parents was accepted as a responsibility by some merchants, but to a strikingly different degree. Thomas Clynt, a wealthy York merchant, left his father only a gown in 1439, 'for his sustenance', where Gilbert Bedford of Hull, a century earlier, had given his parents a life-interest in 2 shops in Hull.<sup>69</sup>

Few testators were so specific, and the dozen or so with parents still alive, simply left them sums of money as John de Acastre did in 1401 or in the case of some young men like John Tykhill of York, made a parent an executor.<sup>70</sup> Some parents, like Margaret, Nicholas Blackburn junior's mother, were well able to survive financially<sup>71</sup> and would have made no claims on their children's estates.

Siblings also, generally appeared in wills as recipients of bequests. Some merchants' sisters were nuns: John Beseby's was prioress of Stanfield, Lincs., William de Clyveland's was said to be 'living with the nuns' at Clementhorpe.<sup>72</sup> Thomas Horneby of York, left £5 to his

67. Ibid., V f. 190 (Sawer); Dec. & Cap. I f. 322 (Bagot).

68. Thomas Phillips and Roger Bushel of Hull were described as 'venerable' in 1479 when they were 42 and 52 respectively. Prob. Reg. V f. 167v. Robert Hancock was so described in 1489 when he was 49, ibid., V f. 355.

69. Ibid., III ff. 567-8v. (Clynt); BRE 1 p. 23.

70. Prob. Reg. I f. 76v. (Tykhill); III f. 65v. (Acastre .

71. Ibid. III ff. 415v.-416.

72. Ibid. I f. 34v. (Clyveland); XI f. 148 (Beseby .

widow in 1426, to ensure his brother Edmund was kept in food and clothing for the rest of his life. John Thompson of York, worrying about his sister's future, left her £2 only if she accepted his wife's counsel 'towards her marriage'.<sup>73</sup>

Hospitals and maison dieux catered for some of those who became dependent, and membership of social and religious guilds and fraternities could provide shelter for those who could afford the subscriptions. Thus in 1444 Robert Yarom was admitted to the almshouse of the Merchant Adventurers' Company with a weekly pension of 9d. and when he died the following year, the Company paid 8s. 9d. to have him buried.<sup>74</sup> Many York merchants paid for their wives to become 'sisters' of the Company for such benefits, and one, Thomas Hessill's son and daughter, were left the cash from William Fox in 1393, specifically to pay to become a brother and sister of St. Thomas' hospital.

Long-lived merchants faced the problem of supporting themselves after giving up 'work'. Thomas del Gare of York's solution was to transfer extensive property to his son, in return for an annual pension of £13 14s. 8d. in 1427.<sup>75</sup>

#### Widows and Wives

What of their widows? Some merchants regarded their wives as helpless individuals and thoughtfully asked friends to step into the breach. John Haynson of Hull asked his friends to help his widow 'in necessities and negotiations'. John Gill, also of Hull, wanted a friend to keep an eye on his widow and to ensure that 'no man do her wrong', and Edward Grenely wanted friends to 'strengthen his widow

73. Ibid., II f. 506 (Horneby); Dec. & Cap. II f. 123v. (Thompson).

74. C.C.G., p. 25.

75. Prob. Reg. I f. 54v. (Fox); Dec. & Cap. II f. 47 (Gare).

in her necessity'.<sup>76</sup> However, Alan Hamerton of York, rather less optimistically, paid his servant Richard Grunnays £10 a year to stay with his wife for 2 years to 'diligently recoup debts'. Grunnays served his master well and Isabelle Hammerton died a wealthy woman in 1433. She generously(?) remitted Grunnays' debts to her. William Hedon of Hull apparently had confidence that his widow would cope as sole executrix, but asked two merchant friends to supervise the sale of his real estate!<sup>77</sup>

Under common law, widows had the right (freebench), to remain in the family home for 40 days after their husband's death so long as they remained unmarried.<sup>78</sup> As the majority of merchants left their widows a life-interest at least, such legal protection was generally unnecessary. Edmund Cottesbroke was exceptional, allowing his widow to remain in his house for 1 year only, but the tone of his will of 1405 suggests that he expected her to challenge his arrangements.<sup>79</sup>

By the 14th century a widow's right to dower in property was accepted in common law and by the early 15th century it was fixed at  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all the lands of which he had been solely seised during the marriage whose issue might inherit that land.<sup>80</sup> She lost her right to dower when she remarried. A husband could not deprive his wife of her dower unless she agreed to a conveyance by fine in a court (as John Goldberg's wife Ellen did in York in 1331), or he settled the land to

76. *Ibid.*, II f. 393 (Haynson); VI f. 107 (Gyll); V f. 501 (Grenely).

77. *Ibid.*, II f. 523 (Hedon); III ff. 245v., 345.

78. M. Bateson, ed., *Borough Customs*, I, Selden Soc. 18 (1904), p. cx.

79. Prob. Reg. III f. 223v. (Cottesbroke).

80. W. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, III (4th edit. 1935), pp. 189-93.

his own use, thereby creating an equitable estate.<sup>81</sup> Whatever she brought to the marriage, her husband had a life interest in, a form of 'profitable guardianship'. He had only a life interest in her land, which he could however alienate. If she survived him, she could recover such land by a writ of recovery, cui in vita, which in York, had to be served within a year and a day.<sup>82</sup> If she predeceased her husband, he could assume a life interest in half the lands of which she had been seised at her death, as a tenant of curtesy, but only if there had been issue and even if the child/ren had not survived. If there had been no children, his wife's property devolved to her heirs.<sup>83</sup>

In boroughs, the right to freely devise, which was the main characteristic of burgage tenure, was in conflict with the law as it was developing in relation to married women, and their position in boroughs varied from place to place according to local custom.<sup>84</sup> In York dower rights in real estate were respected. In 1432 Robert Holme of York left his wife Margaret  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all his lands and tenements 'for her dower, as her accustomed right'.<sup>85</sup> Women could and did inherit and dispose of real estate. Joan, wife of Robert Louth of York, retained a Malton property she had inherited from her father, to dispose of herself, as

81. Ibid., p. 196; A.W.B. Simpson, An Introduction to the History of the Land Law (Oxford, 1961), p. 66; Bateson, Borough Customs, I, p. 126. Ellen Goldberg released her right to dower in only one property: a house in Mickelgate. Yorks.Deeds, VII, pp. 197-8.

82. Holdsworth, English Law, pp. 524-6; Bateson, Borough Customs, II, Selden Soc. 21 (1906), p. 129.

83. Ibid., pp. 185-9; Simpson, Introduction to Land Law, p. 66. Holdsworth, English Law, pp. 543-4.

84. Bateson, Borough Customs, I, p. 277; II, pp. civ-v.

85. Prob. Reg. III f. 365 (Holme).

did Anne Beverley of York in 1492.<sup>86</sup> In some places a woman could be impleaded alone, but could not act as plaintiff or recover without her husband. Thus Thomas Glasyn had to sue for his wife's inheritance in Poppleton.<sup>87</sup> Husbands had a life interest in property transmitted through heiresses, and their children could inherit outright. John Kelk of Beverley enfeoffed his son with a property which had been the dower of his wife Alice, from her marriage to John Brown.<sup>88</sup>

Transmission of inherited property was not always so straightforward and John Lofthouse of York had to sue for his wife's inheritance from her first husband (who had thoughtfully enfeoffed four friends with property worth 40 marks), to re-enfeoff Katherine after his death. They were reluctant to do so.<sup>89</sup> Problems of a different kind confronted William de Barneby's widow Joan in 1409. She was violently evicted from a tenement in Walmegate and a garden in Paynelathes in the suburbs, by his son John, who caused damage to the sum of 20s. The court found in her favour.<sup>90</sup>

In the absence of male heirs, some women became heiress to several estates. John Swynfleet of Hull, who died in 1426, had inherited his mother's inheritance which came to her as niece of Geoffrey and Hugh Hanby of Hull; as heiress and relation of Thomas Longspey of Brompton (N.R.), and as wife of Thomas Swynfleet, sone and heir of John Hanby of

86. Prob. Reg. III f. 450 (Louth); V ff. 419-19v. (Beverley). In some boroughs, husbands could not sell their wife's inherited property without her permission, and this may have been the case in York. Bateson, Borough Customs, II, p. 115.

87. P.R.O. C1/203/41.

88. C.P.R. 1374-7, p. 369.

89. P.R.O. C1/61/39.

90. M.B. I, pp. 140-1.

Yafford.<sup>91</sup> Expectations such as these were not routine, but the ramifications of inter-marriage plus low life-expectancy, could result in un-anticipated cumulative windfalls. An alert woman could not afford to neglect her relatives

Income was something else of course. Although widows might receive rents from property other than the chief messuage,<sup>92</sup> most seem to have been expected to survive on vague cash bequests subsumed in the "residue" of their husband's estate, or on their own resources. Some merchants had the foresight to stipulate how their widows would derive a regular income. John Bedford of Hull gave his son Richard "a place" in Hull in 1344, so that he could pay John's widow £2 a year. Business-like terms were drawn up by another Hull man, John Harrison in 1525 to guarantee that his widow received 26s. 8d. annually from their son.<sup>93</sup>

Chattels were treated differently to real estate in law, and a married woman's rights in respect of chattels were subject to contradictory views. The ecclesiastical lawyers thought that a married woman had a right to dower in chattels, and this was subsumed into the custom of legitim. They also regarded all the goods other than the dos, her dowry, as hers, and argued that she could dispose of these and therefore had the capacity to make a will. This view persisted through the 14th and 15th centuries in the church courts, but from the mid-14th century, common lawyers insisted that married women could not make wills as they owned no property. All their chattels became their husband's at their marriage. She could make a will with his consent, and the common

91. BRE 1 p. 271.

92. Thomas Scauceby of York for example left his wife £2 annual rent income in 1471. Prob. Reg. VI f. 169.

93. BRE 1 p. 24; Prob. Reg. IX f. 328 Harrison .



lawyers allowed that her personal ornaments and clothes, her paraphernalia, could descent to her on her husband's death, unless he had previously alienated them!<sup>94</sup> The effect on will-making was a reduction in the number of wills made by married women; 50% of the 136 wills made by women between 1398 and 1408 in York were those of wives whereas only 2 of the 89 made between 1470 and 1500 were.<sup>95</sup> Of 94 wills made by merchants' widows and wives in York, Beverley and Hull,<sup>96</sup> just  $\frac{1}{3}$  were made by married women and several reflected the deference to a husband whose consent was required. Margaret, wife of Adam Baker of Beverley made her will in 1401 'through the assent and licence of her husband' and Emma Preston used the same phrase in her will, coincidentally in the same year.<sup>97</sup> Ivetta, wife of William de Burton of York, peppered her will with the remark 'if my husband wishes', while Margaret Besyngby of York, left the choice of her burial place to her husband John in 1400. The reverse consideration was not legally required, so that Robert Popilton of York was demonstrating quite extraordinary sensitivity when he made some of his bequests conditional upon his wife's agreement in 1414.<sup>98</sup>

It was customary for a man to divide his estate into three portions: one for his wife, one for his children, and one for himself to

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94. Holdsworth, English Law, pp. 543-4.

95. J.P.R. Goldberg, Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life, in Thompson, Towns and Townspeople, p. 115.

96. Elsewhere relatively few women made wills: only 2 or 3 survive in the London Archdeacon's Register between 1380 and 1415. R.A. Wood, London and Bury St. Edmunds: A Comparative Study of Urban Piety c. 1380-c.1415 (unpublished paper presented to the 15th-century Colloquium at Winchester in 1987), p. 26 n. 17.

97. Prob. Reg. III ff. 60v.-61 (Preston); f. 71v. Baker .

98. Prob. Reg. I f. 88 (Burton); Dec. & Cap. I f. 129 Besyngby ; f. 166 (Popilton).

dispose of as he wished. Thomas Gra of York for example, gave his wife Alice £10 out of his goods above 'the ascertained portion belonging to her by right', and many other references make it clear that this custom was commonly practised in the three towns.<sup>99</sup> If a wife had predeceased her husband, the custom was for his estate to be divided into two, and occasionally a merchant might anticipate his widow's death and arrange such a division. Thus Thomas Wells of Hull, stipulated in his will in 1429, that after his widow's death, his eldest son should receive  $\frac{1}{2}$  of his property and the other three children were to share the other  $\frac{1}{2}$  in equal portions.<sup>100</sup>

Restriction on widows inheriting freely, if they re-married were common. It may have been, that for some, the prospect was too distressing. Elias Casse of Beverley, insisted in 1501 that his widow should 'take vows' before she could inherit his land.<sup>101</sup> and in 1507 John Stockdale left property to his wife, who had been married twice before, on condition that she did not remarry.<sup>102</sup> If Richard Ayley of Beverley's wife remarried, she would receive an annuity of 26s. 8d. instead of his chief messuage at Crossbridge. Thomas Spicer of York stipulated in 1505 that if his wife were to remarry, she was to receive only her part (portion), and a piece of silverware: the implication being that she would otherwise receive some of his own third.<sup>103</sup>

99. Ibid., II f. 235 (Gra) and see also for example Dec. & Cap. I f. 14 (Huntingdon); Prob. Reg. II f. 108v. (Procter), ff. 110v.-111v. (Gare); III f. 504v, (Ormeshead); v. f.7 (Swan); f. 13 (Fisher); f. 425 (Marshall).

100. Ibid., II f. 555. Robert Flinton of Hull made a similar 2 part division, V f. 401.

101. Ibid VI f. 12a (Casse).

102. Ibid., VII f. 30 (Stockdale).

103. Ibid. III f. 105 (Ayley); VI f. 208v. (Spicer).

Not all merchants died wealthy and many widows must have faced the prospect of seeking another husband, not inevitably a preferred choice,<sup>104</sup> or a job. As we have seen, a few merchants' widows continued in trade following their husband's death. Marion Kent, actually became a member of the council of the Mercers' and Merchant Adventurers' Company!<sup>105</sup> These were unusual women in Yorkshire<sup>106</sup> though and most widows seeking work would have found opportunities depended very much on the overall employment situation. Living in a large borough such as York, brought considerable advantages. Even married women, trading apart from their husbands enjoyed the legal independence of a femme sole,<sup>107</sup> and many guilds included women in their regulations. Women in York could work as barber surgeons, cappers, chapwomen, cloth sellers, cooks, freshwater fishers, fishmongers, ironmongers, litsters, patchmentmakers, stringers, and vintners amongst others. They rented shops from the city council and conducted their own commercial affairs.<sup>108</sup> The opportunities were there and from the evidence of guild regulations, women could still find employment in specialist crafts late in the 15th century. There is no reason to suppose that women in Hull

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104. See above note 61.

105. M. & M.A., p. 64.

106. In 1505, 19 women were listed as Staplers, C.P.R. 1494-1509, pp. 447-9, and in London women engaged in international trade buying and selling and lending money, Lacey, London Women, op. cit., pp. 53-4.

107. M.B. II, pp. 144-5. This was possible elsewhere, Bateson, Borough Customs, I, pp. 185-6.

108. M.B. I, pp. 6, 7, 82, 198, 201, 209, 221; II, p. lxi.

or Beverley were worse off,<sup>109</sup> and indeed the brewsters of Beverley had formed their own guild by 1364.<sup>110</sup>

Some women died wealthy and left considerable sums of money. Isolde de Acastre of York was still married when she died in 1395 disposing of at least £264 and real estate. So was Anne Beverley also of York, who left £38, some wool, and real estate in 1492.<sup>111</sup> Some widows died wealthy: Ellen Gisburn left £142 in 1408, Alice Cateryk, £40 in 1440, Alice Beverley, £137 in 1485.<sup>112</sup>

Margaret Blackburn, dying only 3 years after her husband Nicholas in 1435, left £520.<sup>113</sup> Although the size and composition of a woman's initial inheritance from her spouse, affected the size of her own estate, the length of time she had spent living independently might also have been important. Jane Neleson had inherited property from her husband Thomas when he died in 1484. By 1533, 49 years later when she died, she only disposed of 15s. in her will.<sup>114</sup> However, Isabelle Lamerton, died in 1433, 27 years after her husband, and left £106.<sup>115</sup>

09. For a discussion of the variety of women's employment in towns, see:- Goldberg, *Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life*, pp. 116-121; M. Kowaleski, *Women's Work in a Market Town: Exeter in the late Fourteenth Century*, in B.A. Hanawalt, ed., *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England* (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 145-64; M. Kowaleski and J.M. Bennett, *Crafts, Gilds and Women in the Middle Ages*, *Signs*, 14 no. 2 (1989), pp. 474-88. K. Lacey, *Women and Work in 14th and 15th-Century London*, in L. Charles & L. Duffin, eds., *Women and work in Pre-Industrial England* (1985), pp. 24-82, and in the same collection, D. Hutton, *Women in Fourteenth Century Shrewsbury*, *ibid.*, pp. 83-99.

10. *Beverley Town Docs.*, p. 41.

11. *Ibid.*, I f. 81 (Acastre); V ff. 419-419v. (Beverley).

12. *Ibid.*, III f. 283v. (Gisburn); ff. 600-1 (Cateryk); V ff. 28-9 (Beverley).

13. *Ibid.*, II f. 605 (Nicholas); III ff. 415v.-416 (Margaret).

14. *Ibid.*, V ff. 212-3 (Thomas); XI f. 57 (Jane).

15. *Ibid.*, III f. 345 (Isabelle); f. 244 (Alan).

John Stockdale left £44 in February 1507 and just over 3 weeks later, his widow Ellen left over £111.<sup>116</sup> She may of course have drawn up her will anticipating a larger legacy from her husband, but had not lived long enough to discover just how much he had left! There are too many factors unknown to us, to allow even the most general of observations about widows' estates. Some were large, some small and each was affected by individual circumstances.

Although even their chattels belonged to their husbands, in practice, married women did dispose of personal possessions. Their wills characteristically dealt with personal belongings and small amounts of cash bequeathed to family, friends, and relations. Precise care was taken to differentiate the best from the second-best gown or girdle, and presumably the best from the second-best friend! The wealthy widow Isabelle Hamerton of York, made several unusual bequests which included, a spice box, an enamelled cross, a veronica from Rome, an alabaster head of St. John the Baptist, as well as quantities of sea-coal, wool and cloth.<sup>117</sup> Most women's wills however dealt with less exotic items and disposed of gowns and girdles, bedclothes, and domestic utensils.

Women had no automatic right of custody of their children. John Hapsam of York expressly wished his widow 'to bring up his children',<sup>118</sup> and some merchants explicitly made their wives tutrix to their children by leaving them under her tutelage.<sup>119</sup> In 1510 John Kent required his widow Anne, to lose the guardianship of their children if she

116. Ibid., VI f. 185 (John); f. 227 (Ellen).

117. Ibid., III f. 345 (Hamerton).

118. Ibid., V f. 59 (Hapsam).

119. For example ibid., II f. 127v. (Kyam); III f. 523 (Graye).

remarried.<sup>120</sup> This was in accordance with canon law, and Nicholas Strensale's widow, was removed as tutrix testamentaria by the York court when she did marry again. It appointed in her place, a man designated by Strensale in his will for such an eventuality.<sup>121</sup> Such was William Kyam's opinion of his wife in 1446, that whether or not she remarried, he wanted his children under the guidance of his kinsman, and specifically not his wife.<sup>122</sup>

Most merchants and their wives accepted the inevitability and advantage of remarriage. Affection for previous spouses, was evident by the inclusion of them in shared obits, and several partners might be included in one set of prayers. Respect for predecessors was possible: John Northeby of York, wanted land sold to pay for masses for the souls of his wife and her first husband. Henry de Yarom, also of York, left his widow property, specifically to be sold for masses for her and her first husband's souls.<sup>123</sup>

#### Children

Children who were still minors at the time of a parent's death, generated particular anxiety. Of those York merchants with traceable heirs, 17% left children under-age,<sup>124</sup> but in reality the numbers must have been higher. Women in their second marriage worried about the

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120. Ibid., VIII f. 59 (Kent).

121. York B.I.H.R. Act book M2(1)c f. 8v. Discussed in R.H. Helmholz, Roman Law and Guardianship, 1300-1600, Tulane Law Rev., 52 (1978), p. 224.

122. Prob. Reg. II ff. 127-127v. (Kyam).

123. Ibid., I f. 57v. (Yarom); II f. 620 (Northeby).

124. Professor Palliser has calculated that 27% of male heirs in York in the first half of the 16th century were orphaned under age. Tudor York, p. 97. It is impossible to work out a directly equivalent figure for the 14th and 15th centuries.

fate of their children with a step-father, and they had to trust their husband's to fulfill their wishes. In the majority of cases for which there is clear evidence, merchant widowers were conscientious in this respect. Henry Market of York took the occasion of drawing up his own will to fulfil two small bequests made by his dead wife. Joan, wife of Peter Stellar of Hull, left £10 in 1383 to her son Thomas White when he came of age. When Stellar made his will in 1395, he had remarried, but he remembered his step-son's legacy.<sup>125</sup> Robert Graye of York, married for a second time, but in 1437 sensitively left the sons by his first wife silver spoons which had belonged to their mother. He entrusted one of his sons to his second wife's tutelage.<sup>126</sup>

Placing minors under the guidance or tutelage of a step-parent, and/or friends, was a common solution, and presumably went some way towards allaying the particular fear that their inheritance would be dissipated before they were old enough to claim it. Given that common law supplied a guardian for the eldest son only, under primogeniture, and that most infants were left to 'shift for themselves and to get guardians as best they might from time to time for the purpose of litigation',<sup>127</sup> it is not surprising that it became a frequent practice for merchants to appoint guardians for their under-age children, even though their mother or step-mother might still be alive.<sup>128</sup> There was a legal distinction made between acting as a tutor and as a curator

125. Prob. Reg. I f. 98 (Stellar); II ff. 69-70 (Market); Arch. Reg. XII f. 64 (Joan Stellar).

126. Prob. Reg. III f. 523. William Bank of Hull also left his daughter Alison, 6 silver spoons which had been her mother's. VI f. 214.

127. Pollock & Maitland, History of English Law (2nd edit. reprinted 1968), p. 444.

128. E.g. Ralph Close of York named Robert Wilde to be tutor to his son even though his wife was still alive. Prob. Reg. VIII f. 117.

in that the former acted for the child until it reached puberty and the latter from puberty until it came of age. The tutor testamentarius was the individual named in the parent's will and unless he or she was in some way disqualified, was the person preferred by the ecclesiastical courts. Next was the tutor legitimus, the next of kin, but in practice judges often appointed a guardian if non had been named in the will: a tutor dativus.

The court could be compassionate and when the judge had to name a guardian (tutor dativus) for a York merchant, Roger Hovingham's children in 1371, he asked all their relatives to be present and chose two to act as guardians. In another case the judge made his appointment with the agreement of the children concerned!<sup>129</sup>

In the majority of wills studied, the individual merchant entrusted his under-age children to the 'tutelage' of his wife, or unrelated guardians. Thomas Kirkham of York, left his children in the care of fellow merchant John Warde, whereas John Gylyot jnr left each of his three children to the protection of three separate merchant friends. Nicholas Rumlay of York, however, left his daughter Joan her portion in 1442, to have 'without' governance or tutelage.<sup>130</sup> A case involving William Goodknapp of Hull's children, reveals the York court at work. Goodknapp of Hull's children, reveals the York court at work. Goodknapp died in 1504 and was survived by his second wife. He wished his brother John 'to tend to my soul, my wife and my children'. By 1509 the York consistory court was dealing with the problem of the children's guard-

129. York B.I.H.R. Act book M 2(1) c f. 7. Discussed in Helmholz, Roman Law and Guardianship, p. 226.

130. Prob. Reg. II f. 42 (Rumlay); III f. 487 (Kirkham); VIII f. 34 (Gilyot). See also II f. 127v. (Kyam); III f. 223v. (Cottesbroke); f. 523 (Graye); ff. 567-8v. (Clynt).



ianship, so presumably Goodknapp's widow and brother John had died in the interim. Roger Busshel, a fellow Hull merchant, was named tutor et curator legitimus to Goodknapp's children, after he had proved he was their uncle.<sup>131</sup> The prospects for minor heirs was not inevitably bleak. William, Thomas Neleson's son, did not reach maturity until four years after his father's death in 1484, yet 37 years later he was able to transmit to his son, the estate he himself had inherited, virtually intact.<sup>132</sup>

Some merchants harboured a profound distrust either of their spouse's character or practical sense. Richard Bille of Hull made provision that if his wife remarried, Richard Anson, Nicholas Stubbs, John Green and three other Hull merchants were to have the safekeeping of his sons' portions until they came of age. William Tailor, also of Hull, wanted his curate and the mayor to receive 'good and sufficient surety in the town' from any proposed husband of his widow, that he could 'well and truly' pay Tailor's daughter 100 marks when she came of age or married. He even wanted her to receive any interest accrued in the meantime.<sup>133</sup>

Edmund Cottesbroke left his estate in the hands of a trustee in 1405 until his son was of age, but he cautiously arranged for one of his executors to audit the trustee's accounts annually. In addition he forbade his son to marry without his executors' consent.<sup>134</sup>

131. Prob. Reg. VI f. 107 (Goodknapp); York B.I.H.R. Act book Cons. A B 6 f. 14v., Helmholz, *Roman Law and Guardianship*, p. 225.

132. Prob. Reg. V ff. 212-3v. (Thomas); IX f. 203 (William).

133. *Ibid.*, V f. 213v.; IX f. 203 (Nelesons); II f. 233v. (Bille); VIII f. 31 (Taillor). From the step-father's point of view, marrying a widow with children could provide the capital necessary to establish a business if he exploited his step-children's inheritance. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 106-7.

134. Prob. Reg. III f. 223v.

The choice of a marriage partner<sup>135</sup> was more usually a problem associated with girls, and daughters constituted a particular problem. William Goodknapp of Hull, d. 1504, left his daughter £30 on condition that her father-in-law made a satisfactory property settlement upon her and her husband. If Goodknapp's brother and widow thought that the property was inadequate, then the £30 was not to be paid. If daughters were not married at a merchant's death, the most he could do was to provide a sum of money ad maritagium, in addition to any other share in the estate. John Crull of York regarded such a provision as obligatory. He left goods to his daughter in full payment of £4 13s. 4d. 'which I owe her for her marriage'. The sums varied according to parental wealth. Thomas Brownfleet of York, d. 1458, left his daughter Alice 10 marks for her marriage portion in addition to a silver bowl. John Gilyot jnr, of York left his two daughters £20 each in 1509,<sup>136</sup> and Stephen Coppendale of Beverley left his two daughters £100 each in 1485. Marriage portions were not always equal in the same family. Thomas Frost of Beverley's daughter Margaret was left £40, of which £30 had to be collected in debts, and her sister Joan was left £30 and his stepdaughter £20.<sup>137</sup>

Occasionally a merchant would leave cash toward the marriage portion of a friend's daughter. John Gylyot jnr left £2 to Kate Anlagby in this way.<sup>138</sup> A general condition attached to marriage

135. Jeremy Goldberg discusses the choice of marriage partners amongst the non-landed classes. Merchants fell into that category. J.P.R. Goldberg, *Women in Towns*, op. cit., pp. 114-5.

136. Prob. Reg. II f. 386 (Brownfleete); V f. 29v. (Crull); VI f. 107 (Goodknapp); VIII ff. 32-4 (Gilyot).

137. Ibid., V f. 271v. (Coppendale); Arch. Reg. XVIII ff. 384v.-5 (Frost).

138. Ibid., VIII ff. 32-4.

portions, and to the legacies of minors, was that if the beneficiary died before marriage or before coming of age, that portion would revert to the estate. The daughters of one or two merchants took vows and became nuns, but this did not prevent them from inheriting. Roger de Moreton jnr, of York had a daughter at St. Clement's priory, and Adam Coppendale of Beverley had a daughter at Watton, and both were beneficiaries under their fathers' wills.<sup>139</sup> If an unmarried daughter was not safely lodged in a convent, her merchant father sometimes provided her with accommodation. John Gregg of Hull installed his daughter Agnes in a house in Marketgate, at a fixed rent for 48 years, presumably the expected duration of her life.<sup>140</sup>

Marriages between widows and widowers could produce difficulties as two existing families were joined together. When John Bedford of Hull married Agnes, widow of John Dalton of Hull, her son John became co-heir with Bedford's children by his first wife. Bedford, however, made John Dalton's inheritance conditional upon him not 'molesting' his mother Agnes.<sup>141</sup> Disputes between heirs were anticipated whatever the type of family. Elizabeth, widow of Robert Garner of Hull, stipulated in her will in 1513, that if her son Peter tried to defraud his two brothers, he was to be removed from the position of executor.<sup>142</sup> Thomas Neleson tried to be fair by giving each of his grandchildren 10 marks, except one who already had a large inheritance of land. His son William, excluded one of his sons-in-law, William Gascoigne, from his bequests,

139. *Ibid.*, I f. 14 (Moreton); Arch. Reg. X f. 310 (Coppendale).

140. BRE 1 p. 283.

141. Prob. Reg. II ff. 220-221v.

142. *Ibid.*, VIII f. 105.

because he has already had above 'reason in money, raiment and dinners'.<sup>143</sup>

The complexities of several sets of children being merged into one family through successive marriages, did not inevitably lead to hostility. Merchants like William Tele and Robert Johnson of York were careful to make bequests to their step-children, although Johnson discriminated by giving his two daughters £5 each and making them the residuary heirs to his land, whereas his five step-daughters were to receive £2 each and no land.<sup>144</sup> It was possible for some sense of family to survive multiple connections. The children of such families remembered each other in wills. John Dalton for instance, the son of his mother's first marriage made bequests to her second and third families, the Yorks and Whitfields, and his step-father John Whitfield, made John and Thomas Dalton his residuary heirs.<sup>145</sup> John Tanfield of York gave his widowed step-mother a belt he had inherited from his own mother.

A woman might find herself playing a central role in balancing the demands of her several sets of children. Ellen Stockdale, was a widow of William Hancock, Robert Johnson, and John Stockdale. Four of her five daughters by Hancock were still alive in 1507 and received girdles as bequests, including her own mother's of blue silk and gold, and one of silver and red silk she wore on her first wedding day. Her two daughters by Robert Johnson, Maud and Jennet were due their child's part (presumably from their father, and their whole part, which was to be made up from their father's remaining goods (worth £13) and their

143. *Ibid.*, V ff. 212v.-213v. (Thomas); IX f. 203 (William).

144. *Ibid.*, IV ff. 162-162v. (Tele); V ff. 510v.-511 (Johnson).

145. *Ibid.*, V ff. 148v., 483v.-485 and see Appendix 6.

mother's 'own part' after debts had been paid, to make the sum of £100. They were to receive both child's and whole parts if they agreed to accept the counsel of their mother's executors concerning their marriages.<sup>146</sup>

In addition to their immediate family and apprentices, most merchant households had servants. The 1377 Poll Tax reveals that of all the households recorded, one third of those in York, and one sixth of those in Hull had servants.<sup>147</sup> Testamentary evidence makes it very clear that most merchants regarded their servants as an extension of the family, and that their numbers varied from merchant to merchant.

Servants were regularly remembered in wills with small gifts of cash, clothing or bedding. Less common were gifts like the clock Anthony Potter of Hull left his servant in 1505, or the 4 dozen bonnets Richard Sawyer of York left his servant in 1477.<sup>148</sup> Sometimes a merchant left money towards the marriage portion of his female servants, as he did for his daughters.<sup>149</sup> Servants who had married and moved away were not forgotten either and the phrase 'once my servant' frequently appears in wills. Agnes Stokton, prompted by practical considerations as well as affection, left her servant Matilda to a friend in 1414, to train her until she became 20 years old.<sup>150</sup> Some members of the household had an ambiguous position and although they were clearly not members of the immediate family, they were either distant relatives or particularly

146. Prob. Reg. III f. 502v. (Tanfield); VI f.227 (Stockdale).

147. P.R.O. E179/217/16; 202/75. J. Leggett, ed., *The 1377 Lay Poll Tax Return for the City of York*, Yorks. Arch. Jnl., 43 (1971), pp. 128-46.

148. Prob. Reg. V f. 190 (Sawer); VI f. 213 (Potter).

149. John Russell of York for example Prob. Reg. II f. 68.

150. Dec. & Cap. I f. 171.

favoured. Cognatus and famulus were frequently mentioned as recipients of specific gifts. John Russell of York left 13s. 4d. and clothes and his best horse to his famulus John Turner, £2 13s. 4d. to his famula Joan Chester for her marriage and 3s. 4d. to all his other servants. He also left £1 to John Brandesby famulus of John Bolton, a contemporary merchant,<sup>151</sup> which suggests a degree of familiarity with his household. Gifts to servants of fellow merchants were not uncommon<sup>152</sup> but were generally to individuals as though in remembrance of some specific act of goodwill. Apprentices, on the other hand, were less often mentioned in wills and John Whitfield of Hull was exceptional in leaving each of his 6s. 8d. in 1479.<sup>153</sup>

Apprentices and servants might enjoy considerable respect and the confidence of their master. Thomas Catlynson and John Bowland of York each made theirs an executor and Richard Patrington of Beverley paid his £10 to serve as supervisor to the administration of his will.<sup>154</sup>

Edmund Portington of Beverley, who was apparently unmarried, left two of his servants a house each in Beverley for life, and allowed his other servants to remain in his house for four months following his death in 1463.<sup>155</sup> If he had been leaving his property to a wife or family some of his servants would have stayed on in their service in any case, but his forethought reveals the degree of dependence of servant upon master. Richard Chase of York, d. 1402, wished his apprentice to

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151. Prob. Reg. V f. 68.

152. E.g. III f. 508.

153. Ibid., V f. 148v.

154. Ibid., II f. 243 (Patrington); f. 570v. (Bowland); III f. 331 (Catlynson).

155. Ibid., II f. 595.

serve out his indenture after his death, with his wife. Most guilds accepted widows as successors to their husbands' business, although some demanded heavy fines should a non-guildsman marry into an occupation by marrying a widow.<sup>156</sup> John Gregg of Hull specifically asked his executors to treat his servants well after his death and exemplifies the concern and close interest of many merchants for their extended family of servants. Indeed his widow, gave two of his former apprentices, Stephen Gildhous and William Arnold, a  $\frac{1}{32}$  share in a boat and they acted as 2 of her executors.<sup>157</sup>

Mercantile households were filled with goods as well as servants and confirm the impression that some merchant homes must have been very large. The majority of merchants dismissed their household effects as simply 'all my goods and chattels' and most of the evidence for mercantile standards of comfort is derived from the wills of their wives. These detailed lists<sup>158</sup> were generally concerned with the more valuable items such as silver bowls and spoons, silver plated dishes with gilding, and pewter ware. Items such as blankets, sheets, bolsters and particularly featherbeds, were frequently disposed of in bequests, and less often valuable furnishings such as Arras tapestries, cloth of gold, and bejewelled religious images were left to particular friends or the family.<sup>159</sup>

Personal valuables left by merchants included clothing as well as bracelets and rings, and books. Yorkshire merchants dressed to suit

156. Prob. Reg. III f. 76; M. & M.A., p. 1xi.

157. Ibid., II f. 507v.; III ff. 555v.-556v.

158. Such lists could not have been recalled from memory on a death bed, and incidentally reflect the orderliness with which some mercantile households were run.

159. E.g. Prob. Reg. II ff. 86v.-90v.; 220-221v.; V ff. 402v.-403.

their wealth and therefore station, and itemised scarlet, violet, blue and brown gowns, often furred, which they left to their friends.<sup>160</sup>

John Stockdale of York left an unusually elegant gown lined with Cyprus satin to Robert Plumpton, one of his executors.<sup>161</sup> One or two merchants also left pieces of armour. John Thornton Coppendale of Beverley, d. 1343, left all his armour to his son Adam. The Coppendales had a reputation for lawlessness and Adam probably needed the armour as much for his own protection as for possible service to his king! He or his cousin, were licensed to crenellate his house in 1366, which suggests that the Coppendales took their arguments very seriously.<sup>162</sup> Although Thomas Jameson of York, d. 1508,<sup>163</sup> left only a sword, it is a reminder that personal safety was one's own responsibility.

#### Social Ambitions

The ambition of most merchants was to become prosperous and influential within their own towns. Some may have nurtured the ambition to become a country gentleman, but few succeeded. Even the 'Buddenbrook' pattern of a three-generational progress from rural beginnings, via urban commerce back to country gentleman is hard to find, given the poor chances of succession through male heirs. Contemporaries were aware of distinctions between one group and another, and records abound with terms such as inferiores, mediocres, probi homines and so forth. These nuances were reflected in the social status of different religious guilds. In York and Hull for example, the Corpus

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160. E.g. Ibid., V ff. 250v.-251.

161. Ibid., VI f. 185.

162. Arch. Reg. X f. 310; C.P.R. 1364-6, p. 352.

163. Prob. Reg. VII f. 27. See also Ibid., III f. 599 - a gift of a sword by John Esingwold of York.



Christi and Holy Trinity Guilds were the most exclusive.<sup>164</sup> Such was the finesse with which contemporaries could assess each other that in Hull in 1462, and in York in 1495, it was possible for the council to identify 'those likely to become sheriff'.<sup>165</sup>

Urban society itself was visibly hierarchic from the mayor, alderman and council officials, to the craft and religious guilds with their own hierarchy of aldermen and wardens, subordinate searchers, masters and journeymen, and ultimately to the faceless, status-less majority at the bottom. In contemporary terms, to be a successful merchant and civic dignitary was to be something indeed.

Status was associated with each title at each level. The term 'master' might be used out of respect for a particularly prominent merchant. Thus Richard Russell and John Thrisk were both called magister, possibly as deference to their having served as mayor of the Calais Staple. It became increasingly the practice to refer to the recorder and aldermen as master from the 1490s.<sup>166</sup> In the late 15th century in York, the title of 'lord' mayor was increasingly used, and the wives of former mayors were accorded the title of 'dame' or 'lady'.<sup>167</sup> Within the city at any rate, those who completed the cursus honorum and achieved the higher reaches of civic government, deserved the titles of gentility.<sup>168</sup>

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164. L. & T. Toulmin-Smith, English Gilds, E.E.T.S. orig. ser. xl (1870), pp. 160-1.

165. BRB 1 f. 77 v., Y.C.R., II, p. 121.

166. V.C.H. York, p. 104; Palliser, Tudor York, p. 100; House Books passim.

167. E.g. John Stockdale, d. 1506, made bequests to Lady Hancock and Lady Kirk, wives of former mayors Robert Hancock and George Kirk. Prob. Reg. VI f. 185.

168. R. Horrox, The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century, in J.A.F. Thompson, ed., Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century (1988), pp. 32-3.

Few merchants adopted the style 'gentleman' and when they did so it is difficult to establish if it reflected anything of significance. John, son of Simon Grimsby of Hull, styled himself gentleman, whereas his father, who was twice mayor, had been content with merchant.<sup>169</sup> Given that some commentators elevated merchants above gentlemen in the social hierarchy, or at the very least, equated the two,<sup>170</sup> it may be a mistake to dwell on such designations. The Coppendale family of Beverley had prospered there since the early 14th century, but it was not until the late 15th century that they became armigerous, Stephen Coppendale, d. 1485, was the first member of the family to be an esquire,<sup>171</sup> although in c. 1420, Thomas Coppendale had responded to Henry V's enquiry for gentry eligible for military service.<sup>172</sup> Another Beverley family became esquires after several generations. Thomas Frost, who died in 1496, was the first Beverley Frost to describe himself as esquire, although his great-uncle Walter of Hull had so described himself in 1425.<sup>173</sup>

Those merchants who were elevated to a knighthood were recipients of royal favour. There were three in all in York, William Todd, John Gylyot and Richard York. The elevation of the de la Pole family of

169. Prob. Reg. III f. 471v.; f. 398v.

170. Dr. Horrox has drawn attention to Hull's reply to the enquiry for gentry eligible for military service in c. 1420, wherein the council pointed out that merchants had already supplied ships to the Crown. The implication was that merchants and gentry were the same, for practical purposes at least. Horrox, *Urban Gentry*, p. 33; A.E. Goodman, *Responses to Requests in Yorkshire for Military Service under Henry V*, Northern History, 17 (1981), p. 242.

171. Prob. Reg. V f. 486v.; Arch. Reg. V f. 419.

172. Goodman, *Responses to Requests*, p. 242. He had already served the Crown, in 1415 administering a grant to Beverley. C.P.R. 1413-16, p. 275.

173. Prob. Reg. V f. 486v.

Hull to the peerage was completely atypical of mercantile social achievement, and was only possible in the context of early 14th-century wool fortunes. The prestige of joining a national elite of less than 400, was a mixed blessing. Knighthood was regarded as a burden and within 3 years of Todd (then mayor) and York's elevation during Henry VII's visit in 1487, they were granted annuities of £20 and £40 respectively from the Hull customs.<sup>174</sup> Neither was impoverished when they died, although they left more land than cash.<sup>175</sup>

Thomas Neleson (then mayor) and John Gilyot preferred to pay a fine in 1500 instead of accepting the honour. Neleson was obdurate and was fined again in 1503 but Gilyot had succumbed in 1501.<sup>176</sup> The three urban knights of York remained citizens and continued to live in the city, even though they had extensive rural holdings. They did not discontinue their entrepreneurial activities, and Sir Richard York's grandson, Bartholomew, became free of the city as a merchant in 1526.<sup>177</sup>

As we have seen, few merchants acquired sufficient rural property to remove themselves from urban life,<sup>178</sup> but they did maintain a long association with the rural gentry through business and social contacts. Out of town membership of such guilds as the Corpus Christi and St. Christopher and St. George Guild of York, drew merchants into

174. Palliser, Tudor York, p. 101; C.P.R. 1485-94, pp. 256-7, 303; C.C.R. 1485-1500, p. 97.

175. Prob. Reg. VI f. 59v. (Todd); P.R.O. Prob. 11/11 f. 36 (York).

176. Palliser, Tudor York, p. 101; W.J. Kaye, Yorkshiresmen who declined to take up their knighthood, Yorks. Arch. Jnr. 31 (1932-4), pp. 362, 364.

177. York Freeman, p. 248.

178. Skaife believed that John Dalton of Hull founded a family seated in Richmond. Test. Ebor. IV, p. 21-2.

association with the rural and urban gentry.<sup>179</sup> Although the sons of several gentry families became freemen of York and Hull,<sup>180</sup> to try to make a living in the town, there was apparently not the same degree of close interplay between town and country families as there was in other English towns in the 16th century.<sup>181</sup>

However there was a tradition of merchant and gentry association through marriage, and such marriages must often have been to the advantage of both parties and were generally between county esquires and prominent York families and occurred throughout the period. John Barden of York, d. 1396, married his daughter Ellen to John, son of Thomas Dauney of Escrick and his grand-daughter Joan made an exceptionally good marriage to Sir William Gascoigne of Gawsthorpe, the eldest son of the Lord Chief Justice. John Gisburn's daughter Alice married Sir William Plumpton; John Glasyn of York, d. 1483, married Joan, daughter of William Neville Esq., of Thornton Bridge.<sup>182</sup> It was possible for a merchant family to acquire wide gentry connections through several marriages. Thomas Neleson of York, d. 1484, married his daughter Elizabeth, first to Brian, younger brother of Sir John Conyers, and

179. R. Horrox, *Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century*, in R.A. Griffiths, ed., *Patronage, The Crown, and the Provinces in Later Medieval England* (1981), p. 156; E. White, *The St. George and St. Christopher Guild of York*, Borthwick Paper no. 72 (1987), pp. 14-5.

180. E.g. Guy Fairfax, son of Richard Fairfax esq., of Walton, became recorder of the city; Robert Plumpton, common clerk of York in 1490, was a bastard son of Sir William Plumpton. *York Freemen*, p. 193; *V.C.H. York*, p. 74; *C.C.G.*, pp. 56, 125.

181. Cf. Chester, where members of the local gentry were active in trade and in local politics, while retaining, and visiting their country estates. Dr. Horrox however, argues that there was not such a sharp division between rural and urban. *Urban Patronage*, *passim*.

182. *C.C.G.*, pp. 49n., 239-240n.; *Test. Ebor.* I, p. 387.

second to Robert Wassnes Esq., of Heydon, Notts.<sup>183</sup> His son William married Joan, daughter of John North Esq., of Bilton and their daughter Catherine married William, son of Ralph Gascoigne esq., of Bundy.<sup>184</sup> John Bolton of York, d. 1445, also married his daughter Margaret into the Gascoigne family. Her first husband was Roger Salvayn Esq., and her second was Henry Gascoigne of Harswell, great-grandson of John Barden.<sup>185</sup>

The merchant knights of York were perhaps in a better position to marry into the more prominent Yorkshire families. Sir John Gylyot jnr, d. 1509, married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Henry Vavasour of Haslewood.<sup>186</sup> Sir Richard York, d. 1498, married into a famous Yorkshire family on his marriage to Joan Mauleverer. His daughters Anne and Elizabeth married Sir Thomas Mallory of Studeley, and Thomas, son of Sir John Barton of Kilnsey respectively. His son Richard married Elizabeth, possibly daughter of Thomas, Lord Darcy, and their grandson was Sir Martin Frobisher, the famous navigator.<sup>187</sup>

Several merchants' sons took up 'professional' careers in the church,<sup>188</sup> or in the law courts or royal administration. Such moves probably constituted upward mobility in the eyes of contemporary society although some achieved higher status than others within the same profession. Adam Coppendale, probably son of John Coppendale of

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183. C.C.G., p. 90n., W. Longstaffe ed., Tonge's Visitation, Surtees Society, xli (1863), p. 8.

184. Test. Ebor. II, pp. 15n, 92n.

185. Yorks. Deeds, IX, p. 241; C.C.G., p. 38n.

186. C.H. Hunter-Blair, ed., Northern Visitations, III, Surtees Society, cxliv (1930), p. 61.

187. See Appendix 6.

188. Richard Russell of York opted into merchant society, rejecting the opportunity to join the monks of Durham who had brought him up. Dobson, Durham Priory, p. 60.

Beverley, was a Doctor of Laws and prebendary of Beverley Minster at the time of his death in 1481-2. Earlier he had been licensed as a non-resident for two years to enable him to study.<sup>189</sup> Nicholas Lancaster was the son of a York merchant, John Lancaster, and he became a doctor of Laws and Common Clerk to the city.<sup>190</sup> Several merchants' sons became clerics of one sort or another.<sup>191</sup> Thomas Esingwold of York's son became a priest. William, son of William Cleveland, another York merchant, became the chaplain of the Mercers and Merchant Adventurers' Company in 1504.<sup>192</sup> Robert Rolleston, d. 1450, was the son of William Rolleston, a merchant of Beverley, and became provost of St. John of Beverley, whereas his brother Roger became armigerous.<sup>193</sup> Probably the most successful and famous merchant son from the three towns was John, son of William Alcock of Hull, who became bishop of Ely yet maintained close relations with Hull.<sup>194</sup>

Little evidence has survived to show that merchants provided their sons with the sort of education necessary for entry into the church or law. Opportunities for some education were available, however, even if they were limited to the requirements of a York goldsmith, who insisted

189. Prob. Reg. V f. 21; Test.Ebor. IV, p. 8n.

190. York Freeman, pp. 192, 208.

191. If 10%-11% of all testators' sons in late-medieval Norwich became clerics, the scale of recruitment from the Yorkshire merchants was below average. Tanner, Popular Religion in Norwich, p. 58.

192. Prob. Reg. II f. 531; M. & M.A., pp. 80 and passim.

193. Prob. Reg. II ff. 370-370v.; Beverley Accts. 1409.

194. Test. Ebor. III, p. 42n. Other merchants whose sons entered holy orders were William de Appilby, Thomas Bracebridge, and John Tanfield of York, Stephen Tilson of Beverley and Thomas Gore of Hull.

in 1374<sup>195</sup> that his son should be 'in bona conversatione ad discendum ad scolas et ad artem aurifabri'. Ecclesiastical centres such as York and Beverley would not lack educated men who could tutor children, and all three towns had some provision for organised teaching. There is evidence of a school in Hull, later the grammar school, from the late 14th century, and it is probable that a school existed in York from the same period.<sup>196</sup> Beverley had a salaried schoolmaster as early as 1366.<sup>197</sup> Some merchants probably sent their sons away for a fuller education to established schools. John Stockdale of York left 20s. to his nephew in 1506, who was attending Eton College.<sup>198</sup> Certainly merchants' sons went up to Oxford and presumably to the Inns of Court. In 1435 Richard Russell of York left £30 to his nephew Robert to enable him to go to Oxford<sup>199</sup> and John Brompton of Beverley and John Day of Hull left rents and £20 respectively for their sons' exhibitions, presumably to Oxford.<sup>200</sup>

195. Ibid., I, p. 92. I am grateful to Edward Miller for this reference.
196. V.C.H. York, p. 348; St. Peter's School, York had been in existence since the 8th century, and the Grammar School, Beverley, may have been founded soon after. A.F. Leach ed., Early Yorkshire Schools, I, Yorks. Arch. Soc. Rec. Ser. xxvii (1899), pp. vii, xxiv-xxxix. For a discussion of the wide opportunities in York see J. Moran, Education and Learning in the City of York, 1300-1560, Borthwick Paper no. 55 (1979).
197. Bev. Acct. Roll 1366.
198. Prob. Reg. VI f. 185.
199. Ibid., III f. 439.
200. Ibid., II f. 87v.; IV f. 79. For further educational bequests see:- William Fyssh of York, 1392 I ff. 47-47v.; John de More, 1398, II f. 10; Alice Upstall of York, 1431, II f. 640; Nicholas Useflete of York, 1443, II ff. 58-9; Richard Patrington of Beverley, 1452, II f. 243v.; Peter Gyll of Hull, 1469, IV f. 140; Richard Burdall of Beverley, 1476, IV f. 93.

Literacy is a difficult skill to identify in the middle ages,<sup>201</sup> even though it has been claimed that towns were the nurseries of literacy;<sup>202</sup> men or women able to read could not always write. Wills were often drawn up by scribes. Robert Louth of York recorded his need of a clerk when he paid for the drawing up of his will and for 'other writings', which may well have been of a similarly legal nature.<sup>203</sup>

Few personal records such as diaries, letters, or account books have survived. The incidence of book ownership as a reflection of literacy is not reliable; books may have been extremely ornate and valued as artefacts rather than as reading matter.<sup>204</sup> Very few of the wills read contained bequests of books, less than 1%,<sup>205</sup> and without exception those books were religious:<sup>206</sup> psalters, missals,

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201. Sylvia Thrupp's estimate of literacy in London: (40 per cent Latin readers and 50 per cent English readers) was based on the recorded literacy of 116 male witnesses before the consistory court, 1467-1476, London Merchant Class, pp. 156-8. Nicholas Orme believes that merchant literacy meant the ability to read Latin without an understanding of the niceties of grammar, and the ability to read and write in English and French. N. Orme, English Schools in the Middle Ages (London, 1973), pp. 47-8.
202. Orme, English Schools, pp. 43-45.
203. Prob. Reg. III f. 265. See also John Carre, Test. Ebor., III, p. 300.
204. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, pp. 161-2. This impression is confirmed by other studies. M. Deanesly, 'Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', Modern Language Review, xv (1920), p. 23; M.G. A. Vale, Piety, Charity and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480. Borthwick Paper no. 50 (1976), p. 29.
205. In London between 1380 and 1415, 5% of testators left books and in Bury St. Edmunds only 2%. Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
206. An impression borne out by the selection of books available in a city bookshop in 1538. D.M. Palliser and D.G. Selwyn, 'The Stock of a York Stationer, 1538', The Library (London, 1972), pp. 207-219. For an account of the city's printing history, R. Davies, A Memoir of the York Press, (London, 1868); E.G. Duff, The Printers, Stationers, and Bookbinders of York up to 1600 (York, 1900).



primers,<sup>207</sup> a bible, and a book Oracione Dominica et Stimulus Conscientiae in Anglia.<sup>208</sup> An unusual item was an English translation of the Scriptures left by William Ormeshead of York to his nephew Nicholas Blackburn jnr in 1437. Richard Wartre of York clearly valued books himself, and left books worth £10 to his parish of origin, Bugthorpe, in 1458. Richard Russell, also of York, left an extremely fine collection of books to his parish church, St. John the Baptist, Hungate, in 1435. Russell's origins are not known, but it seems likely that he was brought up or educated by the monks of Durham,<sup>209</sup> and his private library was clearly that of a well-educated man, with literary interests beyond those of the average merchant. Lawrence Swattock, apothecary and merchant of Hull, left two 'books of physic called Nicholesse', to his servant in 1492.<sup>210</sup>

Literacy was not of course confined to men. Some merchant's wives left primers and Jayne Harper left a 'mass book in print' in her will of 1513.<sup>211</sup> It could have been produced locally.

The ownership of a handful of books of 'physic' and assorted devotional texts do not create the impression of a social group with cultural pretensions. Yet it is clear that, by the late 15th century at least, merchant councillors sought to convey a complex image of an

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207. Many copies of popular primers in the vernacular survive from the beginning of the fifteenth century and were apparently used by non-Latinists who wished to follow services. J.W. Adamson, The Illiterate Anglo-Saxon and Other Essays on Education, Medieval and Modern (Cambridge, 1946), p. 40.

208. Prob. Reg. II f. 494 (Pettyclerk); III ff. 410-411 (Cateryk), 450 (Louth); Test. Ebor., II p. 117.

209. Prob. Reg. II, 19n.; Prob. Reg. III ff. 439-440 (Russell); IV. f. 116 (Wartre), 503-504v. (Ormeshead); A. Raine, Medieval York: A Topographical Survey Based on Original Sources (London, 1955), p. 83.

210. Prob. Reg. V ff. 410v.-411.

211. Ibid. VIII f. 98.

ancient, learned city when the council displayed impressive talent in mounting a flamboyant series of events to greet Henry VII on his first visit to the city in 1486. The King was to be met by the assembled council and officials, correctly robed according to rank, some burgesses, also formally robed, and a number of children calling joyfully, 'King Henry'. He was then addressed from set tableaux, by a personification of the city, 'Ebrauke', by Solomon, David and the Virgin Mary and showered, weather permitting, with rose-water and sweetmeats. The occasion was to be a glorious mixture of a festival atmosphere, spiced with protestations of York's loyalty, Henry's nobility, and his legitimacy as King of England. Like the play cycles, this event was intentionally staged at a popular level; although some of the versification may not have impressed the throng, the council had to consider its own image as a cultural if not cultured elite. There must have been literate merchants in the discussions of the programme for Henry's visit when reference was made to Bartholomew's encyclopedia De Proprietatibus Rerum as an authority on the pre-eminence of the rose among flowers: an appropriate allusion.<sup>212</sup>

There was another important area of cultural patronage open to the laity in York and Beverley, and that was the production of the play cycles. There were at least three in York; the Creed play, the Paternoster plays,<sup>213</sup> and the Corpus Christi plays. The most important was

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212. Y.C.R., I, pp. 155-9; A.H. Smith, 'A York Pageant, 1486', London Medieval Studies, (London, 1939), pp. 382-98.

213. In the middle of the fifteenth-century the Guild of St. Anthony became responsible for the production of the Paternoster Play, after the guild of that name was absorbed into St. Anthony's. The Mercers' Company performed it in 1488 but in 1496 the Guild of St. Anthony was still putting on an annual performance Y.C.R., II, p. 118. In the late sixteenth-century it was performed on two occasions in lieu of the Corpus Christi cycle. Raine, Medieval York, pp. 94-5; K. Young, The Records of the York Paternoster Play, Speculum, vii (1932) pp. 540-60. The third cycle, the Creed Play, apparently remained under control of a religious guild. J.S. Purvis, The York Religious Plays, in A. Stacpoole et al., eds., The Noble City of York (York, 1972), p. 845.

the last, staged by the craft guilds.<sup>214</sup> In Beverley two cycles were performed, the Paternoster plays and the Corpus Christi plays.<sup>215</sup> Whatever the relative literary merits of these play cycles, they were a dramatic event which involved the whole community and attracted crowds of visitors. In York, members of the craft guilds paid a compulsory contribution, pageant silver, towards the presentation of the particular play associated with the guild.<sup>216</sup> Each guild or group of guilds grappled with the practical problems of props, the choice of actors, and the manhandling of the pageant wagons from station to station.<sup>217</sup> The council assumed overall responsibility; it discouraged violence, ensured that the streets were cleaned and decorated, and by 1476 was concerned that the competent actors performed 'to the honour of the city and the worship of the said crafts'.<sup>218</sup> In addition, the mayor and council were responsible for the pageant of the Coronation of the Virgin in the fifteenth century.<sup>219</sup> In Beverley similar arrangements existed and each craft was responsible for a play and by 1411 the council supervised the overall performance.<sup>220</sup>

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214. E.K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage (Oxford, 2 vols., 1903) for the dramatic development and literary form of medieval play cycles. For a more provocative interpretation see A.H. Nelson, The Medieval English Stage: Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays (Chicago, 1974).

215. J.R. Witty, The Beverley Plays, Trans. Yorks. Dialect Society, part 23, vol. iv (1922), pp. 18-37; A.F. Leach, Ordinances of the Beverley Corpus Christi Guild, Proc. Soc. Antiquaries, 2nd series, xv (1894), pp. 103-8.

216. M.B. I, pp. 134, 136, 185.

217. See for example A.F. Johnston and M. Dorrell, The York Mercers and their Pageant of Doomsday, 1433-1526, in Leeds Studies in English, N.S. A.C. Cawley and S. Ellis, eds., v (1971), pp. 29-34.

218. M.B. II, pp. 64, 146; Y.C.R., I, p. 5.

219. M. Dorrel, The Mayor of York and the Coronation Pageant, pp. 34-45.

220. GGB ff. 12b, 16, 26.

The performance of the plays was seen by the councils in both Beverley and York as an opportunity to entertain visiting notables. York entertained Richard II in 1397 to a performance of the Corpus Christi cycle, and in 1483 entertained Richard III to a performance of the Creed play. Beverley council had members of the Percy family, the local magnates, as guests to a performance of its play cycle in 1423.<sup>221</sup> The plays were also the occasion for profit<sup>222</sup> to shop and innkeepers, and from time to time the commercial and rowdy element threatened the religious purpose of the festival. From 1426, the York plays were performed on the vigil of Corpus Christi, to ensure that people were not distracted from the religious purposes of the festival.<sup>223</sup> Nonetheless, a contemporary writer could claim that the York plays moved spectators to tears, and one recent commentator has seen them as a reflection of the 'personal and quite emotional' spirituality fo the city.<sup>224</sup>

Individually, merchants served their towns as patrons of a range of artistic crafts, through their commissioning of windows, repairs and improvements to parish churches and religious houses. Along with other

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221. York Chamberlains' account roll, 1397; Y.C.R., I, p. 81; Bev. Acct. 1423.

222. There were complaints at a public meeting in 1416, that certain individuals were profiteering from the seat-charges paid at the pageant stations. M.B. II, p. 64. Thereafter the council was to receive one third of the receipts. On a later occasion in 1432 there were complaints that the crafts were using the plays as a means to advertise. Ibid., p. 172.

223. M.B. II, pp. 156-8.

224. C. Davidson, Northern Spirituality and the Late Medieval Drama in York, in E.R. Elder, ed., The Spirituality of Western Christendom (Kalamazoo, Michigan 1976), pp. 129-30.

lay benefactors,<sup>225</sup> their contribution to the ecclesiastical arts and the church rebuilding of the 15th century is immeasurable, but their spiritual aspirations were optimistic and it is to those we next turn.

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225. It may be that we will have to accept the impossibility of identifying such gifts and patronage amongst other groups. Recent work on York craftsmen estimates that only a maximum of 20% made wills. H. Swanson, Medieval Artisans (Oxford, 1989), p. 155.

## II

Spiritual Investment<sup>226</sup>

While anxiety over the material security of their families was apparent in most merchants' wills, a temporal uncertainty engendered by uncertain times; equally powerful was a parallel fear for their souls. The overwhelming impression left by the majority of late-medieval wills is one of insecurity only mitigated by religious and charitable benevolence. This was to be expected since a fundamental tenet of church doctrine, emphasised by the friars in particular, was the existence of purgatory. Prayers for the dead had a redemptive value, and the benefit which the living and the dead received varied in direct proportion to the number of masses said, and the amount of offering made.<sup>227</sup> In a faith which regarded the visible and invisible, the dead and the living, as a single church, all benefited from benevolence. The laity was taught that even small-scale giving would profit their souls and those of their dead.<sup>228</sup>

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226. Lay piety has attracted increasing attention. One of the more recent and influential studies is J. Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory, translated in 1984 from the French 1981 edition. See also J. Bossy, Christianity in the West (1985); A. Kreider, English Chantries, the Road to Dissolution (Cambridge, Mass. 1979); J.A.F. Thompson, Piety and Charity in Late Medieval London, Jnl. Eccl. Hist., xvi (1965), pp. 178-95; M.G.A. Vale, Piety, Charity and Literacy Among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480, Borthwick Paper no. 50 (1976); K. Wood-Legh, Perpetual Chantries in Britain (1965); M. Rubin, Corpus Christi fraternities and late medieval piety, in W.J. Sheils, D. Wood, eds., Voluntary Religion (1986), pp. 97-109, and see notes 195, 209, 232, 255 below.

227. B.L. Manning, The People's Faith in the Time of Wycliff (1919), p. 73; J.T. Rosenthal, The Purchase of Paradise (1972), p. 11.

228. Le Goff, Purgatory, pp. 237-8.

Jean le Goff has recently examined this philosophy,<sup>229</sup> and many of his ideas have been taken up by younger scholars.<sup>230</sup> Le Goff suggests that the combination of a belief in purgatory, the notion of Christian altruism which gave redemption through good works and charity, and the greater merit achieved in assisting others' souls, became fundamental to the way ordinary men and women expressed their faith. What le Goff calls the 'solidarity between the living and the dead',<sup>231</sup> was re-enforced as they were united in the post-mortem provisions of individuals. The executors and heirs gained merit from carrying out instructions, and the testator's soul<sup>232</sup> and those of predeceased spouses, parents, friends, also benefited from a fresh injection of masses.

It is beyond doubt that most of the laity who made wills, accepted the doctrine of purgatory and believed in the efficacy of benevolence and intercessionary masses. In making a will, merchants were 'assessing their priorities',<sup>233</sup> and most put their souls high on the list. Even those who confined their investment to a small sum for forgotten tithes, were accepting the need to settle their spiritual debts to the church.<sup>234</sup> In the case of William Clitheroe of Hull, it was a

229. Ibid.

230. In particular by C. Burgess, 'A fond thing vainly invented': an essay on Purgatory and pious motive in later medieval England, in S.J. Wright, ed., Parish Church and People (1987), pp. 56-84.

231. Le Goff, Purgatory, p. 357.

232. Ibid., pp. 356-7; Burgess, Purgatory and pious motive, p. 67.

233. Rosenthal, Purchase of Paradise, p. 81.

234. At least 95% of testators who made any religious provision, paid towards forgotten tithes. It was a routinely occurring item in the wills of London merchants, Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 185, and in medieval Norwich, Tanner, Church in Norwich, pp. 5-6. In Bury St. Edmunds, 70% of all testators made such a payment. Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, op. cit., p. 6.

responsibility to a particular church, St. Sampson's in York, which he no longer attended, but maybe in the plague-ridden year of 1438, all eventualities had to be covered.<sup>235</sup>

A speedy passage through purgatory and eventual redemption, was sought in one or more ways: by making a single donation, making provision for a simple obit and mass at the funeral, providing for a longer-term chantry endowment or cash payment for masses over a period of months or years, or by various short- or long-term charitable acts. As can be seen from appendix 5, most merchants and their wives kept their expenditure within reasonable limits, although one or two may have jeopardised their social provisions by the amount of money or land they wished to divert into the church. John Aldwik of Hull for example, left all his property to the city to maintain his chantry and his son Geoffrey received a life pension. John de Gisburn specified £242 out of an estate of some £300 for spiritual investment in 1390.<sup>236</sup> In the late 15th century, both John Gilyots, father and son, committed large cash sums and real estate: Gilyot senior £143 out of some £155, and junior, £538 out of £722. £500 alone was to buy land to maintain a perpetual chantry.<sup>237</sup> Personal vagaries determined what percentage an individual spent. Robert Savage spent only £6 out of £106 in 1399, Richard Taunton, £66 out of £86 in 1394.<sup>238</sup>

Without adequate testamentary evidence covering the period 1330-1470, we cannot gauge the impact of the Black Death on lay piety. However, the growth in the act of will-making and the persistence

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235. Prob. Reg. II f. 295.

236. *Ibid.*, I ff. 15v.-16 (Gisburn); II f. 96 (Aldwick).

237. *Ibid.* V f. 237; VIII ff. 32-4. See also Holme of York, £963 out of £2,148, I ff. 100v. -103v.

238. *Ibid.*, I f. 63 (Taunton); III ff. 17-18 (Savage).



of religious bequests, suggests that from the 1370s, there was no appreciable decline in spending on souls. Certain routine bequests were made in a formal way, after the merchant had commended his soul to the Virgin Mary and all saints, and more rarely expounded his thoughts on the weakness of the flesh and eternal life.<sup>239</sup> The most remarkable religious preambles were those of John and then Thomas Dalton of Hull; the one copying the other, but such extended ruminations were exceptional.<sup>240</sup> The parish clergy were rarely omitted. The priest would receive a small sum under 6s.8d. for forgotten tithes, a further similar sum for himself, 4d. or so for the parish clerk, and sometimes 2d. for the sub-clerk. Richard Russell of York left 3s.4d. to a former clerk of his parish and even extended the payments to be made to those priests attending his funeral, to include their parish clerks and sub-clerks.<sup>241</sup> A variable sum would be left for the church fabric, and the best gown for mortuary.<sup>242</sup> Robert de Preston of Hull, exceptionally left his horse for his mortuary in 1347.<sup>243</sup>

239. Cf. R.B. Dobson, 'The Residentiary Canons of York in the Fifteenth Century', Jnl. Eccl. Hist., xxx (1979), pp. 159-160, where the individual phraseology of the religious preambles to the canons' wills is discussed. See also Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, pp. 15-16 for the florid tone of some gentry preambles.

240. Test. Ebor., IV, pp. 21-2; Prob. Reg. ff. 483v.-5; VI f. 51.

241. Ibid., III ff. 439-41; Test Ebor., II p. 55.

242. According to Lyndwood's Provinciale, eds. J.V. Bell and H.C. Bell (London, 1929), p. 6, mortuary was to be paid by the testator 'for and in recompense and satisfaction of such tithes and offerings as he hath taken or kept from the parson'. In the Yorkshire wills, however, mortuary and tithe were often paid as two separate items. Cf. Norwich, where the incidence of tithe bequests increased after 1490. Tanner, Church in Norwich, p. 6. See also A.K. McHardy, 'Some Late-Medieval Eton College Wills', Jnl. Eccl. Hist., xxviii (1977), p. 390 where she describes such payments as conscience money.

243. Arch. Reg. X f. 322.

Most merchants asked to be buried in their own parish church, sometimes in front of a specific altar, but one or two such as John Pettyclerk of York left it to God's will to be buried wherever he died.<sup>244</sup> In Hull, 1 in 4 chose Holy Trinity over the lesser chapel of St. Mary's and in Beverley, 1 in 3 chose St. Mary's over St. John's. In York with a greater number of parishes, the pattern of burials reflected the pattern of residence. Most merchants lived in the central parishes from the evidence of wills. St. Crux and All Saints, Pavement, were twice as popular as any other. All the rest attracted similar numbers: Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, Holy Trinity, King's Court, St. John Evangelist, St. Martin, Coneystreet, St. Martin, Mickelgate, St. Peter Little, St. Sampson's and St. Saviour's. Only one or two lived/were buried in the outlying, suburban parishes such as St. Lawrence, St. Denis, Walmgate, St. Cuthbert's, Peaseholme, and St. Olave. South of the river the large parish of St. Mary Bishophill Senior encompassed eight or so, All Saints, Northstreet, six, and Holy Trinity Priory three. Several asked to be buried away from their town of residence, probably because they were ill and expected to die while away. Alexander Wharton of Hull died in London in 1506 and wanted to be buried in St. Mary Magdalen, Old Fish Street. John Yarom and John Grantham, both of York, were taken ill in London and had to be buried there in 1347 and 1391 respectively. John

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244. P. Heath, *Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: the evidence of Hull wills*, in R.B. Dobson, ed., Church, Politics, and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century (1984), p. 215. Prob. Reg. II f. 494 (Pettyclerk). In Norwich 8 or 9 out of 10 sought burial in their own parish church (Tanner, Church in Norwich, pp. 11-2). The same pattern was observed in London and Bury St. Edmunds, (Woods, *London and Bury St. Edmunds*, p. 4), and contrasted with the choice of many of the nobility who sought burial in a religious house (Rosenthal, Purchase of Paradise, pp. 82, 85, 92). The Yorkshire gentry on the other hand showed a marked preference for a parochial burial (Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9).

Aton of York, however, wanted to be buried in Holy Trinity, Hull in 1394, for no apparent reason, and had perhaps been born in Hull.<sup>245</sup> A few sought burial in a friary, but not as many as the 10% of all testators in Norwich, whose preference for a mendicant-burial created tension between the parish clergy and the friars. Robert Goldyng of Hull sought burial in the Charterhouse in 1453, where his uncle was prior, but his was an unusual choice. The Franciscans were marginally more popular in York and Beverley, the Austin friars in Hull.<sup>246</sup> However, the cemetery of each order of friars was chosen by some merchant for his burial. Their popularity did not apparently diminish: John Crull in 1482, John Skelton in 1487 and Thomas Scotton in 1503, were still choosing a mendicant burial.<sup>247</sup>

Those who had had more than one spouse had to decide which to be buried near. Joan, who outlived her third husband, Sir Richard York, chose to be buried next to her second husband in Holy Trinity, Hull. William Burgh of Hull predeceased his third wife and wanted to be buried next to both his previous wives.<sup>248</sup>

For some merchants their place of burial reflected the warmth as well as the formality of lifetime relationships. Families were traditionally buried in the same church unless the children had moved

245. Prob. Reg. I f. 69 (Aton); f. 45 (Grantham); VI f. 216 (Wharton); Arch. Reg. X f. 320 (Yarom).

246. Tanner, Church in Norwich, pp. 11-13. Prob. Reg. II f. 285. See also for instance:- Thomas Preston the Austin Friary in Hull (II f. 225); Thomas Rolleston and Stephen Coppendale with the Franciscans in Beverley (Arch. Reg. XVIII ff. 34v., 354); William Appilby with the Austin Friars in York (Prob. Reg. I f. 3v.); John Wakeman with the Carmelites in York (II f. 659); William Ireby with the Dominicans in York (I f. 55v.).

247. Prob. Reg. V f. 29v. (Crull); f. 298v. (Skelton); VI f. 60 (Scotton).

248. Prob. Reg. II f. 423v. (Burgh); XI f. 57 (York).

away to another parish. Thomas Bracebridge of York wanted to be buried in St. Saviour's next to his wife and children who had predeceased him, and John Esingwold wanted to be buried in the Austin Friary next to his brothers. Robert Howell of Hull wanted to be buried as close as possible to his wife Margaret in Holy Trinity.<sup>249</sup> Some merchants wanted to prolong a master-apprentice relationship. Robert Hancock of York asked to be buried at the feet of his former master Thomas Barton and similarly Robert Harrison of Hull wanted to be buried at Ralph Langton's feet, and Henry Mindram of Hull next to John Whitfield.<sup>250</sup>

Most merchants were content with a simple tombstone, but one or two aspired to greater glory. Thomas Rolleston of Beverley left 10 marks for a marble slab in 1415<sup>251</sup> and in 1485, Stephen Coppendale, also of Beverley, left 6 marks for a marble slab with his arms carved upon it. John Braythwait of York, or maybe his widow on her own initiative, paid £20 in 1471 for a stone cross to his memory in Thursdaymarket.<sup>252</sup> Elias Casse of Beverley was a businessman to the last and he left 20s. to St. Mary's, Beverley, in 1501 for a proper tombstone, but the money was to be halved,<sup>253</sup> if no tombstone were provided.

It was not the burial which was significant in the middle ages, but the funeral, the services and rituals which preceded the interment. The funeral incorporated the laying out of the corpse, the religious services, prayers of the mourners, carrying of candles and tapers, and

249. Ibid., III f. 487 (Bracebridge); f. 599 (Esingwold); VIII f. 109v. (Howell).

250. Ibid., V f. 473 (Hancock); VII f. 25v. (Mindram); IX f. 112 (Harrison).

251. Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 34v.

252. M.B. II, p. 100; Prob. Reg. V f. 271 (Coppendale).

253. Ibid., VI f. 12a (Casse).

distribution of doles to the poor. It "provided multiple intercession for the testator's soul and a sharing of the burden of sorrow for the bereaved. The funeral harmonised these twin functions to provide comfort for the dying testator and his family".<sup>254</sup>

The funeral was usually conducted by the parish priest, but testators did have familiar and favourite priests. Nicholas Blackburn, snr wanted Sir Gilbert Gyghley to officiate at his funeral in 1432.<sup>255</sup> The Office of the Dead, the placebo, initiated the process the night before the interment. After midnight the Matins of the Office of the Dead, the dirige was performed and sometimes extra antiphons and psalms were added. After the Requiem Mass, the interment took place<sup>256</sup> and the entire proceedings were accompanied by as many intercessionary candles and prayers as possible. To that end it was a common practice to leave wax or cash to buy candles and torches. John Asby of York left £8 in 1455, William Winkburn left 90 lbs. in 1438, and Thomas Hykson 5 lbs. in 1503. The candles were to burn at their funeral: that is throughout the whole period of mourning, the interment and until the 'eighten day'. Most merchants contented themselves with one mass and maybe one or two trentals, thirty requiem masses celebrated in quick succession. William Clitheroe of Hull was exceptional in paying for nine, in groups of three, two groups dedicated to the trinity, to the Virgin Mary, and the third to be requiem masses.<sup>257</sup>

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254. C. Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England (1984), pp. 23-4.

255. Ibid., p. 29; Prob. Reg. II f. 605.

256. C.W. Foster, ed., Lincoln Wills Registered in the District Probate Registry at Lincoln, I, Lincoln Rec. Soc., IV (1914), pp. 245-7.

257. Prob. Reg. II ff. 295-295v. (Clitheroe); f. 397v. (Asby); f. 536 (Winkburn); VI f. 76v. (Hykson); cf. a John Derlyngton of London who wanted 4 trentals, a chantry priest for 1 year, and 1,000 other masses! Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, p. 12; London Guildhall Libr. MS 1403 ff. 5-5v.

With an eye for detail and a good knowledge of costs,<sup>258</sup> Richard Russell of York left 40lbs. of wax for 3 candles and 48s. for 12 torches. Eight of the torches were to be given to three altars in his parish church and the rest were to be held at his exequy by poor men. It was a custom to hand out doles to the poor, and to select 12 or 13, an echo of the Last Supper, to serve as torchbearers. They were sometimes paid with cash or food or by being allowed to keep the funeral garments provided for the occasion. Richard Russell left 60s. to buy bread for that purpose, and Robert Johnson of Beverley, caps and gowns to the 13 poor men who were to attend his funeral.<sup>259</sup> This was one way of enticing as many people as possible to attend and pray. Another was to hand out doles to the poor who attended, or to pay each priest who attended and 'sings for my soul'.<sup>260</sup>

One or two merchants had more elaborate funeral plans, a possibility positively rejected by many Londoners.<sup>261</sup> Thomas Wilton of Beverley wanted virtually all the members of St. John's staff, the chancellor, sacrist, precentor, 7 parsons, 9 vicars, 9 chaplains, 8 clerks, the 2 treasurers, and 8 choristers to sing a mass for him at his funeral for 7s. 8d. divided between them. He also left 13s.4d. for the bells to be rung. Thomas Barton of York similarly remembered all the personnel of his church, St. Michael's Ousebridgend, and left £26 for

258. Such specific instructions were common, Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, p. 29.

259. Prob. Reg. III ff. 439-40 (Russell); V f. 99 (Johnson) and see also VIII f. 32 (Gilyot).

260. Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, pp. 26-8. In Richard Russell's will, he anticipated that each priest would be attended by his clerk and sub-clerk. Test. Ebor., II, p. 55. See also e.g. Prob. Reg. I f. 96v. (Crome); III f. 92v. (Derfield).

261. Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, p. 5.

suits of white damask with gold fringes for the chaplains, deacons and choir.<sup>262</sup> Such splendour, accompanied by the distribution of over £20 in almsgiving, was exceptional. Detailing the form of an obit was unusual too. Alice Esingwold, Thomas's widow, gave £20 to St. Leonard's hospital in York to perform an elaborate annual obit for Thomas and herself on 10th September. It was to be 'with Placebo and Dirige, the mass of the dead and ringing of great bells; in the daily Mass of Requiem, to remember Alice and Thomas in the prayer Incline Domina. Each year the 10s. 10d. to the brothers saying the mass was to be divided equally immediately after the offertory of the said Mass, as is the custom ...',<sup>263</sup>

Contemporary society would remember an individual after a dramatic funeral, and even more particularly if a funeral feast was provided. William Vescy, Bertram Dawson and John Beesby, all of York, left money for such a meal for their neighbours.<sup>264</sup> Guy Malyerd and John Ashton of Beverley, both provided for future memorial bibulation: Ashton, a mercer, left 6 gallons of wine in 1460 to his fellow mercers to drink on Rogation day, and Malyerd 10s. to the aldermen and fellows of his guild in 1486 for three occasions.<sup>265</sup>

Even though the majority of merchants left their funeral arrangements to their executors, few were so casual about the ultimate

262. Prob. Reg. II f. 309 (Wilton); f. 451 (Barton). Elaborate funerals were more common amongst the nobility towards the end of the 15th century. In 1489 £1,038 was spent on the funeral of Henry, 4th earl of Northumberland. Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual pp. 25-6.

263. M.B. II, pp. 222-3.

264. Prob. Reg. III f. 266v. (Vescy); IX f. 39v. (Dawson); XI f. 147 (Beseby). See also Eva Crome I f. 96v.; II f. 68 (Russell); III f. 72(i)v. (Chartres); ff. 254v.-255v. (Holme); f. 365 (Holme); VIII f. 98 (Harper).

265. Ibid., IV f. 148 (Ashton); V f. 309v. (Malyerd).

destination of their souls. Payments for forgotten tithes, to the parish clergy and so on were part of a wider expenditure on what the Elizabethan puritan Philip Stubbes called 'masses, diriges, trentals, de profundis ... and such pelting trash'.<sup>266</sup> They invested in future redemption by endowing a chantry as a perpetual foundation, or by leaving cash for a priest and/or religious institutions to sing masses for them over a specified period of time.

### Chantries.

Perpetual chantries were either endowed with specific rents or with a cash lump sum to be invested in property. A licence to alienate the necessary property had to be purchased from the crown either by the benefactor before his death or by his executors.<sup>267</sup> The total number of licences declined in the 15th century for the country as a whole,<sup>268</sup> and in York it has been estimated that most of the perpetual chantries were established by citizens between 1310 and 1340. New chantries were founded, however, throughout the late 14th and 15th centuries and continued the pattern of single chantries scattered among the large number of parish churches in the city.<sup>269</sup> Roger de Moreton jnr exceptionally endowed a chantry outside York at Rievaulx Abbey. The

266. Quoted in Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, p. 39.

267. T.F.T. Plucknett, The Legislation of Edward I pp. 94-102, 109; S. Rabdn, 'Mortmain in England', Past & Present, 62 (1974), pp. 3-26.

268. Rosenthal, Purchase of Paradise, p. 128.

269. R.B. Dobson, 'The Foundation of Perpetual Chantries by the Citizens of Medieval York', in Studies in Church History, G.J. Cuming, ed. iv (Leiden, 1967), p. 29. Cf. London 1380-1415 where perpetual chantries were rare and Bury St. Edmunds where there were none at all. Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, p. 15. The preference for chantries in parish churches rather than in cathedrals is discussed in Dobson, Perpetual Chantries, pp. 22-38 and in G. Rosser, Medieval Westminster (1989), p. 260, and in Tanner, Religion in Norwich, p. 97.



wish of John Carre of York to found a chantry in the church of St. Leonard's Hospital was also unusual.<sup>270</sup> In Beverley and Hull too few perpetual chantries were endowed for there to be any discernible fluctuation, and the small number of churches available, two in Hull and two and a chapel in Beverley, meant that chantries were more concentrated than in York. In all three towns the few citizens who endowed perpetual chantries were nearly all members of the merchant group. In Hull there was a marked tendency for merchants to endow a combined hospital or almshouse with their chantries. Beverley's biggest chantry, that of John Ake on the Crossbridge, was of this type.<sup>271</sup> In York citizens preferred either to endow a chantry or an almshouse but the two were not often combined.

The size of the initial endowment of perpetual chantries varied, although the average annual salary for a chantry priest was 7 marks (£4 13s. 4d.). In 1370-1 the executors of William Grantham and William de Santon, both merchants of York, alienated rents worth £5 per annum but had to pay £20 for the licence.<sup>272</sup> Richard Thorseby of York left a lump sum of £30 in 1405 and ten years later Thomas Rolleston of Beverley left £66 13s. 4d.<sup>273</sup> There seems to have been no preference for a direct property endowment instead of case or vice-versa as land values fluctuated. The wealthiest merchants of York left enormous lump sums for chantry foundation from the late 14th to the late 15th century. Robert Holme left £400 in 1396, Richard Wartre left £336 6s. 8d. in 1465, and John Gilyot jnr left £400 in 1509, each wishing to endow one

270. C.P.R. 1377-81, p. 458; B/Y f. 106.

271. Beverley Deeds, schedule III.

272. C.P.R. 1370-4, pp. 41-2.

273. Prob. Reg. III f. 245 (Thoresby); Arch. Reg. XVIII f. 34v. (Rolleston).

chantry.<sup>274</sup> Yet the intention must have been to buy property or rent charges to provide an income in perpetuity.<sup>275</sup>

Richard Russell of York left both specified properties and instructions to acquire property to endow his chantry at his death in 1435. In addition to a perpetual chantry he left extensive bequests for short term prayers and further property for a 30-year chantry. His executors took 25 years after his death to obtain an alienation licence, and possibly would not have bothered had not one of them, John Thrisk, wanted to share the chantry.<sup>276</sup> Occasionally executors would find that the testator's endowment was inadequate for the scale of his proposed chantry. John Gisburn of York left £40 for two chantry priests in 1390 but his executors had to reduce the establishment to one priest.<sup>277</sup>

In Hull, four of the five chantries established in the 14th century were endowed by merchants, and ten of the possible eleven, established in the 15th century. As with burials, Holy Trinity as the parish church attracted the most and from at least 1409, had twelve chantry priests organised in a college known as the Priests of the Table. John Gregg left them 12 houses to live in at the west end of the churchyard. Their appointment was in the gift of the mayor of Hull and vicar of Hessle.<sup>278</sup> The Priests of the Table and the mayor and council were the usual

274. Ibid., I f. 102 (Holme); IV f. 116 (Wartre); VIII f. 33 (Gilyot).

275. Cf. Thomas Bataill a London merchant who left 100 marks in 1445 to purchase a rent charge of 4 marks p.a. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 123.

276. Prob. Reg. III ff. 439-40 (Russell); C.P.R. 1452-5, p. 632.

277. Prob. Reg. I ff. 15v.-16 (Gisburn); C.P.R. 1401-5, p. 496.

278. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 287-9; Heath, Urban Piety, pp. 210, 219-20.

trustees for chantries in the 15th century,<sup>279</sup> and it has been argued that the creation of the corporation in 1440, encouraged more foundations. This is difficult to confirm since several large endowments, notably John Gregg's were made in 1437, and one proposed chantry, that of Robert Holme's, provided for in his will in 1449, never came to fruition.<sup>280</sup>

Occasionally the benefactor would use the establishment of his chantry for patronage. Thus Joan Gregg of Hull named John Wilde as the first priest of her chantry and Richard Russell of York named John Turner as priest of his chantry. John Gilyot jnr left the patronage of his chantry to each of his sons in succession, probably hoping that his family would look after the chantry and that it would not revert to the care of the city.<sup>281</sup>

Once a perpetual chantry was endowed and established, its income was regularly supplemented by cash gifts or the income of grants of land, from succeeding generations of townspeople. Even so, chantries could fail as rent values fell and testators were aware of the possibility. In 1451, Agnes Bedford, John's widow, left 8s. rent in Newcastle for an annual obit, but wanted her heirs to use a property in Hull should the Newcastle rent decay.<sup>282</sup>

279. See for example Arch. Reg. X ff. 322 v.; Prob. Reg. II ff. 383, 486v.; III ff. 507v.-508. However, earlier the group chantries of Henry de Selby, Peter Stellar and Walter Dimelton and of John Birbyn, Simon Grimsby and Walter Dimelton, both involved the granting of lands to several different chaplains. C.P.R. 1381-5, 390; 1408-13, p. 36.

280. Prob. Reg. II f. 211 (Holme); III f. 507 (Gregg).

281. Ibid., III f. 556v. (Gregg); f. 439 (Russell); VIII f. 34 (Gilyot). Cf. Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, pp. 18-19.

282. Prob. Reg. II f. 418 (Bedford).

Eventually the York city council found that its responsibilities as trustee incurred the city in considerable expense. In 1528 it was claimed that this expenditure was an important factor behind the city's inability to pay the fee farm. By act of parliament in 1536, the city was released from its maintenance of chantries.<sup>283</sup>

John Gilyot jnr, in addition to founding a new chantry for himself, left property worth 4 marks a year to the chantry priest of St. Thomas' altar in All Saints, Pavement.<sup>284</sup> By far the largest number of gifts to perpetual chantries in the 15th century were of this nature and it is probable that most chantry priests supplemented their income by singing masses for short term endowments also.

Since the establishment of a perpetual chantry was complicated and time consuming, most merchants preferred to distribute money for obits and masses amongst a variety of religious institutions and priests, and to endow a short term 'chantry'. Benefactors seemed to prefer a 1, 3 or 7 year endowment for anniversary masses<sup>285</sup> and endowments for periods over 10 years were unusual. William Bowes and John Gilyot snr of York left money for chantry priests to sing masses for 20 years,<sup>286</sup> but these were exceptional as short term chantries were always endowed with a lump sum from which the yearly salary was to be paid, and longer endowments required a large initial cash outlay. Frequently merchants would leave

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283. V.C.H. York, p. 123.

284. Prob. Reg. VIII f. 34 (Gilyot).

285. Anniversary masses were generally popular, and in London and Bury St. Edmunds, 1380-1415, were common. Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, p. 14. See also C.R. Burgess, A Service for the Dead: the Anniversary in Late Medieval Bristol, Trans. Bristol, Glos. Arch. Soc., 105 (1987), pp. 168-96.

286. Prob. Reg. III, ff. 580-83; V, f. 237.

money for certain chaplains, and anchorites and recluses,<sup>287</sup> to say a mass and Richard Wartre of York was anxious lest they forgot for whom the masses were to be said. He wanted his name and those of his parents and two wives to be written down on 'bills' so that all the chaplains could have the names in front of them as they sang. Since he left £50 for the purpose his anxiety was understandable.<sup>288</sup>

To ensure that no-one missed an individual's demise, the town crier could be paid 'to proclaim' the obit or mass. Thomas Esingwold, John Hagg, and William de Helmesley all of York paid for the 'crier for ringing the bell through the city, as the maner is, to excite the people to pray ...'.<sup>289</sup> Thomas Philips of Hull wanted his memory revived annually through a mass, said 'with the great bell ringing'. He had the foresight to leave £1 to Holy Trinity's bells.<sup>290</sup> Two York merchants asked for holy water to be sprinkled on their graves: John Beseby after daily mass for one year and John Hagg quarterly and accompanied by the de Profundis.<sup>291</sup>

#### Guilds and Fraternities

The less wealthy, who could not afford an independent endowment, could share in an established collective chantry in the form of a religious guild or fraternity. These were established by royal licence, and could own property for maintaining their religious services. They

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287. Ibid. Richard Russell left money for 3 recluses in York and 2 in Hull. Prob. Reg. III ff. 439-440.

288. Ibid. VI f. 116.

289. M.B. II, pp. 37-8 (Helmesley); pp. 222-3 (Esingwold); Prob. Reg. III f. 215 (Esingwold), f. 308 (Hagg).

290. Ibid., V f. 493 (Philips).

291. Ibid., III ff. 307-8 (Hagg); V f. 434v. (Beseby).

consisted of chaplains, paid by the guild, who regularly celebrated masses in a particular church for the members of the guild, who usually paid an annual subscription. When a member died he would leave a small cash bequest to the guild for a special mass. York had three large religious guilds, about 10 smaller guilds in parish churches, and one or two in religious houses.<sup>292</sup> Hull had four or five large religious guilds which were for specific crafts, and about fourteen smaller guilds, of which at least twelve were in Holy Trinity. Beverley had three large religious guilds, and five small ones.<sup>293</sup>

Recent work on parish religious fraternities in London, reveals that there was a rapid acceleration in their foundations following the Black Death.<sup>294</sup> Dr. Barron suggests that their primary purpose was to ensure a decent burial for members, with the full attendance of the fraternity, candles, prayers and singing. By the late 15th century, the emphasis had shifted as the plague induced horror of mass graves receded in people's memories. Such fraternities and social guilds, continued to be founded and to be popular. Some in part defined a social group, others a neighbourhood association. In London<sup>295</sup> they lost what

292. E.g. Ralph Poppilton of York left money to the fraternities of St. Christopher and Our Lady in the Carmelite friary in 1414 (Dec. & Cap. I f. 166v.), and there was a guild of St. Helen in the Franciscan friary in Beverley in 1378 (P.R.O. C47/46/446).

293. V.C.H. York, pp. 482-3; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 58, 289, 295; G. Poulson, Beverlac (1829), pp. 612, 726; H.MSS. C. Beverley, p. 5.

294. C.M. Barron, The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London, in idem and C. Harper-Bill, eds., The Church in Pre-Reformation Society. Essays in honour of F.R.H. Du Boulay (1985), pp. 14, 23-4. Dr. Rosser has argued more recently that the virtual cessation of new parochial creations after 1300 forced new and shifting communities to adopt the fraternity as an alternative framework. G. Rosser, Communities of parish and guild in the late Middle Ages, in S.J. Wright, ed., Parish, Church and People. Local studies in lay religion 1350-1750 (1988), p. 33.

295. Barron, London Fraternities, p. 28, Rosser, Communities of Parish and Guild, pp. 37-8 discusses some of the social functions.

appeared to be a continuing part of their function in York and Hull, namely the chance of sharing in collective masses, or the maintenance of a light. Members of the Corpus Christi guild of York, continued to expect the brothers and sisters to attend funerals. Jane Nelson wanted the Master and aldermen of the guild to attend her funeral in 1533 'as is the custom', and in 1530 John Thornton, wanted the keepers of the guild to be his pall-bearers.<sup>296</sup>

(The choice of guild members to act as pall-bearers was also related to status display. John Feriby left 13s. 4d. to 4 aldermen, if they attended his funeral as pall-bearers.)<sup>297</sup>

From the evidence of many guild regulations,<sup>298</sup> it is clear that in addition to offering participation in collective prayers and some forms of welfare to the aged and infirm,<sup>299</sup> guilds and fraternities saw themselves as embodying ideal moral standards. The wardens of the York Paternoster Guild examined applicants for admission regarding their willingness 'to conform to the moral expectations of the brotherhood and urged members to shun unworthy activities and associations'. In Hull, the guild of the Virgin Mary expelled convicted felons and members guilty of a string of misdemeanours ranging from bullying, night-walking, lying, behaving as a harlot, being excommunicate or any other crime injurious to the good name of the guild. In Beverley's Corpus

296. Prob. Reg. IXf. 464 (Thornton); XI f. 57 (Nelson).

297. Ibid, V ff. 417-8.

298. L. & T. Toulmin-Smith, eds., English Gilds, E.E.T.S. orig. ser. xl (1870).

299. M. Rubin, Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 251-9, 289; B.A. Hanawalt, Keepers of the lights: late medieval English parish gilds, Jnl. Med. & Ren. Studies, 14 (1984), pp. 32-3; Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, p. 18.

Christi Guild only 'honest clerics and artisans' could become members. Members were self-selected, and these associations, whether based on locality or wealth, began with or developed clear ideas as to the sort of persons they wished to include.<sup>300</sup> The Hull Corpus Christi Guild made it quite clear, by charging differential admission rates: more for those not related to existing members.<sup>301</sup>

Guilds and fraternities established group identities on a smaller scale than the entire town; they could gather in the 'inferiores' excluded from the associations of the 'superiores'. As their emphasis shifted though, to a concern with behaviour, they can be seen as agencies of social control,<sup>302</sup> encouraging a conformity to a generally Christian ideal. In that respect it is interesting that merchants were involved in the establishment of many of these guilds. William Craven and John Kirkham, both York merchants, were recipients of the foundation licence for the St. George's Guild of York in 1447. Thomas Crathorn, William Bell, Thomas Cotys and Richard Thornton, all merchants of York, were active in reforming the St. Anthony's Guild as the St. Martin's Guild.<sup>303</sup> As with perpetual chantries, religious guilds depended upon a steady flow of gifts, and these were common in merchants' wills.<sup>304</sup>

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300. W.R. Jones, *English Religious Brotherhoods and Medieval Lay Piety: The Inquiry of 1388-9*, The Historian: A Journal of History, 36 (1974), pp. 651-2.

301. Toulmin-Smith, English Gilds, pp. 160-1.

302. An idea more fully developed by B. McRee, *Religious Gilds and Regulation of Behavior in Late Medieval Towns*, in, J. Rosenthal and C. Richmond, eds., People Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages (1987), pp. 108-22.

303. C.P.R. 1446-52, p. 80; 1441-6, p. 442.

304. For example V.C.H. York, p. 111; V.C.H. Hull, p. 58. John Gregg of Hull left money to the guild of St. Mary in St. Brigid's church, London and to 6 other guilds in Holy Trinity, Hull. Prob. Reg. III f. 506v.



Membership of religious guilds and fraternities was something for the whole family and not only were individual merchants supporters, but so were their sons, daughters and wives. The listed membership of the York Corpus Christi Guild, a rare survival,<sup>305</sup> includes many merchants' wives and children. The benefits of whatever variety, welfare, spiritual comfort or social identity, were such that William Belford's widow Joan became a member in 1441.<sup>306</sup> (Wives often became 'sisters' of the Merchant Adventurers' Company also.)<sup>307</sup>

A less expensive and widely popular form of memorial, was a contribution to the lights of one or more specified altars.<sup>308</sup> Parish churches had several altars dedicated to individual saints, in addition to the high altar, and a light was kept burning over each. Bequests in wills for this purpose were usually small: 4d. or 6d. in cash, candles, or a quantity of wax. A benefactor could leave money for the lights of several altars in one or more churches, like John Carre of York in 1487, and thus spread the investment as he might spread his goods between several ships on a commercial venture. In 1433 Margaret, the thrifty widow of Nicholas Blackburn snr, wanted the remains of her eight funerary candles to be distributed between four different churches in York and hers was not an unusual request.<sup>309</sup>

Individual merchants sometimes served as warden of the lights in their own church. This was a minor office, usually subordinate to that

305. R.H. Skaife, ed., The Register of the Corpus Christi Guild of York, Surtees Soc., lvii (1834).

306. Ibid., passim: p. 39 (Belford).

307. M. & M.A., passim.

308. This was equally popular elsewhere. See A. McHardy, 'Eton College Wills', p. 391.

309. Prob. Reg. III ff. 415-416v. (Blackburn); V f. 327v. (Carre). See also Thomas Bracebridge (d. 1437), ibid., III ff. 487v.-90.

of churchwarden who had overall responsibility for the fabric of the church, although John Beaume of Beverley served as warden of the fabric and lights in St. Mary's chapel in Beverley Minster. His fellow merchants, William de Holm and Thomas Skipwith, both served as churchwarden in the parish church of St. Mary.<sup>310</sup>

Pilgrimages and More Prayers.

It was not uncommon in the middle ages, for benefactors to pay for a pilgrimage to be made by a proxy. William Vescy of York d. 1407, left elaborate provision for at least 9 separate pilgrimages to be made on his behalf to such English holy places as Walsingham, Bury St. Edmunds and Canterbury. The fee to be paid for each trip was carefully worked out and varied from 2d. for the journey to St. Paul's, London to 5d. for the journey to Walsingham.<sup>311</sup> According to Peter Heath, Hull burgesses were an unadventurous lot. He found only two testators in the 15th century who left money for pilgrimages: Richard Bille and John Wells.<sup>312</sup> Wells left 2s. for a pilgrimage to St. John's Beverley, and 10s. for one to St. Mary's by Canterbury.<sup>313</sup> However, two 14th-century Hull merchants, Geoffrey Hanby and Thomas de Santon, actually acquired permits to travel abroad as pilgrims in 1350, but it is not known if they went.<sup>314</sup> Beverley and York merchants certainly looked further

310. C.P.R. 1391-6, p. 150; Yorks. Deeds VII, p. 34.

311. Prob. Reg. III f. 268. (Vescy). For a general discussion of pilgrimages and the shifting fortunes of shrines, see J. Sumption, Pilgrimages. An Image of Medieval Religion (London, 1975) and R.C. Finucane, Miracles and Pilgrims. Popular Beliefs in Medieval England (London, 1977).

312. Heath, Urban Piety, p. 224.

313. Prob. Reg. II f. 115v.

314. C.C.R. 1349-54, p. 272.

afield. Alice and William Durem of York were planning a joint journey to Rome in 1391. William Kyam and John Radclyff of York left 3s. 4d. and 10s. respectively to the hospital of St. Thomas of Canterbury at Rome.<sup>315</sup> Isolde de Acastre left 6s. 8d. for masses in Rome and 10s. to pilgrims. John Radclyff was more particular and left £10 for a chaplain to journey to Rome and to celebrate mass there for John, his two wives Katherine, his nine children, parents, brother and sister-in-law.<sup>316</sup> In 1387 John de Bilby chose a more exotic destination for his proxy: St. James in Galacia.<sup>317</sup>

Proxy pilgrimages were limited in their appeal, probably because of the expense. Even few Londoners undertook them.<sup>318</sup> But merchants' wills almost always included small bequests to religious houses, usually to the established orders of friars but occasionally to priories and abbeys. The sums left were not large, usually 3s. 4d. or 6s. 8d. to each order of friars and 5s., 10s., 20s. for the other religious orders. Bequests to friars were sustained throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. John Gregg of Hull departed from the usual gift of a lump sum when he left money in instalments to the Carmelite and Augustinian friars of Hull so that they should receive 6d. per week for 5 years.<sup>319</sup>

The well travelled merchants left money for masses to religious houses outside their towns, when they could afford to. Such bequests

315. Prob. Reg. I f. 20 (Durem); II f. 91 (Radclyff): 127 (Kyam). See also Tanner, Church in Norwich, p. 125.

316. Ibid. I f. 81 (Acastre); II f. 91 (Radclyff). See also Bev. Shed. III (Ake) who left 6s. 8d. for Thomas Ellerton to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Was this already planned?

317. Dec. & Cap. I f. 87.

318. Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, p. 33; Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, pp. 19-20.

319. Prob. Reg. III f. 507v.

must in part reflect the area of business activity of some merchants since so many individual houses were named which were scattered throughout the immediate region and occasionally throughout the north of England. Robert Colynson of York, for example, left money for masses to the priories of Carlisle, Bolton-in-Craven, Richmond, Appleby, Penrith, Northallerton, Knaresborough, Nunmonkton and Watton as well as to parish churches in some of those places. William Goodknapp of Hull<sup>320</sup> left money to the abbeys of Hafforth, Greenfield, Ledburn, Cottom, Freyn, Ferriby and Horneby, and to the churches of Hafforth, Drypool, Benbroke, Barton, Grimsby and Sutton.<sup>321</sup> A merchant who made such extensive bequests as these must have hoped that, in addition to the spiritual benefit he would gain from the sung masses, he would also be remembered for his personal and business relations with the religious house or parish.

#### Church and Fabric.

Almost every testator left a sum towards the physical maintenance of their parish church, and sometimes other important churches in the region.<sup>322</sup> Robert del Cross of Hull, left a silver chalice to Lincoln Cathedral<sup>323</sup> but small cash sums were more common. St. Peter's York, St. John's Beverley, St. Wilfrid's Ripon, and St. Mary's Southwell,

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320. Ibid II ff. 378-80 (Colynson); VI f. 107 (Goodknapp).

321. The following modern forms of these names have been identified:- Harfordlithe/Staxton (E.R.), Greenfield (Lincs.), Nun Cotham (Lincs.), North Ferriby (E.R.), Hornby (Lancs.). D. Knowles and N. Hadcock eds., Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales (1953), p. 148, 166, 223, 225, 275.

322. Each year the masters of fabric of Lincoln cathedral would send out nuncii to publicise the episcopal indulgences offered to benefactors of the fund. K. Edwards, The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages (Manchester, 2nd ed. 1967), p. 231. For similar routine bequests to the fabric of parish churches see Tanner, Church in Norwich, p. 127.

323. Prob. Reg. I ff. 83v. - 85.

all benefited regularly from such bequests. Gifts to parish churches were often made for specific improvements and although the intention was to purchase prayers and the lasting remembrance of fellow parishioners, the particular arrangements covered by some of the bequests reflects a familiarity and involvement with the church.

Richard Russell of York made provision for the completion of the belfry in St. John, Hungate, for which he had been paying before his death. He also arranged to pay for the bell frame and ladder, the repair of three altars and the glazing of three windows. Bells and glazing attracted a lot of gifts.<sup>324</sup> William Goodknapp of Hull left £36s. 8d. in 1504 towards the building of a steeple on St. Mary's Hull, a church which had gained from several mercantile bequests to maintain its peal of bells for decades. John Haynson and John Swan had both left money for that purpose in 1458 and 1476.<sup>325</sup>

In 1452 Richard Patrington of Beverley left £10 to repair the cross aisle in St. Mary's providing that it was done within three years! Maybe distrust of clerical honesty or efficiency prompted Guy Malyerd to give St. Mary's the actual material required to repair the choir stalls in 1457: 30 squared trees and wainscots. Thomas Spicer of York similarly left St. John's 10 trees and some stone to build/repair an aisle in 1505.<sup>326</sup> Thomas Preston of Hull generously left £33 6s. 8d. in 1451 to the Austin Friars for lead and carpentry to repair their church, and told them to keep whatever was left over for another time!<sup>327</sup>

324. *Ibid.*, III ff. 439-40. See also, Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, pp. 7-8; Tanner, *Church in Norwich*, pp. 128-9.

325. Prob. Reg. V f. 107 (Swan); VI f. 107 (Goodknapp); f. 393v. (Haynson).

326. *Ibid.*, II f. 243v. (Patrington); V f. 309 b (Malyerd); VI f. 208v. (Spicer).

327. *Ibid.*, II f. 225. See also II f. 575v. (Wilcock).

Certain gifts, made as memorials to their donor, contributed to the beauty of the recipient church. Windows in particular fell into that category and apart from the famous Blackburn window in All Saints, North Street, (not mentioned in the donor's will)<sup>328</sup> several other windows owed their existence to the gifts of merchants. John Swan left £11 for a window in Holy Trinity, Hull, and Robert Garner arranged for a window in memory of himself and his wife to be made in the cloister at Swine priory.<sup>329</sup> Memorial windows were not often recorded in wills and more may have been made before the death of the benefactor as in the case of Nicholas Blackburn. Similarly gifts of church furniture were often not recorded in wills but must often have been made. Richard Russell of York left books, altar cloths and chasubles to his parish church. William Ripplingham of Hull, left books and ornaments, and Nicholas Vicars of York, 5 marks to repair several books, plus 4d. 'and no more' to each parishioner.<sup>330</sup>

More often money was left to buy a specific item and the amount precisely stated. John Gaunt of York left 20s. to buy a silver cross for St. Mary's Castlegate. John Thompson of York wanted the new altar cloth for his church to be made from cloth at 6½d. per yard.<sup>331</sup> William Goodknapp left £20 for the purchase of 2 altar tables, £2 for a new altar cloth, and £6 for new vestments for St. Mary's Hull. As priests had to supply their own vestments, such gifts must have been welcomed

328. V.C.H. York, p. 107.

329. Prob. Reg. V f. 7 (Swan); VI f. 204v. (Garner). See also II ff. 572-3 (Bawtre).

330. Ibid., III f. 299v. (Ripplingham); f. 439 (Russell); V f. 355 (Vicars).

331. Ibid., V ff. 336-336v. (Gaunt); Dec. & Cap. II f. 123v. (Thompson).

and William Baron's gift of a cope of 'red purple cloth of velvet with good great flowers of gold', especially so.<sup>332</sup>

Gifts of bed hangings were not uncommon but a curious habit is revealed in the will of Thomas Wood of Hull, who left his best Arras bed (hangings) to Holy Trinity, Hull in 1491, 'to cover his grave at the anniversary of his death, and to be hung among other worshipful beds at the feast of St. George'.<sup>333</sup> Status conscious to the last, and the notion of sleeping in his grave raises interesting theological questions.

Wills are scattered with bequests of small and precious items to be given to parish churches; some hinting at particular devotions. Alice Helmsley of York and Cecilia Malyerd both left jewelled necklets to be hung around statues of the Virgin.<sup>334</sup> A dramatic request was made by William Hedon, who wanted a house sold to pay for a new reredos in Holy Trinity, Hull in 1427.<sup>335</sup>

With death imminent, many merchants' thoughts turned to the parish of their birth. Sir Richard York wanted a memorial to himself and his ancestors to be made in the chapel of St. Catherine, Berwick, but most other memorials of this nature were less grandiose. Nicholas Blackburn snr,<sup>336</sup> of York left £10 to the fabric of his parish church of Richmond. John Ferriby of York left £9 6s. 8d. for a priest for 2 years at Barton-on-Humber where his parents were buried. Bertram Dawson left

332. Prob. Reg. V f. 251 (Baron); VI f. 107 (Goodknapp). John Petty of York left his church a velvet jacket to be altered into vestments. Dec. & Cap II f. 77v. See also Prob. Reg IV f. 116 (Wartre).

333. *Ibid.*, V f. 403v. Cf. similar gifts of clothing and bed hangings in Woods, London and Bury St. Edmunds, pp. 9-10.

334. Prob. Reg. III f. 64v.-5, 1401 (Helmsley); V f. 317, 1487 (Malyerd).

335. *Ibid.*, II f. 523.

336. P.R.O. Prob. 11/11 f. 36 (York); Prob. Reg. II f. 605 (Blackburn).

money for a vestment for the church of his birthplace, at Bamburgh, Northumberland.<sup>337</sup>

Merchants seem to have felt a certain responsibility for the churches with which they were associated and although it is clear that the intention of the donors was to purchase prayers, the careful thought that went into some of the bequests reflects a close involvement and pride in their parish churches. The relationship was reciprocal and just as lay society depended upon the church in all its forms for salvation, so the church was heavily subsidised by the laity and in particular by the wealthy laity. As York's trade recession affected the merchant group, the churches and chantries of the city were in turn affected. In the late 15th century, the council began to merge chantries, because their incomes would no longer support their priests.<sup>338</sup> By 1526 the city was complaining that the decayed endowments of many chantries had left the city with an annual deficit of £50, and in 1536 the council carried out its own dissolution of chantries. In 1547 the city's inability to support its numerous parish churches was recognised, and it was allowed to unite several ~~of~~ those most decayed.<sup>339</sup>

#### Charity.

Although no distinction was made in the middle ages between alms and bequests to religious institutions,<sup>340</sup> since it was the act of

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337. Ibid., V f. 417 (Ferriby); IX f. 39v. (Dawson).

338. For example, in 1477 the chantry to St. Peter in St. Martin's, Coney Street was merged with St. Mary's chantry in St. Helen's, Stonegate. M.B. II, pp. 269-270. See also Y.C.R., II, p. 123.

339. V.C.H. York, pp. 117, 123, 143.

340. Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, p. 28.



giving that was thought to be important, society as a whole depended upon the charity of its wealthier members for a variety of needs. These were met by a reciprocal acceptance that giving brought spiritual merit, and it has been argued recently that 'charity was a central pre-occupation for medieval men and women'.<sup>341</sup> For the majority, that was probably so at infrequent intervals during their lives, but was pressingly so, as they confronted the thought of their own mortality.

The economic success of merchants was beneficial to the whole urban community as its accumulated wealth was routinely diffused down through networks of family and friends, to the poor. Mercantile benevolence has been seen as a manipulative tool, deployed to achieve selfish social and economic goals.<sup>342</sup> This is difficult to establish since the pattern of their giving replicated that of other groups in society:<sup>343</sup> the main difference being one of scale. Merchants were more likely to spend more, reflecting their greater resources. Targeting roads and bridges might be regarded as self-interest, more suggestive of class, interest though, was the staunch support York merchants gave to the Corpus Christi Guild.<sup>344</sup> Of those remembering religious guilds and fraternities, some 60% made a donation to that socially pre-eminent guild. By these means, it could be argued they were maintaining an agency of social elitism. But then, other albeit 'lesser' guilds,

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341. M. Rubin, Charity and Community, p. 1.

342. G.R. Elton's review of Jordan in Historical Jnl. 3 (1960), pp.89-92; Rubin, Charity and Community, p. 6.

343. Tanner, Church in Norwich, pp. 113-140; Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, pp. 23-8; Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 155-7 based on some 800 wills.

344. In Norwich the Corpus Christi Guild attracted more bequests from all testators than any other guild or religious fraternity. Tanner, Church in Norwich, p. 132.

attracted their supporters' gifts, and as we have seen, guild membership could be controlled on the basis of a variety of requirements.

Without merchants' donations, a range of charitable welfare would have been more difficult to sustain. They supported the guilds' care of the needy and their own direct gifts to the poor were considerable. Professor Jordan estimated that in early-modern London, the merchant group comprised 36% of all charitable donors, but was responsible for over 56% of all charitable donations.<sup>345</sup> No equivalent figures have been calculated for the three Yorkshire towns, but in the variety of ways briefly described below, their merchant groups accounted for a steady and significant flow of benevolence. Moreover, there is no indication that flow was fundamentally affected by the state of the local economy, but that as the abstract of wills in appendix 5 demonstrates, religious giving which inevitably included doles to the poor, continued even during periods of recession. The claim that 'charity loomed large in towns in periods of prosperity', is not borne out.<sup>346</sup>

The care of the sick, of the aged, and of the poor, were the areas commonly endowed. Generally such charity took the form of cash distributions (doles) at funerals. Although the 'deserving' were sometimes preferred by testators, most bequests were simply to poor people and one can imagine the spirit of anticipation which must have

345. W.K. Jordan, The Charities of London, 1480-1660 (London, 1960), p. 48. In spite of criticism, his general thesis is supportable. See J.A.F. Thompson, 'Piety and Charity in Late Medieval London', Jnl. Eccl. Hist., xvi (1965), p. 178. One major argument is with Jordan's contention that philanthropic spending increased from the late 15th to the early 17th centuries. See in particular, W.G. Bittle and R.T. Lane, Inflation and Philanthropy in England: a reassessment of W.K. Jordan's data, Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. xxix (1976), pp. 203-10.

346. Rubin, Charity and Community, p. 12.

followed news of a prominent merchant's demise, bringing hopeful paupers crowding around his house. That of course, was one of the intentions behind such doles: the attraction of as many individuals and their prayers as possible.<sup>347</sup> Some merchants left very large sums for this purpose. Richard Russell of York left £13 6s. 8d. for funeral distribution, the same sum for the most needy in three York parishes, and a further £20 for the poor in the rest of York and £10 for the sick.<sup>348</sup> John Brompton of Beverley left £18 in cash for funeral distribution and £10 to buy bread for 80 paupers. Nicholas Blackburn snr of York left money in instalments for the poor of York; £100 at Easter, £100 at All Hallows, and £60 at the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary in the year following his death. John Gregg of Hull also favoured the instalments method and left over £43 for the poor of Hull at 20d. per week for ten years, and over £21 for the poor of Beverley at the same rate for five years.<sup>349</sup> John Garton of Hull stipulated that £20 of the £50 he left for the poor should be given towards the marriage of pauper girls.<sup>350</sup> Long term bequests must have been very difficult, if not impossible, to put into effect, and the prayers of the grateful poor must often have been won at the expense of the executors' fond memories.

Another common form of charity was to leave or make provision for certain goods to be given to the poor, usually food and clothes. Joan Gregg of Hull left £40 for wool and linen cloth for the poor of Hull,

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347. Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, pp. 26-8.

348. Prob. Reg. III f. 439 (Russell).

349. Ibid., II f. 86v. (Brompton); f. 605 (Blackburn); III f. 507v. (Gregg).

350. Ibid., II f. 237v. (Garton).

whereas Richard Wartre of York wanted his executors to have 100 gowns made and distributed together with bread. John Gyllyot jnr left very precise instructions that 50 new beds each worth 10s., and a new mattress and two new blankets and sheets per bed should be given to paupers in the city, that £10 should be given to the most needy married couples in the city, and that £10 6s. 8d. be given for dowries for 40 poor maidens.<sup>351</sup>

In York it was also customary to leave money to the four main prisons, the Kidcotes, castle, and archbishop's prison. For example, William Bowes left 5s. to each prison, whereas William Chimney left 2d. to each prisoner.<sup>352</sup> Such widespread generosity was no doubt a further burden on executors. Few such bequests occur in Beverley or Hull wills although there was a prison in each town. Occasionally the York prisons would be remembered by Beverley or Hull people. Joan Gregg of Hull, for example, left 6s. 8d. to the prisoners in the archbishop's prison in York.<sup>353</sup>

Probably the most necessary and effective form of lay charity was the foundation and maintenance of hospitals and maisons dieux, which seemed to be a combination of hospital and almshouse.<sup>354</sup> There were 6 main hospitals and about 13 maisons dieux in York; 4 small hospitals, the Charterhouse, and 9 maisons dieux in Hull; and 5 hospitals and at least 3 maisons dieux in Beverley.<sup>355</sup> Several of these institutions

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351. Ibid., III f. 556 (Gregg); VI f. 116 (Wartre); VIII f. 33 (Gilyot).

352. V.C.H. York. pp. 491-7; Prob. Reg. III f. 581 (Bowes); VIII f. 3 (Chimney).

353. Ibid., III f. 555v.

354. Cf. London where Thompson estimates  $\frac{1}{4}$  of its testators left money to hospitals and almshouses. Piety and Charity, p. 185. See also Tanner, Church in Norwich, pp. 132-4.

355. V.C.H. York, pp. 363-5; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 333-5; Knowles and Hadcock, op. cit., p. 254; Prob. Reg. I f. 38v. (Carleton); II f. 342 (1) v. (Bridekirke).

were founded by individual merchants and maintained by continuing lay charity. Thomas and Robert Holme of York, for example, each established a maison dieu in the city, and John Craven established another near Layerthorpe.<sup>356</sup> The four small Hull hospitals were established by merchants; one in the 14th century by Robert Selby, and three in the 15th century by John Alcock, John Bedford and John Gregg.<sup>357</sup> John Ake, who died in 1398, left property to establish a 24 person maison dieu at the Crossbridge in Beverley. Its first chaplain was not instituted until 1432, and it became known as Trinity Hospital.<sup>358</sup> John Armstrong of Beverley established a trust to administer £20 annual income from rents, to maintain the St. John the Baptist maison dieu and five others in Beverley, of which no other record has been found. Bequests to such institutions usually took the form of a small cash gift to each incumbent, or to each house, and although such gifts are difficult to total, some individual's donations must have been considerable. More immediately practical was Richard Crull of York's gift in 1460 of 100 bundles of faggotts to several York maisons dieux.<sup>359</sup>

#### Municipal Improvements

Individual merchants who travelled to London and abroad, had seen examples of civic improvements,<sup>360</sup> and no doubt visiting aliens drew

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356. Prob. Reg. I f. 16 (Gisburn); f. 103 (Robert Holme); III f. 254v. (Thomas Holme); f. 607 (Craven).

357. V.C.H. Hull pp. 333-5.

358. Bev. Shed. III; Yorks. Deeds, VII, pp. 26-33.

359. Prob. Reg. II f. 431v. (Crull); VI f. 117 (Armstrong).

360. In early fifteenth-century London, the public were accustomed to a certain standard of public hygiene, and it has been argued that there was in fact only a small minority of the citizens who did not co-operate. E.L. Sabine, 'City Cleaning in Medieval London', Speculum, xii (1937), pp. 25-7.

loud and partisan comparisons. Practical considerations led many merchants into financing public works such as highway maintenance, the provision of a water supply, bridge repairs, and street paving. These were popular projects in many late-medieval towns.<sup>361</sup>

Good communications were close to commercial interests and the repair of roads and bridges regularly attracted donations from testators. Such benefactions had a double advantage, in that they also earned the approval of the Church. One version of a bidding prayer, encouraged the congregations to pray for 'thaim that brigges and stretes makes and amendes that God grant us part of thare gode dedes and thaim of oures'.<sup>362</sup>

The majority of donations were towards the upkeep of roads and bridges close to a merchant's home. Richard Russell of York left money in 1435 for the repair of roads and bridges within a ten league radius of the city. Other merchants favoured the Hull-Beverley road, the Hull-Drypool road, Hull bridge in Beverley, or more distant roads and bridges which were regionally important, including the road across *Hessay Moor*, the bridge at Stamford Bridge, Caterick bridge, and Frodsham bridge in Cheshire.<sup>363</sup> The repair of the internal roads and bridges was generally

361. Cf. Jordan, The Charities of London, p. 21, for the situation in the late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century London, where similar bequests, although not unusual were only a small proportion of all charitable bequests. John Thompson calculated they accounted for some 12%. Thompson, *Piety and Charity*, pp. 179, 187-8. In Norwich, such civic projects were rare. Tanner, Popular Religion in Norwich, p. 137.

362. Quoted in T.P. Cooper, 'The Medieval Highways, Streets, Open Ditches and Sanitary Conditions of the City of York', Yorks. Arch. Jnl., xxviii (1913), pp. 280-1.

363. Arch. Reg. X ff. 309v.-310 (Coppendale); Prob. Reg. I ff. 15v. (Gisburn); 100v.-103v. (Holme); II ff. 327v. (Garton); f. 605 (Blackburn); III ff. 263 (Kelk); 439v.-440 (Russell); 507v. (John Gregg); 555v.-556v. (Joan Gregg); V ff. 308 (Ince); 327-9 (Carre).

paid for from pavage grants and tolls. All the same, Thomas Neleson of York (d. 1484) felt that the provision was inadequate and left £10 for the purpose.<sup>364</sup>

Once in a while a merchant would take upon himself responsibility for a major public project. William Todd of York paid for work on a long stretch of the city walls near Fishergate Bar during his mayoralty in 1486-7. Robert Holme of Hull contributed the materials for the construction of a lead conduit in the city, and when it was pulled up and the lead sold in 1462, the council paid for a perpetual mass to be sung for him.<sup>365</sup> With some foresight, Nicholas Blackburn, snr left £40 to York for the city's tax contribution,<sup>366</sup> but we don't know if the gratitude of the council extended to paying for a mass!

The late middle ages was a time when a collective sense of civic pride was increasingly manifested in the building of new guildhalls,<sup>367</sup> enterprises possible only through collective effort. Four substantial halls were built in York,<sup>368</sup> three of which have survived: the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, built in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries by the guild of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin; Merchant Taylors' Hall built before 1400; and St. Anthony's Hall built sometime

364. Prob. Reg. V f. 212 (Neleson). According to Cooper, York Sanitary Conditions, pp. 270-86, York's streets were appalling and in spite of personal donations and pavage grants, little improvement was made until Elizabeth's reign.

365. Test. Ebor., IV, p. 213; Hull C.R.O. BRE 1 p. 95.

366. Prob. Reg. II f. 605.

367. The London guildhall was rebuilt in the first half of the fifteenth century. C.M. Barron, The Medieval Guildhall of London (1974), passim. See also, Parker, The Making of King's Lynn (1971), p. 12. J. Campbell, 'Norwich', in The Atlas of Historic Towns, ii, M.D. Lobel and W.H. Johns, eds., (1975), p. 15.

368. Two others existed, the butchers' and the shoemakers' halls. Raine, Medieval York, pp. 65, 186-7.

between 1446 and 1453. The fourth or common hall, now the Guildhall, was originally built in the mid-fifteenth century by the guild of St. Christopher and the corporation. It was largely destroyed in the 1939-45 war and subsequently restored.<sup>369</sup> All four halls attracted individual donations towards the initial building costs and upkeep.<sup>370</sup> York was unusual in having several large halls of this type and it was clearly important for a community to have the financial resources as well as a taste for the fashionable. Council guildhalls were recorded in Beverley and Hull, and were probably of fourteenth-century origin, but we know little about them. Hull possibly had in addition two religious guildhalls; the famous Trinity guildhall was started in the 1460's and was probably a two storied half-timbered building with some brickwork.<sup>371</sup>

Late medieval townscapes were inevitably dominated by ecclesiastical buildings and the steady flow of benevolence from the laity helped to maintain these. During the late-fourteenth century and in the fifteenth century, lay donations enabled much new building. In Hull and Beverley lay donations made possible the building of three churches, of which Holy Trinity, Hull, is the largest parish church in England, and St. Mary's, Beverley, has a strong claim towards being one of the most beautiful.<sup>372</sup> In York the appearance of most of the parish

369. V.C.H. York, pp. 481-3, 543-4; E.A. Gee, 'The Architecture of York', in The Noble City of York, A. Stacpool et al., eds. (1972), pp. 372-3.

370. Thomas Barton and Richard Wartre, for example, left respectively £1 in 1460 and £20 in 1465 towards the York Guildhall. Prob. Reg. II f. 451 (Barton); IV f. 116 (Wartre). Similarly in London, Barron, The London Guildhall, p. 36.

371. V.C. H. Hull, pp. 76, 398, 433; Poulson, Beverlac, pp. 420-422.

372. Ibid., p. 76; Pevsner, Yorkshire: York and the East Riding, (1972), pp. 17, 180, 268-70.



churches was totally changed in the course of the fifteenth century through lay donations.<sup>373</sup> At least seven churches were wholly or in part rebuilt: aisles widened, chancels extended, and towers built. During the same period the present fabric of the Minsters of Beverley and York were completed. The economic surplus invested in the beautification of these three towns was considerable.<sup>374</sup>

It is impossible to measure quantitatively the contribution of the merchant group. However selfish their motives may have been, there can be no doubt that their generosity was essential to the physical well-being of their towns. The churches owed the elegance of their buildings and of their religious worship to the constant care of their merchant and other smaller benefactors. Secular building on any scale was undertaken as much by merchants as by the gentry, and ambitious projects such as the Guildhall of York, could not have been financed by any other group. It is an inescapable conclusion that the economic success of the merchant group was beneficial to the physical quality of life.

#### Executors.

All a merchant's last wishes, his pious hopes for the future of his soul, his plans for the care of his children and wife, his support of the church, benevolence to the poor, and generosity to his friends, would not have been possible without reliable executors. As we have seen, debts could comprise a large or a small proportion of a merchant's estate, but they had to be recovered whatever. Bad debts were

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373. Gee, *Architecture of York*, pp. 178, 343-4. *V.C.H. York*, p. 107: a similar rebuilding was underway in fifteenth-century Bristol, E.M. Carus-Wilson, 'Bristol', in Lobel, *Historic Towns*, p. 11. See above pp. 419-20.

374. *V.C.H. York*, p. 107; Gee, *Architecture of York*, pp. 343-50; Pevsner, *Yorkshire*, p. 171.

particularly difficult when a joint venture was involved. John Russell and John Bolton of York, for example, bought two quantities of wool and shipped them under Bolton's name to Calais, where they were sold. Both partners died before the transaction had been completed in 1443 and 1445 respectively, and Russell's widow Joan, and her co-executors, had to take Bolton's widow Alice, to Chancery for restitution of one third of the proceeds of the sale. Alice had bound the only two witnesses (there was no written agreement) in 700 marks not to testify, thus confusing the case even further.<sup>375</sup>

Even if an estate was not lost in bad debts, or fragmented into worthless portions, or diverted to the church for prayers, it was by no means certain that the rightful heirs would inherit. Chancery was flooded<sup>376</sup> with complaints about heirs dispossessed of their inheritance by dishonest executors. John Dalton of Hull, d. 1496, doubtless with such possibilities in mind, exhorted his executors 'to do their duty as they will answer at the dreadful day of Doom ... and to do for me as they would I did for them'.<sup>377</sup> Nicholas Molde of Hull urged his wife in 1474 to 'dispose for me as I would for her'. Richard Wartre of York, d. 1465, expressed similar doubts in requiring all his obligations, deeds, and silver to be locked up in a strong chest after his death, and to be kept in the Minster until all his executors were present. Thomas Doncaster of York insisted in 1431, that none of his other executors should act without the consent of the supervising executor, Richard Russell.<sup>378</sup>

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375. Prob. Reg. II f. 68 (Russell); f. 107 (Bolton); P.R.O. C1/16/592.

376. E.g. C1/22/154a, 61/58, 32/170.

377. Prob. Reg. IV f. 127 (Molde); V f. 484 (Dalton).

378. Ibid., II f. 603 (Doncaster); IV f. 116 (Wartre).

Richard Thornton of York found himself in an extraordinary position with one of his executors, another merchant John Tong. Tong had either been given or had acquired the deeds and other evidence of Thornton's possession of a certain property in York, and he refused to return the documents to Thornton. Thornton took the case to Chancery because he feared that Tong would try to dispossess his heirs. In another case, John Aldestanemore's heirs claimed that some of his goods worth £1,600 were maliciously seized by two of his executors, his son-in-law William Holbeck and William Stockton, both merchants and sometime mayors of York. They left only £100 to settle Aldestanemore's debts and to execute his will, and the complaining heir had to abide by the arbitration of four other merchants. Holbeck and Stockton also twice dispossessed Aldestanemore's niece, contrary to the provisions of the will they were supposed to be executing.<sup>379</sup>

Even a trust composed of respectable citizens was not without risks when a merchant conveyed property to a trust during his lifetime, on the understanding that his heirs would receive the property after his death. John Thrisk<sup>380</sup> of York found that his trustees refused to allow him to use the property during the remainder of his life, and the trustees presumably enjoyed the income until Thrisk died and they were expected to reconvey the property to his heirs. Enfeoffment of trustees in this manner was particularly unreliable, and some merchants with adult sons avoided problems by enfeoffing their heirs themselves. John Kelk of Beverley, for example, enfeoffed his son William of property in Bainton (E.R.) and Appleby (Lincs.) in 1403, three years before his death.<sup>381</sup>

379. P.R.O. C1/58/125, 10/296, 14/25, 15/86.

380. Prob. Reg. V f. 484; C1/270/28.

381. C.P.R. 1374-7, p. 369; 1403-5, p. 233; Prob. Reg. III f. 263.

William Ormeshead of York tried another solution, and distrusting his executors, he took the precaution of asking the archbishop of York to supervise the sale of his property after his death.<sup>382</sup> Perhaps he feared that his executors would undersell to themselves.

William Burgh of Hull was left 3 tenements in Hull by Thomas Diconson in 1447 to establish a chantry for a certain John Bilton. By the time of his own death in 1460, Burgh seemed to have forgotten about Diconson's wishes, and left the properties to be sold to pay off his own debts!<sup>383</sup> Even if executors were not downright dishonest,<sup>384</sup> some seem to have been dilatory and unduly slow. The notorious William Holbeck apparently did nothing to put into effect John Aldestanemore's 1435 wishes for post mortem masses until drawing up his own will in 1477.

The execution of a will was obviously a time-consuming burden. William de Helmesley of York said just that, when he left each of his executors 20s. 'to bear the burden of administering my will'.<sup>385</sup> Some odd bequests must have taxed the patience and ingenuity of executors. What did the executors of William Procter make of his wish that £5 be taken to purchase cloth for a convent in Iceland; or of Richard Bille's bequest to his servant of 2 lasts of stockfish owed to him and to be collected in Iceland; or of Thomas Beverley's bequest of 6s. 8d. to support the Papal War.<sup>386</sup> Administering a will could involve giving

382. Prob. Reg. III f. 504.

383. Ibid., II f. 258 (Diconson); f. 423v. (Burgh).

384. One London mercer's daughter claimed that her father's executors had embezzled the will and forged another! A.H. Thomas, ed., Cal. Plea & Mem. Rolls, City of London, 1381-1412, (1932), p. 263.

385. Prob. Reg. III f. 215 (Helmesley); V ff. 22v.-23v. (Holbeck).

386. Prob. Reg. II f. 108v. (Procter); f. 233v. (Bille); V f. 184v. (Beverley).

support and solace to the bereaved, pursuing debtors, defying creditors, selling real estate, applying to the royal courts for writs, and handling family feuds. John Spicer of Hull made it clear that if either of his sons disputed their legacies, they were to get nothing at all, while Nicholas Bedford of Hull would inherit land in Lincolnshire, provided that he did not 'molest' his step-mother. Thomas Cottesbroke was not to molest his father Edmund's executors: his mother was not to impede them. The irritations of William Neleson with his greedy and parasitical son-in-law William Gascoigne, were eloquently expressed in Neleson's will of 1525. Gascoigne was not to have the small bequests made to his children, because he had already 'had of me above reason in money, raiment and dinners'. Not all sons paid heed to the monitions of the dead. William de Barneby's widow was forcibly evicted by her son John and had to take legal action to get her house back, but by then that family feud was beyond the competence of her husband's executors.<sup>387</sup>

Acting as guardian to a friend's under-age children<sup>388</sup> and administering their portions of their fathers' estate could be an arduous and long-term commitment which was not completed until the executors accepted the heirs had come of age.<sup>389</sup> The guardian had to provide for and to educate/train the children until they reached puberty. He had to act as their legal representative and was expected

387. Prob. Reg. II ff. 220-220v. (Bedford); III f. 223 (Cottesbroke); V ff. 450-1v. (Spicer); IX f. 203 (Neleson); M.B. I p. 140 (Barneby).

388. See Thomas, Cal. Plea & Mem. Rolls City of London, 1381-1412, pp. 208-217, for the scale of the task confronting the executors of Richard Toky a London mercer, who left 5 minors, and for the complaints of incompetence levelled at them by one of Toky's heirs!

389. M.B. I p. 247.

to keep personal items and cash to hand over when each child came of age. Administering real estate was more complex and the expectations less clear.<sup>390</sup> The last act required of the guardian was to make an account of his guardianship.<sup>391</sup>

Merchants' wives similarly depended on their husbands' networks. John Tutbury of Hull's wife Agnes named as her executors, John Bedford, John Snayton and John Steton, all merchants and sometime mayors like her husband. Adam Pund of Hull assumed responsibility for the wife and children and all the debts of John Fox, who left him an income for the purpose.<sup>392</sup> Sometimes a merchant would be asked to act for several members of the same family. Thus John Ferriby of York acted as executor for Thomas Beverley and for Thomas' widow Alice.<sup>393</sup> William Stockton and William Holbeck were named as executors by both John Aldestanemore of York and his mother. His brother Thomas only used them as witnesses to his will, and as John's heirs were defrauded by Messrs. Holbeck and Stockton, Thomas acted wisely.<sup>394</sup>

Sons-in-law were almost automatically named as executors, even when a son had survived and was also an executor. In that way a daughter's interest would be protected against a dishonest brother. William Neleson of York, however, was insistent that his sons-in-law should not inherit the money he was leaving to his grandsons, and stated simply that 'their fathers shall not have it'.<sup>395</sup>

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390. Helmholtz, *Roman Law and Guardianship*, pp. 233, 235-7, 239-40.

391. See *Cal. Plea & Mem. Rolls, City of London, 1381-1412*, pp. 208-217 for an exceptionally comprehensive executor's account relating to an estate inherited by five children under age.

392. Prob. Reg. II f. 667v. (Tutbury); D126 (Pund).

393. Prob. Reg. V f. 28 (Alice); f. 184 (Thomas).

394. *Ibid.*, III ff. 406-8 (John); f. 413 (Thomas); f. 554 (Margaret).

395. *Ibid.*, V f. 107.

Inter-generational family friendships were occasionally reflected in a merchant's choice of executor. Roger Bushel of Hull, d. 1483, appointed Richard Doughty snr of Hull, d. 1488, as one of his executors; Doughty's son Richard, d. 1521, in his turn made Bushel's son Roger, d. 1538, one of his executors.<sup>396</sup> Sometimes a merchant's choice implied a confidence based on previous business dealings. John Day of Hull named as one of his executors John Middleton of Beverley, with whom he had had property dealings in Beverley.<sup>397</sup>

### Conclusion.

It has not been argued that merchants were particularly pious nor honourable, but that they followed the philanthropic fashions of their day. Their acceptance of orthodox doctrine is confirmed by the widespread consistency of religious provision in merchants' wills. The belief in Purgatory and in the efficacy of prayers for the dead was universal. We should hesitate from claiming that there is evidence for a profound piety in conventional testamentary expressions. We know that not all merchants drew up their own wills,<sup>398</sup> and even the literate may have thought that such an important document required a scribal expertise to match their own mercantile skills. Inevitably we are left with the conundrum as to whose pious sentiments we are reading; the scribe's or the testators.<sup>399</sup> This is not to argue that testators did not agree with the standard form and those who wished, could and did

396. Ibid., V f. 87v. (Bushel); f. 350v. (Doughty snr); IX f. 17b (Doughty jnr); XI f. 352 (Bushel jnr).

397. Ibid., IV f. 79; C.C.R. 1466-76, p. 44.

398. See above p. 383 for examples.

399. In smaller communities it is easier to identify scribes. M. Spufford, The Scribes of Villagers' Wills in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Local Pop. Studies, 7 (1971), pp. 28-43.

diverge. The Dalton brothers' elaborate preambles, subsequently copied by John's apprentice Robert Harrison in 1520 (who married Dalton's widow), and by another merchant Henry Walker in 1521,<sup>400</sup> emphasise both the opportunity for an idiosyncratic statement, and the power of fashion.

There were occasional hints of sympathy towards Lollardy when testators referred to their 'creator, saviour and redeemer':<sup>401</sup> thus Alan del Hill in 1438, William White in 1479, Robert Johnson in 1498, Ralph Close in 1512, and Elizabeth Garner of Hull in 1513.<sup>402</sup> Two York merchants hedged their bets by commending their souls to their creator and to the Virgin Mary: William Bromfield in 1482 and Thomas Catour in 1495.<sup>403</sup> John Fitling is the only merchant testator so far identified, who expressed clear Lollard ideas in 1434, when he asked his executors to eschew vainglory in his funeral arrangements, and to do only what was necessary for the praise of God.<sup>404</sup> A few merchants and their wives had private oratories:<sup>405</sup> William Ormeshead, Marion Kent of York, Thomas and Maud Barton and Robert Alcock of Hull, suggesting a particular spiritual need.<sup>406</sup> Although merchants left money to all the mendicant

400. Prob. Reg. IX f. 112 (Harrison); f. 160 (Walker).

401. This is discussed in Vale, Yorkshire Gentry, pp. 14-5. Dr. Vale concludes that wills cannot be used by themselves as evidence of Lollard sympathies.

402. Prob. Reg. III f. 540 (Hill); V f. 161 (White); f. 510v. (Johnson); VIII f. 105 (Garner); f. 117 (Close).

403. Ibid., V f. 30v. (Bromfield); f. 467 (Catour).

404. Ibid., III ff. 284v.-285.

405. On private worship and oratories, C. Richmond, Religion and the Fifteenth-Century Gentleman, in R.B. Dobson, ed., The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century (1984), p. 199.

406. Ibid., V f. 229 (Alcock); Reg. Bothe f. 101 (Kent).



orders and to monastic houses within the region, most of their religious provision was directed towards their parish churches. That was where they wished to be buried and they left money to their local priest to that end. Care for the physical well-being of their churches was reflected in most wills, admittedly as a formal reference to the fabric. The votive lights which attracted bequests, were almost all located in parish churches. The continued and consistent support given to parish churches confirms their dominance in contemporary thinking. They were the mainstay of local religious practice and continued as such in spite of competition from newer organisations such as the mendicants and the religious guilds and fraternities.<sup>407</sup>

Whatever the liturgical or theological sympathies of the testator, wills and testaments were seen as a way of settling the accounts of a lifetime's obligations and responsibilities and of ordering the future as best one could.

Friends and family gained spiritual as well as material benefit from implementing the wishes of the dead, while he (or she) derived reassurance from a knowledge that, at least in spiritual matters, the correct form of benevolence had been observed and the appropriate reward would be received. There was comfort in the reuniting and gathering of family and friends, the living and the dead, in prayers. William Marshall of York wanted those mourning him to pray also for his grandparents, parents, his brothers and sisters; John Thrisk for his three wives, daughter and son-in-law.<sup>408</sup> Affirming family identity through several generations was clearly important. In all these respects, merchants were united with their fellow townsmen. The

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407. Tanner, Church in Norwich, p. 140.

408. Prob. Reg. V f. 424 (Marshall); IX f. 112 (Harrison); C.P.R. 1461-7, p. 541 (Thrisk).

differences were purely those of wealth, since merchants generally enjoyed a greater disposable income than most craftsmen and *artisans*, they could spend more (if they so chose) on their souls.

However, it could be argued that the occasional munificence of mercantile charity and the elaborate arrangements made for a funeral or post-mortem prayers, was intended to confirm the superiority of the testator. Perhaps more would have welcomed the same fate as John Ferriby, who died during his mayoralty in 1491 and as a consequence his corpse was accompanied by six aldermen, and the city sword and mace.<sup>409</sup> Membership of an elitist association such as the Corpus Christi Guild could, at the very least ensure social equals were in attendance at your funeral,<sup>410</sup> as well as the paupers waiting for doles. More generally one can see how the merchant group was brought distinctively together through a mutual dependence, by their appointment of each other as executors and guardians. Such a choice was natural and added another strand to those of intermarriage, joint business ventures, and shared attitudes and responsibilities towards civic affairs, which bound merchants into a recognisable class in urban society. No doubt craftsmen further down the wealth and political scale, created equivalent networks for similar reasons, but they have been less conspicuously identifiable.

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409. C. Kightly and R. Semlyen, Lords of the City. The Lord Mayors of York and their Mansion House (York, 1980), p. 10.

410. See above p. 408.

## CONCLUSION

The opportunities to accumulate capital from trading profits and through the commercial exploitation of other resources such as land and credit, gave merchants an occupational sophistication of an identifiable kind. No other occupational group could claim as much, and it has been argued that it was the contra-puntal existence of the merchant class which gave craftsmen from many different skills, their identity as an artisan class.<sup>1</sup>

Merchants 'formed a distinct class in society, however shifting the outer edges of the stratum'.<sup>2</sup> They were at the apex of urban society. Differentiated by their mode of dress, life style, economic and political expectations they constituted a powerful class. More than any other occupational group, merchants were directly and rapidly affected by fluctuations in international trade. The changing direction of that trade; the fundamental shift from wool to cloth, eventually enlarged and transformed the merchant class.

Indigenous merchants were drawn into international trade as demand for English wool soared in the early 14th century. Whether they traded on capital, on the security of land or by sheer opportunism has yet to be determined. The evidence of their triumph over alien merchants however, is unmistakable. Few Italians could be found trading in Yorkshire by 1340. Further transformation lay ahead in the later years of the 14th century, as these local wool barons became the commercial elite in their own towns. At the same time, growing cloth exports gave individuals access to international trade beyond the monopoly of the wool staplers. The numbers of active overseas merchants increased

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1. Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 172-3.

2. Hanham, Celys, p. 1.

nationally, and in York and Hull. In York at least, the numbers becoming free as merchants rose in the second half of the 14th century.<sup>3</sup> The half century from 1355 were halcyon days for international and probably domestic trade, as it was for many towns' economies. The Black Death had not proved to be a catastrophe. Many urban populations recovered their pre-plague levels, textile production and other manufacturing was buoyant, consumption of imported basics and luxuries rose.<sup>4</sup>

The recession of the 1420s and 1430s mirrored the triumphs of the late 14th century and merchants were forced to adapt their ventures accordingly. Fewer traded in wool, although that generated higher profits than any other commodity and brought access to international credit facilities through the Calais Staple. Falling wool prices may have encouraged an expansion in domestic textile production, particularly in rural West Riding, but even cloth exports via Hull fell away in the 1420s as hostilities with the Hanse closed off major markets to east coast merchants. Yorkshire cloth was increasingly exported through London and merchants spread their investment into general imports, and exported more foodstuffs and lead. The number of men actively engaged in international commerce fell, as did the proportion of the very successful. By the end of the 15th century, there were only a handful of individuals engaged in overseas trade of any significance and, to all intents and purposes, York and Beverley had been left high and dry by international commerce. Hull's continued involvement was almost entirely due to the use of its port facilities, since fewer Hull men traded themselves.

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3. V.C.H. York, p. 114.

4. Hatcher, Plague, Population and the English Economy, pp. 34, 49-50; J. Thorold Rogers, A History of Agriculture and Prices in England, vol. 1 p. 452, IV, p. 381.

How can one calculate the economic contribution of these overseas traders and regional merchants to their own towns? Dr. Swanson has argued recently that merchants undermined urban craftsmen, by their determination to retain control over the trade in key commodities. Given that imported raw materials such as alum, flax, pitch, tar, and timber, were crucial to specific industries, whether in small or large quantities, overseas merchants could dictate commercial terms to dependent craftsmen.<sup>5</sup> This became critical as York (and Beverley) textile workers faced growing competition from rural producers at least from the late 1370s.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, she argues that the closed oligarchy and costly civic pomp increased the costs of upsetting in business in York and indeed, were more likely to deter investment by outsiders than monopolistic guild regulations.<sup>7</sup>

The general thesis that merchants were better placed to manipulate a town's commercial regulations cannot be challenged, though there is some evidence to suggest that merchant oligarchs responded to a craft guild's demands. For instance the council supported the girdlers' claim in 1417 to a monopoly which extended 32 miles around York.<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly merchants did control the mechanics of supply and distribution, but artisans also engaged in regional trade, handled commodities such as grain and lead, and can be found engaging in overseas trade from time to

5. Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 131, 149.
6. [No Editor] Tolls of the Collectors in the West Riding of the Lay Subsidy in Richard II, Y.A.J. v (1879); vi (1881); vii (1882).
7. Swanson, Medieval Artisans, p. 149.
8. M.B. I p. 183. The merchant oligarchy was capable of seeing beyond the greed of individual merchants. In 1406, in response to complaints, the council prohibited the practice of some merchants who were selling 'foreign' cloth and wool in York, as their own and evading the proper tolls to the detriment of the city. M.B. II pp. 204-5.

time.<sup>9</sup> Such dual occupational activities blurred occupational distinctions and it is clear that artisans were as single minded as merchants when it came to profit.

There were more complex reasons for the decline in York's textile production, specifically of broadcloths, than simply mercantile exploitation. The combination of growing demand abroad and rising per capita incomes at home, put cloth workers under considerable pressure to increase production. Merchants bought cloth wherever they could, producers sold it to whoever had the cash or secure credit.<sup>10</sup> The accumulation of resources following the Black Death, had turned some rural survivors into entrepreneurs<sup>11</sup> and the small-scale entrepreneur was vital to the industrial expansion of the West Riding.<sup>12</sup> Their ability to establish a distribution network independent of urban merchants, presaged the contraction of York's textile manufacturing base and ultimately the failure of her merchants. Once it became possible to retain marketing control within an expanding production area, that would be preferred simply because it kept costs down. Transaction costs, excluding guild charges, plus transportation

9. Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 132-141.
10. At this point in the acceleration of the trade in cloth, sale credits probably became as important as cash as the volume of trade rose. Postan, Credit in Medieval Trade, op. cit., p. 261.
11. Evidence from other regions suggest this did not happen until the 15th century. E.M. Carus-Wilson, Evidence of Industrial Growth on some Fifteenth Century Manors, Ec. H. R. 2nd ser. xii (1959), pp. 193-6 (Mid-15th century), pp. 198-200, 202 (by 1409); C. Dyer, A small landowner in the fifteenth century, Midland History, 1 (1972), pp. 1-14.
12. Numbers of mercers were listed in the 1379 Poll Tax in addition to general merchants. See n. 6 above. See also A.R. Bridbury, Medieval English Cloth and Clothmaking. An Economic Survey (1982), p. 63; D.C. Coleman, Proto-Industrialisation: A Concept Too Many, Ec. H.R. 2nd ser. xxxvi (1983), p. 440.

overheads constituted more urban 'add-ons' and existed whether commerce was conducted by craftsmen or merchants.

The investment by urban merchants in rural industry, is one element in this model, another and perhaps the most influential, was the re-routing of Hanse purchasing, away from the east coast ports and towns, and into the regions via London.<sup>13</sup> The Hanse were matched by Londoners and once that trend had become established, it could be argued that it was the failure of the broadcloth industry in York, which directly contributed to the collapse of York's overseas trade. A further crucial consideration was *the* impact of demographic events and of market forces external to Yorkshire, which resulted in London merchants taking over.<sup>14</sup> The shrunken merchant class of mid to late 15th-century York was a pale reflection of its predecessors. Its capital resources were considerably diminished, in spite of a handful of wealthy individuals, there was no longer a sizeable group with middling to large investments in trade. To paint them as the villains in urban decline, because of their failure to continue to generate long-distance trade in their ailing towns, is to ignore important external factors. In any case, investment in York, by outsiders was not deterred, as the activities of London grocers confirms, but whatever profits accrued from their investments, were syphoned away to the south east.<sup>15</sup>

In general terms, merchants energised market towns and the contribution of their particular skills when times were better was an acceptable bonus. By inference, their individual accumulation of wealth and its eventual dispersal through their spending as consumers and as

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13. Gras, Early English Customs, pp. 120, 459, 469.

14. J.I. Kermodé, Merchants, Overseas Trade and Urban Decline: York, Beverley and Hull c. 1380-1500, Northern History, XXIII (1987), pp. 51-73.

15. York C.R.O. E39 pp. 278, 284-5, 288, 295.

employers, and through death-bed charity, was to the benefit of many citizens beyond their immediate households. Collectively, they brought European trade to their fellows, opened up distant markets for locally produced textiles and met the demand for imports. On the debit side, they undermined the livelihood of some fellow citizens by buying wherever prices were most advantageous, and by importing manufactured items which competed with local manufactures. Putting-out and piece-working were as much a part of medieval urban and rural manufacturing<sup>16</sup> as it was of the so-called proto-industrialisation of the 16th and 17th centuries. Few merchants risked capital by investing it in equipment, and like the wealthier artisans, exploited the independent craftsmen by leaving that burden to them. One or two like Robert Holme, Thomas Clynt and Thomas Carre of York directly employed rural out-workers,<sup>17</sup> undeterred by wider considerations of the urban common weal to which they probably paid lip-service.

Their entrepreneurial and financial skills in particular, made them important agents between town and countryside. Obviously as traders, they directly influenced the growth of a town as a regional or local market centre, but they also acted as financial channels, transforming rural wealth into workable capital. Their need for cash and credit far more than any social ambition, developed a capitalist attitude to land as an exploitable resource, and they did not hesitate to use it for their urban-based trade. Towns which lost those specialist entrepreneurial skills, drifted back into local obscurity.

Access to opportunities did not automatically lead to success. While some merchants prospered exceedingly, others barely survived.

16. Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 34, 114; Bridbury, English Cloth, pp. 2, 6, 11, 55.

17. See Appendix 4.



As Sylvia Thrupp observed, 'there were men who had to struggle to keep their heads above water and died without materially increasing the small property with which they had started their business'.<sup>18</sup> Even when massive mercantile fortunes could be acquired in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, the merchant class perforce included men barely distinguishable from hawkers. This is an important point to emphasise since it is easy to use the term merchants to imply a homogeneous wealthy élite. While it is argued that more opportunities to accumulate capital were available to merchants, other townsmen also waxed rich.<sup>19</sup> In terms of accumulated landed wealth, the position of merchants vis-a-vis other townsmen, could vary markedly. In the 1412 subsidy returns, a mere handful of merchants were assessed at £20 in York, amongst a galaxy of earls and knights, whereas in Beverley, merchants accounted for four out of the six so assessed and in Hull, merchants accounted for three out of five landowners.<sup>20</sup> The biographies of the small merchants suggest that many ended up with little disposable income and few assets. Yet they were an important penumbra, a sort of transitional stratum, through which immigrants and a small percentage of occupationally mobile craftsmen moved.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, others moved straight into the middle or even top ranks of the merchant class, by virtue of wealth or influential connections.<sup>22</sup>

18. Thrupp, London Merchant Class, p. 110.

19. See above pp. 259-60; Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 158-9.

20. Feudal Aids, VI, pp. 544-6.

21. Dr. Swanson has calculated that only 7% of the 806 per patrem artisan entries between 1387 and 1534 moved into mercantile occupations. Medieval Artisans, p. 165.

22. E.g. Brian Conyers of York who was well connected, but said to be poor. See Appendix 4.

Inevitably it was the commercially and politically successful who gave the merchant class its high profile in urban affairs and it is to that sphere we now turn. The implications of short-lived merchant families, and of the greater importance of class as opposed to individual family survival, were especially marked in local government. In each of the three boroughs, merchants were the politically advantaged group. In the absence of dynastic dominion, the continuity of government was sustained by a system of self-perpetuating oligarchies, and by a shared belief in what constituted the responsibilities of government. Not all merchants subscribed to that belief or chose actively to propagate it,<sup>23</sup> but those who did, have left evidence of it in borough records. What have survived are those items which councillors and their successors regarded as important.

What impact did merchant politicians have upon their communities? Henry de Belton was one of the first merchants to challenge the landed oligarchy of York for the mayoralty in 1334, and by 1364 that challenge had become overwhelming. Changing economic trends influenced political ambitions and expectations, not just amongst rulers but amongst the ruled. Civic government was under pressure in the 1370s/80s and again from the mid-15th century as tension rose,<sup>24</sup> first as a consequence of prosperity and then of recession. We have seen how, although the nature of oligarchic government in the three towns did change during two hundred years, merchants remained the dominant group, controlling access to and up the cursus honorum.<sup>25</sup> More fundamentally, while the landed interest had been replaced by the mercantile in 14th century York and

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23. Thomas Scotton of York, for instance, was fined for refusing to become an alderman in 1490. Y.C.R. I, p. 37; H.B. VII ff. 2v., 4.

24. V.C.H. York, pp. 46-7, 71, 80-83.

25. See above, chapter 5.

the franchise was expanding as more men enrolled as freemen, the political role of the commons remained limited. The council in all three towns controlled admissions to the freedom, and in York at least also influenced the rate of upset fees for artisans.<sup>26</sup> Collectively, the commons had no formal access to government even though mention is made of the outer council of forty-eight in York and Beverley. They rarely met.<sup>27</sup>

How acceptable that was to their fellow citizens is open to debate. Oligarchic government was supposed to be impartial, with a paramount duty to act for rich and poor alike, and most civic officials' oaths reflected that philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Rulers were expected to rule according to the customs of the town and this implied that action to curb those who ignored such constraints was justified. Some historians have adduced therefore, that a consensus existed in medieval towns about the structure and conduct of government, so that opposition only emerged when that consensus was abused.<sup>29</sup>

The evidence from York and Beverley suggests that a consensus model is inadequate. Its adherents were in the minority. The hierarchy of wealth and power was jealously guarded by the successful, whether within

26. R.B. Dobson, *Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages*, *Ec. H.R.* 2nd ser., xxvi (1973), pp. 18, 20; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, p. 119.
27. See above pp. 285, 297. In 1379 the York forty-eight were referred to as the 'artificers'. *M.B.* I, p. 39.
28. S.H. Rigby, 'Urban Oligarchy' in Late Medieval England, in J.A.F. Thompson, ed., *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (1988), p. 64; *V.C.H. York*, p. 30; *M.B.* II, p. 246; *V.C.H. Hull*, p. 30; BRG 1 ff. 12-14; G.G.B. f. 6v.
29. Reynolds, *English Medieval Towns*, pp. 135-6, 171; *idem*, *Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought*, *U.H.Y.* (1982), pp. 14-23; A.G. Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200-1540* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 247-8.

the guild or civic hierarchy. The notion of guilds as embryonic trades' unions, defending their members against predatory councillors can easily be refuted, and recent research has demonstrated the extent to which civic and guild rulers encouraged the occupational labelling and gathering of individuals into guilds to facilitate their regulation.<sup>30</sup> Councils benefited financially and used guild searchers to supervise manufacturing standards. From 1464 a committee of guild searchers played a small role in mayoral elections in York, and in 1489 the council used them to police the city to encourage a peaceful election. It is unlikely that the guild oligarchs would jeopardise the advantages they gained by supporting the council, and indeed, when the new Common Council was created in 1517, guild searchers were rewarded with significant electoral duties.<sup>31</sup> The manipulated consensus then, bolstered guild oligarchy as much as it did civic oligarchy.

Even within the mercantile elite, collective goals could be abandoned. Some of the outbursts of violent reaction in both town emanated from discontented groups within the merchant class seeking freer access to power as in York in 1357, 1364, 1371, and most dramatically in 1379-81.<sup>32</sup> The eruption of faction in York in 1379-81 was one stage in a continuing struggle within the oligarchy. Accusations of embezzlement were employed and 'new' merchant John Gisburn, was accused by reactionary opponents of corruptly abusing council authority. In one

30. R.H. Hilton, *Medieval Market Towns and Simple Commodity Production*, P. & P., 109 (1985), pp. 16-17; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, pp. 108-120. In contrast see Phythian-Adams, *Desolution of a City*, pp. 106-8.
31. Kermode, *Obvious Observations*, *op. cit.*, p. 101; *V.C.H. York*, p. 137; *C.P.R. 1467-77*, p. 328, 329, 416; *Y.C.R. II*, pp. 40, 43; *III*, pp. 17, 51-9; *H.B. XI* ff. 29v., 44v.
32. *V.C.H. York*, pp. 80-2; *M.B. I*, p. 16; *York C.R.O. C/Y f. 313v.*; *C.P.R. 1364-7*, p. 208; *C.C.R. 1369-74*, p. 275.

sense this was always an easy allegation to make, since the duties of civic officers allowed considerable leeway, but when fiscal manipulation was added, the allegation became a powerful stimulant to action. This factional struggle became embroiled in the national conflagration of the peasants' revolt in 1381. A similar struggle in Beverley also found violent expression during the 1381 revolt: the anti-establishment group of small shopkeepers, supported by archbishop Neville, attempting to institute a system of government by triumvirate.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately the records are sparse for events in Hull during 1381 and few conclusions can be drawn.<sup>34</sup> However, there is evidence from the 1450s and 1460s of council disunity as the serjeants of the mayor and of the sheriff, fell out over their respective areas of jurisdiction.<sup>35</sup> In 1467, it was the sheriff who exceeded his jurisdiction in defiance of the mayor, and the recorder and aldermen had to arbitrate between them.<sup>36</sup>

Collective solidarity was also threatened on some later occasions, during the turbulent decades of the late 15th century. In 1471,<sup>37</sup> 1476,<sup>38</sup> 1482<sup>39</sup> and 1517<sup>40</sup> in York, it was the personal rivalry of

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33. V.C.H. York, pp. 80-2; C.T. Flower, The Beverley Town Riots, 1381-2, T.R.H.S. ns, xix (1905), pp. 80-1; R.B. Dobson, The Risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, 1380-1381, in R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston, eds., The English Rising of 1381 (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 119-130, 139-142.
34. Gillett and MacMahon, History of Hull, pp. 35, 47, 63; Dobson, The Risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, p. 117.
35. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 32-3; BRB 1 ff. 13, 38 (2) v., 83-83v., 97; BRE 2 f. 95.
36. BRB 1 ff. 109v.-10.
37. V.C.H. York, p. 82; C.P.R. 1467-77, p. 239.
38. V.C.H. York, p. 61; Y.C.R. I, pp. 2-3, 11.
39. V.C.H. York, p. 82; Y.C.R. I, pp. 48-52, 69.
40. V.C.H. York, p. 137; Y.C.R. III, pp. 51-9.

individuals which undermined the council's control. At other times, animosities festered but were contained by council action. Sometimes councillors barely concealed their dislike of each other, called each other names, and squabbled over precedence in processions. For instance in 1483, the recorder Miles Metcalfe, called the mayor John Newton, a false harlot and in 1486, John Harper and William Tod, two aldermen bickering over precedence, resorted to defamation and fighting.<sup>41</sup> It may be that it was this sort of rivalry spilling over at times of stress, which stirred up supporters<sup>42</sup> amongst a commonalty already hostile to government by oligarchy, or as likely, already nurturing an instinctive assumption of corrupt conduct by a secure élite.

Hints of corruption surfaced periodically in York to tarnish the élite's reputation. If equivalent records had survived for Beverley and Hull, a similar undercurrent might be observed. As early as 1301, the York commons were complaining that they did not know how city taxes had been spent, and in 1311 and 1316, the tax collectors were accused of fraud.<sup>43</sup> In 1306, there was a complaint brought against a guild of 'wealthy burgesse' (which included several civic office-holders), led by Andrew de Bolingbroke. During his two mayoralities in 1305 and 1309 he was the victim of violent assaults. It was alleged that the guild was conspiring to avoid taxation by shifting the burden onto others, settling disputes outside the city courts thereby undermining council authority and depriving it of judicial profits.<sup>44</sup> In 1476, Common Clerk

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41. V.C.H. York, p. 90; Y.C.R. I, pp. 153, 155, 170; Test Ebor., IV, p. 212n.

42. This was probably so in 1482 when the rivalry between Richard York and Thomas Wrangwish for the mayoralty, apparently sparked off popular disturbances. V.C.H. York, p. 82; Y.C.R. I, pp. 48-52, 69.

43. C.P.R. 1292-1301, p. 624; 1307-13, p. 418; C.F.R. 1307-19, p. 300.

44. G. Sayles, The Dissolution of a Guild at York in 1306, E.H.R., 55 (1940), pp. 85-6, 88, 92. See below p. 448.

was dismissed for dishonesty<sup>45</sup> and suspicions concerning the unfair skewing of taxation assessments persisted. In 1504, Roger Whetely a merchant and a prominent rioter, accosted the mayor wanting to know 'how individuals in the city had been assessed for the levy'.<sup>46</sup>

Local government was becoming more complex in many late medieval towns and the responsibilities of their merchant oligarchs increased. Their perceptions of their duty widened from the maintenance of customs and defence of civic liberties to encompass a whole range of employment and commercial controls, as well as the regulation of public amenities. Popular expectations also changed and it is clear from the occasions of popular rebellion, that councillors did not always match those expectations. The objections of the York commons can be firmly adduced from petitions they presented to the mayor and council in 1475,<sup>47</sup> 1484<sup>48</sup> and in 1490.<sup>49</sup> Their accusations targetted their rulers' incompetence in the financial management of their town (due to them paying themselves and surplus legal counsellors too much in fees and expenses), and inadequate street cleaning. Incompetence plus corruption was implicitly acknowledged by the York council when it agreed in 1475 to a retrospective auditing of the accounts and to ensure better qualified men were elected chamberlains.<sup>50</sup>

Common grazing was another sensitive issue in medieval towns.<sup>51</sup> The York council was caught between the cross-fire of landowners comp-

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45. V.C.H. York, p. 75; Y.C.R. I, pp. 8-11.

46. Y.C.R. III, pp. 8-9.

47. M.B. II, pp. 245-7.

48. Y.C.R. I, pp. 89, 104-5.

49. Ibid., II, pp. 54-5.

50. M.B. II, p. 246.

51. Reynolds, English Medieval Towns, pp. 176, 178.

eting with the citizens over common rights and the citizens' insistence that these be protected. Fuel was added to the conflict when the council apparently favouring Richard III's clients, relinquished rights of common to Lord Lovel in 1483 and St. Mary's Abbey in 1484. The latter concession provoked fierce opposition led by the weavers.<sup>52</sup> Later incidents suggest however, that in less partisan times, the council worked to defend the city's grazing. Disputes arose with Sir James Danby, the Vicars Choral, the prebendary of Fridaythorpe and others. Riots fuelled by the grazing issue broke out again in 1492 and 1494 and on the latter occasion, the council was warned by Henry VII that he would put other rulers in their place if they could not uphold law and order.<sup>53</sup> The dispute with the Vicars' Choral incurred legal costs which were passed on to the community: four citizens were appointed in each parish, on pain of forfeiting their freedom, to assess their fellows for a levy.<sup>54</sup>

The weight of evidence suggests that distrust of rulers was endemic amongst the commons and could be fanned into open resistance when the general situation exacerbated tensions. Key officials such as the mayor and sheriffs of York and Hull were protected by at least one serjeant.<sup>55</sup> Hostility was never far below the surface and easily flared into verbal abuse and occasionally physical assaults.<sup>56</sup> Such behaviour was punishable by fine or imprisonment, and abuse hurled at the mayors of

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52. Y.C.R. I, pp. 30, 32-3; 81, 89, 100, 104-5.

53. Ibid., I, p. 177; II, pp. 37-8, 50-1, 53, 61-2, 65, 83, 94, 105-7, 109-12.

54. Ibid., II, p. 118.

55. V.C.H. York, pp. 70, 72; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 30, 32.

56. E.g. Y.C.R. II, p. 127; III, p. 38; M.B. II, p. 289.



York<sup>57</sup> and Hull,<sup>58</sup> and the Beverley keepers, common clerk and common serjeant were most severely dealt with. Again the evidence for York is more abundant. The unpopular Andrew Bolingbroke, mayor in 1305 was attacked by a man with a knife, and his second mayoralty in 1309 generated further incidents.<sup>60</sup> Roger de Selby was nearly killed performing his mayoral duty in 1369, and an ex-mayor, William Welles was killed during the troubles of 1487, perhaps for being identified with a particular faction.<sup>61</sup> That there was resentment against wealthy oligarchs is clearly illustrated from two incidents. Richard Wayte, a York vintner, complained in Chancery that he was unlikely to have a fair hearing in York, in a case of recovery of debt, because the other party, Thomas Neleson was rich and 'of standing in the city'. A similar resentment was expressed by a former chamberlain, William Scauceby, who also took a debt case to Chancery, because he claimed the other party, William Wells would be believed in York 'because he was an alderman'.<sup>62</sup>

If the commons had goals independent of merchant leaders, what were they? Craft guild regulations provide no clues since these were the product of guild oligarchs, themselves openly allied to the interests of civic governors,<sup>63</sup> and filling a similarly élitist role. For instance, in c. 1420-30, the master cordwainers had to clamp down on irregular and seditious activities amongst their journeymen and apprentices. The latter

57. V.C.H. York, p. 70; Y.C.R. I, p. 31; II, p. 148; III, pp. 14, 36.

58. V.C.H. Hull, p. 30; BRB 1 ff. 105-6.

59. Bev. Cart. ff. 7-7v.

60. C.P.R. 1301-7, p. 541; 1307-13, p. 39.

61. C.C.R. 1369-74, p. 59; Y.C.R. II, p. 14.

62. P.R.O C1/64/485; 67/53.

63. Assisting in elections for instance, Kermode, Obvious Observations, p. 89 and H.B. VII f. 22v.; Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 110-12.

were forbidden to make confederations between themselves; to usurp the authority of the guild by making their own ordinances; or to form conventicles, insurrections, or popular movements against the king's peace in the city.<sup>64</sup> The tailors' servants also tried to form their own fraternity.<sup>65</sup> Their only viable form of expressing discontent was public violence.

Discontent was most visible at election times since those were the occasions when the commonalty's limited constitutional role gave it potential leverage. However, it is difficult to argue that the commons of all three towns consistently sought a more democratic system of government. In Beverley in 1457, the commons asked that elections be conducted according to the 'customs of the town',<sup>66</sup> an appeal to a principle which accepted their right to complain in such circumstances. Moves in both York, Beverley, and Hull to broaden electoral representation were probably done in response to commons' pressure, but only the York commons persistently agitated. Even so it was not until 1504 that the records reveal an explicit demand for the York commons to be involved in the election of the key office of sheriff.<sup>67</sup>

Few instances of riots were recorded in Hull. A gang of shipmen went on a rampage to release some of their fellows from the gaol, shouting 'doune with the maire doune with hum'.<sup>68</sup> In 1442 the council declared that the sheriff's attendants were to carry weapons only when there were riots or disorder, and the following year, the election

64. M.B. I, p. 193.

65. Ibid., p. 191.

66. GGB. f. 7v.

67. Kermode, Obvious Observations, pp. 89-93.

68. V.C.H. Hull, p. 30.

procedure was reformed, for 'the quietness of the town'.<sup>69</sup> In general, the Hull rulers attracted less hostility, maybe because their system of government appeared more efficient and democratic.<sup>70</sup>

Law and order in medieval English towns was maintained by the perpetuation of the belief in the legitimacy of those ruling. It was for this reason that so much emphasis was placed upon the worthiness of prospective officials (being a wealthy merchant automatically made one worthy), upon the respect due to individual civic officials, and to their collective superiority in civic processions and ceremonials. In York at least, the council and officials paraded whenever possible. They were expected to proceed to service in the Minster on Sundays when summoned; officials to conduct themselves in the proper manner especially with regard to dress and attendants; aldermen were to be attended by a servant bearing a torch at the Corpus Christi parade.<sup>71</sup> Such propagandist displays must be treated with scepticism. That they expressed a cohesive ideology is unmistakable,<sup>72</sup> but to see them as accurate reflections of reality is dangerous. The Corpus Christi pageants, depicting the harmonious hierarchy of urban society, with the wealthy merchant rulers rightfully at the head of the corporate civic body,<sup>73</sup> were reflections of the interests of the ruling groups of both city government and craft guilds. How much deeper acceptance went

69. Ibid.; C.P.R. 1441-6, pp. 180-1.

70. Kermode, Obvious Observations, pp. 93, 102.

71. V.C.H. York, p. 70; M.B. II, pp. 86-7; Y.C.R. I, pp. 2, 5-6; II, pp. 55, 59, 89, 145-6. For Hull see V.C.H. Hull, pp. 30-2.

72. Reynolds, English Medieval Towns, p. 180 argues that such pageantry engendered unity. See also C. Phythian-Adams, Ceremony and the Citizen: the communal year in Coventry, 1450-1550, in P. Clark and P. Slack, eds., Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700 (1972).

73. M. James, Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town, P. & P., 98 (1983), pp. 3-29.

is a matter of conjecture. It has recently been argued, that York craftsmen were compelled to support the play cycle to their financial detriment,<sup>74</sup> while in Beverley, there was such little popular support for the plays that their performance was only kept going by the keepers' efforts until even that fizzled out in 1520.<sup>75</sup>

Pageantry was a useful medium for political propaganda.<sup>76</sup> The York council mounted impressive displays to greet visiting royalty of which the most flamboyant and certainly best recorded was that to greet Henry VII in 1486. As ever that occasion served several purposes. The evocation of the antiquity of the city's independent and proud spirit through the image of Ebrauk, was directed at the king, reinforcing the oligarchy's claim to govern. The 'spontaneous' acclamation from the populace enhanced the presentation of the city as united in its joyous loyalty. Aldermen and councillors from the twenty-four, wore different coloured gowns appropriate to their different ranks, so the whole spectacle reinforced the dominance of the merchant oligarchy, benignly presiding over a harmonious community.<sup>77</sup> The divided feelings of the citizens and oligarchy towards Richard III and Henry VII have been well described elsewhere, and there is considerable evidence that

74. Swanson, Medieval Artisans, pp. 119-120.

75. James, Ritual, Drama and Social Body, p. 14; A.H. Nelson, The Medieval English Stage: Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays (Chicago, 1974), pp. 92, 94, 99; H. MSS. C. Beverley, pp. 171-2.

76. See Nelson, Medieval English Stage, passim; M. Dorrell, The Mayor of York and the Coronation Pageant, Leeds Studies in English, N.S. v (1971), pp. 34-45; M. Dorrell and F. Johnston, The Domesday Pageant of the York Mercers, ibid., pp. 29-34; J.I. Kermode, The Merchants of Three Northern English Towns, in C.H. Clough, ed., Profession, Vocation and Culture in Later Medieval England (Liverpool, 1982), pp. 35-6.

77. Kermode, Merchants of Three Northern Towns, p. 36; A.H. Smith, A York Pageant, 1486, London Medieval Studies (1939), pp. 382-98; Y.C.R. I, pp. 155-9. See above, pp. 384-5.

even in matters of loyalty, York was not a united city.<sup>78</sup> The commons could turn the ideology back onto the oligarchy when their spokesmen referred to them being 'all one body corporate' in 1475, in an attempt to influence council policy.<sup>79</sup>

The play cycles and processions were in actuality occasions of squabbling between guilds, occasions for fights, and for making money.<sup>80</sup> They were also occasions which the merchant rulers exploited to foster good relations with members of the nobility and gentry.<sup>81</sup> Given the uncertainty of national and regional affairs, it was politic for civic rulers to spend some money and time, nurturing the 'good lordship' of useful patrons.<sup>82</sup> Mutual advantages were to be derived from this form

78. D.M. Palliser, Richard III and York, in R. Horrox, ed., Richard III and the North (Univ. of Hull, 1986), pp. 51-67; M.A. Hicks, Dynastic Change and Northern Society: the career of the 4th earl of Northumberland 1470-89, Northern History, XIV (1978), pp. 78-107; K. Dockray, The Political Legacy of Richard III in Northern England, in R.A. Griffiths and J. Sherborne, eds., Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages (1986), pp. 203-27.
79. M.B. II, p. 246.
80. V.C.H. York, p. 96. There were complaints at a public meeting in 1416, that certain individuals were profiteering from the seat-charges paid at the pageant stations. York M.B. II, p. 64. Thereafter the council was to receive one third of the receipts. On a later occasion in 1432 there were complaints that the crafts were using the plays as a means to advertise. Ibid., p. 172; M.B. II, pp. 156-8. See above, p. 387.
81. E.g. York entertained Richard II in 1398 to a performance of the Corpus Christi cycle and Richard III in 1483 to a performance of the Creed Play. V.C.H. York, pp. 57, 62; Dobson, York Chamberlains' Accounts, pp. xxxi, xxxvii ; Y.C.R. I, p. 81. Beverley council hosted the Percy family to its Corpus Christi cycle in 1423 and probably on other occasions. Acct. Roll 1423.
82. V.C.H. York, pp. 61-4; V.C.H. Hull, pp. 24-25, 398; A.J. Pollard, The Tyranny of Richard III, Jnl. Med. Stud. 3 (1977) pp. 147-64; R. Horrox, Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century, in R.A. Griffiths, ed., Patronage The Crown and The Provinces in Later Medieval England (Gloucester, 1981), pp. 145-166; Horrox, Richard III and the East Riding, in idem, ed., Richard III and the North, pp. 89-93. See also the essays in note 78 above.

of bastard feudalism and merchants in all three towns could find themselves dealing face to face or by letter with powerful individuals such as abbots of St. Mary's archbishops of York, the earls of Northumberland, the earl of Lincoln, the earl of Surrey, and Sir Richard Tunstall for instance.<sup>83</sup> There is little indication that they were intimidated by men of such elevated status, and indeed as we have seen, a wealthy merchant could have equal status to a gentleman in the eyes of contemporaries. Within their own communities, such dealings had the advantage of being visibly elevating, whereas consorting with other M.P.s at Westminster was not. None-the-less, as M.P.s, and as Crown appointed commissioners, the most successful merchants moved amongst the regions' landed gentry, and their successes characterised the opportunities and opportunism of their class.

For all their apparent self-confidence, public display, and efforts to legitimise their government in the eyes of their fellow townsmen, the myth of able government was vulnerable. In Beverley, economic decline was met with attempts to tighten oligarchic control. Through its association with the Percies, the town escaped the worst ravages of the Lancastrian and Yorkist struggle.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, York experienced quarter of a century of turmoil as its economy slid further into recession. In the 1470s, '80s and '90s, the merchant rulers were under severe pressure as the city's economy contracted and townsmen challenged guild and council authority.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, the factional politics of the Wars of the Roses and their aftermath spilled over, confusing an

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83. Y.C.R. passim.

84. See above pp. 294-5.

85. V.C.H. York, pp. 82-4.

already disturbed situation.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the injustice inherent in mercantile domination of civic government, it is to the credit of the rulers of York that complete anarchy did not occur, although at times the council was close to losing its grip.

Unlike York, Hull did not have to accommodate members of each faction, although the council did distribute largesse to both Yorkists and Lancastrians. As in York, there is evidence of divided loyalties but not of the riotous outbursts which exercised the York Council. The Lancastrian mayor, merchant Richard Anson, was killed at the battle of Towton. Other individuals pursued their own partisan politics, whatever the attempts of the council to placate the new king, and in May 1461, 32 men were expelled from the city for 'misrule' and 3 more imprisoned soon after. Hull diligently courted the favour of Richard of Gloucester, but showed little sign of continued loyalty to him after Bosworth.<sup>87</sup> Hull councillors have left an impression of careful detachment, of a desire to minimise the town's involvement in national politics, and certainly of less grandiose pretensions than those of York.

The perception by others of the merchant class then, was probably mixed. In some important respects, such as their attitude to the church and expressions of piety, merchants were at one with their fellows. Even then, conspicuous spending marked out merchant benefactors. In an age when rank was determined by wealth,<sup>88</sup> merchants were centre stage

86. Ibid., pp. 59-65; M. Hicks, The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered, Northern History, XXII (1986), pp. 39-62.

87. Demands for men, ships and money depleted Hull's resources to such an extent that the city had an enormous deficit in 1461 which continued to burden it for the rest of the century, in spite of royal compensation. V.C.H. Hull, pp. 23-6; A. Goodman, The Wars of the Roses (1981), pp. 218-20; Gillett and MacMahon, History of Hull, pp. 63-9.

88. E.M. Carus-Wilson, Towns and Trade, in A.L. Poole, ed., Medieval England (Oxford, 1958), p. 251.

and dominated urban society through their accumulation of wealth, their marriage networks, and political power. Understandably, their achievements often frustrated the aspirations of others, creating considerable tension. Theirs was the occupation par excellence, which held out the promise of advancement, but which also held on to what it had achieved by a combination of formal and informal institutions. Local religious fraternities might have been open to and have attracted merchant support alongside others, but entry to the York or Hull Corpus Christi Guilds was socially exclusive and artisans were not encouraged. The York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers' Company had a distinctive character quite unlike that of the local craft guilds, but similar to that of a London company.<sup>89</sup> Individuals had a choice of borrowing venture capital or of taking shares in a collective enterprise.<sup>90</sup> Its records are not repetitions of working practices, but to a remarkable extent, replicated municipal records of council proceedings and officials' business. There are details of commercial disputes, letters between the York company and the national adventurers' company, documents relating to the company's own hospital of St. Thomas, registers of new members including merchants' wives, accounts of quarterage payments and arrears and so forth.<sup>91</sup> The company hall must have resembled a corporation headquarters and the link consolidated by the steady stream of masters of the company into the mayoralty.<sup>92</sup>

89. See G. Unwin, The Guilds and Companies of London (1908), passim; Thrupp, Grocers' Company, pp. 247-62, 284-8.

90. M. & M.A., pp. 40, 68, 72-3, 195.

91. Ibid., passim.

92. For the list of masters/governors, see ibid., pp. 322-8. Only 2 of the 37 men who served as master, did not also serve as mayor or sheriff.



However, merchants did not monopolise the top of the ladder for long. Their political demise inexorably followed their commercial failure. By the middle of the 16th century they were just one of several economically important groups in the three towns, and erstwhile inferior occupations moved in to share power.<sup>93</sup> Civic office became accessible to nearly all occupational groups, but the perpetuation of discrimination against butchers, 'the sow's ears',<sup>94</sup> of urban society, testifies to the strength of social division even amongst artisans.

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93. Palliser, Tudor York, pp. 106-7, but cf. Bristol and Exeter where merchants retained their dominance. D.H. Sacks, Trade, Society and Politics in Bristol, 2 vols. (New York, 1985), pp. 694-8. W.G. Hoskins, Old Devon (Newton Abbot, 1966), p. 76.

94. So Heather Swanson described the butchers, Medieval Artisans, p. 171.