1273 the first customs duty was imposed on exports of wool, the returns revealed London and Boston as dominating the trade, with other south- and east-coast ports participating to a lesser extent and Bristol virtually not at all. Bristol merchants did, it is true, deal in wool — indeed they had never failed to do so, situated as they were in the midst of a wool-growing region but most of the wool they handled must have been shipped elsewhere, as from Southampton, in so far as it was not used at home.

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The fourteenth century saw no physical expansion of the city's bounds. Yet it was then that Bristol came to play a major part in England's export trade and acquired a status superior to that of any other English provincial town. For it was this century that saw the spectacular growth of the English textile industry and the beginning of the transformation that was to change England from being a supplier of raw wool to the more highly developed industrial regions on the continent into being herself the leading woollen-manufacturing region of Europe. In and around Bristol, as indeed all over England, the industry had been established long before this. Wool for dyeing had been imported from Picardy in the twelfth century and throughout the thirteenth century the trade continued to flourish; in 1281 the Picards entered into an agreement with Bristol dyers about the pricing of wool, and in 1295, when Edward I confiscated all the goods of French merchants in England, the large quantities of wool found in the possession of eleven Picards at Bristol suggest that dyers in the hinterland as well as in the city were being supplied through Bristol. Weavers were to be found in the old town, but there were probably still more of them in the suburb across the Avon; there they had their own chapel, dedicated to the weavers' saint, St Katherine, in the Temple church. There too fullers, or tuckers as they were called in the west country, abounded, particularly in Tucker Street, which at least by the thirteenth century was called the Street of the Fullers (vicus ful/ onum).

How much cloth was produced in and around Bristol in the thirteenth century there is no means of discovering, but certainly the town was not then specially celebrated for its cloth, as were Lincoln, Stamford and Beverley. The returns of the New Custom, imposed on aliens only in 1303, reveal a small trickle of alien cloth exports, but only with the imposition in 1347 of the Cloth Custom, payable by native as well as alien shippers, is any quantitative estimate of the whole export trade possible. By then an incentive impetus had been given to the English industry by Edward III's wartime diplomatic policy, which at times closed the English market to Flemish cloth and stopped all export of wool to Flanders, and still more by his wartime fiscal policy which, by increasing more than sixfold the export duty on wool, burdened the foreign manufacturer with heavily increased costs. Hence while Flemish looms went idle and workers unemployed an expanding English industry was absorbing large numbers of immigrants, some of them entrepreneurs bringing their own workpeople with them. Bristol, with its long-established industry and its ready access to plentiful supplies of wool, was clearly one of the growth points. There Thomas Blanket and other enterprising newcomers had set up miniature factories on their own premises, installing looms and hiring weavers and other craftsmen to work for them. For this they were fined and otherwise molested, until they succeeded in obtaining a royal writ (1359) which reminded the mayor and bailiffs of the special privileges offered in 1357 to any foreign clothworkers who settled in England.

In the first returns of the Cloth Custom Bristol stands revealed in the mid-fourteenth century as easily the predominant port for the export of English woollens, for her recorded export in the depressed years immediately following the Black Death, averaging seven hundred and fifty-five cloths annually, amounted to some sixty per cent of that of all of England.

Equally striking is the remarkable expansion of her trade through the late fifties and sixties and the fact that almost the whole of it was in the hands of English merchants. By the late fifties the average had risen to two thousand five hundred and fifty, and by the late sixties to over five thousand cloths, while in one year nearly eight thousand cloths were shipped from her port, as compared with only some three thousand from London. Bristol's principal market, apart from Ireland, was still Gascony, and the conspicuous success of her export drive in the sixties must in large part be attributed to the rapidity with which the province then recovered from the devastating effects of war, pestilence and famine. Wine shipments from Bordeaux, which had fallen to an average of only some fourteen thousand runs a year, whereas before the war they had often exceeded ninety thousand, rose to nearly forty thousand runs in 1364—7, and with the profits from their sales wine growers had money to spare for new clothing from England.

Thus the late fifties and sixties proved a period of outstanding prosperity for Bristol. Its pre-eminence in the rapidly developing trade in English cloth, which in due course was wholly to supersede that in raw wool, was as yet unchallenged; consumer demand in its principal market was brisk, and the Low Countries industry, the only serious competitor, was, there was in full decline. Its population had undoubtedly been much reduced by the Black Death of 1348—9 and subsequent visitations of the plague, and the city had clearly reached the limits of its physical expansion for some time to come. But if the burgesses were fewer in number they were not less affluent or successful, while the manual workers were benefiting from a significant rise in real wages. Moreover, with a tax

64 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, 36 sqq. Very few Bristol merchants were among those licensed to export wool in 1273—4, and the quantities for which they were licensed were relatively small: Cal. Pat. 1286—2, 554 etc.; ibid. 1272—1274, 14 etc. The Italians were buying much wool in Ireland as well as England in the late-13th century, but see GRJB 97, for a complaint in 1295 that wool, hides and other goods from Ireland 'go round the land' (circum terram) instead of coming to Bristol for export as hitherto. For Flemish merchants with wool at Bristol see Cal. Pat. 1279—95 (Dr Sharp's MS transcripts and notes); for GRJB 130 and 177 and the tax on weavers 'sitra aquam Abone' in the town rental. For the dedication of St Katherine's chapel in (7) 1299 see N and T, ii. 144.

65 Flanders etc., ed. T. Rymer (1739—42) ii, 100 and 108; and see Cal. Pat. 1313—40. For the importance of the cloth industry in 14th-century Bristol, see the prominence given to its regulation from the earliest recorded town ordinances (1346) in the LKB (e.g. vol. ii, ordinances for weaving, 2, 6, 40, 10, tailing, 7, 19, 141, dyeing, 6, 58, 81, 89; spinning and combing, 29).

66 Carus-Wilson (4), 248 sqq. (other cases); Carus-Wilson and Coleman, 1—2, 194 sqq. (for details of export duties on wool and cloth); Carus-Wilson (3), 402—3, 414—15. For other examples of immigrants at this time see Cal. Pat. e.g. 1332—9, 161, 171; 1336—7, 150, 138—41, 10.

67 Foedera etc., ed. T. Rymer (1739—42), ii, 100 and 108; and see Cal. Pat. 1313—40. For the importance of the cloth industry in 14th-century Bristol, the see the prominence given to its regulation from the earliest recorded town ordinances (1346) in the LKB (e.g. vol. ii, ordinances for weaving, 2, 6, 40, 10, tailing, 7, 19, 141, dyeing, 6, 58, 81, 89; spinning and combing, 29).


69 Carus-Wilson (4), 248 sqq.; James, Wine Trade, 9, 31, 33—41; H. Bouteauire, La crise d'une societe: seigneurs et paysans du Bordelais pendant la guerre du cent ans (1947), 198—9, 207. No figures for wine import into England are available for these years.

70 H. van Wermke, "Eelcne et decline de la Flandre" (Studie in orde van Gijs Luykxse, 1949, 118); F. Wolff, 'Un chemin de Flandre', La Mem. Angl. (1949), nos. 5—6, 271.

71 See the Bristol fullers' ordinances of 1346, where wages rates of sd. and ad. are altered in a later hand to ad. and ad. respectively (LRB, ii, 12), and for the increase in real wages generally, E. H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins (Economia, Aug. 1951) 195 sqq. and Nov. 1956. 266 sqq.
paying population of over six thousand (excluding clerics) in 1377 Bristol was second only to York among England's provincial towns. It is not surprising that it was at this time that the merchant Robert Cheddar (twice mayor in the early sixties) amassed the fortune that caused him to be remembered a century later as the richest man ever in Bristol, and that wealth was accumulated for major building projects such as the almost complete rebuilding of St Mary Redcliff from the transept westwards — a work traditionally accomplished by 1376 and attributed to the elder William Canynges, merchant and five times mayor between 1372 and 1390. It was at this time, too, that another 'famous merchant and burgess of Bristol', Richard le Spicer, founded the chapel of St George close to the Guildhall, with a fraternity of merchants and mariners attached to it, and built for himself the fine hall-house on the Back with which his name was long associated. Bristol Bridge, too, received the citizens' attention; it was most probably then that the shops and houses on each side of the Bridge were built, and the chapel of the Assumption across the middle of it. Such was the prestige of Bristol in these years that she then aspired to a status that no other provincial town could boast: in 1373 she was created a county in her own right, with an elective burgage, but with the 15th century when checked against contemporary records. See J. Latimer (2) 103-4, and Wolff, op. cit. a grant of vacant site to Worship St on condition of building a house there within 2 years, and a lease of vacant land near Aylward's Gate on condition of purchasing a house there within 3 years: GRBr, 219, 221 (1903-9). 

6 Carus-Wilson (i), 158, and (7), 160. Coventry merchants were trading actively through Bristol, sometimes in their own ships: Carus-Wilson (i), 193; (4), 243 no. 1, 176, and of 7, 8, 119.


8 See e.g. grant of vacant site to Worship St on condition of building a house there within 2 years, and a lease of vacant land near Aylward's Gate on condition of building a house there within 3 years: GRBr, 219, 221 (1903-9). 

9 Wadley, Wills, ii, 171, 173; Wadley describes the chapel as 'domino' and Knapp as 'magnificum domum mercatorum et burgorum Brisseli'. 

10 Wadley, Wills, i, 369-70; Wills, ii, 68. 


12 Wadley, Wills, 68; Wills, ii, 171, 173; Wadley describes the chapel as 'duomo' and Knapp as 'magnificum domum mercatorum et burgorum Brisseli'. 

13 Wadley, Wills, i, 369-70; Wills, ii, 68. 

14 For All Saints, see BAO All Saints Deeds CSN 2, Wadley, Wills, i, 369-70. 

15 For All Saints, see BAO All Saints Deeds CSN 2, Wadley, Wills, i, 369-70. 


17 The Poll Tax returns of 1377 give 6, 345 (of York: 2,748): C. Oman, The Great Revolt of 1381 (1969 edn.), 160-5. It is not surprising that it was at this time that the merchant Robert Cheddar (twice mayor in the early sixties) amassed the fortune that caused him to be remembered a century later as the richest man ever in Bristol, and that wealth was accumulated for major building projects such as the almost complete rebuilding of St Mary Redcliff from the transept westwards — a work traditionally accomplished by 1376 and attributed to the elder William Canynges, merchant and five times mayor between 1372 and 1390. It was at this time, too, that another 'famous merchant and burgess of Bristol', Richard le Spicer, founded the chapel of St George close to the Guildhall, with a fraternity of merchants and mariners attached to it, and built for himself the fine hall-house on the Back with which his name was long associated. Bristol Bridge, too, received the citizens' attention; it was most probably then that the shops and houses on each side of the Bridge were built, and the chapel of the Assumption across the middle of it. Such was the prestige of Bristol in these years that she then aspired to a status that no other provincial town could boast: in 1373 she was created a county in her own right, with an elective burgage, but with the 15th century when checked against contemporary records. See J. Latimer (2) 103-4, and Wolff, op. cit. a grant of vacant site to Worship St on condition of building a house there within 2 years, and a lease of vacant land near Aylward's Gate on condition of building a house there within 3 years: GRBr, 219, 221 (1903-9). 

8 Wm IVorc. of Temple Fee, the Priory of St James, St Augustine's and the Castle Fee see ibid. and Spicer as 'magnificum domum mercatorum et burgorum Brisseli'. 

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11 Carus-Wilson (5), 198, and (7), 160. Coventry merchants were trading actively through Bristol, sometimes in their own ships: Carus-Wilson (i), 193; (4), 243 no. 1, 176, and of 7, 8, 119. 


13 Rieart, op. cit. for this and earlier periods, though proving substantially correct for the late 14th century. Mayoral dates in Carus-Wilson and Coleman, (bis), 12, 13, 54 (Temple); 9, 10, 11 (St James); 11, 12, 13, 54 (St James); 9, 10, 11 (St Nicholas); 7, 12, 13, 14 (Temple); 7, 12, 13, 14 (Temple); 7, 12, 13, 14 (Temple); 9, 10, 11 (St Nicholas). 

14 Wm IVorc. of Temple Fee, the Priory of St James, St Augustine's and the Castle Fee see ibid. and Spicer as 'magnificum domum mercatorum et burgorum Brisseli'. The beautiful roof of the hall of his house, part of the screen, and the finely carved main door, were still seen in the late 19th century (illustrations in Nand T, i, 174). Richard Spicer was mayor three times in the third quarter of the century. Mayoral dates in Carus-Wilson and Coleman, 80 sqq. and 142; Carus-Wilson (5), 198, and (7), 160. Coventry merchants were trading actively through Bristol, sometimes in their own ships: Carus-Wilson (i), 193; (4), 243 no. 1, 176, and of 7, 8, 119.