

## RYE AND THE DEFENCE OF THE NARROW SEAS: A 16TH-CENTURY TOWN AT WAR

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*The Tudor period was marked by recurrent wars with France, followed by the threat of invasion from the Spanish Netherlands, placing the maritime counties of south-east England in the front line of England's defences. The Rye chamberlains' accounts record in considerable detail the income and expenditure of the town during the 16th century, providing a unique picture of the impact of war on one of the larger south coast ports. This article reconstructs the main features of Rye's military contributions, offering new insights into the conduct of Channel warfare in the 16th century and particularly into the importance of the town's privateering ventures which were both a major source of revenue and a substantial contribution to England's war effort.*

### INTRODUCTION: THE COSTS OF WAR

Very little has been written about the part played by the south coast towns in the defence of England in Tudor times. What there is, concentrates very heavily on the declining importance of the Cinque Ports and their traditional obligations to provide ships to transport troops across the Channel in times of war.<sup>1</sup> What is clear from the Rye Corporation records, however, is the relative unimportance of the traditional ship service of the Cinque Ports in comparison with other items of wartime expenditure by the town until the war with Spain in the later years of Elizabeth's reign. By far the major item of wartime expenditure until the 1580s was the cost of maintaining Rye's physical defences: the town wall, town ditch and suchlike.

The burdens placed on a town such as Rye by the demands of war were considerable and led to an approximate doubling of expenditure in the crisis years. That Rye was able to afford this and prosper says something for her wealth at this time, for the decline which hit the whole of the Cinque Ports Confederation reached Rye only in the late 1580s. What is perhaps more striking, however, is that Rye managed to fund much of its wartime expenditure through a tax levied on

French prisoners taken by privateers operating out of the town, which, together with the proceeds of goods seized, largely paid for Rye's military expenditure up to 1563. What the main elements of that expenditure were, and how the money was raised, are the subject of this article, which, it is hoped, will stimulate similar studies elsewhere in what is at present a relatively unexplored aspect of 16th-century warfare.

From the end of the 12th century until the mid 16th, recurrent wars with France had made the south coast the front line of England's defences. Rye owed its strategic importance to its situation, at the north-westernmost point of the Camber, a vast natural bay formed by shingle banks at the mouth of the rivers Rother, Brede and Tillingham. In its heyday in the first half of the 16th century, the Camber formed the largest natural harbour of refuge in the eastern Channel, providing shelter, so it was claimed, for as many as three or four hundred ships.<sup>2</sup> Even as late as 1589 Rye was chosen as the rendezvous for the ships of London, Portsmouth and Dover for the transportation of the English force sent to Dieppe to aid the French King, Henri IV. It served as the principal embarkation point, with Dover, for troops from the south coast in 1513,

1543, and 1562; for Kent and Sussex forces in 1589; and, alone, for those of Sussex in 1592 and 1596.<sup>3</sup> It was also regarded as a potential site for invasion attempts: in June 1495 by Perkin Warbeck, who had some sympathizers amongst Rye's citizens;<sup>4</sup> in 1545 when the French galleys appeared off Rye and the countryside flocked to its defence; and again in 1588 when one plan of the Duc de Guise was to land troops from France and Flanders in the Camber from some of the smaller ships of the Armada force.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to its strategic importance, the area had a long tradition of seafaring and considerable expertise in shipbuilding. Henry VII's ship the *Regent*, at over 600 tons the largest ship built on the Camber, was launched at Redyng on the river Rother some nine miles north of Rye in

the autumn of 1488 and towed down river to Rye for the stepping of its main mast there in the spring of 1490 before undergoing sea trials. It evidently needed several small boats to tow it in and out of Dinsdale Creek where it was laid up between Christmas and the Easter of 1491 before going into service.<sup>6</sup> Other great ships built there included the *Marie Gilford* (one of Henry VIII's ships in service in the 1520s), the *Anne Gallant*, and the *Mistris*.<sup>7</sup> In the 1590s a group of Rye merchants built the *Hercules* at Rye, at 150 tons burden the largest ship built there. It later saw service on the Cadiz expedition of 1596.<sup>8</sup>

Not surprisingly, from an early time there were plans for substantial fortifications to protect the Camber, leading to the construction in 1512–14 of 'the blockhouse' (which now forms

TABLE 1  
The Relative Wealth of Rye and the County Towns in the 1524–5 Subsidy

Town	Under								Total
	£2	£2	£3–5	£6–9	£10–19	£20–39	£40–99	£100+	
	<i>Numbers of taxpayers</i>								
Chichester <sup>1</sup>	114	105	46	22	25	11	6	1	332
Lewes	141	71	53	15	19	20	3	1	322
Rye <sup>2</sup>	—	—	3	5	25	20	16	7	76
	<i>Total assessed wealth (in £s)</i>								
Chichester	114	210	174	144	312	287	363	200	1,804
Lewes	141	142	219	83	208	475	120	100	1,488
Rye	—	—	15	36	285	462 <sup>3</sup>	887	1,080	2,765 <sup>4</sup>

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup>The figures for Chichester are based on the more complete returns of 1525.

<sup>2</sup>The Rye chamberlains' accounts for 1522/3 record a total of £7 15s. 8d. spent on a supplication to the King for remission of the loan money, which necessitated the Mayor riding up to Court in November 1522. When this failed Sir John Thompson was approached to sue further on the town's behalf at the following Easter. It was to no avail. The first instalment of the loan was paid on 18 May 1523 and the second part some two months later: RYE 60/5, ff. 119v.–122.

<sup>3</sup>The actual figure of £461 13s. 4d. has been rounded upwards for clarity of presentation.

<sup>4</sup>The actual figure of £2,764 13s. 4d. has been rounded up. Even this is substantially below the assessments of Rye Corporation of the wealth of its inhabitants; in the 1491/2 *cesse*, for example, the estimated wealth of those assessed was £5,303, and in that of 1595/6 it was £15,344: RYE 77/3; RYE 1/6, ff. 30v.–43.

*Sources:* The figures for Lewes and Chichester are taken from *The Lay Subsidy Rolls for the County of Sussex 1524–5*, ed. J. Cornwall (Suss. Rec. Soc. 56). The Rye figures are based on assessments for the 1523 loan. Evidence from counties for which loan and subsidy returns both survive indicates that numbers of the wealthier citizens had their assessments reduced for the latter, but not to the extent that the comparison between Rye and other Sussex towns would be seriously affected. See e.g. J. J. Goring, 'The General Proscription of 1522', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* 86, 681–705; A. C. Chibnall & A. V. Woodman, 'Subsidy Roll for the County of Buckingham, Anno 1524', *Buckinghamshire Rec. Soc.*, 13, 91–4. Rye as a Cinque Port was exempt from the actual subsidy, but those assessed at £5 and upwards paid at the rate of 2s. in the £, or, for assessments over £300 at 2s. 8d. The total amount collected at Rye was £287 11s. 10d. (RYE 81/1–2), more than four times the total assessment for Chichester, and over ten times what was collected there by way of anticipation (Suss. Rec. Soc. 56, pp. xxviii, xxxiv). For a fuller discussion of the wealth and relative standing of Tudor Rye, see my forthcoming University of Sussex, Centre for Continuing Education, Occasional Paper, *Tudor Rye 1485–1603, the Rise and Decline of a Cinque Port*.

the lower part of the central tower of Camber Castle), and finally to the completion of Camber Castle itself at a cost of some £15,760 between 1539 and 1543.<sup>9</sup> The ironwork for its windows, doorways, etc. was provided by William Gibbon of Rye, and one of the three commissioners entrusted with its construction was John Fletcher, Rye's most experienced sea captain and a leading member of the Corporation.<sup>10</sup> No doubt Rye and Winchelsea also provided most of the recruits for the labour force of some 1,272 men employed on its construction in the summer of 1540.<sup>11</sup> By the end of that year a garrison of some 25 men including the captain, Philip Chewte, were installed, a complement comparable in size to those at Portsmouth, Dover and the Downs.<sup>12</sup> As late as 1590 the castle's armoury of brass cannons, culverins and demiculverins equalled those at Dover and elsewhere along the south coast.<sup>13</sup>

Behind these fortifications lay two towns, Winchelsea, whose importance had waned with the silting up of its harbour early in the 16th century, and Rye, which only reached the height of its size and wealth in the middle years of the century, before it too fell into a sudden and irreversible decline. With a population variously assessed at some 2,468 persons in a government survey of 1565,<sup>14</sup> and over 5,000 persons plus an immigrant refugee population of 1,500 French and Flemings in 1573,<sup>15</sup> Rye was by far the largest town in Sussex and easily the wealthiest, as Table 1 shows. Even in decline, in 1580, Rye's 1,200 tons of shipping equalled half that of Hull, Bristol and Southampton and surpassed that of Exeter (or indeed of any other south coast port).<sup>16</sup>

This high level of wealth is reflected in the level of corporate activity indicated by the chamberlains' accounts, which, in the mid 16th century were running at a rate comparable to that of Exeter's, a city with an estimated population of around 7,000 in the 1520s.<sup>17</sup> From an average of less than £60 per year in the 1480s Rye's corporate income rose to around £400 in the early 1570s just prior to the sudden decline

in Rye's economic fortunes. The accounts further demonstrate the impact of the demands of war on the town's economy throughout the period, necessitating such emergency methods of taxation as cesses (i.e. assessments levied on the lands or goods of inhabitants) in 1491/2, 1523/4, 1543/4–1544/5, 1557/8, 1563 and 1595/6;<sup>18</sup> the sale of town and church plate in 1545/6; and a special cesse on aliens in 1542/3.<sup>19</sup>

The strain which wartime expenditure placed on Rye's economy can be seen in Table 2. At the height of the war with France in 1491–3 approximately a third of corporate expenditure was directed towards the war effort. The same was true during Henry VIII's campaigns of 1513–14 and 1522–3 and the situation was getting worse. The invasion scare of the early 1540s and Henry VIII's Boulogne expedition of 1544 drained the town of nearly 60 per cent of its corporate income in the years 1543–6. The situation slightly eased during Mary's war with France in which corporate expenditure rose to a staggering £605 5s. in 1557/8 compared to barely half that sum the previous year. The situation was little better during Elizabeth's disastrous intervention in the first of the French religious wars in 1562, and by the late 1580s with the economy in decline it was becoming increasingly difficult for Rye Corporation to raise the necessary sums to finance wartime levels of expenditure—a situation made doubly difficult by Elizabeth's unwillingness to grant a general licence for privateers, which severely hit town income.<sup>20</sup>

Added to the town's own financial burdens were the increasingly regular demands of the Crown for extra-parliamentary taxation during times of war, to which Rye could not claim exemption by virtue of its Cinque Port status. In the spring of 1514 a cesse of £24 was gathered for payment in lieu of ship service, but was re-delivered to the inhabitants when the King abandoned plans for a further summer campaign.<sup>21</sup> Rye's payment of £287 by way of a forced loan in 1523 came on top of moderately substantial corporate expenditure; and in 1542 and 1545

TABLE 2  
The Costs of War: Expenditure from Rye Chamberlains' Accounts

<i>Year</i>	<i>Town defences</i> £ s. d.	<i>Weapons</i> £ s. d.	<i>Total (town defences and weapons)</i> £ s. d.	<i>Ship service</i> £ s. d.	<i>Soldiers</i> £ s. d.	<i>Misc.</i> £ s. d.	<i>Total military expenditure</i> £ s. d.	<i>Total year's expenditure</i> £ s. d.
1489/90	12 13 10½	2 17 10	15 11 8½			3 1 9	18 13 5½	55 14 7½
1490/1	18 3 4½	7 5	18 10 9½			1 9 5	20 0 2½	69 2 6
1491/2	7 9 3	1 2	7 10 5	10 0		1 15 1	9 15 6	52 17 4½
1492/3		1 1 8	1 1 8	20 16 2½		6 3 9	28 1 7½	93 17 2
1512/13	17 13 10	6 5 3	23 19 1		7 16 3	5 14 8½	37 10 0½	99 5 5
1513/14	1 13 0	5 19 0	7 12 0	44 18 3		16 11 10	69 2 1	205 13 8
1514/15	2 14 4	3 8 0	6 2 4		13 4	2 4 7	9 0 3	104 5 0
1521/2	12 4 10	5 3 4	17 8 2	2 6 8	8 14 4	2 18 5	31 7 7	88 14 8
1522/3	27 8 9	11 0 9	38 9 6	4 0	1 4	9 3 6	47 18 4	124 6 1½
1523/4	11 7 1	15 4	12 2 5		2 12 8	2 2 9½	16 17 10½	99 16 2
1543/4	51 18 4	11 11 0	63 9 4	32 0 6½	25 3 3	7 3 9	127 16 10½	337 17 8
1544/5	217 14 1½	5 15 9½	223 9 11	6 19 5	2 11 0	17 6 0½	250 6 4½	316 18 5
1545/6	55 0 9	35 0 4½	90 1 1½			4 15 7	94 16 8½	203 18 7
1555/6	4 7 7½	3 0	4 10 7½	11 5 6		8 14 5¾	24 10 7¼	272 17 1
1556/7	87 15 11½	5 19 6½	93 15 6	29 5 2½	16 10 11 <sup>1</sup>	16 9 10	156 1 5½	307 14 9½
1557/8	170 12 11	34 11 7	205 4 6		13 0	137 3 3	343 0 9	605 5 0
1558/9	146 10 0½ <sup>2</sup>	5 8 4	151 18 4½			11 7 4	163 5 8½	297 11 0
1559/60	93 9 2½	12 19 9½	106 9 0			21 14 3½	128 3 3½	259 6 2
1562/3	72 13 10½	1 3 1	73 16 11½	1 9 4 <sup>3</sup>		11 10 10½	86 10 11	N/A
1563/4	91 6 7	20 11 3	111 17 10	2 0 2½ <sup>4</sup>		13 0 6	126 18 6½	276 5 2
1587/8	153 5 2	11 12 4	164 17 6	26 17 1		21 16 8	213 11 3	345 8 8 <sup>7</sup>
1588/9	2 1 7	7 16 0	9 17 7	38 17 6		4 8	48 19 9	357 12 3½ <sup>7</sup>
1589/90	1 4 1	15 5 6	16 9 7	30 13 1		31 5 0 <sup>5</sup>	78 7 8	280 16 10 <sup>7</sup>
1590/1	33 14 7	13 8 6	47 3 1			12 0 <sup>6</sup>	47 15 1	207 11 10 <sup>7</sup>
1591/2	4 8 0	12 10 10	16 18 10	11 12 1		9 5 10	37 16 9	243 0 5 <sup>7</sup>

*Notes*

(These figures relate only to known expenditure from the chamberlains' accounts. There may have been additional expenditure, as was the case with ship service in 1588 and again in 1596, most of the cost of which was levied by cesse and expended directly without passing through the chamberlains' accounts.)

<sup>1</sup>Conduct money, etc. for 80 pressed mariners.

<sup>2</sup>Includes building of new jetty accounting for over half this total.

<sup>3</sup>Arrears.

<sup>4</sup>Arrears.

<sup>5</sup>Includes £31 0s. 8d. paid to returning sick soldiers from 1589 expedition.

<sup>6</sup>Payment to sick soldiers.

<sup>7</sup>Land chamberlains' accounts only. No sea chamberlains' accounts have survived for the period 1587-96.

Source: RYE 60/3-9.

Rye's contributions of £170 10s. and £338 6s. to the forced loans and benevolences of those years merely added to the already substantial town exactions on inhabitants by way of *cesse* to finance the construction of the new town defences.<sup>22</sup> In October 1557, when Mary's government made further demands for a forced loan at a time of renewed expenditure on the town's fortifications, the Mayor and Jurats simply refused to allow its collection; the £40 which it cost the Corporation in Mayor Alexander Welles's expenses in the Fleet prison, to which he was committed for a week by the Privy Council, was no doubt seen as a small price to pay in escaping a far greater exaction. In fact 1557/8 marked the nadir of relations between Rye and the Queen's Council, with the enforced pressing of 80 mariners for the Queen's ships at Portsmouth coming on top of the service of two ships for *dolling* (see below) and substantial expenditure on the town's own defences, which led to the Mayor once again appearing before the Council, this time to answer them and sue them 'to preserve maryners from pesteryng according to our Charter'.<sup>23</sup> It was clearly to little avail. Under Elizabeth the pressing of mariners became a regular feature of government demands on the Cinque Ports.

### TOWN DEFENCES

Wartime expenditure in Rye can be broken down into two main elements. First there were the town defences, including such items as work on the town walls and ditch, the erection of temporary barriers and barricades, the setting of booms in the harbour and the placing and maintenance of ordnance and other weaponry. Secondly there was military service, which took the form of 'dolling', the traditional ship service of the Cinque Ports navy in time of war, and the provision on occasion of soldiers, which seems to have been confined to Henry VIII's reign, at least as far as town expenditure is concerned. Of these two elements, the cost of the town's own defences was by far the major part.

As Plate I shows, Rye was a natural defensive site, built on a hilltop peninsula with cliffs to the east, south and west. Only on the north side did its natural topography expose the town to attack, and here, where nature failed, man had made good its defensive perimeter with a high wall and wide ditch, breached only by the Landgate (NE.), the Strandgate (W.) for vehicular traffic, and the Postern Gate at the base of Conduit Hill for foot passengers, with a removable wooden bridge across the ditch.<sup>24</sup> Apart from a narrow isthmus between the Landgate and Playden Hill (NE.) the sea surrounded the town to a depth of 20–30 ft. at some tides, constituting a source of major concern as in 1528 it was reported that 'ships could lie at a stone cast from the town wall and the town would not be able to resist them'.<sup>25</sup> This danger was somewhat lessened by the inning of St. Mary's Marsh in 1554, when a bank was constructed running in a northerly direction from the Strand quay, but the sea broke through again in 1571. The remains of two Elizabethan ships discovered in 1964, 150 yd. east of the Tillingham, confirm that the area north of the town wall was still capable of harbouring ships of nearly 20 ft. draught at the end of the 16th century.<sup>26</sup> It was almost certainly as a result of this potential danger from the north that a secondary line of temporary stone-filled wooden groynes or jetties was constructed on the water's edge along the northern perimeter of the town ditch as part of the town's wartime defences from the 1520s onwards. A similar arrangement was used at Ostend during the Spanish siege of 1601–4.<sup>27</sup>

It was towards the maintenance and improvement of these various elements in Rye's defences that the bulk of corporate expenditure was directed in time of war, although it was only as the 16th century progressed that many of these refinements were added.

In 1489/90 the major expenditure was on scouring out the town ditch, at a cost of some £11 6s. 8½*d.* The following year saw a further £17 8s. 5½*d.* spent on repairs to the town walls, which were linked to the cliffs by means of tem-

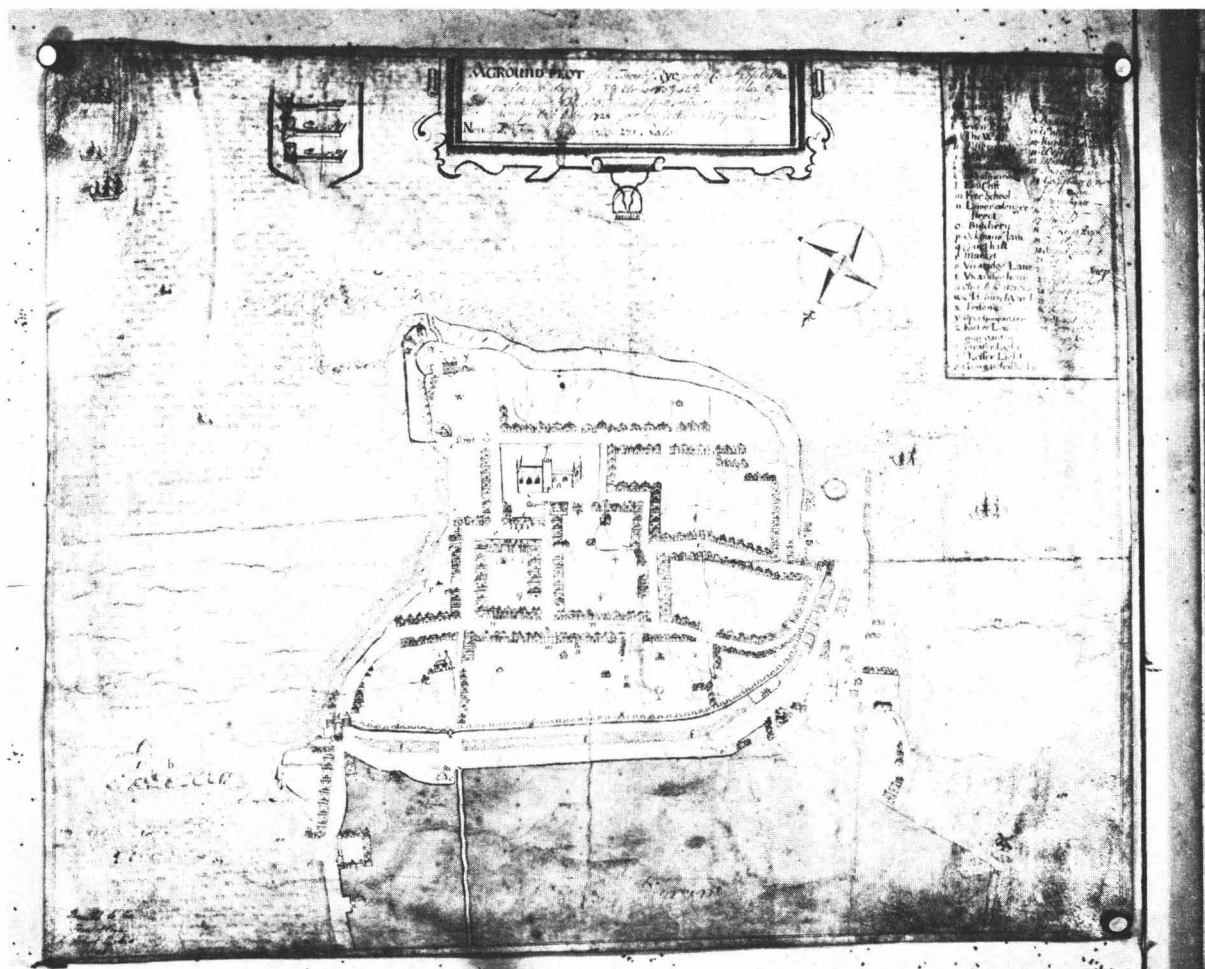


Plate I. Samuel Jeake's plan of Rye, 1666, copied 1728, showing extent of Tudor defences: E.S.R.O., RYE 132/15.

porary barricades of posts and rails surmounted by bundles of thorn. A similar arrangement operated at the end of the town ditch. Finally, in places where cliff erosion had provided possible avenues of attack, the cliffs were pared to render them more sheer. The quay at Strand was always a vulnerable point and it seems likely that the 'sege hous' which accounted for £5 5s. 5d. of expenditure in 1491/2 was an early bulwark with ordnance suitably placed to repel any attempted landing there.<sup>28</sup>

By the time of Henry VIII's first war with France in 1513 the town defences were evidently

in need of some minor repairs. Grass growing on top of Landgate had to be cleared and in places where the wall had fallen down into the town ditch it had to be repaired. Otherwise, apart from some minor work on the 'bulwerke' at Strand the only substantial expenditure was on the erection of groynes outside Landgate and Strandgate involving some 63 loads of 'rysse' together with small amounts of timber.<sup>29</sup> Similar preparations for the town's defence were made in 1522-4, the main cost again being a new groyne at Strand which utilized the remains of an old ship which was towed to the site and

broken up, and quantities of turf, the whole apparently surmounted by brambles and bundles of thorns staked down at its head to discourage any attackers. The bulwark at Strand was evidently a fenced enclosure probably for guns since doors were being made for it in the autumn of 1523 and there was a similarly paled enclosure for guns on the cliff.<sup>30</sup>

Compared to this the programme of fortifications of the early 1540s was on an altogether more ambitious scale. Undertaken under the direction of royal Commissioners, who visited Rye to inspect progress in the spring of 1545, the scale of expenditure for these works was the highest of the century, necessitating emergency measures to raise revenue, including the petitioning of the Privy Council for letters of authorization for a particularly severe cesser of 1*d.* in the pound per month on the assessed wealth of all those of English birth valued at over £5, or ½*d.* per month for those valued at less than £5. In each case aliens and denizens were to pay double. Even servants were to pay 1*d.* per month for every £1 annual wages, with female servants paying half. Other clauses taxed 'rippiers', fishing vessels and merchant ships.<sup>31</sup> By the spring of 1544 work was under way on pales and rails for the Gun Garden by Baddings Tower, on the bulwarks at Strand, and on the town wall, which was evidently being strengthened for the placing of ordnance. By 31 May nine masons and ten labourers were working on the scaffolding at the town wall, rising to 15 masons and 15 labourers in the week ending 21 June. The stone and mortar was brought across from materials left over from the newly completed Camber Castle, and included 120 cart loads of mortar, 60 of fine mortar, and 60 of stone, and at least a further 137 tons of assorted stone, mortar and bricks. The fine mortar alone came to over 660 bushels.<sup>32</sup>

The building campaign of 1545 was chiefly concerned with the erection of timber bulwarks filled with stone, running from Salcot (i.e. Playden—presumably the bottom of Playden Hill) to Budgwell and eventually to a point

beneath the shops at Strand. From the beginning of January a small but growing band of sawyers and carpenters were at work on Leasham Hill, just north-west of Rye, felling timber and making frames for 'the fortresse'. By 24 January the labour force had risen to 28, most of whom were helping set up frames against Mr. Byrchett's woodhouse. Between March and April some 14 men per week were digging down the cliff at the conduit head, while others set up the bulwark at Baddings (probably the Lower Gun Garden) and erected barriers at the top of the cliffs. By 18 April 47 men were employed, almost half of whom were working on the town wall and in the Gun Garden. The sense of urgency which such numbers indicate is borne out by various references to working through Sundays and at night unloading lighters carrying turf for the Gun Garden and elsewhere. Between June and September the main emphasis was on the rebuilding of the town wall east of Landgate, for which over 200 tons of dressed stone was brought in from Winchelsea and Camber Castle, at least 150 tons of it from the remains of St. Giles's church, Winchelsea, as well as a further 237 cartloads of earth. At the height of building works the new wall accounted for 14 masons and 16 labourers together with, during July, at least one group of French prisoners for whom bread and beer were provided. Other groups of French prisoners were set to work in the Gun Garden 'to make the lower fortress', presumably to stop anyone climbing up the cliff; in August they were working at Landgate and Baddings and filling the newly erected groyne at Strand with stones. This was evidently part of the new 'fortresse' there which involved pulling down 'the old shops' to make room for a railed way from Strandgate. By early autumn the work was largely complete at a cost of over £200.<sup>33</sup>

Work on the town defences in 1558/9 largely consisted of repairs and rebuilding. In 1558 there was work on a new jetty at Budgwell and on arming it with thorn; and on the jetty against the Almshouse which had been built since the previous campaign outside the Land-

gate on the west side of the highway, which itself seems to have been fenced in from that point to Landgate presumably to make a narrow and easily defensible passage into the town. Other major items of expenditure included the digging out of the town ditch between January and March 1559, which at its height was employing 51 men; the construction and erection of new portcullises for both Landgate and Strandgate between February and April; and yet more repairs to the town wall involving 18 masons and 14 labourers during July.<sup>34</sup>

The defences between the Almshouse and Landgate seem to have been only temporary, since in 1562 the accounts record the new erection of planks between the Almshouse and Budgwell and for fencing the way.<sup>35</sup> Otherwise the work that year seems to have been confined to routine repairs. The preparations against the Armada in the first six months of 1588 were on a rather larger scale, presumably because after more than 20 years' disuse the town defences were somewhat decayed. Something over 240 tons of timber was felled and utilized in repairs to the platform in the Gun Garden and the bulwark at the Strand. The town ditch was cleaned out and a bridge over it at the Postern Gate was taken up and rebuilt. In April 1588 bricks were bought to make the arches of the gunholes in Landgate and in May there was work to 'hedge in the flanker' there (i.e. to protect a flanking gun). Finally there was some activity in repairing the conduit and making a new grate for it, and stopping up some of the waterways in the town wall, such repairs to the water supply being another recurring feature of wartime expenditure.<sup>36</sup>

The only complete inventory of the town's ordnance is for 1569 and there are no surviving muster returns until 1598. Until the late Elizabethan period, therefore, any information on the town's weaponry has to be based on passing references (usually to repairs and the making of gunstocks and carriages, etc.) in the chamberlains' accounts. Nevertheless it is still possible to gain a reasonably clear impression of the nature

and disposition of the town's ordnance in the earlier period.

In the late 15th century, when large guns were only just beginning to be deployed on a wide scale, Rye seems to have possessed at least three and possibly four pieces of ordnance: a great serpentine, which may or may not be identical with the 'great gun' which was had from Calais and for which new wheels were being made in early 1491; and two more guns which were bought for the town from Adam Oxenbridge for 21s. 8d. in 1493.<sup>37</sup> In 1513 the town bought two more serpentines, each with three chambers and forelocks, at a cost of £3 6s. 8d., to add to an arsenal of at least four other guns which seem to have been stored in Baddings Tower. In 1514 there is reference to two more guns borrowed 'of Metfordes' and to ironwork for two sling guns. Eighty-one lb. of lead were bought for 4s. 8d. for pellets which were evidently used since there was a further purchase of lead for pellets (2s. 6d.) and John Bryket was paid 3s. 6d. 'for 26 pellettes shotyng for gonnes and for his other attendance arredying the gonnes and layinge of them'. Half a barrel of gunpowder had been bought (probably in London) for £3 6s. 8d., but more was provided for the town by the King together with bows and arrows which had to be fetched from London. Finally, at the end of the war in 1515, the town bought an additional 'gret gonne' with one chamber from John Fletcher and his company, probably captured from a French prize, for £3 6s. 8d. By the end of Henry VIII's first war with France, Rye must have been able to dispose around ten or eleven guns on the town's defences.<sup>38</sup>

When war broke out again at the end of 1521 the town was therefore rather better prepared than hitherto, though the Corporation took the opportunity of 'setting Mr. Wymond to the blockhouse when he went unto the Kinges grace to sue for the same to be fynished'.<sup>39</sup> The following spring he was sent to the Council again with an urgent request 'for ordenaunce of the towre at Kevyle'. The accounts are somewhat



more informative at this point as to the disposition of the ordnance. There was apparently a paled gun enclosure on the cliff and other guns were coped in with board on the bulwark at Strand. At the end of 1523 two gunstocks were made for the great guns at Strandgate and there are the usual references to lead and iron pellets and the buying of gunpowder including 18 lb. 'bought of a Docheman'. The August 1523 payments of quarterly wages to town officers included for the first time reference to a gunner, Symon Belingere, who received 6s. 8d.; and the same summer the town bought a further two and a half slings of iron with four chambers from John Fleccher, Adryan Blakeherd and James Poope, also no doubt from captured prizes, for a further £8.<sup>40</sup>

By early 1544 the Gun Garden was nearing completion and was presumably the site of 'the great brasen piece' which we are told was 'at Baddings'. Two and a half cwt. of gunpowder was bought at this time from the King's powder maker in London for £6 13s. 4d. together with ten 'shooting gloves'. In June there is mention of 'iron pieces' there. The following April, James Mercer was sent to the Council to ask for more ordnance which seems to have arrived late in May. It too was taken up to the Gun Garden. Other pieces were placed on the fortress at Strand and 'in Mr. Easton's garden' which backed on to the town wall. On 28 June a payment is recorded for fetching gunpowder out of the Camber from the Vice-Admiral. A month later, on 18 July 1545, the French fleet was off Brighton. On 21 July the Rye chamberlains' accounts record provision of a barrel of beer for the soldiers 'that came owte of the contrey when the Galles and Franche Shippes were before thys Towne'. On 22 July a French force landed at Seaford. Later, Rye had to reimburse the Captain of Camber Castle for the loss of three bows 'att the tyme of the contrey commyng in for the defence of our enmyes'. Evidently the town was in need of more gunpowder following this incident, since the following April they bought a further 8 cwt. from London at a cost of

£20 10s. 8d., at the same time buying new gun chambers there.<sup>41</sup>

The succeeding years record the acquisition of more bows, arrows and morris pikes, the use of arquebuses, and the taking over of the north aisle of the chancel as a munitions store.<sup>42</sup> In 1557, at the start of Mary's war with France, the town apparently also owned seven shirts of mail which were in need of cleaning. One of the brass pieces was again set up in the Gun Garden and there is reference to a demi-cannon and another piece of ordnance at Landgate. In September a further 150 lb. of gunpowder was bought together with 13 shot 'of the great ordnance'. In late January 1558 five men were employed stocking the guns and making hail shot; and early in February the gunner was paid for placing the ordnance about the town. There was evidently further fear of the possibility of invasion since 12 dozen pikes were bought between March and July<sup>43</sup> together with gunpowder, shot and two iron cannons to shoot hail shot on 22 July at a cost of £5 15s. 10d. There was also expenditure on new ladles, rammers and tampkins for the guns. Gregory Sheppard's quarterly wages as gunner had risen to 25s. in 1557/8 compared to only 6s. 8d. in 1546, indicating the effects of inflation in the middle years of the century.<sup>44</sup>

The accounts for Elizabeth's first war with France in 1562/3 reveal little of additional note apart from the acquisition of two shot for the 'great ordnance' in December 1563 weighing 31 lb. each, and the acquisition of some dozen or so sets of ladles and rammers indicating a substantial arsenal of heavy weaponry,<sup>45</sup> a fact borne out by the indenture between the town and the Office of Ordnance for the ordnance and shot remaining in the town on 28 March 1569, the contents of which are set out in Table 3.

When the next invasion scare came, in 1588, Rye was well provided for in terms of heavy artillery quite apart from the protection afforded by Camber Castle. Preparations were therefore largely confined to work on the platform in the Gun Garden and on placing the ordnance there, at the Landgate and at Strand. By now, Rye was

TABLE 3  
Ordnance at Rye 28 March 1569

<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Brass</i>	<i>Cast iron</i>	<i>Shot</i>	<i>Newly received shot</i>	<i>Newly received carriages</i>
Cannons	1		37		1 <sup>1</sup>
Culverins	2		40	40	2
Sacres	7	4	75	300	11
Mynions	2 <sup>2</sup>		15	100	2
Faucons	2	2	26	200	4
Portepieces <sup>3</sup>		3			
Fowlers <sup>4</sup>		4			
Arquebuses		39			
Morris pikes		30			
Fauconet shot			6		
Stone shot			65		
Serpentine powder		1 last			

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup>for a demi-cannon.

<sup>2</sup>includes a French mynion captured by Rye ships.

<sup>3</sup>with 2 chambers each.

<sup>4</sup>with 7 chambers.

Source: RYE 45/20.

employing a gunner on a permanent basis, not merely in time of war, at a cost of 33s. 4d. a quarter following further inflation. There was also now a proper gunhouse with racks for the town's pikes and bills, although repeated references to the drying-out of the powder periodically suggests that conditions were not perfect.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the heavy ordnance the town was expected to provide a range of light weapons for the selected and untrained bands. In June 1574 the Commissioners to view the munitions ordered Rye to obtain more gun carriages, 100 new pikes, 50 calivers and substantial additional quantities of powder.<sup>47</sup> From 1577 annual musters within the Cinque Ports were being enforced, those selected being trained in caliver shot for four days both at Easter and in Whitsun week. The chamberlains' accounts indicate annual repairs to the butts each April or May, and there are considerable indications in the correspondence between Rye and the Lieutenant of Dover Castle that the Privy Council was determined to improve the preparedness of the Ports in view of the possibility of invasion. In 1589 Rye was ordered to increase the number of muskets in the town (it had only 29) and to replace the older

calivers with them. When this failed, the Ports were ordered in 1590 to see that each Jurat supplied one or more muskets according to his ability at his own charge. Detailed rolls of the selected and untrained bands had to be submitted annually to the Lord Warden in order that these measures could be enforced. The earliest detailed return to have survived is the draft return of 1597/8 listing male inhabitants aged between 16 and 60 by ward together with their weapons. The results are set out in Table 4. The most noticeable feature of this return is the almost total phasing out of bows and arrows and their substitution by firearms as the principal weapon of foot soldiers in the later 16th century.<sup>48</sup> The town had also more than tripled its supply of muskets compared with nine years earlier. The return also reflects the social divisions within the town. The wealthier wards, Middlestreet and Market, have virtually no bills or pikes. The poorer wards, Watchbell and Baddings, have very few muskets.

#### MILITARY SERVICE

The second major aspect of defensive expenditure was military service, which itself can be

broken down into two elements: the provision of soldiers and naval service. The demand for soldiers to serve under the Lord Warden was a recurrent feature of each of Henry VIII's French campaigns. In 1513 Rye was ordered to supply six soldiers, two of whom were provided by its limb, Tenterden, although Rye seems to have paid all the charges and the Mayor of Rye rode with them to Dover Castle to present them to the Lord Warden there. At least five of them were bowmen. Each had a sword and harness (i.e. a leather jerkin for protection) and there is also mention of two bills and one poleaxe.<sup>49</sup>

In 1522 eight men were demanded for service at Calais. Among those who went were Robert Wymond, a future Jurat (who was on horseback) and Thomas Johnson, a freeman, but they may well have been part of the Lord Warden's personal entourage of 22 men from the Ports, for which special instructions were sent out in May.<sup>50</sup> In 1524 a further demand was made, this time for four men: Thomas Pynder and Richard Rucke, billmen, and Robert Hodson and Stephyn Gateworth, archers. Rucke was a future Mayor of Rye, so again the contingent was hardly made up of the common soldiery. Nevertheless there was growing irritation at the regularity of these demands, reflected in the comment in the chamberlains' accounts that this was 'contrary the great charter of the ports'. Two years later the then Mayor, Mr. Sutton, is recorded as having been imprisoned for not having prepared men in harness for service over the seas.<sup>51</sup>

Henry VIII's Boulogne campaign in the summer of 1544 was the last such enterprise of his reign. On this occasion, Rye had to supply 20 men. Their weapons included 20 swords, 20 daggers, 14 bows and sheafs of arrows, and 9 bills. Each man was fitted out with new hose, shoes, a white fustian doublet lined with canvas, a leather jerkin and a sword girdle. Forty yd. of red, blue and yellow cadiz cloth (the colours of the Cinque Ports coat of arms) and ten dozen silken arming pontes were brought from London and a quarter of an ell of red cloth was bought to set on their bills. The contingent again included

Robert Wymond and they were each given 2s. conduct money to Dover.<sup>52</sup>

The main Cinque Ports contribution to military service in time of war was, however, ship provision. It was in return for such service that the Confederation enjoyed its coveted liberties and privileges as enshrined in the General Charter to the Cinque Ports, regranted by successive monarchs at the beginning of their reigns. Traditionally, by the end of the 15th century, this service had come to mean the provision of a variable number of ships, in theory 57, upon one month's notice, for 15 days' service when the monarch went to war. After that time, in theory at least, the King had to pay for any additional days' wages for the crew and hire charges and provisioning of the ships. Since the 14th century, England's traditional enemy had been France, so in practice this had come to mean the transportation of the King's army across the seas to Calais, England's last continental possession, from where they would sally forth in a brief summer campaign in northern France. Under the Tudors 'the King's Voyage' or 'dolling', as ship service was known within the Cinque Ports, was also successfully demanded on other, more ceremonial occasions, such as the transporting of the French Queen, together with the Princess Mary, to France in the autumn of 1514, or the conveying of King Philip overseas in 1556.<sup>53</sup> Sometimes this service seems to have been paid for by the Crown and there are no corresponding entries for expenditure in the Rye accounts, as for example for the transporting of the Emperor Charles V to England in 1524, or the transporting of the Duc d'Anjou and his party (suitor for Elizabeth's hand in marriage) in 1581.<sup>54</sup>

According to Oppenheim, ship service was demanded of the Cinque Ports in 1491, 1513, 1531, 1544, and 1556, and for the last time in 1562.<sup>55</sup> The Rye chamberlains' accounts record payments for ship service in the summers of 1492, 1514, and 1544, the autumn of 1556, and the spring of 1557, and minor sums relating to the provision of ships in 1562. There are further small sums for the sending of two ships to Calais and

TABLE 4  
Private Individuals and their Weapons from the 1597/8 Muster Rolls

<i>Ward</i>	<i>Weapons</i>								<i>Armour</i>					
	<i>Bill</i>	<i>Sword</i>	<i>Dagger</i>	<i>Pike</i>	<i>Halberd</i>	<i>Bow and arrows</i>	<i>Musket</i>	<i>Caliver</i>	<i>Spanish murrion</i>	<i>Corselet</i>	<i>Skull</i>	<i>Cap</i>	<i>Headpiece</i>	<i>Cuirass</i>
Landgate	17	6	4	13	3	—	28	11	7	8	14	14	2	2
Strandgate	7	3	3	7	3	—	14	16	4 <sup>1</sup>	3	1	1	—	2
Middlestreet	2	1	1	8	—	—	30	25	1	8	2	—	—	4
Market	4	3	3	5	4	—	11	17	3 <sup>1</sup>	8	4	2	—	4
Baddings	7	2	2	10	2	1	7	15	6 <sup>1</sup>	1	4	—	1	—
Watchbell	25	1	1	23	4	—	7	16	11	—	24	—	—	1
Total	62	16	14	66	16	1	97	100	32	28	49	17	3	13

*Note*

<sup>1</sup>includes one murrion (i.e. not Spanish).

*Source:* RYE 85/2.

one to Southampton in 1522 in connection with the visit to England of the Emperor Charles V, and again in 1545.<sup>56</sup> In 1492 the cost to the town seems to have been approximately £20 for providing five ships.<sup>57</sup> By 1514 expenditure had risen to just under £45 for the provision of seven ships to transport the King, though this seems to have included the ship service of the other Sussex Ports since Rye's income that year included £13 6s. 8d. from Hastings and Winchelsea towards the charges of transporting the King, together with £10 from Rye's limb, Tenterden.<sup>58</sup>

The next major demand for wartime service was in 1544 when three ships were sent to Dover for dolling at a cost of just over £32 including the wages of the crews, provision of coats, victuals, hire of the ships, and the charges of one of the Jurats, Mr. Wymond, riding to Dover 'to enter the ships that went a dollyng and for presentment of our Lord Warden's crew of men which he had owte of this towne'. Master and mate were paid at the rate of 6d. a day, ordinary seamen 3d. and the ship's boy 1½d.<sup>59</sup> The following year, in July 1545, a further two ships were sent to join the Lord Admiral 'in the West parts' and in September two more ships are recorded as having been sent bearing letters to the King's fleet, presumably in connection with the activities of the French fleet along the Sussex coast that year.<sup>60</sup> There are no references to the payment of wages for any of these ships so it may be that they were hired. Seven Rye ships appear in the Navy lists that August.<sup>61</sup>

In the spring of 1556 two Rye fishing boats were appointed by the Council to keep watch on the French coast. In April John Foster, master of a hoy, was paid 51s. 8d. for the hire of his ship and the wages of himself, five men and a boy, possibly in connection with the Council's request. The town provided the victuals: punchions of ship's biscuit, 661 lb. of beef, and 31s. worth of salt fish. In September came the demand for the full ship service. Rye sent two ships, the Savyor (50 tons) and the James (20 tons). Detailed accounts for their service survive, showing that the Savyor had a crew of 18, including its master, Allyn Bennett, who received

10s. for two weeks; a mate (5s.); a boatswain and a purser (5s. 4d. each); a master gunner (5s. 8d.); a trumpeter (3s. 4d.); one mariner who received 3s. 8d. and a further nine who were paid 3s. 4d. each; and two boys who received 3s. 4d. between them. The ship itself cost 65s. to hire and was victualled with five barrels of beer, one barrel of herrings, and 18 dozen 1d. loaves of bread, together with some butter, vinegar, and a dozen candles. The James which was hired for two weeks and three and a half days, carried a crew of 14, including its master, James Pottyn, a mate, a master gunner, 11 mariners, and a boy.<sup>62</sup> The total cost of both ships to the town was just under £30.

Under Elizabeth, ship service was first demanded in 1562 for the ill-fated Le Havre expedition. It was not needed again until the war with Spain and the Armada scare of the summer of 1588. As preparations began to be made for naval defences in September 1587, the Council demanded 12 ships from the Cinque Ports. By the following April this had been reduced to five, to serve for two months from 25 April, of which Rye was to provide one ship of 60 tons. The detailed accounts for the setting forth of this ship, the William, have survived in the Rye Corporation records and show that the total cost to the town was £286 7s. 2d., of which over £95 was still owing for various supplies the following January. Of the receipts, £119 came from Tenterden, but only £20 from the chamberlains' accounts which on this occasion are no guide to the scale of expenditure involved.<sup>63</sup>

The William was evidently well stocked with ordnance on this voyage since in addition to what it already carried the town supplied two brass pieces, two fowlers, 5 cwt. powder, 1 cwt. match, 15 muskets and 15 calivers from the town's store. Since the ship was hired from a French privateer, it must have been very well armed indeed.<sup>64</sup> It carried a crew of 59, including the master, William Coxson, a gunner and his mate, and Mathew Flory the French surgeon, a member of the 1,500-strong French protestant community in Rye since 1572.<sup>65</sup>

By the end of July the danger was past; the

Armada had been broken up by fire-ships from Dover and was being blown to its destruction by gales in the North Sea. In this last engagement 30 ships from the Cinque Ports had taken part at one day's notice, but there is no record of how many came from Rye.<sup>66</sup> In September, with the imminent danger over, but with fears of a possible further attempt the following year, the Cinque Ports were again ordered by the Council to supply ships, this time to the number of 13. Initially Rye was supposed to supply three ships, Dover five, Sandwich four and Faversham one. In the final proposal, however, Rye had to supply only two ships, the *Blessing of God* (100 tons) and the *Diamond* (20 tons), carrying a total of 95 men at an estimated cost of £126 13s. 4d. per month.<sup>67</sup> This service, as it happened, seems not to have been needed and the next major call upon the Cinque Ports for ship service was for the Cadiz expedition in 1596.

In August 1595 came the demand for five ships from the Cinque Ports. Initially the Western Ports (New and Old Romney, Lydd, Rye, Winchelsea, Hastings, and their members) were to have provided two ships, but this was later reduced to one ship and a hoy, which was hired in London. The ship chosen to serve by the Western Ports was the *Hercules* of Rye (150 tons). The Mayor of Rye, Thomas Hamon, together with two Rye Jurats, was appointed to make the necessary arrangements following an assembly of representatives of the Ports at Rye on 2 February 1596. The total cost of the expedition, allowing for the voyage lasting five months, was £1,600, of which Rye was assessed to pay £250.<sup>68</sup> Again the Rye chamberlains' accounts are silent on the matter but the assembly books record the levying of a special *cesse* of 4d. in the pound on lands and tenements or goods and chattels to raise an estimated £200 towards the costs of setting forth the ship and hoy.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to the 16 tons of ordnance already carried by the *Hercules*, Rye Corporation sold the Western Ports a further four brass pieces for £30 each, making £120 in all, together with 20 muskets and an unspecified number of

pikes. The hoy (the *Daisy*) carried two demiculverins and ten sacres weighing 14 tons at a cost of £119, 12 muskets and 12 short pikes. She also carried a ton of shot for the sacres and demiculverins (£10) and 2,000 lb. weight of gunpowder (£100).<sup>70</sup> The *Hercules* carried a total crew of 50 including the captain, master, pilot, a master gunner, two gunner's mates and four quarter gunners, a trumpeter, a surgeon, a steward and a cook. The *Daisy* had a total complement of 27 including the master. They were all paid according to the current rates of pay in the Queen's ships.<sup>71</sup>

The ships were evidently well victualled. The *Hercules* carried 8,000 lb. beef, 3½ tons bread, 625 lb. cheese, 625 lb. stockfish, 375 lb. linge and 28½ tons beer, equal to a daily consumption of over 1 lb. beef, 1 lb. bread, 1½ oz. cheese, 1½ oz. stockfish, just under 1 oz. linge and just over 7½ pints beer per day.<sup>72</sup> The ships sailed early in April 1596. By the end of August they were back in port at the end of one of the most spectacular raids of the Elizabethan period, having ended Philip's hopes of organizing any further invasion attempts. Only one man appears to have been hurt, James Potten of Rye, who was allowed £5 for having been 'maimed' in the expedition.

Although Rye had to contribute an estimated £250 to the expedition, more than any other of the Western Ports apart from her limb Tenterden, the town itself clearly did quite well out of the affair. In the first place the *Hercules* was a Rye ship, hired from Rye owners, and, as its crew list shows, it was entirely crewed by Rye seamen. The ship was almost certainly victualled in Rye and on its return its brass ordnance was sold to Thomas Fisher of Rye, together with the new carriages made for them at the Ports' expense, for £110 (i.e. for £10 less than they had been bought by the Ports without any carriages). The remaining powder was sold for £83 6s. 8d. and a number of other items were landed, presumably for sale, at Hastings. Francis Bolton, Town Clerk of Rye, bought the remaining items in the ship and hoy belonging to the Ports for

£30. John Mynge, a Jurat of New Romney and one of the three Treasurers appointed by the Brotherhood to oversee the accounts for the voyage, evidently regarded these aspects of the affair as highly suspicious, though it may just have been sour grapes on his part.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, even allowing for the opportunities for private gain which the provisioning of such a ship afforded to a few wealthy individuals, the burden on the Corporation was substantial. Ship service under Elizabeth had become considerably more expensive both proportionately to income and in absolute terms than at any time during the Tudor period. The ships being demanded were far bigger and the length of service required was considerably longer than the traditional 15 days of Henry VIII's reign. But of course the main reason for this was that the nature of the enemy had changed. Warfare was no longer a matter of a brief summer campaign in France. Instead it had become an infinitely more expensive naval operation against seemingly the mightiest nation in Europe, Philip II's Spain. This change in the nature of late 16th-century warfare had a particularly severe impact on the Cinque Ports, whose strategic role was largely dependent upon the traditional rivalry between England and France. Their position was further weakened by the growing reluctance of the Elizabethan government to sanction licensed privateering which had long been a source of considerable profit to the Ports in time of war.

#### THE PROCEEDS OF WAR: PRIVATEERING

The extent to which Rye Corporation was able to offset wartime expenditure against the proceeds of wartime privateering ventures can be seen in Table 5. In 1492/3 the value of goods seized equalled half the costs of the ship service of that year. In 1513/14 receipts from 'head money' (a tax payable to the town for each prisoner captured and at this time set at 4s.) more than equalled the total of corporate ex-

penditure that year on wartime activities and was over a third of total corporate income for the year. In the early 1520s during Henry VIII's second war with France, income from head money and goods seized from prizes again equalled military expenditure by the town. In the 1540s the percentage of expenditure which could be offset against the profits of war fell to about 50 per cent but at a total of nearly £250 still represented around 30 per cent of total corporate income. Most spectacularly of all the proceeds of 1557/8 almost doubled corporate income that year, pushing it for the only time in the 16th century to over £600.

The disappearance of head money and of sales of goods taken from prizes after 1563 marks a deliberate change of policy by the Elizabethan government. In former times it had become usual for governments to issue a general licence to set forth ships against enemy nations and their aiders and abettors in time of war, at their owners' expense but with the right to dispose of all the profits without interference by the Lord Admiral or Lord Warden. Sometimes these licences entailed putting up bonds, often locally in the home port, not to stay ships in league or amity with the English Crown. This seems to have been the case in Henry VII's reign when bonds of ships' masters, to keep the peace against the King's subjects and allies and all others having his safe conduct, have survived written into the back of one of the Rye chamberlains' accounts volumes for 1487 (1), 1491 (3), April 1495 (11), and 1 July 1495 (9).<sup>74</sup>

Head money itself, according to a letter from the Privy Council to Rye, dated 11 July 1545, was an 'ancyent custome paid to the Townes and by the inhabitantes off the same employed aswelle for mayntenance off the prysons as otherwyse for defence off the Townes agaynst thenymys' and 'ys alwayes paid aswelle on the Frenche syde as on thyssyde and runnethe uppon the charge off the prysoners and nott uppon the takers'.<sup>75</sup> It was therefore additional to the other charges levied on prisoners by their captors for their ransoms and for their board

TABLE 5  
The Proceeds of War: Income from Rye Chamberlains' Accounts

Year	Number of prisoners	Head money £ s. d.	Goods seized £ s. d.	Total income £ s. d.
1490/1		1 16 8		1 16 8
1492/3			10 9 0	10 9 0
1512/13		16 0		16 0
1513/14	c. 370	74 11 5		74 11 5
1514/15	46	9 12 10		9 12 10
1521/2	6 <sup>1</sup>	1 6 0	3 3 4	4 9 4
1522/3	179	35 16 10	1 13 4	37 10 2
1524/5	104	20 16 10	24 7 4	45 4 2
1525/6			8 14 0 <sup>2</sup>	8 14 0
1543/4	c. 400	97 10 8	31 19 6 <sup>3</sup>	129 10 2
1544/5	c. 283	77 5 8		77 5 8
1545/6	c. 137	33 14 8		33 14 8
1549/50	226	56 9 4		56 9 4
1556/7	78	28 8 2		28 8 2
1557/8	465	145 14 4	111 19 4 <sup>4</sup>	257 13 8
1558/9	125	38 9 8		38 9 8
1559/60	6	1 18 0		1 18 0
1562/3	c. 38	11 8 0		11 8 0
1563/4	161 <sup>5</sup>	48 1 0		48 1 0

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup>French prisoners brought in by a Dutch man-of-war.

<sup>2</sup>Arrears of goods seized in previous year.

<sup>3</sup>Proceeds of a French fishing vessel taken in the haven.

<sup>4</sup>Includes 'wines etc seized from our men of war', £63 15s.; madder seized, £34 0s. 4d.; and other minor items.

<sup>5</sup>Includes one group 'which lay long and in the end were bought for the number of 12 men and so agreed by Mr Mayor and his brethren'.

Source: RYE 60/3-9.

and lodging whilst in captivity.<sup>76</sup> The money seems to have been collected from the prisoners at the time of their ransoms and paid by their captors to the Corporation as for example in this typical entry for 1557: 'Receyved the viith daye of Septembre of John Cheston for viij prisoners of Pollett taken by hym viij crownes Ls viijd.'<sup>77</sup> Throughout the period payment seems to have been fixed at one French crown, which rose in value from 4s. in the early 16th century to 6s. 4d. in 1557 as a result of the debasement of the English coinage.

The general licence to privateers was obviously of great financial benefit to the Ports in time of war and came to be regarded as almost a traditional right. When in May 1558 the licence was suspended and all privateers were ordered to return to their home ports within the month on

pain of imprisonment and forfeiture of their ships, because so many mariners had gone that not enough were left adequately to man the Queen's own ships, Rye reacted speedily. In June they sent Mr. George Reynoldes, the previous Mayor, and Robert Jackson, the Town Clerk, to the Lord Warden at Dover and thence to the Lord Admiral of England 'to knowe his pleasure for the licence for the men of warre to go to the seas'.<sup>78</sup>

Privateering expeditions were undertaken by many of the leading captains in Rye. From 1513 John Fletcher's name occurs most frequently in this connection until his death in 1546. In 1545/6 eight captains are listed as bringing in prisoners: Thomas Fletcher, Davy Corke, John Bredes, Robert Maycott, John Barley, Edward Legat, John Stronge and Robert



Skinner. In 1549/50, of the 226 French prisoners taken that year, 79 were assigned to Richard Fletcher, 62 to Davy Corke, 28 to Thomas Dugard, 10 to John Huntrey, 9 to John Yonge, 8 to Andrew Church, 7 each to James Johnson, Robert Bolle and Nicholas Raynold, 5 to Walter Elmer and 4 to Nicholas Love. In 1557/8 a total of 32 captains are listed as having taken a total of 465 French prisoners. Several of these masters were amongst the town's governing elite. John Fletcher, his sons Thomas and Richard Fletcher, John Bredes and John Yonge all served as Mayors of Rye, and several of the remainder were Jurats or holders of other town offices. Occasional references to privateers from neighbouring ports, such as Hastings and Lydd in 1558/9, indicate that such activity was common amongst the captains of the Kent and Sussex ports.<sup>79</sup>

The majority of the French prisoners whose origins are given in the accounts came from Dieppe and neighbouring ports on the Nor-

mandy coast. Others came from as far afield as Arromanches and Quilleboeuf at the mouth of the Seine and Boulogne in the north, indicating a wide theatre of operations for ships of both nations in the channel; the numbers of prisoners from each port are set out in Table 6.

Many of these prisoners provided valuable information to their captors, as for example in March 1523 when prisoners of Dieppe, Tréport and Seinehead confirmed the rumours that there were 24 French ships ready to go to Scotland and laden with ordnance. Some prisoners even seem to have volunteered information in return for their release, as with John Feu of Normandy who had been captured several times by John Fletcher and was allowed to return to France on pledges for his ransom and on his promise to gather what information he could on the movements of the French navy.<sup>80</sup> The Rye accounts for 1513/14 provide evidence of regular examinations of prisoners by the Mayor and Jurats throughout the war and on one occasion

TABLE 6  
Origins of French Prisoners from Rye Chamberlains' Accounts 1544-63

<i>Port of origin</i>	<i>Number of prisoners</i>					
	<i>1544/5</i>	<i>1545/6</i>	<i>1556/7</i>	<i>1557/8</i>	<i>1558/9</i>	<i>1563/4</i>
Pollett	23	12		16	19	6
Dieppe	12	4			9	
Honfleur	16					
St. Valerie		6		8		
Ault		6			12	
Arot (Arromanches)			22			
Rouen				18		
Le Tréport				6		21
Kewld (Cayeux)				4		12
Boulogne				1		
Veules					16	
Port-en-bessin					12	
Abbeville					9	15
Lingerfilde (Longueville)					8	12
Barke (Berck)					8	8
Quilleboeuf					4	
Le Portel						20
Breufille (Bacqueville?)						9
Gaggès (Grèges)						6

Source: RYE 60/6-7.

the taking of some of them to Dover and then to the Council in London, a pattern followed on other occasions.<sup>81</sup>

Such occurrences were not, of course, entirely one-sided. In August 1522, for example, it was reported that 'the Galleon' of Dieppe had come home from the north, having sold divers prisoners in England. The following year a group of Rye seamen lately returned from captivity in France confirmed the reports of French prisoners concerning the 24 ships bound for Scotland.<sup>82</sup> The Rye chamberlains' accounts are inevitably reticent about Rye losses since these would not normally directly affect the Corporation. But there are a few entries. In 1491 some Scots took a crayer from the harbour. In 1513/14 a young man who had helped some English prisoners escape was sent to the Council for a reward. The same year the Corporation paid out £5 for losses incurred by the loss of the *Mary Hankyng*.<sup>83</sup> In June 1564 four dozen *ld.* loaves were bought for 'the botes when they went forth to rescue the fishermen' and there are other payments for riding to Court to inform the Council and for beer for the ships that went forth to rescue them.<sup>84</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The evidence of the Rye Corporation records conclusively demonstrates the importance of the role played by south coast towns in the nation's defences in the 16th century. In particular two aspects of this role indicate the need for at least a partial revision to what has become the generally accepted view of the development of England's defences in the Tudor period. Firstly, it is clear that the provision of

ships for the traditional Cinque Ports service in time of war formed only a very small part of the wartime expenditure of towns such as Rye. By far the bulk of corporate activity was directed towards the cost of maintaining the town's physical defences and the provision of ordnance. It was, in fact, only in the 1580s and 1590s, as a result of the war with Spain, that the Cinque Ports and other south coast towns were called upon to make major financial contributions towards ship provision; this is an important point since it was also at this time that Elizabeth's government was putting increased pressure on the Cinque Ports to become more fully integrated into the shire defences. Secondly, what emerges with regard to Channel warfare during the period of the French Wars is that a major part of that warfare was conducted by considerable numbers of privateers operating out of French and English ports. Again, it was not until the later years of Elizabeth's reign that this traditional method of warfare was largely replaced by the organization of a disciplined royal naval force in response to Spain's mighty armadas. Yet the role of privateering in mid-Tudor warfare has been almost entirely ignored as a result of too much concentration on the development of the Tudor Navy. It was the loss of Calais in 1558, effectively ending more than two centuries of Anglo-French hostilities, followed by the deterioration of relations between England and Spain, which shifted the focus of England's naval operations from the south coast to the western ports and ended the significance of the Cinque Ports. While France remained England's chief antagonist, towns such as Rye made a major contribution to the defence of Tudor England.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. M. Oppenheim, 'Maritime History', *Victoria County History, Sussex*, 2, 143 ff.; J. Collard, *A Maritime History of Rye* (Rye, 1978), 17-27.

<sup>2</sup>East Sussex Record Office, RYE 99/1. (Later references to

Rye Corporation MSS. are cited simply as RYE.) Even allowing for the obvious element of exaggeration in this claim, made in a draft parliamentary bill of 1548 for the preservation of the Camber, it is clear from numerous references in *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (hereafter

- cited as *L.P.*), that the Camber was the main harbour of refuge in foul weather for Channel shipping in the early 16th century.
- <sup>3</sup>*Acts of the Privy Council* (hereafter cited as *A.P.C.*), 1589-90, 98-100; RYE 60/4, f. 297; *L.P.* 19(1), nos. 491, 546, 672; *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. P. L. Hughes & J. F. Larkin (Yale, 1964), 2, no. 497(5); P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice), SP 12/226/41; British Library, Harleian MS. 703. I owe this last reference to Dr. J. J. Goring, who kindly commented on an earlier draft of this article.
- <sup>4</sup>RYE 60/4, f. 21.
- <sup>5</sup>RYE 60/6, f. 108v.; P.R.O., SP 12/109/57.
- <sup>6</sup>RYE 60/3, ff. 74, 82, 83, 88, 89v., 90, 92. For further reference to the Regent and other royal warships of the period, see J. D. Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors, 1485-1558* (1957), 268. Dinsdale is a creek running off the river Tillingham, south-east of Winchelsea.
- <sup>7</sup>RYE 99/4.
- <sup>8</sup>*Rye Shipping Records 1566-1590*, ed. R. Dell (Suss. Rec. Soc. 64), p. xxxvii; K(ent) A(rchives) O(ffice), CP/Br/5/2.
- <sup>9</sup>H. M. Colvin, *The History of the King's Works*, 4(2), 415-47.
- <sup>10</sup>Colvin, 422-3, 428. For John Fletcher's political career in Rye see my article 'Religion, Faction and Politics in Reformation Rye: 1530-59', in *Suss. Arch. Coll.* 120.
- <sup>11</sup>*L.P.* 15, no. 598.
- <sup>12</sup>*L.P.* 15, no. 323.
- <sup>13</sup>RYE 47/41/1 (writ of 12 Feb. 1590 to captains or constables of castles on Channel coast ordering surrender of certain brass ordnance, to be replaced by iron ordnance, for the use of the Navy: schedule detailing brass ordnance at each fort or castle).
- <sup>14</sup>P.R.O., SP 12/38/28.
- <sup>15</sup>RYE 47/7/68. Although probably an exaggeration it seems unlikely to have been a very great one, particularly since the amount of wheat and malt for which the town sought licence of the Lord Treasurer to import was 3,200 quarters and 6,100 quarters respectively: RYE 47/7/152. On the basis of Lord Buckhurst's calculations that the necessary provision for 1,000 soldiers in the 1589 campaign for ten days was 40 quarters of wheat baked, 3,200 quarters should have been sufficient to keep a town of at least 3,000 persons from the date of the request, 17 October 1573, adequately fed for ten months (i.e. until the following harvest), quite apart from any stocks of wheat held in the town or available for purchase locally: P.R.O., SP 12/226/62(1). There were also at least 1,500 French refugees in the town: P.R.O., SP 12/187/1.
- <sup>16</sup>*Suss. Rec. Soc.* 64, p. xxxv.
- <sup>17</sup>W. T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter 1540-1640* (1978 edn.), 55-7.
- <sup>18</sup>RYE 77/3; RYE 60/5, f. 143v.; RYE 60/6, ff. 53v., 87; RYE 60/7, f. 162v.; RYE 1/3, ff. 43-8; RYE 1/6, ff. 32-43. Neither the 1491/2 nor the 1595/6 cesses leave any trace in the chamberlains' accounts volumes.
- <sup>19</sup>RYE 60/6, f. 119; RYE 60/6, f. 34v.
- <sup>20</sup>See Table 5.
- <sup>21</sup>RYE 60/4, f. 318.
- <sup>22</sup>P.R.O., E 179/231/218; E 179/190/200.
- <sup>23</sup>RYE 60/6, f. 178v.
- <sup>24</sup>According to W. Holloway, *History and Antiquities of the Ancient Town and Port of Rye* (1847), 587-9, the ditch was 50 ft. wide.
- <sup>25</sup>*L.P.* 4(2), no. 5031.
- <sup>26</sup>H. Lovegrove, 'Remains of Two Old Vessels Found at Rye, Sussex', *Mariner's Mirror*, 50, 115-22.
- <sup>27</sup>R. A. Skelton, *Decorative Printed Maps of the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (1952), pl. 22.
- <sup>28</sup>RYE 60/3, ff. 74-6, 80-4, 88-94, 98-104, 107-13.
- <sup>29</sup>RYE 60/4, ff. 292v.-301, 310-23. The term 'rysse' has not been explained.
- <sup>30</sup>RYE 60/5, ff. 104-110v., 119-122v., 128-135v.
- <sup>31</sup>RYE 45/19. 'Rippiers' was the name given to those who transported fish from Rye to London overland by pack donkey.
- <sup>32</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 62-74v.
- <sup>33</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 91-114.
- <sup>34</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 165-183v., 198-206.
- <sup>35</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 290-9, 314-320v.
- <sup>36</sup>RYE 60/9, ff. 271-279v.
- <sup>37</sup>RYE 60/3, ff. 88v., 93, 113.
- <sup>38</sup>RYE 60/4, ff. 292v., 295v., 310v., 317, 319, 321v., 322; 60/5, ff. 8v., 9v.
- <sup>39</sup>RYE 60/5, f. 104v. It is not clear whether this is meant to indicate the presence of the King at the blockhouse or whether it was merely a preliminary visit to ascertain the exact state of the defences before riding to the Court. There is a reference to Mr. Wymond riding six days to the Council on this matter at about the same time: *ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup>RYE 60/5, ff. 106v., 109v., 119, 123, 130.
- <sup>41</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 68v., 70v., 100v., 101v., 103, 105v., 107v., 108v., 109v., 124v.
- <sup>42</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 189, 191v., 193.
- <sup>43</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 148v., 149v., 165, 171v., 172-4, 177, 178, 180v.
- <sup>44</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 178, 179v., 182v.
- <sup>45</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 317-18.
- <sup>46</sup>RYE 60/9, ff. 271, 272, 274, 277, 278, 279, 289v.
- <sup>47</sup>Hist. MSS. Com. 31, *13th Rep. IV*, Rye Corporation (hereafter cited as *H.M.C.* 13(4)), 32.
- <sup>48</sup>*H.M.C.* 13(4), 58, 63, 85, 90, 95; RYE 60/9, ff. 301, 325; RYE 60/10, ff. 56v., 65. The main weapon in use at musters in 1557 in Rye was still the bow and arrow: see RYE 60/7, f. 149, recording repairs to one of the town's bows broken during the musters.
- <sup>49</sup>RYE 60/4, f. 301.
- <sup>50</sup>RYE 60/5, ff. 108, 110v.
- <sup>51</sup>RYE 60/5, ff. 132-3, 155v.
- <sup>52</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 66, 68v.-70.
- <sup>53</sup>RYE 60/4, f. 323; 60/5, ff. 6v., 8v.; 60/7, ff. 120v., 124v.
- <sup>54</sup>*L.P.* 4(1), no. 398; *A.P.C.* 1581-2, 352.
- <sup>55</sup>*Victoria County History, Sussex*, 2, 143-4, 150.
- <sup>56</sup>RYE 60/5, ff. 107, 109; 60/6, ff. 106v.-107.
- <sup>57</sup>RYE 60/3, ff. 107-111v.
- <sup>58</sup>RYE 60/4, ff. 311v.-321.
- <sup>59</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 65, 68, 70v., 72, 73v.
- <sup>60</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 106v.-107, 111, 114.
- <sup>61</sup>*L.P.* 20(2), nos. 27(2), 88.
- <sup>62</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 124v., 127v.-128v., 145-146v. There is also an entry under 7 August 1557 for 31s. for bread and beer supplied to John Cheston's boat in going on dolling. Since Robert Chandler and John King are mentioned as the owners of the *Jesus* and the *James* respectively and John Cheston was master of neither, this presumably relates to additional ship service, although there is no mention of any payment of wages in the accounts: RYE 60/7, ff. 146v., 150. This example shows the frequent difficulty of interpreting the Rye chamberlains' accounts, which abound with such stray references.
- <sup>63</sup>*H.M.C.* 13(4), 85, 87; RYE 72/1; RYE 60/9, ff. 274v. (5 tuns of beer for the ship at 40s. the tun, £10), 276v. (for money to send to the ship, £10).
- <sup>64</sup>RYE 1/5, f. 132; *H.M.C.* 13(4), 60-1. Captain Russell was among those of Rye fined for piracy in 1578.
- <sup>65</sup>RYE 72/1.
- <sup>66</sup>P.R.O., SP 12/213/72.
- <sup>67</sup>P.R.O., SP 12/203/51; SP 12/216/250; SP 12/217/28.
- <sup>68</sup>*H.M.C.* 13(4), 111; K.A.O., CP/Br/5, 40.

<sup>69</sup>RYE 1/6, ff. 30v.-43.

<sup>70</sup>K.A.O., CP/Br/5, 12.

<sup>71</sup>K.A.O., CP/Br/2, 5, 40.

<sup>72</sup>K.A.O., CP/Br/42b. The hoy was supplied with 500 nails of beef, 3,500 lb. of bread, 14 tuns of beer, 156 lb. of butter, 312 lb. of cheese, 312 of stockfish and 187 of linge: K.A.O., CP/Br/12.

<sup>73</sup>H.M.C. 13(4), 111; K.A.O., CP/Br/13, 15, 21. Further lists of goods landed at Hastings and remaining in the ship, differing in minor respects, survive amongst Francis Bolton's private accounts: RYE 145/4, 7.

<sup>74</sup>For the issue of such general licences see *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Hughes & Larkin, 1, nos. 73, 243; 2, nos. 435, 508. After the revocation of the general licence in 1564 there was a series of measures aimed at ensuring the full declaration of all prizes taken by English privateers and their delivery to the Lord Admiral for disposal: *ibid.* 2, nos. 526, 654; 3, nos. 730, 742, 743, 749, 764. The

next general licence to be issued after 1563 was not until 1597 and again in 1602: *ibid.* 3, nos. 790, 818. For bonds entered into by Rye ships' masters see RYE 60/3, ff. 115-117v.

<sup>75</sup>RYE 60/6, f. 86.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>RYE 60/7, f. 160v.

<sup>78</sup>*Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 2, no. 442; RYE 60/7, f. 179.

<sup>79</sup>RYE 60/6, ff. 120, 210; RYE 60/7, ff. 160v.-162.

<sup>80</sup>L.P. 3(2), no. 2922.

<sup>81</sup>RYE 60/4, ff. 313v., 319v.-320; RYE 60/6, ff. 70v., 72.

<sup>82</sup>L.P. 3(2), nos. 2459, 2922.

<sup>83</sup>RYE 60/3, f. 91v.; RYE 60/4, ff. 313v., 323. This loss may explain the reason why Cristian Barnham had to be restrained from 'scolding with the Vice-Admiral', for which she was later set on the cucking stool: RYE 60/4, f. 314v.

<sup>84</sup>RYE 60/7, ff. 318, 320.