

THE PORT OF CHICHESTER AND THE GRAIN TRADE, 1650–1750

BY J. H. ANDREWS

THE purpose of this article is to trace the development of the port of Chichester during the period when it attained its greatest relative importance among the ports of Sussex. In the second half of the seventeenth century Rye, which had previously been the leading Sussex port, lost most of its foreign trade as a result of Anglo-French commercial rivalry; but the trade of Chichester was increasing fast and unlike the other Sussex ports it was hardly affected by the wars at the turn of the century. This increase, which was chiefly due to the growth of corn exports, seems to have continued at least until the middle eighteenth century.

The limits of the port of Chichester were demarcated in 1680.¹ As one of the twenty-one 'head ports' of England and Wales, its boundaries were the Hampshire border in the west and Copt Point, near Folkestone, in the east, but the division of the coast into head ports was of very small practical significance. A more important boundary was the border of the parish of Felpham, which divided Chichester from its member port of Arundel: any maritime trade crossing the Sussex coast west of this point was recorded under the heading Chichester in the Port Books and other Customs statistics.²

Chichester Harbour was of course the principal geographical feature within these limits. The condition of the harbour in about 1750 is shown in the appended map, reproduced from a manuscript map of the Sussex

¹ Exchequer K.R. Special Commissions 6501.

² The Receiver General's accounts of Customs receipts for Chichester (Audit Office, Declared Accounts: Customs) seem also to have included the receipts of Arundel and Shoreham before 1708, when the two latter ports began to submit separate accounts (*Calendar of Treasury Books, 1708*, p. 196). For the Customs classification of Sussex ports see J. H. Andrews, *Sussex Notes and Queries*, xiv (1954), p. 1.

coast in the Society's possession.¹ Its chief disadvantage was the bar at its mouth, which was said to change its position with every storm, and even with every tide; only persons familiar with the harbour were advised to enter it without a pilot.² This difficulty seems to have precluded the use of the harbour by naval vessels: the Admiralty surveyors of 1698, reporting on the harbours of the south coast, did not even consider Chichester.³ Once the bar was crossed, three creeks—Thorney Creek, Bosham Creek, and Chichester Creek—led inland across the coastal plain of south-west Sussex. Of these the last, which served the city of Chichester, was the most frequented, but its trade suffered from the fact that the town lay at some distance from the navigable channel, which shallowed considerably towards its head. In 1671 a local merchant reported that the channel was 'not so navigable as it has been within this deponent's knowledge and is so shallow that any vessel which draws above nine feet of water will not pass to and from the said quay [Dell Quay] unless it be a spring tide'.⁴ At the same time it was stated that ten years earlier vessels of 40 tons had reached the quay as easily as ships of 10 tons at the time of writing and that many vessels had to unload their cargoes into lighters at a point half a mile below the quay. This deterioration, which was attributed to the deposition of ballast in the creek, seems to have been arrested, however, for in 1739 a vessel of 100 tons could normally reach a point two miles from the city.⁵ Certainly the trade of the port increased without apparent interruption.

Dell Quay was the principal landing place in Chichester Harbour. It was the only legal quay for the transaction of foreign trade in the port of Chichester,⁶ and much of the harbour revenue was expended in its maintenance.

¹ This map, the history of which is unknown, seems to have been drawn in connection with a scheme for the fortification of the coast; the navigational details appear to be based on Grenville Collins's *Great Britain's Coasting Pilot* (2nd ed. 1723).

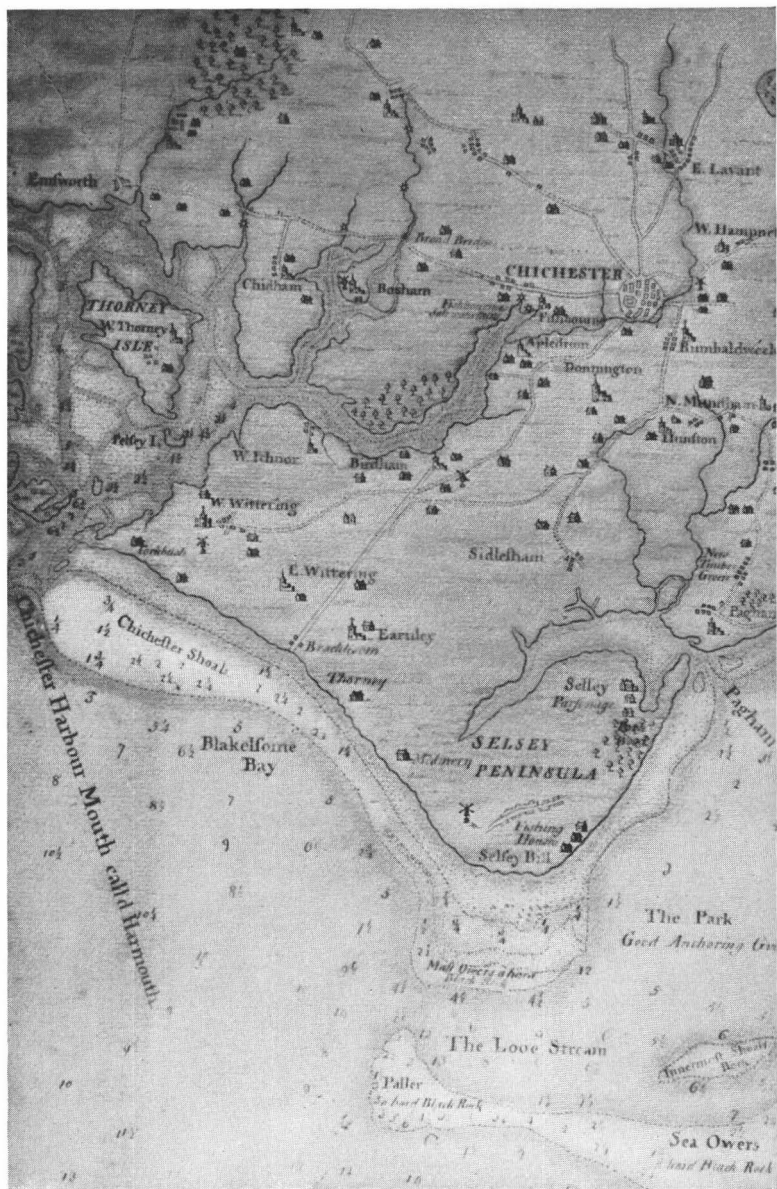
² *England Displayed* (1769), p. 115.

³ Sloane MS. 3233.

⁴ Exchequer Depositions 21 & 22 Chas. II, H. 16; 22 & 23 Chas. II, H. 14.

⁵ Additional MS. 5841, f. 141.

⁶ Exchequer K.R. Special Commissions 6501.



THE PORT OF CHICHESTER, c. 1750

In 1697 the annual cost of repairing the quay was estimated at £80 in seven years by one witness and at £30 per year by another,¹ while between 1685 and 1690 the lease of the quay duties was worth £36 per year,² small sums for a port of this size. Two other places in Chichester Creek were frequently used by shipping: Salt Mill at the head and to the west of the channel, and Itchenor lower down and on the opposite side. There is no record of ships belonging to these places. Bosham ships, however, were frequently mentioned in the Chichester Port Books, and there is no doubt that Bosham Creek was regularly used by merchant vessels. Except for a few references to trade from Chichester to Nutbourne Mill, there are no records of Thorney Creek, and no mention of ships belonging to places adjoining it; it was not mentioned in the various reports listing the landing-places of the port.

Most of the Customs Officers stationed in this region were simply listed under the heading Chichester in the Customs Registers, which therefore throw little light on the problem of locating the various landing-places of the port. But it is known that waiters and searchers of the Customs service were stationed at Sidlesham in the 1680's and at Pagham at least from 1671 to 1705.³ Pagham Harbour was only a small inlet, and growing smaller through reclamation,⁴ but it was still visited by ships in the middle of the eighteenth century, and a 'strong convenient quay' was built at Sidlesham Mill in 1755.⁵ Unfortunately it is not possible to distinguish the trade of Pagham Harbour from that of the port of Chichester in general, or to distinguish the trade of the different creeks of the main harbour. In some ports this can be done by using the data of ships' registrations given in the Port Books, assuming that ships usually traded from their place of registration. This method cannot be applied to Chichester, for much of its trade

¹ Exchequer Depositions 8 Wm. III, E. 34.

² A. Hay, *The History of Chichester* (1804), p. 401.

³ Customs Registers, Series I; Sloane MSS. 1425, 3931.

⁴ The development of Pagham Harbour is fully described in E. Heron-Allen, *Selsey Bill, Historic and Prehistoric* (1911).

⁵ Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

was carried in ships from other ports: besides Chichester itself, Bosham and occasionally Sidlesham, the chief ports contributing ships to the trade of Chichester were Hythe (Hampshire), Gosport, Poole, Christchurch, Arundel, and Brighton.

Details of the trade and shipping of the port of Chichester are to be found in the Exchequer K.R. Port Books. The series for coastwise trade is nearly continuous from 1656 to 1716, the only later coast books being those for 1731; the books for foreign trade continue into the 1720's, finishing in 1731.¹ These documents list all the shipments inwards and outwards, stating the character and quantity of the cargo; the name, place of registration and master of the ship, and sometimes its burden and its crew; and the port of origin or destination. The remainder of this article, dealing with the ships and trade of Chichester, is based on the Port Books except where otherwise stated.

The following table gives the sizes of ships using the port.

<i>Foreign Trade</i>			<i>Coastwise Trade</i>		
	<i>Average Burden</i>	<i>Maximum</i>		<i>Average Burden</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
1665	15.0 tons	20.0 tons	1656-7	15.0 tons	35.0 tons
1699	38.4 "	125.0 "	1708	18.4 "	80.0 "
1713	30.4 "	80.0 "	1731	27.8 "	200.0 "

To students unfamiliar with the Port Books of this period, these figures probably seem very small, but in fact they were only slightly smaller than those recorded at other Sussex ports in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Further light is thrown on this subject by the following analysis of coasting ships at Chichester from Midsummer 1715 to Midsummer 1716.

	<i>Average Burden</i>
Coal Trade	67.5 tons
Timber Export Trade	65.9 "
Corn Trade to London	33.2 "
Imports from London	32.3 "
Corn Trade to Western ports	18.1 "
Imports from Western ports	12.5 "

¹ Exchequer K.R. Port Books, Bundles 768-812.

These figures confirm the conclusions of T. S. Willan (in *The English Coasting Trade, 1600-1750*) that ships engaged in the trades in bulky goods were larger than those carrying more valuable commodities, and that ships on the east coast of England were larger than those on the south coast. It also appears that Chichester, like most other ports at this period, worked well within its capacity as regards size of ships: in the year for which figures are given in the foregoing table, the largest ship was of 116 tons, but 152 ships out of 211 were of 30 tons or less. Ignorance of the small size of merchant ships at this period has led historians to attach too much importance to changes in harbour capacity. Nearly every case of declining trade in Sussex in 1650-1750 is to be explained rather by commercial circumstances than by changes in the state of the harbours.

The next two tables trace the development of the trade of Chichester.

Average Number of Cargoes per Year

<i>Coastwise Trade</i>		<i>Foreign Trade</i>	
1656-88 .	122.0	1662-86	19.9
1691-4 .	59.0	1690-7	2.2
1699-1701	186.0	1699-1714	11.0
1702-12 .	211.8	1718-23	18.7
1714-16 .	219.2	1731	58.0
1731 .	251.0		

*Tonnage of Ships*¹

	<i>Ships engaged in coastal trade (each ship once)</i>	<i>Ships engaged in foreign trade (each ship once)</i>	<i>Foreign Trade (including repeated voyages)</i>
1709	318	..	200
1716	432	130	210
1723	676	220	1,158
1730	629	58	737
1737	566	220	2,548
1744	537	225	3,424
1751	261	1,025	9,113

The latter table is of secondary value, since it gives data only for every seventh year, and the number of ships

¹ Additional MSS. 11255, 11256.

engaged bears no definite relation to the actual flow of trade, but there was certainly no reason to suppose that the steady increase in trade was arrested, except temporarily by the wars of 1689-97 and 1702-13.

It is now time to consider the composition of the trade. Nearly every ship leaving the port of Chichester, whether for foreign or English ports, carried a cargo consisting mainly of corn. Chichester lay at the centre of the widest part of the south-west Sussex plain, a region whose soil fertility, according to Arthur Young, Junior, was 'probably equal to any in the Kingdom'.¹ With flat land, light, fertile soils, and a relatively dry climate, it was particularly suited to the cultivation of malting barley and of wheat. Oats and rye, the products of heavier and less fertile soils, were scarcely mentioned in the Chichester Port Books, and the characteristic farm products of East Sussex, such as hops and wool, were quite insignificant items of trade. The Chichester malting industry attracted the attention of many contemporary writers, but later historians seem to have misrepresented the course of the trade. Dallaway wrote: 'After the Restoration of King Charles II . . . the trade in grain and malt to Ireland became so considerable and lucrative as to lay the foundation of the wealth of the four principal families and several others in the city during the last two centuries.'² Horsfield's account is somewhat different: 'In the reign of James I an export trade from Chichester to Cork, in Ireland, was first attempted, and became so successful that it was the original source of the opulence of several of the principal families. It was by making malt of barley brought from Norfolk and the eastern counties, and by brewing strong beer, both of which were sent to Ireland . . . etc.'³ In fact the export of malt to Ireland in the second half of the seventeenth century was confined to the period of

¹ A. Young, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex* (1804), pp. 6-7.

² J. Dallaway, *A History of the Western Division of the County of Sussex* (1815), I, 210.

³ T. W. Horsfield, *The History, Antiquities and Topography of the County of Sussex* (1835), II, 18.

English military activity under the Commonwealth, reaching a maximum of 9,100 quarters in 1652.¹ Between 1660 and the 1720's exports to Ireland were almost unknown, and there is no evidence of an import trade in barley from eastern England: the average annual import of barley from 1656 to 1701 was only 67 quarters, and most of this came from other Sussex ports. The malting industry drew nearly all its supplies of barley from the farmlands surrounding the town.

The average annual coastwise exports from Chichester were as follows:

	<i>Malt</i>	<i>Barley</i>
1656-1701	5,783·0 qrs.	473·7 qrs.
1702-16 .	6,052·1 ,,	374·0 ,,
1731 .	4,801·0 ,,	Nil

The external structure of the coastwise malt trade was far from simple. Chichester lay near the edge of the area supplying London with corn by sea, and the period 1656-1731 witnessed the gradual capture of the Chichester malt trade by the London market from the ports of Exeter, Plymouth, and Dartmouth. This trend was obscured by the temporary war-time developments of 1689-1713, when much of the trade was diverted to the important naval dockyard at Portsmouth.

Percentage of Malt Exports to Various Destinations

	<i>London</i>	<i>Portsmouth</i>	<i>Devonshire</i>
1656-78 .	1·1	..	95·3
1681-92 .	17·8	..	80·3
1693-1703 .	25·7	36·6	34·9
1704-10 .	3·3	52·8	43·1
1711-16 .	73·7	15·7	9·7
1731 .	100·0	..	..

The development of the wheat trade was even more complex. Defoe's account, published in 1724, runs as follows:

'The farmers generally speaking carried all their wheat to Farnham to market, which is very near forty miles by land carriage . . . But

¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1650*, pp. 541-6; 1651-2, pp. 555-63.

some moneyed men of Chichester, Emsworth, and other places adjacent, have joined their stocks together, built large granaries near the Crook, where the vessels come up, and here they buy and lay up all the corn which the country on that side can spare; and having good mills in the neighbourhood, they grind and dress the corn, and send it to London in the meal about by Long Sea, as they call it.¹

Fuller gives data implying that 28,800 quarters of grain passed through Chichester market every year,² a figure which confirms Defoe's suggestion that only a small proportion of the local grain production was exported by sea. Coastwise exports of wheat averaged 2,132 quarters per year from 1656 to 1701; 3,640·7 quarters per year from 1702 to 1716; and only 408½ quarters in 1731. The decline in the trade shown in the last of these figures was due to the fact that by this time, as Defoe had said, wheat was being exported in the form of flour. The regular trade in meal began in 1686, reached a maximum of 2,566 quarters in 1701, and then steadily declined until 1716, when only 41 quarters were shipped. No meal was exported in 1731. The coastwise trade in flour was first recorded in 1696, and by the end of the century it had already equalled the meal trade in volume, although the war-time years which followed witnessed some decline. The annual average export from 1699 to 1716 was 1,537·7 quarters and in 1731 4,592½ quarters of flour were exported coastwise.

The following table shows the external structure of the coastwise trade in wheat, meal, and flour. Wheat, like malt, was at first shipped almost entirely to the ports of Devonshire and later diverted to London, which also received most of the earliest exports of meal and flour. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), enemy privateers reduced the trade from Sussex to London, while the naval base at Portsmouth enjoyed an increased import trade in corn. Post-war developments illustrated the principle that concentrated products can stand longer hauls than their raw materials: in 1731 only Portsmouth, the nearest market, was

¹ D. Defoe, *A Tour through England and Wales* (Everyman edition), I. 135.

² T. Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (1662), II. 381.

importing unground wheat from Chichester, while the export trade in flour had been extended as far as Bristol.

Percentage of Exports to Various Destinations

<i>Wheat</i>					
	<i>London</i>	<i>Cowes</i>	<i>Portsmouth</i>	<i>Southampton</i>	<i>Dorset & Devon</i>
1656-7 . . .	..	..	..	..	99.6
1662-1702 . .	77.2	..	3.5	..	15.1
1703-14 . . .	5.1	14.6	61.1	..	17.2
1715-16 . . .	35.5	3.8	35.6	21.1	3.9
1731 . . . . .	..	..	99.3	..	..

<i>Meal</i>			<i>Flour</i>		
	<i>London</i>	<i>Portsmouth</i>		<i>London</i>	<i>Portsmouth</i>
1686-94 . . .	98.9	0.8	1693-1701 . .	77.5	3.1
1695-1702 . .	66.2	26.6	1702-10 . . .	3.4	73.1
1703-12 . . .	13.5	85.0	1711-12 . . .	59.6	35.3
1714-16 . . .	50.5	49.5	1714-16 . . .	97.2	1.3
			1731	55.7	8.1

The last Chichester Port Books show that the flour milling industry had outgrown local wheat supplies: after 1710 about one-fifth of the considerable exports of wheat from Arundel were shipped to Chichester and in 1731 825 quarters of wheat were imported.

The foregoing remarks apply only to the coastwise trade. The history of the foreign corn trade was very different. The earliest Port Books, those of the 1660's, record scarcely any foreign exports of grain, but by the end of the century under review very large quantities were shipped abroad every year. This change was chiefly due to changes in commercial policy. Before 1656 corn could be exported only by licence, but in that year exportation was permitted if and when the price fell below a certain level and in 1670 exports were allowed at all times. In 1673-81 and after 1689 a bounty was awarded on corn exported, provided the price fell below a certain level, and export duties on corn not receiving the bounty were abolished in 1700. The effects of these measures are clearly shown in the following table of average annual foreign exports.

	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley and Malt</i>
1662-9 .	172·6 qrs.	Nil
1676-1710 .	1,215·9 „	307·4 qrs.
1711-31 .	2,123·3 „	311·1 „
1735-9 .	11,970·6 „	3,989·8 ¹ „
1744-50 .	18,419·9 „	12,071·6 ² „

Foreign exports of flour were first recorded in 1719, and had reached 2,232 quarters in 1731.

The relative importance of the Chichester grain trade may be judged by comparing it with the other ports of south-east England. In the second half of the seventeenth century its coastwise corn exports were more than equal to those of all the other Sussex ports combined, and in Kent only Sandwich and Margate exported more malt than Chichester. By the middle of the eighteenth century, foreign corn exports from Chichester were equal to the combined foreign exports of all the other ports of Sussex and Kent. In 1735 Chichester ranked sixth among all English ports exporting corn to foreign countries, its trade being exceeded only by London, Yarmouth, Wells, Portsmouth, and Kings Lynn.

There were no other exports of any importance. A few cargoes of timber were exported each year, but even at the time of its greatest development (1694-1716) the trade averaged only 130 loads annually. Except during the wars, when some timber was shipped to Portsmouth and Plymouth, nearly all the trade was with London. There are some records of oyster exports, mainly to Holland and Flanders, between 1679 and 1724, the largest export in any one year being 800,000 oysters. Coastwise exports were mentioned only in 1685, when 320,000 oysters were shipped to Colchester, Rochester, and London, but there is some other evidence to suggest that in the eighteenth century Chichester oysters were fattened in Essex and North Kent.³ Records of paper mills at Chichester and Westbourne⁴ are confirmed by

¹ Treasury Various (T. 64) 277; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1736, p. 559; 1742, pp. 140, 472; 1743, p. 35.

² Additional MS. 38387, ff. 33-39.

³ *Calendar of Treasury Books, 1712*, p. 217; W. Pollitt, *Trans. Southend Historical and Antiquarian Soc.* iv (1947), p. 26.

⁴ A. H. Shorter, *Sussex Notes and Queries*, xiii (1951), p. 169.

the Port Books, which show that an annual average of 116 reams of brown paper was exported coastwise, mostly as small make-weights in the corn cargoes shipped to Devonshire. Copperas stones, used in the manufacture of inks and dyes, were evidently found near Chichester, for regular exports to London began in the first years of the eighteenth century, although the volume of traffic seldom exceeded 100 tons a year. Exports of red ochre, which was found at Chidham, half a mile from Bosham Creek,¹ were even smaller and more infrequent.

The import trade at Chichester was never as large as the export trade. Foreign imports remained small throughout the period covered in this article, but coastwise imports increased considerably in the early eighteenth century. The chief foreign imports were wine, from France until 1678, afterwards from Spain and Portugal; deals and timber from Norway; and cargoes of miscellaneous manufactures from Rotterdam. Until 1689 an annual average of about 40 weys of salt was imported from the Bay of Biscay.

Of the coastwise imports the most important in volume and regularity was coal from Newcastle and Sunderland. Average annual imports in Newcastle chaldrons are given below.

1656-88	.	.	208.4
1689-97	.	.	137.7
1698-1701	.	.	222.5
1702-13	.	.	88.0
1715-16	.	.	365.5
1731	.	.	814.0

These figures, taken from the Chichester Port Books, may be supplemented by those from the Port Books of Newcastle, and by figures calculated from the receipts from the Customs duty on waterborne coal. According to these sources, Chichester imported 637 Newcastle chaldrons in 1736, 565 in 1738, 570 in 1740, 1,064 in 1749, and 839 in 1750.² A considerable increase had

¹ Young, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

² Exchequer K.R. Port Books 242/4, 249/10; Audit Office, Declared Accounts (Customs) 806/1042; 808/1045; 813/1055.

clearly occurred during the period 1650-1750. Other coastwise imports were salt, of which about 100 tons per year were imported from Hampshire after 1700; pipe clay, a regular import from Poole; and pavure and Portland stone, which began to be shipped from Poole and Weymouth in the 1720's.¹

A very different type of import trade was exemplified by the shipments from London, which increased from five per year in 1656-88 to twenty-eight in 1731. Nearly every London cargo included a great variety of manufactured goods of both foreign and English origin, especially wine, tobacco, sugar, textiles of all kinds, leather, earthenware, glass, metal manufactures, groceries, spirits, and oil. During the War of 1702-13, when much of the London traffic was lost, a rather similar trade from Portsmouth and Southampton appeared, reaching a volume of about thirty cargoes a year in the last recorded years of the period. The contents of these cargoes show that a considerable proportion of Chichester's foreign trade, especially in wine and Norwegian timber, passed through neighbouring ports.

Students of the Wealden iron industry will be interested in the small and short-lived trade in sow iron from Pevensy and Newhaven to Chichester between 1683 and 1699.² Like the similar trade to Arundel this was much larger than would have been required for normal consumption in a port the size of Chichester and presumably the iron was destined for some inland forge. There is no trace of this trade in the eighteenth century.

It is hoped that the foregoing paragraphs will have shown the utility of the Port Books as a source of data about the economic development of the Sussex Coast before the mid-eighteenth century. Similar studies could be made of the ports of Arundel, Shoreham, Newhaven, Pevensy, Hastings, and Rye. Together with the information contained in the *Victoria County History* and other local histories, such studies would do much to advance our knowledge of Sussex in the past.

¹ Exchequer K.R. Port Books, Bundles 915-20.

² See J. H. Andrews, *Trans. Eastbourne Nat. Hist. & Arch. Soc.* XIII (1953), p. 18.