



The Trade of Chester in the Reigns of the Three Edwards.

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THE site of Chester had several of those attributes which made for the growth of an important mediæval trading centre. Its position in a bend of the Dee rendered it easily defensible; it lay on the natural highway connecting the midlands of England with the Irish Sea and Ireland; it stood at the last practicable crossing of a navigable river. When a bridge and fortifications had been erected, it was certain that a town would rise. When that town assumed the character of a border fortress, became the centre of government of a county palatine, and the seat of a great monastery, the town was bound to attain some importance.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Domesday reveals at Chester a town which, though relatively small, was by far the largest for many miles, a community with well defined customs, a port through which trade was conducted with Ireland. In the succeeding centuries, Chester grew. Directly and indirectly, the Norman Conquest had increased its political, military and ecclesiastical importance. Its earls were not unmindful of its commercial development. Its market and annual fair rapidly rose in importance, and a monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey, writing about 1200, left an interesting account of the town in his day. The course of the Dee differed a little at that date from its present course, and the Roodeye was washed daily by the tide. The river abounded with fish¹ and to the port came ships from Aquitaine, Spain, Ireland and Germany, bearing wine and

other merchandise.² The market, held in the middle of the town, received large supplies of goods, especially of food, and men brought articles for sale from long distances.³ The English brought corn, the Welsh brought cattle and meat, the Irish brought fish.⁴ Chester held the keys of Ireland, and travellers to and from that land used to rest or wait at the abbey of St. Werburgh.⁵ The region surrounding the town was fertile and the Welsh, driven by hunger, used to approach this district of greater plenty, but withdrew, not daring to attack.⁶

Meanwhile, the growing English interest in the affairs of Ireland was leading to increased traffic from the Dee estuary across the Irish Sea. As early as 1164, Henry II assembled Irish ships at Chester with a view to crossing the channel,⁷ and although the first English settlers in Ireland did not start from Chester, the town became, and remained throughout the Middle Ages, the chief port of embarkation of troops for Ireland, and was second only to Bristol in the volume of its Irish trade.

A series of charters granted in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries reflects the growing prosperity both of the town and the port. The citizens had their Gild merchant, the exclusive right of trading in the city, and various regulations governing business transactions, disputes with Welshmen being specifically mentioned. Other charters refer to the customs observed in the Chester-Dublin trade in the days of Henry I and confirm and enlarge the citizens' privileges in their trading relations with Ireland.⁸

It is evident, therefore, that at the opening of the reign of Edward I, Chester had already attained considerable importance. During the reigns of the three Edwards, it reached its zenith. By the end of the fourteenth century it had begun to decline.

Progress and decay were alike closely connected with the political history of North Wales. Edward's conquest and settlement of that land were not wholly advantageous to Chester. Peace and security were welcome and at first brought prosperity, but the permanence of the settlement

ultimately deprived Chester of its military and political importance. There was, however, no immediate decline, and certainly no immediate diminution in the care of the city's defences. The walls were maintained in good condition—their massive masonry astonished Higden⁹—and repairs at the castle were almost continuous.¹⁰

But the peace permitted expansion, and the town was spreading beyond the two mile circumference of its walls. Houses were built outside the Northgate, across the river in Handbridge, and especially in Foregate Street,¹¹ and the city's bounds extended to Heron bridge, to Hoole and to Saltney.¹² Outside the walls also stood two hospitals—St. John's for poor people near the Northgate,¹³ and St. Giles' for lepers at Boughton.¹⁴

Within the walls were houses of the Black, White and Grey Friars, the monastery of St. Mary, and the abbey of St. Werburgh. In addition to the area occupied by the buildings and offices of these religious houses, the town also contained a number of houses and shops belonging to the abbot of Stanlawe (Whalley) and the abbot of Vale Royal.¹⁵ The power of the church, therefore, was great, but not greater than was common in mediæval towns.

The internal history of Chester at this period has been written by the late Canon Morris. It is, however, desirable to consider certain aspects of the city from an angle rather different from that taken by Canon Morris. In particular, it is necessary to study the economic position of Chester in respect of supplies, in relation to the great abbey of St. Werburgh, and finally in relation to maritime trade.

As a market town of considerable importance, Chester needed supplies of food, fuel, and miscellaneous merchandise. Situated in the border land, she could procure supplies as easily from Wales as from England while the Dee enabled her to obtain goods readily from overseas. Of flesh meat there was no dearth in the immediate neighbourhood. The citizens had common pasture for their cattle on Hoole Heath at all times of the year,¹⁶ and cattle were brought from Wales in times of war as well as of peace.¹⁷ The Cheshire

forests moreover, provided pannage for many pigs,¹⁸ sheep were fairly numerous at the monastic granges, and small cheeses were made in the county.

Corn, on the other hand was not so plentiful. Wheat, barley, oats and rye were, of course, grown in the county,¹⁹ and wheat for seed was sold in Chester,²⁰ but it was necessary to import corn from Ireland and from England, and imported corn was subject to a toll at the city gate.²¹

Fish was very plentiful. All along the Dee there were fisheries, and salmon were abundant.²² Several religious houses had fishing boats on the Dee, and the farm of the fishery of Dee bridge was very valuable.²³ The monks of St. Werburgh's abbey had also fishing rights round Anglesey²⁴ and in the sea around the Isle of Man²⁵, and a good deal of fish was brought into the port in private boats. Tolls were levied at all the city gates on fish, and the lists include herrings, salmon, ray, oysters, whelks and eels.²⁶

Finally, supplies of beer were brewed in the town; quantities of wine were imported from Gascony; the abbot perfected his domestic arrangements by the laying of a water conduit along the highway from Newton's well to the abbey (1278)²⁷; and plums, pears, blackberries, nuts, partridges, woodcocks, and other fruits and birds were found in the surrounding country.

Fuel was not lacking in mediæval Cheshire. The timber in the royal forests was most carefully preserved,²⁸ but brushwood and deadwood from the forests, from Shotwick park and from Loitcoit were sold to dealers.²⁹ Moreover, the barons had the right to dispose of dead wood on their own land at will.³⁰ Since, however, there were no extensive woods in the immediate neighbourhood of Chester, cartage was an important matter, and when it became necessary to improve the road surface in the town, funds were raised by a pavage of a halfpenny on every cartload of firewood or coals.³¹ One of the chief sources of supply lay at Kinnerton, where the citizens were granted permission to take timber and make charcoal.³² Another source was Shotwick park from which a Chester baker bought 10,000 faggots in 1347.³³

Turves also occur in the lists of tolls at three of the city gates. They were cut in many of the marshy places in the county,³⁴ and the abbot of Chester had the right to take thirty cartloads of turf each year from Elton moss.³⁵ Finally, as the mines of Ewloe were worked more extensively, quantities of "sea coal" were brought into Chester.³⁶

In addition to fuel and food for the citizens, hay, grass and bedding were brought in for the cattle, and certain miscellaneous articles for sale or manufacture. As enumerated in the lists of tolls,³⁷ these articles are not very numerous or very diverse. The lists, however, can hardly be complete catalogues of goods entering the city, for an inquisition in 1321 showed that certain goods should be exempt from tolls; and further, the lists include such comprehensive items as a "horseload of merchandise of any kind." On the other hand, life was crude, requirements were few, transport was difficult, and manufactured articles were made within the city rather than brought from a distance. Salt, of course, was needed. It came in at the Eastgate and was measured for purposes of toll by the crannoc and the bushel. Knives, spoons, and a few other finished articles in iron and lead were brought. There were also dishes, earthenware, ropes and cords, baskets, bows and bow sticks, skins and furs and sacks of wool. Further there were the materials—chiefly of wood—needed for the building and repair of houses, the making of vehicles, agricultural implements and horse-gear. In this class are nails, boards, posts, laths, fellies, spokes, cart-wheels, cart-yokes, ox-bows, axle-trees, cart-saddles, etc. Finally there was bark (for the tanners) which came into the port³⁸ as well as from the Cheshire forests.³⁹

As already stated, these lists do not necessarily represent all classes of goods coming into Chester. Doubtless a greater diversity was to be seen at the annual fair held for three days at the feast of St. John the Baptist. The right to hold this fair had been granted by Earl Hugh Lupus to the Abbey.⁴⁰ Earl Randle Gernons in confirming the right, had permitted the erection of traders' booths in front of the abbey gate, and allowed the monks to make these booths and let them for

hire. Traders were forbidden to buy or sell anything anywhere else during the time of the fair,⁴¹ and the abbot had ample powers to enforce his rights.⁴² He had also certain tolls which included the following :—

For every horse sold	-	-	-	4d.
For every ox sold	-	-	-	2d.
For every five sheep sold	-	-	-	1d.
For every three pigs sold	-	-	-	4d.
For every sack of wool sold	-	-	-	4d.

payment of the tolls on the animals (but not on the wool) being divided equally between the seller and the buyer. He had, moreover, tolls on food and merchandise sold, and to increase his revenue still further, the unloading or selling of goods from ships entering the port during the fair was restricted.⁴³

It is evident therefore, that the abbey had a powerful influence in the economic life of the city. Since the abbot took the tolls, his interest lay in enlarging the fair. Since however, he had a monopoly of the sales, the citizens might justly contend that the fair would be of greater advantage to the city, if the citizens had greater freedom in selling their goods. This conflict of interests led to an appeal to Edward I., who ordered an inquiry into the whole situation.⁴⁴ In 1288, a settlement was reached by which the citizens were allowed to erect booths for themselves and for hire, provided they were away from the open space in front of the abbey gate. The abbot further conceded the right of stallage in fair time to the citizens for 46s. 8d. a year.⁴⁵

These concessions enabled the monks to escape the odium which necessarily fell on all who hindered the economic progress of the city. The existence of the abbey was not wholly advantageous to the city. The annual fair was beneficial to the city's trade, but it is certain that had there been no abbey in Chester, the citizens would have secured the right to hold a fair of their own at an earlier date than they secured this limited control. The large area occupied by the abbey—almost a quarter of the space within the city walls—remained outside the authority of the mayor and

corporation down to the Reformation. The abbey moreover, was wealthy and influential. It was in a position to render the Crown valuable service, and to look for valuable favours in return. Its independence was advanced when in 1345 it secured exemption from episcopal jurisdiction.⁴⁶ Enjoying ample revenues and lucrative rights, having its own mills,⁴⁷ its own court, and its own postern gate in the city walls,⁴⁸ it had a prestige and power which the municipality was obliged to respect.

That serious conflicts were infrequent at a time when the fetters of monastic privilege were keenly resented, is probably due to the character of the abbots, to the fact that the Earl of Chester was King of England, and to the fact that the abbey's estates, though near to Chester, were not actually contiguous to the city boundaries. There had been conflicts between the monks and citizens during the years 1258-1265,⁴⁹ and there were occasional disputes during the period under consideration, but for the most part, the abbey and city were friendly. Hospitality was maintained on a considerable scale, and the production of the mystery plays must have brought some measure of good will to the monks. In the fourteenth century, neither the abbots nor the monks were austere, and if their manner of life commanded less esteem, it made fraternal relations with the citizens easier. An episcopal visitation⁵⁰ in 1323 revealed a condition which, while hardly scandalous, was nevertheless far from the monastic ideal. The abbot was too busy to hear confessions. The monks were keeping hunting dogs. Two of the monks had been guilty of incontinence, and a third was suspected. There had been some trickery or collusion in the distribution of alms, and there was considerable slackness in the discipline. Such a condition in a monastery was not uncommon in the fourteenth century, and probably the laity were not greatly scandalised.

In the succeeding half century, the internal life of the abbey degenerated still further, but while its moral prestige waned, its wealth remained undiminished. Its great revenues were regularly collected, its tenants were kept in

subjection, its abbots busied themselves with the development of their estates,⁵¹ and the great institution remained a powerful influence in the city's and indeed the county's economic life.

But the day had passed when a monastery represented the only great accumulation of wealth within a mediæval city. Trade was already an important source of wealth and a moneyed class was rising into great prominence in the city and county. Dealers in wool, dealers in wheat or in wine, speculators in the minerals of North Wales, had little of the dignity attaching to the abbot, but some of them wielded a powerful influence in the trade of the period. Conspicuous among these wealthy citizens stands Richard the Engineer, a supervisor of royal works in North Wales and Cheshire. Before the Welsh wars began, Richard had paid £140 a year for the mills (1275), a clause in his agreement indemnifying him against liability for loss resulting from any Welsh attack on the mills.⁵² After the war, he secured a grant of the mills and fishery (of Dee bridge) at a rent of £200 a year,⁵³ and he continued paying this high figure—twice the farm of the city—for twenty years. Another wealthy citizen was Bartholomew de Northenden who paid no less than £248 6s. 8d.,—the highest price paid in the fourteenth century—for the farm of the Dee mills and fishery in 1347.⁵⁴ Still another and more famous citizen was William of Doncaster, a merchant, shipowner and army contractor of very varied activities. In 1295 his agents were buying wine in Gascony for sale in Chester and Anglesey.⁵⁵ From 1304, he was importing large quantities into Chester and at times supplying the king.⁵⁶ In the early years of the fourteenth century, he was also engaged in the wool trade, exporting sacks from Chester,⁵⁷ and also sending wool across country to Ipswich and thence to Flanders.⁵⁸ At the same time, he was dealing in Ireland, apparently in corn.⁵⁹ He was also interested in the mineral deposits of North Wales, farming the lead mines of Englefeld,⁶⁰ and supplying lead for the roofing of Chester Castle⁶¹. In 1307, he was engaged in a big deal in horse shoes and nails with the king.⁶² In 1308,

he was collector of the custom of two shillings a tun on imported wine in the ports of Chester, Denwall, Conway, Beaumaris and Carnarvon,⁶³ and although he had been convicted of introducing bad money in 1300,⁶⁴ he was made "searcher of money" in the same ports in 1311.⁶⁵

The wealth acquired in these varied activities raised him to eminence. He purchased or leased land in Rhuddlan, in Overton, in Mostyn,⁶⁶ and he was mayor of Chester three times.⁶⁷ Trading by land and by sea, interested in the newly settled Wales rather than in England, Doncaster stands out a vivid illustration of the city's activities during the period of its greatest prosperity.

This prosperity rested in a large measure on the activities of the port. Many English seaports at this period were flourishing as a result of the expansion of trade with the continent and especially with Flanders. For this trade, the position of Chester was disadvantageous. It faced away from Europe. Its hinterland was poor. The county produced comparatively little wool, and Edward III prohibited its export from Chester.⁶⁸ The port had no connection with the Hanseatic league, and it saw very little of the activities of the Italian merchants. Nevertheless, the port was not idle, for it enjoyed a considerable trade with Ireland, with Gascony and with the Welsh coastal towns.

The nature and extent of the Irish trade have not yet been fully investigated. The marten skins mentioned in Domesday are well known,⁶⁹ but few modern writers have anything definite to say about the Dublin-Chester trade in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Mrs Green, one of the most specific on this subject, refers to the export from Ireland to Chester of cloth:—"friezes and serges, cloth white and red, russet and green."⁷⁰ Other writers refer to merchants travelling to and from Ireland, but do not mention any commodities. Nor are mediæval writers very precise. William of Malmesbury stated that "necessaries are exchanged between Chester and Ireland, so that deficiency in any one article due to the character of the soil, is made good by the labour of the merchant."⁷¹ The three

Chester monastic writers are almost equally vague. Lucian and Higden mention merely fish and merchandise, and Bradshaw apparently only quoted his predecessors.⁷² The writer of the *Libel of English Policy* goes into details of Irish products in the fifteenth century—hides, skins, fish, woollen and linen cloth,⁷³—but does not state specifically that any of them were imported at Chester.⁷⁴

A study of sources on the English side tends to show that the most important commodity received from Ireland was not fish, nor cloth, but corn. Whenever famine or extraordinary consumption caused a dearth of corn in Cheshire or North Wales, merchants and monks alike turned to Ireland for supplies. Large quantities of wheat and oats were brought into the port of Chester and the Dee Estuary during the Welsh wars. The importation of Irish corn had been encouraged by a charter of Walter de Lasci (1202-1231) granting the citizens of Chester licence to trade in corn and grain and flour, at Drogheda and all other ports in his lands in Ireland, and withdrawing the toll of 2d a crannoc, which he had previously exacted.⁷⁵

The importation continued during the five years' peace between the two Welsh wars,⁷⁶ and was a prominent feature in the life of the port during the reign of Edward II, while an inquisition of 1309 showed that Irish merchants had also taken ships laden with corn to the little river port of Frodsham.⁷⁷ Thus in 1316, John Demestre of Chester obtained a safe conduct for a year for the purpose of importing Irish corn,⁷⁸ and in the same year a number of Chester merchants went to Ireland on the earl's behalf to buy up to 200 quarters of wheat.⁷⁹ In 1321 two merchants, William of Basingwerk and Madoc of Capenhurst, sought protection for their agents who were sent to purchase 200 quarters of corn,⁸⁰ and in 1322, the earl himself sent servants to buy "corn and other dead stock" in Ireland and North Wales.⁸¹ The difficulties under which buyers of corn laboured are illustrated by the lot of a Chester merchant who, having obtained a quantity of wheat, had to give up thirty crannocs to the king's purveyors to be sent to Scotland.⁸²

During the reign of Edward III, the Irish corn trade appears to be of much less importance, but at the end of the fourteenth century a period of scarcity again necessitated importation, and in 1400, orders were sent to Ireland for 100 quarters of wheat, sixty quarters of oats and thirty quarters of peas, for consumption in Cheshire and the castles of North Wales.⁶³

It is a more difficult task to discover what mediæval Chester exported to Ireland. Chester merchants settled in Dublin at an early date, and in the middle of the thirteenth century, the names of several of whom are found on the rolls of the free citizens of Dublin.⁶⁴ During the reigns of the three Edwards, the greater Chester merchants such as William of Doncaster had their agents in Ireland,⁶⁵ and merchants from Dublin and Drogheda came to Chester.⁶⁶ Miscellaneous entries record the movement of live bucks and does from the Cheshire forests to a royal park in Ireland,⁶⁷ or the transfer of some oxen and sheep,⁶⁸ but for the most part the goods exported, like the goods imported, are described generically as "merchandise."⁶⁹ Higden says quite briefly that Ireland loves to get England's "minerals and salt."⁷⁰ On the whole, it is probable that Chester received a greater quantity of goods from Ireland than she sent back.

Apart altogether from trade, however, the increasing interest in Irish affairs displayed by the English crown was leading to an increased traffic between Chester and Dublin, which was advantageous to the ship-owners.

From the early years of the reign of Edward III, ships were frequently assembled in the Dee for the conveyance of officials and their retinues, and not infrequently for the transport of men at arms and even horses. For example, in 1331 the chancellor of Ireland sailed from Chester.⁷¹ In 1332 boats were collected at Whitehaven, Holyhead, Tenby and Chester for the transport of troops and victuals to Ireland.⁷² In 1337 six ships were ordered for the conveyance of a new chancellor and various ministers.⁷³ There were similar orders in 1341 and 1356,⁷⁴ and the operations of Lionel duke

of Clarence from 1361 onwards caused a large demand for shipping in the ports of Chester and Liverpool. Ships were impressed both in Ireland and England, and some hundreds of troops and reinforcements with horses and harness were despatched.⁹⁵ Minor operations in the later years of the reign and in the reign of Richard II, kept the port busy with Irish traffic down to the end of the fourteenth century.⁹⁷

Next in importance to trade and traffic with Ireland came the trade with Bordeaux. Before the end of the thirteenth century, large quantities of wine were being imported into England from Gascony. Since both producers and consumers were subjects of the Crown, the trade enjoyed royal approval. As its dimensions grew, regulations were drawn up which were designed to facilitate the trade, protect the merchant, and prevent excessive charges both in respect of middle men and in cost of transport. In this important trade, Chester took a share. Cargoes of wine were brought into the port throughout the period under consideration, the volume of business increasing as the fourteenth century advanced. The port became a depot from which wine was distributed not only to the palatine county, but to Lancashire and North Wales.

The ships used in this trade were almost exclusively English or Irish, but a large proportion of them belonged to ports other than Chester.⁹⁸ They usually reached Chester in October, November, or early December. Some sailed direct from Bordeaux, without touching at any port on the way. Others put in at Milford or Cork or Dublin. The former, of course, paid prisage at Chester; the latter paid at the first port at which they touched, and obtained a certificate of payment to present to the earl's officials at Chester.⁹⁹ This system of forwarding a certificate or letters acknowledging the receipt of prise probably worked fairly well, but it was not without difficulties. Occasionally, a merchant complained that payment was exacted twice,¹⁰⁰ and not infrequently when the forwarding of his certificate was delayed, he had to enter into a recognizance for certain sums in the event of the certificate not arriving or proving unsatisfactory to the officials in charge.¹⁰¹

In some instances the size of the cargo or the cost of freight is stated. Thus in March 1303-4, a ship of William of Doncaster, brought into the port seventy tuns of wine, fifty of which belonged to the earl of Lincoln and twenty to various merchants.¹⁰² In 1322, the *Nicholas* of Lymington sailed for Chester with no less than 105 tuns and seven pipes.¹⁰³ In 1402 the *Michel* of Dublin carried 67 tuns.¹⁰⁴ The rates charged by a Chester shipowner for carriage in the *Trinity* of Ottermouth in 1395 were as follows¹⁰⁵ :—

Bordeaux to Waterford	-	14s. per tun.
Bordeaux to Dublin	-	15s. per tun.
Bordeaux to Beaumaris	-	18s. per tun.
Bordeaux to Chester	-	18s. per tun.

In the same year, the *Leonard* of Portsmouth was chartered to carry 78 casks from Bordeaux to Beaumaris or Chester at 18s. per tun.¹⁰⁶ The rates varied from time to time, dropping as low as 12s. or even 10s. per tun, and rising to 20s. per tun.¹⁰⁷

That some of the wine which came to Chester was of high quality is clear. While in Gascony, prior to his coronation, Edward I sent some wines to Chester.¹⁰⁸ During his Welsh campaigns further quantities were bought for him and sent to Chester.¹⁰⁹ But a safer indication of quality lies in the time of importation and the value per tun. Many of the wine ships reached Chester in the autumn immediately after the vintage. The liquor they carried was inferior to the "wines of rack" which were shipped in the spring. When therefore, Edward I learned that a vessel had reached Chester containing "good, choice and clear wines of rack," he ordered his justice to secure forty casks if they really were good, choice and clear, and to keep them safely in the royal cellars till otherwise ordered.¹¹⁰ This higher quality of wine is referred to again in 1320 when the *Holirodecogge* reached Chester "in July, in the Reck-time." The two tuns of wine of prisage taken from this ship at the standard rate of 20s. per tun, were afterwards sold back to the ship owner at 80s. a tun¹¹¹—a very high price in the fourteenth century.

The importation of wine was therefore a very prominent feature in the trade of Chester in the fourteenth century. Bordeaux was the most distant port to which the Chester sailors voyaged, and Chester was, as a rule, the most northern point on the west coast to which wine ships came.¹¹² The activities of the port in normal times were almost confined to trade with Ireland and Gascony, and since some of the wine ships belonged to Dublin, and others touched sometimes at Irish ports, the two chief branches of Chester's maritime trade cannot be wholly separated. The remaining trade was mainly with the towns of North Wales—with Rhuddlan, Carnarvon, Conway and Beaumaris. Millstones were brought from Anglesey,¹¹³ slates from Ogwen,¹¹⁴ lead from the Isle of Man.¹¹⁵

Finally, military operations in Scotland in the fourteenth century brought activity to the port. The conveyance of men at arms and horses for operations in Ireland has already been noted. During the Scotch wars, Chester furnished ships for the transport of provisions. Large quantities of corn, wine, bacon, salt and horse-shoes were sent to Skinburness in Cumberland in 1308 and 1310,¹¹⁶ two ships fully armed and provisioned were requisitioned in 1311,¹¹⁷ and further quantities of provisions were sent to Carlisle in 1318¹¹⁸ and to Skinburness in 1333.¹¹⁹

The size of the ships sailing between Chester and Bordeaux, Dublin or Skinburness, is not wholly a matter of conjecture. Some light is thrown on their carrying capacity by the cargoes already mentioned. Respecting their tonnage, letters patent of 1363 ordered the arrest of all ships of twenty tons burden and upwards in certain western ports,¹²⁰ and similar letters in the following year refer to "all ships of from thirty to eighty tons burden."¹²¹ That there were smaller vessels in the Irish Sea is clear from an order of 1394 for the seizure of all vessels of ten tons and upwards in the ports between Holyhead and Furness.¹²²

These small boats ran great risks. In addition to the perils of tempest which drove the master mariners to seek some sheltering haven,¹²³ the Irish sea presented other

dangers. The shallow waters round Anglesey were difficult for navigation. Higden even spoke of a whirlpool in the Menai strait.¹²⁴ Moreover, prior to the Edwardian settlement of Wales, wrecking had been a custom of the Welsh, and the English efforts to suppress it aroused bitter complaints.¹²⁵ Further, piracy was common. The Irish sea was less infested with robbers than the North Sea and English channel, but the typical English sailor, as pictured by Chaucer, was unscrupulous enough when occasion served, and indeed there were at least two incidents in which Chester men were indicted for plundering at sea. One is the case of Robert de Bradburn, master of the *Nicholas* of Chester, who with other masters and sailors boarded a vessel off the Lizard and carried off a valuable cargo.¹²⁶ The other occurred in the Western Hebrides, where a band of Chester men seized twenty tuns of wine belonging to the King of Scotland at a time when England and Scotland were at peace.¹²⁷

Apart from piracy, unexpected hostility might be met. In 1322, eight Chester merchants, among whom was the famous William of Doncaster, chartered a ship, *La Nicholas* of Lymington, to carry wine from Bordeaux to Chester. With a cargo of 105 tuns and seven pipes, the vessel touched at "Le Stanhous" in Anglesey. Here it was inspected by the Chamberlain of North Wales, and for some reason that is not explained, the chamberlain's men attacked the sailors. In a panic they put out to sea, but were driven back by a tempest, whereupon the chamberlain and his men renewed the attack, raised the hue and cry, killed two of the crew and injured five others so that they died of their wounds. Again the boat put out to sea, and this time it was driven by the storm into "parts unknown." Part of the cargo was lost and the remainder had suffered deterioration before the vessel finally reached safety.¹²⁸ Such an episode may have been rare. That it could occur at all, is a reminder of the risks run by merchants and mariners in the Irish sea. A final illustration may be seen in a request by the Earl of Pembroke for a certain writ. "As there is danger in the

passage to Ireland," the petition runs, "he prays that the king's writ may be issued in duplicate so that one attorney may cross over from Chester and the other from Pembroke."¹²⁹

In spite of these dangers to shipping, the port flourished. Its remoteness from the busy commercial life of the North Sea and English Channel made its growth more distinctively English, for neither Hansard nor Lombard had any direct connection with the port. On the other hand this very remoteness limited its development. The customs system of the fourteenth century directed the movement of English exports into definite channels, and since the exports were mainly destined for Continental markets, it was natural that Chester should be omitted from the list of ports where staple commodities were concentrated. In 1302, the Chamberlain of Chester accounted for £19 1s. 8½d. as custom on the export of "twenty-seven lasts, four dickers, two hides, one sack of wool, and 563 lambs' fleeces."¹³⁰ This was a comparatively small quantity, but from 1303 onwards, the typical English products, wools, wool fells, and hides, were not exported from Chester at all. The Chamberlain reported each year that his receipts from the custom of wool and hides were nil "because the liberty of the cocket is not yet obtained from the Lord the King in this county."¹³¹ And although as the century advanced, various changes were made in the list of staple towns, Chester did not gain the privilege of exporting these goods.

It is however, possible that small quantities of wool were smuggled out of the port. The fact that there was no cocket seal at Chester must have led some merchants to seek to escape the payment of custom by shipping their wool there. Letters close of 1343 state that "several merchants have bought wool in divers counties of England . . . and they take such wool to Wales, Cornwall and Chester to load there without paying the custom and subsidy to the king."¹³² A letter patent of the same date brings to light a specific instance. Two burgesses were said to have hidden 200 sacks of wool in the town of Hereford, "which

wool the said James and Peter are trying to carry to Wales or Chester and thence take clandestinely to foreign parts without paying the custom and subsidy due."¹³³ What degree of success attended such efforts at smuggling cannot be determined, but the exclusion of Chester from the list of staple ports must have hindered in some degree the prosperity of the port.

On the other hand, Chester suffered no restrictions in respect of imports. There were, of course, customs to be paid, and it is necessary to distinguish three different duties in different areas. In the first place, the king (after 1303) levied a duty of two shillings a tun on imported wines. The second duty was levied by the Earl of Chester, who took his prise of two tuns from each cargo of wine entering the port. Lastly there were certain dues claimed by the citizens of Chester.

The official appointed to collect the two shillings per tun on imported wine was responsible for this duty not only at Chester but in all the ports of North Wales. This grouping of a series of ports was merely an administrative device for the collection of revenue. The whole coastline of England and Wales had been "divided into sections in each of which was a chief port and member ports."¹³⁴ In this instance, however, it would be erroneous to suppose that there was any subordination of the Welsh ports to Chester, or any definition of the extent of the port of Chester. Indeed, the stretch of coast line in which the official operated varied from time to time. Sometimes it was "Chester, Denwall, Conway, Beaumaris and Carnarvon" sometimes "Chester and the adjacent ports," while at times it included South Wales and even Ireland.¹³⁵

In a more limited area, the Chamberlain was responsible for the earl's prisage. There appears to be no explicit definition of the extent of the port of Chester, but there are grounds for believing that in the fourteenth century, the port was conceived to extend the length of the estuary, thus including the lesser ports in Wirral. The citizens had certain admiralty powers between Chester and Arnold's Eye,

a point at the limit of the estuary.¹³⁶ Freights from Bordeaux to Chester were quoted to the Redbank, a point far down the estuary.¹³⁷ Many of the ships from which prise was taken were said to be "in the port at the Redbank."¹³⁸ A similar ship was said to be "in the port at Burton"¹³⁹ and in one instance, the wine of prisage from "a ship called the *Naudeu* of Dartmouth discharged in the port of Chester" was taken at Heswall.¹⁴⁰

In a still more limited area, the citizens had their dues. In answer to a *quo warranto* of the latter part of the fourteenth century, the mayor and citizens claimed the right to levy certain duties on any ship "entering the aforesaid liberty laden with wine, allec, fish, salmon, grain or any other merchandise or food."¹⁴¹

Now the liberty of Chester extended down the river to Poolbridge near Saltney.¹⁴² It is evident therefore, that any deterioration of the river channel which prevented ships from sailing up the river at least as far as Poolbridge, would not only hinder the trade of the city, but, also lessen its tolls. The increasing use of the estuary ports in the fourteenth century indicates that the decline of the city had already begun. The cause of this decline—the silting of the Dee estuary—is well known, but the process has not yet received detailed historical treatment.¹⁴³ The process presents no novelty, but only the gradual choking of a channel which for many years must have presented difficulties for navigation.

The position of Chester had almost all the natural advantages which made for the rise of a mediæval town, but natural advantages are relative to the condition of human beings. Moreover, some of them are not permanent. The advantages which accrued from the Dee as a highway of commerce steadily diminished. In the course of centuries, the river's channel has changed in position, in depth, and in width. At the time of the Roman occupation, the river flowed near the position of the Watergate.¹⁴⁴ At the end of the twelfth century, the Roodee was covered daily by the tide,¹⁴⁵ and even in the early fourteenth century, the river

flowed so near the city walls, that vessels were moored to rings in the walls of the Water Tower.¹⁴⁶ By the middle of the fifteenth century, the condition of the channel was such that sea-going vessels could not approach within twelve miles of the city.¹⁴⁷

The silting which had thus ruined the port was due primarily to the normal deposition of sediment in the estuary, a process accentuated by the tidal current which checked the river current. A secondary cause lay in the fact that erosion was taking place both on the shores of the estuary and on the sea front. For example, at Gronant in Flintshire, certain lands were leased by the Dean and Chapter of St. Asaph from the Black Prince, a clause in the indenture stipulating that an allowance of 12d. a year should be made for every acre which might be wasted by the sea. That the danger referred to was real, may be inferred from the fact that several commissions were appointed to assess the damage suffered from time to time by the lands at this spot.¹⁴⁸ Tidal currents therefore brought sand into the estuary, and ebbing more slowly than they flowed, left deposits which gradually accumulated. Moreover, the work of nature was accelerated by the work of man, for the great causeway at Chester robbed the river of the swirl which might have carried the sediment further out.¹⁴⁹

The forces at work were fairly well understood by the citizens—at any rate in the fifteenth and subsequent centuries. Letters patent of 1445, quoting a petition from the mayor and citizens stated that “for forty years now the great flow of water at the said port . . . is taken away from the said harbour by the wreck of sea sand so that the said harbour is wholly destroyed . . . no merchant ship can approach within twelve miles and more of the said city.”¹⁵⁰ Similar letters in 1484 attribute the choking to “The wreck of sea sands daily falling and increasing in the channel”¹⁵¹ and a letter of 1486 refers to “the vehement inflow of the sea, . . . the vehement influx of sand, and silting up of gravel.”¹⁵² In recognition of

the declining prosperity of the city, the king reduced the fee farm from £100 to £50, then to £30, and finally to £20.

The same letters however, state that at the time the fee farm of the city was fixed at £100 (namely 1300) "and long after, there was a good harbour to the said city." It is evident, therefore, that whatever the exact position of this "harbour"¹⁵⁴ may have been, the fourteenth century represents the latest period when the navigation of the Dee was practicable for sea-going ships. It is probable that the climatic stress of this century accelerated the silting¹⁵⁵; it is possible that changes in the channel rendered navigation more difficult; it is possible that in the next century, vessels of deeper draught were sailing the Irish sea.¹⁵⁶ It is certain that after the close of the fourteenth century, Chester's importance as a seaport was negligible. ?

NOTES.

The following abbreviations are used:—

C.C.A. for *Cheshire Chamberlains' Accounts*.

Morris (Doc.) for the documents printed in Morris' *Chester during the Plantagenet and Tudor Periods*.

¹ *Liber Luciani*, 46.

² *ibid.*, 46.

³ *ibid.*, 47, 62.

⁴ *ibid.*, 44.

⁵ *ibid.*, 58.

⁶ *ibid.*, 52.

⁷ *Brut y Tywysogion*, 203.

⁸ Morris (Doc) 480—486.

⁹ *Polychronicon* II. 76, 78, 80.

¹⁰ See Chapter [The writer here refers to a chapter in a work by him on Cheshire in the Reigns of the Three Edwards, not yet printed.—Ed.]

¹¹ *Ancient Deeds*, VI., Nos. C6335, C6339, C6341, *ibid.*, Vol. III, C3653, C3356.

¹² Morris (Doc.) 497.

¹³ *Recognizance Rolls*, 11, 163, 239, 263, 316, 327, 338.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 46, 133, 144.

¹⁵ The Vale Royal property included a house and thirteen shops (*Vale Royal Ledger Book*, 131). In the absence of statistics relating to the fourteenth century, a search in the "rentals and surveys" of the sixteenth century shows that in 1526 the priory of St. Mary's had seventy tenants within the walls, and fifty in Handbridge, the suburb across the Dee (*Rentals and Surveys Roll* 119. P.R.O. printed in Chester Arch. Society's Journal, N.S. Vol.xiii).

¹⁶ Deputy Keeper's *Report*, xxviii., 36. Ormerod, ii., 813.

NOTES—*continued.*

17 See Chapter [The writer here refers to a chapter in a work by him on Cheshire in the Reigns of the Three Edwards, not yet printed.—Ed.]

18 *C.C.A. passim*. Boys were employed to drive pigs from Delamere to Chester. *ibid.*, 9.

19 *C.C.A.*, 193, 194.

20 *ibid.*, 198.

21 Morris (Doc.) 555

22 *Polychronicon ii.*, 26.

Liber Luciani 46, Giraldus vi., 139.

Domesday Survey of Cheshire, 109

23 *C.C.A.*, 102, 111.

24 Dugdale ii., 385.

25 *Harl. MSS.*, 2071/62a.

26 Morris (Doc.) 555.

27 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281) p.

Harl. MSS., 2071/90c.

28 See Chapter [The writer here refers to a chapter in a work by him on Cheshire in the Reigns of the Three Edwards, not yet printed.—Ed.]

29 *Recognizance Rolls*, 101, 102, 104, 432, 13, 20, 110, 67, *C.C.A.*, 202, 222.

30 Tait, *Chartulary of St. Werburgh's Abbey*, 102.

31 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281), 311.

32 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281), 235.

The Abbot of St. Werburgh had licence to take timber and brush-wood from this source for a short period. *ibid.*, 255.

33 *C.C.A.*, 122.

34 For example:—Frodsham (*Cal. Misc. Inquisitions*, Vol. ii., Nos. 46, 53); Delamere (*C.C.A.*, 130, 169), (*Recog.* 140, 453); Wirral (Ormerod ii., 441). Leland surmised that some of the many pools in Cheshire had gathered where turves had been cut. (*Itinerary*, iv., 2).

35 *Recognizance Rolls*, 515.

36 Morris (Doc.), 561.

37 Morris (Doc.) 554-562. There is also a further list of duties (granted for the repair of the walls and pavement) on pp. 562-564. This list, however, was only granted for a short period and although it contains a number of new articles (*e.g.*, various kinds of cloth) it cannot be quoted with the same confidence.

38 *C.C.A.*, 93, 104, 121, 128, 208, 263.

39 *Recognizance Rolls*, 21, 325, 459.

40 Dugdale ii., 385.

41 Morris (*Chester*), 122.

42 See a plea to a writ *Quo Warranto*, 31 Edward III, printed in Ormerod i., 287-288.

43 *ibid.*

44 *Harl MSS.*, 2071/89h.

45 Morris (*Chester*) 123.

46 The exemption was the subject of much controversy. It was revoked in 1363, but the revocation was annulled in 1392. *Calendar of Papal Registers—Letters.*

47 *Harl MSS.*, 2071/94c. Morris (*Chester*) 27.

48 Deputy Keeper's *Reports*. No. 27, p. 119.

49 *Annales Cestrienses*, 86-96.

50 The matter quoted here is taken from the manuscript Register of the Bishops of Lichfield, Vol.iii., folio 36a, and folio 98. The registers are preserved at the Diocesan Registry, Lichfield.

NOTES—continued.

⁵¹ See Chapter. [The writer here refers to a chapter in a work by him on Cheshire in the Reigns of the Three Edwards, not yet printed.—Ed.]

⁵² *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281), 105.

⁵³ *Cal. Fine Rolls* (1272-1307) p. 153, 206. *C.C.A.* 1, 14.

⁵⁴ *C.C.A.* 119.

⁵⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1292-1301), 105.

⁵⁶ *C.C.A.* 45, 91, 93. *Cal. Fine Rolls* (1272-1307), 82. *Flintshire Ministers Accounts*, 46.

⁵⁷ *C.C.A.* 18.

⁵⁸ *Cal. Close Rolls* (1307-1313), 141. *Recognizance Rolls*, 150.

⁵⁹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1292-1301), 126, *ibid.*, (1301-1307), 143.

⁶⁰ *Flintshire Ministers Accounts*, 9, 27, 42, 57, 64, 70.

⁶¹ *C.C.A.* 79.

⁶² *Recognizance Rolls*, 150.

⁶³ *Cal. Fine Rolls* (1307-1319) 33, 67, 467, 476.

⁶⁴ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1292-1301), 526.

⁶⁵ *Cal. Fine Rolls* (1307-1319), 79-80.

⁶⁶ *Recognizance Rolls*, 109, 151. *Cal. Fine Rolls* (1307-1319), 70. He made other purchases, e.g., in Foregate Street, Chester: *Ancient Deeds*, vi., p. 330; and he leased lands in Balderton, Pulford and Dodleston. Ormerod ii., 866.

⁶⁷ Morris (*Chester*), 577.

⁶⁸ *Cal. Close Rolls* (1343-1346) p.78.

⁶⁹ Round: *Feudal England*, 465.

⁷⁰ *The Making of Ireland and its Undoing*, 52.

⁷¹ Quoted in *Liber Luciani*, 21.

⁷² *Liber Luciani*, 23.

⁷³ Wright: *Political Poems ii.*, 157.

⁷⁴ A writer of high imaginative power who quotes no sources states, "The wharves are littered with quintals of raisins, with bales of hides and furs, sheep fells, yarns and rugs and blankets, with lasts of eels and salted salmon, most of these from Ireland in ships which will leave Chester again loaded with grain, cheeses, salt from the Wiches, bow staves and manufactured articles." Duckworth, *Chester*, 125.

⁷⁵ Morris: *Chester*, 11 and 458.

⁷⁶ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281).

⁷⁷ *Cal. of Inquisitions—Miscellaneous*, Vol. ii. Number 53.

⁷⁸ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1313-1317) p. 470.

⁷⁹ *Cal. Close Rolls* (1313-1318) p. 299

⁸⁰ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1321-1324) p. 27.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸² *Cal. Close Rolls* (1323-1327) p. 41.

⁸³ *Recog.* 445.

⁸⁴ *Historical and Municipal Documents of Ireland, 1172-1320. Guild Merchants* (1226); Johannes de Cestria, Laurencius Sumor de Cestria, (pp. 83, 86). *Free Citizens* (1225-1250), Hugo de Cestria, Willielmus de Cestria, Randalphus de Cestria, Ricardus filius Johannis spicarii de Cestria (pp. 113, 115, 121, 122), *Gild Merchant*, (1256-57) Adam le Koppere de Cestria, Johannes le Houte de Cestria, Ricardus de Wichio de Cestria, Philippus de Cestria sutor, Herbertus frater Agnetis vinetar de Cestria, Willielmus cyrothecarius de Cestria, (pp. 137, 138, 139).

⁸⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1292-1301) 126, (1301-1307) 143. *Cal. Close Rolls* (1307-1313) 6.

⁸⁶ Morris, *Chester*, 471.

NOTES—continued.

- 87 *Cal. of Documents relating to Ireland* (1171-1251) p. 398.
 88 *Royal Manor and Park of Shotwick*, 30.
 89 *E.g.*, *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1361-1364), 347.
 90 *Polychronicon* ii., 18.
 91 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1330-1333) 214.
 92 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1330-1334) 323.
 93 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1337-1339) 161.
 94 *ibid.*, (1341-1343) 56, *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1354-1358) 429.
 95 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1360-1364) 187, 304. *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1361-64) 17,
 19, 21, 36, 415. *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1364-1367) 12, 29.
 96 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1374-1377) 336, 396.
 97 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1377-1381) 447. Morris, *Chester* 31, 32, 458.
Recog., 28, 197, etc
 98 *e.g.*, Dartmouth, Dublin, Bristol, Plymouth (*Recog.* 7, 27, 105, 249
 529). It was not uncommon for merchants of one port to employ ships
 of another port. (*Cf.* Gras, *Early English Customs System*, 115, 120). A
 good example is Innocent de Chesterfield, a Chester merchant, who
 shipped wine from Rochelle in the *Mary* of Bristol (1393), from
 Bordeaux in the *Christopher* of Newcastle (1393-4), and in the
Maudelane of Tenby (1395-6) (*Recog.* 105). Compare also the transport
 of corn from Ireland to Lancaster in the *Trinity* of Chester (*Historical
 and Municipal Documents of Ireland*, 391).
 99 *Recog.*, 7, 34, 38, 62.
 100 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1364-1368) 226-7.
 101 *Recog.*, 529.
 102 *C.C.A.*, 45.
 103 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1318-1323) 453.
 104 *Recog.*, 529.
 105 Simon, *History of the Wine Trade*, i., 256.
 106 *ibid.*, i., 256.
 107 *ibid.*, i., 256. He also had some wine brought by land to Chester.
Cal. Pat. Rolls (1272-1281) 228.
 108 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281) 79.
 109 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1272-1281) 212.
 110 Simon *op. cit.*, i., 268. The entry is taken from the *Close Rolls*,
 but the *Calendar* (1272-1279) 274 omits the words "of rack."
 111 *C.C.A.*, 91, 93. The "wine of prisage" was sometimes sold by
 the Chamberlain, the price being entered in his receipts. If the price
 obtained was low, he added an explanatory note such as "because it
 was beyond measure weak," or "because it became so bad that it could
 not be sold higher" *ibid.*, 91, 208.
 112 After the middle of the fourteenth century, some went to Liver-
 pool. *Cal. Close Rolls* (1364-1368) 226-7.
 113 *C.C.A.*, 126, 167, 241.
 114 *C.C.A.*, 241.
 115 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1231-1292) 341, 358.
 116 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1307-1313) 81. *Cal. Close Rolls* (1307-1313) 213.
 117 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1307-1313) 353.
 118 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1317-1321) 198, 215.
 119 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1333-1337) 25, 26.
 120 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1361-1364) 415.
 121 *ibid.*, (1361-1367) 12.
 122 *Recog.*, 38.
 123 *Recog.*, 105. See also the incident in Anglesey (p. 57).
 124 *Polychronicon* ii., 41.
 125 *Registrum Epistolarum J. Peckham*, II. xlviij, II. 443, II. 453.

NOTES—continued.

- 126 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1348-1350) p. 593, 594.
 127 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1281-1385) p. 355.
 128 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1318-1323) 453.
 129 *Cal. of Documents relating to Ireland*, (1252-1284) 464.
 130 *C.C.A.*, 18.
 131 *ibid.*, 91, 102, 160, 224, 263.
 132 *Cal. Close Rolls* (1343-1346) 78.
 133 *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1343-1345) 164.
 134 *Gras, Early English Customs System*, 105.
 135 *Cal. Fine Rolls* (1307-1319) 9, 10, 33, 67. *Cal. Pat. Rolls* (1327-1330)
 107, 128. *ibid.*, (1330-1334) 103, 434. *Cal. Close Rolls* (1381-1385) 239.
 136 *Morris* (Doc.) 498, 529n.
 137 *Simon, History of the Wine Trade*, 256.
 138 *C.C.A.*, 238, 240, 255, 271, 275.
 139 *ibid.*, 229. The phrases are not quite free from ambiguity, "In the port at the Redbank" might be held to mean, "In the port [otherwise unnamed, which stands] at the Redbank," or "In the port which is at Redbank." In view of the other evidence, the meaning "in the port [*viz.*, of Chester, and] at the Redbank" seems the more probable.
 140 *C.C.A.* 26.
 141 *Morris* (Doc.) 553. *Morris* merely prints the claims without comment, explanation or examples.
 142 *Morris* (Doc.) 497.
 143 The best geological account is to be found in Ashton's *Evolution of a Coastline*, (London, 1920) pp. 161-169.
 144 Ashton, 163.
 145 *Liber Luciani*, 46.
 146 Ashton, 163.
 147 *Morris* (Doc.) 511.
 148 *Recog.*, 9, 206. *Cal. Close Rolls* (1381-1385), 469.
 149 Mr. R. Stewart-Brown suggests a further cause of silting:—"It is quite probable though it does not seem to have been generally noted, that to the excessive use of fish weirs, "coups" fishyards or floodyards, as they were called, may be ascribed much of the silting up of the Dee" (*Royal Manor and Park of Shotwick*, p. 18).
 150 *Morris* (Doc.) 511.
 151 *ibid.*, (Doc.) 576.
 152 *ibid.*, (Doc.) 521.
 153 *ibid.*, (Doc.) 490.
 154 The words are "bonus portus" in both the letters of 1445 and 1484. *Morris* translates the first "a good harbour," the second "a good port."
 155 On the subject of climatic stress, see Ellsworth Huntington: *World Power and Evolution* (Yale University Press, 1919).
 156 See Abram: *Social England in the Fifteenth Century*, 44.

