

XIII

Aspects of the Tyne's Overseas Trade as Evidenced by the Customs Bills of Entry, 1861–1880

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SUMMARY

Although relatively late in appearance and restricted in their period of publication, Newcastle's Customs Bills of Entry (NBESL) provide a remarkable source for the study of the port of Tyne's foreign-going trade and shipping in the late-nineteenth century. Until recently however, the sheer volume of the tabulated information that they contain has deterred research interest, a constraint which can now largely be surmounted by the use of relational database techniques. Analysis of the Bills not only provides valuable insight into factors which ensured that the port of Tyne remained the 'port of choice' for the Great Northern Coalfield's coal exports, but also helps explain how Newcastle positioned itself at the centre of that export trade's mercantile information network.

INTRODUCTION

THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF TRUTH in Milne's recent remark that, with regard to 'studies of the North East's maritime trade and shipping ... in many ways the early modern centuries are better known than the later nineteenth-century period of greatest change and growth.'¹

This paper seeks to address such concerns at a specific riparian, rather than regional, level. It illustrates how examination and analysis of a little-used primary source, the *Newcastle-upon-Tyne Bill of Entry and Shipping List* (NBESL) and associated Customs Bills, helps widen our understanding of the nature and complexity of the port of Tyne's overseas trade and shipping during this 'period of greatest change and growth.' Although Newcastle's Bills were published for barely twenty years, 1861–80, the period of issue was a significant one, entertaining radical innovations in North East merchant shipping and in local mercantile practices alike. As Fischer wisely advises though, such Customs Bills of Entry must 'not be regarded as a panacea' when studying the foreign-going trades, although the Newcastle Bills uniquely resolve one of his 'greatest difficulties' — they provide unrivalled opportunity to study outward (export) cargoes.²

In this work, consideration is given first to the remit, published format and information content of the NBESL, assessing its advantages and limitations as a source for determining patterns in the port of Tyne's trade and shipping during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Subsequently, practical demonstration of the facility it affords is provided through an outline case-study determining trade shifts and shipping deployments in a high-profile foreland area: the Baltic (foreland — a region to which a port's exports are commonly directed). Lastly, brief attention is given to the contemporary role of the NBESL and its companion publication, *Browne's Export List* (BEL), as viewed in terms of current business information and networking theory.^{3,4}

Initially, however, it useful to place the character and appearance of the NBESL in a wider context.

CUSTOMS BILLS OF ENTRY: THEIR ORIGINS

Published privately under Crown Letters Patent as an information source for merchants, the first regular Customs Bill of Entry appeared in London in the mid-seventeenth century, providing a digest of ship arrivals, departures and cargo details as compiled from the port's official Customs records. A similar bill, the *Bristol Presentiments*, appeared in the latter part of the eighteenth century, whilst the substantial expansion of trade that occurred at other regional ports in the nineteenth century resulted, from around 1830 onwards, in the Clyde, Liverpool, Hull, Newport and Newcastle following suit with their own dedicated bills for imports and exports (those of Liverpool and Hull having previously been incorporated in London's).⁵

During this early nineteenth period of growth, the profitable right to the publication of all Bills of Entry was purchased from the widow of the previous patent holder, John Lewis, by the Customs Annuity and Benevolent Fund, a fund that had been established in 1816 to provide for widows and dependents of the Customs service. Consequently, it was under this fund's auspices that the last of the major provincial bills to appear, Newcastle's, was produced — the first issue appearing in March 1861. However, when the Customs Benevolent Fund's own patent fell due for renewal nearly twenty years later, changes in Treasury policy caused the Crown (through the Commissioners of Customs) to become responsible for producing all Bills of Entry.⁶ Therefore, Newcastle's locally-published bills comprise a relatively short series, only 20 annual volumes, spanning the years 1861 to 1880. Nevertheless, in respect of the port's history this was an extremely significant period, one in which there was massive growth in the Tyne's foreign trade and complex changes in the character of the shipping that serviced it.

THE NEWCASTLE BILL: ITS NATURE AND CONTENTS

The NBESL was published on behalf of the 'Directors of the Customs Benevolent Fund' (subscription, 2 guineas p.a.) by Septimus A. Cail, 42–43 Newcastle Quayside, from 9 March 1861 to 31 December 1880.⁷ Initially, this Bill appeared three times a week in a single leaf (one- or two-printed page) format, and each issue carried comprehensive listings of 'Imports', 'Exports' and '[Ships]Entered Outwards', followed by several column inches of revenue-generating nautical advertisements — including those for ships 'Now Loading' or making scheduled sailings. Until 1 April 1875, all published entries referred solely to the port of 'Newcastle-upon-Tyne', but from that date onward additional provisions were made for North Shields and South Shields and, as a consequence, issues now occasionally ran to two leaves (three printed pages). Frequency of issue also increased, with the NBESL becoming a daily: Monday–Saturday.

Characteristically, and throughout its period of publication, the NBESL's columnar listings comprised:

Imports. Presented as individual ship's cargoes by date of entry. Each such entry included: date of arrival; port of departure; ship name; master's name; crew numbers; the nature — and

sometimes volume — of items discharged (arranged by consignee); and consignee's name, or, the designation 'to order'.

Exports. Presented as sequential loadings by date of notification. As a consequence a ship's export cargo — especially a general cargo — might comprise separate entries for parcels of goods, or coal products, loaded over a period of days. Each individual loading entry included: date; destination; ship name; master's name; nature and volume of items loaded (listed by consignor); and consignor's name.

Entered Outwards. Presented by date of clearance at the Custom House, with each entry listing notice of a ship's intention to load for a nominated foreign destination. Publication of a ship's entry outward usually, but not invariably, preceded its listing(s) in the 'Exports.' column. An 'Entered Outwards.' entry included: date clearance notified; destination; ship name; ship's home port (later, for foreign ships, the country of origin only); master's name; ship's registered tonnage; crew numbers; and name of the ship's Tyneside agent.

For all practical purposes, the NBESL provides historians with a remarkable opportunity to compile datasets about overseas trade and shipping from an accessible primary source. And, moreover, such compilations effectively mirror a contemporary shipper's and ship-owner's usage of it. Nevertheless, as with other comparable sources, some inconveniences remain for the modern researcher. In particular the names of ships, masters and destination- or home-ports were sometimes irregularly spelt or anglicised, whilst synonymous titles were given to some ports.⁸ Human error by clerks or typographers occasionally, and inevitably, resulted in minor omissions, duplications or incorrect dating, but cross-checking of relational database records or reference to reliable secondary sources resolves most such issues. Similarly, although identical (or similar) ship names occur with some regularity, resolution into individual vessels can usually be achieved by cross-referencing tonnages, masters and/or places of origin.⁹

Overall though, the NBESL is remarkably reliable, with a level of consistency and accuracy that seems to owe more to beneficial local decision-making than to the Customs Fund's policies nationally. Almost throughout the entire twenty years of its publication it was compiled at the Newcastle Custom House under the supervision of just one senior official, Newcastle's then Collector of Customs, J. Baldwin. Similarly, it was typeset in an adjacent works under the auspices of a single dedicated and self-interested printer, S. A. Cail.¹⁰ Contemporary newspaper comment also reveals that there were close understandings between Baldwin and Newcastle's burgeoning 'Quaysiders', the men who were the senior members of the port's commercial community.

This last understanding — between Collector and 'Quaysiders' — resulted in the one (historically significant) feature that distinguishes Newcastle's bills from provincial bills published elsewhere: the prominence given to detailing exports as against imports. Uniquely, and perhaps with a degree of Geordie perversity, Newcastle's bill of entry is really a bill of departure. For what Tyneside's shipowners, merchants, brokers and coalowners really wanted to know was: who was exporting what coals where, and, in what ships? Imports were of lesser interest, volumes were barely a quarter those of exports and import shipments depended much on outside, rather than locally-owned, carriers. Consequently, every exported chaldron of coal ('large' and 'small'), ton of coke, hundredweight-quarter-and-pound of soda, alkali or iron, pig of lead, thousand of firebricks, gas retort cupola, etc. was accounted for, and assigned its carrier, destination and consignor. Import cargoes however,

merited far less quantification, and product volumes were frequently left vague or unrecorded (even for the staples: grain and timber). Finally, although the bills' 'Entered Outwards.' entries duplicated carrier information recorded under 'Exports.', the former's listings additionally — and crucially for the historian — cited each ship's (register) tonnage and provenance.¹¹

Overall there is no doubting the NBESL's authenticity as a primary source. And, although rarely providing absolutely comprehensive computer datasets, the levels of internal integrity and completeness — especially in respect of exports — are remarkably high, rarely falling short of the theoretical potential by more than a percentage or two. Conversely, inaccuracies, detectable errors and inconsistencies are few and generally minor in nature. Analytically then, what may be extracted from such voluminous listings?

HISTORICAL YIELD

The Newcastle bills provide an extraordinary opportunity to study the nature and volume of the port's trade and its seaborne carriers in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, with the potential yields from their analyses falling into three areas: trade; shipping; and associations. Unlike other official publications, in particular the parliamentary *Annual Statements* with their broad — and sometimes obscure — collective categorisations by product, carrier and destination,¹² the NBESL's daily entry system allows for detailed, real-time analysis of cargo flows by specific destination and defined product, together with apportionment of shipping tonnage according to its character (i.e. sail or steam), size, and provenance.

For trade, the NBESL's port-to-port entry system provides for much finer distinctions to be made in the direction of trade than are afforded by the (largely port-to-nation/region) statistics provided by comparable national sources. The nature of the materials traded is similarly open to refinement, either by aggregation (e.g. large coals + small coals + coke + patent fuel = total coal products) in order to determine overall trends, or, by sub-division so as to isolate a specific cargo component (e.g. superphosphate amongst other chemical manufactures). Indeed, the volumes of materials traded — most particularly exports — can be determined with a very high degree of accuracy, and there is full opportunity to determine seasonal trade flows, a vitally important consideration in the coal trade. Finally, the senders (consignors) and — to lesser extent — the receivers (consignees) of shipments can be identified.¹³ Identification of the former is particularly helpful, allowing a merchant's trading volume and his relative business ranking to be determined with accuracy. Only rarely though, do the NBESL's entries provide for traceability of an export cargo's contents; manufacturers (or processors) who regularly consigned on their own account provide the only real exception.¹⁴

For shipping, corresponding data can be extracted about ships' voyages on a port-to-port (or, port-to-region/country) basis. This allows determination of particular carriers' (or carrier groups') routing regimes and their operational limitations or preferences; for example, did they make deliveries to shallow-water ports? The exact nature of the shipping deployed and whether it was engaged in the carriage of bulk (primarily coal) or mixed cargoes, can readily be determined. Similarly, the tonnage, size range, manning levels and stowage efficiency of the shipping units engaged. Accurate reckoning may also be made for a select time series — usefully a shipment season — of the aggregate tonnage, carrying capacity and propulsion character (sail or steam) of the vessels employed upon a chosen route or in a chosen trade.

Table 1 Tyne-registered shipping entering Newcastle, Hull and London with imports from the Baltic, 1880 (source — NBESL, Hull Bills of Entry, London 'A' Bills of Entry; 1880).

	Newcastle		Hull		London (5 months)	
	Entries (No.)	Tonnage (tons)	Entries (No.)	Tonnage (tons)	Entries (No.)	Tonnage (tons)
Sail	5	1333	1	376	10	2705
Steam	2	1410	9	5351	17	11115
Sail:Steam		1:1		1:14		1:4

Alternatively, vessels may be grouped according to their provenance (register-port/maritime region/nationality), typology or size, and deployments analysed accordingly.

Finally, explicit trade and shipping analyses of this kind may be cross-linked to associated primary sources, including the *Annual Statements* and analyses derived from them.¹⁵ Similarly, our understanding of the voyage patterns of Tyne-owned vessels may be enhanced through correlation with the published bills of other British ports — in particular those of Hull and London (table 1). Subsequently, by factoring in contemporary freight rate quotations, realistic reconstructions may also be made of select locally-owned ships' revenue earnings, and freight flow values for specific export destinations prepared on like basis.¹⁶ Correspondingly, correlation with individual entries in contemporary and recent shipping registers allows determination of the age-structure, character of build, typology and ownership patterns of British (especially North East) vessels that feature in the NBESL.¹⁷

In time, perhaps, it will be possible to integrate many such findings with complementary data extracted from the *Official Agreements and Accounts of Crew*.¹⁸ Merging, for example, these Official Agreements' records of manning, payment and voyage duration, with the trade, cargo and shipping stock information derived from bills of entry such as Newcastle's. At more local level, material derived from the bills might usefully be employed in a comprehensive study of Newcastle's late-nineteenth century maritime and commercial communities, a process already underway for the port city of Liverpool.¹⁹ However, in the immediate future the greatest value of the NBESL lies in its potential for making sectoral explorations of the port of Tyne's markets and overseas trade, 1861–80. These are explorations that, owing to the huge volume of data to be considered, are made practicable only through the advent of a powerful modern tool, the relational database.²⁰

CASE-STUDY: THE TYNE'S BALTIC TRADE

Most recently, Milne has confidently re-affirmed that it was the production of coal — and in particular its export — that underpinned Tyneside's economic expansion between 1850 and 1914.²¹ Similarly, all significant sources point to the conclusion that the port of Tyne's principal characteristic in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was, quite simply, growth.²² Although earlier it had been domestic (i.e. coastal) and not overseas (i.e. export) coal shipments that had dominated the Tyne's trade, in the 1830s and 1840s this well-established balance had begun to shift in favour of exports until, by the mid-1850s, there was near parity. This trend in seaborne shipment continued and, by the mid-1860s, export demand began to outstrip the now stagnant coastal business. Consequently, future growth became firmly

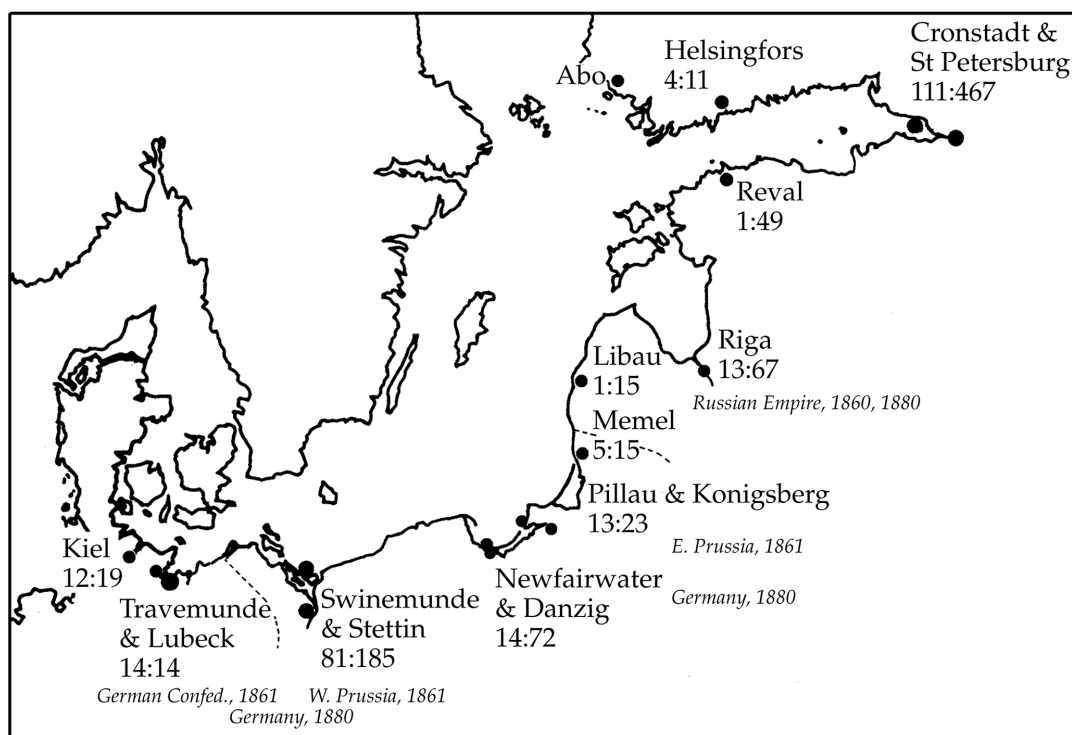


Fig. 1 The Baltic foreland, with the Tyne's coal shipments (thousand tons, 1861:1880) to its principal receiving ports (source — NBESL, 1861, 1880)

anchored in the 'Foreign Trades', and no more so than in the period covered by the NBESL. Between 1861 and 1880 Newcastle's coal exports rose more than twofold, from 2.1 to 4.5 million tons, and the port consistently accounted for around a quarter of the UK's gross annual exports of coal.²³

Although worldwide in extent, it became apparent that just a few regions of this global marketplace were absorbing the greater part of the Tyne's coal exports; a situation that the NBESL was uniquely positioned to record and reflect. Outstanding amongst these major (multi-national) regions were two of Newcastle's long-standing northern forelands, accessed through the ports of the North Sea and Channel coast (Brest-Elbe),²⁴ and the Baltic shore, respectively. This latter trade, that to-and-from the Baltic, was of especial note, constituting a well defined — if markedly seasonal — foreland in nineteenth-century mercantile terms.^{25, 26} However, it constituted a very diverse marketplace, one where — as is uniquely demonstrated by the NBESL — the port of Tyne was required to engage with some three dozen Russian, Prussian and German ports, large and small, along the Baltic's gulfs and littoral: from Kiel round to Åbo (Turku) (fig. 1).²⁷

The Baltic market was already absorbing 15 per cent of Newcastle's total exports of coal in the early 1860s, and this share grew significantly in the 1870s, reaching 22 per cent by 1880. In absolute terms, the expansion was marked by a threefold increase in volume, from 310,000 to 980,000 tons, as against the Tyne's twofold global norm over the same period.²⁸ Correspondingly, as Britain's leading manufacturer of chemicals, Tyneside benefited from the Baltic's

growing industrial, urban and agricultural need for these relatively high value products. Exports of chemicals, principally soda and alkali, increased at a higher rate even than coal's, expanding more than fourfold, from just over 8,800 tons in 1861 to more than 40,700 tons in 1880 — this latter representing a product value approaching £250,000 (compared to coal's £400,000).²⁹

Export trades of this magnitude necessarily required a very large volume of low cost shipping to carry them, for the prime cargo, coal, was one of considerable bulk but low commodity value; one ton of coal occupied 40 cubic feet of hold space, though valued at only some 5s. as loaded on board.³⁰ Even a cursory appraisal of the NBESL for 1861 suggests that these carriage needs were initially, and overwhelmingly, met by sailing vessels of modest size and mixed nationality. Quantitative analysis of (over 3,500) relevant NBESL entries reinforces this immediate impression, whilst adding various layers of understanding. For example, the capacity needs of 1861 were largely met by vessels owned in the home ports of three of the participating trading nations: England; Prussia; and the German Confederation (table 2). By and large, Prussian and German ports in the Baltic imported coal in their own domestic (national- and state-flagged) vessels, and it was largely Russia's inability to do so — through her acknowledged merchant shipping weakness — that opened up an opportunity for British carriers.³¹

This was a major opportunity indeed, for Russia absorbed 44 per cent (137,000 tons) of all the Tyne's Baltic-bound coals in 1861, with its leading Baltic-shore port, Cronstadt, importing three-quarters of them (102,000 tons). Some 260 sailings were needed in order to service this Cronstadt demand alone, of which 80 per cent were made by English-registered vessels. And it was from the resulting triangular voyages (Tyne — Cronstadt — London/Hull) that the Tyne's resident shipowners profited most.³² However, as close examination of the NBESL reveals, this provision was not — as has sometimes been assumed — the prerogative of a dedicated set of local ships, the 'Baltic Fleet'. Rather, it was an important constituent of a far more complex regime of ship deployments, a regime that requires elaboration. Contemporary

Table 2 The major regions of sail shipping supply for the Tyne's Baltic Trade, 1861
(source — NBESL, 1861).

Country	Region	Ships (number)	Tonnage (tons)	(%)
Prussia	East and West	207	40422	23
England	N. E. Coal Ports	146	37076	21
German Con.	Baltic-shore	179	29946	17
Dutch Rep.	Northern Provinces	79	8367	5
Scotland	North East Coast	60	8059	5
German Con.	North Sea Coast	75	7710	4
England	East Yorkshire	34	7660	4
England	Humber	19	5972	3
Denmark	Archipelago	42	4464	3
England	London	13	3869	2

authorities agree that around 1,400 sailing ships were owned on the Tyne in the early 1860s,³³ and analysis of the NBESL for 1861 reveals that, collectively, these Tyne-owned vessels made 1,818 foreign-going clearances from their home port during the year: 188 (10%) of them to the Baltic. Considered geographically, Tyne-owned sailing ships were deployed to nine distinct trading zones worldwide, of which — in order of tonnage cleared — the three most important were: the continental Home Trade (Elbe to Brest); Southern Europe and the Mediterranean; and the Baltic. Together, these three afforded almost 85 per cent of all voyage opportunities and provided potentially complementary seasonal deployment patterns, all of which might be supported by a ship's reversion to the coastal coal trade in winter (fig. 2).

If not exactly comprising a 'Baltic Fleet', then the 119 Tyne-owned ships that traded to the Baltic in 1861 followed a characteristic foreign-going pattern. Half of all their overseas voyages were made to the Baltic, and nearly 90 per cent of their entire foreign-going clearances were for north European ports. Undoubtedly the main factor that limited this group of ships' wider geographic operation was that few of them were 'yellow metallised'.³⁴ However, the former notion that they comprised a dangerously old and inferior class of vessel is noteworthy only by way of qualified refutation. Statistical analysis indicates that although this fleet's overall age profile was indeed higher than that of Tyne-owned ships deployed elsewhere overseas, their casualty rates differed little from them; if anything, the Baltic-going vessels enjoyed slightly better life expectancy. Nevertheless, by modern standards the overall attrition rate was very high. Tyneside shipowners' foreign-going casualties lay at 5–20 per cent p.a. throughout the 1860s, and their sales of ships also increased. Conversely, their ship replenishment levels were extremely low. As yet though, there was little direct competition from cargo-steamers that could viably make the Baltic run, although the newly introduced steam colliers of the era were making serious inroads on the coal trade's east coast and continental routes. And these were the very routes that the 'handy-sized' Baltic-going sailing colliers had depended upon for much of their yearly employment.³⁵ Consequently, the Baltic trade's shipowning and coal consigning constituencies were required to respond to change, and throughout the succeeding critical decade — the 1870s — the evidences within the NBESL reflect that situation.

Two processes in particular drove change in the Tyne's Baltic trade during the 1870s: quantitative change, marked by escalating demands for British coal in Russia and Germany; and the revolutionary, qualitative, technical change signalled by the introduction of the bulk-cargo carrying steamer. As indicated, the Baltic's demand for coal tripled between 1861 and 1880, but analysis of the NBESL's entries reveals that the demands on shipping rose even more steeply; shifts in export destination and the coal products despatched caused, proportionally, an even greater demand for cargo capacity.³⁶ Considered against the 1861 baseline, the supply of capacity was required to increase at 17 per cent annually, almost quadrupling by 1880 (reaching 1 million cargo-tons). How then, did the trade's carriers respond to this exceptional rise in demand for shipping tonnage? Again, quantitative scrutiny of the NBESL, with its unique ability to discriminate ship provenance and cargo movements, port-to-port, provides the answer.

Towards the end of the 1860s a singular typological shift started to occur in the composition of the Baltic-going fleet. By 1870, even though its sailing ship element still bore close resemblance (in nature and numbers) to that of 1861, bulk-cargo carrying steamers were providing more than one-third of the shipping tonnage employed. From then onwards, these steamers almost unremittingly increased their share of the Baltic freight market.³⁷ True, sail

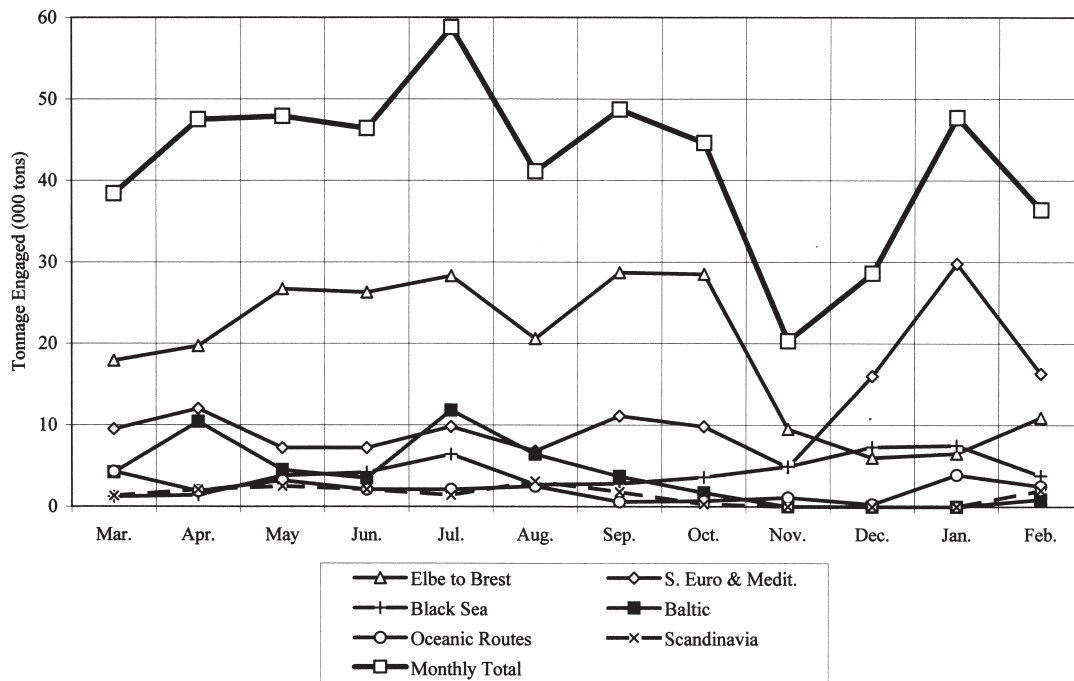


Fig. 2 The seasonal foreign-going deployments of Tyne-registered shipping from the Tyne, 1861-62 (source — NBESL, Vol. 1).

continued to provide the largest number of ships engaged until at least 1880, but in that year the 672 sailing vessels involved provided just under a quarter of the trade's cargo capacity, whilst 367 steamers supplied over three-quarters of it (fig. 3). Significantly, 262 of these steamers were in British hands, and most were sizeable modern vessels of over 700 registered tons. Meanwhile, the average size of the largely foreign-owned sailing ships now employed was less than 200 tons — smaller than their British-owned equivalents, the brigs and snows, of 1861.

This contrast between sail and steam was not in size alone, but in voyage speed and frequency, a fact that voyage patterns derived from the NBESL of the 1870s reveals only too well. The owners of these steamers could exploit the speed and regularity of their vessels' passage times in order to make multiple sailings during the Baltic's short (April–November) ice-limited season.³⁸ So the facility for series delivery became a new and significant factor in the Tyne-to-Baltic trade, confidently allowing the North East's coal producers and merchants to make forward sales contracts — especially for gas coal and coke — on an unprecedented scale. By contrast, passage times under sail remained relatively slow and unimproved, militating against multiple seasonal voyaging; almost 75 per cent of sail's Baltic deliveries were made by ships that carried out only one seasonal trip. These differences in delivery mode had implications for the Baltic destinations served as well, resulting in increased emphasis on those regarded as 'steamer ports'. Steamer ports were those that could assure shipowners of fast turnarounds through sufficient depth of water, length of quay, effective cargo handling and, ideally, railway-based infrastructures.³⁹ This shift, however, did not

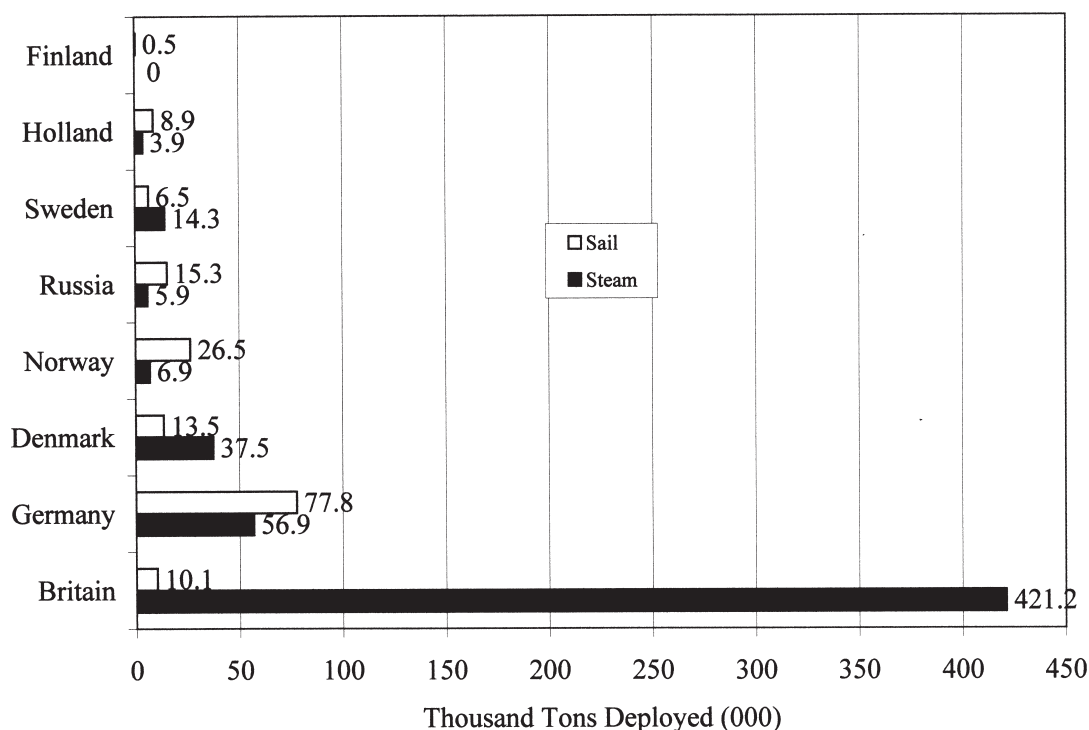


Fig. 3 Sail and steam shipping tonnage deployed in the Tyne's Baltic trade, 1880: by nation (source — NBESL, 1880).

always adversely affect sailing ship operations. Small-scale sail still held the advantage when making infrequent deliveries of small quantities of coals to a spread of minor ports — and there were still many of them. Nevertheless, the delivery of high-volumes of coal exports steadily became a polarised, steamer port business, concentrated at the Baltic's extremities: Stettin/Swinemünde in the west (Germany); and, Cronstadt/St Petersburg in the east (Russia). By 1880, these two ports absorbed over two-thirds of the Tyne's Baltic exports between them, and British steamship owners dominated the carriage of coal to both.

In conclusion, although the roles of sail and steam in the merchant shipping of the late nineteenth century are often portrayed as ones of outright competition, case-study investigations of this kind often reveal a far more subtle story, one whose subtleties may be discovered through study of a detailed and differentiated source such as the NBESL. Between 1860 and 1880 it can be seen that the Tyne's exports to the Baltic grew at an unprecedented rate, a demand-led situation that placed great pressure upon the available shipping tonnage. Stability of supply was ensured not only through the capacity of carriers to respond by adopting innovative technologies and practices, but by select responses that allowed pre-existing, sail based supply chains and techniques to persist. During this era of unprecedented change it was complementarity and interdependence, rather than competition alone, that was the key to the trade's expansion.

How far the river Tyne's own shipowning constituencies responded during this era of change, 1861-80, is yet another layer of the story, and one that cannot be elaborated within

the confines of this paper. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to remark that whilst Tyneside's ship-owners gradually lost their lead in the Tyne-to-Baltic carrying trade, the port of Tyne never lost its supremacy as the Great Northern Coalfield's 'port of choice' for the shipment of coals to the Baltic. Testament to this is found in the returns of the NBESL's companion publication, *Browne's Export List*, the aggregation of whose monthly listings for 1880 shows that 71 per cent of this coalfield's exports to the Baltic market were shipped via the Tyne, whilst its nearest rivals, Sunderland and the Hartlepoons, handled only 13 and 12 per cent respectively (proportions that varied little throughout the 1870s).

These statistics are of more than passing historical interest, for the compilation of real time listings and league tables was a significant expression of the need for information flow in the region's mercantile communities throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. The protection and selective publication of such information was, as will be shown, a matter that excited commercial and governmental concerns. Concerns in which policy and personality were not always separable.

THE BILL'S CONTEMPORARY VALUE

Three Quayside-based institutions of medieval antiquity still provided the basic network through which Newcastle's exporters and shipowners worked in the mid-nineteenth century: the [coal] Exchange, a trading floor which (twice daily) occupied part of the city's Guildhall hard by the Tyne bridge; the Custom House, just a furlong away at the Quayside's mid-point; and, a similar distance up Broad Chare, Newcastle's Trinity House. Indeed, one might well remark that between them these three formed an institutional holy trinity, one so disposed topographically that even a corpulent, short-of-breath broker might make the necessary perambulations a couple or more times a day — business information networking by shoe leather, food and ale. This was the working environment into which the new public information source, the NBESL, arrived.

Not, however, that it was altogether new, for the Custom House was already selling its (less detailed) import and export lists to two local newspapers, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily Express*. But soon after the NBESL first appeared, in March 1861, the Custom House authorities conveniently noticed that — in contravention of its existing publication agreement — the *Express* was sharing these lists' purchase cost by allowing a third party, the *Newcastle Journal*, to publish them. Consequently, the Collector of Customs, 'at the instance of the Bill of Entry Office', immediately threatened the *Express* with legal action unless it ceased to publish the lists. In expectation of resumption, the three papers complied and cannily put forward a higher joint offer, but the Customs Fund simply reiterated their sole patent rights and refused this improved bid outright, indicating that 'the sum offered was much below what the Bill of Entry Office would take'. Disgruntled, the *Journal* (with its newly-established daily issues to fill) commenced a public campaign, a 'paper war', by publishing anonymous letters aimed at the Collector of Customs, J. Baldwin, an effrontery he swiftly matched by commencing a libel action against the paper. Meanwhile, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, the prime purveyor of local commercial news, stood tactfully on the sidelines, making emollient noises to Baldwin by blaming 'the authorities whose instructions he [has] carried out in the most agreeable manner possible.'⁴⁰ A storm in a very local teacup you might say, but one that demonstrates how valuable a commercial commodity this Newcastle Custom House information was considered to be.

In fact, it was already considered valuable enough to have encouraged the separate publication (in tabular form) of Custom House-based monthly aggregates of exports and imports. Established *c.* 1853, and titled *Browne's Export List* (BEL), this subscriber-financed, monthly publication was also produced 'under the authority of the Queen's letters patent...' but was edited by the eponymous Thomas Browne, '1st clerk and cashier', *c.* 1850–59, in the Long Room (the Bill of Entry Office) at Newcastle Custom House.⁴¹ Browne in turn passed on the editorship to his nephew, John Browne Bates, a junior clerk (3rd and 2nd class), 1859–80. The revenues raised by publishing this monthly list were probably always directed to the Customs Fund, but it was not until March 1880 — the same year that the NBESL ceased publication — that BEL first carried the definitive acknowledgment: 'Published Monthly, under the Authority of the Directors of the Customs Annuity and Benevolent Funds.'⁴² Indeed, this particular issue of *BEL* was a highly significant one for, having become increasingly 'costly to produce' and suffering the loss of its principle subscriber (the North of England United Coal Trade Association), it had almost foundered.⁴³ Rescue had been achieved only through the support of a few unnamed Quayside merchants who — prompted by the *Chronicle* — had eventually 'come up very well in the matter'. Sadly, J. B. Bates died (aged 45 years) in the summer of that same year, 1880, leaving behind a revived publication that was 'held in great value by the commercial community not only of Tyneside, but of the great ports of the Kingdom ...', and which within a few years was being congratulated on having become 'thoroughly established at London, Hull, and Liverpool ... [where] its statistics are regarded as authoritative'.⁴⁴ Interestingly, until as late as December 1891 — the last full run of issues traced locally — Bates' executors continued to be cited as 'Publishers' on behalf of the Customs Fund.

As to the monthly information content of BEL, there is no more succinct description than that displayed on its masthead: 'AN ACCOUNT OF COALS, COKE, PATENT FUEL, & IRON exported from all the principal places in England, Scotland, & Wales, viz., [list of 33 principal ports and 11 sub-ports] — as well as the Tons of Coal, Coke, and Patent Fuel carried coastwise from these Ports, together with an account of *all* Goods exported from Newcastle, North Shields, South Shields, Blyth, Amble, Seaham, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Middlesboro', and Stockton, and of the Number of Vessels belonging to the different Countries engaged in the Export Trade of Coal and Coke [these last listed by nationality under the list's 33 principal ports].

Again, this cameo history of BEL may seem a very local tale, but it is one that has wider resonance. Firstly, it is meaningful that such a publication should be branded (and the term is used advisedly) with a Custom House officer's own name, signifying the authentic and comprehensive nature of the information it contained. Secondly, the long term success of BEL is an indicator of the expanding market for Tyneside's mercantile information during the late nineteenth century. Initially, Thomas Browne's digest was compiled to service a very local commercial network (the Newcastle Quayside constituency), but later it fulfilled a recognised regional need: 'without it [BEL], it would be difficult to arrive at a notion of the shipping trade of the Northern coal ports'.⁴⁵ Eventually, as has been indicated, the great expansion of the nation's maritime commerce encouraged its much wider circulation, with issues reaching specialist users 'throughout the great ports of the Kingdom'.

Finally, it is necessary to return to the fate of the NBESL itself. As indicated, the Customs Funds' patent was not renewed after December 1880 and, although Newcastle Custom House made it clear that this local Bill would still continue to be issued under its auspices, the 'Lords

of the Treasury' intimated that the new listings would omit the names of exporters — a contentious issue ever since the Bills' seventeenth-century inception. Such omission immediately provoked a strongly-worded memorial from existing subscribers in Newcastle, the 'merchants, manufacturers, shipowners and shipbrokers on the Quayside', who indicated that this 'repression' of exporters' names would destroy 'much of the benefit now derived from its [the Bill of Entry's] publication'.⁴⁶

Not for the first or last time, metropolitan and North East views on the need for a transparent information flow had collided.

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NOTES

Abbreviations

NBESL *Newcastle-upon-Tyne Bill of Entry and Shipping List*
 BEL *Browne's Export List*

¹ G. J. Milne, *North East England, 1850–1914, The Dynamics of a Maritime-Industrial Region*, Woodbridge (2006), 10.

² L. R. Fischer, 'A Flotilla of Wood and Coal: Shipping in the Trades between Britain and the Baltic, 1863–1913', in Y. Kaukiainen, ed., *The Baltic as Trade Road*, 7th Baltic Seminar at Kotka (1989), 45–6.

³ G. Boyce, *Information, Mediation and Institutional Development: The Rise of Large-scale Enterprise in British Shipping, 1870–1919*, Manchester (1995).

⁴ G. J. Milne, 'Knowledge, Communications and the Information Order in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool', *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2002).

⁵ E. Carson, 'Sources for Maritime History (1): Customs Bills of Entry', *Maritime History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1971), 176–7.

⁶ Carson, 'Sources for Maritime History', 177, 184.

⁷ *Newcastle-upon-Tyne Bill of Entry and Shipping List*, Vol. 1–Vol. 20; local collections, Newcastle Central Library.

⁸ For example, Danzig's (Gdansk's) deepwater port (now, Nowy Port) listed as: Neufahrwasser; Newfarewater; Newfairwater; or, Fairwater.

⁹ For instance, it can be demonstrated that eight separate vessels named *Maria* made Tyne-to-Baltic trips in 1861, whilst several (variously spelt) *Margaret* can also be disentangled.

¹⁰ Septimus Cail, printer and nautical retailer, was a proponent of another medium of commercial information exchange, the Quayside's private luncheon clubs.

¹¹ Initially, both British and Foreign provenance was recorded by port of ownership, but later practice accorded foreign ships their nationality alone.

¹² BPP, *Annual Statements of Trade and Navigation, 1853–70*; BPP, *Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping, 1871–1913*.

¹³ The designation of imports 'to order' indicated that a Newcastle consignee had not been nominated at time of shipment; sale during voyage transit was commonplace.

¹⁴ This is a particular limitation in the case of coal. Shippers can be identified, but not producers.

¹⁵ D. J. Starkey et al, eds, *Shipping Movements in the Ports of the United Kingdom, 1871–1913*, A Statistical Profile, Exeter (1999).

¹⁶ Tables of freight charges (especially for coal) were widely published locally and nationally. However, local reports of ship charters actually 'fixed', such as those carried in the commercial section of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, provide a far more reliable source.

¹⁷ Clayton's *Register of Shipping*, 1865, reprint, Liverpool (2002); R. E. Keys, *Dictionary of Tyne Sailing Ships*, Newcastle (1998); Lloyd's *Register*, 1860–80, London (1860–80); Marwood's *Annual Directory, Shipping Register and Commercial Advertiser*, 1854–5, reprint, Liverpool (2003); Turnbull's *Shipping Register*, 1865, 1875, 1885, North Shields (1865, 1875, 1885).

¹⁸ K. Matthews, 'Crew Lists, Agreements and Official Logs of the British Empire, 1863–1913', *Business History*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1974).

¹⁹ The *Mercantile Liverpool Project*, available at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/merchant/> (Accessed 22.6.2007).

²⁰ A. G. Osler, 'Responding to Change: Shipping Deployments in the Baltic Trade of the Tyne, 1860–1880' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2006), 296–8.

²¹ Milne, *North East England*, 16–59.

²² For example: J. Guthrie, *The River Tyne: Its History and Resources*, Newcastle (1880); R. W. Johnson, *The Making of the Tyne: A Record of Fifty Year's Progress*, London (1895); N. R. Elliot, 'Tyneside, a Study in the Development of an Industrial Seaport, Parts I and II', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, No. 53 (1962), 225–37, 263–72; O. Lendrum, 'An Integrated Elite: Newcastle's Economic Development, 1840–1914', in R. Colls and B. Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne, A Modern History*, Chichester (2001), 27–46.

²³ Osler, thesis, 14–19.

²⁴ Legally, but confusingly, part of the 'Home Trade'.

²⁵ A. G. Osler, 'Coal, Chemicals and Change: Tyneside's Baltic Trade, 1860–1880', in P. Salmon and T. Barrow, eds, *Britain and the Baltic, Studies in Commercial, Political and Cultural Relations, 1500–2000*, Sunderland (2003), 198–9.

²⁶ Osler, thesis, 3–4.

²⁷ Prior to unification (1871), German ports comprised those in states of the German Confederation e. g. Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Although listed separately in the NBESL, statistics for the ports of the Grand Duchy of Finland (Imperial Russia) are considered as 'Russian' here.

²⁸ Osler, thesis, 26–31.

²⁹ Osler, thesis, 31–5.

³⁰ Freight charges to the Baltic generally exceeded the coal's actual commodity cost.

³¹ S. Palmer, *Politics, Shipping, and the Repeal of the Navigation Laws*, Manchester (1990) 54–5; this convincingly describes Russia's 'exceptional maritime incapacity'.

³² Osler, thesis, 151–61.

³³ Marwood's *Annual Directory*, 1854–55; G. B. Hodgson, *The Borough of South Shields*, Newcastle (1903), 317; W. G. Armstrong et al eds, *Industrial Resources of the Tyne, Wear and Tees etc.*, 2nd ed., London and Newcastle (1864), (3)–(5); Clayton's *Annual Register*, 1865.

³⁴ That is, they were not protected against the dangerous wood-boring molluscs (*teredo*) of warmer seas.

³⁵ A. G. Osler, 'Time Runs Out: a Case-Study in Baltic-going Sail, 1854–1872', *The Northern Mariner/Le Mariner du Nord*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2002), 13–27.

³⁶ The longest route, that to Cronstadt or St. Petersburg (c. 1300 nautical miles), now employed a higher proportion of sailings. Coke cargoes — which occupied twice the hold space of an equivalent weight of coal — increased sevenfold.

³⁷ Osler, 'Coal, Chemicals and Change', 207–14.

³⁸ The principal advance was the introduction (or retro-fitting) of fuel-efficient compound engines. This brought even the Baltic's longest routes within the bulk-cargo carrying steamer's effective range (see Osler, thesis, 182–91).

³⁹ Y. Kaukiainen, 'Coal and Canvas: Aspects of Competition between Steam and Sail, c. 1871–1914', in L. U. Scholl and M-L Hinkkanen, comp., *Sail and Steam: Selected Maritime Writings of Yrjö Kaukiainen*, St John's, Newfoundland (2004), 113–5.

⁴⁰ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 27 May, 17 June, 1864.

⁴¹ *Ward's Directory of Newcastle, Gateshead etc.*, 1850, 42.

⁴² Subscriptions were two guineas p. a., the same level as for the *Newcastle-upon-Tyne Bill of Entry and Shipping List*.

⁴³ No issues appeared in January and February 1880.

⁴⁴ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 27 July 1880: Bates' obituary, which described him as '... a good type of Newcastle man, plain and straightforward in his information, and never unwilling to impart it to such as needed it.'

⁴⁵ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 30 January 1880.

⁴⁶ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 18 December 1880.

