

Stephen H. Rigby / Robert C. Nash



**The Overseas Trade of Boston,
1279–1548**



QUELLEN UND DARSTELLUNGEN ZUR HANSISCHEN GESCHICHTE

HERAUSGEGEBEN
VOM
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Stephen H. Rigby/Robert C. Nash: The Overseas Trade of Boston, 1279–1548

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THE OVERSEAS TRADE OF BOSTON, 1279–1548

BÖHLAU VERLAG WIEN KÖLN

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PREFACE

The particular and enrolled accounts of the customs and subsidies levied on England's medieval trade which are preserved amongst the records of the royal Exchequer provide us with a picture of English commerce in the later Middle Ages that is unparalleled in its detail and richness. These sources are particularly important for the study of the history of the Lincolnshire town of Boston, which, despite being one of England's largest towns and major ports in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, lacks a borough archive of the kind that allows us to trace the history of many of England's other medieval towns. Nevertheless, although the present study outlines some of the major changes in the composition of Boston's overseas trade as revealed by the customs accounts, its purpose is not to offer a detailed description or explanation of the development of the port's commerce in this period: I hope to provide a more in-depth analysis of Boston's trade in a future account of the town's history in the later Middle Ages. Rather, the aim of this study is to bring together all of the statistical data from Boston's enrolled customs accounts for the period from 1279 to 1548 so as to trace the fluctuations in the volume of the port's commerce, the changes in the nature of the commodities which were imported and exported, and the shifts in the origin of the merchants who shipped them (whether denizen or alien, Hansard or non-Hanseatic alien), and to explain the evolution of the customs system which produced this information. I hope that this book might inspire specialists in the history of other ports to publish similar studies so that we will eventually have detailed and comprehensive statistical information available for the medieval trade of each of England's customs' head ports during this period.

All historical research is necessarily a collaborative exercise. In writing this book, I have benefitted from assistance generously provided by Jim Bolton, Bruce Campbell, John Oldland and Alex Sapoznik. I am also very grateful to Mark Bailey, Rosalind Brown-Grant, Pamela Cawthorne and Wendy Childs for their extremely useful feedback on earlier drafts, and to Cath D'Alton who prepared Map 1. I am especially indebted to Stuart Jenks and Maryanne Kowaleski for their expert advice and detailed guidance on England's trade and customs system, and to Robert Nash who not only suggested many improvements to my text but also prepared the graphs of Boston's imports and exports given below. Naturally, none of these scholars can be held responsible for the errors which inevitably remain in the text. Finally, particular thanks are owed to the trustees of the Marc Fitch Fund for providing the financial support which enabled the publication of this book.

Stephen H. Rigby

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I.

THE EXCHEQUER ENROLLED CUSTOMS
ACCOUNTS AS A SOURCE FOR ENGLISH OVERSEAS
TRADE IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Modern visitors to the Lincolnshire town of Boston are likely to be struck by the surviving architectural evidence of the town's wealth and importance in the Middle Ages. Its existing medieval buildings include the Guildhall, which dates from the 1390s, the refectory of the Dominican friary (the only one of Boston's four mendicant houses with standing remains), a number of brick and timber-framed domestic buildings and, most famously of all, St Botolph's, which is one of the largest medieval parish churches in England and whose famous tower, the Stump, is the highest in England (excluding spires).¹ Around the time that the Guildhall was being built for the Guild of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Boston was amongst the leading urban communities in the country, with its 1377 poll tax return suggesting a population of perhaps 5,500, the tenth largest of any town in England.² Yet, disappointingly, the surviving written sources for medieval Boston are scattered and fragmentary. Despite its size and importance, medieval Boston did not achieve the formal self-government enjoyed by many other English towns, especially royal towns such as Lincoln or Grimsby, which were administered by their own elected officials and which have their own borough archives. Instead, Boston was subject to

1 For these buildings, see G. Harden, *Medieval Boston and its Archaeological Implications* (Sleaford, 1978); J. Minnis and K. Carmichael, *Boston, Lincolnshire: Historic North Sea Port and Market Town* (Swindon, 2015); K. Giles, 'St Mary's Guildhall, Boston, Lincolnshire: the archaeology of a medieval "public" building', *Medieval Archaeology*, 55 (2011), pp. 226–56; S. Moorhouse, 'Finds in the refectory at the Dominican friary, Boston', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 7 (1972), pp. 21–53; L. Monckton, "'The beste and fayrest of al Lincolnshire": the parish church of St Botolph, Boston', in S. Badham and P. Cockerham, eds, *The beste and fayrest of al Lincolnshire: The Church of St Botolph's, Boston, Lincolnshire, and its Medieval Monuments* (British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 554 (2012)), pp. 29–48. For further reading on medieval Boston, see the notes and bibliography in S. H. Rigby, *Boston, 1086–1225: A Medieval Boom Town* (Lincoln, 2017).

2 The National Archives, London (T.N.A.), Exchequer LT. R., Enrolled Lay Subsidy Returns, E359/8B, m. 18; E359/8C; *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381, Part 2: Lincolnshire–Westmoreland*, ed. C. Fenwick (Oxford, 2001), p. 3. For the problems involved in calculating total populations from numbers of taxpayers in 1377, see S. H. Rigby, 'Urban population in late medieval England: the evidence of the lay subsidies', *Economic History Review*, 63 (2010), pp. 393–417, at 398–9. For urban populations in 1377, see A. Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in D. M. Palliser, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Volume I (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 747–70, at 758.

the overlordship of a number of different manorial administrations; consequently a dedicated borough archive has not survived for the period before the town's incorporation in 1545.³

As a result, perhaps the most important surviving sources for Boston's history in the later Middle Ages—and certainly the most significant quantitative sources—are not borough records, but rather the accounts of the royal customs and subsidies levied on the port's overseas trade as part of the national customs system which was developed by the Crown from 1275 onwards. At first, only exports of wool, woolfells and hides were customed but, over the course of the fourteenth century, more and more commodities were brought into the system until, by the end of the century, virtually every import or export was subject to one or more duties.⁴ The officials who collected these customs were responsible for accounting at the royal Exchequer for the revenues from the overseas trade which was carried out within their jurisdiction.⁵ Two main forms of accounts survive as the products of this system and together they provide us with evidence for England's overseas trade whose detail is unparalleled in the rest of medieval Europe. First are the detailed 'particular' customs accounts produced by the local customs officials themselves which were sent to the royal Exchequer to be audited. These accounts list the individual ships which arrived at or left a port within a specific period, often that of the Exchequer year which ran from Michaelmas (29 September) to Michaelmas, along with the names of the merchants with goods on board and details of the commodities they imported and exported.⁶ The particular accounts, whether compiled by the customs collectors themselves (in which case they also give details of the customs and

3 S. H. Rigby, 'Boston and Grimsby in the Middle Ages: an administrative contrast', *Journal of Medieval History*, 10 (1984), pp. 51–66; S. H. Rigby, *Medieval Grimsby: Growth and Decline* (Hull, 1993), chapters 2, 4. For the text of Boston's 1545 charter of incorporation, see T. H. Allen, *The History of the County of Lincoln from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (two volumes; London, 1834), I: 233–8. Allen ascribed the charter to 1546 (*Ibid.*, pp. 226, 238), as did Thompson (P. Thompson, *The History and Antiquities of Boston* (Boston, 1856), p. 64) and, following him, some recent popular histories of the town, but the charter was actually dated 14 May, 37 Henry VIII, i.e. 1545 (*Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, volume 20, part 1, no. 846/38; *British Borough Charters, 1307–1660*, ed. M. Weinbaum (Cambridge, 1943), pp. 69–70).

4 For the evolution of the customs administration, see N. S. B. Gras, *The Early English Customs System* (Cambridge, Mass., 1918).

5 For the accounting procedure, see *The Overseas Trade of London: Exchequer Customs Accounts, 1480–1*, ed. H. S. Cobb (London Record Society, 27 (1990)), pp. xxiv–xxviii; *The London Customs Accounts: 24 Henry VI (1445/46)*, ed. S. Jenks (Cologne, 2018), pp. xxiv–lx.

6 T.N.A., Exchequer K. R. Customs Accounts, E122. For the text of particular accounts for Boston, see *The Overseas Trade of Boston in the Reign of Richard II*, ed. S. H. Rigby (Lincoln Record Society, 93, (2005)); Gras, *The Early English Customs System*, pp. 273–302, 516–20; and the Appendix below.

subsidies due from each merchant and of the total amount owed to the Exchequer) or by the controller, who was appointed in each port as a check on the collectors' honesty and efficiency, are unrivalled in their detail. Unfortunately, however, once the Exchequer accounting procedure was completed, there was little need to preserve these accounts and so their survival in all ports is rather random and very patchy. For instance, for Boston, we have particular accounts for only eight of the twenty-two years of Richard II's reign (1377–99).⁷

By contrast, the second form of the customs accounts, the 'enrolled' accounts compiled at the Exchequer itself, do survive for most years from 1279 to 1548. These accounts summarise the volume or value of trade liable to each particular duty in each port within a specific accounting period and record the total amounts of custom and subsidy due from each of them for which the collectors were liable at the Exchequer. As a result, the enrolled accounts allow us to follow the annual fluctuations in the trade of individual ports—and of England as a whole—in the later Middle Ages. Since merchants of different origins paid customs and subsidies at variable rates, it is often possible to distinguish the trade of denizen (mainly English-born) merchants from those of alien merchants, or to separate the trade of merchants of the Hanseatic League from that of other aliens.⁸ Before 1303, these enrolled accounts were included alongside other forms of royal income in the Exchequer pipe rolls, but after this date the enrolled accounts of revenues from customs and subsidies on overseas trade were gathered together in separate rolls.⁹

Within the customs system, Boston was one of the 'head ports' (of which there were thirteen in the fourteenth century, and fifteen or sixteen in the following century) whose officials were responsible for collecting customs along particular stretches of the English coastline.¹⁰ The Boston collectors' authority stretched northwards along the Lincolnshire coast to Grimsby, which sometimes lay within the jurisdiction of the Hull collectors and sometimes in that of Boston, and to the south extended either to Maidenhouse (a deserted port now in Clenchwarnton parish, Norfolk) or to Wisbech (Cambridgeshire), where the Lynn customs jurisdiction began (see Map 1).¹¹ The enrolled customs accounts rarely distinguish

7 Rigby, *The Overseas Trade of Boston in the Reign of Richard II*, pp. xvii–xviii.

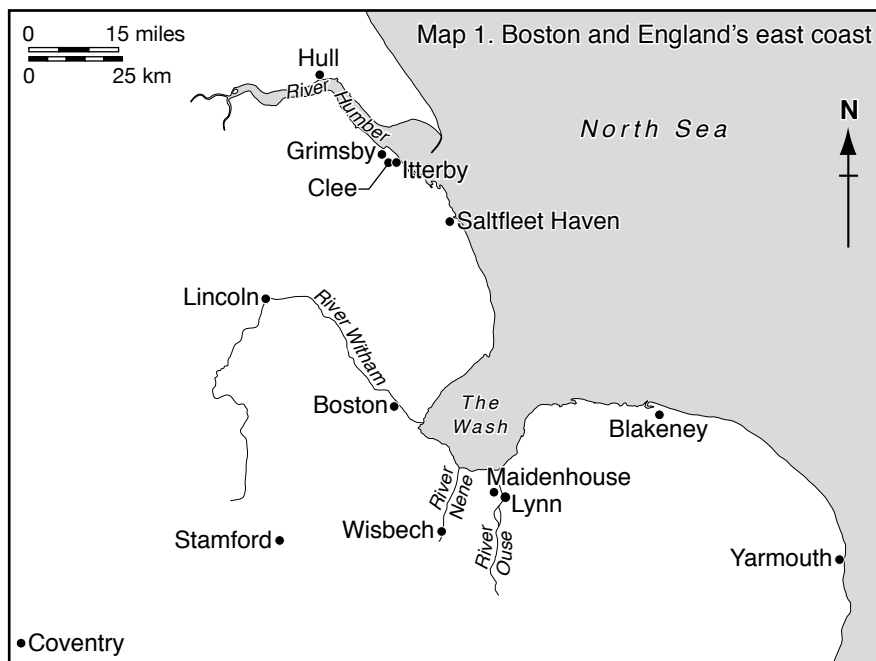
8 Although most denizens were native-born Englishmen, this category also included foreign merchants who had received letters patent granting them denizen status. For instance, Henry Kerle, a German merchant, was awarded this status in 1385 (*Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1381–85*, p. 581), as was Herman Standforth in 1390 (*Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1388–92*, p. 367).

9 T.N.A. Pipe Rolls, E372/124–5; E372/133–4; E372/146; E372/149; T.N.A., Exchequer L. T.R. Enrolled Customs Accounts, E356/1–27; *The Enrolled Customs Accounts, Parts 1–12*, ed. S. Jenks (List and Index Society, volumes 303, 306–7, 313–14, 319, 324, 334, 341, 344–5, 348 (2004–13)).

10 M. Kowaleski, 'Port towns: England and Wales, 1300–1540', in Palliser, *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, I, pp. 467–94, at 472; Jenks, *London Customs Accounts*, p. xviii.

11 E. M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, *England's Export Trade, 1275–1547* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 178, 187–8.

Boston's member-ports from that of Boston itself, but when they do so they show that their trade was extremely minor compared with that of the head port itself. For instance, for the period from March 1347 to April 1348, the collectors of a subsidy on overseas trade levied in Grimsby and its nearby villages of Clee and Itterby (see Map 1) reported that no wool exports had been made there and that the value of other goods imported and exported there amounted to only £ 108 10s. whereas the Boston collectors accounted for the subsidy on over 3,837 sacks of wool exports and on £ 3,608 of other goods in the same period.¹² Similarly, from 16 November 1378 to 27 May 1379, the Grimsby collectors of a subsidy of poundage levied at 6d. in the pound of the value of imports and exports, excluding wool, woolfells, hides and wine, accounted for the revenue collected from only £ 82 13s. 4d. of imports and exports made in the port, less than 1% of the £ 10,172 6s. 11d. of goods liable to the subsidy which passed through Boston during the same period.¹³



Map of Boston and England's east coast

¹² T.N.A., E356/5, mm. 10, 12, 12d. See also E356/5, mm. 23, 23d.

¹³ T.N.A., E356/5, m. 23d; E356/13, m. 1d; *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1377–81*, p. 121. See also Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, p. xvi; T.N.A., E356/9, mm. 24, 24d. For the scale of Grimsby's overseas trade, see Rigby, *Medieval Grimsby*, pp. 56–7.

Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions, the particular customs accounts also fail to distinguish the trade of the head port of Boston from that of its members. For instance, none of the particular accounts which survive for Boston for eight years of Richard II's reign (1377–99) makes such a distinction.¹⁴ When, however, these accounts do separate the trade of Boston itself from that of its member-ports, they again confirm that the trade of member-ports was on a minor scale. For instance, a particular account compiled by the Boston collectors for the year from March 1467 notes the arrival in Saltfleet Haven, a port to the north of Boston (see Map 1), of a ship called the 'Kateryn', of Veere (or 'Caumfer'), in Zeeland, on 27 April 1467 and again on 26 September 1467. The only goods on board were a variety of miscellaneous imports which were liable to the subsidy of poundage which was paid at the rate of 12d. in the pound (see section 2.9, below). In total, these imports made up less than 4% of the total value of miscellaneous denizen and non-Hanseatic alien goods for whose poundage the Boston collectors accounted during this year, quite apart from the wool, cloth, wine and Hanseatic goods which were liable to other duties which passed through head port.¹⁵ It is likely, then, that the vast bulk of the trade for which the collectors of Boston's customs accounted was shipped through Boston itself.

The one period when a change in the geographical extent of the jurisdiction of the Boston customs collectors did have a significant impact on the figures for the port's trade contained in the customs account was in the two decades from 1353, when the Boston collectors were given control of the stretch of coastline which was normally administered from the head port of Lynn. As a result, their authority during this period extended as far as Blakeney, to the east of Lynn, which was usually the boundary between the Lynn and the Yarmouth customs administrations (see Map 1).¹⁶ Unfortunately, neither the enrolled accounts nor the only surviving particular account for this period gives any indication of how trade was divided between Boston and Lynn during these years.¹⁷ The significance of this merger of the Lynn and Boston customs jurisdictions for the apparent fluctuations in the individual branches of Boston's commerce is discussed below.

Naturally, it would be very convenient for the historian if the accounts produced by the medieval customs administration provided us with a reliable guide to the development of England's late medieval trade. Certainly, there do seem to have been a number of constraints on the collectors' dishonesty, including their supervision by controllers, the existence of searchers who had the responsibility to look for illegal

14 Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, p. xvi.

15 T.N.A., E122/10/8, ff. 13, 15v.

16 *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1347–56*, p. 385; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 178, 182, 187–8, 190.

17 T.N.A., E122/7/10, for 1365–66, is the only surviving particular account for the period when the Lynn and Boston customs jurisdictions were merged.

trade, and regular Exchequer audits of the collectors' accounts, whilst the collectors themselves had a vested interest in being honest and efficient, since a third or more of the value of smuggled goods seized as forfeit went to the discoverer.¹⁸ Nevertheless, there are reasons why we might question the reliability of the customs accounts as indicators of fluctuations in England's overseas trade in the later Middle Ages. For instance, Exchequer audits were of limited value, since the Exchequer could only audit the accounts which the customs officials themselves provided. The role of the controller as an independent control on the honesty of the collectors thus becomes a crucial issue. However, when we look at the periods for which we have accounts of both the controllers and collectors in Boston, their accounts seem remarkably similar, suggesting either that one account was based on the other, or that the two were drawn from a common source, probably that of a manifest provided by the shipmaster.¹⁹ In itself, this certainly does not prove dishonesty on the part of the officials. After all, it could be argued that listing merchants in the same order in the two accounts facilitated a comparison between them and so allowed auditors to check more easily for any discrepancies. But it does mean that the surviving controllers' rolls were not independently compiled, which reduces their utility to historians as a check on the reliability of the collectors' returns.

Our faith in the reliability of the accounts produced by the customs collectors should be strengthened by the fact that there was a whole network of officials whose duties included the discovery of illegal trade. In Lincolnshire itself, the sheriff of the county, the bailiffs of Wainfleet, the mayor and bailiffs of Grimsby, and the bailiff and customs collectors of Boston all annually accounted for seizures of illegal imports and exports, as did the searchers for the Lindsey and Holland divisions of the county.²⁰ Yet, despite this comprehensive coverage, these officials reported, year after year, that they 'owed nothing' to the Exchequer.²¹ They claimed that they had arrested nothing, even in periods when the Crown suspected that wool and other goods were being exported and imported without full payment of customs and subsidies,²² that grain was being illegally shipped to Scotland from Lincolnshire ports,²³ and that cloth was being exported without paying customs, which resulted

18 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 23–4.

19 Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. xxxii–iv. There was a similar resemblance between the returns of the collectors and the controller at Newcastle in 1499–1500 (*The Customs Accounts of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1454–1500*, ed. J. F. Wade (Surtees Society, 202 (1995)), p. 287).

20 See, for instance, T.N.A., Exchequer L.T.R. Memoranda Rolls, E368/153, Dies dati, Michaelmas, Hilary, Easter). For examples of the appointment of searchers for the jurisdiction of the Boston collectors, see *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1391–99*, pp. 30, 60, 88, 191, 192.

21 See the accounts in T.N.A., E368/151 to E368/172.

22 *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1392–6*, p. 164.

23 T.N.A., E368/164, Recorda, Easter; *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1385–9*, p. 136. Of course, rumours of illegal trade did not always turn out to be true in particular cases (*Calendar of Close Rolls, 1381–5*, p. 417).

in the Boston collectors being required to swear in packers of cloth.²⁴ Thus, in the twenty-three years of Richard II's reign, the accounts of these Lincolnshire officials in the Lord Treasurer's Memoranda Rolls contain references to smuggling in only three years. Firstly, in 1378 the sheriff of Lincolnshire was ordered to distrain Richard Stightelbergh of Louth for £ 133 6s. 8d., which he owed for grain illegally taken from minor Lincolnshire ports to Scotland; Thomas Tinte owed £ 32 for the same offence at this time.²⁵ Secondly, in 1378–9, Philip Gernoun, the bailiff of Boston (and later himself a Boston customs collector), and the Boston customs collectors accounted for 45 woolfells worth 16s. 8d., which had been arrested in the ship of John Willard as uncustomed exports.²⁶ Finally, John Belle, the bailiff (and later customs collector) of Boston and the port's customs collectors accounted for £ 48 15s. of herring arrested as forfeit in December 1382.²⁷ These amounts are very minor indeed when compared with the total volume of trade passing through Boston at this time: in 1381–2, for instance, when £ 48 15s. of herring was arrested, over £ 12,000 of alien goods liable to the *ad valorem* custom of 3d. in the pound were imported and exported through Boston, quite apart from all of the other alien and denizen goods passing through the port. In fact, the Memoranda Roll accounts are not comprehensive in their record of seizures of illegal goods. Thus, whilst the account of the bailiff of Boston and the port's customs collectors for the year from Michaelmas 1385 reports that they owed nothing to the Exchequer for arrested goods, as they had found nothing that they could arrest, another account for the same period reveals that these men had actually seized four bales of madder which had been illegally imported and that they had then sold for £ 8 10s., a sum for which they had accounted at the Exchequer.²⁸ Even so, a total of £ 8 10s. of goods arrested in a year was insignificant when compared with the £ 6,942 of alien goods liable to the *ad valorem* duty of three pence in the pound, to which this madder was liable, during the same period.²⁹

A similar impression arises from the accounts of the searchers who were supposed to uncover illegal imports and exports. Their accounts suggest that they

24 *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1383–91*, p. 170. The Crown's order had no apparent effect on the amount of cloth exports returned in the customs accounts (Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, p. 150). For complaints by Hanseatic merchants about the packers' failure to seal their cloth exports, see *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1385–9*, p. 220.

25 T.N.A., E368/151, Brevia retorna.

26 T.N.A., E368/152, Status et visus, Michaelmas. For Gernoun, see Rigby, *The Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. 242–3.

27 P.R.O E368/156, Status et visus, Michaelmas; E122/7/16. For other references to smuggling in Lincolnshire, see T.N.A., E368/147, Recorda, Easter; Brevia retorna, Easter. For Belle, see Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. 244–6.

28 T.N.A., E368/159, Dies dati, Michaelmas; E122/192/86.

29 T.N.A., E356/14.

rarely detected such illicit trade.³⁰ For instance, an account of Dennis de Lynn of Boston, searcher in the jurisdiction of the Boston customs collectors from Grimsby to Wisbech, survives for the four years from Easter 1412. In theory, Lynn was to have searched, or to have caused to have searched, all ships entering or leaving his jurisdiction which were suspected of carrying illegal cargoes. Yet, despite these wide powers, in this four-year period Lynn and his deputies arrested only five packs of woollen cloth, which had been exported uncustomed by a Boston merchant.³¹ Similarly, in the fourteen-month period from November 1405, Lynn accounted for only £ 12 13s. 2d. of furs and osmund arrested as forfeit to the Crown.³² It would seem that, in practice, the searchers discovered suspiciously little smuggling.

Carus-Wilson and Coleman argued that, in addition to the appointment of officials responsible for identifying smuggling, other factors worked to limit the extent of customs evasion in late medieval England. For instance, the Merchant Adventurers disapproved of smuggling whilst the Staple Company had a vested interest in preventing the illegal export of wool, the one commodity whose heavy rate of duty made it profitable to smuggle.³³ However, the Adventurers could hardly have been expected to condone in public the practice of illegal trading. Staple officials at Middelburg and Calais did help to regulate trade and did, on occasion, arrest small amounts of goods thought to be illegally shipped from Boston.³⁴ Nevertheless, these officials could only deal with trade that came to the staple, a destination which most smugglers probably preferred to avoid. In the fifteenth century, the Staple Company did have a financial interest in preventing smuggling, as from 1407 the Staplers made a series of loans to the Crown on the security of the customs revenues, whilst from 1466 they received customs revenues directly in return for their payment of the garrison at Calais. Before this time, however, the Staple Company was perhaps a less powerful force in the prevention of smuggling, although, of course, individual Staplers did have an interest in preventing their competitors from exporting wool without paying heavy duties, which would have allowed them to undercut those who traded legally.³⁵

It is easy to see, then, why historians have sometimes raised doubts about the reliability of the accounts rendered by late medieval customs officials.³⁶ Certainly,

30 See, for instance, T.N.A., E122/189/151; E122/181/45; E122/131/38.

31 T.N.A., E122/181/45.

32 T.N.A., E122/131/38.

33 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 25–6.

34 T.N.A., Exchequer K.R. Memoranda Rolls, E159/170, Recorda, Easter; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1385–9, p. 31.

35 E. Power, 'The wool trade in the fifteenth century', in E. Power and M. M. Postan, eds, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1935), pp.39–90, at 73–5.

36 See, for instance, an emphasis on the extent of smuggling and customs evasion in the fourteenth century in R. L. Baker, 'The English customs service, 1307–43: a study of medieval administration', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., 51/6 (1961), pp. 3–76,

contemporaries themselves often questioned the honesty of the collectors. In 1390, for instance, parliament complained of the excessive favour shown by collectors towards merchants, a credible charge when it is remembered that, in ports such as Boston, the collectors were normally local merchants who were being asked to regulate the trade of their friends, neighbours, relatives and fellow guildsmen.³⁷ Moreover, in practice, it is unlikely that collectors always carried out their duties in person. For example, when William Spaigne died on 13 May 1385, not only was he a Boston customs collector, but also sheriff of Lincolnshire and an officer of the duchy of Lancaster.³⁸ In practice, much of the actual work of the customs collecting was probably done by a clerk employed by the collectors, who was paid out of the expenses which each pair of collectors was entitled to receive (amounting to £ 30 a year in the late fourteenth century).³⁹ The collectors themselves functioned chiefly as guarantors that the large sums of money paid for customs and subsidies would actually be handed over to the Crown or to those who had been granted assignments from the customs revenues. It is not surprising then that, as Stuart Jenks has shown, in those periods when royal officials were appointed as customs collectors and controllers, in place of local merchants, customs receipts went up, suggesting an improvement in the efficiency or honesty of the customs administration.⁴⁰

Studies of particular periods in the history of the customs administration have challenged the reliability of the collectors' accounts. For example, it has been claimed that the shortcomings of the customs service in the years from 1336 to 1343 led to control of the customs administration being granted to a group of English merchants.⁴¹ However, the rapid changes in royal policy in these years, when the Crown was attempting to finance the first phase of the Hundred Years' War, embargoes were being imposed on wool exports, and the unpopularity of royal fiscal policies among the merchant class was at its peak, meant that this was by no means a typical period for England's trade or for its customs administration. Similarly, whilst the introduction of outsiders and of royal clerks into the customs administrations

at 21; J. L. Blake, 'Medieval smuggling in the north-east: some fourteenth-century evidence', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, fourth series, 48 (1965), pp. 243–60, at 257; W. M. Ormrod, 'The English Crown and the customs', *Economic History Review*, 40 (1987), pp. 27–40, at 31–2; and N. Hybel, 'The grain trade in northern Europe before 1350', *Economic History Review*, 55 (2002), pp. 219–47, at 244.

37 *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, volume III, p. 281; C. Given-Wilson, ed., 'Richard II: parliament of November 1390, text and translation', item 27, in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, eds C. Given-Wilson et al., CD-ROM. Scholarly Digital Editions (Leicester, 2005).

38 T.N.A., E356/14; *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1383–91*, p. 93; T.N.A., Duchy of Lancaster, Ministers' Accounts, DL29/242/3894. For Spaigne, see Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. 225–9.

39 T.N.A., E356/14.

40 S. Jenks, 'Zollamt, Häfen und Außenhandel in England: ca. 1377–1470', *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 75 (1988), pp. 305–38, at 335.

41 Baker, 'The English customs service, 1307–43', pp. 48–50.

of England's ports in the early 1390s, alongside the local merchants usually chosen as collectors, has sometimes been seen as a response to widespread corruption and dishonesty in the customs service, it is more likely that this change was actually the result of a desire to ensure the implementation of new royal policies concerning the location of the wool staple and the export of bullion.⁴²

There were particular times when customs evasion may have been more prevalent, such as the late 1450s, a period of political conflict and administrative chaos in England during which the 'documentation of government activity in all spheres, including justice and finance, all but broke down'.⁴³ At Boston, for instance, there are no surviving enrolled customs accounts for the fifteenth months from Michaelmas 1458 to December 1459, a period which constitutes a rare break in the run of the port's enrolled customs returns in the later Middle Ages. There may also have been particular branches of trade, such as the export of tin, where the customs accounts are particularly untrustworthy, although tin exports were not normally shipped through Boston.⁴⁴ Overall, however, historians have tended to accept the general accuracy of the Exchequer customs accounts as evidence for the types of commodities and the volume of trade passing through England's ports.⁴⁵

42 For this period, see A. Steel, 'The collectors of customs at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the reign of Richard II', in J. Conway Davies, ed., *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (London, 1957), pp. 380–413; O. Coleman, 'The collectors of customs in London under Richard II', in A. E. J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway, eds, *Studies in London History* (London, 1969), pp. 181–94; A. Steel, 'The collectors of customs in the reign of Richard II', in H. Hearder and H. Loyn, eds, *British Government and Administration* (Cardiff, 1974), pp. 27–39; S. H. Rigby, 'The customs administration at Boston in the reign of Richard II', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 58 (1985), pp. 12–24; Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. xxiii–xxx. For biographies of the men appointed as Boston collectors in this period, see Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. 223–57 and S. H. Rigby, "John of Gaunt's Palace" and the Sutton family of Lincoln', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 35 (2000), pp. 35–9.

43 J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 331; Carus-Wilson, *The Overseas Trade of Bristol*, p. 9.

44 J. Hatcher, *English Tin Production and Trade before 1500* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 110–16, 169. For tin and pewter exports through Boston, see the discussion of poundage in section 2.9, below. The late fifteenth-century Dartmouth customs returns for Exeter and Dartmouth may also understate the volume of cloth exports there (Oldland, *English Woollen Industry*, p. 280).

45 P. Ramsey, 'Overseas trade in the reign of Henry VII: the evidence of customs accounts', *Economic History Review*, second series, 6 (1953–4), pp. 173–182, at 173–7; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 18–33, 201–7; *Chester Customs Accounts, 1301–1566*, ed. K. P. Wilson (Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 111 (1969)), p. 13; Childs, *The Customs Accounts of Hull*, pp. xiv–xviii; Cobb, *The Overseas Trade of London*, pp. xxviii–xxxiii; W. A. Harwood, 'The customs system in Southampton in the mid-fifteenth century', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 53 (1998), pp. 191–200, at 195–8; Rigby, *Overseas Trade of Boston*, pp. xxi–xxiii, xxx–xxxviii.

Perhaps the main reason for this acceptance of the basic reliability of the medieval customs accounts is that the rates of custom and subsidy levied on imports and exports were relatively low, meaning that there was little incentive to evade them by smuggling goods in or out of the country. For instance, in the late fifteenth century, when non-Hanseatic alien merchants imported or exported miscellaneous goods liable to the *ad valorem* custom introduced in 1303 and to the subsidy of poundage, they paid the custom at the rate of 3d. in the pound and the subsidy at the rate of 12d. in the pound, i.e. a combined rate of only 6.25%; denizens, who did not pay the custom but were liable to poundage, were charged at the rate of only 5%; Hansards, who were exempt from poundage at this time and so paid only the custom of 3d. in the pound, were liable at the even lower rate of 1.25%. Moreover, the valuations of goods made for the purposes of levying these *ad valorem* duties were themselves rather low, being based on the prices at which merchants had originally bought the goods rather than the price at which they sold them on, which further reduced the effective rate of custom being charged.⁴⁶ The customs and subsidies on England's cloth exports were also relatively low. For example, on the standard mid-fifteenth-century customs valuation of £ 1 15s. per broadcloth, Hanseatic merchants were paying a custom of 2.9% per cloth exported, denizens were paying 3.3% and non-Hanseatic alien merchants faced a combined custom and subsidy of 12.9%.⁴⁷ Only for raw wool were customs and subsidies high enough (equivalent to around 25% of its value for denizens and 33% or more for aliens for most of our period) to make smuggling worthwhile; but wool was also one of the most bulky and difficult goods to conceal.⁴⁸ Given these low rates of custom and subsidy, even Jones, who presented smuggling as a 'key component' of Bristol's

46 *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1461–71*, pp. 6–7; 274; Gras, *Early English Customs System*, pp. 263–4; Cobb, *Overseas Trade of London*, p. xxv; *The Customs Accounts of Hull, 1453–1490*, ed. W. R. Childs (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, 144 (1986 for 1984)), pp. 16–18; S. Jenks, 'Capturing opportunity, financing trade', in W. Blockmans, M. M. Krom and J. Wubs-Mrozewicz, eds, *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade Around Europe, 1300–1600* (London, 2017), pp. 36–56, at 37.

47 In this period, Hansards and denizens did not pay the subsidy of poundage on the value of their cloth exports (see section 2.9, below). If we add poundage, to which these merchants had been liable in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Hanseatic cloths were being charged at 7.9% and denizen cloths at 8.3% (H. L. Gray, 'English foreign trade from 1446 to 1482', in Power and Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 1–38, 361–3, at 7). Since customs on cloth were levied per standard cloth and were at a fixed rate prior to 1558, their real rate fell even further as the weight and price of cloth rose in the late fifteenth century (J. Oldland, *The English Woollen Industry, c.1200–1560* (Abingdon, 2019), pp. 8, 202, 219, 277)

48 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 22–3; *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (London, 1937), pp. 8–9; M. Bonney, 'The English medieval wool and cloth trade—new approaches for the local historian', *The Local*

trade in the sixteenth century, allowed that the incentives to trade illegally were ‘fairly limited’ in the years prior to c. 1530. Restrictions on exports of grain after 1516, on other foodstuffs from 1534 and on tanned hides after 1538 did increase the inducement to ship goods illegally and so, in the 1530s and 1540s, exports of leather and grain seem to have dominated Bristol’s illicit trade. Illegal wine imports rose only from 1558, when there was an 18-fold increase in the level of duties, whilst smuggled cloth probably only accounted for a small proportion of total exports, even after 1558, when imposts on cloth exports were increased more than fivefold.⁴⁹

As a result of their acceptance of the general reliability of the customs returns, historians have used the accounts as evidence for long-term changes in the volume and composition of England’s commerce in this period, such as the shift from raw wool to manufactured woollen cloth in England’s export trade, and the increasing monopolization of the country’s overseas trade by London at the expense of the provincial ports.⁵⁰ Certainly, in the case of Boston itself, the fluctuations in the port’s late medieval trade indicated by its customs accounts are so marked that they cannot be explained by short-term or marginal alterations in the reliability of the customs officials, but do seem to express genuine long-term changes in the scale and composition of the port’s commerce.

Boston’s particular and enrolled customs accounts have already been employed by a number of historians to establish some of the main trends in the port’s trade in the later Middle Ages, or to examine specific aspects of its commerce, particularly the role of Hanseatic merchants.⁵¹ Some of the information contained in the

Historian, 22/1 (1992), pp. 18–40, at 20–1; Wade, *Customs Accounts of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, pp. 10–12; Oldland, *English Woollen Industry*, p. 194.

49 E. T. Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy: Reconstructing the Smugglers’ Trade of Sixteenth-Century Bristol* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 33, 59, 103, 110, 185–6, 193–4, 197–203, 208–19, 223, 224–5; Oldland, *English Woollen Industry*, pp. 13, 245, 314.

50 On the shift from raw wool to cloth exports, see E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (second edition; London, 1967), pp. xviii–xxv; B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 358–9; S. Broadberry, B. M. S. Campbell, A. Klein, M. Overton, B. van Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth, 1270–1870* (Cambridge, 2015), 144–7; R. H. Britnell, *Britain and Ireland, 1050–1350: Economy and Society* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 320–1, 326–31. For the growth of London, see the references in footnote 171, below.

51 For Boston’s trade in this period, see W. I. Haward, ‘The trade of Boston in the fifteenth century’, *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 41 (1932–33), pp. 169–78; E. M. Carus-Wilson, ‘The medieval trade of the ports of the Wash’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 6–7 (1962–3), pp. 182–201; S. H. Rigby, ‘Boston and Grimsby in the Middle Ages’ (unpublished University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1983), chapters 4 and 7; S. H. Rigby, ‘“Sore decay” and “fair dwellings”: Boston and urban decline in the later Middle Ages’, *Midland History*, 10 (1985), pp. 47–61 at 49–55; and S. H. Rigby, ‘Medieval Boston: economy, society and administration’, in Badham and Cockerham, *The beste and fayrest of al Lincolnshire*, pp. 6–28. For the Hanse in Boston, see S. Jenks, *England, die Hanse und Preussen: Handel und Diplomatie*,

enrolled accounts has previously been tabulated for specific commodities, such as wool, cloth and wine,⁵² or for particular periods, such as 1303–36,⁵³ 1399–1482,⁵⁴ and 1509–47.⁵⁵ The aim of this present study is to build on this previous work by bringing together in one place all of the statistical information contained in Boston's enrolled customs accounts for the years between 1279 and 1548, to explain how this information was originally compiled, and to outline the main changes which the port's trade underwent in this period.⁵⁶ The figures given here for Boston's trade between 1303 and 1548 are based on my own transcriptions of the enrolled customs accounts, which have been checked against those in Stuart Jenks's indispensable twelve volumes that calendar the enrolled accounts for all of England's ports in the years before 1512.⁵⁷ Statistics for exports of wool and hides for the years before 1303 (Figures 1.1 and 2.1) are drawn from Jenks's calendars of the enrolled customs

volumes I–III (Cologne, 1992); M. Burkhardt, 'One hundred years of thriving commerce at a major English sea port: the Hanseatic trade at Boston between 1370 and 1470', in H. Brand and L. Müller, eds, *The Dynamics of European Culture in the North Sea and Baltic Region* (Hilversum, 2007), pp. 65–85; J. D. Fudge, *Cargoes, Embargoes and Emissaries: The Commercial and Political Interaction of England and the German Hanse, 1450–1510* (Toronto, 1995); P. M. Cawthorne, 'Medieval Boston and the German Hanse (c.1250–1474)', in B. Ayers, et al., *Six Essays in Hanseatic History* (Cromer, 2017), pp. 26–52; and M. Burkhardt, 'The German Hanse and Bergen: new perspectives on an old subject', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 58 (2010), pp. 60–79, especially pp. 64–5. Pishey Thompson, the pioneering historian of Boston, made little use of the port's customs accounts since he was aware only of the enrolled accounts of the wool customs contained in the pipe rolls for 1279–1303 (P. Thompson, 'On the early commerce of Boston', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, 2 (1852–3), pp. 362–81, at 368–9; Thompson, *The History and Antiquities of Boston*, pp. 328–9).

- 52 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 36–119; A. Beardwood, *Alien Merchants in England, 1350 to 1377: Their Legal and Economic Position* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), pp. 145, 165–6, 178–80; M. K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade*, ed. E. M. Veale (Oxford, 1971), pp. 96–116.
- 53 T. H. Lloyd, *Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages* (Brighton, 1982), Table A, I.6.
- 54 H. L. Gray, 'Tables of enrolled customs and subsidy accounts: 1399–1482', in Power and Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 321–60, at 330–33. For other studies giving information from the enrolled accounts, see Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 4–6.
- 55 G. Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik gegen Ende des Mittelalters mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Zeitalters der beiden ersten Tudors Heinrich VII und Heinrich VIII* (two volumes, Leipzig, 1881), II: 57, 71, 77, 101, 115, 125, 145, 154.
- 56 The figures given below supplement, correct and supersede those provided in Rigby, 'Boston and Grimsby in the Middle Ages', pp. 454–83.
- 57 Jenks, *The Enrolled Customs Accounts, Parts 1–12*. The notes to the tables below note my rare disagreements with Dr Jenks's astonishingly accurate transcriptions of the figures in Boston's enrolled accounts.

accounts contained in the Exchequer pipe rolls.⁵⁸ In both the tables and the graphs below, figures for twelve-month periods are given wherever possible, but the accounting periods used in the enrolled accounts sometimes mean that totals are for more or less than a full year. In the graphs, no attempt has been made to adjust or estimate figures so that they form an estimate of the volume of trade within twelve-month periods, as Carus-Wilson and Coleman did in their graphs of wool and cloth exports.⁵⁹ In those cases when the customs returns cover more or less than an entire year, care should be taken when using the tables and graphs below as indications of short-term fluctuations in Boston's trade.

58 Jenks, *Enrolled Customs Accounts*, Part 1. See also Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 36–40.

59 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 10–11, 16, 18.

BOSTON'S OVERSEAS TRADE, 1279–1548

2.1 WOOL EXPORTS, 1279–1548

The levies imposed by the Crown on wool exports allow us to follow the changing fortunes of England's wool trade in the later Middle Ages. The first duty on wool exports was introduced in 1275, when Edward I imposed a custom (i.e. a permanent levy at a fixed rate) on exports of wool and woolfells which was paid by both denizen and alien merchants at the rate of at 6s. 8d. per sack of wool (i.e. 364 lbs) or per 300 woolfells.⁶⁰ From 1368, the rate of custom was increased to 6s. 8d. per 240 woolfells and so, in order to compare the volume of wool exported before and after this date, we need to convert exports of woolfells into their equivalent as sacks of wool at a consistent rate throughout the entire period; it is this post-1368 figure which is used in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below.⁶¹ However, since woolfells made up only a small part of this trade when Boston's wool exports were at their peak, the choice of whether to use a figure of 240 or 300 fells per sack of wool has little impact on the long-term trends revealed in the table and graph below. Woolfells did make up a higher proportion of wool exports in the early sixteenth century, but by then the total volume of this trade was much reduced from its fourteenth-century heyday.

In 1303, Edward I granted a charter of liberties, the *Carta Mercatoria*, to foreign merchants, who, in return, agreed to pay various additional customs to the Crown.⁶² These new duties included an extra 3s. 4d. per sack of wool or 300 woolfells exported (changed to 240 fells from 1368, as noted above), which henceforth allows us to distinguish wool exports by denizen merchants from those made by aliens, whether Hansards or non-Hanseatic aliens.⁶³ From 1303, the 1275 custom became known as the 'ancient custom', in contrast with the 'new custom' of 1303, whilst the ancient custom of 1275 and the 1303 new custom on wool, woolfells and hides together eventually became known as the 'great custom'.⁶⁴

Although we do not have returns for wool exports for the very earliest years of the wool custom, accounts do survive from 1279 onwards, when they were included in the Exchequer pipe rolls (although the accounts for 1291 to 1294 are missing),

60 Gras, *Early English Customs System*, p. 223; Jenks, *Enrolled Customs Accounts*, Part 3, p. iv.

61 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, p. 13; Jenks, *Enrolled Customs Accounts*, Part 1, p. vi.

62 S. Jenks, 'Die Carta Mercatoria. Ein hansisches Privileg', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 108, (1990), pp. 45–86.

63 Gras, *Early English Customs System*, pp. 66, 262; Jenks, *Enrolled Customs Accounts*, Part 3, p. v.

64 Gras, *Early English Customs System*, pp. 60–1, 74–5.

and then, from 1303, were recorded in separate rolls.⁶⁵ There are occasional gaps in the series of Boston returns. For instance, from 30 January 1333 to 6 June 1334, when there was a home staple at Lincoln, returns for the customs on wool (as well as on the other staple goods of hides and lead) were made by customs officials based in that city rather than in Boston, although customs on non-staple goods, such as cloth and wax, continued to be collected at Boston. The period covered by the returns for the wool custom at Boston, i.e. up to 2 February 1333 and from 24 May 1334, slightly overlap with those when it was being collected at Lincoln.⁶⁶ The totals in Figure 1.1 thus include all the wool on which custom was paid in Boston and Lincoln during these two years. A more significant gap in the returns for the duties introduced in 1275 is that from 1343 to 1351, when the customs for all ports were farmed by a consortium of English merchants, which means that we do not have annual returns of the custom from individual ports.⁶⁷ The new custom of 1303 was not paid during two brief periods: from August 1309 to August 1310, when it was temporarily stopped, and from October 1311 to July 1322, when it was again abolished as part of the Ordainers' reform of Edward II's finances.⁶⁸ The new custom was also included in the grant of the customs to the consortium of English merchants from 1343 to 1351 (see above), which means that we lack figures for it during these years. As noted above, the merger of the Lynn and Boston customs jurisdiction for twenty years after 1353 complicates the interpretation of the customs figures. However, since wool exports at Lynn, both before and after this period, were of minor significance compared to those at Boston, it seems likely that the bulk of the wool exports for which the Boston customs collectors accounted in the two decades from 1353 was shipped through Boston itself.

In addition to its permanent customs revenues, the Crown also benefitted from the levying of a subsidy on wool exports, i.e. a duty which was granted at a variable rate for some specific term, such as a number of years or for the life of the king.⁶⁹ From the start of the Hundred Years' War, these subsidies became a regular imposition and were levied at much higher rates than the 1275 and 1303 customs. In Edward III's reign, the subsidy was usually charged at between 3s. 4d and 4s. 4d. per sack of wool exported, compared with only 6s. 8d. per sack which denizens paid for the ancient custom and 10s. per sack paid by aliens for the ancient custom and new custom.⁷⁰ Similarly, for most of the fifteenth century, denizen merchants paid

65 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 157–8.

66 T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 121; T.N.A., E356/4, m. 15; E356/8, m. 25; E356/10, mm. 15, 16d.

67 E. B. Fryde, *Studies in Medieval Trade and Finance* (London, 1983), chapter 10.

68 Lloyd, *Alien Merchants in England*, pp. 30–1.

69 Gras, *Early English Customs System*, pp. 77–80.

70 W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society, 1327–1377* (London, 1990), p. 206.

40s. subsidy per sack of wool exported; aliens paid the subsidy at an even higher rate which, in 1471, was fixed at 76s. 8d. per sack.⁷¹ The returns of subsidies levied in 1347–48 and 1350–1 usefully reveal the level of wool exports during the period when we do not have figures for the ancient and new customs because they were at farm.⁷²

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below give the total of wool sacks exported from Boston between 1279 and 1548, with woolfells converted to sacks of wool at the rate of 240 fells per sack, and with totals rounded up or down to the nearest sack.⁷³ When the accounts begin, in the decade from 1279, Boston was England's pre-eminent port for the shipment of wool at a time when raw wool was by far the country's main export commodity; over 9,000 sacks a year were sent through the port in this period, around a third of the national total.⁷⁴ Boston fair, which began on St Botolph's day (17 June), was one of England's leading fairs at a time when the country's wholesale trade was based on a succession of such marts, and it was the main fair at which wool was sold, or was at least delivered to merchants by producers.⁷⁵ Boston drew mainly on the wool of the Welsh borders and Midlands, from Flintshire, Cheshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire through Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Warwickshire and Nottinghamshire, as well as on the fine-quality wool of Lincolnshire itself.⁷⁶ The trade in Boston reached its peak in the years after 1304, when England's wool output was recovering after a series of sheep murrains.⁷⁷ Over 10,000 sacks of wool a year were exported there during this period, representing the wool of almost two and a half million sheep, with over half of this wool being shipped by alien merchants, including Italians from Florence, Lucca and Piacenza. However, by this date, Boston had been overtaken by London, where denizen merchants dominated the trade, as the leading export port for wool, although Boston did briefly regain its primacy in the early 1330s, when alien trade in the capital was suffering a decline.⁷⁸

71 Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, p. 194.

72 T.N.A., E356/5, mm. 10, 11, 12, 13d., 14; E356/12, mm. 2d., 3, 5, 6d. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, p. 46 omits the figure for 1347–8.

73 Some of these figures differ from those given by Carus-Wilson and Coleman in *England's Export Trade*, but such differences are usually slight and generally result from the ways in which totals have been rounded up or down to the nearest sack. Significant differences with their figures are given in the notes to Figure 1.1.

74 Figures for wool exports nationally and for ports other than Boston are taken from Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, pp. 36–74, 122–3.

75 A. R. Bell, C. Brooks and P. R. Dryburgh, *The English Wool Market, c. 1230–1327* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 56–8. For the history of the fair, see Rigby, *Boston, 1086–1225*, pp. 41–8, 67; Rigby, 'Medieval Boston', pp. 9–12.

76 For references, see Rigby, 'Medieval Boston', pp. 9–11.

77 P. Slavin, 'Mites and merchants: the crisis of English wool and textiles revisited', *Economic History Review*, 73 (2020), pp. 885–913, at 887–97.

78 Lloyd, *Alien Merchants in England*, p. 52; Rigby, 'Boston and Grimsby in the Middle Ages', pp. 173–77.