

**PRIVATEERING IN ELIZABETHAN BRISTOL:**  
**A CASE STUDY ON JOHN HOPKINS.**

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**\* This study is approximately 15,500 words \***

## ABSTRACT.

Privateering consisted of attacking and capturing enemy ships for plunder. Unlike more official naval expeditions it was wholly financed and directed by private individuals. It was distinguished from piracy in legal terms: privateers had commissions from the Admiralty to take action against a designated enemy (in this case Spain). In reality the line was often more difficult to draw, as will be shown. During the Sea War of 1585-1604 hundreds of English vessels were involved in privateering activity. They were promoted by famous commanders like Drake and Raleigh, members of the gentry, professional sea-captains and also the merchants who were by far the largest group. The port with the greatest overall share in this activity was London, though outports like Bristol, Southampton, Weymouth and Plymouth were also significant.

This dissertation is primarily a case study of one individual privateer named John Hopkins. The admiralty records show that he was one of the greatest privateers from the outports and was arguably the leading privateer in Bristol. For these reasons he is a suitable choice for an individual study. Using a wide range of local sources and also a selection of the *State Papers* this study will piece together Hopkins' personal background and career. In addition to his privateering it will look at his various business interests as a merchant as well as his role in municipal government. In doing so this study will provide an example of the type of outport merchant who became engaged in privateering.

The intention of this study is therefore to contribute towards the overall understanding of the structure and nature of privateering in the Elizabethan period. Contributing in particular to awareness of the different groups involved and the variation that existed between the ports.

I confirm that the following dissertation is my own work and all quotations, documentary evidence and data drawn from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

**.....William Jessop.....**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The only major research on Elizabethan privateering has been produced by Kenneth Andrews who has studied it as a whole, using the Admiralty records in particular. As Andrews himself stated in 1964:

‘Elizabethan privateering is a subject that has been neglected by serious students of history, even though some of the most famous voyages have been examined in detail.’<sup>1</sup>

His own research dates back to his thesis completed in 1951: ‘The Economic Aspects of Elizabethan Privateering’. The most useful of Andrew’s works on the subject is his book *Elizabeth Privateering 1585-1603*, published in 1964. This book contains some fresh sources and more up-to-date discussion, however his original thesis remains important because it contains a more detailed description of the records on privateering. In addition to the work of Andrews there have been numerous biographical studies on famous English commanders including Hawkins, Howard, Essex and in particular Drake and Raleigh. On the other hand there has been no study specifically on Bristol privateering since the work of J. W. Damer Powell published in 1930, even then only his third chapter dealt with the Elizabethan period. Otherwise very little research has been done. Andrews hoped his own work might stimulate further interest in the subject of privateering. He goes on to say that:

‘much work remains to be done before the structure and phenomenon of this role can be firmly defined. Local studies of privateering – at Weymouth, Plymouth and Bristol, for example – are needed’<sup>2</sup>

In terms of the individuals involved in privateering there is substantial work on the great names, as mentioned above. Meanwhile Andrews has also focused on the small body of great London merchants who he terms ‘privateering-magnates’, these were the individuals who dominated the business. Generally however less detail is known

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<sup>1</sup> K. R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering 1585-1603* (Cambridge 1964), p. v.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

concerning the backgrounds of the merchants who were engaged in privateering from the outports.

This dissertation is primarily based upon a case study of one individual privateer named John Hopkins. The admiralty records show that he was one of the greatest privateers from the outports and was arguably the leading privateer in Bristol. For these reasons he is a suitable choice for an individual study, which will look at his personal background and career.

The main sources for this dissertation concerning Bristol's merchants and its overseas trade include printed sources based on local records, especially the edited collections by Jean Vanes and Patrick McGrath. In addition a few manuscript sources from the Bristol Archives Office have been used, along with *John Hopkins' Will*, which was available from the Public Records Office. For the Virginia enterprise in particular the publications of David Quinn have been useful, though lacking a full list of Company members. For the Bristol Corporation an essential source has been Beaven's *Bristol Lists* while the earlier works of Latimer, Rickart, Adams and Barrett have also been valuable (see bibliography). Some more general sources used are the printed editions of the *Calendar of State Papers* and the *Acts of the Privy Council*. For privateering itself the main sources are the lists of privateers and prizes compiled by Andrews. These are drawn from the High Court of Admiralty records, the Caesar papers, the Harleian Manuscript and also several other sources of less value.<sup>3</sup>

The structure of this dissertation will be as follows. The first chapter will provide an overview that explains the subject of privateering. In particular it will show how the system operated through the Admiralty Court and how voyages were organised. It will then move on to discuss the main groups involved in privateering and what we know of them.

The second chapter will then show the background context for Privateers from Bristol. This will involve looking at the city's merchant community and the ways in which they were organised. It will also look at office holding and status within Bristol's

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 241-73. See also K. R. Andrews, 'The Economic Aspects of Elizabethan Privateering' (unpublished thesis in University of London Library 1951).

municipal government, which was significant to many Bristol privateers. It will then look at the activities of Bristol merchants during the Spanish War and consider the ways in which war affected the city. Finally the chapter will discuss Bristol's overall involvement in privateering, combining the previous work of Andrews with some new research.

The majority of this study will be taken up by the third chapter, which will contain the case study on John Hopkins. The case study will seek to identify the type of person he was. For this purpose it has been divided into 3 sections covering privateering, trade and local government. It will seek to answer certain questions, for example: what were his business and trading interests? What was his role within the Bristol community? What led to his involvement in privateering? Was he typical for a Bristol privateer?

In more general terms of historiography this study will hope to build on the work of Andrews: firstly by adding greater knowledge of privateering in the port of Bristol, secondly by contributing to an overall understanding of the groups involved in Elizabethan Privateering.

## **CHAPTER 1) AN OVERVIEW OF PRIVATEERING.**

This chapter will begin by outlining the main characteristics of the sea-war of 1585-1603 and will examine the prominent role of English privateering within this conflict. It will also explain the how the English privateering system operated at this time, including the functions of the Admiralty Court and the expenses involved in fitting out privateering vessels. The second part of the chapter will look at the various social groups who became involved in privateering during the war: including court favourites, seafaring gentry and, in particular, the merchants. It will look at why they participated and what they gained from it.

### **Privateering and the Spanish War:**

Elizabeth had not wanted war with Spain and it was only reluctantly that she entered into open war, largely because of the need to support the Dutch rebels in the Netherlands. In doing so she hoped to force Philip to agree to a compromise settlement. In fighting the war Elizabeth was primarily concerned for England's own defence and security, it was never her intent to deliver a fatal blow to the Spanish Empire. Elizabeth not only lacked the political will for an all-out offensive war, but also lacked the means. She had limited resources and these were spread on many fronts in France, the Netherlands and increasingly in Ireland. One result of these limitations was the pre-eminence of private enterprise at sea. During the two decades of the Spanish War privateering was 'the characteristic form of maritime warfare'.<sup>4</sup>

Privateering ventures were different to the semi-official enterprises that also took place in this period. The former were wholly directed and financed by private individuals. The latter were national undertakings in which the queen's interest predominated. For example in Drake's voyages Elizabeth may only have made a modest investment but she gave official instructions to the expeditions. Such expeditions were therefore intended to have a strategic purpose, other than mere prize hunting.

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<sup>4</sup> K. R. Andrews, Elizabethan Privateering 1585-1603 (Cambridge 1964), pp. 6-10.



At this time there were many leading naval commanders and courtiers who favoured a maritime offensive. The most important of their ideas was to take and hold some Iberian base from which they might thoroughly disrupt Spanish commerce. For instance in 1589 Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Norris planned to attack Lisbon and establish the pretender Dom Antonio as king. However the expedition turned into a disastrous failure and many men were lost. Due to limited resources the enterprise had been reliant on the finance of private venturers, who had organised it with an eye for plunder. As Elizabeth later complained ‘they went to places more for profit than for service’. In 1596 another great expedition, this time led by Lord Admiral Howard and the Earl of Essex, succeeded in capturing Cadiz. But the English forces withdrew from the town shortly after, realising they lacked sufficient means to hold onto it.<sup>5</sup>

Such ventures were largely financed and led by the merchants and sea gentry. Inevitably a cloud of privateers would accompany the expeditions looking for a share of the spoils. Although primarily concerned with prize-hunting privateers could also fulfil useful strategic roles such as scouting. When actually sailing with organised fleets they were given allotted tasks.<sup>6</sup>

Having discussed some strategic aspects of the sea-war and the nature of the major expeditions launched, this section will now look at how the business of privateering activity (the predominant aspect of the sea-war) was carried out. Officially privateering was within the jurisdiction of the Court of the Lord Admiral, who dealt with cases relating to prizes, spoils and piracy. These cases largely involved disputes between English and foreign merchants. The Lord Admiral himself received revenues from unclaimed goods and was also entitled to a tenth share of spoils taken, before embarking on a privateering cruise captains were obliged to sign a bond promising to give him this tenth. Unfortunately the lord Admiral lacked the resources to ensure that all his rightful revenues were being collected and evasion of payment was common. Those suspecting of evading payment were taken to the High Court of Admiralty.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 19 and K. R. Andrews, Trade, Plunder and Settlement (Cambridge 1984), pp. 236-243.

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, Elizabethan Privateering, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> K. R. Andrews (ed), English Privateering Voyages to the West Indies 1588-1595 (Cambridge 1959), pp. 2-5.

Following the Spanish seizures of English shipping in May 1585 the government instructed the Lord Admiral to issue Letters of Reprisal. These letters permitted merchants and other private citizens to engage in privateering. They were supplied to those individuals who submitted a complaint that they had had ships or goods taken by the Spanish. However when the initial crisis failed to pass then Spanish ships effectively became fair game to all, so after 1585 there was little obligation for individuals to prove they had suffered losses. Therefore obtaining letters became a mere formality, while many even ignored the formalities altogether.

To officially claim a prize upon their return the privateers had to appear before the Admiralty Court, make a statement and produce witnesses to prove that the prize had belonged to Spain. But again such full procedures were not usually observed. In some cases the original owner might come forward to claim back their goods, the court would then seize the goods and hold them while the case was heard.<sup>8</sup>

Andrews has argued that during the years 1589-1591 there were at least 235 English vessels engaged in privateering. The majority of these were off the coast of Spain and Portugal, though some were around the Azores and a few ventured as far as the Caribbean.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the circumstances fitting out privateering vessels was an expensive business, the ship had to be supplied with stores of victuals, powder, shot and other equipment. The crew themselves were often unpaid but were entitled to a third of the spoils. Andrews calculates that the value of a lesser privateer, including the ship, might be between £500-600. However for the largest privateers over 300 tons the value might be as high as £3000. Ventures to the West Indies were even more costly still due to the longer voyages and higher risks of losing the ship; in addition owners often had to pay costly repair bills for damage to their ships.<sup>10</sup> Increasing numbers of large and well-armed merchantmen, normally used in long distance trade, were being built. The sea-war created fresh opportunities for them to be used, their size advantage

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<sup>8</sup> Andrews (ed), English Privateering Voyages, pp. 6-10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

meaning that they could carry more victuals and men and also heavier guns, thus enabling them to attack bigger prey.<sup>11</sup>

Privateering promoters often spread the risks and costs by funding through joint-stock systems. Those most involved were the ship-owners. Generally a smaller vessel was owned by one individual while larger vessels were usually owned by two or three men. However the number of investors involved in a venture was often much greater. This could include smaller contributions of money, victuals or other supplies from individuals such as seamen or local tradesmen. Such ventures were therefore financed on credit, though this was less typical for larger ventures of several ships. Andrews describes this system as ‘terminable joint-stock’. At the end of the voyage 10 percent of the prize goods supposedly went to the Lord Admiral and the customs duties were also paid, the rest was then divided with a third going to the crew, a third to the ship’s owners and a third to the victuallers. In turn the owners and victuallers divided up their portion as shareholders.<sup>12</sup>

In cases where both the tonnage of a privateering vessel and the total value of the prize taken are known then it is possible to give a rough estimate of the profitability of an individual voyage for its promoters.<sup>13</sup> It is impossible to quantify the exactly the total of profits made by privateers during the Spanish War. However Andrews has estimated that between 1589-1591 the value of English prizes (including those of unknown value) taken into all ports was around £400,000. For 1598 he estimates the figure was only around £75,000. This decrease in the value of prizes was largely due to the absence of the richest prize cargoes. In 1591 for example the ships of John Watts took over £40,000. Generally profits seem to have decreased after the early years. 1598 represented a particularly poor year for privateers; this was partly because the great promoters were preoccupied in Cumberland’s unprofitable expedition to Puerto Rico.<sup>14</sup> In general Andrews has estimated that the value of prize goods taken ranged from about £100,000-£200,000 per annum. This in turn represented 10-15

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<sup>11</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, pp. 35-6. For total costs of fitting out ships of different sizes see also p. 49, Table 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-7.

percent of English imports (at least as much as the Iberian trade before the War).<sup>15</sup> The particular trends for Bristol, in comparison to other ports, will be shown in the next chapter.

The commonest prize taken from the Americas was a Brazilman carrying sugar and brazilwood. The sugar was highly valuable, the quantity taken in 1589-1591 being worth £100,000 alone. These and other rich American cargoes represented approximately 70 percent of the total value of prize goods, and overall around 90 percent of the value came from non-European goods. Privateering activity resulted in the import of new kinds of goods and did more than simply replace the interrupted trade in Iberian products.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Groups Involved:**

When not involved in major expeditions the royal ships were employed in the same way as privateers, since Elizabeth expected them to pay their own way. Elizabeth's leading naval commanders were also privateering promoters. Charles Howard for example owned 7 private men-of-war; these were used to accompany the Queen's ships in major expeditions but were also used in purely privateering ventures. Others like Drake and Hawkins were involved in a few privateering ventures, though they put most of their money into semi-official expeditions and their own ships usually served with the royal fleet.<sup>17</sup> Through their exploits in such expeditions figures at court could seek political credit. In this way Essex and Howard both sought to monopolise the credit for the Cadiz expedition which was publicly viewed as a great success. The expedition marked a high point in the careers of both men. Essex in particular maintained the Queen's favour. He emphasised his own magnificent conduct and criticised the other commanders for the decision to abandon Cadiz and the decision to return home without attempting any other significant targets.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>18</sup> See the following biographies for detailed perspectives: R. W. Kenny, *Elizabeth's Admiral: the Political Career of Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, 1536-1624* (John Hopkins Press 1970) and G. B. Harrison, *The Life and Death of Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex* (Cassel 1937).

Other promoters of privateering were adventurous members of the gentry, in particular West Country gentlemen. Often equipped with better ships and soldiers than the common merchants they attempted greater exploits. Although plunder was always central to their privateering many of the gentry also sought fame and honour and to strike a blow against the Spaniard. Before the Spanish War in 1585 some had sought commissions, permitting them to engage in privateering, from foreign princes including Henry of Navarre and Dom Antonio. There were connections between their drive for trade and the drive for plunder. Amongst the gentry there was increased interest in oceanic venturers like those of Drake. They also gave patronage to various freebooters and pirates.<sup>19</sup>

The group of most interest to this study is the merchants; this group became involved with privateering for a variety of reasons. Before 1585 there were already some merchants who sought a share of colonial trade in Morocco, Guinea and the Americas. In doing so they challenged the existing Spanish and Portuguese monopolies, which led to mutual hostility. For others there might be an element of religious animosity if they had suffered at the hands of the Spanish inquisition. Meanwhile the Hawkins family and others entered into their own private war with Spain and urged the government to adopt anti-Spanish policy. But despite these factors the majority of merchants involved in overseas trade, especially to Iberia, wanted to maintain peace. They were willing to ignore the West Indies and Africa for the sake of maintaining trade with Spain and Portugal (this trade was particularly vital to Bristol as will later be shown). Such merchants' views were represented and expressed by the Spanish Company. However, when the final crisis came in 1585, the sudden loss of open-trade transformed these same Iberian traders into the chief force behind the privateering war.<sup>20</sup>

The superior resources of London merchants and their larger ships, particularly the Barbary and Levant merchants, meant that they tended to dominate the privateering business. The most profitable kind of venture was the direct combination of trade and plunder in the same voyage. For example in 1592 the *Amity* of London captured two large Spanish ships while returning on a trading voyage to Barbary, the prize goods

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<sup>19</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering 1585-1603*, pp. 16-19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-15.

she took were valued at over £20,000. Masters on long trading voyages were often instructed to spend a certain amount of time hunting for prizes.<sup>21</sup>

Some leading merchants made substantial profits, for example John Watts who sent out fleets of privateering vessels throughout the war, mostly to the West Indies. In fact Watts made privateering his chief business. In 1585 he had at least a partial interest in 5 ships that were confiscated. In 1587 he sent ships with Drake's Cadiz expedition and then in 1589 he captained the *Margaret and John* in person during the Armada campaign. During his merchant career he belonged to the Spanish Company and Levant Company and he was a governor of the East-India Company. He became Lord Mayor of London in 1606 and was also knighted by James I. Watts was therefore a leader of the merchant community.<sup>22</sup>

Other major London privateers with similar careers and interests to Watts included Paul Bayning, Thomas Cordell and Thomas Myddelton. These privateering magnates were among London's merchant elite. Involvement in privateering activity reinforced their ambition for colonial trade. Aided by the profit they made from the war they also established estates and offices and obtained political influence.

To some extent Andrews has also looked at involvement of outport privateers. However, compared to the careers of the great magnates of London, Andrews has given less information concerning the leading outport merchants. This study however will provide a detailed career background of at least one such individual (see Chapter 3 below). In more general terms Andrews has shown that Southampton's merchants were less able to afford privateering and that most investment in Southampton privateering came from Londoners and professional owner-captains. In Weymouth however the local merchants went into partnership with professionals; as a result Weymouth became a major privateering base. By operating together in syndicates the outport merchants at Weymouth were relatively successful. Meanwhile Bristol was, with a few exceptions, dominated by small local merchantmen privateers bringing in smaller prizes (see chapter 2 below).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-8.

Generally a well-run privateering expedition could hope to capture some prizes and make some sort of profit, provided those involved did not get over ambitious or suffer some misfortune. Most merchants were satisfied with small gains for minimal risks. Privateering ships were expensive for other individuals to afford, while the merchant owned ships could pay for themselves through trade. Merchants usually had the advantage of having the facilities to store, transport and sell their prize-goods. At the very least they possessed better contacts with wholesalers who could purchase them.<sup>24</sup>

Merchant promoters did not usually go on these privateering ventures in person. As a result they could lose out heavily from pillage and embezzlement. Detailed instructions were given to captains and masters, however it was essential to have loyal agents on board. Therefore command of the vessel was often given to one of the investors or alternatively to a trusted individual or relative. Another common solution was for the promoters to make the captain into a partner. Numerous court actions were brought by the merchants against their own crews. The crews themselves tended to have rather loose discipline, also suffering from drunkenness and disorder. There were frequent quarrels amongst the men, especially over shares of prize money.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically once the war was over many merchant privateers returned to trading with Spain. At a meeting of the Spanish Company in May 1604 Thomas Wilford, president of the society, read out certain articles of trade that were to be presented to the Privy Council in the desire that they might be included in the future peace treaty. Unsurprisingly they sought to have all the previous grants and privileges given to English merchants in Spain ratified and confirmed. However one article in particular makes reference to past privateering activities. The society sought guarantees that:

‘no subject of any nation shall be allowed to take legal action against Englishmen in Spanish Courts, nor sequester their persons, ships or goods, for any ships goods or treasure formerly seized, on land or water, but to be brought to justice in England.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-9.

<sup>25</sup> Andrews (ed), *English Privateering Voyages*, pp. 22-5.

<sup>26</sup> P. Croft, *The Spanish Company* (London Record Society 1973), pp. 5, 114.

Overall the war with Spain allowed England to gain strength and experience in the Atlantic. Privateering provided a stimulus to ship building and created a substantial English ocean-going merchant fleet. Significantly privateering activity also led to an increased concentration of capital in the hands of prominent merchants (particularly Londoners) and professional venturers, while there were losses for smaller traders and ship owners. The capital and oceanic experience acquired were then invested in colonial ventures. Many privateers, a few of them from Bristol, later became involved in the founding of the Virginia Company.<sup>27</sup>

Privateering activity led to a sudden growth in English sugar refining, transforming it into a serious rival to the Dutch and German industries. Refiners themselves had links with privateering, in particular the Auldworths of Bristol who captured cargoes of sugar and also purchased them from their fellow privateers.<sup>28</sup> Refiners also promoted ambitious ventures such as the raid on Pernambuco for sugar.<sup>29</sup>

Viewed in general privateering brought great gains to a few and smaller losses to many. As Andrews has observed it helped to bring about a significant shift in the economic structure.<sup>30</sup> The following chapters will show how Bristol privateering itself fits into the overall pattern described above.

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<sup>27</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, pp. 222-41.

<sup>28</sup> K. R. Andrews, 'The Economic Aspects of Elizabethan Privateering' (unpublished thesis in University of London Library 1951), pp. 152-5.

<sup>29</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> Andrews, 'The Economic Aspects', p. 176.



## **CHAPTER 2) A BACKGROUND TO BRISTOL'S PRIVATEERING.**

This chapter will begin with an overview of Bristol's economic and political community; it will also look at the situation in Bristol during the Spanish war; finally it will provide an overview of Bristol's involvement in privateering itself. This information will allow the different aspects of Hopkins' career to be viewed and understood within a wider context.

### **Bristol and its Merchant Community:**

Bristol served as an economic centre for all the towns and creeks of the Severn valley, reaching as far as Shrewsbury. The city was 'a great centre of trade where raw materials and foodstuffs from the whole of the West Country were manufactured and exchanged for imported commodities'.<sup>31</sup>

The main interest of Bristol's overseas merchants lay in the Southern trades. The majority of ships traded with France, Spain and Portugal. In addition these were larger vessels of greater tonnage and they often carried a wide variety of merchandise. Bristol's Irish trade employed further ships, though in value it was worth less than 10 percent of the total trade.<sup>32</sup> Overall Bristol's trade was focused on importing high-price and high profit goods from the Iberian Peninsula. However later on a more complex trade was also emerging with new locations, for instance there was increased trade with the Mediterranean and Atlantic Islands and occasionally to Guinea. In the early seventeenth century Bristol's trade grew considerably.

The merchant community itself was well organised. Sacks estimates that by the mid 1570s the number of active overseas merchants had fallen to fewer than 100. These were entrepreneurs with varied business interests; their success required cooperation at home and abroad and depended on close personal ties and mutual trust. Bristol's

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<sup>31</sup> J. Vanes, Bristol at the Time of the Spanish Armada (Bristol branch of the Historical Association 1988), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> D. H. Sacks, The Widening Gate. Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700, (University of California Press 1993), pp. 37-40.

merchants aided one another by dealing in partnership, by serving as factors or agents, by acting as intermediaries and by jointly transporting their merchandise.<sup>33</sup>

In order to trade with Iberia Bristol's merchants had to belong to the London-based Spanish Company, which held a trading monopoly for both Portugal and Spain. The Company was granted a new charter on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1577, renewing its charter granted by Henry VIII. The charter stated that they were to have offices in both London and Spain. In total 389 members were listed, including 74 merchants from Bristol.<sup>34</sup> In 1605, following peace with Spain, another new charter was granted to the Company. This included 97 Bristol merchants, making them the largest group after the Londoners.<sup>35</sup> At the beginning of the 1600s Bristol merchants were also pushing for an official share in the trade to Venice and Turkey monopolised by the London based Levant Company, though without success.<sup>36</sup>

Bristol's merchants disliked trading through the Spanish Company and were anxious to assert their independence. During 1605 they succeeded in reviving the Bristol Merchant Venturers Society, which had probably ceased activity after 1571.<sup>37</sup> On 31<sup>st</sup> December 1605 it was agreed that all the merchants of Bristol would exempt themselves from the Spanish Company. In place of this it was confirmed that there would be a Merchant Venturers Company of Bristol, as previously established in the city, which would be ordered and governed by themselves.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately the Society did not draw up an actual list of members until 1618. However the initial membership would have been similar to the list of Bristol merchants from the Spanish Company (see above).

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-61.

<sup>34</sup> Calendar of the Patent Rolls. Elizabeth I. Vol. 7, 1575-1578 (1982), pp. 317-20.  
Vanes, Bristol, Spanish Armada, p. 15. P. McGrath, The Merchant Venturers of Bristol (Society of Merchant Venturers 1975), p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> P. McGrath (ed), Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century, Bristol Record Society, (1951), Vol. 17., pp. 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> J. Vanes (ed), Documents illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century (Bristol Record Society 1979), pp. 38, 114.

<sup>37</sup> McGrath, The Merchant Venturers of Bristol, pp. 22-23. Also McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers, p. 54 (Book of Charters I, 45.) See also A. B. Beaven, Bristol Lists: Municipal and Miscellaneous (T. D. Taylor, Sons, and Hawkins 1899), p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> McGrath, Records, Merchant Venturers, pp. 4-6.

In February of 1606 a Parliamentary Bill was passed for free trade to Spain, Portugal and France. This effectively destroyed the monopoly of Spanish Company. Bristol's Merchant Venturers Society sought to get their charters exempted from this free-trade Bill, but their petitions were rejected by parliament. After this Bristol's response was simply to ignore the new bill and continuing to use its own charters.<sup>39</sup> In 1612 Bristol's Common Council passed a further Act seeking to limit Bristol's foreign trade to members of the Merchant Venturers Society, excluding others.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to their trading involvements many Bristol privateers also belonged to Bristol's municipal government, referred to as the Corporation. Its main body consisted of 43 members including the mayor, sheriffs, Aldermen and common councillors. The merchants formed the richest group in Bristol and were therefore heavily represented. Public office was seen as customary for the social and economic leaders within the city; the principal office holders also needed wealth because they sometimes had to pay the financial charges of the office out of their own pocket.

The Common Council itself had crucial powers in economic regulation. Its vacancies were filled by a vote of the remaining members. Newly appointed councillors were often chosen as sheriff; nearly all councillors held this office during their career.<sup>41</sup> From 1581 the Charter of Elizabeth had increased the total number of Bristol Aldermen to 12, the Charter also made it legally necessary to fill Aldermen vacancies with members of the Common Council.<sup>42</sup>

A mayor and two sheriffs were annually elected from among the Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> September and eventually took office on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The mayoralty was a great honour within the city, it meant recognised worthiness for this special office and enhanced the individual's social importance. Holding office as mayor could be both time-consuming and expensive for the individual (as the following chapter will show). On

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. xvii, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>41</sup> Sacks, *Widening Gate*, pp. 160-4.

<sup>42</sup> Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, p. 184.

the beneficial side however the mayor's increased status gave him greater political weight and influence in local affairs.<sup>43</sup>

Overall there was a sense of corporate identity and community within the city and the bristolians were jealous in defending their rights from outsiders.<sup>44</sup>

### **Bristol during the Spanish War:**

Having outlined the features of Bristol's trade and municipal government this chapter will now focus upon the period of the Spanish war and the effects of this war upon the city. A series of petitions in the 1570s show the continual difficulties Bristol's merchants already faced in Spain. One petition detailed the loss of 13 ships and 5 barks. Another group of merchants claimed losses of £45,000 through piracy and wreck, while other ships were stayed in Portugal and Spain, their cargoes worth £10,000.<sup>45</sup> During the 1580s Bristol's regular trade to Iberia continued, though the situation remained uncertain with merchants being seized and imprisoned in Triana. Finally, in 1585, all English ships in Spain were seized.<sup>46</sup>

Open war brought an interruption to Bristol's normal trade. During this period Bristol petitioners to the Council complained of their poverty, while in April 1587 Leicester (the High steward of Bristol) informed Burghley of the decline of Bristol trade. By 1597 the Lord Admiral agreed that restraints on trade were 'to the great hinderance of Her Majesties Customs and the decay of the Citie'.<sup>47</sup>

The *Merchants Avizo* (a book for apprentice merchants that explained overseas trade) was written by a Bristol merchant named John Browne. Remarkably it was published in 1589, the year of the Spanish Armada. Its wide popularity among the merchants of Bristol suggests the intent to carry on trading to Iberia, regardless of the wartime trade embargo. Later editions even contain samples from the bills and accounts of Thomas

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<sup>43</sup> Sacks, *Widening Gate.*, pp. 172-80. R. Ricart, *The maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, ed. L. T. Smith (Camden Society 1872), pp. 70-1. W. Barrett, *History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (William Pine 1789), pp. 119-21.

<sup>44</sup> Vanes, *Bristol, Spanish Armada.*, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 26.

Auldworth that show he was trading to Spain between December 1589 and January 1590.<sup>48</sup> In the preface of the *Avizo* John Browne recites a poem calling for a return to peace:

‘When merchants trade proceedes in peace  
And labours prosper well:  
Then common weales in wealth increase,  
As now good proof can tell’<sup>49</sup>

Trade with Iberia was not ended by the war, rather it was continued by illicit means. Even immediately after the seizures of ships in May 1585 the trade had tentatively resumed. Smaller ports were now preferred where there was less vigilance and local officials often turned a blind eye. Another method employed was to simply ship to a French port near the Spanish coast. As a result substantial quantities of English and Spanish goods were exchanged at places like St Jean de Luz.<sup>50</sup>

Bristol ships were also involved in exporting war materials; these included lead, powder, cannon, muskets and ships’ tackle.<sup>51</sup> A report to the Treasurer and Lord Admiral in July 1591 details supplies of foodstuff to the enemy and expresses fears that Bristol may supply ordinance to the enemy via trade with Hamburg.<sup>52</sup> In 1592 there were captures of English ships trading to Spain, the merchants having ‘yearly sent both victuals and munition to her [the Queen’s] enemies’.<sup>53</sup> In July 1599 there was a general arrest of English ships and goods in Spain and Portugal to the value of £300,000. This apparently led to the ‘utter ruin of many merchants of Bristol, London &c’.<sup>54</sup>

During the war in Ireland there were more alleged abuses by the men of Bristol. Merchants traded on the difference between the English pound and the new debased

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<sup>48</sup> Browne, John, *The Marchants Avizo*, ed. P. McGrath (Baker Library, Harvard 1957), pp. 26-40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. Note: there are 10 verses in total.

<sup>50</sup> For a full account of these practices see P. Croft, ‘Trading with the enemy 1585-1604’ in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 32 (1989), pp. 281-302.

<sup>51</sup> Vanes, *Bristol, Spanish Armada.*, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Cal. S. P. Dom.* Vol. 1591-4., pp. 72-4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

<sup>54</sup> *Cal. S. P. Dom.* Vol. 1598-1601., pp. 242-3.

coinage in Ireland; many made a fortune by selling their goods at three times the price. Such abuses hindered the war effort. The merchants of Bristol were also accused of trading with the rebel Irish, providing them with supplies and arms.<sup>55</sup>

As Pauline Croft has concluded ‘it is clear that many Englishmen and Spaniards alike cared more for their livelihoods than for any considerations of foreign policy’. The war was therefore an interruption to their normal trading, which necessitated flexible responses, ‘whether by illicit trade or privateering or a combination of both’.<sup>56</sup>

Despite this Bristol participated in the war itself through both military and financial contributions. During the 1570s and 1580s the city made preparations for its defence and trained its militia. In 1589 Bristol provided three ships and a pinnace, which were sent to Plymouth to await the Armada. Then in 1596 Bristol and Somerset were instructed to provide 3 ships for the Cadiz expedition, these were ‘victualled for five months and manned from hence with one captain and 50 mariners in every ship’.<sup>57</sup> According to a Council report in October the expedition cost Bristol £2,500. This was worsened by Somerset failing to pay its share of the money.<sup>58</sup>

During this time Bristol was second only to Chester in its importance as a base for the assembly and transportation of troops to Ireland. Between 1595-1602 a total of fourteen levies of footmen and horse were sent to Bristol. These made up a combined total of 10,275 footmen and 602 horse.<sup>59</sup> The mayors of Bristol faced substantial difficulty in billeting, feeding and keeping the troops in order. (See pp. 38-9 below.) Bristol was also troubled by bands of deserters fleeing back from Ireland. From 1596 onwards the city appointed a ‘beadle of rogues’ to hunt for deserters in the city.<sup>60</sup> In 1600 Lord Deputy Mountjoy in Ireland wrote to Carew informing him that ‘soldiers

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<sup>55</sup> J. McGurk, The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: (Manchester university Press 1997), Chapter 7. pp. 172-3.

<sup>56</sup> Croft, ‘Trading with the enemy’., pp. 295, 301.

<sup>57</sup> Bristol Record Office, Ordinances of the Common Council, Ref. 04272, fo. 63.v. Vanes, Bristol Spanish Armada., pp. 26-7.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> McGurk, Elizabethan Conquest., pp. 139, 165.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 169.

continually flock to Bristol, Barnstable and other ports of the west out of this kingdom, which must be out of your province [Munster]'.<sup>61</sup>

In January 1602, due to ongoing war, the crown asked the mayor, aldermen and common councillors of Bristol for a loan. The mayor was to pay £100, the aldermen were to pay £20, councillors were to pay between £10-20. A second and similar demand was then made in May.<sup>62</sup>

As the war subsided in the early 1600s the English colonial movement was revived with a number of substantial merchants now becoming involved. Many of these were leading privateering promoters. In addition plundering accompanied nearly every colonising voyage and was used to help cover the expenses.

In Bristol itself there had been an earlier interest in Christopher Carleill's proposed project in 1582-3.<sup>63</sup> Bristol's interest was then revived for Martin Pring's 1603 voyage to North Virginia with two ships. This was a commercial voyage aimed at collecting medicinal plants and trading for fur. An account of the voyage attributed to Robert Salterne states that: 'Master Iohn Whitson being Maior, with his brethren the aldermen, & most of the Merchants of the Citie of Bristow, raised a stock of 1000 l.'<sup>64</sup>

The Virginia Company Charter of 1606 combined two separate companies. Firstly there was a London-based company, secondly a West-country branch consisting of Plymouth, Exeter and Bristol. In 1607 the later group attempted to establish a colony in North Virginia. Bristol was sceptical about investing until assured that it was a national enterprise. Subscriptions were then opened, though only 13 members of the Common Council offered a yearly contribution, creating a total investment of £101 14s 8d per year. Therefore Bristol did not give wholehearted support.<sup>65</sup> Early

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<sup>61</sup> Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts, Vol. 1589-1600, eds., J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen (Kraus reprint 1974), p. 424.

<sup>62</sup> McGurk, Elizabethan Conquest, pp. 171-2.

<sup>63</sup> D. B. Quinn (ed.), The voyages and colonising enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert Hackluyt Society (1940) 84. Vol 2., pp. 347, 350.

<sup>64</sup> D. B. Quinn and A. M. Quinn (eds), The English New England Voyages 1602-1608, Hackluyt Society (1983) Vol. 161., pp. 212-4.

<sup>65</sup> Bristol City Records, Common Council Book II, cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 380-3.

misfortunes for the colony soon cut away financial support and the venture ended in failure. Compared to London the outports generally did not have the capital or the will to invest greatly in overseas plantation. In 1609 a second Charter reorganised the previous structure to create a single incorporated Virginia Company.<sup>66</sup>

### **Bristol's involvement in Privateering:**

Looking at the mayors of Bristol over a thirty-year period (1585-1614), beginning with the outbreak of the Spanish War, it is possible to say that on at least nine occasions the appointed individual was known to have had some involvement in privateering.<sup>67</sup> This list includes John Barnes (1587), Robert Kitchen<sup>68</sup> (1588), John Hopkins (1590 and 1600), Thomas Auldworth (1592), Michael Pepwall<sup>69</sup> (1593), Thomas James (1605 and 1614) and Robert Auldworth (1609). In addition to this there is John Barker (1606), whose brother Andrew led an expedition to the West Indies.<sup>70</sup> Given that the merchants formed the most dominant group in Bristol's political society the number of mayors connected with privateering is perhaps unsurprising. Nonetheless it demonstrates the fact that privateering was prevalent among Bristol's greatest social and economic elites.

Most of Bristol's privateering ventures were sent out by local merchants. There are 15 former privateers amongst the 97 Bristol merchants listed under the Spanish Company Charter in 1605.<sup>71</sup> As not all privateering activity was recorded the actual number may have been higher. However it still shows that only a modest selection of Bristol's Iberian merchants became engaged privateering. Despite this those of them who did participate formed the strongest element in the ownership and setting forth of privateering vessels from Bristol.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>67</sup> For mayors see W. Barrett, *History and Antiquities*. Unless otherwise specified (see below) privateer names are taken from K. R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering 1585-1603* (Cambridge 1964), pp. 258-61.

<sup>68</sup> J. W. D. Powell, *Bristol Privateers and Ships of War* (Arrowsmith Ltd 1930), pp. 41-3, 345.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-7.

<sup>71</sup> McGrath, *Records, Merchant Venturers.*, pp. 2-3. Privateer names in Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering.*, pp. 258-61, see also pp. 167, 202 for Henry Roberts. See also Powell, *Bristol Privateers.*, p. 33. John Barker, p. 44. Thomas Pitt.



Andrews estimates that in the years after the defeat of the armada (1589-91) Bristol had 29 ships privateering. The majority of these were small merchantmen, 75 percent of those of known tonnage were below 100 tons. They were mostly plundering the South West European trade. For these years Andrews has shown 41 prizes for Bristol and Bridgewater (including 11 of unknown value). He has calculated the total value for the prizes of known value at £31,148. In 1598 however there were only 3 Bristol and Bridgewater prizes recorded, with a total value of just £354.<sup>72</sup>

Bristol was therefore active in privateering during early years. It was one of the greatest privateering bases outside of London, comparable with Southampton, Weymouth and Plymouth.<sup>73</sup> However toward the end of the century Bristol lost some of its trade to London, the lack of trade leading to a decline in shipping. Andrews blames this for the decline in Bristol privateering during the 1590s, which meant by 1598 Bristol had ceased to be of much importance in this field. Another reason for the decline was that most local merchants were not deeply interested in privateering. It was an opportunity allowing them to use ships and men rendered idle by the interruption of trade. However such activities were only a partial substitute for their normal trade. By the late 1590s the only consistent promoters left were John Hopkins, William Walton and Robert Auldworth.<sup>74</sup> The following chapter will look in particular at the background of John Hopkins.

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<sup>72</sup> Andrews, Elizabethan Privateering, pp. 125-6, 140-1. K. R. Andrews, 'The Economic Aspects of Elizabethan Privateering' (unpublished thesis in University of London Library 1951), p. 146, see Tables A and G.

<sup>73</sup> Andrews, Elizabethan Privateering, pp. 32-3.

<sup>74</sup> Andrews, 'Economic Aspects.', pp. 46-9.

## CHAPTER 3) JOHN HOPKINS: A CASE STUDY OF AN INDIVIDUAL INVOLVED IN PRIVATEERING.

This chapter will look more closely at the type of men who became involved in Bristol privateering. It will achieve this primarily through a detailed case study of one important individual, John Hopkins. It will first look at Hopkins' privateering activities; it will then examine his career as a merchant and his involvement in Bristol politics. The details of his career and background will also be compared to that of other leading Bristol privateers. Overall the chapter will seek to build up an image of Hopkins, showing what kind of person he was, and saying whether this was typical of Bristol's privateers.

### **Hopkins' role as a Privateeer:**

During the Spanish War John Hopkins was one of the two greatest individual promoters of privateering in Bristol, along with William Walton.<sup>75</sup> From 1588 onwards Hopkins had seven different ships on reprisal at various times. One such ship was the *John*. In 1589 Hopkins himself captained the ship and took a prize cargo of sugar and brazilwood from a Brazilman. This prize was worth an estimated £4,000.<sup>76</sup> One of Hopkins' ships most regularly involved in privateering was the *Elizabeth Bonaventure* (80.t.).<sup>77</sup> In 1591, captained by William Cole, she took a total of three prizes, which included two Portuguese ships and one Leaguer. Two of the cargoes were valued at £850 and £670 but the value of the third is not known. The *Elizabeth Bonaventure* remained active over the following years and took further prizes in 1592, 1593 and 1594.<sup>78</sup> In 1592 Hopkins is listed as the owner of another privateer, the *Moonshine* of Bristol, while he is also known to have owned a privateer called the *Mary-flower*.<sup>79</sup> Another of his ships, the *Daisy* (40 t.) brought in prizes in 1593 and again in 1595.<sup>80</sup> He obtained further prizes in 1594 and 1596 brought in by the

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<sup>75</sup> See below p. 23.

<sup>76</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, p. 259. See also Andrews, *Economic Aspects*, p. 326.

<sup>77</sup> Possibly named after his wife. It was quite common for ship-owners to do this, for example John Watts' ship the *Margaret and John*, also Paul Bayning's two ships the *Susan* and the *Great Susan*. See Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, pp. 106, 110.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259. Andrews, *Economic Aspects*, p. 322. Powell, *Bristol Privateers*, p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Andrews, *Economic Aspects*, p. 322.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322. Powell, *Bristol Privateers* p.46.

*Ferret*.<sup>81</sup> Hopkins was also the owner of the *Mary Fortune* (150 t.), she was the largest out of his privateering ships for which we know the actual size and probably his largest ship overall. She brought in a prize valued at £210 in 1598, under the captaincy of Daniel White.<sup>82</sup>

The various prizes that men like Hopkins were bringing into Bristol could lead to disputes with the customs officials. In 1594 Hopkins made a complaint to the Lord High Treasurer against Thomas Taylor, a Bristol customs officer. Hopkins claimed that Taylor had been trying to overcharge him on the collection of customs duty for a prize cargo of indico (sugar), taken from a carrick near the Azores. He was not the only merchant to make complaints against Taylor, who seems to have had a reputation for corruption.<sup>83</sup>

The list of tenths paid to the Lord Admiral shows that overall Hopkins brought home at least 16 different prizes, these known prizes had a total value of £18,276. This represented a consistently respectable profit.<sup>84</sup> It is not possible to quantify here how much of his total wealth and profits he owed to privateering. As with other merchants his trade interests gave him the necessary ships and other means to supplement his normal business activity with some privateering. Although, unlike many other Bristol merchants who ventured into privateering, he clearly developed the experience and resources that were necessary to sustain his enthusiasm throughout the war and make his ventures relatively successful.

By comparison the only other individual involved in Bristol privateering on such a scale was William Walton. Walton was a professional privateer with interests in both Bristol and Weymouth: his Bristol Ships included the *Salamander*, the *Looking Glass*, the *Flying dragon*, the *William* and the *Pheonix*, while his Weymouth Ships were the

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<sup>81</sup> Andrews, *Economic Aspects*, p. 322.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323. Andrews, *Eliz privateering*, p. 271. Daniel White: alias Daniel Norton. Seaman and gentleman. Had received letters of reprisal to serve as master on previous privateering ventures of other promoter's ships, *Bark Norton*, *Minion*, *Green Dragon*, *Exchange*. Also on 22nd April 1599 he was again master of the *Mary Fortune*, this time on a trading voyage to Venice (see below p. 33).

<sup>83</sup> Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>84</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, p. 145. See Table 4 on p. 49 for estimates of privateering expenditures.

*Jane Bonaventure*, the *Pearl*, the *Prudence* and the *Francis*. Overall from 1588-98 his prizes are mentioned 17 times in the Lord Admiral's list of tenths.<sup>85</sup>

In 1589 the *Salamander* took a cargo of wheat valued at £120 from a League ship.<sup>86</sup> The following year a ship of William Walton's was involved in a large privateering expedition headed by John Randall. Two ships were captured and Walton's ship took a share of the prize-cargoes, which were valued at £10,000 and £13,000.<sup>87</sup> For the same year Walton's ships, the *Salamander* and the *Pheonix*, are listed as sailing together, however the details of their captured prize are unknown.<sup>88</sup> In addition on 26<sup>th</sup> October Letters of reprisal were issued for the *John* (100 t.), a ship owned by company of merchants led by Walton. The ship had 43 crewmen with victuals for a 6-month voyage.<sup>89</sup> Further activity was recorded in 1591 when the *Looking-Glass* captured sugar and brazilwood worth around £3060.<sup>90</sup> The *William* also took a prize that year, though the prize details are not known.<sup>91</sup> Walton remained involved in privateering throughout the decade, in 1598 his Weymouth ship the *Pearl* seized a prize valued at £2,200 from a Sao Thome ship. That year his Bristol ship the *Flying Dragon* also committed several acts of spoil, though again the prizes are unknown.<sup>92</sup>

During this period Walton became embroiled in a long-running controversy over one of his prizes. In December 1591 a letter from the Doctors Commons to Lord Burghley states that a warrant has been issued for the arrest of Walton and others. Together with the *May Flower* of St Ives Walton's ship the *Salamander* had previously captured the *Whale* of Denmark. The English government subsequently received a complaint from the King of Denmark, following this complaint they offered to help the Danish owners obtain compensation from Walton and his associates.<sup>93</sup> Years later, in 1597, there is a certificate of William Walton's appearance in the chamber of the Admiralty

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.260.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.253.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.260.

<sup>89</sup> Powell, *Bristol Privateers.*, p. 46.

<sup>90</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering.*, pp. 148, 159. In partnership with his London relatives John and Richard.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.270-1

<sup>93</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom.* Vol 1591-4. Ref. 85.

Court. Together with others present Walton made a payment of £50 to John van Vorden; this was partial compensation for the value of the Whale and its cargo.<sup>94</sup>

Beside Hopkins and Walton there were several other prominent individuals in Bristol privateering. These included the family of Thomas, Robert and Richard Auldworth who were eminent Bristolians with interests in ‘sugar refining, in the Levant and East India companies and in western planting’.<sup>95</sup> Therefore Privateering was just one of many diverse commercial activities for them. In the early 1590s they set forth the *John*, the *Green Dragon* (60 t.) the *Gabriel* (80 t.) and the *Sugar*. At this time Richard Auldworth was also a joint-promoter of the *Jonas*, which captured the *Fortune* of Lubeck in 1591. He also collaborated with Henry Cletherow in a London privateer called the *Harry*. Overall the Auldworths have six recorded prizes in the list of tenths, with a total value of £7,000. In addition to this they frequently bought-up prize-goods from other privateers. As late as 1603 Robert Auldworth involved with a privateer called the *Consolation*.<sup>96</sup>

When Robert died in 1634 he was buried in St. Peter’s Church in Bristol and given a monument. Upon this monument he was described as “a famous merchant, a successful voyager through many seas, seeking rather the glory of his country and the relief of the poor than thirsting for the accumulation of hordes of wealth”.<sup>97</sup>

In contrast John Whitson, one of the most important Bristol merchants at this time, apparently refused to participate in privateering on moral grounds. In 1585 two privateering ships *Maryflower* and *Seabright* brought home two prizes. John Whitson was a part-owner of these ships but upon inspecting the prizes he immediately felt guilty because some of the plunder they had taken he ‘judged to belong unto poor mariners’. If his servant’s account of events is to be believed Whitson afterwards sold his shares to Thomas James and vowed never to have any involvement in privateering again.<sup>98</sup> Such a reaction seems to have been fairly unique, certainly after the Spanish seizures of English shipping earlier that year.

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<sup>94</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom.* Appendia 1580-1625. Ref. 83.

<sup>95</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering.*, pp. 146, 148.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 259.

<sup>97</sup> Powell, *Bristol Privateers.*, p. 49.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Thomas James was another of Bristol's leading privateers. In the same year that he bought the shares from Whitson a servant of his accidentally set fire to *Maryflower* while she lay in port, as a result the ship was sunk. However she was later recovered and repaired and James renamed her the *Pleasure*.<sup>99</sup> In 1590 James was one of the joint promoters when the *Pleasure* captured a Brazilman.<sup>100</sup> Then on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 1591 James wrote to Lord Burghley, in his letter he referred to the new discovery of the island of Ramea, saying that eight days ago the *Pleasure* had captured one of the two St. Malo ships that had discovered it.<sup>101</sup>

Thomas Holcomb was another eminent privateer, three of his prizes listed between 1589-1591, all as a joint-promoter. This shows that he was one of the busiest Bristol privateers in these early years of the war. He was listed as a promoter of the *Diamond*, the *Hopewell* and the *White Lion*. In 1590 one particular voyage by the *Hopewell* was highly successful, she took a Portuguese cargo of gold, pepper and ivory estimated at £12,000 in value.<sup>102</sup>

One of Holcomb's partners in the privateering business was one Thomas Hopkins. From his sources Andrews has identified that Thomas was in fact the son of John Hopkins.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately it has not been possible to confirm this fact from local sources or from the details of John Hopkins' own will (see pp. 41-3 below), though the fact that the pair of them served in office together in 1600 could also imply that they were closely related.<sup>104</sup> Thomas was joint-promoter of the *White Lion*, which took a modest prize cargo worth £110 in 1589 and made further ventures in 1590 and 1593.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile in 1591 he also sent out the *Amity*, which brought him prize cargo off a Leaguer, this time to the value £170.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>100</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*., p. 260.

<sup>101</sup> Powell, *Bristol Privateers*., p. 47.

<sup>102</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*., pp. 258-61.

<sup>103</sup> Andrews, *Economic Aspects*., p. 322.

<sup>104</sup> Beaven, *Bristol Lists*., p. 222.

<sup>105</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan privateering*., p. 261. Andrews, *Economic Aspects*., p. 332.

<sup>106</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan privateering*., p. 258. Andrews, *Economic Aspects*., p.320.

By comparing the records of Bristol's most frequent promoters of privateering, as described above, it is possible to identify different practices when it came to promoting a ship on privateering ventures. The following figures are based on solely upon the years 1589-1591 and 1598.<sup>107</sup> Here the records show that the two greatest promoters, John Hopkins and William Walton, preferred sole investment. In these years Hopkins invested in 3 ventures as the sole promoter, while Walton invested in 5 as the sole promoter and only 1 as a joint-promoter. Because they owned several ships and often had more than one vessel out on reprisal at any given time both men could afford the risks of being the sole promoter. As already mentioned they were both specialists for whom privateering had evidently become a major interest. In return they enjoyed the benefits of greater control over the ventures and greater rewards when they were successful.

Meanwhile the other merchants with less involvement often preferred to opt for joint-promotion. For example from 1589-1591 Thomas Holcomb invested 4 times as a joint-promoter, Thomas James invested just once as a joint-promoter and Thomas Hopkins invested in one ship as the sole and promoter and one ship as joint-promoter. This preference for 'joint-stock' investments allowed them to spread their risks.

As already mentioned in the opening chapter, English merchant-promoters did not usually go out on privateering ventures in person. A survey of the captaincy of privateering ships, based on the records of ventures for Bristol and Bridgewater in 1589-1591,<sup>108</sup> supports this overall trend. The records (in cases where the names of both the captain and the promoters of the venture are known) show that the ship's owner was captain on 5 occasions. While on 4 occasions a joint-promoter or close relative was chosen as captain. On the remaining 23 occasions a separate individual was appointed as captain.<sup>109</sup> These figures show that the merchant promoters, with various different interests, clearly preferred to stay ashore where they could concentrate on organising their dealings in trade and other affairs.

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<sup>107</sup> These are the years for which Andrews has published detailed accounts of his findings in the Admiralty records. See Andrews, *Elizabethan privateering.*, pp. 247-73.

<sup>108</sup> Listed in *Ibid.*, pp. 258-60.

<sup>109</sup> Not being an official promoter this doesn't necessarily mean the captain made no investment. For example some captains made modest contributions such as supplying equipment or victuals.

John Hopkins was one of the few owners to have captained a privateering voyage in person, though on most of his ships he still employed other captains, for example William Cole on the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*. In addition to this Hopkins also captained one of his own ships at Cadiz (see below). This direct involvement is further evidence that he had developed a major personal interest. It also suggests that he was particularly adventurous compared to some of the other merchants.

The other owner-captains listed are William Trenchard (twice), John Pike and William Samford. However these are all lesser privateers. Apart from John Hopkins, none of the other leading figures in Bristol privateering (William Walton, the Auldworths, Thomas James and Thomas Holcomb) are recorded as captain of a privateering venture.

As well as organising and promoting the kind of privateering activity against Portugal and Spain that has been described, John Hopkins personally took part in one of the greatest expeditions of the whole war. In February of 1596 the Queen demanded from Bristol and Somerset 3 fully equipped and provisioned ships, at an estimated cost of £2,500, to join Royal Navy in preparation for an offensive. According to Latimer this was achieved and the three ships, including *Pleasure* (250 tons) and the *Unicorn* (250 tons) and a third unnamed ship, took part in the great expedition that sailed to Cadiz. Latimer also notes that one of these ships was equipped and captained by John Hopkins.<sup>110</sup>

Powell and Andrews both accepted Latimer's statement that Hopkins commanded one of the three ships financed by Bristol and Somerset.<sup>111</sup> However Vanes has since identified the third unnamed ship as the *Exchange* (200 tons).<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile a letter from the Privy Council shows that the *Mary Fortune*, owned by Hopkins, was also present at Cadiz (see below). Therefore a reinterpretation of Latimer's source, which seemingly gives special mention to Hopkins, would indicate that in fact Hopkins separately financed his own ship the *Mary Fortune* and joined the Cadiz expedition as a private adventurer in search of personal gain.

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<sup>110</sup> Latimer, *Sixteenth Century Bristol*, pp.109-10. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol*, p.15.

<sup>111</sup> Andrews, *Economic Aspects*, p. 322. Taken from Powell, *Bristol Privateers*, p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> Vanes, *Bristol, Spanish Armada*, pp. 26-7.



Despite this Hopkins, as a wealthy merchant and a Council member, would still have been expected to contribute to the efforts of the city's corporation to finance its three ships. He later became mayor in 1600 and the Bristol audit-book for that year also contains the following note: 'Paid the mayor for the loan of four pieces of ordnance put aboard the *Pleasure* of Bristol in the voyage for Cales, £9 5s'.<sup>113</sup>

The Cadiz expedition was largely financed by the Queen, Lord Admiral Howard and the Earl of Essex. Estimates of the number of ships vary depending on the sources, some suggest nearly 100 ships while others say there were around 150. Either way the fleet was still an impressive sight. The fleet made a surprise attack on Cadiz and succeeded in destroying two galleons and capturing two more. The commanders then landed their soldiers and sacked the town itself, securing a famous victory.

However the expedition was not as successful as it might have been. They failed to seize outgoing Indies fleet in the bay which was given time to destroy itself. The expedition returned to England having made no attempt to take the incoming treasure fleet and no attempt on any other significant port. Lisbon, which held the main strength of the armada, was ignored. Furthermore most of the loot taken from Cadiz was embezzled by the crews and captains, which left the original promoters (including Elizabeth) without profit from their investment.<sup>114</sup>

In a letter addressed to the mayor of Bristol and the port officers, which was dated 30<sup>th</sup> August, the Privy Council said they had been informed of matters concerning 'two ships of Bristoll called the Mary Fortune and the Unycorne that were in the late voyage'. They also noted that one of the two belonged to John Hopkins, saying that within the two ships 'yt is supposed there were goodes and merchandise to a great value'.<sup>115</sup>

The Customs officers of Bristol had sought to make a search of the two ships upon their return, but they were resisted by the hostile behaviour of 'Thomas Parre, a

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<sup>113</sup> Bristol Record Office, Mayor's Audit Book, Ref. 04026 (10), fo. 145. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol*., p. 15.

<sup>114</sup> Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and settlement*., pp. 241-2. Vanes, *Bristol, Spanish Armada*., pp. 27-9.

<sup>115</sup> *A.P.C.*, Vol. xxvi, 1596-7., p. 136.

capten, Andrewe batten, master of the said ship called the Unycorne, and his mate and others'. The two crews unloaded the plunder into small boats and conveyed it away. The Customs officers had commanded that the mariners' chests should be searched, but they were resisted and threatened with violence. Having heard of this the Privy Council ordered the mayor to question all those involved in order to discover what goods had been embezzled or smuggled ashore 'out of the said shippes of the spoyle of Cales'.<sup>116</sup>

The behaviour of Hopkins and his accomplices was not unusual. During that summer there were numerous complaints of returning ships from Cadiz smuggling plunder into the country without declaring it. Even some of the senior officers fell under suspicion.<sup>117</sup> Special instructions were given for the searching of returning ships by officials. For example commissioners were appointed in London to search the vessels returning for any goods, commodities, money or jewels that were taken at Cadiz.<sup>118</sup>

Nonetheless the expedition was widely hailed as a popular success. In his account of the voyage Monson wrote (with somewhat exaggerated praise) that: 'Spain never received so great an overthrow, so great a spoil, and so great an indignity at our hands as in this journey to Cadiz'.<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile John Hopkins' own return was greatly celebrated in Bristol. 'He was met with much joy by the citizens on Durdam Down'. He was then welcomed home with a great procession of 'tallow candles and a great bonfire at the High Cross'.<sup>120</sup> It is only possible to speculate how far this fame and popularity was beneficial Hopkins. Over the following years he went on hold some of the most important offices and positions within the city, as the following sections will show. Undoubtedly this was largely due to his wealth and social standing, but it is also possible that the prestige gained from Cadiz increased his personal influence.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>117</sup> See in particular *Cal. Sp. Dom.* Vol. 1595-7. The numerous complaints include: embezzlement charges against Sir Anthony Ashley pp. 283-5, spoils taken by Raleigh and other officers p. 266, the disappearance of the money known to have been stored in the castle at Cadiz pp. 280-1, complaints against Sir Christopher Blout who wrote to Lord Cecil to deny any personal wrongdoing concerning the spoil of Cadiz pp. 286-7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 271. *A. P. C. 1596-7.*, pp. 109, 113.

<sup>119</sup> *Monsons Tracts Vol I.*, p. 353.

<sup>120</sup> Latimer, *Annals of Bristol*, p.15.

### **Hopkins' career as a merchant:**

Having described Hopkins' involvement in privateering this chapter will now examine who he was as a merchant and how he fitted into Bristol's merchant community. Identifying when Hopkins served his apprenticeship is not straightforward. The Bristol Burgess Books show that there were at least three individuals with the name John Hopkins who were made freemen of Bristol during this period, while yet another John Hopkins appears in the Bristol Apprentice Books.<sup>121</sup> An entry in the Burgess Books for 1566 shows a John Hopkins apprenticed to a bookbinder named Philip Scapulis, though such a background seems unlikely for an important merchant.<sup>122</sup> Another entry in 1578 refers to a John Hopkins who was a son of William Hopkins fishmonger of Bristol, this also sounds a little unusual.<sup>123</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1570 the records show that one John Hopkins, apprentice to a merchant named George Hyggynes (Higgins), was made a freeman.<sup>124</sup> It is likely that this entry is referring to the John Hopkins of this study: the year is roughly appropriate and it also shows him as being apprenticed to a known merchant. In addition there is a separate letter showing Hopkins working for Higgins in 1569 (see below). When describing John Hopkins Latimer refers to him as 'fishmonger', this is probably an error on Latimer's behalf caused by reading the other entry in the Burgess Book.<sup>125</sup>

In many cases an apprenticeship would last for 7 years, the often starting when the apprentice was around 14 years of age. Therefore based on the records above it seems likely that John Hopkins was born no later than 1549, apprenticed to George Higgins no later than 1563 and finally made a Freeman on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1570.

On 27<sup>th</sup> October 1569 a letter, sent from Tours, refers to a siege at St Jean D' Angely in southern France. It then reports that an English merchant was captured by the French and ransomed for 100 crowns. The merchant is named as John Hopkins:

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<sup>121</sup> 27th April 1556, John son of husbandman Henry Hopkins from Barton Hundred in Gloucestershire was apprenticed to Elizabeth Hooper, a Vinter, for 7 years. Ralph, Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book 1532-1565, Part III 1552-1565, p. 41. Ref. 520.

<sup>122</sup> B. R. O. Burgess Book 1557-1599, Ref. 04359/1. Microfiche FC/BB/1(c)2 (print 27)

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Microfiche FC/BB/1(c)4 (print 33)

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. Microfiche FC/BB/1(c)3 (print 7)

<sup>125</sup> Latimer, Annals of Bristol, p.15.

‘John Hopkins, servant to mr. Hickens of Bristol, who says that he saw fifteen days since in the river of Bordeaux, eight galliots, two foists, and two great ships equipped for war. His grief was great to hear the disquiet that the Duke’s sudden departure caused both Her Majesty and the council. His wife is very ill troubled with a lame leg.’<sup>126</sup>

It has not been possible to find any other references to a ‘Mr Hickens’. However this is probably a variation of spelling and it probably refers to George Higgins (see above). The source implies that there was a gap between Hopkins completing his apprenticeship and being made a freeman. It suggests that during this time he was working for Higgins as a factor, trading to the Bordeaux region during the French war.<sup>127</sup>

In 1559 George Higgins was accused of importing goods without paying customs duties, which he denied. Then in 1570 he was one of the petitioners from Bristol who had ships and goods seized in Spain, this was probably one cause of his bankruptcy the following year by the sum of £1,000. However in 1575 the Privy Council took pity on Higgins, noting that some of his losses had been incurred in her majesties service, and granted him a licence to export grain.<sup>128</sup>

Hopkins himself had also suffered losses to the Spanish. In 1570 a petition was sent to the Privy Council from some merchants of Bristol, Hopkins included, asking the council to help them secure some form of restitution. They had goods aboard the ship *The Falcon* of Barnestabull, which has been unlawfully seized by the Spanish fleet at Tersera.<sup>129</sup> The voyage had been sent out in March: 6 months before Hopkins became free of the city. Once again this shows that Hopkins was trading for a time before he applied to become a freemen (for which he would have to pay expenses).

It appears that Hopkins did well in building up his trade during the 1570s as the following sources show him making significant investments. In 1579 a note from the

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<sup>126</sup> Cal. S.P. Foreign Series 1569-71. Ref. 486., p. 136.

<sup>127</sup> For Bristol’s trade with Bordeaux see Vanes, Documents., pp. 17-21.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 33, 131, 135.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 155-6.

Exchequer stated that bounty was to be paid to Hopkins and 4 other men of Bristol for the new ship they have built, the *Toby* (300 t.). Hopkins and another man, William Yate, entered a bond for £200 not to alienate the ship.<sup>130</sup> In 1581 £75 of this bounty was paid.<sup>131</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1584 a list of imports to Bristol shows that the *Toby* was used by Hopkins and others to import 134 t. of sack, from Andalusia.<sup>132</sup>

Then in October 1585 Hopkins and others were accused of smuggling wheat and corn out from Bristol. This was delivered to San Lucar in Spain aboard Hopkins' ship the *Mary Fortune*; the alleged voyage took place between 10<sup>th</sup> October and 10<sup>th</sup> December in 1584. The investors gained evidence of this from 4 separate witnesses.<sup>133</sup>

Already it is clear that Hopkins had developed the diverse interests in the southern trades that were common to many Bristol merchants. The sources above show he was involved in trade with Southern France, Andalusia and the Islands. However he suffered a misfortune in 1594 when his ship the *Elizabeth Bonaventure* sailed to St. Jean de Luz. After a stay of 12 days she was wrecked in the river. The loss of ship and cargo cost Hopkins a total of £500.<sup>134</sup>

On 27<sup>th</sup> January 1599 the government ordered that Hopkins should to be paid 838 crowns as reward for building the *Mary Fortune*. The money was to be paid out of customs on future goods conveyed by the ship in question.<sup>135</sup> She was probably built as a replacement for an earlier ship of the same name; the *Mary Fortune* was also mentioned in connection with smuggling in 1585 and privateering in 1596 and 1598, as shown above.

Then on the 22nd April 1599 the *Mary Fortune*, captained by Daniel White, returned from a voyage to Venice. She brought a cargo of brimstone and anneseed belonging to Hopkins and two other Bristol merchants. The following day the *Mayflower* of Bristol

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<sup>130</sup> Meaning not to sell it to foreigners.

<sup>131</sup> Powell, *Bristol Privateers*., p. 343 (appendix).

<sup>132</sup> Vanes, *Documents*., p. 146.

<sup>133</sup> P. R. O. E134/27&28Eliz/Mich8. Evan, Jones. 'The Smugglers' City'.  
<<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/Maritime/Sources/1585smuggling.htm>> September 2004.

<sup>134</sup> Vanes, *Documents*., p. 101.

<sup>135</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom.* Vol 1598-1601., pp. 154-5. Bounties were given to encourage merchants to build new ships and thereby improve the maritime fleet.

returned from Toulon. Her cargo of oil and alum belonged to several merchant investors including Hopkins.<sup>136</sup> These accounts show that by 1599 or earlier Hopkins had become involved in more distant forms of trade.

Three years later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1602, Hopkins took on an apprentice. His apprentice was Henry Fryer the son of Thomas Fryer, a doctor of medicine in London.<sup>137</sup> This ambiguous link may suggest that Hopkins had spent time in London. It is certainly likely that he made visits there during his career.

Through his own trade and connections within the merchant community Hopkins was able to gather news of foreign events, information that could be passed on if deemed useful. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1586 he wrote to Doctor Cæsar, a judge of the Admiralty, with news received from ‘one Cade of Bastable’ who had recently departed from Lisbon aboard a French ship. He reports that the visiting French vessels are checked to ensure there are no goods or men of ‘our nation’. He also states that ‘a greete fleete’ is being prepared and also that they are taking men from the French ships to use as pilots. Hopkins letter was then forwarded to a figure named ‘Master Clethro’, an additional note was added with further news that concerned a fleet being assembled and prepared in the Maderas.<sup>138</sup> By passing information to an Admiralty Judge Hopkins was clearly hoping to gain favour in the process. This may have been beneficial to him if he was thinking of engaging in privateering or beneficial if he was already involved.

Hopkins was therefore willing to aid the government when it suited him, as he also did at Bordeaux in 1569 (see p. 32 above). However he did not allow support for his nation to interfere with the business of making a profit, even if it meant supplying the enemy with war materials. For example his name appears in a list of merchants, drawn up in 1587, who had illegally exported goods to Spain from Bristol. It states that Hopkins and others had furnished and freighted a ship belonging to Robert

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<sup>136</sup> Vanes, Documents., p. 162.

<sup>137</sup> McGrath (ed), Merchants and Merchandise., p.2.

<sup>138</sup> PRO SP 12/188/44 (microfilm).

Barratt with various commodities. The ship, including 4 cast-pieces, was then sold to the Spanish.<sup>139</sup>

As part of his trading activities Hopkins was heavily involved in some of the trading companies of Bristol and London. Alongside other merchants of Bristol he was listed as a member of the Spanish Company in 1577.<sup>140</sup> He was listed again under its new Charter in 1605 and was also one of the 4 Bristol members who were nominated as Assistants for the Company.<sup>141</sup> That same year he probably played an important part in the revival of the Merchant Venturers Society of Bristol, he was then appointed as Master of the Society. The fact that he was the first Master to be chosen demonstrates his prestige and standing as a merchant. Thomas Hopkins, who may have been his son (see p. 26 above), was also a member of both companies and he was made a Warden of the Merchant Venturers in 1608-9.<sup>142</sup>

It was through the Merchant Venturers that John Hopkins made a charitable donation. In 1610 he was executor of the will of Mrs Margery Synott of London, he took £6 of her estate and £4 of his own then delivered the £10 to the Treasurer of the Merchant Venturers on condition that each year they pay 13s. 4d. to the poor in the Almshouse belonging to the Company.<sup>143</sup>

Evidently he was still active and prominent within the Society in 1612. On the 18<sup>th</sup> August that year the Common Council of Bristol appointed a committee of 6, including Hopkins, to consider the ordinances of the Society and report back their opinions.<sup>144</sup>

The Auldworth family was also important within the Society of Merchant Venturers. Thomas Auldworth (the younger) was appointed Treasurer in 1605. In 1607 Robert Auldworth was appointed as a Warden, he was also appointed as Master of the

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<sup>139</sup> Vanes, Documents, p. 141.

<sup>140</sup> Calendar of the Patent Rolls. Elizabeth I. Vol. 7, 1575-1578 (1982), pp. 317-20.

Vanes, Bristol, Spanish Armada, p. 15.

<sup>141</sup> P. McGrath (ed), Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century, Bristol Record Society, (1951), Vol. 17, pp. 2-3.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6. Beaven, Bristol Lists, p. 122.

<sup>143</sup> McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers, pp. 85, 87, 89, Barrett, Histories and Antiquities, p. 617.

<sup>144</sup> McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers, p. 7.

Society on no less than three occasions, 1609, 1612 and 1625. Meanwhile John Auldworth was a Warden in both 1609 and 1612, then Master in 1614. Thomas James was another notable privateer within the Society, he was appointed as a Warden in 1606, and was appointed as Master in 1607 then again in 1615.<sup>145</sup> However other Bristol privateers like William Walton and Thomas Holcomb do not appear to have been Society members.<sup>146</sup>

During the early 1600s Hopkins also became interested in the Virginia enterprises. He contributed to Pring's voyage in 1603 along with the rest of the Bristol Corporation. Then in April 1606 he was one of the 13 Bristol Councillors who offered a yearly contribution to the colonising voyage of 1607, in fact he was one of the largest contributors with 'xij<sup>li</sup> x<sup>s</sup> for fyve yeres'.<sup>147</sup> In the Charter of 10th April 1606 founding the Virginia Company Hopkins is listed as a member, he was one of the founders of the West-country branch. His name appears once again in the Second Charter of 23rd May 1609.<sup>148</sup> This sustained involvement in the Virginia Company suggests that during the war-years he had accumulated sufficient capital to make new investments. It also reinforces the view, based on his privateering activities, that he was both adventurous and ambitious.

Thomas Auldworth was another of Bristol's merchant-privateers interested in western enterprise. In 1583 Thomas had been in communication with Sir Francis Walsingham. He fitted out two ships, which were to go with Walsingham's stepson Christopher Carleill in a proposed expedition to North America, though in the end this voyage did not go ahead.<sup>149</sup> The family's interest was continued by Robert Auldworth and by his son-in-law Giles Elbridge. As early as 1625 they had an agent in America in what is

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<sup>145</sup> Beaven, Bristol lists, p. 122-3, 132.

<sup>146</sup> See McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers, pp. 2-3.

<sup>147</sup> D. B. Quinn and A. M. Quinn (eds), The English New England Voyages 1602-1608, Hackluyt Society (1983) Vol. 161., pp. 381-3.

<sup>148</sup> 'The London Company of Virginia Members'.

<http://www.virginiadescendants.com/virginiaherhistoryandherfamilies/londoncompanymembers.htm>.  
September 2004. 'From Revolution to Reconstruction'. <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1601-1650/virginia/chart02.htm>. September 2004.

<sup>149</sup> The voyages and colonising enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, D. B. Quinn (ed.) Hackluyt Society 84 Vol. 2 (1940)., pp. 347, 350. Andrews, Trade, Plunder and Settlement, p. 193.



now Maine; then on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 1632 they received a grant of 1,200 acres, with an additional 100 acres for every person brought over.<sup>150</sup>

### **Hopkins' role in local government:**

Hopkins' importance and social standing within the Trading Companies of Bristol was matched by his role within the Corporation of Bristol, as will now be shown. During his lifetime he held many various offices and appointments within the city. In 1586-1587 he was appointed as a sheriff.<sup>151</sup> This appointment shows that he already belonged to the Corporation as a member of the Common Council.

While he was acting as sheriff he became involved in a certain dispute. In December 1588 a letter from the Privy Council to the mayor of Bristol stated that 'ther hath been a longe controversie between Edwarde Longe and John Hopkins, late sheriffs of Bristol, and Thomas James and his partenours'. During their time in office as sheriffs Longe and Hopkins searched a ship, however during the process one of their men was slain by way of 'accidental manslaughter'. So they made a claim against James and the other partners for their 'goodes and chattells'. The Privy Council's letter tells the mayor he should hear the case of both sides and either end the matter or refer them to the law. It points out that the Lords of the Privy Council are tired of hearing about this matter and don't want to be troubled by it any further.<sup>152</sup>

Disputes arising from customs payment were common, as has already been mentioned. Due to the nature of local government men like Hopkins were responsible at certain times for enforcing the law, but on other occasions they themselves would be found breaking it. It simply depended upon what suited their interests at the time.

Hopkins is listed as both an Alderman and member of Common Council from 1598-9, holding these positions until he was replaced after his death in 1615. Unfortunately records are incomplete before the first existing Minute Book of Bristol, covering the year 1598-9. So Hopkins might well have been an Alderman for several years already;

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<sup>150</sup> Powell, *Bristol Privateers*., p. 48.

<sup>151</sup> W. Barrett, *The Histories and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (William Pine, 1789)., p. 686.

<sup>152</sup> *A. P. C.*, Vol. xvi, 1588., pp. 403-4.

in 1591 however the names of 9 out of 12 Aldermen are known and Hopkins is not among them.<sup>153</sup> In 1598 there is one particular example of his work as an Alderman. It was agreed that the mayor, the aldermen (including Hopkins) and some named gentlemen to meet weekly to discuss acts and ordinances from the Common Council. Additionally Hopkins was listed on a special committee appointed to set up charges on merchandise imported to Bristol, these charges were to be used for keeping the river.<sup>154</sup>

Hopkins was one of the few men to be appointed as Mayor of Bristol on more than one occasion, firstly in 1590 and then again in 1600.<sup>155</sup> During his second term as mayor he had to deal with certain difficulties, as will now be shown. This included supervising the levies of men arriving in Bristol to await transportation to Ireland. While he was mayor he was responsible for 2 separate levies; these levies have been listed by J. McGurk, the details are copied below:

December (1600) – 220 foot.

July-August (1601) – 895 foot, 40 horse.<sup>156</sup>

Part of Hopkins' duty was to make arrangements with local ship-owners to transport the soldiers. On the 14<sup>th</sup> December the Privy Council advised him that 'if you are to find them unreasonable in their demands you are to lett them knowe that their shippes ought and maie justlie be taken for her majesties service'.<sup>157</sup> McGurk lists Hopkins own ship the *Mary Fortune* among those involved in transportation during the war.<sup>158</sup>

A great burden of loans was often placed on the city for the victualling and shipment of the soldiers and it took long time to receive the loan repayments. Such delays in payment meant that the mayors of Bristol frequently had to borrow money from

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<sup>153</sup> Beavan, *Bristol Lists*, pp. 184-5, 195.

<sup>154</sup> M. Stanford (ed), *The Ordinances of Bristol 1506-1598* (Bristol Record Society 1990), p. 103.

<sup>155</sup> Barrett, *Histories and Antiquities*, p. 687. Beavan, *Bristol Lists*, p. 222.

<sup>156</sup> McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland* (Manchester university Press 1997), p. 167. Note: McGurk has wrongly listed Hopkins as the mayor responsible for levies in January-March of 1600 and August-September of 1600. In Bristol the new mayor did not take office until michaelmas, 29<sup>th</sup> September. In the same way McGurk mistakenly attributes the July-August 1601 levy to Hopkins' successor William Vawer, see *A.P.C.* vol. xxxi., pp. 12-4.

<sup>157</sup> *A. P. C.* Vol. xxxi., pp. 16-7.

<sup>158</sup> McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest*, p. 190. Note: Unfortunately the footnote reference McGurk gives for this ship is incorrect, the source given makes no mention of this activity.

wealthy citizens. Hopkins himself borrowed £1,000 from a Cuthbert Gerrard to cover the burden of the December levy. However it seems that the eventual cost of this levy was less than had been the case in previously, in January 1601 the Privy Council paid £456 7s 9d to cover the expenses.<sup>159</sup>

Then in July he received word of a fresh levy of around 900 reinforcements for Munster, which were to be sent to Bristol.<sup>160</sup> This particular levy was stranded in Bristol until August by adverse winds. Once again Hopkins made payments at his own expense and it seems he was not repaid until after the 31<sup>st</sup> October.<sup>161</sup>

During their stay the soldiers' unruly behaviour made the citizens afraid. Unfortunately Hopkins' efforts to keep order were unsuccessful. The city annals claim the soldiers were preparing open hostilities against the mayor. As a result the town bell was rung and the citizens were armed; the soldiers were heavily beaten and had to take refuge in the transport ships.<sup>162</sup>

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1601 Hopkins was also ordered to purchase a quantity of timber to be sent to Ireland for the war effort.<sup>163</sup> Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August the Privy Council sent an open letter to the mayors and officers of the outports. In preparation against a feared Spanish invasion all available sailors were to be impressed and sent to Chatham and shipping was to be stayed in every port.<sup>164</sup> The events described above illustrate some of the duties Hopkins performed as mayor. They also show the type of expenses he incurred in office.

In September 1601 he was elected as one of two members of parliament for Bristol. However the term of this parliament was fairly short, lasting only until December.<sup>165</sup> He received another important office on 31st May 1605 when Bristol's Admiralty Court was granted a new Commission of Admiralty. The terms of this commission mostly repeated those of earlier commissions granted. As a result Hopkins, along with

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 171. *A. P. C.* xxxi., pp. 168-9.

<sup>160</sup> *A. P. C.* Vol. xxxii., pp. 70, 127-8.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., pp. 195, 323.

<sup>162</sup> Latimer, *Annals of Bristol*, p.15.

<sup>163</sup> *A. P. C.* Vol. xxxii., pp. 172.

<sup>164</sup> *A. P. C.* Vol. xxxi., pp. 136-7.

<sup>165</sup> Beavan, *Bristol Lists*, p. 166.

the incumbent mayor and list of other gentlemen, was appointed as a commissioner for Admiralty causes in the city and county of Bristol.<sup>166</sup>

By comparison, William Walton, although described as being from Bristol, does not appear to have held any notable municipal office within the city. However in 1597 he was elected as the mayor of Weymouth.<sup>167</sup>

Thomas Auldworth, by contrast, was one of the most distinguished merchants of the Bristol Corporation. He was a Common Councillor from 1566-1594, sheriff from 1566-1567, an Alderman from 1591-1599 and was made mayor three times: in 1582, 1589 and 1592 respectively.<sup>168</sup> Thomas also served as a Member of Parliament for Bristol from 1586-7 and 1588-9.<sup>169</sup> He died on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1599.<sup>170</sup>

Of the rest of the family Robert Auldworth was also Common Councillor; he was made sheriff in 1596, served as mayor in 1609-1610 and was finally made an Alderman in 1614.<sup>171</sup> In 1625 Robert was also responsible for building a new dock in Bristol and he later built a second one.<sup>172</sup> John Auldworth was another Common Council member, who was made sheriff in 1602. Lastly, Thomas Auldworth (the younger) was appointed to the Council in 1602 and made sheriff in 1609, but was later discharged from the Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1611.<sup>173</sup>

Thomas James had been born 'at Wollaston, Shropshire, of a Welsh family'. In Bristol he was a Common Councillor, a sheriff in 1591, an Alderman from 1604 and was mayor of the city in 1605 and again in 1614. He died in February 1619.<sup>174</sup>

Despite the quantity of his privateering Thomas Holcomb was apparently not involved in Bristol's municipal government. His name is not mentioned in any of the lists for

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<sup>166</sup> R. C. Latham (ed), Bristol Charters 1509-1899 Bristol Record Society. Vol. 12 (1946)., pp. 230-1.

<sup>167</sup> Andrews, Elizabethan Privateering, p.144. Beavan, Bristol Lists., pp. 122, 132, 166, 184, 195, 222.

<sup>168</sup> McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers., p. 60. Beavan, Bristol Lists., pp. 166, 184. Powell, Bristol Privateers., p. 48.

<sup>169</sup> William Salterne was originally one of the M.P.s for 1588-9 but he died and Thomas Auldworth replaced him. See Beavan, Bristol Lists., pp. 166

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 195. Powell, Bristol Privateers., p. 48.

<sup>171</sup> Powell, Bristol Privateers., p. 49. Beavan, Bristol Lists., pp. 184, 222.

<sup>172</sup> Powell, Bristol Privateers., p. 48.

<sup>173</sup> Beavan, Bristol lists., pp. 196, 222.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 184, 195, 222. Powell, Bristol Privateers., p. 47.

mayor, sheriff, alderman, councillor, or Member of Parliament.<sup>175</sup> The overall pattern of the evidence shows that most of Bristol's leading privateer individuals were also important members of the Corporation. However there was enough room within Bristol's privateering business for outsiders like Thomas Holcomb and William Walton to join in as well.

By the later stages of his career John Hopkins was clearly a prominent and respected individual within the Bristol Corporation. The following sources suggest that he had also developed contacts outside the city. On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1610 he sent a letter to Lord Admiral Nottingham detailing local problems concerning piracy. In this letter he said that 'Sir William St. John' had taken a flyboat of 100 tons, he also made reference to a pirate named Eston hovering on the coast and said a Bristol merchant ship has been taken by pirates.<sup>176</sup>

In 1613 the Privy Council wrote to 'John Hopkins, alderman of the cittie of Bristoll' and Christopher Cary, sheriff, and George White, merchant. They described how Philip Cooper, a merchant of Bristol who had 'performed many good services to the state', had fallen into distress and poverty through various causes listed as: piracy, shipwreck, bad debtors and dishonest factors who now claimed he was indebted to them. Philip Cooper had gone to the Council seeking favourable mediation. The Council therefore authorised Hopkins, Cary and White to hear the case and mediate a settlement between all the parties. Any who did not comply were to be reported to the Council.<sup>177</sup> This case shows that Hopkins was known to the Privy Council, it suggests that they viewed him as being a man of local authority and someone who would be reliable.

Overall Hopkins career indicates he was greatly involved in local politics during the later part of his life. He probably lived to above 66 years of age. Details about his family can be found in his final will, dated 'the eight daye of november anno a.d. 1615'.<sup>178</sup> He died at some point between this date and the 9<sup>th</sup> January when his will

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<sup>175</sup> Bevan, *Bristol Lists*, pp. 122, 132, 166, 184, 195, 222.

<sup>176</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom.* Vol 1603-1610., p. 586.

<sup>177</sup> *A. P.C.* Vol. xxxiii., pp. 169-70.

<sup>178</sup> National Archives Online, John Hopkins' Will, p. 1. lines 1-2.

was proven.<sup>179</sup> He left behind a widow, Elizabeth Hopkins, his son-in-law John Kettleby and three grandsons named Charles, John and Thomas Kettleby.<sup>180</sup> His daughter Marie had died some time earlier and was ‘buried in the church at St Warborowee’ where John himself also wished to be buried.<sup>181</sup> Thomas Hopkins, who may have been his son (see above p. 26), had already died in May 1614.<sup>182</sup>

Hopkins’ will demonstrates his wide range of personal contacts within the Corporation of Bristol and the merchant community. As the executors of his will he appointed ‘my lovinge wife Elizabeth Hopkenes and my worthy good friend William Baldwin nowe one of the sheriffes of the foresaide cittye of Bristoll’.<sup>183</sup> He also appointed as overseers his ‘Good friends John Roberts esquire and John Tomlinson merchante’.<sup>184</sup> In addition there were 4 witnesses including John Boulton, another Bristol merchant.<sup>185</sup>

The will also shows that he owned a house on Corne Street, which was bequeathed to Elizabeth. Following her decease it would go to his grandson Charles. Donations were made to his other grandsons John and Thomas. In addition it was his wish that Elizabeth should bring up their grandchildren. His will states that she should:

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 2. lines 44-5. See also Beavan, Bristol Lists., p. 195. Powell mentions Hopkins’ death but mistakenly dates it as 1610. Powell, Bristol Privateers., p.25.

<sup>180</sup> See John Hopkins’ Will. His son-in-law John Kettleby was also a member of the Virginia Company. ‘The London Company of Virginia Members’.

<http://www.virginiadescendants.com/virginiaherhistoryandherfamilies/londoncompanymembers.htm>. September 2004. ‘From Revolution to Reconstruction’. <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1601-1650/virginia/chart02.htm>. September 2004.

<sup>181</sup> John Hopkins’ Will. p. 1. lines 11-2.

<sup>182</sup> Beavan, Bristol Lists., p. 196.

<sup>183</sup> John Hopkins’ Will, p. 1. lines 19-20, p. 2. line 1. His friend William Baldwin was a member of the Common Council from 1613-1617, sheriff in 1615, and died December 1617. See Ibid., pp. 197, 222.

<sup>184</sup> John Hopkins’ Will, p. 2. lines 36-40. John Roberts: member of the Common Council 1599-1608, died around June 1608. Beavan, Bristol Lists., p. 196. Also listed as a merchant of the Spanish Company. McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers., pp. 2-3. John Tomlinson: member of the Common Council 1614-1648, sheriff in 1615, he later became alderman and mayor and also served as both Master and Treasurer of the Merchant Venturers. Beavan, Bristol Lists., p. 310.

<sup>185</sup> John Hopkins’ Will, p. 2. line 43. John Boulton was a Common Councillor (1599)-1619, sheriff in 1600-1601 (when Hopkins was mayor) and Warden of the Merchant Venturers in 1608, he died around June 1619. Beavan, Bristol Lists., p. 279. He was also a member of the Spanish Company. McGrath (ed), Records, Merchant Venturers., pp. 2-3. He traded with Hopkins in 1594. Vanes Documents., p. 101.

‘give unto them and every of them their bringing up and maynteynaunce untill suche tyme as good order shalbe taken by their said father for the placinge of them for their better preferment.’<sup>186</sup>

Elizabeth herself died in 1618. She left a legacy of £5 to the Merchants Almshouse.<sup>187</sup>

### **Conclusions on Hopkins’ Career:**

With 7 ships on reprisal and at least 16 prizes taken Hopkins was arguably Bristol’s greatest privateering promoter. He clearly had substantial experience and resources in this field of activity. By contrast most of the other wealthy and important merchants in Bristol played a lesser role in privateering or played no part at all. This shows that Hopkins’ own involvement was not typical for Bristol’s merchant community; rather he was an adventurous entrepreneur with a particular interest. As has been shown he operated as a sole promoter and even captured at least one ship in person, which was unusual for a Bristol ship-owner or main promoter. In this context his voyage to Cadiz was even more outstanding; it also seems certain that he gained local prestige from it.

Hopkins’ career as a Bristol merchant shows that he was relatively successful. Despite the problems he encountered he built up diverse trading interests to France, Iberia and the Azores, eventually becoming involved in more long-distance trade to the Mediterranean. On occasions these activities involved both smuggling and trading with the enemy. In contrast he also sought favour from the Admiralty by passing on information. In addition Hopkins and other leading merchant-privateers like the Auldworths also invested money in the Virginia projects. Finally Hopkins’ role in the Merchant Venturers Society demonstrates his overall importance and status within Bristol’s the merchant community.

As shown Hopkins was a significant figure within the city Corporation, and carried out the various duties and responsibilities of office. Evidently he also developed contacts outside the city with the Privy Council and the Admiralty. Overall Bristol’s leading privateers can be divided into two types based upon their backgrounds within

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<sup>186</sup> John Hopkins’ Will, p. 2. lines 33-5.

<sup>187</sup> Powell, Bristol Privateers, p. 25.

the city. The first group consists of John Hopkins, Thomas James, Thomas Hopkins and the Auldworth family who were important members of both the Bristol Corporation and the Merchant Venturers. The second 'outsider' group consists of William Walton and Thomas Holcomb who had no involvement with the organisations above, nor were they significantly involved in Bristol's overseas trade.



## CONCLUSION.

This study has provided detailed research on the background and career of John Hopkins. It has shown what kind of individual he was and also placed him within the wider Bristol community of merchants and privateers. This research has therefore contributed to the overall understanding of privateering by providing detailed knowledge of a leading outport privateer. It is a significant example because Hopkins was one of the greatest privateers from outside London, while at the same time Bristol was one England's most important privateering centres.

Based upon the findings of this study it can be argued that, operating on a smaller scale, the individual careers of Hopkins and other leading Bristol privateers mirrored those of the great London merchant-privateers like Watts, Bayning, Cordell and Myddelton. Like these privateering magnates their backgrounds show involvement in long-distance trades, colonial ventures and the holding of important offices.

Like privateering the Virginia projects were a new kind of venture offering new opportunities. Examples from Bristol confirm the view of Andrews and others that the two activities attracted investment from a similar sort of entrepreneur.

This study has also confirmed that in Bristol, as was the case elsewhere, there were disputes and evasions of payment on prize goods. Meanwhile the example of Hopkins and others, who regularly traded with the enemy, supports the arguments of both Croft and Andrews that most merchants were not anti-Spanish. It reinforces Andrews' arguments that most merchant-privateers were motivated by financial interest rather than anti-Spanish sentiment.

Neither has this study has found evidence that merchants became involved in privateering in order to gain political favour. In truth it was the probably the other way round. As shown Hopkins sought favour with the Admiralty, no doubt hoping this would benefit him later in Admiralty Court proceedings relating to spoils. Similarly Hopkins personal connections within the Bristol Corporation would have helped him during the mayor's investigation into the smuggling incident concerning the spoils of Cadiz.

It has not been possible here to review all the potential source material concerning Hopkins, for example a longer project might also include research using the Admiralty Court records and the Bristol Port Books. Nonetheless this study has added fresh perspective on a subject that has been neglected for too long. This project has been primarily concerned with issues related to privateering, however the case study on Hopkins' career can hopefully also prove useful in more general studies of Bristol's merchant community.

Hopkins career is a notable example of outport privateering during the Elizabethan period, however there is still a need for further research. Similar case studies on William Walton or the Auldworth family could prove useful. More important would be parallel studies on other outports, for example: *Privateering in Southampton* or *Privateering in Plymouth*. Only then could the wider structure of involvement in privateering be more accurately understood and defined.

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