

The Case of Currants: The Levant Company Monopoly as a Stimulus for Bristol's Illicit Trade 1590-1666.

As the sixteenth century drew to a close a series of fiscal innovations sought to increase royal revenue through an expansion of the customs system. One of these was the emergence of monopoly trade corporations, of which the Levant Company was one. The staple commodity for Levant trade was currants, originating in markets within their monopoly area, and the company's regulation of the trade acted to exclude non-members from interfering in their most profitable commercial sphere. The efforts of Bristol's mercantile elite to bypass the inconveniences of this monopoly took two forms: attempts to overturn the monopoly charters and grant Bristol legal access to the currant trade; and, where this failed, systematic circumvention of customs duties and impositions. In order to assess the impact of these disputes primary evidence, transcribed from the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers' Book of Trade, has been examined; consisting of records of the correspondence between the Merchant Venturers, their representatives in London, the Levant Company and the Privy Council.¹ Through analysis of these findings this essay will consider the role played by the Levant Company's monopoly over the currant trade in the expansion and development of illicit trade within Bristol, analysing the motives that encouraged Bristol's merchants to engage in the currant trade; the increased incentives for illicit trade following the establishment of the Levant monopoly; and the resultant development in the nature of illicit trade in Bristol. Although the question of monopoly as a stimulus for Bristol's illicit trade has not yet been examined in great detail, historians like Williams have demonstrated that the seventeenth century saw significant changes in the nature of illicit trade in England;² and it would appear that changes were occurring in Bristol, as a direct result of the Levant Company's monopoly, which mirror these widespread changes on a local level.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century currants emerged into the international market, a seedless alternative to other dried fruits. Within a few decades they had become an indispensable and highly popular addition to the English diet. In an era when sugar represented a rare and expensive commodity currants were used to sweeten and flavour foods ranging from breads and cheeses to meat. They became one of the most commonplace of all foodstuffs and their health benefits were proclaimed publicly; stressing that "beside their pleasantness in taste they [...] are verie good and wholesome for eurie season, age, and constitution."³ With the establishment of a

1 See Appendix 1 for transcriptions.

2 N. J. Williams, *Contraband Cargoes: Seven Centuries of Smuggling* (London, 1959) Chpt. 3.

3 Tobias Venner, quoted in J. Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (London, 2009) p.55

commercial currant trade in western Europe it is important to assess the development of motivating factors that made engagement in it such an attractive prospect for Bristol's merchants. The enormous popularity of currants made the trade an extremely lucrative one; and as soon as English merchants began to involve themselves in it they reaped significant financial returns. By 1605 reports of 300 per cent profits made on currant shipments were circulating in England.⁴ This potential for profit was not lost on the merchants of Bristol and the Merchant Venturers society sought to ensure some degree of activity within such a thriving trade sector. Besides the financial implications of high profit margins the trade represents part of something of a phenomenon in English society. Mather argues that the early seventeenth century demonstrated a turning point in the birth of English consumerism.⁵ It appears that, even before the huge expansion of the consumer market in the eighteenth century, society was beginning to purchase and consume luxury commodities on an unprecedented scale. By the 1630s the import of luxury goods (in this case: wines, silks, sugar, raisins, pepper, tobacco and currants) made up 43% of English imports.⁶ Furthermore, these figures do not take into account the disproportional level of illicit trade that existed in luxury items due to the high duties they generally incurred. As the rich enjoyed fine silks and sweet wines; currants, as a luxury affordable for all, pervaded the vast majority of seventeenth century English society. This demonstrated the existence of an expanding and sustainable market for currants; providing another important motivation for Bristol's merchants.

However, the financial potential of currants was not the only factor that made the currant trade appear so attractive to Bristolians. Bristol's location in the South West of England had significant implications on its trade routes and accessible markets. Whilst London's merchants enjoyed easy access to the markets of the low countries, for Bristol's merchants the most important market for overseas trade was that of the Iberian peninsula.⁷ Whilst Bristol's merchants found it difficult to make inroads at the London dominated markets of central Europe, this natural disadvantage was rendered obsolete when considering Levant trade where, if anything, Bristol enjoyed the more convenient location. This became increasingly important as events of the late sixteenth century rendered Iberian trade unreliable. The Anglo-Spanish war closed all avenues of legal trade with the peninsula and merchants were forced to look elsewhere for their products such as sweet wines and dried fruit. By the turn of the century it is clear that Bristol's merchants were already willing to venture to the Levant in order to take on shipments of currants; as the Bristol Port Books for 1600/1 contain records of the arrival of several shipments of currants, originating in

4 J. Latimer *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol* (Bristol, 1903) p.137

5 Mather, Pashas p.54

6 Mather, Pashas p. 55

7 P. McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: A History of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its origin to the present day.* (Bristol, 1975) p.53

Cephalonia. These shipments were large scale ventures, totalling 50 and 76 tons.⁸ The incentives of currants' high market potential, coupled with a comparatively open trade (in comparison with the London dominated markets of the Low Countries and the prohibited ports of Spain) explain the anxiousness Bristol's merchants felt to involve themselves in the currant business.

Opportunities for Bristol's merchants to do so, however, were strictly limited by the emergence of a trade innovation, embodied by the Levant Company's monopoly. Royal revenues from customs had suffered a significant diminution due to a period of inflation during the sixteenth century. The result was the development of several fiscal innovations to increase royal customs revenues. One of these was the emergence of joint stock monopoly companies such as the East India Company, the Merchant Adventurers of London and the Turkey and Venice companies, which later merged to form the reorganised Levant Company itself. These organisations were given the sole rights of access to certain international markets. In the case of the Levant company these rights consisted of exclusive rights to trade with the Ottoman territories and the Greek fruit islands of the Levant seas. In 1590 the Levant company was granted its official charter; following the merger of the Turkey Company and the Venice Company. The company flourished and before long it had "growne to that height that (without comparison) it is the most flourishing and beneficiall Company to the commonwealth of any in England."⁹ The currant trade itself was the most lucrative branch of the Levant company's business and, shortly after the establishment of the reorganised Company, it was claimed that 2,300 tons of currants were being imported annually, generating profits of £11,500.¹⁰ Also crucial to the company's success was its assumption of the charter the Venice company had previously held, allowing them to extract a levy of 5s. 6d. on every hundredweight of currants being imported from the islands of Zante and Cephalonia by merchants who were not members of the Company. Clearly this license presented a difficulty to any non-member wishing to take advantage of such a profitable commodity. Inspired by the motivating factors already discussed, and unwilling to pay duties on their trade, Bristol's merchants sought to bypass these constraints. Their solutions took the form of efforts to overturn the crown's monopolistic policy; and an engagement in illicit trade, stimulated by the strictly regulated trade of the Levant monopoly.

The first recorded disputes between the Levant Company and the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol took place in 1618. Bristol's merchants, under pressure from the company to pay duties on currant imports, petitioned the Privy Council in the hope of securing a share in the

8 S Flavin and E.T. Jones 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas' No.84
<<http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1308>>

9 A. C. Wood, A History of the Levant Company (London, 1935) p.42

10 Wood, History of the Levant Company p.24

trade without paying impositions. Analysis of these documents reveals invaluable evidence pertaining to: the opinion of Bristol's merchants concerning the very concept of monopoly; their ultimate objective of "ffree and unrestrained"¹¹ trade; the basis of the Levant Company's opposition to these petitions; and the outcome of the dispute, which served in setting the precedent for illicit trade over the rest of the period. Central to the petitions of the Merchant Venturers was their opposition to trade monopolies, particularly those held by the merchant elites of London. The Society was always equally quick to advocate the benefits of free trade as it was to stress the injustice and commercial danger it saw within the monopoly system. In 1619 the Society wrote to Alderman Guy, their representative in London at that time, entreating him to raise their protests before the Privy Council as they opposed the "uncivill practices and projects"¹² of London merchants with intentions for monopoly trade in certain cottons and dried fruit. Alongside criticisms of this "unreasonable and oppressing attempt" come dramatic claims that these monopolistic "dissignes are Contrary to the lawes of the Kingdome, the benefitt of the comon wealthe, the increase of his Maiesties Customes, humane society, yea against the Rules of Christianity."¹³ The Bristolians argue for a spectrum of offences against law, society and even religion; however, whilst moral and ideological opposition to the concept are dealt with last, there is an eagerness to stress the direct influence the monopoly would have on the coffers of the King, and the Commonwealth as a whole. The Merchant Venturers, it appears, were fully aware of the Crown's preoccupation with financial revenues.

Interestingly it seems that a similar paradigm existed within the Society itself. As it championed the moral opposition to restrictive trade; in reality, it too was focused on financial gain. It is easy to demonstrate the limit to the Merchant Venturers' basic opposition to monopoly, as they spent much of the seventeenth century petitioning in order to establish one. Much expense and effort was incurred, throughout the century, attempting to renew the Act of 1566 that had granted the Society monopoly of Bristol's overseas trade. It is clear then that their argument against monopoly trade was a self-interested one and their real motivations in the maintenance of unrestrained trade were to improve their financial standing and, where opportunities arose, attack the primacy of favoured London elites. When applied to the currant trade this sentiment was clearly stated; in their petitions they stressed their unequivocal support for free trade in the commodity. A letter sent back to the Society from their petitioners shows how their categorical opposition to the Levant impositions had impeded their bargaining position. It is apparent that the instructions these representatives had received were "peremptory at the last assemblie to be ffree with out lymittacion

11 McGrath, Merchant Venturers, p.52

12 See Appendix 1, p.70 (Document 5)

13 See Appendix 1, p.70 (Document 5)

or wholly exempted”¹⁴ this demand for unrestricted trade had placed the petitioners “in danger to be overruled by yeelding unto a Composition for ymporting a certayne quantity of Currants yeerely” which they were “resolved to refuse without the approvacion and allowance of the Company of Merchants.”¹⁵ The Society’s reply goes further to demonstrate this mindset as they explain how the petitioners’ letter “finde them all of the same resolution that they weare of, when you weare present at the hall.”¹⁶ Whilst some provision is given to negotiate terms other than completely free trade, this is only to be done should they “see greate cause theare to yeeld to that which heere yet wee shall not thinke well of.”¹⁷ These documents are crucial in demonstrating how, at this stage, Bristol’s merchants were fundamentally opposed to any limit on the currant imports; arguing instead for the liberty of completely free trade.

The next document in the Book of Trade makes it clear that the Society was forced to yield to trade under specific conditions, something they were clearly unwilling to do. It was decided in the Privy Council that:

the marchantes of Bristoll should
have license [...] to bring into that Porte
of Bristoll every yeere what quantity they pleased of the said
Currans soe as the same did not exceed in any one yeere
twoe hundred tons at the most, Payeng unto the Levant
Company fower pence uppon every hundred of Currans soe
ymported¹⁸

At best this result represented limited success. Whilst Bristol’s merchants had secured some access to the lucrative currant market, their demands for free trade remained unfulfilled. The Levant Company’s opposition to demands of this kind rested on several key tenets, though their petitions do not appear in the Book of Trade. They argued that, in the Levant, they faced high risk, high costs and poor trade;¹⁹ justifying their monopoly in return for English access to this exotic market. To some extent these arguments can be upheld; as the company was now running on a ‘regulated’ basis, as opposed to a joint stock organisation, merchants carried out their trade on an individual basis and, facing the real risk of piracy in the Mediterranean, some stood to make substantial financial losses. Similarly the trade incurred significant costs; the Levant company was responsible for the upkeep of the Constantinople embassy, and equally the merchants were liable to extortion

14 See Appendix 1, p.51 (Document 1)

15 See Appendix 1, p.51 (Document 1)

16 See Appendix 1, p.52 (Document 2)

17 See Appendix 1, p.52 (Document 2)

18 See Appendix 1, p.53 (Document 3)

19 Wood, History of the Levant Company pp. 24-26

from the local Pashas. However, the argument for poor trade is harder to accept, the trade continued uninterrupted and remained extremely lucrative. The company's claims of failing trade seem to consistently emerge during disputes with rivals or the government and, as Wood argues, "this sort of statement was too common throughout the whole history of the company to carry much conviction."²⁰ On this occasion, it seems that their opposition was forceful enough to dictate some compromise from their rivals. It appears that the Privy Council anticipated that this would not satisfy the Merchant Venturers, concluding with "if those of Bristol shall dislike this order they may seeke further remedy if they please by the Course of Lawe."²¹ Before the enactment of this charter the objective of Bristol's merchants was to secure free access to the currant market, without restriction or interference. Facing both limits and impositions upon the currant trade they were so keen to exploit, Bristol's merchants adapted their response to this monopoly from attempts to change commercial policy to efforts to bypass the same policy through systematic customs evasion.

It is at this point that the Levant monopoly began to act as a stimulus for illicit trade, however it was not the sole incentive for such activity and it is important to consider the other factors acting to facilitate it at that time. The limited control experienced by the Crown and the Levant Company within Bristol; a degree of rivalry between Bristol's merchants and London monopolists; and a shift in public morality all provided further incentives for Bristol's engagement in unlawful dealing. The illegal import of currants by non-members (interloping) caused the Levant Company's executives continuous anxiety,²² and they made efforts wherever possible to prevent the practice. Difficulty with corruption at home was significant enough to justify the company's installation of a dedicated official in the London customs house in 1634. This officer was instructed to check and sign all entries of cargoes originating from the Levant. Whilst this provided relatively strict control over the transport of commodities in their home port the company still lacked direct control elsewhere. The company's enforcement of stringent control in the London customs house demonstrates the perceived frequency of customs offences and, by contrast, their lack of influence in the provincial ports, such as Bristol. This was an era of rampant corruption, ranging from the port-side officials to the Lord Treasurer himself. Moreover, historians like Jones and Williams have argued that Bristol was leading the way in terms of customs evasion. Bristol's civic elite was largely made up of merchants, many with a history of illicit trade and vested interest in casual customs enforcement. Customs officials were recommended by this elite to the Lord Treasurer, often alongside a gratuity to ease the process, allowing a degree of control over the very people left to

20 Wood, History of the Levant Comapny p.24

21 See Appendix 1, p.54 (Document 3)

22 Wood, A History of the Levant Company p.51

police trade.²³ Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries large scale customs evasion was occurring, often relatively openly, and when William Culliford conducted his Survey of the Western Ports in 1681 he unearthed rank customs abuses. The most astounding of these offences were found to be occurring at Bristol, where customs officers were openly taking bribes and falsifying accounts; and tides-men were negligent and frequently drunk, one was even totally blind.²⁴ These factors made it near impossible for the Crown or the company to exert authority over Bristol's smugglers, and with corruption so endemic it would prove difficult to change to situation. Clearly this lack of observation and enforcement acted as a significant incentive in encouraging illegal trade in currants.

The difference between London and the out-ports did not simply extend to the application of customs regulations, it appears that in some cases it embodied itself in rivalry and distrust. The merchants based in the out-ports around England felt marginalised by the Crown's preferential treatment of London's commercial elite. The volume of trade passing through London was significantly greater than at any of the provincial ports and McGrath argues that "disputes were about commercial policy were in no small measure disputes between London and the out ports."²⁵ This general rivalry was condensed into more specific disputes between the Merchant Venturers of Bristol and the Levant Company through much of the seventeenth century, for the provincial merchants "it was obvious that the Crown and the Company were quite unfairly in cahoots."²⁶ This took the form of such a personal rivalry that McGrath describes the Levant Company as "the old enemy"²⁷ of the Merchant Venturers and evidence of this can be seen in several of the documents from the Book of Trade. In correspondences from the Privy Council reference is made to the "matter in difference"²⁸ or "differences betweene the Levant Companie, and some of the marchantes of that Citty" that emerged "upon several hearinges."²⁹ Similarly, when Bristol's merchants were already engaging in illicit trade and refusing to pay their duties to the Levant Company it appears that the company, in revenge, sent "a shipp of London laden with Currans" to Bristol with "merchants of the Levant Companie who intend to land them and put them to sale."³⁰ This was in direct contravention of the order of the Privy Council who stressed that "the Levant merchants of the Citty of London shall alsoe bee prohibited from ymporting any Currans

23 E.T. Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy: Reconstructing the Smuggler's Trade of Sixteenth Century Bristol*, (Unpublished book draft, August 2008) p.53

24 Williams, *Contraband Cargoes* p.84

25 McGrath, *Merchant Venturers* p.52

26 Mather, *Pashas* p.64

27 McGrath, *Merchant Venturers* p.58

28 See Appendix 1, p.257 (Document 8)

29 See Appendix 1, p.205 (Document 6)

30 See Appendix 1, p.219 (Document 7)

whatsoever into the porte of Bristoll.”³¹ That Levant merchants were not above breaking the conditions of a royal decree in the pursuit of revenge demonstrates the degree of rivalry between these merchant sects; and undoubtedly this would have strengthened Bristol’s refusal to pay duties to their adversaries, in turn encouraging illicit currant trade?

A final incentive for illicit trade can be seen in a change in public opinion regarding smuggling. Williams argues that the era represented a period in which public morality in England was at a low. He contests that at this time the average Englishman would side with smugglers, and in the event of capture would sympathise with their misfortune.³² By the 1680s the public even tended to view prosecutions on the basis of illicit trade as “a tyrannical way of proceeding, little less than an invasion of property.”³³ This increase in acceptability was based partially on the events of the currant impositions of the early 1600s; which the Crown implemented as an import tax without parliamentary backing. Merchants saw these taxes as illegitimate and despotic and refusal of payment became justifiable as smugglers presented themselves as guardians of civil liberty. This dismantlement of the taboo pertaining to smuggling provided Bristol’s merchants with further reason to conduct illicit trade in spite of the Levant monopoly. All these factors combined to generate significant incentive, and justification, for illicit trade and, as Latimer argued, “when almost every branch of trade, manufacture and commerce was restrained and harassed by the monopolies conceded by the Crown to court favourites and London Confederacies, it is not surprising that Bristol merchants, shut out from many regions, should have sought to better their position,”³⁴ in this case through illegal trade.

As a result of these incentives it becomes clear, through examination of the documentary evidence, that the Levant monopoly proved to be a significant stimulus for an expansion in the scale of Bristol’s illicit trade, but also a development in its nature. Latimer argues that “at the date of the restoration the commerce between Bristol and Eastern Europe had largely increased in despite of the frequent interference by the London monopolists.”³⁵ However, little numerical evidence exists for the scale of Bristol’s illicit trade in currants for the era; although much can be inferred from the correspondence recorded in the Book of Trade. For this reason it serves better to examine the development in the nature of the interlopers’ profession, and to use these findings as a basis to determine its expansion in scale. These developments took the form of the establishment of strategic commercial relationships; the use of dedicated voyages for illegal trade; and the transfer

31 See Appendix 1, p.55 (Document 4)

32 Williams, *Contraband Cargoes* p. 72

33 Roger North, quoted in Williams, *Contraband Cargoes* p.75-6

34 Latimer, *Merchant Venturers* p.140

35 Latimer, *Merchant Venturers* p. 138

from smugglers to interlopers as customs evasion became systematic. Before the disputes of 1618 the most troublesome cases of currant smuggling were those of merchants acting alone.³⁶ As demonstrated by Oliver Dunn the techniques used were similar to those used in the illicit trade of other restricted commodities. In Thomas Watkins' 1600 Petition he identified John Whitsone as a currant interloper, describing how he "entred v puncheons of prunes contrary xxC waighte but it was Currante amountinge to some lxxx C."³⁷ This attempt to convince customs officers that illegal goods were unrestricted alternatives represent the efforts of individual merchants working in the style of sixteenth century smugglers. Epstein identifies some merchants attempting currant smuggling of this kind in various out ports, including Bristol, in 1617. However, following the disputes of 1618, and the establishment of limits and duties on Bristol's currant trade, an immediate change took place. In 1618 two ships were sent to the Levant to exert Bristol's right to import 200 tons of currants; returning with profitable and enthusing results. The next year two more vessels, of 100 and 80 tons, carried cargoes worth £5,406 to the Levant to trade for more currants. It is not until 1632 that any more is heard on the matter; but at this point the development of the nature of Bristol's illicit currant trade is made clear.

In a letter to the aldermen of Bristol the Levant Company acknowledge the currant shipments and specify the imposition that is required to be paid on imports of this kind claiming "which dutie hath for manie yeeres past been retained and not paid according to the said orders."³⁸ The Bristol merchants, whilst happy to utilise their right to import a specific amount of currants, had bluntly failed to pay any duties owed to the Levant Company. The company requested that the Merchant venturers "publish this our letter, and therefore our order to all such of that Cittie as have any way interested in the Curran trade" in order to "reape the benefitt of our owne arte."³⁹ As the company appealed for payment of arrears stemming from 13 years of trade the Bristol merchants simply replied that it would be impossible to collect these duties for such a long period of time, conveniently claiming that many of the trading merchants had since died.⁴⁰ Whilst the Merchant Venturers had been happy to make full use of their license to import currants, they had no intention of paying the imposition placed upon them. This is not the last we hear of the dispute and, despite the assurances of the Merchant Venturers that prompt payment would be made in future, 35 years later another complaint is launched against the Bristolians in the form of a petition to the Privy Council:

36 M. Epstein, *The English Levant Company: Its Foundation and its History to 1640* (London, 1908) p.113

37 Quoted in O. Dunn "The Petitions of Thomas Watkins against Customer John Dowle 1598-1600" (BA Thesis, University of Bristol, 2006)

38 See Appendix 1, p.205 (Document 6)

39 See Appendix 1, p.205 (Document 6)

40 Latimer, *Merchant Venturers* p.140

That the Merchants of Bristoll trade to Zante within the priviledges of your petitioners Charter, and though they bee not questioned for soe doeing, Notwithstanding their not being free of the said Company, yet they refuse to pay those impositions Layd on fforraigne Comodities imported and incourage others to doe the like by their example although they reape the benefitt of those chardged⁴¹

Clearly the Merchant Venturers had continued their lucrative trade to the Levant, yet had remained unwilling to pay the duties they owed. These offences had now reached a point where direct appeals to Bristol's elite, clearly having no effect, would not suffice and the Levant Company were inspired to petition the Privy Council and the King himself on the matter. This systematic and collaborative abuse represents large-scale interloping and an enormous quantity of illicit trade. In place of the earlier accounts of individual shipments of concealed currants; Bristol's illicit currant trade now took the shape of large, dedicated shipments, loaded with tons of currants which consistently ignored any due impositions. Without Levant Company or crown control within the port this represented a professional and publicly executed customs evasion.

A similar development was the establishment of commercial relationships that facilitated circumvention of the Levant Company's trade regulations. A certain degree of suspicion existed within the company, focused on the activities of their distant factors in the Levant territories and certain unscrupulous members. This is mentioned in the Book of Trade as the company refers to the "irregularitie of factors"⁴² and the subsequent implications on their trade. In an era when corruption was rife these members could be easily convinced, through bribery, to abet interlopers. A common abuse was for a member to lend his name to an interloper, with which to enter restricted goods through customs. It was largely to prevent this abuse that the Levant official was positioned in London's customs house but, as has already been discussed, no such control existed in Bristol. Similarly factors on the currant islands were often accused of trading on their own account; and over such long distances tight control of these traders remained near impossible. These factors acted to "colour" the cargoes of interlopers as well as helping smugglers to avoid charges through false entries of goods.⁴³ These abuses required "the ships' captains and factors working in collusion"⁴⁴ and represent the basis of this new style of illicit trade. This co-operation with company members and factors is evidence of advanced and professional techniques in customs evasion.

41 See Appendix 1, p. 264 (Document 9)

42 See Appendix 1, p. 205 (Document 6)

43 Wood, History of the Levant Company p.56

44 Wood, History of the Levant Company p.56

Williams has made the case for a development of illegal trade during the seventeenth century; claiming that the professionalisation of interlopers transformed their trade in a somewhat “recognised profession”⁴⁵ Parallels with this thesis can be drawn from what was witnessed in the development of the currant trade in Bristol at this time. This circumvention of monopoly policy utilised dedicated and collective shipments of illicit goods; systematic and blatant evasion of customs duties; and commercial relationships within illicit trade networks. Furthermore, assuming that in each of the first 13 years the Bristol merchants had imported their full their allowance of currants, it could account for up to 2,600 tons of currants, amounting to potential customs evasion of as much as £867, despite the comparatively low duty levied on Bristol’s merchants. This demonstrates the dramatic development that Bristol’s illicit trade underwent during the first half of the seventeenth century as a direct result of the stimulus of Levant monopoly.

Whilst these developments appear to remain a consistent feature of Bristol’s currant trade; a significant change occurred during the Civil War. This change incited a further development in Bristol’s activities as, whilst circumvention remained the focus, techniques beyond illicit trade returned with an increased efficacy. During the Civil War, as London rebelled against the crown, Bristol provided a loyal garrison for royalist forces. King Charles I describes, in his 1643 royal charter, how:

the Merchants of the said City of Bristol have expressed their loyalty and fidelity unto us in these late tymes of difficulty when our City of London and the Cittizens and Merchants [...] have forgotten their duty unto us and many of them have trayterously rebelled against us.⁴⁶

In response to this loyal service the King granted the Merchants their ultimate objective: free trade, and free access to all areas previously held by London monopolies. This included “any the ports or places in the Levant Seas where any of our Merchants of the Turkey Company doe trade.”⁴⁷ However, this charter was viewed as a wartime measure and shortly after the restoration the Levant Company began demanding its duties again. In response Bristolians returned to their practice of systematic evasion, culminating in the complaints of 1665. In 1618 Bristol’s petitions for free trade had failed, stimulating an expansion and development in its illicit trade. However, following the temporary access it had enjoyed from the 1642 charter, the attitude of Bristol’s elite changed again. Claiming the liberties of the 1642 charter, which had never been officially rescinded, Bristolians continued to evade the Levant monopoly, which they now claimed was illegitimate. In an era of

45 Williams, *Contraband Cargoes* p.63

46 Cited in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 106-7

47 Cited in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 106-7

increased moral justification for smuggling, Bristol's merchants now had a valid challenge for the legitimacy of their trade restrictions; proving a significant stimulus in the decision of Bristol Merchants to continue their activities in the evasion of Levant duties in the second half of the century.

Furthermore whilst, following the Civil War, it appears techniques for customs evasion remained the same; Bristol's elite again focused on the potential of royal petitions to circumvent monopoly. Bristol's merchants were experts who "had little to learn about special pleading"⁴⁸ and a change in their campaigning technique, identified by McGrath, becomes clear. Whereas the failed petitions of 1618 had focused on the implications of monopoly on customs revenues and the expansion of trade;⁴⁹ the new petitions made claims based on the validity of a charter granted by a martyred King. Their arguments became primarily emotional and practical implications became secondary; the exact opposite of what we see in 1618. Their emotive appeal concludes by asking "who then can thinke [...] that there should not bee given the greatest veneration and Continuance to the Charters Even of that Mirror of Kings whose goodness transcended his meridian greatness, seeing he willingly yielded up his life in sacrifice."⁵⁰ In opposition the Levant Company show some similarity in their complaints, referencing Bristol's offences against the charters of "your Majesties Royall Grandfather."⁵¹ Both parties were called to court at Whitehall "to speake by their counsell in the said Business."⁵² It appears, though, that Bristol's emotive appeal was more convincing and in 1666 a decree from Whitehall announced:

It is hereby Ordered (his Majestie present in counsell)
That hereforward noe imposition be layd upon or demanded by
the said Governours & Company of Merchants of London tradeing
to the Levant seas from any the Merchants of Bristoll
who do, or shall trade to Venice or Zante for the comodities
of those places only.⁵³

Bristol's merchants had succeeded in circumventing the Levant Company's monopoly on a legal and permanent basis. Whilst their techniques in illicit trade had remained the same, the 1642 charter resulted in a distinct change in their methods of persuasion coupled with a renewed vigour for royal petitioning. This served to end trade restrictions and immediately render obsolete any stimulus for

48 McGrath, Merchant Venturers p.47
49 See Appendix 1, p.70 (Document 5)
50 Quoted in McGrath, Merchant Venturers p 56
51 See Appendix 1, p.264 (Document 9)
52 See Appendix 1, p. 265 (Document 10)
53 See Appendix 1, p.257 (Document 8)

illicit trade stemming from the Levant monopoly. It is therefore clear that whilst the Levant Company's monopoly had stimulated illicit trade to expand and develop; where the opportunity for constitutional circumvention of the restrictions existed, Bristol's merchants were willing to encounter considerable effort and expense in order to secure such liberties.

In order to assess the impact of the Levant Company's monopoly of the currant trade on the scale and nature of Bristol's illicit trade it has been necessary to consider in detail the development this trade underwent in the seventeenth century, and the motivations and justification behind such development. Having demonstrated the key motivations for Bristol's merchants to engage in the currant trade; it is clear that the influence of the monopoly was to build upon these motivations, creating significant incentive for illicit trade. This incentive, in turn, resulted in a development in both the nature and scale of Bristol's illicit currant trade through professionalisation and expansion. The original objective of Bristol's merchants was to secure free and unrestrained access to the currant trade; the stimulus for development of the illicit trade only emerged out of the frustrations in securing this constitutional access during the disputes of 1618. Importantly, the stimulus provided by the Levant Company monopoly was simply directed at securing access to the currant market, be it through legal or illegal means. As a result, at different times, it stimulated a development of activities in both illegal and legal spheres. Perhaps the most significant incident of the era was the Civil War charter of 1642; which provided both the justification and incentive for continued development of illicit trade, whilst at the same time provided the opportunity to bring its necessity to an end. By 1666, with the original objective of free trade achieved, the stimulus for illicit trade based in the Levant Company's monopoly had been rendered obsolete.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol, Book of Trade 1598-1693 - [SMV/2/1/1/34 \(Bristol Record Office\)](#)

Flavin, S., Jones E.T., 'Bristol Port Book, Overseas, 1600/1' <<http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1308>>

Secondary Sources

Bisson, D.R., *The Merchant Adventurers of England: The Company and the Crown, 1474-1564* (London, 1993)

Brenner, R., *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders 1550-1653* (Princeton, 1993)

Croft, P., "Fresh Light on Bate's Case" *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 30, No.3 (Sep. 1987) pp. 523-539

Dunn 'The Petitions of Thomas Watkins against Customer John Dowle 1598-1600' (BA Thesis: University of Bristol, 2006)

Esptein, M., The English Levant Company: Its Foundation and its History to 1640 (London, 1908)

Jones, E.T., Inside the Illicit Economy: Reconstructing the Smuggler's Trade of Sixteenth Century Bristol, (Unpublished book draft, August 2008)

Latimer, J., The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol (Bristol, 1903)

Mather, J., Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World (London, 2009)

McGrath, P., The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: A History of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its origin to the present day. (Bristol, 1975)

Willan, T.S., 'Aspects of English Trade with the Levant in the Sixteenth Century' The English Historical Review, Vol. 70, No. 276 (July, 1955) pp. 399-410

Williams, N.J., Contraband Cagoes: Seven Centuries of Smuggling (London, 1959)

Wood, A.C., A History of the Levant Company (London, 1935)

Appendix 1

Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol, Book of Trade 1598-1693

- SMV/2/1/1/34

- Documents taken from Book of Trade, 10 documents - original page numbers given as reference.

Transcription Conventions

I adopt the following conventions in transcription of these documents:

Suspensions and abbreviations are generally italicised and rendered in full, e.g. 'wth' = 'with', 'M^{tie}' = 'majestie', 'ye' = 'the'.

Punctuation is as in the text.

Line Breaks and Paragraphs are as in the text.

Spelling is as in the text.

Capitalisation is as in the text.

Original document page numbers are given at the head of each section.

Where I am uncertain of my transcription, the word is underlined.

- Transcriptions by Charlie Gent

Doc. 1 - Book of Trade, p.51

A Letter to the Company from Mr Whitson & Mr Barker concerning their proceedings at the Counsell Table for ymportinge of Corrans.

After our hartiest comendacons & since our repayre unto this place wee have solicited our Lord high steward and other Lords of his Majesties most honorable privie Counsell for a speedy and favourable hearing at the councill board which wee hope to obteyne soe soone as the affaires of state will permitt In the meane time wee doe observe by the passage of our busines that wee are in danger to be overruled by yeelding unto a Composicion for ymporting a certayne quantity of Currants yeerely which we are resolved to refuse without the approbacion and allowance of the Company of marchants which you, in regard they weare peremptory at the last assemblie to bee ffree without lymittacion or wholly exempted, our selves likewise assented with them in opinion at that tyme, yet wee must subscribe to the ancient Englishe proverbe (It is better to incurre inconvenience than mischiefe,) Howsoever if you please to entertayne - composicion, wee wilbee carefull it shalbee done with such caution

as shall noe way infringe or prejudice our charters Thus expecting
your speady and effectuall answeere to the promisses wee committ you
to god resting

London the vth ffeb
1617

Your Loving and respectfull friends
John Whitson
John Barker

To the Woorshipfull: our Lovinge frinds
Thomas James Mathew Habiland
and Robert Aldworth aldermen
of Bristoll or unto either of them
these delaid in Bristoll

Doc.2 - Book of Trade, p.52

The answeere of the Company to the former letter

After our hartie Commendacions & such, having communicated your letter to
to the Company of marchants of this Citty, wee finde them
all of the same resolucion that they weare of, when you weare
present at the Hall, and they are desirous that the Lorde would
bee pleased to referre the validitie of our Charter to the lawe,
Notwithstanding for that you may see greate cause theare, to -
yeeld to that which heere yet wee shall not thinke well of, wee
cannot give you direction particularlie in it but Doe referre
the carriage of the business to your good discrecions, prayeng
you alwaies soe to conclude that our Charter may not bee
damnified thereby and rather then to bee out borne, yt is
thoughte fitt here that the Queenes highnes be petitioned
in the name of the Mayor and Cominaltie of this Citty to
protect us for the maintenace of our ancient liberties &
Charter Thus leaving you, and your affaires to the protectcion
of the Almyhtie God rest

Bristoll the xvith of
ffeb 1617

Your loveinge friends
Thomas James
Matthew Habiland

To the woorshpful our Very Loving
frinds John Whitson and John
Barker marchants at the
three Cupps in Bred street

London

Robert Aldworth
Abell Kitchen
John Guy
John Gomme
John Langton
Humfrey Hooke
Richard Holmwerthy
Thomas Wright
William Jones
Giles Elbridge
Ffrancis Creswicke
Walter Ellis
William Griffith

Doc.3 - Book of Trade, pp. 53-54

The Order sett downe by the lordes of his Majesties moste honorable
privy Counsell for the ymportinge of Corrans into the Port of Bristoll

At the Courte ate Whitehall the xvth of march 1617	
being Sunday in the fore noone	Present
Lord Archbishop of Canterbury	Lord Carew
Lord Chauncelor	Lord Hay
Lord Treasurer	Mr Tresurer
Lord Stuard	Mr Comptroller
Lord Chamberlen	Mr Secretary Lake
Earl of Arundell	Mr Secretary Naunton
Lord B of Ely	Mr Chauncelor of the exchequer
	Mr of the Rolls

Whereas the marchants of Bristoll have bine humble suitors unto
this bord for leave to bring in into that Porte a certeyne quantity
of Currants yeerely, such as may serve for the provision of the
city of Bristoll and of those parts aroundabout at reasonable rates
where they may with their Best Comoditie vent the same - -
Notwithstanding the Charter of the Levant Company and his
Majesties proclamacions, inhibiting all others who be not of that
Society, to bring any Currants into this Kingdome, Their Lords having
referred the Consideration of this suite unto the Lord Treasurer of England
these: Barons Mr Secretary Lake Mr Secretary Naunton Mr Chauncelor of
the exchequor and Sir Edward Cooke Knighte, The said Lords Committees
thereuppon called both parties before them aswell those of the

Levant Company as alsoe the merchants attending heere on the behalfe of Bristoll and having hard at large what could bee alleadged in favour of the saide suite or objected against it, did at the last make their repourte unto the Boord That they - thought it fitt and reasonable the marchantes of Bristoll should have license for the reasons aforesaid to bring into that Porte of Bristoll every yeere what quantity they pleased of the said Currans soe as the same did not exceed in any one yeere twoe hundred tons at the most, Payeng unto the Levant Company fower pence uppon every hundred of Currans soe ymported with reporte being made unto their Lords this day in full Counsell it was allowed and ordered accordingly that the said Marchants of Bristoll should freely bring in the said twoe hundred tons of Currans in manner and Condicion as aforesaid Provided the the said Maurchants of Bristoll doe fetch the said from the Islands under the Seignory of Venice and not from any other Porte Provided alsoe that they doe not shipp directly
(or

p.54

indirectly any parte of the said Currans soe ymported into the City of London nor into any out Porte in the parte of the Kingdome neere thereunto, And this lycence to contynuee by way of triall for three yeeres onely with reservacion Nevertheless unto this honorable bord to moderate or inlarge the same in the meane time as their Lord shippes shall thinke fitt his Majesties service and benefitt of the Comon wealthe Considered And if those of Bristoll shall inslike this order they may seeke further remedy if they please by the Course of Lawe

Concord Cum Regio Geo: Calvert

Doc. 4 - Book of Trade, p.55

The Order of the Lords of his Majesties most honorable Privie Counsell
inhibitinge the Londoners to ymporte Currans to Bristoll

At whitehall on ffriday the xvth of March 1617

Present

Lord Archbishop of Canterbury	Lord Hay
Lord Chauncelor	Mr Treasurer
Lord Steward	Mr Comptroller
Lord Chamberlen	Mr Secretary Lake
Earl of Arundell	Mr Secretary Naunton
Lord Baron of Ely	Mr Chauncellor of the exchequor
Lord Carew	Mr of the Rolls

Whereas by an order bearing date the xvth of this moneth it was thoughte fitt by their Lords that the marchants of Bristoll should have Lycence and free libertie to bring in twoe hundred tonns of Currants yeerely into the Porte of Bristoll as by the same order more plainly may appeare Provided that they do not shipp directly or indirectly any parte of the said Currans soe imported into the City of London nor unto any out Porte in this parte of the kingdome neere thereunto, It is nowe this day further ordered by way of declaration or explanacion of the former that the Levant merchants of the City of London shall alsoe bee prohibited from ymporting any Currans whatsoever into the porte of Bristoll or members thereof during the Contynuance of the said Lycence

Concord Cum Regio
Geo Calvert

Doc. 5 - Book of Trade, p.70

The companies letter to Mr Alderman Guy in London to intreate his paynes to sollicite the Lordes concerning the payment of the money and to prevent the practice of certayne London marchants to obteyne the sole exportacon of Shrewsbury Cottens and ymportacon of Reisons

Worthie Sirs

Wee have percieved yours of the vith puerte and according to your advise wee will endeavour to hasten the provision of CCLE in London to satisfie the Lorde for this yeeres Contribution hoping it will be accepted notwithstanding all former scruple, and the rather by the Contynuance of your mediacion and disrceete endeavours it being a due and liberall Rate according to the proporcion of our poore trade being compared with other Ports of this Kingdome in their disbursements for the present intended service And concerning the uncivill practices and projects of some marchants of London which you advertize us are nowe in hand to obteyne the sole exportacion of Shrewsbury Cottons and ymportacion of raisings in that Porte restrayning all other his Majesties subjects, Wee doe not soe much admire their unreasonable and oppressing attempte as rejoyce in the Confidence and assurance of their repulse and disgrace from the righte honorable Lords of his majesties privie Counsell whoe will never entertaine or admitt such oppression Nevertheless wee doe most thankfully pprove and Commend your vertuous resolution to oppose and Crushe in the shell those cacatrisises prayeng you to persevere therein during your necessary residence in London and if occasion shall require wee will intreate some other of our Society to builde uppon your foundation when your busines shall call you home, it were superfluous to remember you that these dissignes are Contrary to the lawes of the Kingdome, the benefitt of the comon wealthe, the increase of his Majesties Customes, humane society, yea against the Rules of Christianity therefore wee doubt not but they will vanishe and become frustrate, In which Confidence being somewhat comforted with having remembrance of our right hartie salutacons wee comitt you to god and remayne

Bristoll the xth of

Your very Loving & Respecfull friends

ffeb 1619

John Goning Master of the Company
 John Whitson
 Humfry Browne
 John Barker
 John Laugton
 John Tomlinson

* Andrew Charlton
 Williams James
 Richard Holworthie
 Thomas Wrighte
 Richard Levy
 John Locke

Doc. 6 - Book of Trade, pp. 205-206

To the Woshipfull Mister Humfrie Hooke
 Alderman in the Cittie of Bristoll

The Turkye Comp: Letter the the mercants of Bristoll for
 payment to be made of 6s 8d per ton upon Currans ymported
 from zaunt and zephalonia with Coppies of orders made
 by them for the better government of trade there

After our verie hartie Commendacions. Whereas uppon severall hearinges
 at the Counsell board in the yeere 1617 of the differences betweene the
 Levant Companie, and some of the marchants of that Cittie uppon their suite to
 have libertie to ymport Currans from the Islands of Zaunt and Ceffalonia
 for the use of the Cittie and Countrie thereaboute their Lords were pleased
 (notwithstanding the Companies priviledges for the sole trade in that commoditie
 with a prohibition to all other his Majesties subjects) to order that the maurchants
 of that place should paie license to ymprt twoo hundred tons of Currants
 yeerlie thither for the space of three yeeres, paieing unto the Comapnie by
 way of acknowledgement a dutie of 4 per hundred for everie hundred of
 Currans soe brought in which dutie hath for manie yeeres past bene
 retained and not paid according to the said orders. And whereas this
 Companie have of late yeeres sustained great losses and prejudice in that
 trade of Currans as well by the Greekes enhancing of the price the beneficiaries
 imposing many new and unwonted duties uppon the said Commoditie and alsoe by
 the irregularitie of the factors and frequenci and untimelie comming in of Shippes
 to lade for prevencion of which inconveniences, and the advancing of the trade
 for the time to come for the generall yoos of all that are anie way interessted
 therein wee have made severall orders the contents whereof will appeare
 to you by the coppie enclosed and deliver to you that you will publish this
 our letter, and therefore our order to all such of that Cittie as have any way
 interessted in the Curran trade, and that as well themselves and their
 factors abroad, by their appointment may bee conformable thereto in

p. 206

everie particular as alsoe that wee may redresse the said dutie of the 4d per hundred
 for the time alreadie past and for the time to come. The said being soo long
 since uppon full hearinge and mature deliberation ordered by the lorde
 that doe we may reape the benefitt of our owne arte made for the generall
 good of the trade and traders, and have noe cause of comlaint against you
 of that place in any kind whatsoever. And soe not doubting but you
 willbee readie to annswere our expectacons herein espetiallie considering
 that some of yo are members of our Companie, and have taken oath to

* In original document these names appear listed below the others (Whitson - Tomlinson)

bee observant of our orders wee Commend you to gods proteccion And
remaine

London this 19th of May 1632

To Mr John Barber, and Mr Richard
Holworthie at Bristoll

Your Veriee Loveing ffriends

Hugh Hamersley
Job Harbie
John Langham
John Wild
John Williams
Lodwicke Roberte
Richard Briston
Joseph Keble
Robert Gayer
Hamon Gibbon
Thomas Liestard
Ralphe Ffreeman
John Bardell
Henrie Garway
John Evier
William Botayne
Henrie Hunt
Richard Castleman
Mathew Cradocke
Thomas Davis
Lybbee Chapinan
John Huse

Doc. 7 - Book of Trade, p. 219

A coppie of another letter sent to Alderman Barker and Mr Longe in London concerning currants brought into the port of Bristol in a shippe of London and alsoe concerning a barke the captain whereof had commission to serve against the enemie

Wee have made bould once againe to trouble you in regard of the former acquaintance with the passages betweene the marchants of this Cittie and those of the Levant Companie concerning the importing of Currants into this port, And have sent you coppies of two orders made at the Counsell table by the honorable Lords in March 1617 the one prohibiting the marchants of Bristoll to bring Currants into the port of London and places adjoining, and the other the Levant marchants to import currants to Bristoll, or members thereof. Now here is latelie arrived in this port A shipp of London laden with Currans, and muscadells for account of some of the merchants of the Levant Companie who intend to land them and put them to sale Having already entered their shippe and goods in the Customs house of Bristoll, wherewith manie marchants of this Cittie doe find themselves much aggreived having some quantities of Currants to sell, being alsoe contrarie to the said orders. Alsoe there is a finall barke of a bout 20 tons lyeing at Minehead the Captaine whereof hath a Commission from the Archduchesse to serve against the enemie. The coppie whereof we send you herewith. His lieutenant is staid here in Bristoll being that hee endeavoured to thake upp men for that service, and that as wee are enformed their man of warre doth attend the comming downe of a dutch shipp that is now in this port readie to bee gone. The barke is said to bee of Weymouth, and the Captains and the Companie are all English men, and their designe comming into this channell soe neere sett fames ffaire is suspected whereuppon the Mayor and justices have committed the said lieutenant uppon his good behaviour and lieth in prison for want of sureties. Wee concent that it is against his Majesties proclamacions that any of his subjects should serve and forraigne prince without speciall licence, And therefore their actions not to bee tolerated. Wherefore wee entreate you to take the premisses into consideration as well for the one matter as the other, and to doe what you shall thinke most requisite to bee donne therein for avoiding of such inconvenciences as may follow thereuppon. and as wee have ever been beholding unto you for your paines and care of the good Societie soe wee shall alwaies continue thankfull for the saime, and ever remaine

Bristoll the 11th of Julie
1633

your verie loving ffriends

Doc. 8 - Book of Trade, p. 257

At the Court of Whitehall
the 23rd of May 1666

The Kings most Excellent Majestie

His Royall Highness the Duke of Yorke	Lord Viscount Fitzharding
Lord Chancellor	Lord Arlington
Lord Treasurer	Lord Berkeley
Lord of Berkshire	Lord Ashley
Earle of Bathe	Mr Vice Chamberlain
Earle of Craven	Mr Secretary Morice
Earle of Landerdaill	Mr Chancellor of the dutchy
Lord <u>Bl</u> of London	Sir William Coventry

The matter in difference betweene the Governours of the Company of Merchants of London trading to the Levant seas touching their Complaint against the Merchants of Bristoll that trade to Zante yet refuse to beare share of Impositions layd upon the said Traders, being this day brought to a hearinge according to an order of the 25th of april last, Upon full debate of all petentions which were offered either by the Merchants themselves or Counsell learned on both sides & deliberate consideracion thereupon. It was Resolved and accordingly It is hereby Ordered (his Majestie present in counsell) That hereforward noe imposicon be layd upon or demanded by the said Governours & Company of Merchants of London trading to the Levant seas from any the Merchants of Bristoll who do, or shall trade to Venice or Zante for the comodities of those places only. And all partys are dismissed from further attendance at this board in that behalfe.

Edward Walker.

Doc. 9 - Book of Trade, p.264

To the Kings most Excellent Majestie and the Lords of his Majesties most honorable privy Counsell

The humble petition of the Governours and Company of Merchants of England trading into the Levant seas.

Sheweth

That your Majesties Royall Grandfather found it necessary, in order to the preservacion and improvement of the Trade into the Levant to incorporate the Turkey Company by his Royall Charter without which that trade being wholly without Government would have bin exposed to the many Injuries and oppressions of ssovrraigne Nations That your Majestie hath bin graciously pleased to reafirme and renew the Charter to your petitioners suite which Royall favour of your Majesties your petitioners who can now supporte the chardge of their government wihtout laying of some Impositions amongst themselves have endeavoured to make those impositions as easy to trade as possibly they could, And for that and have taken of all imposicons formerly layd upon the Wollen Manufactures exported there, And have laid the same upon the fforaine Comodites employed to the great encouragement of the Cloathing trade within your Majesties Doyminions, That the petitioners have likewise with great cause and chardge provided with the Repablike at Venice to take of an Imposition of Two Dollers per hnd layd upon Currants.

That the Merchants of Bristoll trade to Zante within the priviledges of your petitioners Charter, and though they bee not questioned for soe doing, Notwithstanding their not being free of the said Company, yet they refuse to pay those impositions Layd on fforaigne Comodities imported and incourage others to doe the like by their example although they reape the benefitt of those chardged your peticoners are as for the support of the Company All which tend to the distrucon of your Petitioners Society and the utter overthrow of all that policy and order whereby the Trade to the Levannt hath hitherto bin managed and incouraged, and to deprive your petitioners of the fruite of your Majesties Royall comessions.

May it therefore please your most Excellent Majestie to cause such of them as continue obstinate in an open conteimpt of your Majesties Charters and provisions for the trade of your subjects to appeare before your Majestie in Counsell then and there to ansvere the promisses

And your petitioners as in duty bound shall ever pray

Richard Governer

Doc. 10 - Book of Trade, p.265

Att the Courte at Whitehall the
28th of Aprill 1665

Present

The Kings most Excellent Majesty

The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury
Lord Chauncelor
Lord Treasurer
Lord Privy Seale

Earle of Carlisle
Earle of Landerdale
Earle of Middleton

Lord Generall
Duke of Crimond
Margnelse of Dorchester
Lord Chamberlaine
Earle of Northumberland
Earle of Alband
Earle of Bath

Earle of Barberry
Lord Bishopp of London
Lord Almigton
Lord Berkeley
Lord Ahsley
Mr Treasurer
Mr Secretary Morris
Sr Edward Nicholas

Upon the reading the peticon of the Governers & Company of Merchants of England tradeing to the Levant Seas setting forth, that the priviledge of their Charters are infringed by certaine Merchants of Bristoll that trade to Zante who likewise refuse to beare their share of imposicons layd upon the said Traders for the support of the trade, albeit they enjoy the benefitt thereof, And prayeng that they may appeare and answere the said Complaynt at this Board It is this day ordered his Majestie present in Counsell that a Copy of the said petition annexed be herewith sent unto the Mayor of Bristoll who is to give notice to all the persons of the said Towne concerned in the said Trade to appeare and intend at the Board upon this day, Moneth being ffriday the sixth and twentieth day of May next, Att which tyme all parties are to be prepared to speake by their Counsell in the said Business.

Robert Senthwell