

How were the Tyndall brothers able to establish their fortunes?

William and Robert Tyndall are perhaps two of the most well documented of Bristol's sixteenth century merchants, active from about the 1540s until their respective deaths in 1558 and some time after 1574. There are a large number of surviving sources about them, throughout their lives, most notably some of their accounts from 1544/5, a letter from William warning his brother to move his ship as the customs men were about to search it and the will and probate inventory of William Tyndall, as well as a large number of references to them in other documents. They became two of the most successful Bristol merchants of their time, William Tyndall's will and probate inventory show that he died a wealthy man as well as having had a successful political career and as his business partner it seems likely that Robert would also have established a considerable fortune. How exactly they were able to be so successful is not immediately obvious and to establish this it will be necessary to piece together the evidence for their lives and examine it from a number of angles. These include how they were able to benefit from their apprenticeships, what trade they conducted and how this was done, what extent they were involved in illicit activities and how they benefited from these as well as exactly how successful they were and whether factors other than trade could have contributed to this.

Little evidence exists of the early lives of the Tyndall brothers, William was born in about 1512 and Robert probably a few years later.¹ Robert's apprentice records show that they were the sons of a husbandman, Thomas Tyndall from Belton in Lincolnshire.² They had at least three other brothers and two sisters.³ Only one of these appears to have also come to Bristol. James, who was probably much younger, was apprenticed to Richard Davis, a Bristol brewer, in 1551.⁴ Other siblings Rychard, Thomas, Anne and Ysabeth are referred to in William's will as 'them fowre that remayne in Lincoln Shire'.⁵ Although these humble origins suggests a rags to riches

¹ S. T. Bindhoff, *The House of Commons 1509-1558 III Members N-Z*, (London, 1982), p. 498.

² D. Hollis, *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book 1532 – 1565, Part 1 1532-1542*, (Bristol Records Society, 1948), p. 55.

³ See appendix 1 for an attempt to reconstruct their family tree.

⁴ E. Ralph and N Hardwick, *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book 1532 – 1565, Part 2*, (Bristol Records Society, 1980), p. 141.

⁵ *The Will of William Tyndall*, (Transcribed by E. England 2002).

story this was not necessarily the case, apprentice records show that it was fairly common for people from lowly origins to become merchants, apprentices taken on by William later in life include two sons of husbandmen, the son of an innkeeper and the son of a tanner.⁶

Robert was apprenticed to a leading Bristol merchant, John Smyth, for 9 years on the 19th of July 1535 and, although the apprentice records do not go back far enough to record it, it also seems likely that William was also apprenticed. He is first recorded in Bristol in 1532 when he would have been 20, ironically, considering his later career, seizing smuggled goods from a merchant, and was admitted as a freeman of Bristol in 1538.⁷ This lengthy interval between first being recorded in Bristol and being made a freeman could suggest an apprenticeship. Although the interval between the two references is not as long as the terms of most apprenticeships (typically 7-14 years) it is certainly possible that he had been in Bristol before that date. It would have been unusual for a successful merchant at this time not to have undergone an apprenticeship so it is fairly safe to assume that William Tyndall was not an exception.

These apprenticeships would have been valuable to the Tyndall brothers in a number of ways and certainly played a significant part in allowing them to become so successful. Robert was able to gain a vast amount of experience during his apprenticeship, within two years he was in Bordeaux serving as purser on Smyth's ship the Trinity.⁸ In 1539 he was acting for Smyth in Spain, being described variously as 'my prentice resident at San Sebastian in Spayne' and 'my ffactor there'.⁹ Knowledge gained during this time would have been valuable to Robert during his later career as he and his brother conducted a considerable amount of trade to Northern Spain and he appears to have spent a lot of time in San Sebastian. He was also in Spain on other occasions during his apprenticeship, for example in 1543

⁶ E. Ralph and N. Hardwick, *Bristol Apprentice Book Part 2*, pp. 30, 59, 90.

E. Ralph, *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book 1532 – 1565, Part 3*, (Bristol Records Society, 1992).

⁷ J. Vanes (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society, 1979), p. 134

S. T. Bindhoff, *The House of Commons*, p. 498.

⁸ J. Vanes (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smyth, 1538-1550*, (Bristol Record Society, 1974), p. 36.

⁹ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 105.

Smyth paid Tyndall for 'costs of all the seid goods and his truble at Bilbao', although it was not indicated what this trouble was, during a voyage to Biscay.¹⁰ Smyth's ledger shows that Robert Tyndall did a considerable amount of business on his behalf during his apprenticeship, both collecting and paying debts for Smyth overseas and also trading on his behalf. For example in October 1539 Smyth sent a horse to sell and £95 to Tyndall at Bordeaux for use in buying wine and Vanes has calculated that he accounted for £600 of his master's money that autumn.¹¹ Such responsibility and opportunity to engage in the business of trade would have allowed Robert to gain valuable experience and an intricate understanding of how trade worked, what were good prices and where to find them which doubtlessly would have contributed to his later success as a merchant in his own right. It also possibly suggests that he was quite a talented businessman as Smyth would have been unlikely to have risked such large sums of money on someone he did not have absolute faith in. Although no records exist of William's apprenticeship it seems likely that he would have been able to gain at least some similarly valuable experience.

As other apprentices would have gained similar experience during their apprenticeships this does not explain why the Tyndall brothers were able to be more successful than many of their contemporaries. They would however have benefited in other ways from their apprenticeships which could explain their extraordinary success. This notable among these is the contacts they would have made. John Smyth, who Robert was apprenticed to, was one of the most successful merchants of his generation and in his service Robert would have come into contact with all of the people he was doing business with, which would doubtlessly have helped him when he set up as a merchant in his own right. He also maintained his connection with Smyth after his apprenticeship, who continued to refer to Robert as 'my sarvant', and Vanes suggests that they became 'life long friends'.¹² It would certainly appear that they continued to do some business together, Tyndall continued to act as Smyth's factor in Spain and they may also have exported some goods together. For example on 28th March 1545 Smyth notes in his ledger the import of '2 buttes of Tyndall's and

¹⁰ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, pp. 210-12.

¹¹ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, pp. 13, 20.

¹² J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 13, 28.

6 buttes seck of myne' of Gascon wine.¹³ There can be no doubt that in a tight knit merchant community having such a powerful friend as Smyth and a wealth of contacts would have helped the Tyndall brothers to be successful as merchants and establish their fortunes.

Robert Tyndall was freed from his apprenticeship on 9th August 1544 and 6 days later on the 15th he set up a company trading in partnership with William.¹⁴ William had certainly been trading before this date, for example he bought a licence from John Smyth to export 7 weys of beans in July 1539 and customs records in 1543 show that he was exporting woollen cloth.¹⁵ There is also some evidence that they were already trading together before Robert was freed, an entry in the accounts of their company dated 12th August 1544 actually refers to goods exported on the St. John of Rentaria on 28th May of that year.¹⁶ They evidently already had some money behind them when they set up the company, the total sum including all of the goods put in when it was set up was £196 2s 2d,¹⁷ and their total expenses for the voyage which set out in May 1544 add up to £181 14s.¹⁸ This money may have come from William's trading activities before they set up in partnership, some of it may also have been earned during their respective apprenticeships; there are a number of references in Smyth's ledger to paying for the expenses of his apprentices, which could be wages, and they may also have earned commission on any trade they did for him.¹⁹ Although there is no reference to this in the ledger the Merchants Avizo, a guidebook for young merchants written by a Bristol merchant in the 1580s, suggests that apprentices should expect to earn a 2 ½ per cent commission, which with the volume of trade Robert Tyndall did as Smyth's factor could have amounted to a significant sum.²⁰ However they had come by it, having money to invest would have helped the Tyndall brothers to be successful as it meant that they were able to invest in significant amounts of

¹³ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 110.

¹⁴ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 13.

J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 117-8.

¹⁵ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 256.

Appendix 2.

¹⁶ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 118-119.

¹⁷ J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 118.

¹⁸ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 118-9.

¹⁹ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 13, 85.

²⁰ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 13.

goods and therefore able to make significant profits and establish their fortunes rapidly.

As has already been mentioned most of the Tyndall brother's trade was with Northern Spain, probably taking advantage of knowledge of the region gained by Robert during his apprenticeship. They appear to have dealt mostly in cloth and leather exports whilst importing iron and wine, although other goods such as foodstuffs also appear to have been traded at times. The customs accounts of 1546 show them to have exported goods, including cloth, leather and lead to the value of £206 and imported iron worth £83, although it must be borne in mind that the customs accounts do not necessarily record all of their trade. The best evidence of their trade is the surviving accounts of their company from 1544 and 1545. These show them exporting leather and cloth and importing large quantities of iron which were then sold on to a number of individuals and also some canvas and paper.²¹ To give a rough indication of profits, 9 tons of iron imported in September 1545 sold at about £6 13s 4d per ton and the 3 tons they bought in October from John de Berobye (who was master of the St. John of Rentaria when they exported leather on it in 1544²²) at the Back Hall cost £5 16s 8d per ton.²³ This would suggest a profit of about 16s 8d per ton, giving profits of £7 9s 3d on the 9 tons. It seems likely that the iron they imported themselves would have been significantly cheaper, although they had to pay £9 freight costs. Robert Tyndall was probably, at least for part of the time, living in Spain which would have put him in the best possible position to exploit his knowledge of local trade to maximise profits. on 30th June 1548 he describes himself as 'merchant of the Syte of Bristow, beinge rezident at this presentin this towne of San Sebastians' while defending men of San Sebastian against a charge of piracy and in 1558 a Spanish notarial document describes him as a resident of San Sebastian.²⁴ His exclusion from a list of those proposed as members of the Merchant Venturers, found in the back of Smyth's ledger and probably dating from some time in the early 1550s, which includes William, would certainly suggest that Robert Tyndall was not at the forefront of the minds of

²¹ J. Vanes, *Documents*, 117-121.

²² J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 119.

²³ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 119-121.

²⁴ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 128-129.
J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 14.

Bristol's merchant community despite being significantly involved in trade.²⁵ Such a significant volume of trade, exploiting Roberts's knowledge of Spain, certainly would have yielded significant profits and played a large part in establishing the Tyndall brother's fortunes. This working in partnership with Robert managing affairs in Spain and William those in England, also possibly explains why they were more successful than many of their contemporaries, although many merchants shipped goods on the same ship, the Tyndall brothers are unique in forming a complete partnership

They were obviously able to find a ready market for their goods, for example when they received 9 tons of iron from San Sebastian on 30th September 1545 they had it by October 17th and bought some more.²⁶ England has suggested, based on a list of debtors in William Tyndall's probate inventory that he had a network of regular buyers over the country who he sold imported goods to on a credit basis.²⁷ There is some evidence that a similar system was already in place in 1544/45, although probably not as well developed, for example William Ryce, tucker, was given until Christmas to pay the second instalment on a ton of iron which he had bought on 30th September and Howell Aprichard, baker, was given until 'the begynnyng of Aprell next', to pay for the hogshead of iron he had bought on 11th April.²⁸ This ability to sell their goods easily to an established network of potential customers would have meant that the Tyndall's could invest in goods with very little fear that they would not be able to sell them. This would have allowed them to engage in the significant volume of trade which allowed them to establish their fortunes.

Given the limited survival of records (the only surviving accounts of the Tyndall brothers are from 1544/5) it is difficult to accurately assess how much trade they did over the course of their careers and exactly how successful they were. The volumes of goods in these accounts suggest that they were carrying out a significant amount of trade and the occasional references to them over the next fifteen or so years suggests they continued to carry out significant trade in similar goods. For example in 1547 William Tyndall is recorded selling 20 butts (2520 gallons) of sherry to a Thomas

²⁵ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 315.

²⁶ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 120-121.

²⁷ E. England, *Snapshots from the Grave - William Tyndall; Life as Shown through a Probate Inventory*, (undergraduate thesis, 2003), pp. 45-60.

²⁸ J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 120.

Harris in Andalusia for £100.²⁹ This incident also shows William's ruthlessness as a businessman as although he had assured Harris that the sherry would be 'good and merchantable' he could not get anyone to buy it for £3 a butt and begged Tyndall for extra time to repay him, however William had already begun an action against him in the Staple Court at Bristol.

Further evidence of their success is that by 1558 both brothers owned ships. Ship owning was not unusual at this time; however it was a considerable investment and also a fairly significant risk. The first evidence of Robert's ship, the Caesar of San Sebastian, is a Spanish charter party from 28th May 1558, showing that it was laded with a cargo of iron, wine and other merchandise at San Sebastian, destined for Bristol.³⁰ It is difficult to estimate the size of this ship or its value, although the charter party refers to twenty sailors, six cabin boys and two young men being taken on the voyage. As it was carrying 93 tons of iron as well as other goods when it was wrecked in 1561 it would seem that the Caesar was a fairly large ship which would have been a considerable investment.³¹ John Smyth's c.115 ton Trinity was valued at £250 in 1539.³² William's ship, the Margaret, is also first recorded in association with him in 1558 when it was seized for carrying an illicit cargo.³³ It seems likely however that it had been in his possession before this as one of the documents reporting its seizure refers to Tyndall having illegally shipped goods in it on 1st December 1557, although it seems strange that they did not seize it until nine months later.³⁴ Again it is difficult to estimate the size of the Margaret; Jones suggests that it may have been a ship of about 15 tons which had been recorded in the Bristol customs records in 1542-3, although it would not have been owned by Tyndall at this stage. If William had bought the ship from someone else it might explain why she strangely appeared to be named after his brother's wife. The evidence would fit with it having been a fairly small ship, the accounts of its seizure suggest that it had carried cargoes of 30qr. of wheat and 7 barrels of butter and another of 40qr. of wheat (roughly 8 ½

²⁹ J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 138.

³⁰ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 122-123.

³¹ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 124-125.

³² J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 14.

E. T. Jones, *The Bristol Shipping Industry in the Sixteenth Century*, (unpub. Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1998), p. 239.

³³ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 46, 122.

³⁴ J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 122.

tons, although it may have been partly laden or had other cargo), one of the accounts suggesting that the goods were going to be transhipped to the Caesar for export overseas. This, combined with her small size, indicates that the Margaret was used for local voyages, possibly venturing as far as France, while the Caesar was used for longer distance voyages to Spain. Following William's death the Margaret was valued at about £133, showing that although she might not have been as valuable as the Caesar she was also a considerable investment. William Tyndall's probate inventory also shows that he owned a half share in a barke called the Katherine, valued at £15. No other evidence of this ship exists, although she could not have been particularly large, and there is also no indication of who owned the other half, it is possible that it was Robert although this cannot be assumed. Mention is also made of a 'lighter' (a small ship) valued at £10, and a 'Shipp boate' valued at £3, again little is known of these although they may well have been used for transporting goods up and down the River Severn, where many of the goods they were exporting would have come from.³⁵

As has already been suggested a sizeable proportion of the Tyndall brother's trade involved illicit activities and these may explain how they were able to be so successful as these illicit activities allowed them to gain an advantage in some trades and participate in others which were prohibited. The most obvious example of this is in August 1558 when the Margaret was seized trying to smuggle a cargo of wheat out of the country. Export of grain was officially prohibited in 1531; however an effective prohibition had been in force before this as exports were not allowed if the domestic price was above a certain level.³⁶ It was possible, and often worthwhile as high prices could be gained on the continent, to circumnavigate this prohibition through the purchase of licences, often granted by the crown in return for political favours and then sold on to merchants; however these could be expensive and would eat into the merchant's profit margins considerably. Jones has shown that when John Smyth bought a licence to export leather in 1540 it cost him 13s 4d per dicker when

³⁵ The Probate Inventory of William Tyndall, (transcribed by E. England 2002).

³⁶ Hughes & Larkin, *Tudor Royal Proclamations Volume 1*, (Yale, 1964), PP. 201-203.

he was buying leather at 44s per dicker and when he bought a licence to export grain in 1541 it cost him 5s per quarter when he had bought the grain at 8s per quarter.³⁷

There are numerous pieces of evidence for this 1558 incident including a letter from William to Robert warning him to move the ship and Exchequer court records referring to the seizure of the ship. It would appear that they had tried to load 40 qr. of wheat on the Margaret, possibly intending to tranship this to the Caesar at Kingroad, but the crew were observed when they 'cast out that weate geare' (Vanes suggests that these may have been the mats which were used in stowing the wheat) and this was reported to the customs officers.³⁸ The Customer and Comptroller officers who William describes as 'honest men' warned him that they would be forced to search the ship and William wrote to Robert informing him of this saying that 'pray God send yow a good time that ye may be out of this place'.³⁹ Robert was evidently unable to escape however as William Harvest, servant of the searcher at Bristol reported to the Exchequer court on 5th August that he had seized the ship and the goods.⁴⁰ Evidently they escaped full punishment as Robert was able to buy back the Margaret after his brother's death for considerably less than her actual value. The accounts of her seizure suggest that the Margaret was valued at either £10 or £42, although 5 months later in William's probate inventory she was valued at £133, and Robert did not even pay all of this, making a payment of £2 2s 4d and a further £3 to Harvest.⁴¹ This incident illustrates both that the Tyndall brothers were involved in illicit trade and that the risks were relatively small, as the customs officers were obviously willing to turn a blind eye if they could and even when they were caught it cost them relatively little. It also suggests that they were more regularly involved in illicit activities, the Customer and Comptroller's warning to William certainly suggests that he had paid them for their support before.

³⁷ E. T. Jones, 'Illicit business: accounting for smuggling in mid-sixteenth century Bristol', *Economic History Review*, (2001), p. 26.

³⁸ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 46, 122.

³⁹ J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 46, 122.

⁴¹ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 46, 122.

The Probate Inventory of William Tyndall, (transcribed by E. England 2002).
E. T. Jones, *Bristol Shipping Industry*, p. 56.

There are also numerous other occasions where the Tyndall brothers can be observed engaging in illicit practices. For example at the beginning of their partnership in 1544 their accounts show that when they laded a considerable amount of leather (which was prohibited without a licence) on the Saint John of Rentaria some of the goods were 'laden aboard the seyd shippe in Kyngrode', an illegal practice as all goods had to be loaded at the official port where the customs officers could supervise them.⁴² This account also contains a reference to a payment of £3 10s to two individuals, William Hill and Giles Dane, who can be identified as customs officers 'for ther gentelnes shewed in the lading of the seid lether', which can only be a bribe to overlook what they were doing.⁴³ Jones' comparison of this cargo to the customs accounts shows that although they were carrying 445 tanned hides, only 160 of these were covered by the customs accounts. William Tyndall was again accused of smuggling in 1553 when on 3rd June Richard Serche seized a pipe and 17 ends of iron belonging to him, although Tyndall claimed that he had reported the goods at the customs house.⁴⁴ At the opposite end of his career Robert Tyndall was arrested by the inquisition in Spain and had his goods seized. This incident probably occurred some time after 1571 as the letter which shows it is addressed to Lord Burghley, William Cecil was not created Baron Burghley until 1571. This would suggest that he was arrested in Spain with his goods during the breakdown of relations between England and Spain which occurred between 1568 and 1573 which led to an embargo on trade, which Tyndall must have been breaking.⁴⁵ It can therefore be seen that throughout their careers illicit activities, mostly in the export of leather and foodstuffs, were an important part of the Tyndall brother's trade. This would have contributed significantly to allowing them to establish their fortunes as it increased the profits they were able to make from trade.

There is evidence which shows that many of Bristol's other merchants were also involved in illicit activities, suggesting that the Tyndall brother's circumnavigation of the rules was not necessarily what made the Tyndall brothers particularly successful. Through study of John Smyth's ledger and the customs records Jones has shown that Smyth was also heavily involved in the illicit trade, and that a number of the city's

⁴² J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 118-119.

⁴³ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 118-119.

⁴⁴ J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 135.

⁴⁵ P. Croft, 'Trading with the Enemy 1585-1604', *The Historical Journal*, (1989), p. 282.

other merchants were implicated by buying shares in the ventures.⁴⁶ Further evidence that large numbers of merchants were engaging in illicit activities comes from 'An Act for the Preservation of the Ryver Severn' passed in 1543. This shows that merchants were dumping ballast in the river prior to lading illicit cargoes, as the Tyndall's were doing, and that this was on such a scale that it was making the river un-navigable.⁴⁷ This certainly suggests that a large part of the merchant community was involved in illicit activities, although it cannot necessarily be established, other than in Smyth's case, whether they were as heavily involved as the Tyndall's. Therefore although illicit trade could have played a significant part in establishing the Tyndall brother's fortunes it does not necessarily explain why they were more successful than many of their contemporaries.

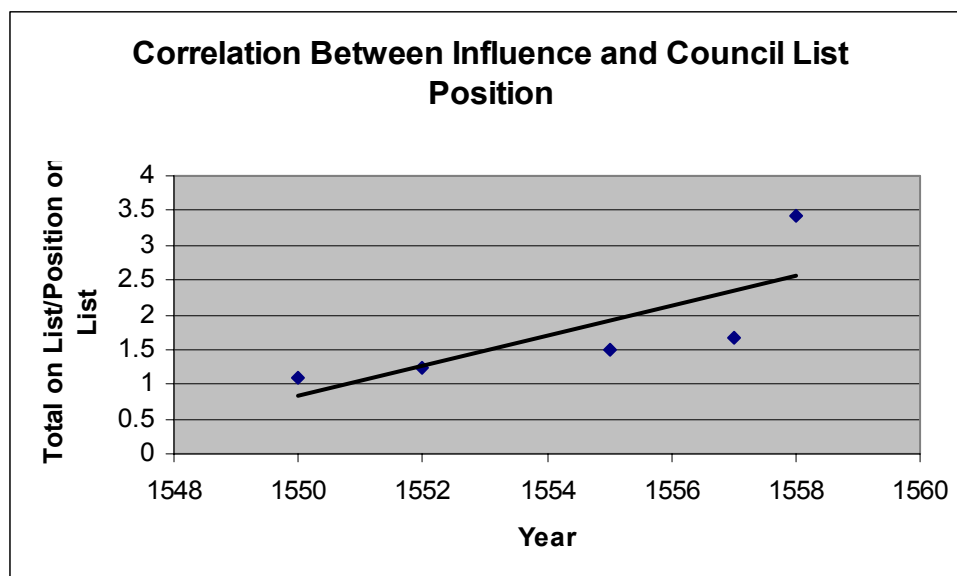
In addition to his success as a merchant William Tyndall had a successful political career, culminating in him becoming an MP in 1558. He was a sheriff of Bristol from 1548 to 1549 and then served on the council from 1550 until his death in 1558, signing 5 city ordinances during this time and fulfilling the role of auditor of the city chamberlain's accounts in 1551-2.⁴⁸ Inwood has shown through a study of Anthony Standbank, whose career on the council overlapped with Tyndall's, that the influence of an individual can be determined by the relative position of their name on the list of those signing the ordinances.⁴⁹ The data for William Tyndall is limited as he only served on the council for eight years and signed 5 ordinances, however it may be worth examining whether this technique can reveal anything about his career. The below graph shows that Tyndall steadily progressed up the list, suggesting a rise in influence, with a sudden rise in 1558 when he became an MP. Although the trend line is distorted by the sudden rise at the end it appears that he steadily progressed up the list and had his career not been curtailed by his death in 1558, at an age of about 46, he probably would have risen to be one of the most influential men in Bristol's politics.

⁴⁶ E. T. Jones, *Illicit business*, pp. 26-33.

⁴⁷ *Statutes of the Realm*, Volume III, pp. 906-7.

⁴⁸ S. T. Bindhoff, *The House of Commons*, p. 498.
The Ordinances of Bristol, pp. 20-27.

⁴⁹ J. Inwood, *How Did Anthony Standbank rise to prominence and become one of the leaders of Bristol's community?*, (2005), pp. 7-8.



That William Tyndall served as an MP can be seen by the fact that in 1558 he drew £5 6s wages for the first session, although he died before second session and is marked a 'mortuus' on the Crown Office list.⁵⁰ In addition to being a success in its own right Tyndall's influence and status gained through his political career may have aided his career as a merchant and helped him to establish his fortune, although a certain degree of wealth and success as a merchant were probably an essential precursor to political success. Unlike his brother, Robert Tyndall does not appear to have had a political career, possibly because he spent much time overseas.

Estimating the exact scale of the success of the Tyndall brothers is not easy; however there are a number of methods which can be applied to gain a good impression. Some indication of the Tyndall brother's success and standing as merchants can also be gained from considering the number of apprentices they took on. During his career William Tyndall had 8 apprentices, the first being apprenticed to him in May 1545 and the last in March 1557.⁵¹ Of these only one, Robert Smyth, can be seen as having been admitted as a burgess of the city in 1557, it is certainly possible that the others were also admitted although no records survive of this.⁵² It seems possible that he had as many as 6 apprentices simultaneously. Robert can also be shown to have had

⁵⁰ S. T. Bindhoff, *The House of Commons*, p. 498.

⁵¹ E. Ralph and N. Hardwick, *Bristol Apprentice Book Part 2*, p. 30.
E. Ralph, *Bristol Apprentice Book Part 3*, p. 56.

See Appendix 4 for a full list of the Tyndall's apprentices.

⁵² D. M. Livrock (ed.), *City Chamberlains accounts in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Bristol Record Society, 1966), p. 20.

apprentices; the first is recorded in 1561.⁵³ Although they are not recorded in the apprentice book which ends in 1565 it appears that Robert had at least two, possibly three further apprentices as they are mentioned in the account of a dispute with a Breton Ship master.⁵⁴ The possible apprentice is a Thomas Tyndall who is referred to as 'in the service and previously in the charge of', this could either be William Tyndall's son and heir or the son of their brother Rychard who was left £6 13s 4d in William's will.⁵⁵ 'Previously in the charge of', would suggest that if he had been Robert's apprentice he was no longer so in 1568, however as he is not recorded in the apprentice records before 1565 this would mean he had been an apprentice for less than three years. This seems unlikely, with more realistic possibilities being that either his apprenticeship had begun earlier but was missed from the records, the account is wrong and he was still Robert's apprentice or he was another merchant's apprentice, merely acting for Robert, 'previously in the charge of' possibly referring to Robert being responsible for him while he was a minor. Whether or not Thomas Tyndall was Robert's apprentice it is evident that both brothers took on a significant number of apprentices. That they were able to support a large number of apprentice certainly suggests that they were successful merchants, establishing considerable wealth.

William Tyndall's will and subsequent probate inventory give a unique insight into his wealth at death, however it is not exhaustive as he clearly had property which was not included in the probate inventory. William Tyndall's will, which is dated 13th September 1558, leaves his house to his wife Jane for the rest of her natural life and then to his son Thomas, each of his 3 children, Thomas, Joan and Faith receive a hundred marks each and he also provides for his family remaining in Lincolnshire, a cousin living in Bristol and some provision for the poor of the city.⁵⁶ Jane was probably his second wife as the apprentice records up until 1555 list a wife called Matilda and the will states what should happen to William's children if Jane re-married, suggesting that they were not hers.⁵⁷ Through analysis of his probate

⁵³ E. Ralph, *Bristol Apprentice Book Part 3*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁵ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 87-88.

The Will of William Tyndall, (Transcribed by E. England 2002).

⁵⁶ *The Will of William Tyndall*, (Transcribed by E. England 2002).

⁵⁷ E. Ralph and N. Hardwick, *Bristol Apprentice Book Part 2*, pp. 30, 42, 59, 90, 132, *Part 3*, p. 41. *The Will of William Tyndall*, (Transcribed by E. England 2002).

inventory, England has shown that at his death William Tyndall had possessions worth a total of £749 5s, and when debts owed to him are included his total wealth would have been £1873 10s 11d, a considerable fortune.⁵⁸ This however does not, as has already been mentioned, include some of Tyndall's property or debts he owed (merchants frequently operated on a credit basis). At least one of these debts is known of as a London merchant John Jakes through a number of representatives tried to reclaim a bill of exchange, which appears to have been made by Robert in Bilbao the previous November, for £65 15s 7d, first from William's widow Jane and then from Robert who eventually paid him.⁵⁹ Although it is not possible to establish the exact extent of his wealth it is clear that William Tyndall died a wealthy man having established a considerable fortune.

As it is not fully listed in the probate inventory some separate consideration of William Tyndall's property is also necessary. He had a considerable amount of property, either owned or rented throughout Bristol and elsewhere.⁶⁰ Notable amongst this is the amount of property from the former monastery of Grey Friars which he acquired, following the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s and 40s when much land, complete with buildings, became available cheaply. William appears to have taken advantage of this to help establish his position and also probably made a considerable sum from stripping the buildings of anything that could be sold, for example lead from the roofs. Robert does not appear to have invested in property to the same extent; the only property associated with his name is his house in Broad Street. At his death a considerable amount of William Tyndall's wealth consisted of property and his exploitation of the cheap property available in the wake of the Dissolution of the monasteries may also have played a part in establishing this fortune.

The careers of William and Robert Tyndall appear to have been inextricably linked and so it is reasonable to assume that as his brother had established a considerable fortune Robert had also. They were certainly trading together in 1544-5 and Robert's presence on the Margaret in 1558 shows that this was still the case at the end of

⁵⁸ E. England, *Snapshots From the Grave*, p. 61.

⁵⁹ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 126-127.

⁶⁰ A full list of known property can be seen in Appendix 5.

William's life. The absence of Robert Tyndall's name for the list of those proposed as members of the merchant venturers may also suggest that he was so inextricably linked with his brother that their contemporaries did not think it was necessary to name them separately.⁶¹ Although William's will shows that he died a rich man however his brother was not so fortunate having 'fallen into decaie and povertye' when he died in the house of his wife Margaret's parents.⁶² The exact date of Robert's death is uncertain, falling between 1574 when he is referred to living in 21 Broad Street and 1598 when Margaret Tyndall, widow, is referred to in the same house.⁶³ He probably did not have any surviving children as on her death in 1605 Margaret Tyndall left her tenement in Broad Street to the church of St. John the Baptist.⁶⁴ Robert's decline probably began with the death of his brother as they had worked together as such a successful partnership, however this would have been seriously compounded on 27th January 1561 when his ship, the Caesar, was wrecked in a tempest on Barnstable bar (Devon) while returning from Spain.⁶⁵ In addition to his valuable ship he also lost her cargo, including 93 tons of iron, cloth, some gold items and jewels and other merchandise. He evidently continued to trade as is shown by his dispute with a Breton ship master in 1568; however he was again hit by bad luck when he was arrested by the Inquisition in Spain probably in about 1571.⁶⁶ In this incident he had goods seized worth £1035 5s 5d and although he and two other individuals wrote to Lord Burghley asking to be allowed to recoup their losses from goods seized from Spanish merchants in Britain, there is no evidence that they were successful. Even though he had established a considerable fortune, Robert Tyndall died in poverty, probably as a result of these two highly expensive pieces of bad luck and the increasing difficulty of trading with Spain, his main market, as political relations between Spain and England deteriorated.

In conclusion at their height both of the Tyndall brothers were highly successful merchants with considerable fortunes which had been amassed largely through overseas trade. Although they both came from relatively humble origins both

⁶¹ J. Vanes, *Ledger*, p. 315.

⁶² J. Vanes, *Documents*, p. 6.

⁶³ R. H. Leech, *Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol*, p. 34.
Bristol Records Office - P/AS/D/BS B 21.

⁶⁴ R. H. Leech, *Topography*, p. 34.

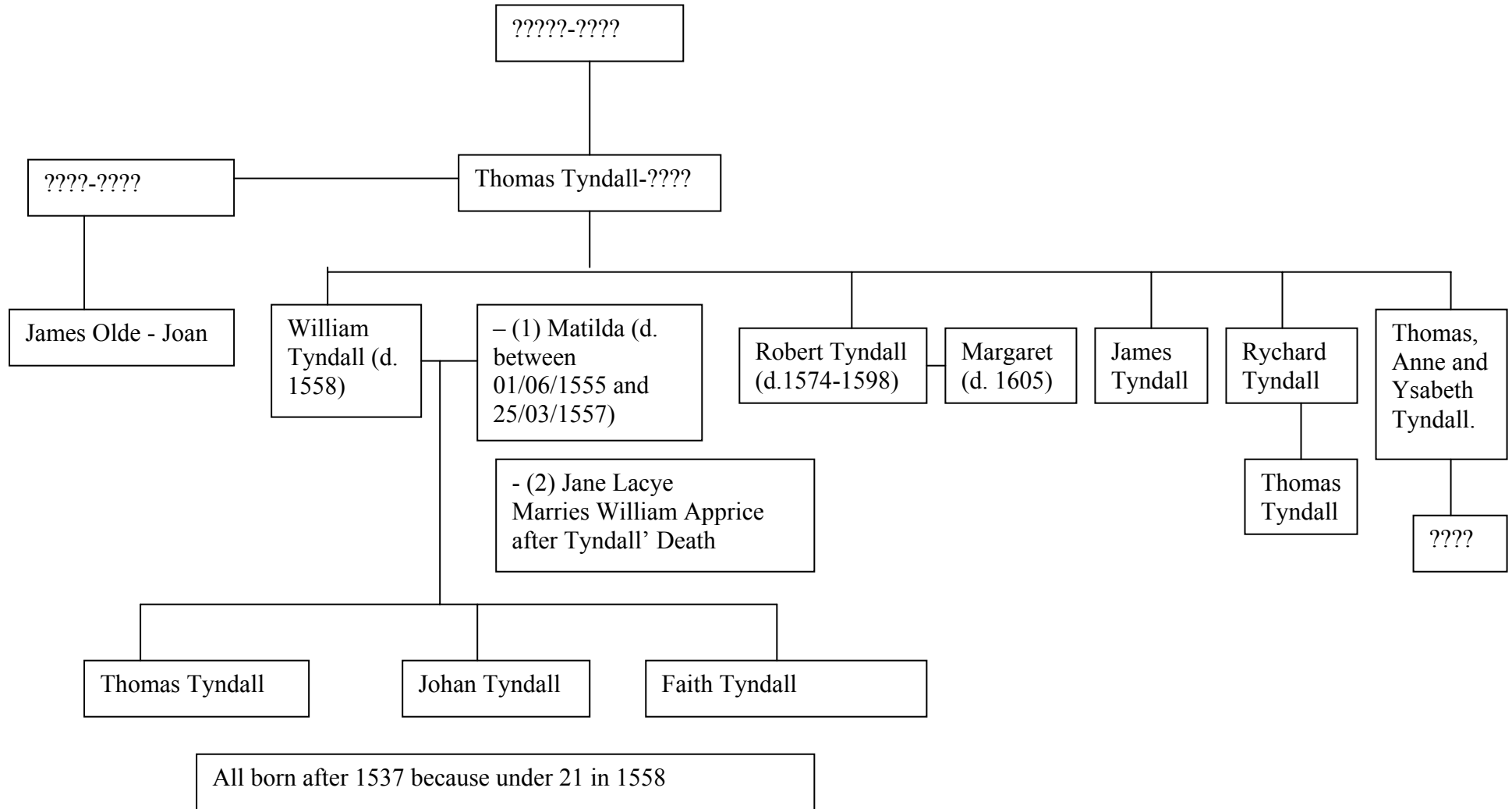
⁶⁵ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 124 - 125.

⁶⁶ J. Vanes, *Documents*, pp. 87-88, 132.

brothers appear to have served apprenticeships which would have provided them both with experience and contacts and possibly some capital to invest in their own enterprises. They engaged heavily in trade, mostly with Northern Spain, exporting leather and cloth and importing iron, Robert probably managing the Spanish side while William built up a considerable network of customers at home, a unique partnership which possibly explains why they were so successful. They were evidently successful merchants as by Williams's death in 1558 both brothers had ships and throughout their careers both had a considerable number of apprentices. Illicit activities allowed them to maximise their profits from overseas trade with relatively little risk and it is evident that they were exploiting these opportunities throughout their careers, although wider participation in the illicit trade means that this cannot explain why they were more successful than many of their contemporaries. As well as his career as a merchant William Tyndall had a successful political career and owned a considerable amount of property, both of which would have helped him to establish his fortune. William Tyndall's will and probate inventory show that he died a very wealthy man and as his brother's career had been inextricably linked with his it is reasonable to assume that he had also amassed a considerable fortune, although a series of bad luck meant that he was later to lose this and die in poverty. No one factor can explain how the Tyndall brothers were able to establish their fortunes, although it would appear that it was achieved through a combination of their talent as merchants, working as a partnership and exploitation of whatever opportunities presented themselves.

Appendix 1

Tyndall family tree.



Appendix 2**References to the Tyndall's in the customs records.⁶⁷**

Ship Name	Port	Country	Master	Depart Date	Arrive Date	Sailing to	Sailing From	Merchant	Quantity	Commodity	Total £
MARY	RENERIA	SPAIN	DOMINGO De LESSO	07/07/43	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	8	WOLLEN CLOTH	0
CHRISTOPHER	WATERFORD	IRELAND	JOHN STRONG	04/10/46	0	IRELAND	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	1	WINE	0
SANTA MARIA	RENERIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	06/01/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	20	LEAD	100
SANTA MARIA	RENERIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	06/01/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	30	CALF SKINS	5
SANTA MARIA	RENERIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	06/01/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	3	WOLLEN (BRECON) CLOTH	3
SANTA MARIA	RENERIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	06/01/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	12	CALF SKINS	2
SANTA MARIA	RENERIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	06/01/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM	27.75	TANNED HIDES	0
SANTA MARIA	RENERIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	0	05/28/46	BRISTOL	CONTINENT	WILLIAM / ROBERT	33.5	IRON	83
ISABEL	BLAVET	FRANCE	ALAN DE MIRREL	08/25/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM / ROBERT	13	WOLLEN CLOTH	2
ISABEL	BLAVET	FRANCE	ALAN DE MIRREL	08/25/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM / ROBERT	2	MANCHESTER COTTON	1
MARY	FUENTERRABIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	09/08/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM / ROBERT	10	LEAD	50
MARY	FUENTERRABIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	09/08/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM / ROBERT	80	MANCHESTER COTTON	40
MARY	FUENTERRABIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	09/08/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM / ROBERT	20	CALF SKINS	3
MARY	FUENTERRABIA	SPAIN	JOHN DE BEREBY	09/08/46	0	CONTINENT	BRISTOL	WILLIAM / ROBERT	14	WOLLEN CLOTH	0

⁶⁷ Extracted from data compiled by E. Jones.

Appendix 3**Data for council influence graph.⁶⁸**

Position from the top	Number of Names	Year	Ratio of Position to Number
24	26	1550	1.083333333
35	43	1552	1.228571429
20	30	1555	1.5
21	35	1557	1.666666667
12	41	1558	3.416666667

⁶⁸ Source: M. Stanford, *The Ordinances of Bristol 1506 – 1598*, (Bristol Record Society, 1990), pp. 20-26.

Appendix 4

William and Robert Tyndall's Apprentices.

Start Date	Name	Father's Occupation	Area of Origin	Term (Yrs)	Date due to End	Master	Wife
04/05/1545	Robert Tailor	Tanner	Ludlow	9	04/05/1554	William Tyndall	Matilda
20/05/1546	Charles Harte	Goldsmith	Canterbury	12	20/05/1558	William Tyndall	Matilda
16/05/1547	John Atkyn	Husbandman	Haslingfield, Cambridge	9	16/05/1556	William Tyndall	Matilda
18/11/1548	James Olde	yeoman	Salop	7	18/11/1555	William Tyndall	-
11/02/1549	Robert Smyth	Husbandman	Bedworth, Warwick	8	11/02/1557	William Tyndall	Matilda
05/05/1551	John Welton	Wiredrawer	Bristol	7	05/05/1558	William Tyndall	Matilda
01/06/1555	Robert Michell	Innholder	Birmingham	10	01/06/1565	William Tyndall	Matilda
25/03/1557	John White	Gentleman	Caldecotte, Bucks	8	25/03/1565	William Tyndall	Jane
06/11/1561	Peter Tucker	-	Bristol	12	06/11/1573	Robert Tyndall	Margaret
1565 – 1568	Thomas Tyndall?	Probably William or brother Rychard	?	?	1568? Term seems to short	Robert Tyndall	-
1565 – 1568	Anthony Tampson	?	?	?	?	Robert Tyndall	-
1565 – 1568	Peter Cooper	?	?	?	?	Robert Tyndall	-

Appendix 5

William and Robert Tyndall's Property.

Property	Owner/Tenant	Provable Dates	Evidence
Fisher Lane	William Tyndall	1544 – 1558.	In tenure or occupation of William Tyndall or his own assign in 1544. ⁶⁹ Paid 3s 8d rent in 1556. ⁷⁰ Leaves to his son Thomas. ⁷¹
The Maudlens	Mr Tyndall	1556	Was paid 4s rent for by the corporation in 1556. ⁷²
Orchard & Lower grounds at Long Ashton	Mr Tyndall	1556	Paid 53s 4d rent in 1556. ⁷³
A courte at the Key evidently includes a number of buildings.	William Tyndall	1556 – 1558.	Paid 2s rent in 1556. ⁷⁴ Probate Inventory refers to as the store house on upon the key possibly also the shopp. ⁷⁵ Leaves a house and a shop there to his daughter Joan. ⁷⁶ Leaves Store house and two dwelling houses to his son Thomas.
Close and Gardens at Greyfriars.	Mr Tyndall (probably William because stops in 1558).	1551 – 1558	Reference in introduction to Bristol Charters. ⁷⁷
A close of pasture within the limits of the lately dissolved house of Grey Friars	William Tyndall	1555	Sold to William Tyndall in 1555 by Richard Cole – mentioned in a letter to Cole by William's widow Jane in 1581. ⁷⁸
21 Broad Street.	Robert and Margaret Tyndall.	1574 – 1605.	Robert and Margaret are living there in 1574 and Margaret leaves it to the church of St. John the Baptist in 1605. ⁷⁹
House in Marsh Street. Also a Stable there and some rented ground.	William Tyndall	1558	Leaves his house in Marsh Street to his wife and his Stable there in his will. ⁸⁰ Referred to in the Probate Inventory. ⁸¹
The Parsonage at Lyttleton	William Tyndall	1558	Referred to in the Probate inventory. ⁸²
Ground at Lewins Mead. Possibly the Grey Friars property.	William Tyndall	1558	Proposes building a house for 12 aged poor people there in his will. ⁸³

⁶⁹ Bristol Charters p. 108.

⁷⁰ City Chamberlains Accounts, p. 6.

⁷¹ The Will of William Tyndall

⁷² City Chamberlains Accounts, p. 24.

⁷³ City Chamberlains Accounts, p. 64.

⁷⁴ City Chamberlains Accounts, p. 54.

⁷⁵ The Probate Inventory of William Tyndall

⁷⁶ The Will of William Tyndall

⁷⁷ Bristol Charters, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Bristol Records Office - **P/AS/D/BS B 21**.

⁷⁹ Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol, p. 34.

⁸⁰ The Will of William Tyndall

⁸¹ The Probate Inventory of William Tyndall

⁸² The Probate Inventory of William Tyndall

⁸³ The Will of William Tyndall

Houses in Christmas Street.	William Tyndall	1558	Leaves 1 to his daughter Faith and another 2 to his son Thomas. ⁸⁴
Lease of a garden in St. Michalls parish	William Tyndall	1558	Leaves to his daughter Joan in the care of Joan Olde.

⁸⁴ The Will of William Tyndall