



Livelihoods and Liberties of Low Countries Immigrants in Late Medieval Lynn

SUSAN MADDOCK

School of History and Art History, University of East Anglia

Abstract

This article contributes to burgeoning research on the alien population of late medieval England, that is, residents who had been born outside the realm. It focuses on the borough of Lynn – known as King’s Lynn from 1536 – which was one of England’s most prosperous port towns throughout the late Middle Ages. Covering the period from 1421 to 1524, during which the majority of immigrants were artisans from the Low Countries, the article traces their participation in both economic and civic life. In doing so, it places the experience of Dutch and other immigrants in Lynn within their wider historical context of alien immigration, both locally and nationally.

I

Our understanding of the extent and nature of the presence of aliens – people born outside the realm – in late medieval England has been transformed in recent years by the *England’s Immigrants 1330–1550* project, whose website gives access to over 60,000 records extracted from central government archives.¹ Two books complement the online database: one from a national perspective and the other featuring essays on particular groups and localities.² These and other case studies are gradually enriching our view of the alien population of late medieval England by contributing place-specific answers to some of the questions posed by the *England’s Immigrants* project about the origins, lives and work of alien residents and the extent to which they were integrated into their host societies. Common themes have emerged in relation to urban areas, where, usually in response to economic or other pressures, aliens were often subject to restrictions in practising their trades or participating

¹ *England’s Immigrants 1330–1550* database <<https://www.englishimmigrants.com>> [accessed 9 January 2024].

² W. Mark Ormrod, Bart Lambert and Jonathan Mackman, *Immigrant England, 1300–1550* (Manchester, 2019); W.M. Ormrod, Nicola McDonald and Craig Taylor (eds), *Resident Aliens in Late Medieval England* (Turnhout, 2017), in which Christian D. Liddy and Bart Lambert, ‘The civic franchise and the regulation of aliens in Great Yarmouth, c.1430–c.1490’ (pp. 125–43) and Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘The assimilation of foreigners in late medieval Exeter: A prosopographical analysis’ (pp. 163–79) are especially relevant to Lynn.

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in civic life. This article analyses evidence relating to aliens living in the port town of Lynn between 1421 and 1524, the overwhelming majority of whom had arrived from the Low Countries, exploring how they were received in a borough where artisans in general had a relatively low, but improving, status and how far they had an equal voice in town affairs.

The article starts by sketching out the earlier history of alien immigration into Lynn and outlines aspects of the borough's economy and governance which affected the reception offered to newcomers. A survey follows of the principal archival sources used. The central case study is divided into two phases: from 1421 to 1466 and from 1466 to 1525. A concluding section reviews the evidence from Lynn in a wider context, considering broader questions of coexistence in late medieval England.

II

Medieval Lynn was a supremely mercantile town: from its Norman foundation until it became King's Lynn in 1536. The history of Lynn revolves around two interlocking strands: the dominance of merchants within the borough and the external overlordship of the bishop of Norwich. Both are rooted in the town's location, on land reclaimed from a marshy estuary adjoining the bishop's manor of Gaywood. The new settlement flourished, thanks to the active intervention of Bishop Herbert de Losinga, who not only initiated the building of its parish church around 1100, but, as Kenneth Penn has recently established, also undertook the diversion of the Little Ouse to Lynn from its previous outfall at Wisbech, thereby enhancing his new town's potential as a port open to both overseas and inland traffic.³ As manorial lord of the territory on which Lynn was founded, the bishop had extensive rights in the town. These were protected in the borough's royal charters from 1204 onwards, but without defining them, leaving plentiful scope for friction in succeeding centuries.

Merchants came from across England and elsewhere to settle in the rapidly growing new town, thereby contributing to episcopal revenues, as well as their own individual and communal prosperity. Most were English, but some came from Scandinavia, Scotland, France and northern Europe, becoming members of the merchant guild and burgesses of the borough. The last in this line of alien merchants to settle in Lynn seems to have been Siglaf Susse of Gotland, who joined the 'great guild' – the merchant guild of Lynn, and its most prestigious religious guild, dedicated to the Holy Trinity – in 1306 and was admitted a burghess of the borough at around the same time. By 1322, he was a king's merchant, trusted to supply royal towns and castles in Scotland with Norway herrings, corn and other

³ Kenneth Penn, 'The diversion of the Little Ouse: Herbert de Losinga and the founding of Bishop's Lynn', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 111 (2022), pp. 179–90.

victuals.⁴ During his lifetime, the direction of much of Lynn's trade was shifting towards Prussia, and Danzig in particular: routes dominated by merchants of the Hanse, who enjoyed unique trading privileges in England and so had no incentive to seek permanent residence.

From the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, an increasing proportion of resident aliens have names revealing Low Countries origins. Walter Flemmyng, a weaver presented to the borough's annual leet court in 1346, is an early instance, but more followed after the Black Death. A servant from Zeeland known as Thomas de Seland and Hankyn Flemmyng, porter, are named in 1352, for example, and James Holand, a shoemaker, and John Smyth, Flemmyngge, in 1359.⁵ Their status was quite unlike that of the alien merchants who had benefited from the town's rapid growth and continued prosperity in the previous two and a half centuries: Lynn was among the dozen wealthiest towns in England in 1334 and ranked eighth in 1377.⁶

Given that Lynn's economy and government were dominated by its merchants to a quite exceptional extent, it is no surprise that craft guilds did not exist in the town: even in the mid- to late fifteenth century, such regulatory craft structures as existed were initiated and controlled by the borough.⁷ The only Lynn guild exercising overtly commercial and political functions in addition to its role as the town's leading religious fraternity, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, was its wealthy and prestigious merchant guild, which unlike those in many English towns never included 'a variety of petty traders and craftsmen'; still less did craftsmen constitute 'the majority of its members'.⁸ Of the numerous purely religious guilds, Corpus Christi was no less exclusive than the Trinity guild, and two more, dedicated to SS Giles and Julian and St George, also had an elite and mercantile focus. Some merchant-burgesses also patronized one or more of the less exclusive guilds and served as their officers, but it is hard to find evidence of social mixing between merchants and artisans. Membership records survive for very few of the guilds, but from those which do, no connection is evident between individual fraternities and specific occupational groups of artisans, as opposed to merchants. To newly arrived alien craftsmen, Lynn must have presented a startling contrast with their home towns on the Continent, where 'craft

⁴ King's Lynn Borough Archives (KLBA), KL/C 5/1; *Calendar of Patent Rolls (CPR), 1313–17*, p. 264; *CPR, 1317–21*, p. 389, 431; *CPR, 1321–4*, p. 90, 107; *Calendar of Close Rolls (CCR), 1318–23*, pp. 616–7, 654.

⁵ KLBA, KL/C 17/4-6.

⁶ D.M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, I (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 755, 758.

⁷ The existence, at least briefly, of a guild of tilers, founded in 1329, may appear to contradict this, but there is no evidence that its remit went beyond the religious and social functions common to all the town's many religious guilds. Its only extant record is published in Dorothy M. Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 319–21.

⁸ S.H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1995), p. 161; Charles Gross, *The Gild Merchant*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1890), I, p. 107. There is no satisfactory modern account of Lynn's numerous guilds, but the 'observations' in William Richards, *The History of Lynn*, 2 vols (King's Lynn, 1812), I, pp. 411–86 remain useful.

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guilds were essential for the organization of urban society in the late middle ages'.⁹

All merchants residing in Lynn were required to become burgesses and were fined if they traded on their own account before entering the liberty. Artisans could purchase their freedom, but they were not equal in status: only a merchant-burgess would be considered for civic office. However skilled or successful some might be, the artificers were essentially support services for the mercantile elite. Symptomatic of this attitude is the manner in which admissions to the freedom were entered in the borough records throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: an occupation was recorded only for those few new entrants who were butchers, drapers, goldsmiths, and so on: the word 'merchant' does not appear at all until 1419.¹⁰ Before that date, all burgesses were assumed to be merchants unless described otherwise: an assumption so engrained in the mercantile psyche that the difference in levels of privilege enjoyed by merchants and artificer-burgesses is nowhere stated in any borough ordinance: it literally went without saying.

It was a fresh episode in the intermittent struggle to free the borough of its overlord which would ultimately lead to change. The accession of Henry IV, whose friendship as Henry Bolingbroke the borough had secured by early and enthusiastic support, offered an irresistible opportunity to the borough's small ruling group. They initiated legal action against the bishop, alleging trespasses, extortions and oppressions against the inhabitants of Lynn. The bishop – the belligerent Henry Despenser – took counter action, and the disputes ground on until Despenser's death in 1406. The whole enterprise proved an expensive and humiliating failure, resulting in a backlash against five former mayors and a decade of conflict, riots and protests.¹¹

In a heroic effort to resolve the conflicts, the borough experimented in 1412 with a radical new governing constitution, but it proved unwieldy in practice and was abandoned in 1416. However, the body of burgesses was larger following an influx of artificers, most of them admitted en masse in 1412 in order to secure a reformist candidate as mayor, and its overall character had changed. Around half, rather than a tiny minority, were now artificers, not merchants. The introduction in 1418 of an annually elected common council offered a new entry point into civic government for artisans and lesser merchants alike, and the last formal

⁹ Peter Stabel, 'Guilds in late medieval Flanders: Myths and realities of guild life in an export-oriented environment', *Journal of Medieval History*, 30 (2004), p. 187.

¹⁰ John Catleyn, merchant (Anonymous [J. L'Estrange], *A Calendar of the Freeman of Lynn, 1292–1836* (Norwich, 1913), p. 32).

¹¹ Susan Maddock, 'Margery Kempe's home town and worthy kin', in Laura Varnam and Laura Kalas (eds), *Encountering the Book of Margery Kempe* (Manchester, 2021), pp. 167, 172–6; Anne F. Sutton, 'The bishop of Norwich and his "ghostly children": Lynn in the second reign of Edward IV', in David Harry and Christian Steer (eds), *The Urban Church in Late Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Clive Burgess*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies XXIX (Donington, 2019), pp. 332–52, reviews Lynn's relationship with successive bishops from a late fifteenth-century perspective.

distinction between merchants and artificer-burgesses was abolished in 1425: thereafter, artificer-burgesses became eligible for election to the inner council of twenty-four and the mayoralty, as well as to the common council. The extent to which this transformation opened opportunities to alien, as well as native, artisans will be examined later in this article.

III

The *England's Immigrants 1330–1550* database contains records from the alien subsidies, which were national taxes levied on first-generation immigrants from 1440 to 1487, together with entries relating to alien taxpayers from assessments for a general subsidy granted to Henry VIII in 1523. Some other, less voluminous, sources held by The National Archives at Kew are also included, among them the names of those who took an oath of fealty to the English crown in 1436 after the Duke of Burgundy's abandonment of his alliance with England prompted concern that people from the Low Countries were potential threats to national security.

One series of locally created archives, those of Lynn's leet court, has already been mentioned as recording the names of some alien residents in the fourteenth century, and more – between six and twelve aliens in any one year – are identifiable between 1400 and 1434, the year of the last surviving roll.¹² In isolation, they offer only anecdotal insights, but there is sufficient overlap between the last few leet rolls and the local and national records relating to the taxation of aliens to support a detailed survey (published in 2022) of forty aliens who were resident in Lynn between 1421 and 1430.¹³ A series of local assessments, or 'fines', on aliens, 1421–66, was a key source in that earlier study, but took account only of entries relating to aliens who were living in Lynn up to 1430. The present article exploits the whole series, which appears to be unusual, and possibly unique, among English borough records, so an explanation of its origins and character is also essential here.

The backlash against the mercantile ruling group's disastrous bid to shake off the bishop's lordship fractured the merchants' comfortable sense of superiority, and they became less tolerant of infringements of their privileges. In 1421, a group of merchants complained that aliens living in the town were undermining their business and robbing them of their profits.¹⁴ It was not the manufacturing businesses that bothered them, but the fact that a few of the immigrants, just like some of their English counterparts, were doing some small-scale trading on the side. There was some foundation for this allegation: a tailor from Zeeland and a broker, or dealer, called Albrecht Broun, had been presented to the leet court

¹² The leet court records are described more fully in Susan Maddock, 'Society, status and the leet court in Margery Kempe's Lynn', in Richard Goddard and Teresa Phipps (eds), *Town Courts and Urban Society in Late Medieval England, 1250–1500* (Woodbridge, 2019), pp. 200–19.

¹³ Susan Maddock, 'Encountering the "Duche" in Margery Kempe's Lynn', in Linda Clark (ed.), *The Fifteenth Century, XIX: Enmity and Amity* (Woodbridge, 2022), pp. 90–112.

¹⁴ KLBA, KL/C 6/5, m. 4d.

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in 1416 because they had been boarding newly arrived ships to buy up goods before they came to market.¹⁵ The merchants wanted the aliens to pay annual fees in exchange for being allowed to continue trading and proposed a licensing system for non-burgesses who bought and sold goods. In response, the mayor ordered the ward councillors to compile lists of tradespeople, both English and alien, in their wards. When the lists were presented to a guildhall meeting on 27 January 1421, a small number, including most of the aliens, were assessed for an annual payment, or 'fine' which would allow them to continue trading. Only one refused: Albrecht Broun the broker, who seems to have left the town rather than pay up. A different approach was taken with the native tradesmen: if they were thought to be doing well enough, they were asked to become burgesses at the usual fee of 40s.¹⁶ This was a complete change in policy from the period before 1412, when burgess applications by artisans were tolerated, rather than encouraged.

The assessments on aliens, each listing between eight and eighteen people with the sums they were expected to pay, were made more or less annually until 1466, providing a guide to the relative fortunes of the more prosperous aliens living in Lynn. From 1425 onwards, their relationships with property owners in the town are also evidenced thanks to the addition of the names of many of their landlords. The borough's hall rolls and books, in which the alien fines lists were entered, also contain information about burgess admissions omitted from the published list of Lynn freemen and, from 1419 onwards, the names of common council electors in each of the borough's nine wards, both of which are also key sources for this case study.¹⁷

All the entries relating to Lynn residents from the *England's Immigrants* database have been collated with information extracted from the borough records and references to the same person identified as far as possible. This is less than straightforward because one individual was often named differently in different contexts, as in the case of Baldwin Ducheman *alias* Williamstone, a cordwainer from Brouwershaven in Zeeland.¹⁸ Conversely, when faced with multiple entries for tailors called John, all recorded simply as 'John Tailleur', some guesswork is required to estimate how many individuals are represented. One also needs to be aware that people with names suggestive of an overseas origin were not necessarily first-generation immigrants.¹⁹ Names which look alien but have no supporting

¹⁵ KLBA, KL/C 17/1.

¹⁶ Maddock, 'Encountering the "Duche"', pp. 94–96.

¹⁷ Hall rolls, 1418–22, and books, 1423–1543 (KLBA, KL/C 6/4-6; KL/C 7/2-5).

¹⁸ He was recorded in leet rolls, 1416–34 (KLBA, KL/C 17/16-22), as Bowen or Baldwin Ducheman, but as Baldwin Williamstone in a hall book entry, 1428 (KLBA, KL/C 7/2, p. 195), and in the aliens' oaths list, 1436 (*CPR, 1429–36*, p. 563).

¹⁹ For example, James Nicholasson, the merchant-burgess son of an alien patten-maker who obtained letters of denization in 1413 after his status was questioned: Bart Lambert, 'Citizenry and nationality: The participation of immigrants in urban politics in later medieval England', *History Workshop Journal* 90 (2020), pp. 61–63.

evidence to confirm that status have therefore been discounted for the purposes for this study.

In all, at least 290 aliens were living in the borough for varying periods between 1421 and 1525. This is a surprisingly low number, compared with some other major seaports, especially those in the south and west of England, but less so in an East Anglian context. As Barrie Dobson noted in his study of aliens at York, 'East Anglia seems to have attracted fewer immigrants from across the North Sea than its late medieval religious and artistic history might have led one to suppose'.²⁰ After London, Bristol had the largest alien community: over 700 names of aliens are recorded as living there in 1440, the year of the first alien subsidy assessment. By comparison, Lynn had just forty-three alien taxpayers in 1440, slightly fewer than Great Yarmouth, while Boston, Lynn's rival port across The Wash, registered eighty and Sandwich in Kent had over 200.²¹

IV

Between 1421 and 1466, at least 235 aliens were resident in the borough of Lynn for varying periods, of whom no more than forty-three are recorded in any one year. Exactly where most of them originated from is impossible to determine. The best source for nationality during this period is the list of people who swore the oath of allegiance in 1436, which is heavily biased towards people of Low Countries origins. Twenty Lynn residents are named as having taken the oath, and other records identify the nationality of an additional seventeen, bringing the total to thirty-seven. Eleven of those thirty-seven were from Holland; eight from Brabant; and six from Zeeland, three each from Flanders and Scotland, two from Friesland, and one each from Utrecht, France, Ireland and Orkney. The single mostly commonly used descriptor, however, is the vague term 'Duche', which identified people by the way they spoke and was applied to dialects used across the whole of the Low Countries and the west and north of Germany.²² Three of the Brabanters and two Zeelanders at Lynn were also labelled as 'Duche', but for another fifty-four 'Duche', there is no more specific evidence of their place of origin. Of those not described as 'Duche', many have first names or surnames suggestive of similar origins, such as Deryk Claysson, recorded from 1436 to 1456, Herman Clokmaker, 1444–5, and a beer brewer called Aron Scuter, 1449–55. Occupations were commonly used as bynames, as for Christopher Lanternmaker, 1427–8, James Pursemaker, 1437–43,

²⁰ R. Barrie Dobson, 'Aliens in the city of York during the fifteenth century', in John Mitchell (ed.), *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of Andrew Martindale* (Stamford, 2000), p. 255.

²¹ *England's Immigrants* database; Ormrod et al. *Immigrant England*, p. 62 (table of 'Estimated alien presence in English provincial cities and towns, 1377–1524/5'). There is no obvious reason for the relatively low level of alien settlement in East Anglia.

²² For a fuller assessment of the usage and implications of 'Duche' or 'Doche', see Ormrod et al. *Immigrant England*, pp. 102–10.

Table 1 Trades of resident aliens at Lynn, 1421–66

Tailors (including 2 widows; 1 mother; 2 servants)	40
Cordwainers/shoemakers (including 4 servants)	27
Beer brewers (including 4 servants)	23
Hardwaremen (including 2 servants)	12
Weavers (including 1 servant)	10
Smiths	7
Patten-makers (including 3 servants)	6
Goldsmiths (including 1 servant)	5
Skinners	4
Pursemakers	3
Saddlers (including 1 servant)	3
Tilers	3
Turners	2
Lantern-makers	2
Listers (dyers) (1 woman; 1 servant)	2
Renovators of old clothes (1 dubber; 1 scourer)	2
Other trades (basket maker, boulder, broker, butcher's servant, chapman, clockmaker, currier, ferryman, greaseman, haberdasher, locksmith, oatmeal-maker, organ-maker, painter, shipman, spicer, taverner's servant)	17
Trades unknown (including 17 servants)	67
Total	235

and Henry Cordwainer, 1447–9, but those which occur most frequently – beer brewer, cordwainer, hardwareman and tailor – are strongly associated with regions which would have been considered ‘Duche’. In summary, the overwhelming majority of aliens in mid-fifteenth-century Lynn could have been labelled ‘Duche’ by their fellow townsfolk, whether or not the word was ever attached to them in an official record.

The range of trades practised by aliens in Lynn, 1421–66, is summarized in Table 1.

Forty alien tailors appear a large number, but many were recorded in just one year: only eight of the forty were living and working in Lynn for ten years or more. When all the tailors in Lynn were summoned to the guildhall in 1449 to select two headsmen in accordance with new craft ordinances devised by the mayor and council, there were thirty-eight, of whom just three were immigrants: John Taillour, Ducheman, Henry Blake and Albryght Taillour.²³ The ordinances show that becoming a burghess was a matter of choice for craftsmen, but those who did purchase the freedom could take advantage of discounted ‘newe setting uppe’ fees. No difference in fees is cited for alien, as opposed to native, tailors, but the

²³ KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fo. 283v. The word ‘craft’ was interpreted by Carole Rawcliffe (“‘That kindliness should be cherished more, and discord driven out’: the settlement of commercial disputes by arbitration in later medieval England”, in Jennifer Kermode (ed.), *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth Century England* (Stroud, 1991), p. 106) as meaning that these were ordinances of a ‘Guild of Tailors’, but the context shows that the word was being used here in its more everyday sense of a skilled trade.

‘sowers’, to whom the tailors presumably subcontracted the sewing of cut cloth, were a different matter. Every resident tailor was required to pay either $\frac{1}{4}$ d. weekly or 2d. quarterly for each denizen or native, sewer they employed, but double for every alien. This suggests there were appreciable numbers of aliens in Lynn fulfilling this subordinate role in tailoring: something which is not apparent from either the surviving alien subsidy returns or the borough assessments for fines.²⁴ The immigrant shoemakers were also a minority among the town’s shoemakers as a whole, but not by such a big margin. In the 1420s, one in three of the town’s shoemakers were aliens, so they must have been a more noticeable presence than the alien tailors were to their fellow workers.²⁵

Beer brewing, by contrast, was an exclusively alien trade, at least until the very late 1400s.²⁶ The words ale and beer are used more or less interchangeably today, but in late medieval England, the difference was very clear. Ale had been brewed here for centuries: it was safer than water and a staple part of the diet for all ages. Made from malted grains, boiled water, yeast and herbs, it was relatively quick to prepare but did not keep well, so most households brewed their own regularly and might sell off any surplus. Hopped beer had a different taste – the bitterness of the hops offset the sweetness of the malt – and it would keep for months rather than days. That longer barrel life made beer a more viable product for brewing on a large scale, supplying bigger domestic markets, but also for export. From the thirteenth century onwards, towns in northern Germany were exporting beer across the Baltic and into the Low Countries and, by the mid-fourteenth century, to England. Imported beer had been on sale in Lynn since at least 1359, enabling immigrant beer brewers to exploit an already well-established taste for their product.²⁷ Between one and four beer brewers were subject to alien fines each year from 1421 onwards, and all were doing well. The last assessment, 1466, has just one, but he was to pay more than three times as much as any of the other fifteen aliens.²⁸

The immigrants needed homes and workshops in their adopted home town, and this aspect of their relationship with their host community is unusually well documented at Lynn. Aliens were not legally permitted to buy land, so however prosperous a few of them may have been, they could not invest in freehold property in the way well-off native townsfolk did. The alien subsidy records in the *England’s Immigrants* database indicate whether aliens were householders or non-householders, but only nine entries in the national tax records, 1440–1525, record the names of

²⁴ Tailors’ use of sewers appears to be poorly documented in general but was not unique to Lynn: ordinances of the Exeter tailors’ guild, 1483, include a regulation relating to the employment of sewers (Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds*, p. 314).

²⁵ Maddock, ‘Encountering the “Duche”’, pp. 103–10.

²⁶ Simon Asshenden, an English beer brewer, was admitted burgess in 1498 (KLBA, KL/C 7/5, fo. 17v.).

²⁷ Maddock, ‘Encountering the “Duche”’, pp. 92–93.

²⁸ KLBA, KL/C 7/4, p. 231.

householders' landlords. Of those nine, six were Lynn residents taxed in 1440:²⁹

Herman Chapman, tenant of John Gebon, Purfleet Street.
 Deryk Ducheman, tenant of William Waynflete.
 Peter Ducheman tenant of Margaret Frank.
 Claus Smyth, tenant of Robert Hamond, chaplain.
 Nicholas Swete, tenant of John Nicollason.
 Nicholas Taliour, tenant of Richard Cosyn.

By itself, this snapshot of landlord–tenant relationships in 1440 would be of limited interest: the six Lynn aliens whose landlords are named are a minority of the twenty-five householders assessed for the alien subsidy in 1440. However, the local assessments of aliens at Lynn had already begun to name some of their landlords fifteen years earlier. At first, this was simply a means of uniquely identifying men whose names were unknown to the assessors, as was the case with three unnamed tailors who were tenants of Thomas Burgh, William Palmer and Muriel Spyre in 1433,³⁰ but the practice had become almost routine by the 1440s. This example, from 1453, lists fifteen individuals, all but four of whom are as tenants of named landlords.³¹

Deryk at the Ape 40d.
 Nicholas Smyth in the Cheker 13s. 4d.
 John Goldsmyth tenant of Giles Seintlo 40d.
 Frederic tenant of Thomas Salisbury 20d.
 William Wever tenant of Thomas Leighton 20d.
 Peryn Otemelmaker in Seggeforldlane 20d.
 John Taillour tenant of William Lewes 40d.
 Albryght Taillour tenant of the guild of St George 12d.
 Aron Berebruer tenant of S[imon] Pygot 10s.
 [blank] hardwareman tenant of Robert Hunte 40d.
 [blank] tenant of Idonia Salisbury in the Cheker 12d.
 [blank] tenant of Richard Cosyn in the Tuesday Market 12d.
 Peter Berebruer tenant of Margaret Frank 6s. 8d.
 [blank] tenant of William Nayler in Purfletestrete 20d.
 Henry Patynmaker servant of John Bawedryk 20d.
 Total: 54s. 8d.

The relationship between Peter Berebruer, Ducheman, and Margaret Frank, spanning two decades, is the longest recorded between one alien tenant and one landlord. Peter first appears in the alien fines lists in 1437, when he was assessed at a mid-range 6s. 8d., but by 1440, he was being asked for four times that sum, and double that demanded from any of the others assessed that year. His annual assessment remained the highest in town for the next three years, though it went down from 26s. 8d. to

²⁹ *England's Immigrants* database: the other three householders with named landlords were at Great Yarmouth, Norwich and Northampton.

³⁰ KLBA, KL/C 7/2, p. 119.

³¹ KLBA, KL/C 7/4, p. 7.

20s. in 1442, and by 1444, two other aliens, Nicholas Smyth and Godfrey Hardewareman, were seen as equally prosperous, assessed at the same sum of 20s. Thereafter, the sums paid by Peter Berebruer gradually reduced and settled back to 6s. 8d. most years from 1448 until his last appearance, in 1456. Even so, he was still among the top three in a list of sixteen. Peter Berebruer is very likely to be the same man as Peter Johnson, beer brewer, taxed as a householder in 1450, along with two alien servants in his employment. He probably died between March 1456 and Michaelmas 1457, by which time another alien beer brewer, John Cannynges, had taken over the tenancy.³²

Margaret Frank, Peter Berebruer's landlady, was the widow of Philip Frank, a prominent merchant and former mayor who died in 1432.³³ She outlived him by at least twenty-five years without remarrying: instead, she appears successfully to have continued the Lynn-based aspects of his enterprises in her own name, including a tavern in which the borough entertained distinguished visitors, such as Thomas, Lord Scales and Joan, and Lady Bardolf in the 1440s.³⁴ Margaret also had premises in the North End which her husband had used for ale brewing: in 1430, he was the fifth biggest of twenty-five ale-brewers in the borough, but there is no mention of a Frank brewery in the next leet roll, 1434.³⁵ It seems likely that Margaret looked for a tenant in preference to running the brewery herself, and that it was Peter who first used the former ale brewery to produce beer.

Something similar may have occurred in relation to the brewery of another leading mercantile family: the Salisburys, who had acquired the house and brewery of Robert atte Lathe in Lathe Street through Robert Salisbury's first marriage to Robert's widow, Joan.³⁶ Robert Salisbury was last licensed as an ale-brewer in 1426: the following year, Henry Beerbrewer was there for half a year.³⁷ After that, there is no unambiguous record of the brewery until 1445, when a Henry Berebruer, who may be a different man, appears in the alien fines list as tenant of Robert's son, Thomas Salisbury. Another, unnamed, beer-brewer had taken over by 1448 and was last recorded there in 1450.³⁸

Across the town as a whole, forty-four landlords of alien tenants are named in the alien fines lists, 1421–66 or the alien subsidy returns, 1440. Thirty-one of these landlords were burgesses or their widows; at least twenty were merchants; thirteen were elected at least once as mayor, while another nine served as one of the four chamberlains. Clearly, these wealthy

³² KLBA, KL/C 7/2-4, *passim*.

³³ For a biography of Philip Frank, see J.S. Roskell, Linda Clark, and Carole Rawcliffe (eds), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421*, III (Stroud, 1992), pp. 122–3.

³⁴ Chamberlains' account, 1444–5 (KLBA, KL/C 39/55).

³⁵ KLBA, KL/C 17/21-2.

³⁶ Will of Robert Salisbury, 1429 (KLBA, KL/C 12/11). The atte Lathe/Salisbury house, now known as Hampton Court, still stands on the corner of Nelson Street and St Margaret's Lane.

³⁷ KLBA, KL/C 17/19-20.

³⁸ KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fos 245v., 260v., 279v.

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members of the borough elite were happy to lease premises to enterprising alien tenants. The location of the premises within the town is rarely easy to pinpoint – most of the merchants owned tenements in more than one area – but the street is occasionally named and the relevant ward is sometimes identifiable from other evidence. Sixteen of the properties let to aliens by named landlords can be placed in a specific ward: of those, ten are in Chequer, three in North End, two in Trinity Hall and one in Stonegate. This matches the pattern which emerges from analysing the data relating to all aliens during the period of the alien fines.

From leet records, together with the earliest fines assessment, 1421, which is the only one to identify the immigrants by ward, it appears that in the 1420s, well over half the aliens in Lynn lived in the central riverside ward of Chequer, an area dominated by merchants, rather than artisans (Figure 1). The town's main industrial zone was inland, in Kettlewell ward, where not a single alien can be identified as living.³⁹ After 1434, when the leet rolls give out, there is less evidence as to ward of residence, and only 104 of the 235 aliens who were living in Lynn for varying periods between 1421 and 1466 are identifiable with a specific ward, but if those 104 people are typical, the balance remained the same. Despite their being artisans, not merchants, not a single immigrant can be identified in Kettlewell; the overwhelming majority were in Chequer ward, and the next highest number in North End.

The north-south street called the Chequer runs along the line of the riverbank as it would have been in the early twelfth century, but the river was gradually pushed westwards over the following centuries, providing reclaimed land for development (Figure 2).⁴⁰ This was used first as quays, then additionally for warehouses, and by the late fourteenth century also for substantial houses on the west side of the street. Two of the town's wealthiest religious guilds, Corpus Christi and St George's, built new halls on the west side of the Chequer in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁴¹ The guildhalls were both set in a complex of buildings and open spaces leading westward to the river, most of which were let out either as dwelling houses, some with associated gardens, or as storage areas for goods. The same doubtless applied to four other quayside tenements on the west side of the Chequer, parts of which were let to aliens between 1440 and 1462 by individual owners: Henry Bermyngham, Thomas, then Idonia, Salisbury, William Lewes, and John Burdy, who had acquired Robert Hammond's quay and buildings by 1456.⁴² Bermyngham, Salisbury and Lewes were

³⁹ Maddock, 'Encountering the "Duche"', pp. 97–107.

⁴⁰ Trevor Ashwin and Alan Davison (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 3rd edn (Chichester, 2005), pp. 80–81.

⁴¹ St George's Guildhall, built between 1406 and 1420, is still extant. Peter Sykes, 'The site of Corpus Christi Guildhall, King's Lynn: A documentary search', *The Quarterly: The Journal of the Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group*, 47 (2002), identified the site of the lost Corpus Christi guildhall on the southern half of 21 King Street, but the guild also owned the northern half of this large plot.

⁴² *CCR, 1454–61*, p. 132.

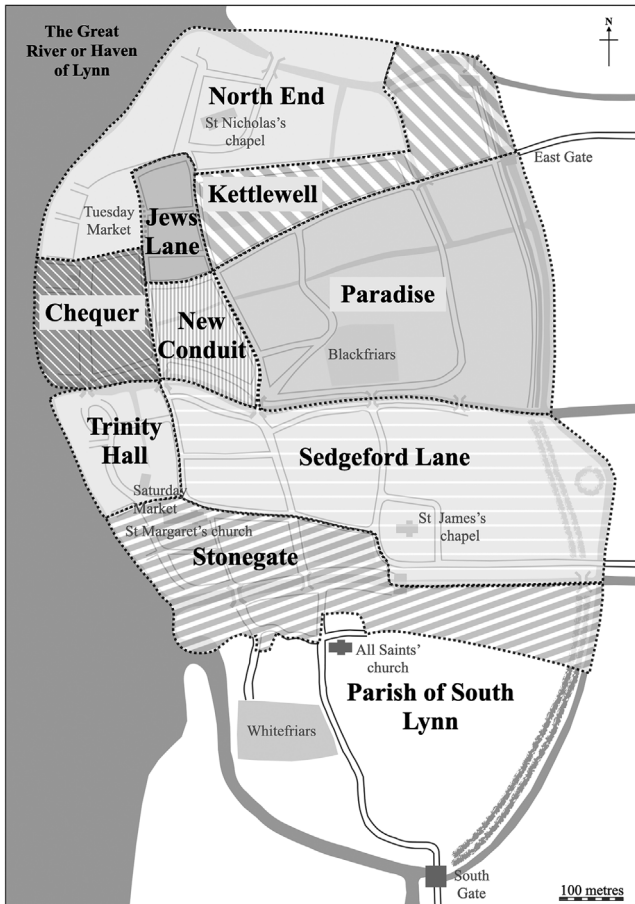


Figure 1 Map showing the locations of Lynn's nine wards, with the names they acquired by the late sixteenth century.

all merchant-burgesses and members of the ruling group who served at least twice as mayors. Their alien tenants were mainly tailors, among them Wynkyn Taillour, William Lewes's tenant in the Chequer from 1455 to 1466, by which time his unnamed mother was living with him.⁴³

A patchy series of Corpus Christi guild accounts provides glimpses into the gradual expansion of its riverside site, investment in new buildings and patterns of occupation. Street-facing units were occupied on an annual basis by artisans, including tailors, coopers, a smith and a barber in the 1430s, and twenty years later, several cellars and open yards close to the

⁴³ The alien fines list, 1466, includes 'Wynkyn Taillour et mater sua 20d.' (KLBA, KL/C 7/4 p. 231).

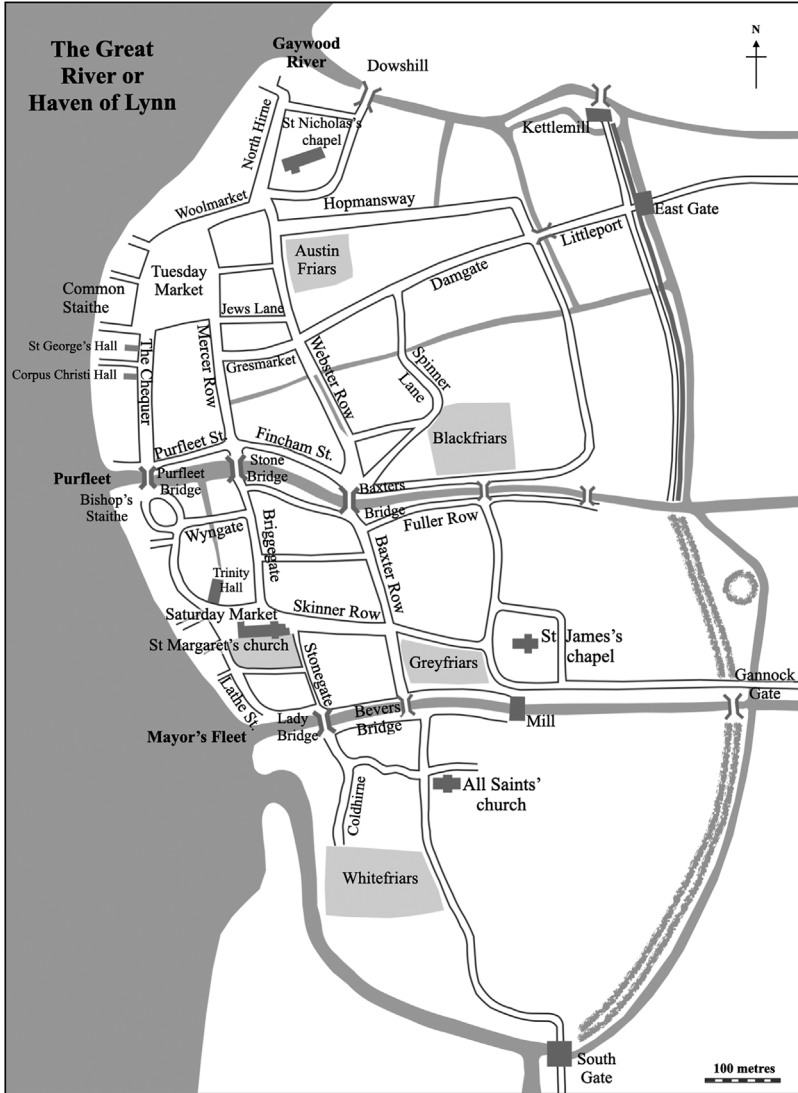


Figure 2 Street map of late medieval Lynn.

river were being offered on short-term hire.⁴⁴ The guild’s tenants in 1459–60 included two ‘Duchemen’ who hired storage space for a few weeks each, and the following year, John Clayson and Albright Ducheman rented the ‘great cellar’ for six months, while ‘divers Duchemen’ used another

⁴⁴ KLBA, KL/C 57/19-24, 34.

1468296, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-230X.13436 by University of East Anglia, Wiley Online Library on [19/02/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

cellar for ten weeks.⁴⁵ The guild also had a few longer term alien tenants: Martin Ducheman, for example, was living in a house somewhere on the site by 1493–4.⁴⁶ The Corpus Christi complex was able to accommodate a variety of annual and short-term tenants, native and alien, residential and mercantile, and where they are comparable, the amounts charged in rent show that the terms offered were the same for all tenants, irrespective of status.⁴⁷ The same can reasonably be assumed to be true of the private landlords, for whom no similar records have survived.

Throughout most of the fourteenth century and the first quarter of the fifteenth, the wealthiest ward in Lynn had been the North End,⁴⁸ but by the middle of the century it had been totally eclipsed by Chequer.⁴⁹ The Hanse's targeting of the west side of the Chequer as their preferred location for a base in Lynn during negotiations leading to the Treaty of Utrecht, 1474, forcefully demonstrates its desirability.⁵⁰ By 1466, the last year of alien fines, therefore, the more successful alien residents, alongside native artisans, were contributing to the prosperity of the area in which most of them lived. Why, then, did the borough cease its annual assessments on aliens? The total income from the annual fines reached a peak of £7 13s. 8d. in 1447 but declined to less than £1 by 1466, so one reason may have been that the effort was no longer worth the small returns.⁵¹ Meanwhile, resident aliens were increasingly being assessed for local taxes on the same basis as native inhabitants. A list of town tax arrears for 1452 includes two aliens in Chequer ward – Deryk Johnson, tailor, and Henry Patynmaker – and two 'Duchemen', John Warner and William Bayard, in North End.⁵² None of these four was assessed at more than 20d., but a one-off assessment made in January 1461 to meet the cost of sending twenty-four men to join the king's army puts Paul Berebrewere, Symon Pygot's 'Duche' tenant in Chequer ward, at the same level as his landlord, a merchant and former mayor: both were assessed at 6s. 8d. Two other aliens appear in this highly selective list of 198 taxpayers: Wynkyn Taillour and Hugh Smyth, who were both Chequer residents assessed at 20d.⁵³ Hugh Smyth's long career, documented over almost forty years, is of particular interest because it spans the two phases of alien regulation, before and after 1466, to the second of which we now turn.

⁴⁵ KLBA, KL/C 57/34-5.

⁴⁶ KLBA, KL/C 57/2.

⁴⁷ In 1459–60, cellars and yards were let at the rate of 3d. a week to Edmund Westhorpe, a merchant-burgess and member of the borough's inner ruling group, and to two different unnamed 'Duchemen' (KL/C 57/34).

⁴⁸ Maddock, 'Society, status and the leet court', p. 207.

⁴⁹ There are almost no detailed tax assessments for the fifteenth century, but the Hall book records total sums which tax collectors were expected to raise in each ward in 1453–4, 1454–5 and 1461 (KLBA, KL/C 7/4, pp. 31, 49–50, 154–5).

⁵⁰ Stuart Jenks, 'Trade and relations between Lynn and the Hanse in the Middle Ages', in Claus Friedland and Paul Richard (eds), *Essays in Hanseatic History* (Stibbard, 2005), p. 104. The building finally assigned to the Hanse in 1475 still stands between St Margaret's Place and South Quay.

⁵¹ KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fo. 234v.; KL/C 7/4, p. 231.

⁵² KLBA, KL/C 39/57; KL/C 7/4 p. 155.

⁵³ KLBA, KL/C 7/4, p. 154.

Table 2 Trades of resident aliens at Lynn, 1466–1525

Shoemakers (including three servants)	8
Hatmakers (including three servants)	7
Beer brewers (including four servants)	5
Tailors	4
Beer sellers (one woman and her servant)	2
Merchants (including one Danish servant)	2
Shipmen (both servants)	2
Other trades (cooper, smith, goldsmith, hardwareman, labourer, stationer)	6
Trades unknown (including one widow and two servants)	20
Total	56

V

Between 1466 and 1525, at least fifty-six aliens were living in Lynn for varying periods. The best single snapshot of their nationalities comes from the alien subsidy for 1483–4, which includes thirty Lynn taxpayers. Fifteen were Zeelanders, two each came from Brabant and Flanders and one from Holland; seven were Scots, and one, a merchant's servant, was Danish. The origins of the remaining two are unknown.

Evidence of where in the town aliens were living is much sparser after 1466, but the Chequer area seems to have retained its appeal, providing homes for eight of the twenty-two who can be placed in a specific ward. Their occupations, however, as shown in Table 2, show a change from earlier in the century: the appearance of hatmakers from the Low Countries represents a new trend, albeit one lagging well behind the arrival of 'Duche' hatmakers in London and York.⁵⁴ At least five, four from Zeeland and one from Brabant, were living in Lynn by 1483. There is no evidence as to whether they were making felt hats, or straw, but there was certainly a market for the latter: 1,400 straw hats arrived in Lynn in August 1465, as part of a Lynn merchant's cargo,⁵⁵ and in 1476 two 'Duche' hatmakers, Nicholas Goldsmyth and William Dirikson, set up an unlicensed shop to sell their own straw hats. This had not been forgotten a year later: in July 1477, the borough authorities imposed a 20s. fine on the two men and decreed that the hat shop was not to be resurrected on pain of imprisonment. The entry is not explicit as to whether or not the two 'Duchemen' were residents, but the delay in taking action on the previous year's offence, and anticipation of a recurrence, suggests they were seasonal visitors who had just returned to the town, hoping again to take advantage of a harvest-time demand for straw hats.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Shannon McSheffrey and Ad Putter (eds), *The Dutch Hatmakers of Late Medieval and Tudor London* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 13–14.

⁵⁵ Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 373.

⁵⁶ KL/C 7/4, p. 373.

The abandonment in 1466 of a separate system of impositions on Lynn's resident aliens suggests that the borough no longer saw them as a group justifying differential treatment within its local tax regime. This did not affect the immigrants' liability for national taxes, although the levying of alien subsidies also began to fall out of favour soon afterwards and was abandoned after 1487, 'having long since outlived its useful purpose'.⁵⁷ But did the immigrants now have an equal voice with their English counterparts when it came to town affairs? Bart Lambert, who has examined the extent of alien participation in English urban politics, has suggested that nationality was of secondary importance in most instances in the late medieval period.⁵⁸ With regard to Lynn, we have already seen that the status of native artificer-burgesses was enhanced between 1412 and 1425: so much so, that by the middle of the century, some had been selected as jurats and mayors, while rather more were elected as common councillors. The latter were chosen by annual ward meetings in which non-burgesses always participated: a feature of Lynn's governing arrangements between 1418 and 1524 which has escaped notice in previous studies of the borough's constitution.⁵⁹ Unlike the Norwich composition of 1415, which restricts the right to vote to citizens, the formal document setting out the procedure to be followed at Lynn made no stipulation as to the status of electors, as opposed to councillors, who were to be burgesses considered 'sufficient, peaceful and discreet'.⁶⁰ The early elections were held under the mayor's watchful eye, and the meetings were very different from the mass gatherings which had swamped some mayoral elections and other key meetings at the height of the troubles, but the extent of non-burgess participation is nonetheless remarkable.

The most prominent burgesses tended not to participate in common council elections, leaving the relatively modest responsibility of choosing ward councillors to less exalted men, including non-burgesses, who were invariably in the majority. In 1440, for example, 151 of the 238 electors were non-burgesses, and from 1467 onwards the electors included between one and five aliens in most years.⁶¹ The electors represent only a minority of male householders, even in 1440, when there was a record turnout of 238, while in most years the total number of electors was below 200, and the numbers declined over time to fewer than 100 by 1513. In this context, alien participation in common council elections matched, and possibly exceeded, the proportion of aliens among all Lynn's resident

⁵⁷ Ormrod et al. *Immigrant England*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Lambert, 'Citizenry and nationality'.

⁵⁹ Alice Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols (London, 1894), II, p. 421; James Tait, *The Medieval English Borough* (Manchester, 1936), p. 321. Both relied on a cursory description of the ward electorates in Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *Eleventh Report, Appendix 3: The Manuscripts of the Corporations of Southampton and King's Lynn* (London, 1887), p. 162. The electors' status can only be determined by comparing their names with records of freemen.

⁶⁰ W. Hudson and J.C. Tingey, *The Records of the City of Norwich*, 2 vols (Norwich, 1906–10), I, p. 99; HMC, *Eleventh Report*, pp. 245–6.

⁶¹ KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fos 128v.–129; KL/C 7/4-5 *passim*.

householders. At least one alien is named in thirty of the forty-one annual election records between 1467 and 1514, and no fewer than five in 1502. The majority of the aliens were non-burgesses, like most of their fellow electors, but, also like them, some purchased the freedom after they had acted as electors at least once. In other words, they appear to have followed exactly the same pattern as native householders, but only after the abolition of the alien fines in 1466, again suggesting a change of policy at that time.

Hugh Smyth's personal story provides further confirmation of this shift in attitude towards aliens from 1467 onwards. A Zeelander, he first appears in 1446–7, as a supplier of various types of iron nails for repair work on a mill belonging to the borough.⁶² He was first assessed for alien fines, at a mid-range 6s. 8d., in March 1450, when he was living in Purfleet Street.⁶³ That prompted him to follow the examples of two immigrant artisans of a previous generation, a patten-maker from Brabant called John Baudryk and Baldwin Williamsone, a cordwainer from Zeeland, and purchase the freedom of Lynn, thus escaping any future liability for the local fines.⁶⁴ Baudryk, perhaps on Williamsone's behalf as well as his own, negotiated a deal after they were handed assessments of 20s. and 6s. 8d., respectively, in February 1428. On 21 April, the town's governing body agreed in principle that John Patynmaker *alias* Baudryk might enter into the liberty for a payment of £4, which was double the usual fee. Both men were formally admitted in early May, only two days apart. This decision set a precedent which was followed for the next century, or more.⁶⁵

More than twenty years passed after Baudryk and Williamsone became burgesses before Hugh Smyth followed their example, on 23 September 1450.⁶⁶ He continued to supply nails, hinges, hooks and spindles for repairing the town's mills and other buildings and also carried out similar work for the Trinity guild,⁶⁷ from which we can be sure he had not left the town, but he is otherwise unrecorded until his name first appears in the common council electors' list for Chequer ward in 1467.⁶⁸ Thereafter, he was recorded as present almost every year until 1484, and probably died soon after. His voting record outstrips that of any of the other twenty alien electors who are named between 1467 and 1514, either from a keen interest in town affairs, or perhaps in being seen as a responsible burghess. It is telling that he did not participate in an election until 1467, the year after the last alien fines assessment, again suggesting a change in policy.

⁶² KLBA, KL/C 39/56.

⁶³ KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fo. 279v.

⁶⁴ Maddock, 'Encountering the "Duche"', pp. 99, 102, which incorrectly suggests Baudryk was the only alien artisan admitted burghess before 1490. The present article reflects subsequent research.

⁶⁵ KLBA, KL/C 7/2, pp. 190, 193, 195. William Garrett paid £4 for admission as an alien surgeon in 1553 (KL/C 7/6, fo. 186).

⁶⁶ KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fo. 291v. As in 1428, the £4 fee is the sole indicator of alien status.

⁶⁷ KLBA, KL/C 39/57; KL/C 38/21, 23.

⁶⁸ KLBA, KL/C 7/4, p. 243.

The next two aliens to become burgesses were the 'Duchemen' Sibert Hase, 1477, and Peter Potter, 1483.⁶⁹ Both were occasional common council electors, but that is unremarkable by this time. Next in this still-select category of alien burgesses was James Johnson, a Zeelander who was living in Lynn by 1483, when he was a servant living in someone else's household.⁷⁰ He became a burges of Lynn, as a 'Duche' shoemaker in 1490, and probably married not long after: his will, made in 1493, shows that his wife Margaret was pregnant with their only child at the time of his death.⁷¹ Margaret remarried within two or three years, to Peter Peterson the younger, a hardwareman in the parish of St Andrew, Norwich. There were several alien hardwaremen in Lynn in the middle years of the century, two of whom were described in 1448 as servants of two Norwich hardwaremen, Deryk and Hans, one Flemish and the other from Brabant.⁷² It also seems likely that a Matthew Hardwareman recorded at Lynn in 1463 was the same man as Matthew Johnson, hardwareman, who paid the alien subsidy in Norwich in 1469 and died in 1474.⁷³ Immigrants from the Low Countries seem to have cornered the hardware market in both Lynn and Norwich and readily moved between the two: trade and family connections would have facilitated moves between towns, as well as across the North Sea.

Margaret Peterson, formerly Johnson, died early in 1497, leaving her infant son, named James after his father, in the care of a family friend who was also named an executor along with Margaret's husband.⁷⁴ He, too, died only few months later. The lavish pious and charitable provisions in Peter Peterson's will suggest he was a prosperous man.⁷⁵ It names several members of the Peterson family and their connections in Norwich, among them Adam Hardwareman and Magnus Hatmaker. In addition to his stepson, James Johnson, who was to have 40s. when he reached the age of sixteen years, Peter mentions a different James Johnson, the son of another alien hardwareman called Gerard Johnson. Gerard was connected with yet another Norwich hardwareman, Florence Johnson, who died in the parish of St Peter Mancroft in 1500.⁷⁶ Florence made his wife, Joan, executrix, but also appointed two helpers, of whom Gerard Johnson was one: the other was Abraham Pawlysson, who brings us back again to Lynn.

Abraham Powle, Powlesson or Polson was the first alien merchant to settle in Lynn for almost two centuries. A Burgundian, he was at Lynn

⁶⁹ KLBA, KL/C 7/4, pp. 375, 472. The 1477 entry explicitly states that Hase paid £4 'because he is an alien'.

⁷⁰ His entry in the alien subsidy return, 1483 (*England's Immigrants* database) is the only record which identifies him as a Zeelander.

⁷¹ *England's Immigrants* database; *Calendar of Freeman*, p. 69; The National Archives (TNA), PROB 11/9/334.

⁷² KLBA, KL/C 7/3, fo. 245v.; *England's Immigrants* database.

⁷³ KLBA, KL/C 7/4, p. 196; Norfolk Record Office (NRO), NCC will register Gelour 52.

⁷⁴ NRO, NCC will register Multon 33.

⁷⁵ NRO, NCC will register Multon 55.

⁷⁶ NRO, NCC will register Wight 78.

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by 1498, when he was admitted a burgess as a 'Docheman' at the alien rate of £4.⁷⁷ In 1515, he enhanced his status further by obtaining letters of denization. This involved paying a fee and taking an oath of allegiance to the Crown: in return, the denizen and his descendants acquired the same legal status as an English-born subject.⁷⁸ Formal denization had been an option for more than a century for those aliens who could afford to pay for it, but Abraham Powlesson is only the third man from Lynn recorded as having done so.⁷⁹ Abraham Powlesson's main reasons for denization may have been to enable him to buy and sell freehold land and to sue in English courts of law. He held properties in Lynn, West Winch, Hardwick and Runcton, and from 1515 onwards, he was party, as plaintiff and defendant, to various suits in Common Pleas and Chancery.⁸⁰ In his mercantile activities at Lynn, he occasionally risked infringing the borough's trading rules, as did some of his English counterparts: he was fined or had his liberties as a burgess temporarily removed at least three times between 1514 and 1520 for improperly purchasing quantities of fish from 'Duche' ships before they had been landed for open sale.⁸¹

Powlesson lived in Lynn for at least forty years, but where he resided for most of that time is unclear. He was a common council elector in Chequer ward in 1502, and by 1510, he had a lease from the borough of Sparrow Hall, a substantial house between the Saturday Market and the river which his family still held in 1546. In 1525, however, his national tax assessments were based on goods in two different wards: New Conduit and Stonegate.⁸² He died in 1539, perhaps after a short and sudden illness, as his will is surprisingly brief and informally expressed for so wealthy a man. It specifies a burial place in St Margaret's church 'afore my stole where I doo use to sitte' and after various pious provisions leaves the residue of his estate to his son Sybrand, who, by implication, was also his sole executor. Just one, quite exceptional, provision hints at how well-connected Abraham Powlesson was: his choice of the bishop of Norwich, William Ruge, as supervisor, 'desiring him to see this my will performed and to stand with my son Sybrand in his right with his honourable advice and counsel in time of his need, to whom I will a ring of gold wherein shall be graven the image of Abraham for a token of a remembrance'.⁸³

Abraham's appeal for the bishop's 'advice and counsel' should not be read as implying that Sybrand Powlesson was young or inexperienced. Sybrand had already acted as executor to two wealthy Lynn merchants

⁷⁷ KLBA, KL/C 7/5, fo. 12.

⁷⁸ Ormrod et al. *Immigrant England*, pp. 24–29, describes the process of denization and its development between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

⁷⁹ *England's Immigrants* database. The earlier denizens were James Nicholson in 1413, whose father had been an immigrant, and a Breton called Henry Drewe in 1414.

⁸⁰ For example, an action of debt against another Lynn merchant, John Alysaunder, 1513 (TNA, CP 40/1038).

⁸¹ KLBA, KL/C 7/5, fos 149, 150, 158, 197, 211.

⁸² KLBA, KL/C 7/5, fos 51, 107, 126; *England's Immigrants* database.

⁸³ NRO, NCC will register Deynes 47.

who were relatives through marriage to his wife, Joan: his father-in-law, William Castell, 1524, and his brother-in-law, Thomas Trunche, who died in 1525.⁸⁴ Admitted burgess in 1524, Sybrand was elected to the common council in 1526, served as constable of Stonegate ward, 1526–30, and was made one of the twelve alderman in 1541.⁸⁵ He died in 1546, asking to be buried next to his parents in front of St Lawrence's altar in St Margaret's church. His will names several family members and friends in Lynn and Norwich. A reference to 'my uncle Sir John Florows' explains Florence Johnson's choice of Abraham Powlesson as executor in 1500: the unnamed wife to Abraham and mother to Sybrand had been Florence's daughter.⁸⁶

As an alien merchant-burgess of Lynn in the two centuries before the Reformation, Abraham Powlesson appears to have been unique. During his lifetime, six other aliens became burgesses: Clement Goter, Ducheman, 1498; William Ellam, a Scots shoemaker, 1519; two 'Duche' shoemakers, William Blok and Walter Bussheman, 1520; William Nycholassan, a Frisian hardwareman, and Reginald Foxe, described simply as 'alien', also in 1520.⁸⁷ Compared with Powlesson, these six burgesses have a low profile, although the three shoemakers are all documented in Lynn for around twenty years, mainly as common council electors from 1506 onwards. Of eleven aliens, all 'Duchemen', listed as taxpayers at Lynn in 1524–5, Abraham Powlesson was by far the wealthiest, with goods totalling £66 13s. 4d.; at the other end of the scale, three had wages valued at £1, on which they were to pay 12d. each.⁸⁸ One wage-earner, Reynold Wolfe, who was assessed at 16d. on wages of 26s. 8d., deserves separate mention.

Reynold, or Reyner, Wolfe is well known for his later career in London as a stationer and printer in St Paul's Churchyard, where he set up his press in 1542. Five years later, he was licensed by Edward VI as royal typographer and bookseller in the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages. A Gelderlander from Druten, he obtained letters of denization in 1533, renewed and modified in 1542, and citizenship of London in 1536, and he was a founder member of the Stationers' Company, incorporated by royal charter in 1557. After his death in 1573, his widow, Joan, took over responsibility for his business until her own death, only a few months later, in 1574.⁸⁹ Peter Blayney's comprehensive study of the Stationers' Company shows that Wolfe was based in London by 1530 as an importer and seller of books: that he had already been operating this trade in

⁸⁴ TNA, PROB 11/21/318; PROB 11/21/595.

⁸⁵ KLBA, KL/C 7/5, fos 246, 256v., 333.

⁸⁶ NRO, NRO and NCC will register Whytefoot 183. Sir John Florence was a chantry priest in St Peter Mancroft, Norwich (G. Baskerville, 'Married clergy and pensioned religious in Norwich Diocese, 1555', *The English Historical Review*, 48/190 (1933), p. 210).

⁸⁷ KLBA, KL/C 7/5, fos 18v., 206, 211, 215v., 216, 218v.

⁸⁸ *England's Immigrants* database.

⁸⁹ Peter W.M. Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London, 1501–1557*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 321, 463, 492–5, 607, 663.

England since at least 1524 has previously gone unnoticed.⁹⁰ Presumably he stayed in Lynn for a few weeks or months, obtaining commissions from potential customers before returning to the Continent: he was still travelling to and fro between Europe and London in the 1530s.

VI

From the mid-fourteenth century onwards, most of the resident aliens in Lynn came from the Low Countries and northern Europe and were routinely described as ‘Duche’. The implications of this vague term, which the much-travelled Margery Kempe used primarily to describe the people of ‘Duchelonde’, and Danzig in particular,⁹¹ seem to have shifted by the middle of the fifteenth century. Lynn’s ‘Duche’ inhabitants were now overwhelmingly from the Low Countries, and Zeeland had overtaken Holland as the most commonly specified area of origin by the 1480s. Overall, their numbers were modest even for East Anglia, and, as at Great Yarmouth, they were all artisans, with the single striking exception of Abraham Powlesson.

Lynn’s prosperity was founded on international trade, which remained the engine of its economy and the prime focus of its governing group during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As a consequence, craft guilds never gained a toehold in the town, and the regulation of crafts by the borough was relatively light-touch. Rather than resenting the second-class status of artificers in Lynn, some immigrants may have welcomed a working environment which was not only less regulated than in their homelands, but less so than in many English towns, London in particular.⁹² The availability of suitable premises for rent in the commercial heart of the town must have been an attraction, while the town’s wealthy merchant community offered a market for clothing, footwear and luxury goods, as well as beer. The fact that only one of Lynn’s more prosperous aliens refused to comply with the first round of fines assessments in 1421 suggests that most valued the opportunities they had found: a conclusion reinforced by the readiness of a few aliens to invest in purchasing burgess status in exchange for exemption from the annual fines. Aliens were commonly subject to differential treatment in respect of eligibility for full citizenship, so the requirement at Lynn to pay double the regular fee was far from exceptional. More unusual was the absence of pressure on Lynn’s artisans in general to become burgesses: for those craftsmen, native and alien alike, who may have had no interest in public affairs or in taking on additional responsibilities, this, too, may have been a positive attraction.

⁹⁰ Blayney’s work predates the *England’s Immigrants* database, which enables such connections to be easily identified.

⁹¹ Maddock, ‘Encountering the “Duche”’, pp. 93–94.

⁹² Ormrod et al., *Immigrant England*, pp. 33–35, 256–7.

Overall, the picture which emerges over the last three quarters of the fifteenth century is one of minimal hostility and growing integration into civic life, albeit not to the same level as at Exeter. There, aliens not only took up the freedom in appreciable numbers, but a handful also became civic officeholders. Maryanne Kowaleski attributes this harmonious picture primarily to the city's healthy economy in the fifteenth century.⁹³ Although the period of Lynn's greatest prosperity may have passed, it, too, was still among the ten wealthiest towns in England in 1525.⁹⁴ At Great Yarmouth, by contrast, where the burgesses repeatedly lamented their town's economic decline, anti-alien prejudice was more evident, and the town's alien residents shared the reluctance of native artisans to join their dwindling number.⁹⁵ In most towns, aliens were subject to differential treatment, such as restrictions on access to the freedom, or liability for additional fees, but active hostility, let alone physical violence, was rare. The same was not true in London, where the various immigrant communities were larger and more visible and anti-alien sentiment was both stronger and more closely aligned with national developments.⁹⁶ In a recent study of the famous Evil May Day riot of 1517, Shannon McSheffrey identified 'rivalries between alien artisans and London guild craftsmen' and 'frustrations arising from the structural problems faced by young English artisans' as factors lying behind the violence.⁹⁷

At Lynn, as we have seen, craft guilds were absent and the tensions between different groups which had erupted in riots in the early fifteenth century had largely been resolved, although mercantile resentment towards those artisan non-burgesses who were buying and selling goods in the town led to measures being taken against the latter in 1421. English tradesmen were pressured to undertake the costs and responsibilities of burgess admission, while aliens were assessed for annual payments. There was no precedent in Lynn at that time for aliens who were not merchants becoming burgesses, so this difference does not necessarily reflect increased hostility towards aliens as such. The admission as burgesses of the first two aliens in 1428 was therefore a significant change in principle, although it was some time before their example was followed by others. A further retreat from differential treatment came in 1466–7, when the borough abandoned its annual fines on the better-off aliens and either encouraged, or ceased to discourage, their participation in the

⁹³ Kowaleski, 'The assimilation of foreigners', pp. 170–2, 178–9.

⁹⁴ Alan Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in D.M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, I (Cambridge, 2000), p. 765.

⁹⁵ Liddy and Lambert, 'The civic franchise', pp. 139–143.

⁹⁶ Ormrod et al. *Immigrant England*, p. 249; J.L. Bolton, 'London and the anti-alien legislation of 1439–40', in Ormrod et al., *Resident Aliens*, pp. 33–35; Matthew Davies, 'Aliens, Crafts and Guilds in Late Medieval London', in Elizabeth A. New and Christian Steer (eds), *Medieval Londoners* (London, 2019), pp. 119–47.

⁹⁷ Shannon McSheffrey, 'Disorder, Riot and Governance in Early Tudor London: Evil May Day, 1517', *The English Historical Review*, 138/590–1 (2023), p. 33.

annual elections for ward councillors, whether or not they were burgesses, on an equal basis with other householders.

Although James Johnson's will of 1493 contains no hint of his having maintained links with his countrymen, his widow's subsequent move to Norwich to marry into a network of interconnected alien families provides some insight into the extent to which aliens might value 'socializing with those who shared their language and origins', and the support which such networks could provide.⁹⁸ While we have no explicit evidence as to the extent to which communications were also maintained with friends and relatives overseas, the frequent comings and goings of 'Duche' mariners and merchants' servants along the riverside quays of Lynn, where 'Duche' artisans had already taken up residence, must have enabled news to travel readily across the North Sea. Perhaps Wynkyn Taillour's mother was the recipient of such a message in the 1460s, encouraging her to venture over the sea herself to join her son in his new home between the Chequer and the Great Haven of Lynn.

⁹⁸ Charlotte Berry, *The Margins of Late Medieval London, 1430–1540* (London, 2022) p. 68.