

King's Lynn and the Low Countries in the Early Seventeenth Century: Maritime Trade and Sexual Scandal

G. ALAN METTERS

School of History and Art History, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

Abstract

This article analyses the general pattern of King's Lynn's overseas trade as it is recorded in the port books during the early years of the reign of James I and the place of trade with the Low Countries within that overall pattern. It shows how Lynn's merchants adapted to the emergence of the new Dutch Republic and in particular to the growth of the entrepot of Amsterdam. Dutch shipmaster-merchants played a major part in the trade with their home ports, but a group of Lynn merchants were also highly significant in the wider picture, with two in particular being dominant. An angry official complaint made by one Dutch shipmaster triggered another less happy relationship between Lynn and the Low Countries and exposed a case of sexual assault by a senior member of the borough's political elite. As this scandal unfolded, it became clear that some members of the borough corporation were not just aware of what the scurrilous alderman had been doing but had previously been his victims. The attempts to remove him from his place on the corporation ultimately failed and, without a criminal prosecution, he seems to have got away more or less scot-free.

Those who come to King's Lynn for the first time are often impressed by the way in which the 'old town', the area around the quays, the two market places and the major churches, seems to be a kind of reflection of prototypes from across the North Sea. Many of the secular buildings are reminiscent of what you might find in the historic quarters of Amsterdam and The Hague or even of Ghent and Bruges. Dutch and Flemish¹ visitors can probably feel very much at home there. Although lacking a proper canal system, only having its 'fleets', some now turned into drains, Lynn does have a mighty river flowing alongside it, and before the coming of the railways, this was always a significant source of its wealth. Maritime trade, particularly as it is recorded in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents known as 'port books', has been a major feature of the history of the town and of its relations with other countries, and it is what this article will initially cover, with special reference to Lynn's commercial links with ports in the Low Countries in the early years of the reign of James I, specifically the decade 1604–14. This analysis, most of which has not previously been published, will show not only how general trade patterns evolved but also how Lynn's merchants responded to what was happening in the emergent Dutch Republic. It was all part of a process that Charles Wilson once identified as 'England's

¹ In this article, the terms 'Dutch' and 'Dutchmen' refer predominantly to those in and from the Dutch Republic, also called the United Provinces in this period; 'Flemish' refers to those from Flanders in the Spanish Netherlands; and 'Netherlands' (unless further qualified) refers to all of the provinces which were collectively known as the Low Countries and encompassed what today include the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and also parts of north-western France.

apprenticeship', by which he meant apprenticeship to the Dutch.² Initially, in Lynn at least, it seems to have been a constructive relationship, only later in the century possibly becoming poisoned by increasingly bitter rivalry, although in a provincial port rather than the hothouse of London that may have been less of an issue.

On the local political front, however, there is also something much less seemly and rather embarrassing to the borough's governing elite, an affair that was initially exposed by Dutchmen. That episode will illustrate the way in which the direct involvement of outsiders could play a crucial role in drawing attention to an issue of which a number of members of the corporation were already well aware but which they had apparently never before dared to mention, or had chosen not to acknowledge. It was a very different kind of Dutch influence on life in King's Lynn, so as well as commerce we will encounter what really amounted to criminal activity. The latter will revolve around sexual wrongdoing and the way in which a senior member of the borough corporation could, apparently, survive it more or less scot-free.³

There are two parts to this article, the first on maritime trade and the second on sexual scandal, linked by the common thread of involvement with the Low Countries. While the trade continued and evolved, the scandal was apparently a much more transient affair and might even be said to have been, in the end, rather shrugged off, which could speak volumes about the real interests and concerns of Lynn's governing elite. Were their priorities far more rooted in business and commerce rather than in individual morality, or were they the political and social implications of serious failings in personal behaviour by one public figure?

I

The lack of an extensive series of merchants' account books from which general patterns of commercial activity might be drawn has been a major loss to historians. Odd individual examples have survived, but there are more references to, or even just hints about, what might have been.⁴ Government-generated documentation such as customs accounts, therefore, remain our best source, whatever their weaknesses, from which to derive the kind of overall picture that we need. The series of E190 port books,⁵ on some of which the following analysis is almost entirely based, was inaugurated in 1565 and continued down to 1799 when it was finally discontinued

² Charles Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship, 1603–1763* (London, 1965). On wider cultural influences, see Lisa Jardine, *Going Dutch: How England Plundered Holland's Glory* (London, 2008).

³ For a very similar case in colonial New England later in the century, which the Lynn events seem to prefigure, see Noel Malcolm, *Forbidden Desire: Male-Male Sexual Relations, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 2024), pp. 315–17.

⁴ See, for example, George D. Ramsay (ed.), *John Isham, Merchant and Merchant Adventurer: Two Account Books of a London Merchant in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Gateshead, 1962). The extent and nature of what we have lost is hinted at in the will of the Bristol merchant, Thomas White, in which he enumerated all the detailed account books that he kept to record his various business activities: Patrick McGrath (ed.), *Merchants and Merchandise in Seventeenth-Century Bristol* (Bristol, 1955), p. xv. A more recent discussion of the issue can be found in Edmond Smith, *Merchants: The Community That Shaped England's Trade and Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2021), pp. 34–56, where the production of legal and auditable records in the ideal business world is exemplified and lauded. In King's Lynn, things might have been much slacker. One of the members of the mercantile elite in the town was asked by officers of the exchequer, during a formal inquiry in 1604–5, to produce his account books, but he swore that: 'he neyther did nor dothe keepe anye suche bookes, but saythe that he used to keepe shorte notes, in loose papers touchenge those matters which notes after his Majesties duties [were] satisfied he never regarded but did lose and teare them. And further [he] saythe that he kepes no bookes for such corne as he ladeth beyonde the seas.' (TNA E178/4250).

⁵ The documents are listed in Neville J. Williams (ed.), *Descriptive List of Exchequer, Queen's Remembrancer, Port Books, Part 1, 1565 to 1700* (London, 1960), pp. v–ix. For other useful introductions, see D.M. Woodward, 'Short Guides to Records, 22. Port Books', *History*, 55 (1970), pp. 207–10; Neville J. Williams, *The Maritime Trade of the East Anglian Ports, 1550–1590* (Oxford, 1988; based on his unpublished DPhil thesis, 1952), pp. 1–49; and Raymond William King Hinton (ed.), *The Port Books of Boston, 1601–1640* (Lincoln, 1956), pp. xiii–xliii. See also G. Alan Metters (ed.), *The King's Lynn Port Books, 1610–1614* (Norwich, 2009), pp. 1–48, for a fuller discussion of some of

and, like many other records, the manuscripts were then left to moulder in sacks, in increasing states of decay and subject to the depredations of damp, mice and rats; some of them still show the teeth marks. As a result of both this neglect and more wanton destruction, such as happened to many of the London port books for example, relatively few have survived. For the port of Lynn,⁶ and concentrating on only the three major officials, the customer, controller (or surveyor) and searcher, between the accession of James I in 1603 and the calling of the Long Parliament in 1640, there should be at least 114 overseas port books, whereas in fact we now only have twenty.⁷ Fortunately for Lynn, the extant overseas books are not too badly scattered and so it has been possible to focus attention on a short period for which, in the circumstances, there is a reasonably good coverage which can reveal both general commercial trends and also patterns of merchant activity. For the decade 1604–14, we have about eighty per cent of the likely available information on overseas trade: books for Michaelmas 1604 to Michaelmas 1605, then a gap for Michaelmas to Christmas 1605 when the Great Farm of the customs began and the accounting year changed; Christmas to Christmas 1605–6, with a gap for 1606–7; and then, with all years running Christmas to Christmas, 1607–8 and 1608–9, with 1609–10 missing; and finally, very unusually, four consecutive years 1610–14 – evidence in all for eight out of ten years.⁸ The discussion that follows, with particular reference to trade with the Low Countries, will be based on a detailed analysis of all the data for these years.

Figure 1 shows all the major ports with which Lynn traded in the early seventeenth century. They ranged from Iceland and the Baltic to the Mediterranean, although in the latter case only during the best harvest years when Marseilles, Genoa and Leghorn might be added to what is shown there. Table 1 gives a full breakdown of all of the 1,941 recorded overseas shipments,⁹ inwards and then outwards in the decade 1604–14, shown by year, at the top, and by region.¹⁰ While trade with Scotland appears to have been of some significance, it was handled mainly by Scottish merchants, including many ‘shipmaster-merchants’ who were almost certainly acting as factors or agents for other merchants back at home. Very few Lynn businessmen, with the notable exception of the father and son partnership of John and William Atkin, seem to have concerned themselves with it. It can also be seen as a kind of extension of the coastal trade, particularly after the personal union of the crowns in 1603, which was probably the only part of James I’s much vaunted project for a new

the Lynn port books for the latter part of the period to be covered here, with further consideration of their potential weaknesses as evidence for commercial activity.

⁶ Technically, the ‘Port of Lynn’ included not only the headport itself but also the creeks, or minor harbours, attached to it for customs purposes. These included Wisbech (mainly important for coastal trade), Wells and Burnham, as the principal creeks, but there were also a few even smaller harbours in between: see Williams, *Maritime Trade*, pp. 5, 11–15; and G. Alan Metters, ‘The Rulers and Merchants of King’s Lynn in the Early Seventeenth Century’ (PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1982), pp. 83–4. After 1611, the Lynn port books included separate sections for Wells and Burnham, but it is clear from detailed analysis of the activities of individual merchants that in earlier years, their trades were simply recorded under ‘Lynn’.

⁷ For coastal trade, the situation is even worse. Here, the customer and controller kept a joint book, so there should only be seventy-six books for the same period, but only nine have survived. See Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, pp. 435–7, for summary tables of all the surviving port books for this period; and idem, *King’s Lynn Port Books*, p. 3.

⁸ The documents can be found at The National Archives (hereafter: TNA), E190/433/5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; E190/434/1, 2, 3, 4. Some of these, covering the latter part of the decade, the years 1610–14 (E190/433/12, 13, and E190/434/1, 2, 3, 4), have been published in Metters, *King’s Lynn Port Books*.

⁹ A ‘shipment’ is here defined as ‘a shipment of cargo, which may consist of more than one item, made in one ship by one merchant, or by a group of merchants clearly working in some kind of partnership, to or from one port’. Where cargo details have become split up in the manuscripts (e.g. details of wine imports, which were covered by a different syndicate following the introduction of the Great Farm of the customs), they have all been reconciled into single shipments in this analysis.

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of all of these areas of trade, and of all the merchants involved in them, see Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, pp. 129–83.

Table 1 All overseas shipments, 1604–14

	Mich 1604–5	Xmas 1605–6	Xmas 1607–8	Xmas 1608–9	Xmas 1610–11	Xmas 1611–12	Xmas 1612–13	Xmas 1613–14	Total
Inwards:									
Scotland	41	67	53	44	-	42 ^a	67 ^a	75	389
Netherlands	27	23	38	15	1	53 ^c	42 ^f	54 ^e	253
N. Europe	9	10	26	19	-	16	11	51	142
France	5	4	4	10	4 ^a	7	4	10 ^b	48
Spain and Port.	19	16	7	4	-	1	5	1	53
Medit.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iceland	2	-	18 ^a	13	-	4 ^a	4 ^c	3	44
Other	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	3
Unknown	-	4	3	3	120	-	-	1	131
Total	103	124	150	109	125	123^d	133^g	196^d	1,063
Outwards:									
Scotland	6	86	18	34	-	21	48	32	245
Netherlands	62	56	71	13	-	11 ^b	23 ^d	12 ^a	248
N. Europe	12	14	14	10	-	6	7	18	81
France	10	6	3	4	-	3	1	1	28
Spain and Port.	56	14	5	2	-	1	1	1	80
Medit.	25	22	13	-	-	-	-	-	60
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	3	4 ^b	1	8
Other	-	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	4
Unknown	1	21	4	-	98	-	-	-	124
Total	172	220	128	65	98	46^b	84^e	65^a	878
Total Shipments	275	344	278	174	223	169^e	217^h	261^e	1,941
			a. from E190/433/8		a. from E190/433/12	Wells and Burnham: [included in figures above]			
						a. 1	a. 2	a. 1	
						b. 3	b. 3	b. 2	
						c. 15	c. 4	c. 8	
						d. 17	d. 7	d. 10	
						e. 20	e. 10	e. 11	
							f. 12	[incl. 'Lynn with W & B']	
							g. 18		
							h. 28		

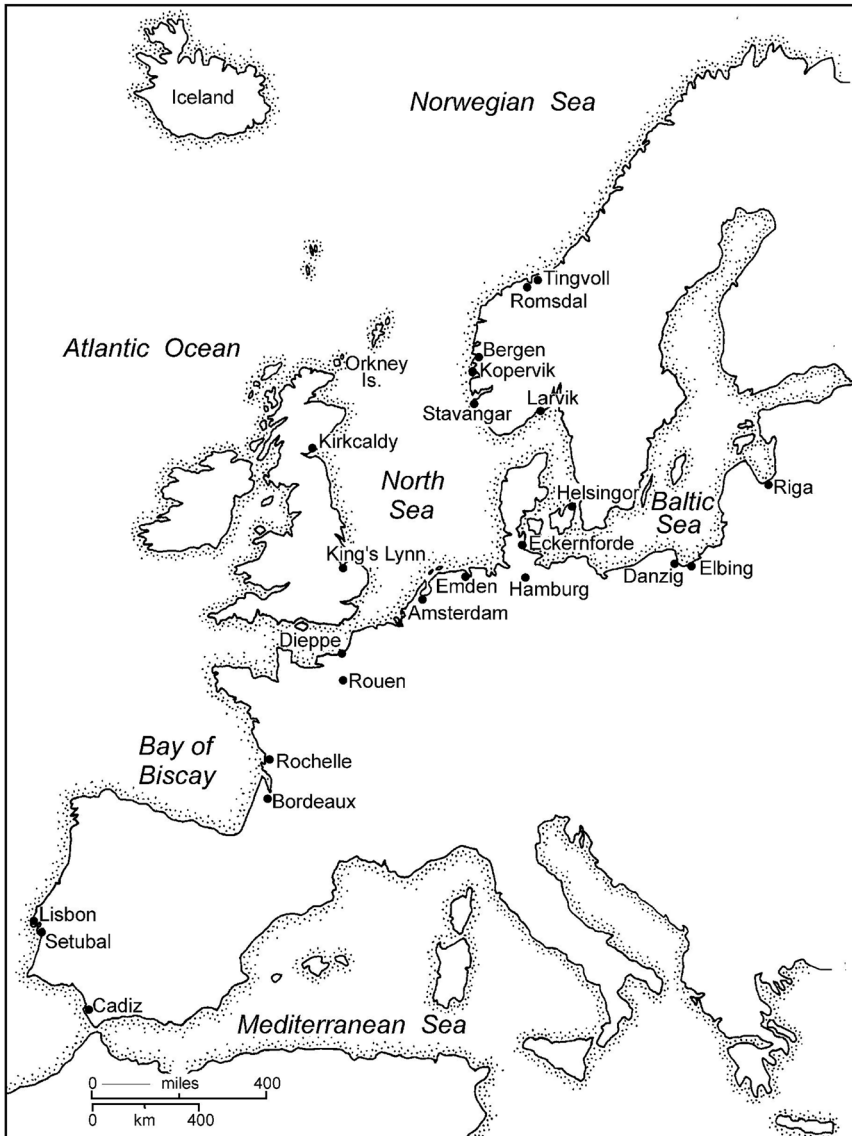


Figure 1 Principal ports in the foreign trade of King's Lynn. Courtesy of Phillip Judge and the Norfolk Record Society.

Union of Great Britain actually to take root.¹¹ The other areas of overseas activity, in which trade with the Netherlands remained the most significant part, were much the same as they had been in the previous reign,¹² although some, especially the Iceland trade, were unevenly recorded in the port books. One general feature to note is the apparent collapse of exports in the second half of the period, in large part due to

¹¹ See Susan Doran, *From Tudor to Stuart: The Regime Change from Elizabeth I to James I* (Oxford, 2024), pp. 390–415. After 1603, Scottish merchants were no longer classed as 'aliens' and were entered in the port books as 'Scots'. They also no longer had to pay the 'strangers' custom' on their cargoes.

¹² Williams, *Maritime Trade*, pp. 69–135.

poor harvest qualities in the hinterland, which made the shipping of grain and grain-related commodities, and the consequent government bans on exports, much more difficult.¹³ For a port such as Lynn, for which the corn trade was far more important than the exporting of cloth, this could be fairly disastrous. Even some members of the landed gentry, with agricultural concerns of their own, could recognize that.¹⁴

According to Neville Williams, trade with the Netherlands, north and south, had held pride of place for the East Anglian ports, both Lynn and Yarmouth, in the Elizabethan period, and he clearly showed how local merchants became increasingly active in it, even after the outbreak of the bitter war for Dutch independence.¹⁵ That might have crippled economic activity, but in fact it served to stimulate commercial growth and development, at least in the north. The seventeenth century was to see an even greater flowering of Dutch commercial enterprise with merchants from the new republic taking an ever-increasing part. They became such regular visitors to English harbours that contemporary commentators were eventually provoked into producing polemical tracts and pamphlets denouncing the growing Dutch monopoly and bemoaning the consequent decay of English shipping – works such as Thomas Mun's 'England's Treasure by Forraigne Trade', and 'The Trade's Increase' by a certain 'J.R'.¹⁶ Eventually, these feelings were to lead to three wars between England and the Dutch Republic, two of them, in 1652–4 and 1665–7, about commercial and maritime issues; the other, in 1672–4, a more opportunistic and disreputable collaboration with Louis XIV's France. There were two outstanding features of Dutch commercial expansion in the seventeenth century, the emergence of the carrying trade and the growth of the great *entrepot* at Amsterdam,¹⁷ never perhaps quite matching the glories of Antwerp in its heyday but still a notable phenomenon.¹⁸ Both of these features began to be reflected in our period, particularly after the conclusion of a temporary peace between Spain and her troublesome, yet enterprising, former dependencies in 1609. This was the so-called 'Twelve Years' Truce', which was finally confirmed in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, formally recognizing Spain's total failure to effect a re-conquest during the wider Thirty Years' War.¹⁹ After 1609, Lynn merchants can be detected buying a wide range of both European and non-European commodities in Amsterdam and often shipping them home in Dutch vessels.

¹³ William G. Hoskins, 'Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480–1619', *Agricultural History Review*, 12/1 (1964), pp. 28–46; Peter Bowden, 'Statistical Appendix', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 4, 1500–1640* (London, 1967), p. 820; C. J. Harrison, 'Grain Price Analysis and Harvest Qualities, 1465–1634', *Agricultural History Review*, 19/2 (1971), pp. 135–55. On the general importance of Lynn's hinterland for corn growing and the consequent potential for profitable exports when conditions, and government regulation, permitted, see Thomas S. Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan Foreign Trade* (Manchester, 1959), p. 72; Williams, *Maritime Trade*, pp. 35–7, 55–61, 150–61; Norman S. B. Gras, *The Evolution of the English Corn Market from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1915), p. 176 and appendices C and D; Alan Everitt, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce', in Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History*, p. 526.

¹⁴ See, for example, G. Alan Metters, Victor Morgan, Elizabeth Rutledge and Barry Taylor (eds), *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, volume 6, 1608–13* (Norwich, 2017), pp. 8–12, 14–15, 17–22.

¹⁵ Williams, *Maritime Trade*, pp. 69–80.

¹⁶ John R. McCulloch (ed.), *A Select Collection of Early English Tracts on Commerce* (London, 1856), pp. 191–204; *Harleian Miscellany*, 3 (1809), pp. 232–50.

¹⁷ Jan A. Van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800–1800* (London, 1977), pp. 191–210; Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 307–60.

¹⁸ See Michael Pye, *Antwerp: The Glory Years* (London, 2021) and, on England's particular involvement in the money market, John Guy, *Gresham's Law: The Life and Work of Queen Elizabeth I's Banker* (London, 2019), especially pp. 19–31. On Antwerp's subsequent decline: George D. Ramsay, *The City of London in International Politics at the Accession of Elizabeth Tudor* (Manchester, 1975); and idem, *The Queen's Merchants and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (Manchester, 1986). Isolated in the Spanish Netherlands and cut off from the sea by the Dutch 'sea beggars', Antwerp was effectively killed off as an economic force during the war of independence.

¹⁹ When the truce expired in 1621, Spain cynically re-commenced hostilities against the new Dutch Republic, notionally in support of the Holy Roman Empire, but achieved little or nothing from its efforts.

Table 2 Dutch ships and their masters (the biggest and the smallest)

Ship name	Tonnage	Home port	Named Master
Biggest:			
Red Hart	100	Grootebroek	Matthias Anthonison
Blue Lion	100	Terschelling	Cornelius Garrettsen
Seahorse	100	Rotterdam	?Fra. Harry
White Coney	120	Medemblik	Anton Peterson
George	120	Medemblik	Min. Cornelius
White Unicorn	120-140	Edam	Perter Clawson
Greyhound	140	Bolsward	?Runn. Grealts
Blue Hen	150	Vlieland	Lucas Jacobson (as master only)
Red Lion	150	Enkhuizen	Melchior Seabrandson
Red Lyon	180	Staveren/Friesland	Martin Oates
Young Tobias	200	Workum	Albe. Jacobson
'Bounty Freeze'	200	Hindeloopen	Thomas Senart
Smallest:			
Water Rat	6	Veere	Daniel Johnson
Swan	6	Veere	?Gulym Baker
Nightingale	6	Flushing	Adrian Absolon

It is worth noting that the largest ships recorded in the Lynn port books, every one of those of 100 tons' burthen or more, were Dutch and from the northern provinces (see Table 2). The average capacity for ships using the port was something like 30 to 40 tons, about the same size as the articulated lorries which thunder along our roads today. The *Young Tobias* of Workum and the *Bounty Freeze*, perhaps a crude anglicization of the name, of Hindeloopen were both relative 'monsters' for Lynn at 200 tons each. Equally, however, it is notable that the smallest ships recorded were also Dutch: the *Water Rat* and the *Swan* of Veere, along with the *Nightingale* of Flushing, each being of only six tons. One wonders how these tiny vessels managed to survive North Sea crossings, perhaps a comment on superior skills of seamanship. A total of 85 Dutch shipmasters are mentioned in the port books, 59 of them as 'masters and merchants' who landed cargoes apparently in their own names but who were almost certainly acting as factors or agents of unnamed merchants in their homeports (Table 3).²⁰ A further 26 Dutchmen were named as masters only, and many of these brought in cargoes for Lynn merchants. All of the ships involved here had Dutch crews and so the quayside at Lynn would at times have been awash with seamen who spoke a language other than English. The presence of Scots and of Geordies engaged in the coal trade further added to the variety of languages and dialects within the town.²¹

At a superficial level, the trade between Lynn and the Netherlands appears to have been fairly evenly balanced over the decade, with 248 shipments out and 253 in. If the figures for Wells and Burnham are excluded, it could even be slightly tilted on the side of exports. However, during the course of the decade, there were a number of major changes. As Table 4 shows, in the first few years, shipments outwards from Lynn were very strong. They actually exceeded those inwards in the ratio of two to one. Exports were then heavily concentrated on Rotterdam, and thereafter on Amsterdam

²⁰ They were then legally bound by local trading ordinances only to do further business, both in selling and in buying, with Lynn freemen, the most prominent being members of the town's political elite.

²¹ On the coastal trade of Lynn, which was dominated by imports of coal from the north-east of England, see Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', pp. 196–235; and idem, 'Corn, Coal and Commerce: Merchants and Coastal Trading in Early Jacobean King's Lynn', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 23/1 (2011), pp. 149–78.

Table 3 Dutch shipmasters coming into King's Lynn, 1604–14 [*NG* = *not given*]

Shipmaster name (mostly as mr AND merchant)	Ship's name	Tonnage	Ship's Homeport	Trade port(s) involved
Adrian Absolon	Nightingale	6	Flushing	Flushing
	Thornback	<i>NG</i>	Flushing	Flushing
Derick Adrianson	Golden Windmill	40	<i>NG</i>	Harlingen
	Gideon	70–89	Harlingen	'Soundwater', Kopervik and Tingvoll
Bern[ard] Albert/Alberson	Fortune	40–60	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Garret Anderson (mr only)	Sperratter	<i>NG</i>	Amsterdam	Langesund
Matthew Anthonison	Red Hart	40–60	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
	Red Hart	100	Grootebroek	Grootebroek
Maynard Anthonison	Red Goose	40	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
James Anthony	Tonning Fish	14–20	Veere	Veere
?Guyl. Baker	Swan	6	Veere	Veere
Andre[as] Blome (mr only)	Neptune	34	Dordrecht	Dordrecht
Jacob Bonis	Estrich	15–20	Veere	Veere
Cornelius Clawson	Griffen	40–60	Dordrecht	Dordrecht
Peter Clawson	White Unicorn	120–140	Edam	?Portugal
Cornelius Collins	Hope	16	Flushing	Amsterdam Flushing
Andreas Cornelison	Old Dove	50	Amsterdam	Norway [<i>sic</i>]
Claus Cornelison	Nightingale	<i>NG</i>	? <i>Ankershott</i>	<i>NG</i>
Cornelius Cornelison	Crabbe	40	Harlingen	Amsterdam
?Fre. Cornelison (mr only)	Adventer	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Henry Cornelison (mr only)	Lamb	40	Harlingen	Rouen
Jon Cornelison	Falcon	60	Harlingen	Harlingen
Claus Cornelius	Elephant	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
?Mini. Cornelius	George	120	Medemblik	Danzig
William Cornelius	Paradise	30–40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Adrian Derickson	Apple	60	Harlingen	Harlingen
Claus Derickson (mr only)	?Teane	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Rake Derickson (mr only)	Black Horse	40	Rotterdam	Rotterdam
Myne Egbertson (mr only)	Griffen	50	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Jon Elderson (mr only)	Swan	40	Flushing	Flushing
?Vigo. Elwortes	Love	<i>NG</i>	Harlingen	Amsterdam
John Engle	Flying Hart	40	Rotterdam	Rotterdam
Cornelius Evason/Ivason	White Swan	80	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
Cornelius Frausham	Post	12	Veere	Veere, Middelburg
Isbr[and] Garrardson (mr only)	Hope	40	Enkhuizen	Romsdal
Melchior Garrardson	Fortune	30–40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Cornelius Garrettson	Blue Lion	100	Terschelling	Romsdal
?Garb. Garrettson /Gratterson (& as mr only)	Jonas	50	Enkhuizen	Flekkefjord
	Hope	40	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen and 'Norway'
?Runn. Grealts (mr only)	Greyhound	140	Bolsward	Danzig
Fra[nz] Harry	Seahorse	100	Rotterdam	Danzig
Hugh Henrikson (mr only)	Fisher	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Boare	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Nicholas Henrikson (mr only)	Boare	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
William Henrikson	George	20	Harlingen	Harlingen
?Otta. Hides (mr only)	?Roming	80	Amsterdam/ Rotterdam	North Bergen
Cornelius Howerson	Black [<i>illegible</i>]	40	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
Anthony Israel (& as mr only)	Fortune	40–50	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Nicholas Jacob (mr only)	Greyhound	30	Amsterdam	Amsterdam

(Continued)

Table 3 (Continued)

Shipmaster name (mostly as mr AND merchant)	Ship's name	Tonnage	Ship's Homeport	Trade port(s) involved
Albe[rtus] Jacobson	Small Profit	12	Egmont	Egmont
	Young Tobias	200	Workam	Norway [<i>sic</i>]
Claus Jacobson (& as mr only)	Dolphin	50	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Griffen	40	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
John Jacobson	Seahound	20	Nieuwpoort	Delfshaven
Luca[s] Jacobson (mr only)	Blue Hen	150	Vlieland	Danzig
Nomm. Jacobson	Leopard	<i>NG</i>	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
Andr[eas] Johnson	Fortune	80	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Daniel Johnson	Water Rat	6	Veere	Veere
Deonys Johnson	Fortune	40	Veere	Veere
Hybe Johnson	George	30	Dordrecht	Dordrecht
Jacob Johnson (mr only)	George	<i>NG</i>	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
John Johnson (mr only)	Fortune	60	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Roger Johnson	Falcon	50	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Simon Johnson	Fortune	60	Dordrecht	Yarmouth, London Dordrecht Rochelle
Peter Johnson (mr only)	Buck	<i>NG</i>	Amsterdam	Danzig
[<i>Missing</i>] Johnson (mr only)	St John	80	Dunkirk	Dunkirk
Samuel Martins	Hope	12	Veere	Veere, Middleburg
Marinus Martinson	Claw	<i>NG</i>	Flushing	Flushing
Adrian Maye	Purpose (?Porpoise)	18	Rotterdam	Rotterdam
Peter Musslere (mr only)	Hope	70	Amsterdam	North Bergen
	Orrengtree	40–50	Amsterdam	Flushing
Garrard Nabbs	Cock	10–16	Flushing	Flushing
Martin Oates (mr only)	Red Lyon	180	Staveren	Helsingor
			Friesland [<i>sic</i>]	Danzig
Joas Penn	Sheep	<i>NG</i>	Middelburg	Middelburg
Claus Peters	Puppe	14	Flushing	Flushing
Anthony Peterson	White Coney	120	Medemblik	'Soundwater'
	Star	40	Hoorn	Hoorn
Elka Peterson (mr only)	Red Hand	28	Groningen	Groningen
?Love. Peterson	Eaver	20	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
	White Buck	80–100	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen and Danzig
Peter Peterson (& as mr only)	Fortune	30	Medemblik	Rotterdam
	Hope	40	Amsterdam	Norway [<i>sic</i>]
Matthew Peterson	Nightingale	25–30	Middelburg	Middelburg
Nicholas Peterson	Puppe	?3	Flushing	Flushing
Jacob Phillipson	Estrich	15	Veere	Veere
Anthony Raynoldson	Salmon	?4	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
Derick Remerson	Griffin	60	Grootebroek	Elbing
	Coure	60	Enkhuizen	Enkhuizen
Melchior Seabrandson (& as mr only)	Red Lion	150	Enkhuizen	Danzig
?Auru. Sibells (mr only)	Red Lion	80	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Jacob Symons (mr only)	Weypen	120	Hindeloopen	Danzig
Peter Tolphin	Falcon	10–15	Flushing	Flushing
Thomas Senart (mr only)	Bounty Freeze	200	Hindeloopen	Staveren
?Jerre. Tyze	Hogge	16	Flushing	Flushing
Cornelius Verduse	Hope	10	Flushing	Flushing
Cornelius Williamson	Blue Pigeon	30	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
Peter Williamson (mr only)	Hunter	<i>NG</i>	Dordrecht	Dordrecht
Roger Yearlove	Black Dog	16	Delfshaven	Medemblik

Table 4 Shipments to the Netherlands, 1604–14

PORT	1604–5	1605–6	1607–8	1608–9	1610–11	1611–12	1612–13	1613–14	Total
Rotterdam	22	26	43	1			1 ^a	1 ^a	94 ^a
Amsterdam	20	6	5	4		4	8	5	52
Enkhuizen	16	16	3			1		1	37
Flushing		1	5	4		3	4	3	20
Veere			7			3 ^a	6 ^b		16 ^b
Dordrecht			5	1			3		9
Middelburg	4	2	1					1	8
Grootebroek		3							3
Holland [<i>sic</i>]		2							2
Delfshaven							1		1
Hoorn				1					1
Ostend			2	1					3
Dunkirk				1				1	2
Totals	62	56	71	13	?	11	23 ^c	12 ^a	248 ^c
						Wells and Burnham:			
						a. 3	a. 1	a. 1	a. 2
							b. 6		b. 9
							c. 7		c. 11

and Enkhuizen (see Figure 2). There were fairly regular shipments to Flushing and to Veere, in the latter case particularly from Wells and Burnham, the twelve shipments recorded for 1607–8 being almost certainly from those creeks. A similar handful of shipments went to Dordrecht and Middelburg. A few other ports are mentioned less frequently, and two ships were rather unhelpfully described as simply being bound for ‘Holland’. Shipments to the Spanish Netherlands, to Dunkirk and Ostend, were fairly insignificant. The commodities exported included barley, malt and cloth, the leading items, the first two always very heavily dependent on harvest qualities, as well as government restrictions. Then we find: peas; saffron, particularly through Wells and Burnham; rapeseed; hempseed, some of it initially from Boston but trans-shipped and sent on via Lynn; mustard seed; oil cakes; coal and beer; together with, at first, re-exported salt and even some spices. In the case of the last two items, salt and spices, the contrast between the direction of trade at the beginning and then at the end of the decade is most marked. By 1614, they were being brought in from Amsterdam in very considerable quantities and by then exports in general had dwindled. There was, in fact, an adverse trade balance; in 1613–14, shipments outwards numbered only twelve and were over four times less than those inwards.

The imported shipments, as shown in Table 5, reflect both the general trend in Lynn’s trade as a whole and the rise of the major new Dutch *entrepot*. Imports initially came from a variety of ports, of which Enkhuizen was the most important in these early years, followed by Rotterdam and Amsterdam. But from 1611, Amsterdam became the dominant player in the trade to King’s Lynn. Flushing, Rotterdam and Veere continued to play a part and so, perhaps, did Dordrecht, but Enkhuizen had apparently ceased to matter. Among what might be termed home products from the Netherlands were cheese, onions and hops, but other foodstuffs were also re-exported to Lynn, articles such as bay salt²² and Spanish salt, ‘Dansk’²³ rye, figs and raisins, spices and Icelandic fish. French and Spanish wines also increasingly found their way

²² From the Bay of Biscay.

²³ From Danzig, and elsewhere in East Prussia.

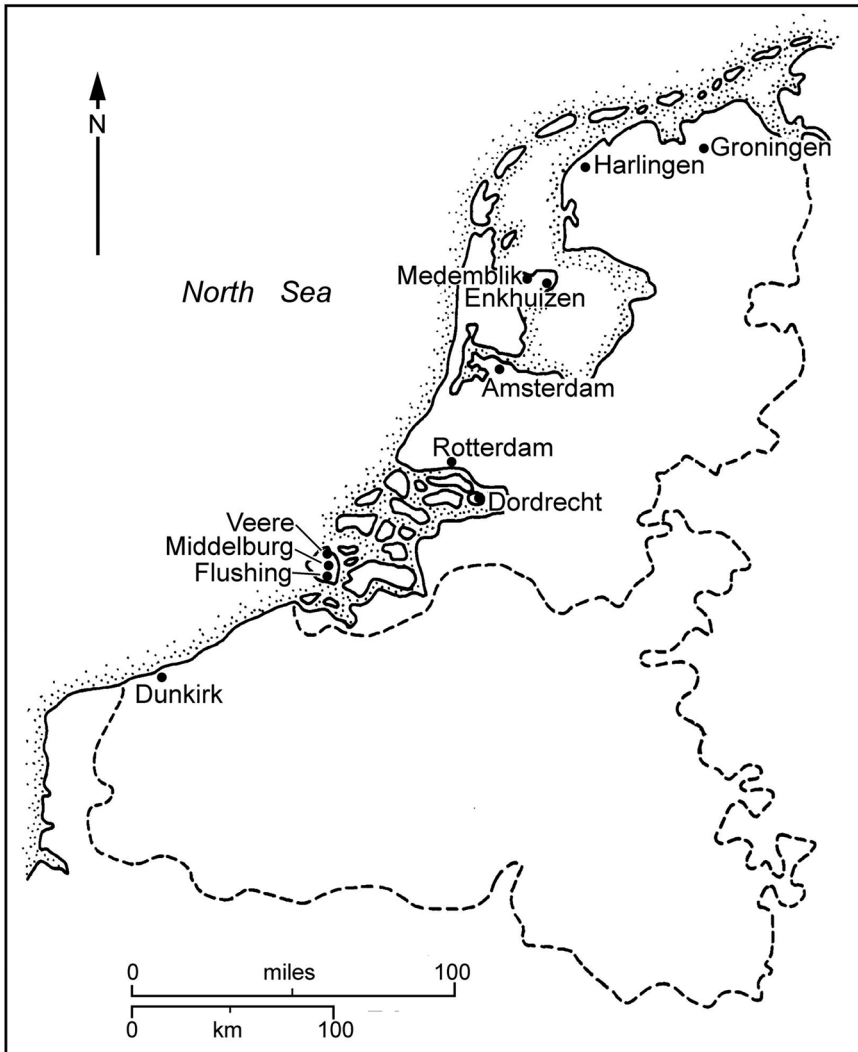


Figure 2 Some of the leading Dutch and Flemish ports. Courtesy of Phillip Judge and the Norfolk Record Society.

to Lynn via Dutch ports, as did timber, rope, pitch and tar, from northern Europe. Coal, usually termed ‘Luke coals’ from Liege,²⁴ and various kinds of stones, cloth, paper, glass, kettles, pots, tiles and bricks were significant among the other trade goods brought in. Even live Icelandic hawks, much prized by the aristocracy and gentry, made an occasional appearance.

A total of 148 merchants can be identified trading with the Netherlands, and these can be divided into three almost equal sub-groups. The Lynn men numbered forty-five altogether; then, there were fifty-one aliens, nearly all of them Dutch;²⁵ and

²⁴ ‘Luik’ was, and still is, the Dutch form of the city’s name.

²⁵ The apparent discrepancy between the fifty-one here and the fifty-nine ‘masters and merchants’ mentioned in connection with Table 3 is a reflection of the fact that some Dutch masters/merchants were only recorded as being involved in trades with Baltic and Norwegian ports.

Table 5 Shipments from the Netherlands, 1604–14

Port	1604–5	1605–6	1607–8	1608–9	1610–11	1611–12	1612–13	1613–14	Total
Amsterdam	3	1	7	2		34 ^d	21 ^b	41 ^c	109 ^e
Enkhuizen	12	10	5	4		1	1	1	34
Flushing	1	1	3	6		4 ^a	6 ^a	7	28 ^b
Rotterdam	2	7	8			5 ^b	4 ^b	2 ^b	28 ^c
Veere	2		5			4 ^c	7 ^c		18 ^d
Dordrecht	2		5	2	1	3 ^a	1	1	15 ^a
Harlingen(?)			3					1 ^a	4 ^a
Middelburg	3					1			4
Grootebroek	1	2							3
Brill			1						1
Delfshaven							1		1
Egmont			1						1
Groningen						1			1
Holland [<i>sic</i>]	1								1
Medemblik							1		1
Staveren		1							1
Ostend		1		1					2
Dunkirk								1	1
Totals	27	23	38	15	1(+?)	53 ^e	42 ^d	54 ^d	253 ^f
						Wells and Burnham:			
						a. 1	a. 1	a. 1	a. 1
						b. 2	b. 2	b. 2	b. 2
						c. 4	c. 7	c. 5	c. 6
						d. 7	d. 12	d. 8	d. 11
						e. 15			e. 14
									f. 35

fifty-two others, English and a few Scots. Most of the aliens were shipmasters and, as mentioned above, probably acted as factors for other merchants at home. There were fourteen leading merchants (Table 6), the ones whose names feature the most frequently, and they handled a significant proportion of the total trade, over two-fifths of all the recorded shipments. Three were not English, and they were all shipmasters, one of whom, Jacob Bonis, only ever traded to the creeks. It is noteworthy that all the shipmasters invariably traded only between ‘Lynn’ and one Dutch port, presumably the homeport. In the case of Bonis, it was only to Veere; Cornelius Clawson only to Dordrecht; Garrard Nabbs only to Flushing. No less than nine of the leading fourteen were Lynn men, and these few handled just over a quarter of the recorded shipments. The other two leading traders were Henry Congham, who was very active through the creeks and appears both as a shipmaster and as a merchant in his own right, and Robert Drewry, apparently a Norwich merchant, who traded only between Lynn and Rotterdam.

The two names that stand out are the two men who were the most active in Lynn’s trade overall in this decade: John Greene and John Wallis. Both were members of the borough corporation, while Greene may also have been the controller of the port; one of the manuscripts carries his signature at the end.²⁶ His shipments were heavily weighted by one particularly busy year which involved the export of 25 cargoes of barley to Rotterdam. There are some difficulties here, however, as the name might refer to more than one person. On one occasion, John Greene was referred to as

²⁶ TNA E190/434/3.

Table 6 The leading merchants trading with the Netherlands

Name	Homeport	Masters	Nationality	Shipments		
				In	Out	Total
Jacob Bonis ^a	Veere	Mr	Alien	9	8	17
Cornelius Clawson	Dordrecht	Mr	Alien	5	6	11
Henry Congham ^b	Wells	Mr	English	14	7	21
William Doughty	Lynn		English	9	-	9
Robert Drewry	Norwich		English	2	11	13
Thomas Garrard	Lynn		English	4	4	8
John Greene ^c	Lynn(?)		English	5	30	35
Robert Hayes	Lynn	Mr	English	9	2	11
John Lead	Lynn		English	7	1	8
Nathaniel Maxey	Lynn		English	6	8	14
Garrard Nabbs	Flushing	Mr	Alien	11	7	18
Robert Thory	Lynn		English	10	2	12
John Wallis	Lynn		English	14	11	25
John Wormell	Lynn		English	4	8	12
Totals				109	105	214
% of total trade				43.1	42.3	42.7

^a All shipments through Wells and Burnham.

^b Many shipments through Wells and Burnham.

^c Some shipments through Wells and Burnham.

Scottish, which admittedly could have been simply a scribal error, but he was also the only significant Lynn merchant to trade extensively through Wells and Burnham, and we know that there was a family of Greenes in Wells, so there might have been two, or even more, people with the same name.²⁷ Wallis is a much more straightforward character, and his trades were spread much more evenly across the decade. Most of his shipments went to or came from Amsterdam, but he also traded with Rotterdam, Enkhuizen, Dordrecht and Middelburg, and he was the only Lynn man to have links with Brill. He used mainly Lynn ships in the first half of the period, but after 1610, he also began to transport goods in Dutch vessels; on occasions, he could even be found sharing cargo space with Dutch merchants. From Amsterdam, he shipped rye, bay salt, wine, paper, glass, timber, cable, pitch and tar; from Enkhuizen basically the same commodities with the addition of fish; from Brill only fish; and from Dordrecht oats, fish, wine, millstones and paper. Most of his exports were sent out in the first half of the period. To Amsterdam went barley, hempseed, Spanish salt in 1605, Devon dozens and 'northern' cloths; to Enkhuizen the same, together with Suffolk cloth and some coal; to Rotterdam barley and hempseed; and to Middelburg Spanish salt in 1606. John Wallis was a fine example of an early Stuart provincial general merchant, and he must have made a good living from his Dutch trades. During the controversy over Thomas Baker, to which reference will be made below, it emerged that he was a fluent Dutch speaker, and one can surmise that when a young man apprenticed to another Lynn bigwig, Alderman John Nelson who later became his father-in-law, he may well have spent some time in the Netherlands acting as an agent for his master. As well as being generally the most prolific Lynn trader at this time, involved with every area of trade in Europe, he became a major political figure in the town, serving

²⁷ Benjamin Mackerell, *The History and Antiquities of the Flourishing Corporation of King's Lynn in the County of Norfolk* (London, 1738), p. 23, for his memorial in St Margaret's church, which states that John Greene, the controller of the port, was 'born at Wells near the Sea within this county'. For the full details of his questionable identity, Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', p. 293.

no less than four terms as mayor and representing the borough in parliament.²⁸ It is a shame that he seems to have left no permanent memorial in Lynn and his name means nothing today.

The activities of two other men warrant some further comment. Nathaniel Maxey, one of the fourteen leading merchants shown here, later an alderman and mayor,²⁹ developed a rather specialised trade exporting short worsted stockings to Amsterdam, no less than 988 pairs in 1613 and 1614, returning with nutmeg, cinnamon, mace, cloves, aniseed, ginger and pepper, along with sugar and raisins, all of them ‘luxury’ items. The other individual, but one not mentioned in this list, was the alien merchant Erasmus Coates, apparently a Dutchman who settled permanently in Lynn. He did a lively trade in what are recognisably Icelandic goods from Dutch markets. He was also very much involved more directly with the annual ‘Iceland Venture’ from Lynn, the combined fishing and trading expedition in which basic supplies and also a few trade goods were taken north in the spring and fish, fish oil, hawks and the strange Icelandic woollen cloth called *wadmál* came back in the autumn.³⁰ The cloth was usually entered by the customs clerks as ‘woadmole’. In November and December 1612, Coates brought into Lynn, from Amsterdam, Icelandic ling and cod, and both ‘raw’, presumably unfashioned, *wadmál* along with knitted *wadmál* stockings. At other times, he had brought in *wadmál* mittens directly from Iceland; perhaps they were welcomed as being particularly effective against bitterly cold weather.³¹ He was the only prominent alien trading to Lynn not to be a shipmaster, and ultimately he died in the town, apparently with an English family and, according to his extant will, the owner of two properties.³²

II

Moving away from the port book record, however, there is a much less happy episode in the history of Lynn’s relations with the Low Countries and one that triggered what was potentially something of a major scandal.³³ It involved Dutchmen in an altogether different way and had some immediate political repercussions, although precisely how much was known by the wider population remains unclear. The nature of the ‘closed’ corporation and the lack of any kind of effective accountability could

²⁸ Mayor 1609, 1616, 1623 (a partial term following the death, in office, of Thomas Snelling) and 1631; MP 1620 and 1624 – Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, p. 432. Very few aldermen served as many as four mayoral terms.

²⁹ Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, p. 423.

³⁰ A fragment of *wadmál* was discovered during an excavation at Thoresby College in Lynn: Helen Clarke and Alan Carter, *Excavations in King’s Lynn 1963–1970* (London, 1977), pp. 374–6. On the origins and early development of this trade, see: Eleanora M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London, 1954), chapter 2; Anna Agnarsdottir, ‘Iceland’s “English century” and East Anglia’s North Sea world’, in David Bates and Robert E. Liddiard (eds), *East Anglia and Its North Sea World in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 204–16; Williams, *Maritime Trade*, pp. 98–109. For a fuller discussion of this trade in the early-seventeenth century, see Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, pp. 156–61.

³¹ There was a notorious ‘great frost’ during the winter of 1607–8 that badly affected Lynn. It completely froze the town’s water pipes and made life particularly difficult for those involved in the brewing industry (there was a limited but fairly sophisticated municipal water supply system for parts of the borough – see Vanessa Parker, *The Making of King’s Lynn: Secular Buildings from the 11th to the 17th Century* (London and Chichester, 1971), pp. 28, 132–3, 137, 162–3. Only the winter of 1564–5 was worse, apparently, and both really had been exceptionally severe – information kindly supplied by the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia.

³² TNA PROB 11/149/320.

³³ This account is based primarily on two sources: NRO KL/C 64/7/1, the mayor and burgesses’ answer to Thomas Baker’s *mandamus* for reinstatement as an alderman, where full details are given, in English, of the original incidents after the formal Latin of the first part of the document; and a case in the Court of Star Chamber, TNA STAC 8/59/6, particularly the depositions taken at Lynn on 19 September 1609 and on 17 April 1610. Details from the borough’s hall books, the corporation minutes, have been separately cited.

have kept many of the details fairly secret.³⁴ Much would have depended on the levels of interaction between seamen on the waterfront and the ordinary men and women who took little or no part in the workings of the borough government. The members of the political elite themselves were to become highly involved, admittedly some more directly than others, but they all almost certainly did their level best to keep things as confidential as they possibly could. Much would depend on who knew what, and when, and whether anybody was likely to talk about it either privately or in public, and this we will perhaps never know. The fact that the episode seems to have made little or no difference to trade between Lynn and the Netherlands may also have a significance of its own.

In late July 1608, towards the end of the first term of office of Mayor John Atkin³⁵ and in the middle of the decade in which the trading patterns have been analysed above, an angry and official complaint was made by a Dutch sea captain called Simon Johnson, a frequent visitor to Lynn as the port books clearly show. He regularly skippered the *Fortune* of Dordrecht and sometimes seems to have worked in association with Cornelius Clawson, master of the *Griffen* of Dordrecht. The enraged Captain Johnson accosted some leading Lynn merchants and corporation members who were apparently sitting beneath the custom house, then on the first floor of a corporation-owned property in the Tuesday Market Place.³⁶ Also present was Thomas White, the customer of the port who later deposed that he knew Johnson well from their previous official contacts. At least one of the merchants there, William Parkin, had some knowledge of Dutch and could understand what the issue seemed to be. According to Johnson, a certain Thomas Baker had sexually assaulted, '*commisit pederasciam cum ...*',³⁷ two of his ship-boys, and he was furious about it. Whether he had any other personal motive in making this initial complaint is not clear. He threatened that the 'buggering villain', or in other translations 'buggerly rascal' and 'rascally bugger', would have been burned alive if he had been caught in the Netherlands, and he demanded that something be done. It was now an official matter, to be dealt with by the town government because Thomas Baker was no ordinary felon. He was an alderman and former mayor of the borough, and he had already

³⁴ The corporation was essentially 'self-elected': the aldermen chose the common councillors, and the councillors elected the alderman, both groups serving for life or until resignation/removal; the mayors, serving terms of only one year, were elected by the councillors from among the aldermen. The records of corporation meetings were never made public.

³⁵ He served as mayor twice, in 1607–8 and 1615–16 – Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', p. 409. The circumstances of his first election, on 29 August 1607 (to assume office on 29 September following, according to established practice) was most unusual, as he had only been elected an alderman on the same day, both elections being made by the common council of the borough. It is possible that Atkin, who hailed from Wells and might still have been regarded as something of a relative 'incomer', was being chosen to sort out a perceived problem within the governing body, which was in some confusion at the time. There had been no less than eleven new elections in the previous six months, adding seven totally new men to the common council. That 'problem' might well have revolved around Thomas Baker. He and Atkin had crossed swords before, in 1602, when Atkin had made a formal complaint to the lord keeper, on behalf of both himself and others in Lynn, about malicious lies being spread by Baker and his brother John; he also mentioned quarrelsome behaviour by Thomas Baker at meetings of the corporation – see Victor Morgan, Jane Key and Barry Taylor (eds), *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, volume 4, 1596–1602* (Norwich, 2000), pp. 263–5. However, there can be no accusation of prejudice on Atkin's part as this latest affair unfolded. During his mayoral inquiry into what had happened, he repeatedly gave Baker the opportunity to state his own case and those invitations were consistently spurned. On the general pattern of office-holding within the borough, including details of elections and ejections, see Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', pp. 17–60; and idem, 'Office-Holding and Local Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century King's Lynn', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 47/2 (2015), pp. 183–207.

³⁶ That property was re-built in the 1620s, but the customs officers remained there, with a new lease (NRO KL/C 51/34-5). The more famous 'Custom House' which still stands on the Purfleet Quay dates from the 1680s, initially opened as a merchants' exchange and only later becoming the home of the customs service: Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *The Buildings of England. Norfolk 2: North-West and South*, 2nd edition (New Haven and London, 1999), p. 477.

³⁷ This wording from NRO KL/C 64/71.

been in trouble with his colleagues on earlier occasions about other, unrelated, issues.³⁸ As this scandal developed, it became clear that many members of the corporation were already well aware of his wayward sexual adventures; some had actually been his victims. Now however, ‘the fat was in the fire’; an outsider had made a public and official complaint, and the issue could no longer be ignored or covered up. Over the next two years, initially as a result of Captain Johnson’s accusation and the formal internal inquiry that it triggered, and then during a later action in the Court of Star Chamber, initiated by Baker against John Atkin when the affair might have looked as though it had all blown over, the whole sordid business was raked over again and again. This is how we now know quite a lot about it; it generated a prodigious amount of documentation, in both the local records and the National Archives, although not, it should be noted, in the records of any criminal court or in any forum which would have attracted public attention.

Upon learning of the sea captain’s complaint, Mayor Atkin took advice from other borough justices, who included former mayors and the recorder, and also sent for Alderman John Wallis, who was known to be fluent in Dutch. On 2 August 1608, the two Dutch boys, Esdras Jacobson and Cornelius van Stigen, were then summoned to appear before the justices at Atkin’s house, a relatively new property in 1608 and still standing in South Lynn; it is now known as Greenland Fishery House.³⁹ The boys’ testimony has been recorded in full:

Esdras sayth at the comande of the shipper he went with a West Falling [*Westphalian*] gamon of bacon & a cheese and three pickled herringe, the which Mr Baker hath received the same bidding the younge man welcome, and calling for a cupp of beere in a silver cupp, and drinke to him he sayd to the foresayd younge man Esdras Jacobson that he should drinke it out otherwise he should not be welcome. The younge man not drinke it out he thrust or putt hime downe uppon the bench, strikinge him uppon the face sayinge to him agayne that he must drinke it out notwithstandinge he had filled the cupp full agayne. Then givinge him three pence in money and the younge man havinge druncke it out Mr Baker thrust his hand into the younge man’s bretches so that he felt his bare britch sayinge ‘and shall I not britch you & shall I not britch you and shall I not britch you [*sic*]’. Then went Mr Baker awaye, and the younge man went also awaye and cominge aboard he beinge ashamed told his greife to one Adrian Jacobson askinge him what such manner of doinge ment as he before of Mr Baker had reported unto him. This was done the 23 of July 1608 *stilo novo*.

Cornelius van Stigen was then sworn and gave his evidence about other incidents, which included this:

... Mr Baker would have thrust his hand in my britches and I asked him what manner of doing that was to thrust his hand into a younge man’s britches. And he hath bene divers times in hand with hime to come to him about such doings and also he did untie my poynts, then he went to shutt the chamber dore thinckinge to have me alone with him in the chamber. I thinke it was about the 24 of June *stilo novo*. The first time was in the

³⁸ Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, pp. 42–4. His offences included trying to defraud his father’s creditors in the aftermath of the old man’s death, in which he involved one of his sisters, described as ‘a verve simple woman & of smalle capacite and lyttell discession to know good from evill’ (TNA REQ 2/181/69); and then there was a major breach of local trading ordinances which also implicated one of the borough’s common councillors and led to the latter’s expulsion from the corporation (NRO KL/7/8, ff. 210–11).

³⁹ Pevsner and Wilson, *Buildings of England. Norfolk 2*, pp. 492–3. For a fuller analysis and discussion of its more unusual features, see Parker, *Making of King’s Lynn*, pp. 94–7, 207, plates 24 and 25. Although built by Atkin in 1605, the current name commemorates its later eighteenth-century fame as a tavern frequented by seamen engaged in Greenland whaling expeditions. The fact that the initial enquiry was conducted, almost privately, at the mayor’s house and not in the Trinity Guildhall, the town hall, is itself quite interesting, although further investigations do seem to have become more obviously ‘official’.

shippe chamber where men see the shipps come upp and halfe an hower after that, in a chamber in a corner house by the crane.⁴⁰

Some days after this hearing, other witnesses, mostly Lynn men, were summoned to appear before the mayor and justices and yet more incidents came to light. John Bloye, a Lynn shipmaster, swore that:

... about some twelvemonths sithence at the instance & request of the sayd Thomas Baker he did britch and whipp the sayd Thomas Baker on his bare buttockes with a birchen rodd the sayd Thomas Baker havinge turned & putt downe his owne hose for that purpose and layinge himselfe on his bedd fitt for that purpose. And also he sayth uppon his oath that about some halfe yeare sithence he did the like agayne unto him layinge himselfe uppon a chest in his chamber and turninge downe his owne hose for that purpose. And further he sayth that after the sayd Mr Baker was whipped as aforesayd he the sayd Mr Baker desired [of] this examinant that he the sayd Mr Baker might likewise whipp the sayd examinant but this examinant denied to doe so beinge ashamed of such actions. And further he sayth that the sayd Mr Baker have often times desired this examinant to doe the like agayne unto him, but this examinant hath not only refused to doe so but hath also refrayned his company for that cause.

Two members of the common council, John Boston and Joshua Greene, the latter later to become an alderman and mayor,⁴¹ also gave further evidence about Baker's misdemeanours when they had been younger, and the fact that all of his victims seem to have been boys or very young men may be highly significant. Greene testified that during Baker's mayoralty, ten or twelve years earlier, he had been a suitor to the mayor for obtaining his freedom of the borough.⁴² He had visited Baker's house and been taken into his chamber, where sexual malpractice was forced on him, with the threat that he would not secure his franchise otherwise. Baker had kissed his bottom and 'handled his privities'.

More details would emerge later in the depositions taken in 1609 and 1610, in connection with the Star Chamber case. At that time, a carpenter of Lynn, a waterman from Worlington, a woollendraper from Yarmouth and John Beane of Lynn, a cousin of Alderman John Atkin and himself later to become a member of the borough corporation,⁴³ all told their own alarming stories. Charles Carvell an attorney from the Isle of Ely, recounted how, many years previously, Mr Baker 'by handlinge the privities of this deponent did enforce his nature to come from him this deponent'. Another witness described having seen Baker do the same thing to himself: 'by handling of his privities to shedd his nature'. John Lead the younger, who was eventually to join the common council of the borough, deposed that a young sailor from Burnham, Nicholas Smith, had once confided to him when they were in Spain together that he, too, had whipped Mr Baker, although Smith subsequently denied that any such thing had taken place when he was himself questioned formally; he then insisted that when alone with Baker, the conversation had only ever revolved around the prices of goods in the Netherlands!

There do not appear to have been explicit assertions, in any of these recorded testimonies about sexual malpractice, of actual anal penetration, which constituted what contemporaries would have understood as 'perfect sodomy'. This was a kind

⁴⁰ i.e. the crane on the Common Staithe Quay, which can be seen in some of the near-contemporary representations of the waterfront.

⁴¹ Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', pp. 411, 418. Greene also has his mayoral portrait in the town hall: see the ArtUK website: <<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/venue:kings-lynn-town-hall-4098>> [last accessed 21 Jan. 2025].

⁴² Baker, the son and heir of George Baker, himself an alderman and mayor, served as mayor in 1598–9 – Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', p. 409.

⁴³ Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', p. 411.

of ‘final act’ in a sequence which could proceed from solitary masturbation, through mutual masturbation and interfemoral sex, or ejaculation between the thighs only, to full penetrative intercourse. As far as we can tell, Baker may not have gone that far; or nobody was prepared to admit to participation in the more extreme forms of what were still termed ‘unnatural’ sexual practices – other than, perhaps, in the original Dutch accusation of ‘pederasty’. Being a ‘passive’ participant, or even a victim of such activities, was not usually seen as a sufficient defence or excuse whenever an incident took place, which was itself a good enough reason for never initiating any kind of formal legal action. In general, mutual masturbation was commonly seen as being just being as wicked as the more extreme interpretations of sodomy or buggery, at least in northern Europe. Attitudes in the Mediterranean lands, especially Italy and in the Ottoman Empire, were apparently rather different.⁴⁴

The Dutchmen seem to have dropped out of the picture after the initial complaint, and they did not get the kind of retributive justice that the shipmaster at least had sought, but they had certainly ‘lit the blue touch paper’. When these latest offences by the troublesome alderman had been brought to official notice, the mayor and the governing body decided that they had to take action, but they still did not instigate any criminal prosecution. On 17 August 1608, the corporate sense of outrage was recorded in the hall book, the minutes of the corporation meetings:

Att this day Mr Maior, the aldermen and common counsell, for that Mr Thomas Baker, one of the aldermen of this Burgh, hath committed divers misdemeanors and eviell behaviours to the great disgrace of the government of this Burgh and to the scandall of this societie as by divers examinations taken before Mr Maior and divers Justices of Peace of the same Burgh, wherunto reference be made more particularly appereth, therfor they have agreed and by this present order have discharged and doe therbye remove and discharge the said Mr Baker from the place of Alderman.⁴⁵

Elsewhere Baker, clearly recognized by his peers as something of a sex pest and predator, was also called a frequenter of taverns, an uncontrolled tippler and more generally ‘*vir contentiosus et male*’ and ‘*obscenus, turpis et infamis*’.⁴⁶ How notorious he was among the wider population of the town remains unclear.

It was not, however, to be quite the end of the affair. Baker then went on to the offensive himself. He knew his way around the courts system, having done legal work both for the borough and, with his brother John, for no less a personage than Sir Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, as upright and up-tight a puritan justice of the peace as one could ever imagine.⁴⁷ Baker must have known that ever since the passing of the ‘Buggery Act’ in 1533, the offence of which he could have been accused in a criminal court would incur a capital sentence. Perhaps, ironically, it was this that actually saved him. The statute had established as a common law felony ‘the detestable and abominable vice of buggery committed with mankind or beast’ but did not actually go any further in defining precisely what was this might involve.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Baker

⁴⁴ For the most recent analysis and discussion of all these issues, in their widest contexts, see Malcolm, *Forbidden Desire*, especially pp. 214–76.

⁴⁵ NRO KL/C 7/8, f. 424.

⁴⁶ From NRO KL/C 64/7/1.

⁴⁷ A. Hassell Smith and Gillian M. Baker (eds), *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, volume 3, 1586–95* (Norwich, 1990); Victor Morgan, Jane Key and Barry Taylor (eds), *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, volume 4, 1596–1602*, (Norwich, 2000); and Victor Morgan, Elizabeth Rutledge and Barry Taylor (eds), *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, volume 5, 1603–7* (Norwich, 2010) – *passim*, see indexes. After Thomas Baker’s initial expulsion from Lynn’s governing body, both brothers disappear from Bacon’s circle. On their work for the borough corporation in London, where yet another brother, Walter, was based, see NRO KL C7/8, ff. 43, 70, 75, 86, 105, 120, 154, 156, 170, 178, 180, 183, 186, 187, 106, 202, 220. Again, these commissions ceased after the exposure of the affair.

⁴⁸ 25 Henry 8, c. 6. It prescribed loss of life and property as likely outcomes as well as that ‘no person offending in any such offence shall be admitted to his clergy’ and seems to have been part of Thomas Cromwell’s campaign to

twice resorted to the Court of King's Bench and secured two separate writs of restitution, although we do not know on what precise legal technicalities he based his case; the full details of his sexual activities were almost certainly never mentioned.⁴⁹ The first writ was resisted by the corporation, apparently with some success, but on the second occasion, the borough's rulers capitulated, as recorded on 9 June 1609:

Whereas att the hall holden the 17 daye of August last passed Mr Thomas Baker was removed from the place of an Alderman sithence which tyme he hath brought two severall writtes of restitucion out of His Majesties Court of Kynges Bench att Westminster, the latter whereof Mr Maior this day brought into the hall and the same beyng broken up, itt is accepted and he restored to his place of Alderman accordinge to the tenor thereof.⁵⁰

This caused nearly as much confusion as his initial removal, because not only had another alderman been appointed in his place, but the ruling group as a whole now had somehow to save face and maintain their own dignity and integrity, as well as to preserve what they saw as their established and exclusive right of ejection and election, as laid down in the 1524 letters patent of Henry VIII.⁵¹ Their intense concern to safeguard their official position is very clear from the hall book record, and involved delegations being sent off to London until they were satisfied.⁵² Thereafter, Baker pursued his own personal vendetta against John Atkin, his action in Star Chamber claiming that the mayor who had removed him had been selling beer to retailers at excessive prices, since Atkin was a substantial brewer,⁵³ and had been guilty of other 'misconduct' in office during that first mayoral term. But, it would seem, there was little hope of success; we have no record of the final outcome, the case probably allowed to lapse. The depositions taken on the defendant's behalf included all the further lurid details of the sexual adventures that constituted a large part of the general character assassination of Baker in the Atkin defence, albeit still in a civil, rather than a criminal, action. Atkin did receive firm support from his colleagues among the ruling elite, whereas Baker seems to have been pretty well out on his own, with hardly anybody of any notable political or social standing supporting him.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Thomas Baker is not commemorated in the town; best forgotten it would seem. John Atkin is remembered, however, not only in the house that he built but also in the fulsome memorial that he has in St Margaret's church, now the Lynn Minster.⁵⁴ His eldest son, William, followed his father as an alderman

'purge' both church and state, perhaps particularly directed against monks and friars. Subsequent judicial decisions eventually led to some firmer definitions of what might come within the provisions of the legislation, including making a distinction between buggery/sodomy and bestiality. The act remained on the statute book effectively until 1861.

⁴⁹ NRO KL/C 64/7/2, copy of the letters patent of James I ordering Baker's reinstatement as an alderman.

⁵⁰ NRO KL/C 7/8, ff. 434, 438, 441, 444, where all the implications were extensively discussed and recorded.

⁵¹ NRO KL/C 2/46, which had reorganised the borough government into a 'closed' self-electing corporation and laid down the new procedures for mayoral and other elections. A subsequent royal grant in 1537 (NRO KL/C 2/48) confirmed these arrangements and, among other things, transformed 'Bishop's Lynn', the former dependency of the bishop of Norwich, into King's Lynn.

⁵² References cited in note 50 above. The problem of what to do about John Wormell, elected alderman in Baker's place, was resolved when on 21 August 1609 he was re-elected to replace John Inman, who had resigned, perhaps specifically in order to make room for him – NRO KL/C 7/8, f. 447.

⁵³ On his brewing business, and that of his eldest son, see: Metters, 'Rulers and Merchants', pp. 343–51; idem, 'Business and Politics in the Reign of James I: The Careers of John and William Atkin', in Adam Longcroft and Richard Joby (eds), *East Anglian Studies: Essays Presented to J.C. Barringer on His Retirement* (Norwich, 1995), pp. 181–90. Interestingly, the Atkins were notable among the very few Lynn merchants who actively traded with Scotland, and considerable quantities of beer were among their exports.

⁵⁴ These days, it is, regrettably, usually hidden beneath carpeting and church furniture. The memorial gives full details of his extensive family – see also Mackerell, *History and Antiquities*, p. 22; and Metters, 'Office-Holding', p. 191.

and mayor, and his official portrait in the town hall is the oldest to survive.⁵⁵ As mayor, William Atkin, too, had to deal with the cantankerous Thomas Baker. There seem not to have been any further major incidents, although whether any of his ‘unnatural’ sexual activities continued remains unclear; no more are recorded. Baker did occasionally continue to irritate his fellow rulers, including on one occasion twice refusing to attend a hall meeting because he claimed that he was ‘too weary’, and was probably too drunk. One of the sergeants-at-mace was sent to fetch him and found him initially in one of the town’s inns, ‘refreshing himself.’ Then, when sent for a second time, he was discovered at home but had instructed his maidservant to say that he was asleep.⁵⁶ He nevertheless remained an alderman, presumably tolerated at best as an eccentric, until his death in 1626, which was recorded in the hall book with some sense of corporate relief. At the hall meeting on 27 November of that year, he was listed as ‘Thomas Baker *mortuus*’, one of the very rare occasions when such wording was used.⁵⁷ At the time of his death, he seems to have been a rich man. He had been named in the subsidy assessment of 1625 among the three wealthiest of the town’s taxpayers,⁵⁸ and in his will, he made very substantial bequests to a range of people and also to Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, for books for the library. He named brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and god-children as beneficiaries, but clearly had no wife or children of his own.⁵⁹ Never again, though, was Thomas Baker chosen by the common council to be mayor of the borough; the Dutch connection had put paid to that.

III

King’s Lynn’s commercial relations with the Low Countries had been well established by the early seventeenth century and maintained a pattern that had evolved strongly during the previous reign. They were developed further as Dutch merchants and shipmasters began to take an ever more prominent part in the trade of the port. Some of the leading burgesses of the town remained closely involved in these developments and indeed seem to have profited from them, both directly in their own overseas trading ventures and more indirectly in collaboration with their potential economic rivals who had no alternative but to do business with Lynn freemen once their ships had arrived at the quayside. There seems to have been no enmity or antagonism, and there are plentiful examples of active Anglo-Dutch co-operation in shipping goods into and out of the port. The only potential point of discord at this time did not result from trade or business but from the wayward sexual behaviour of one former mayor. He had for years pestered and sometimes persecuted young men both from Lynn and also from elsewhere in the hinterland. When he tried his luck with some Dutch boys, though, he aroused the wrath of their shipmaster, who made an official complaint which the town fathers then had to respond to. Not wanting to go down the path of criminal prosecution, they found that their more limited action in simply expelling the troublesome alderman from the governing body ultimately backfired. He fought back and made a successful political comeback which the rest of the ruling group simply had to put up with. Probably much to the disappointment of the one shipmaster who had first exposed the sexual malpractice, the Dutch intervention here

⁵⁵ William Atkin served as mayor in 1619–20 – Metters, ‘Rulers and Merchants’, p. 409; idem, ‘Office-Holding’, p. 191. His portrait can be found on the ArtUK website: <<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/venue:kings-lynn-town-hall-4098/page/3>> [last accessed 23 Jan. 2025].

⁵⁶ NRO KL/C 7/9, f. 131* (*sic* – a torn folio between ff. 131 and 132).

⁵⁷ The death of a member of the corporation was invariably noted only when a replacement was elected in his stead.

⁵⁸ TNA E179/153/589.

⁵⁹ TNA PROB 11/151/18.

had only a limited impact in the end. It does not appear to have made any difference whatsoever to the more serious business of trading and making money, something that the governing and mercantile elite would not, in all probability, have wanted to jeopardise.