

APPENDIX 3

Elizabethan cloth exports

During the last two years of Henry VIII's reign enrolment of the customs accounts became very erratic and was given up entirely during the next two reigns. The practice recommenced with effect from Michaelmas 1559 and continued until 1604, when it was abandoned for ever. Despite the fact that Hanse cloth exports were now taxed at denizen rates they continued to be recorded separately until 1579, when they began to pay alien rates. Thereafter it is not possible to distinguish Hanse exports from those of other aliens, but the marked fall in the combined figures of the two groups suggests that there was very little Hanse export. During the brief interlude in 1586–7 when Hansards were again allowed to export at denizen rates, their trade is not distinguished from that of natives. By the 1560s Hanse and other alien cloth exports were virtually confined to London; for the trade of this port see the accompanying table.¹

Figures given in the enrolled accounts form the official record of all cloths (converted to notional short-cloths) which paid custom to the crown. They provide the only possibility of establishing trends in trade, but must nevertheless be used with extreme caution. The figures do not include the duty-free wrapper allowance, which was one cloth in every ten at London and all provincial ports except Hull and Newcastle, where it was two in ten. In order to calculate true exports, many figures in customs accounts have to be adjusted upwards. Unfortunately, it is not known when the wrapper allowance was introduced, though there is some evidence for it in the early sixteenth century. If the allowance came in suddenly and uniformly then there would have been an artificial drop of 10 per cent in recorded exports, which really requires an upward adjustment. Hanse and other alien exports are not affected by this

¹ At Hull Hansards exported 94 cloths in 1559–60, 15 in 1561–2 and 106 in 1562–3. A few were also exported in other years until 1566, but are not distinguished from those of denizens.

problem in the 1550s and earlier, since neither group then received a wrapper allowance. Indeed, it is likely that the allowance was originally given to denizens to reduce their fiscal disadvantage *vis à vis* Hansards. The latter gained the allowance in 1560 when it was determined that they should pay the same custom as denizens. Other aliens never received a wrapper allowance, but were given a smaller rebate in their cash payment; in their case this requires no adjustment of the recorded cloth figures.

Another problem which arises when comparing Elizabethan cloth exports with those of earlier periods (and also different years within this reign) concerns the size of the short-cloth. The customs definition of a short-cloth was altered several times in the second half of the sixteenth century, but most drastically in 1584, when Sir Walter Raleigh was granted a lease of overlengths. The inclusion or exclusion of overlengths after that date makes a difference of more than 10 per cent in recorded exports. Finally, it must be noted that the figures for the years 1569–72 should be regarded sceptically. In this period some of the customs officers were heavily ‘massaging’ their port books, partly – though allegedly not entirely – for criminal purposes. The figures given here show the official attempt to set the record straight.

	London cloth exports					
	Denizen	Hanse	Alien		Denizen	Alien
1559-60	89,864	8,381	11,444	1582-3	95,452	3,566
1560-1	59,556	16,425	5,866	1583-4	89,370	4,645
1561-2	55,735	10,133	8,714	1584-5	94,760 ^a	5,539 ^a
1562-3	32,161	12,115	7,955	1585-6	95,858 ^a	7,064 ^a
1563-4	41,603	9,038	5,838	1586-7	90,390 ^a	6,211 ^a
1564-5	106,076	10,156	17,824	1587-8	79,601 ^a	6,270 ^a
1565-6	59,654	12,278	10,249	1588-9	103,945 ^a	5,134 ^a
1566-7	56,504	8,211	4,424	1589-90	94,277 ^a	4,628 ^a
1567-8	71,814	14,906	6,877	1590-1	84,481 ^a	3,939 ^a
1568-9	72,561	12,204	11,683	1591-2	106,101	3,656
1569-70	60,569	22,907	7,728	1592-3	82,746	2,478
1570-1	67,951	4,962	5,336	1593-4	No details in acct.	
1571-2	49,447	8,443	5,695	1594-5	111,506	3,475
1572-3	73,351	5,779	536	1595-6	No acct. found	
1573-4	71,573	11,583	8,900	1596-7	56,159	2,606
1574-5	74,696	14,667	9,890	1597-8	105,267	6,284
1575-6	85,348	16,499	6,505	1598-9	81,568	6,281
1576-7	74,873	13,536	6,455	1599-1600	106,362	4,599
1577-8	78,512	12,677	9,628	1600-1	100,380	4,195
1578-9	83,735	3,723	9,965	1601-2	113,512	5,072
1579-80	92,137		7,718	1602-3	acct. corrupt	2,465
1580-1	91,436		5,225	1603-4	113,785	5
1581-2	92,228		4,974			

^a Figs. *exclude* overlengths from 25 March 1584 to Easter 1591. Thereafter overlengths are *included*.

Source: PRO, E356/28-9.