

CHAPTER I

The winning of the Hanse franchises, 1157–1361

A legal compilation commonly termed the Billingsgate tolls shows that subjects of the Emperor (*homines imperatoris*) were trading in London about the year AD 1000.¹ In addition to the regular city tolls they paid the king certain specific dues at Christmas and Easter, in return for which he gave the same protection to their possessions as natives enjoyed. The privilege, no matter how limited, and the discharge of an apparently collective obligation suggests some degree of organisation on the part of these merchants. The only townsmen from within the Empire specifically mentioned in this source are those from the Meuse settlements of Huy, Liège and Nivelles, none of which was ever a member of the later German Hanse. However, the implication is that all imperial subjects shared the privilege and doubtless men from other German towns also came to England at this date. The next evidence survives in a miscellaneous collection put together between 1206 and 1216, which portrays conditions existing in London a century or more earlier. Formerly, historians dated its first compilation to about 1130, but a more recent analysis suggests an eleventh-century date.² One manuscript begins with the statement that these were the laws of the men of Lorraine; another shows that they were applicable to all subjects of the Emperor and, possibly, in general terms to all aliens. The laws were intended to define the rights and duties of merchants who arrived by way of the Thames, which must have been the most frequently used route. They could either remain in their ships and sell their goods there or else bring them up into the city. Those who did the former paid no duty except for an impost on wine known as *cornage*, but those who

¹ A. J. Robertson (ed.), *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 70–3.

² M. Bateson, 'A London Municipal Collection of the Reign of John', *EHR*, 17 (1902), 495–502. C. Brooke and G. Keir, *London, 800–1216* (London, 1975), p. 267.

chose the latter had to pay *eschawinge*, a tax on all goods which had been recorded in the Billingsgate tolls. Most merchants were free to lodge wherever they wished within the city walls, but those of Tiel, Bremen and Antwerp had to remain below London bridge unless they were willing to be ruled by the law of the city. Possibly, this meant that they would be required to renounce their right to trial by a form of law merchant, which may otherwise have been used in disputes between aliens and citizens. Those who lodged in the city had to inform the sheriff and await his coming before unpacking their goods, although they might proceed with impunity if he did not arrive within three days. The delay was probably intended to allow time for the king's right of pre-emption. If the right was not exercised then the merchant could sell to others, but in a carefully defined order, with Londoners having first choice, next citizens of Oxford, then those of Winchester and finally any others. Until he had remained one night in the city after unpacking his goods, the merchant of Lorraine could not venture beyond four specified boundary points. This restriction was less than that put upon Norwegians, who were forbidden at all times to go out of the city to trade in markets and fairs. Danes, on the other hand, might go wherever they wished in England. Both Danes and Norwegians were allowed to stay in the city for up to a year, but Lorrainers were required to leave after forty days unless they were delayed by bad weather or unpaid debts.

The main import of the merchants of Lorraine was wine and, besides having a right of pre-emption, the king enjoyed butlerage, which allowed him to purchase a few casks at less than the market price. Except for one cask the rest had to be sold wholesale. The privilege of selling only one cask by retail can hardly have had much economic significance, so possibly its origin lay in the need to offer hospitality or samples to potential customers. Similar restrictions confronted aliens in disposing of the rest of their goods. Cloth might be sold only by the whole piece and other wares could not be sold in less than certain amounts. Other trade goods specifically mentioned in the laws were cups of gold and silver, precious stones, cloths from Constantinople and Regensburg, coats of mail from Mainz, fine linens, fustians, wax, pepper and cummin. The import trade, then, may be summed up as one in which wine was the staple commodity, with a wide variety of luxury goods making up the balance. It is impossible to construct a convincing picture of the exports of these

merchants, and statements about restrictions upon their purchases in London merely reiterate, in a garbled form, clauses from the earlier Billingsgate tolls. There is no reason to doubt the continuity implied by these two sources, but nor is there evidence that any specific privilege or form of mercantile organisation survived from this period into post Norman Conquest times.

Given the pre-eminence of wine among German imports in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, it is not difficult to accept that merchants of Cologne already played a part in the trade. Nevertheless, there is no explicit written evidence of this until the reign of Henry II. A surviving writ of that king orders the sheriffs and bailiffs of London not to molest the men of Cologne, but to let them sell wine on the same terms as Frenchmen. More important is another grant of about 1157, which conferred perpetual protection upon the *homines et cives Colonienses*. As long as they paid established dues they were to be treated as the king's own men and no fresh charges would be levied on them without their consent. By this time they had some form of corporate organisation with a headquarters in London and the king's protection was extended to that place – *domo sua Londonensi*, glossed in a later hand as *gildhalla sua*. In 1194, Richard I, in return for help given to him by the Archbishop of Cologne, conferred upon the merchants of that city the widest measure of privilege which they had yet received in England. The London Gildhall was freed from an annual tribute of 2s and its members were absolved from the payment of all local dues in London and throughout the kingdom; they could attend fairs and buy and sell wherever they wished, not excepting London; finally, they were free to exercise their own customs in England. King John several times granted simple letters of protection to Cologne merchants during the early years of his reign, but he did not confirm Richard's charter until 1210, excepting, however, customs of London. In 1213 he again confirmed the charter as part of the price paid for the support of Cologne for his nephew, Otto, in his struggle with the Hohenstaufen.³

It has been assumed that Henry III disregarded the charters of his predecessors and exacted the 2s rent for the Gildhall until 1235. If the payment or non-payment of this trifling sum was merely symbolic then its collection might indeed suggest a reluctance by the

³ *HUB*, 1, nos. 13–14, 40, 84, 89.

king to recognise the privileges which had been enjoyed by the merchants in earlier reigns. However, it is likely that previously historians have misinterpreted the significance of the renewal of the Cologne charter in 1235. It is probable that the merchants sought confirmation that year not because of any hostility shown towards them by Henry III, but rather because of the aggressive behaviour of his subjects. The previous year the king had instructed the authorities of London not to exact murage from any Germans until they had counsel with him, while immediately after the renewal of the charter he ordered the bailiffs of Yarmouth to repay 53s 4d which they had exacted illegally from the merchants of Cologne. This suggests that the confirmation of the charter was intended to publicise the fact that the merchants of Cologne enjoyed a wide measure of immunity from the payment of local tolls. The merchants had indeed temporarily lost seisin of the Gildhall earlier in Henry III's reign, possibly as a result of *quo warranto* proceedings, but had recovered it in 1220 for a payment of 30 marks.⁴

At this date both the English authorities and the merchants of Cologne may have been reluctant to concede common rights to the different groups of Germans trading in England. The Cologners were probably willing to share their privileges with neighbouring Rhineland towns, provided that these recognised the authority of the city, but north Germans were a different matter. Mention has already been made of Bremen merchants in London in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, although then they enjoyed fewer rights than some other aliens. There is no evidence from the late twelfth century about the activities of northerners, except for the grant of a wine-cellar in the parish of St Peter the Less by Richard I to Robert le Herre of Saxony. Nevertheless, it is likely that north Germans came increasingly to England as part of their general expansion in the North Sea region. In 1213 Bremen merchants were given a general safe-conduct during the king's pleasure, while a number of north-German ships received individual letters. Thereafter, English sources are again silent about them until the crisis which followed the death of Philip Augustus of France in July 1223. During this emergency all English and alien ships were placed under arrest in case they should be needed to repel a French invasion. Gradually, writs were issued for the release of ships of friendly powers and for the persons of merchants who had been detained. Orders

⁴ CCR, 1231-4, p. 453; 1234-7, p. 216. CChR, 1, p. 214. J. M. Lappenberg (ed.), *Urkundliche Geschichte des Hansischen Stadhofes zu London* (Hamburg, 1851), 1, p. 9.

given during the course of 1223 and 1224 prove the presence in England of ships from Bremen, Emden, Hamburg, Staveren and Groningen, as well as unnamed subjects of the Emperor and of various German dukes. The only more specific reference to a Baltic merchant in these years is the safe-conduct given in July 1223 to Gilbert of Schleswig, a subject of the Duke of Lüneberg.⁵

In 1237 Henry III issued a charter in favour of all the merchants of Gotland which declared them to be free of customs and tolls throughout England on all their imports and exports. This has always been regarded by historians as an original grant, but it was probably a confirmation of an existing right. Earlier, in 1226, the Gotlanders successfully claimed in the *curia regis* that they should be free of lastage and other customs throughout England, and that they had never paid any before the last war, presumably the disturbance of 1223–4. At that time Henry de Hauvill had begun to exact lastage from them in Boston and Lynn, but they claimed that they still paid no tolls elsewhere, not even in London.⁶ But just who were these Gotlanders? One problem about their identity which has exercised some historians is the question of whether by the thirteenth century the original Scandinavian merchants of Gotland had been entirely superseded by the Germans who had settled at Visby.⁷ The wardrobe purchases of Henry III indicate that Scandinavians were still prominent among the Gotland merchants, but there seems no reason to doubt that both groups shared whatever rights the islanders possessed in England. Gotland merchants still frequented the east-coast ports in the early fourteenth century, but they handled only a tiny proportion of the northern trade. More important than the ethnic identity of the Gotlanders is their relationship to the Gotland Community of the Baltic which, as we have seen, is widely regarded as having been at the core of the German Hanse. Henry III's charter was granted to 'all the merchants of Gotland' but there is no evidence to link this to the Gotland Community. Moreover, it is quite clear that merchants of Lübeck and other towns of the north-German mainland did not automatically share in Gotland privileges in England.

⁵ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, 1201–16, p. 194. *CPR*, 1216–25, p. 376. H. M. Chew and M. Weinbaum (eds.), *The London Eyre of 1244* (London Record Soc., 6, 1970), p. 89. Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 16–17.

⁶ *CCR*, 1234–7, p. 427; 1237–42, p. 38. *CChR*, 1, p. 227. *Curia Regis Rolls*, 12, p. 427.

⁷ A. E. Christensen, 'Scandinavia and the Advance of the Hanseatics', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 5 (1957), 89–117. G. A. Lönig, 'Deutsche und Gotländer in England im 13 Jahrhundert', *HG*, 67–8 (1942–3), 65–93.

Evidence that Lübeck merchants were coming to England before 1226 is provided in an imperial charter granted to the city that year. It ruled, *inter alia*, that Cologne must stop exacting illegal tolls from Lübeck merchants in England. This establishes that there was already some connection between the two groups, for why else should the former try to tax the latter in a country which was alien to both? It could never have tried such a move against Flemings or Italians. No doubt Lübeck resisted the attempted taxation not merely on financial grounds, but because payment would have acknowledged the leadership of Cologners in the German community in England. For several decades the two groups continued to go their own ways, but there is little direct evidence that Lübeck formally led a rival, north-German community. Nevertheless, the growing north-German presence in England forced the government to consider their claims to parity of treatment with the Cologners. When the city of London obtained a murage grant in 1234, the mayor and sheriffs were instructed not to collect it from the merchants of the King of Germany or the Archbishop of Cologne until the king had a colloquy with all parties. In 1230 Henry III granted a general protection to all the men of Otto of Brunswick, who included Lübeck merchants, though it was conditional upon payment of all established duties. In 1238 certain privileges were granted specifically to Lübeck, but they were not as wide as those enjoyed by Cologne. In fact they were little more than the safeguards needed by any merchant venturing abroad regularly, such as a guarantee against spoilation in the event of shipwreck. In 1252 the citizens of Hamburg obtained protection for three years, while in 1257 those of Lübeck were given protection for seven years, provided that they remained true to Henry III's brother, Richard, now King of Germany. In this time their goods were to be spared all royal prises.⁸ More significant were developments in 1266. In November the merchants of Hamburg received permission to have their own hanse in England, while at Christmas the men of Lübeck were vested with privileges wider than any they had yet enjoyed, including the highly coveted immunity from distraint of goods for any offence or debt other than their own. The record of the latter grant made no mention of a hanse, although this may have been an oversight, since a few days later the Lübeckers obtained a charter which not only reiterated the newly acquired

⁸ *CPR*, 1225–32, p. 415; 1247–58, pp. 155, 553. *HUB*, 1, nos. 205, 292.

privileges but also added that they could have their own hanse like that of Cologne. It can be no coincidence that these two major cities each obtained a hanse within a few weeks of one another at the end of 1266. Although there is no record of any *quid pro quo*, it is impossible to doubt that they were allowed their hanses in an attempt to soften resistance to the collection of the 'new aid', the English customs duties which had recently been imposed by the crown on both native and alien merchants.⁹

During the second half of the thirteenth century the various groups of German merchants were welded into a single community claiming common privileges. This included the Gotlanders, whose 1237 charter was still in the possession of the London Steelyard in the middle of the fifteenth century. The process of assimilation is not easily reconstructed. Some historians have claimed that the decisive step had been taken by 1260, when Henry III at the request of his brother Richard confirmed the existing privileges of the merchants of the 'gildhalla teutonicorum vulgariter nuncupatur', but without reference to any earlier specific grant.¹⁰ This description of the hall has been taken as proof that merchants from all over Germany were now admitted to the Cologne organisation. There is nothing in the charter to warrant this interpretation beyond doubt, for although an official record it is cursory in the extreme. The common parlance referred to probably had in mind the Cologne Gildhall when it spoke of the Gildhall of the Germans, for then as now the man in the street probably regarded one German-speaker as being much the same as another and would be unable to remark the difference between one from Cologne and another from Hamburg. On the other hand, another document also datable to 1260 refers to the leader of the Gildhall merchants as 'aldermanno mercatorum Alemannie', which perhaps provides support for the theory of a united community at that time.¹¹ It may be argued that the grant of separate privileges, including hanses, to the merchants of Hamburg and Lübeck in 1266 proves that they were not yet part of a wider community, for if they were why was such independent action necessary? The point is not incontrovertible since both towns acted unilaterally even in the Baltic, where there is less doubt about the existence of a united Hanse. Before 1261 Lübeck obtained privileges for its own citizens in Sweden. In that year they were confirmed and extended to the men

⁹ *CRP*, 1266–72, pp. 5, 20, 23. Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, p. 60.

¹⁰ *HUB*, 1, no. 552.

¹¹ Lappenberg, *Urkundliche Geschichte*, 2, no. 28.

of Hamburg, but not to those of other German towns, despite the fact that earlier Swedish rulers had made grants without qualification to merchants of Germany. K. Kumlien interprets this as a significant step in the metamorphosis of the Hanse of merchants into the Hanse of towns.¹² It might be unwise, however, to put the same gloss on the 1266 development in England.

While the 1260 charter does not positively establish the existence of a united commercial community in England at that date, it must be admitted that in later years the Hansards attempted to persuade the English authorities that it did just this, particularly when their liberties were threatened. The 1260 charter was always the earliest put forward by the united German Hanse for confirmation, and its brevity and vagueness became an advantage rather than a disadvantage. After the passage of time it became more and more difficult to prove that the privileges referred to in 1260 should be enjoyed only by the men of Cologne, if that was indeed the case, and not by those who had joined up with them after that date. The first confirmation of the 1260 charter was obtained in November 1281, a few months before the earliest conclusive evidence of a united Hanse. The need probably arose from renewed claims by the de Hauvill family about their rights to lastage in the principal East Anglian ports. Thomas de Hauvill, the king's hereditary falconer, leased the lastage of Boston to two Florentine merchants for two years from 30 November 1281 for 100 marks and there may well have been a dispute about his rights in Lynn. At any rate, it was later claimed that the Germans ceased to pay lastage here on 2 November 1281. There the matter rested until 1291 when, following a *quo warranto* enquiry, de Hauvill again attempted unsuccessfully to establish a right to lastage from the Germans at Lynn. The Cologne men seem to have had no objection to the use of the 1260 charter by the united Hanse, but in 1290 and again in 1321 they took the sensible precaution of renewing and defending their other charters, dating back to the twelfth century.¹³ These protected their rights even if the 1260 charter should at any time be declared invalid. There is no evidence that the Hamburg and Lübeck men ever sought separate

¹² K. Kumlien, 'Hansischer Handel und Hansekaufleute in Skandinavien', pp. 88–9, in A. von Brandt and others, *Die Deutsche Hanse als Mittler*, pp. 78–101.

¹³ *CPR*, 1272–81, p. 465. *Placitorum... Abbreviatio* (London, 1811), pp. 280, 285. H. T. Riley (ed.), *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis* (London, 1859–62), 2, pp. 66–7. *HUB*, 2, no. 381. *Hanseakten*, no. 26.

confirmation of their charters of 1266, presumably because the rights defined therein were narrower than those enjoyed in practice by the end of the thirteenth century.

As already mentioned, the earliest clear reference to a united Hanse is found in 1281, and it is possible that then, or shortly before, the German merchants decided to form a common front against Englishmen, particularly Londoners, who were seeking to curtail their privileges. Early in that year the city authorities tried to make the Germans accept financial responsibility for the repair of the Bishopgate and also to pay murage, a local tax charged on goods entering and leaving the city. The first claim had been made during the hundredal enquiries of 1275, when two juries found that the Germans (*Teutonichi*) were responsible for maintaining Bishopgate, which had fallen into disrepair. Both juries admitted that in return the merchants should enjoy all the liberties of citizens. When the merchants resisted, the city appealed to the king, who summoned both parties to the Exchequer, where judgement was given on 4 July 1282.¹⁴ It was agreed that the Germans should now pay 240 marks to put the gate into good repair, that they should be responsible for future repairs and also that they would bear one third of the cost of keeping a watch at the gate, the city paying the rest. In return it was ruled that the Hanse should be freed from payment of murage in perpetuity. It was also agreed that corn brought into the city by Hanse merchants might be sold from their hospices and granaries within forty days, unless the king or the city authorities needed to order otherwise because of dearth. A third concession was that the merchants should have their own alderman. He was to be elected by them and then presented to the city authorities, before whom he was to swear that he would do right and justice in the Hanse's own court. The office was described as having existed before this, and that was certainly true. Possibly, the present agreement set the seal to a change in status or alternatively afforded formal recognition to what had hitherto existed without the sanction of the crown.

Whether the city or the Hanse gained the greater satisfaction from the agreement of 1282, it is unlikely that at this date the Londoners could have made serious inroads into the liberties of the merchants. Any move in this direction would certainly have been blocked by Edward I, whose policy of protecting aliens culminated in the

¹⁴ *Rotuli Hundredorum* (London, 1812–18), 1, pp. 416, 428. *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, 1, pp. 485–8.

suspension of London's charter in 1285. Opposition to direct rule and the favouring of aliens is visible from at least 1290, but the king loosened his grasp on the city only in the wake of the constitutional crisis which began in the autumn of 1297. In April 1298 he withdrew the royal warden and restored the mayoralty. The citizens immediately rounded upon aliens who had been bold enough to take advantage of the laxness which had prevailed during the interval of direct royal government. In June 1298 many aliens, including eight Germans, were charged with keeping lodging houses, a practice forbidden by the city although during the suspension of the charter both alien freemen and other aliens of good character had been suffered to do so. Amerciaments and warnings given to those found guilty and to others charged the following year failed to curb the desire of aliens to dwell in their own premises or to lodge with fellow countrymen. In April 1300, ten Germans and eight southerners were again ordered to give up their own hospices and to take up residence with freemen. The attempt by the Londoners to restore old customs was not confined to hosting regulations, for they also tried to enforce other rules, including the forty-day limitation upon residence. In May 1301 a number of citizens were chosen to go with the mayor to Kenilworth to treat with the king about this and other matters. However, the business was repeatedly suspended and it remained unresolved until the grant of the *Carta Mercatoria* in 1303. In the meantime the city was ordered not to molest aliens.¹⁵

The two groups which stand out most clearly in this struggle between London and the alien community were the merchants of the German Hanse and the Gascon wine importers. The city seems to have mounted a concerted campaign against the pretensions of the Germans in an effort to hamper the growth in their trade. In June 1298 the Hanse was charged with illegally avoiding payment of duties on goods imported into and exported from London. The citizens claimed that the privileges of the merchants provided immunity only for goods which they brought directly from their homeland and that there was no protection for *aver de poys*, drapery and wool, in all of which the Germans had recently begun to meddle. The Hanse was given a day to prove its claim to the wider immunity

¹⁵ *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, 2, p. 71. R. R. Sharpe (ed.), *Letter Books of the City of London* (London, 1899–1911), C, pp. 16, 65, 95. A. H. Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Early Mayors' Court Rolls* (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 7–10, 12–13. *CFR*, 1, pp. 439–40. T. H. Lloyd, *Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages* (Brighton, 1983), pp. 21–4.

from duties. A little later two of its members were charged with removing wax from a ship in Greenwich – a breach of the law that imported merchandise should be discharged only within the city. For good measure both were also accused of importing pollards and crockards in breach of the recently enacted statute of Stepney, but in the event the latter charge was disproved. The charges brought by the Londoners receive a certain amount of support from the fact that in May 1298 the king had sent a writ to the sheriffs of the city ordering them to pay particular attention to the activities of the Germans and to stamp out certain offences which he believed them to be committing. He had heard that they were abusing their liberties by avowing other men's goods as their own, and also that they were smuggling false money. It is possible, of course, or even likely that such rumours emanated from the Londoners themselves.¹⁶

On this occasion the Hanse seems to have made no attempt to argue its case before the city but instead appealed directly to the crown, for a royal writ dated 7 August 1298 was sent to the mayor and sheriffs. It cited the Hanse charter of 1260 and its confirmation by Edward I and alleged that these liberties had been disallowed by the citizens. The latter were now commanded to let the merchants enjoy their rights or else to appear before the king to justify their disobedience. The writ was returned with the observations that the liberties had not been denied and that when the merchants had been summoned before the city they failed to prefer charges against anyone. In the light of the last statement the Hanse thought it advisable to bring a test case, and on 24 August Ralph de Attendorn complained before deputies of the mayor that on two occasions Richer de Refham had unlawfully exacted duty on imported silk. The case probably went against the Hanse and it appealed yet again to the king, oiling the wheels of justice with loans to the wardrobe of 500 marks and 600 marks. Further royal mandates ordering that the merchants be allowed their liberties had no effect and in February 1301 two justices were commissioned to hear their complaints and to enforce their rights. These disputes were soon overtaken by other events, for in 1303 Edward I published the *Carta Mercatoria*, the most important royal pronouncement yet made about alien trade. Extensive privileges valid throughout the kingdom were conceded to all alien merchants, but in return they were required to pay

¹⁶ *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, 2, p. 196. *Early Mayors' Court Rolls*, pp. 2, 26.

additional customs duties on all their imports and exports. The Hanse, as one of the leading and most cohesive groups of aliens, played a major part in the discussions which gave birth to the *Carta Mercatoria* and it was equally prominent in the struggle to get the charter accepted in London. For example, when the city made concessions in 1309 in an important matter relating to the weighing of goods, the Hanse provided eleven out of twenty-one alien negotiators.¹⁷

Since Edward II confirmed the *Carta Mercatoria* shortly after his accession, and since it appeared to provide safeguards as strong as, or stronger than, those of their charter of 1260, the Hanse made no immediate move to obtain confirmation of the older instrument. But by the summer of 1311 the situation was very different, for the privileges enjoyed by all aliens were then fiercely under attack and the *Carta Mercatoria* was soon to be cancelled as part of the famous ordinances published that autumn. This caused the Hanse to scrutinise its own charters very carefully and, finding that the 1281 confirmation of the 1260 grant made no reference to the merchants' heirs, they felt it worth paying £100 for a confirmation by Edward II which rectified the situation.¹⁸ This was done in June 1311 before the cancellation of the *Carta Mercatoria*, so that after that the merchants of the Hanse were legally back where they had been before 1303.

No sooner had the Hanse obtained confirmation of the 1260 charter than further gaps in its franchises were exposed, although the events which demonstrated this resulted eventually in the deficiencies being made good. The cause of the trouble was a series of piratical attacks upon Englishmen, in which German ships were alleged to have been involved. The most serious case was the seizure off the coast of Norfolk of wool and other goods belonging to a group of Lincolnshire merchants. The culprits were said to have come from Lübeck, Hamburg, Kampen, Cologne and other towns in Eastland. In retaliation the Englishmen obtained writs instructing the sheriffs of Norfolk and Suffolk, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire to arrest all German-owned property within their bailiwicks. This provoked the Hanse into making representations to the crown, and on 10 July 1311 the sheriffs were instructed to release the goods,

¹⁷ *Early Mayors' Court Rolls*, p. 43. *CPR*, 1292–1301, pp. 450, 479, 622. *Letter Book C*, p. 41; *D*, p. 209. Lloyd, *Alien Merchants*, pp. 27–9.

¹⁸ *CPR*, 1307–14, p. 354. *Rotuli Originalium in Curia Scaccarii Abbreviato* (London, 1805–10), p. 181.

since the king wished to show special favour towards the merchants of Almain. However, they had to provide surety to answer the charge of piracy in the Chancery on 9 September. As a result of this hearing the sheriffs were ordered to release the mainpernors of the Germans, on the grounds that the original arrest of their goods had been illegal. It is clear that the Lincolnshire merchants lost the first round of their action for damages because they had acted prematurely in seeking the writs of distraint. This was an accepted part of the law merchant, but such distraints should not be made until the aggrieved parties had sought justice from the lords or civic authorities of alleged robbers or debtors. Only if justice was denied should the plaintiffs then have recourse to direct action in their own country in order to speed up the legal process. Since the crime in question had been committed on 24 June 1311, the Lincolnshire men cannot possibly have sought and been denied justice in Germany before the arrests of early July. It was probably on these grounds that the Chancery ruled that the arrests were illegal; the fact that the owners of the arrested goods were not privy to the robbery was not an issue, for provided that due processes had been observed they might legally be called to account for the actions of their compatriots. Although the Lincolnshire men had been faulted on this occasion they were not debarred from continuing their action and in March 1312 they obtained royal letters addressed to the civic authorities of Hamburg, Lübeck and Kampen requesting that the pirates be brought to justice. Hamburg and Lübeck replied in very similar terms, simply denying any involvement of their citizens. Kampen neither admitted nor denied implication in the piracy, but submitted counter-charges of its own merchants. After refusing several times to link the specific charge of the Lincolnshire men to general complaints of Kampen, Edward II finally acceded to a request for a letter of safe-conduct for envoys to come to England to discuss all grievances; two consuls came under the protection of a letter covering the period from 1 May to 1 November 1313. According to the English version of events, these two merely sought to delay settlement of the piracy claim and then broke off all negotiations without justification. After the failure of the talks, writs were issued on 16 November 1313 for the arrest of all goods belonging to Hamburg, Lübeck and Kampen to satisfy the claims of the Lincolnshire merchants.¹⁹

¹⁹ *CCR*, 1307–13, pp. 111, 364, 378, 541, 543, 578; 1313–18, p. 26, *CPR*, 1307–13, p. 567. *PRO*, SC1/13/80; 19/71.

Although the seizures noted above were limited to the cities of Lübeck, Hamburg and Kampen, there is no doubt that they were a cause of concern to the Hanse as a whole, for within a few days it had asked the king to command the Chancery to maintain the Hanse in its liberties. In fact, these liberties did not protect the Hanse against reprisals which were soundly based on the law merchant. It is true that the king could and did bestow immunity from arrest upon individuals or groups of merchants where they were not themselves debtors or trespassers, but this was a jealously guarded privilege which had been excluded from the *Carta Mercatoria*. Among the cities of the Hanse only Lübeck had so far obtained this right, although in the present troubles it seems to have been disregarded. The Hanse now made a determined effort to add this plum to its liberties and in April 1314 it was conceded to all the merchants of Almain.²⁰

Having obtained the immensely valuable privilege of immunity from general arrest the Hanse had to vindicate it against powerful interests. It was soon an issue in several cases involving English merchants, but the real test became a complaint by William de Widdeslade, citizen of London. Widdeslade had goods valued at £300 taken from a Brabant vessel putting out from Sluys in Flanders, and he laid charges against the men of the Count of Holland and eight named German towns. In January 1316 in the parliament assembled at Lincoln the king's council awarded him the amount of his loss plus £100 damages. The following Michaelmas Widdeslade obtained writs authorising the arrest in Boston and Lynn of goods belonging to men of the Count of Holland and of 'the men whom he shall ascertain'. The Hanse immediately petitioned for the release of the arrested goods, claiming that none of the eight towns were involved in the piracy; indeed, some had actually lost goods in the same incident. Moreover, all were members of the Hanse and therefore enjoyed immunity from general arrest. The plea was accepted and in mid-November 1316 instructions were given for the release at Boston of goods and ships belonging to Lübeck, Münster and Soest. But, in January 1317, Widdeslade obtained a new writ authorising the arrest at London of goods to the value of £300 plus any damages awarded by a city jury. The Hanse appealed yet again and in March the sheriffs were ordered to release Hanse goods valued at £400. By 1317 the immunity of the Hanse

²⁰ *CChW*, 1, p. 394. *CPR*, 1313–17, p. 112.

from arrest was a serious issue and it must have seemed expedient to obtain confirmation at the highest level. On 27 June a royal patent guaranteed immunity until 6 September; on 30 September this was extended until the next parliament, when presumably it was intended to debate the whole matter thoroughly. However, on 7 December 1317 the Hanse confounded its opponents by obtaining a royal confirmation of its charters, for which it paid no less than £1,000. Not only did Edward II confirm the grants of his predecessors and his own award of immunity from arrest but, for the first time, he conceded that neither he nor his heirs would place new impositions on the Hanse without its consent.²¹

The new Hanse charter probably made its enemies even more determined to discuss their grievances in parliament, and the Germans whose goods had been released in London in March 1317 were summoned to the assembly held at York at Michaelmas 1318. It was then urged that, since an award had been made against them before the date of their recent charter, the earlier judgement should be implemented. No agreement could be reached on this matter and a decision was deferred until the next parliament. In fact, it was not until July 1320, after several more reverses, that Widdeslade was finally able to secure the successful execution of a writ of distraint against a group of German merchants. By this time the influence of the Hanse was waning rapidly and in the following year Widdeslade petitioned in parliament for an increase in the amount of damages awarded to him, on the grounds that the Germans had vexatiously delayed a settlement. In consequence of this a London jury increased the figure by £200.²²

The purchase of the 1317 charter must have convinced the English merchants that they could not secure the abolition of the Hanse liberties and therefore their only course of action was to restrict the number of those entitled to enjoy them. This was no easy matter. Some of the Hanse charters referred merely to the merchants of Almain, while more recent grants to the merchants of Almain of the London Gildhall were hardly more satisfactory, since they seemed to allow the Germans to determine their own membership. In the York parliament of 1318 the Englishmen established that a certain German whose goods had been arrested was no longer a member of the Gildhall, but thereafter they ran into difficulties.

²¹ *CCR* 1313–18, pp. 366, 376, 393, 398. *CChW*, 1, p. 447. *CPR*, 1313–17, p. 672. *HUB*, 2, no. 313.

²² *CCR*, 1318–23, pp. 45–7, 89, 155, 158, 248, 414.

Almost invariably, when German merchandise was arrested, Hanse officials swore that the owners were members of the Gildhall and the goods had to be released. Naturally, the English were not prepared to accept this state of affairs indefinitely and at the end of 1319 they challenged the testimony that certain merchants of Soest and Greifswald were members of the Gildhall. A jury composed of Londoners and non-German aliens then found that the merchants in question had not been members at the time their goods were arrested. In 1320, no doubt in consequence of the conflicting testimony of the Hanse and the London jury, the crown brought a suit in the King's Bench against the former. It was called upon to certify the names of all its members, the towns from which they came and who admitted them. Before this case was concluded it was overtaken by *quo warranto* proceedings arising from the London eyre of 1321. The latter action was the more serious since it was not restricted to the question of membership, and the entire fabric of the Hanse privileges came under attack. The proceedings began in the Chancery but were soon transferred to the King's Bench, where they were repeatedly adjourned. In Hilary term 1324 the merchants failed to appear and the sheriffs were ordered to take their liberties into the king's hands. The next year the merchants paid a fine of £20 to replevy their liberties, but judgement was continually deferred until the matter was closed by the accession of Edward III and a fresh confirmation of the charter of 1317 and all earlier privileges.²³ The precariousness of the collective liberties of the Hanse in the later years of Edward II forced individuals to protect their own interests as best they might. The Cologne merchants did so by submitting their own charter of 1194 to the *quo warranto* proceedings of 1321. Since the privileges which this enshrined were narrower than those enjoyed by the greater Hanse, the charter had been somewhat neglected in recent years and had never been confirmed by Edward II. But should the wider franchises be overthrown and the Hanse disintegrate, the Cologne charter might establish a useful fall-back position for the men of Westphalia. Additionally, from at least as early as the spring of 1323, some German merchants obtained personal letters of protection. At first these tended to be simple letters of safe-conduct, but later documents described the principal liberties claimed by the Hanse and stipulated that they should be enjoyed by the recipient. Some men received progressive benefits; privileges

²³ CCR, 1318–23, p. 45. H. M. Cam (ed.), *The Eyre of London, 1321*, 1 (Selden Soc., 85, London, 1968), pp. lxxiv–lxxv, cxvii–cxix; 2 (86, 1969), pp. 180–5.

bestowed at first during royal pleasure, then for life, with a final accolade of denizen status.²⁴

Unlike his father, Edward III did not issue a general confirmation of the *Carta Mercatoria* after his accession; instead, individual groups of aliens were left to renew their own copies of the charter. This fact became significant in the early 1330s, when London began to levy murage on alien goods. The city was not simply ordered to desist; instead, Chancery issued separate instructions in favour of any merchants who produced current charters to warrant their liberties.²⁵ The German Hanse was not among those who thought it advisable to update their copies of the *Carta Mercatoria*, probably because it felt sufficiently protected by its other charters, which were confirmed by the new king as early as March 1327. Its confidence was not without foundation. The liberties granted uniquely to the Hanse by Edward II were in some respects more valuable than those provided by the *Carta Mercatoria*. Moreover, the temporary cancellation of the *Carta Mercatoria* under the terms of the 1311 ordinances had shown that it was vulnerable to political attack. The Germans' own liberties were no more vulnerable; in fact, since they were shared by a smaller group, they might rouse less resentment and therefore be easier to defend. Whether or not the Germans' neglect of the *Carta Mercatoria* was deliberate, they undoubtedly tried to capitalise on the fact in 1330. That year, they petitioned that the duty of 3d in the pound, and by implication all the alien customs duties established in 1303, were being taken from them illegally. But, instead of simply claiming that they did not currently come within the terms of the *Carta Mercatoria* and ought not therefore to bear its charges, they sought to distort the historical record. They alleged that Henry III had granted that no custom should be taken from them without their consent and that Edward I had confirmed this before 1303. Even were it true, this claim would have been irrelevant since the Germans were undoubtedly in the forefront of those who negotiated and gave their consent to the charter of 1303. In fact, while the *Carta Mercatoria* itself contained a vaguely worded promise that aliens would not be subjected to further taxation without their consent, an unambiguous undertaking to this effect unique to the Hanse was given only in 1317. Not surprisingly, the crown rejected the suggestion that Hansards should be exempt from the 1303 duties. In April 1332 Edward III made his first general confirmation of the

²⁴ CPR, 1321–4, pp. 280, 434; 1324–7, p. 194. CCR, 1323–7, p. 402.

²⁵ Lloyd, *Alien Merchants*, p. 33.

Carta Mercatoria. Thereafter, there could hardly be any question but that the Hanse was subject to all its provisions.²⁶

In 1335 the position of all alien merchants in England was significantly strengthened by a statute made in the parliament assembled at York. Until now their status had depended almost entirely upon the royal prerogative, but many of the privileges which the king had bestowed upon them conflicted with prescriptive and chartered rights of English communities. Conflict was inherent in any attempt to favour aliens, but hitherto in many quarters the claims of natives had been regarded as paramount, by virtue of that bastion of liberties – *Magna Carta*. Chapter 41 of this document attempted to provide a minimum of civilised treatment for visiting merchants, but it ranked well below chapter 13, which said that London and all other towns should continue to enjoy all their ancient liberties and free customs. The statute of 1335 cut through this difficulty by declaring that all chartered franchises and customary usages which interfered with its intent were null and void. Parliament did not, however, explicitly endorse the *Carta Mercatoria* and the short statute did not go into any detail about the points at issue between Englishmen and aliens. It simply stated that aliens might trade in all commodities, although wine could be exported only by royal licence, and that they might deal with whomsoever they wished, whether denizen or fellow alien. Nevertheless, it was clearly the intention of parliament to establish a wide measure of free trade, and when the statute was confirmed in 1351 it was then spelled out that this included the freedom to engage in both retail and wholesale trade.²⁷

During wartime all rights to trade, whether established by royal charter or parliamentary statute, were subordinated to other considerations. At the beginning of the Hundred Years War such considerations included Edward III's diplomatic and financial strategies. To assist these a total ban was placed on the export of wool, which was the main English product handled by both denizen and alien merchants. The king sought to reassure aliens and to encourage them to maintain the rest of their trade by letters of safe-conduct. A large number were issued in the early years of the war, some in favour of all aliens, some limited to particular groups. They were generally for a specified period of time, usually from one to three years; however, little if any significance can be attached to the

²⁶ CPR, 1330–4, p. 270, *Rot. Parl.*, 2, p. 46. HUB, 2, no. 460.

²⁷ *Stats.*, 1, pp. 270, 315.

time factor. On the one hand, although letters often promised that the *Carta Mercatoria* would be respected during this period there is no suggestion that afterwards recipients would automatically be put outside the charter. On the other hand, one cannot suppose that the king bound himself unconditionally to continue his protection until the end of the given period; should circumstances require, it would undoubtedly be withdrawn. Legally, notice ought to be given if letters of protection were terminated prematurely, so that aliens had time to settle their affairs and depart in peace. Naturally, such a courtesy was not extended to the subjects of any power who behaved unfairly to English merchants abroad. On at least two occasions during the early years of the war the Hanse franchises were put in jeopardy. The first threat arose from the arrest within the territory of the Archbishop of Cologne of one master John Piers, who was released only after payment of a large fine.²⁸ From 1344 until 1346 his executors sought to recover damages by distraining the property of German merchants in England. Although Piers had been about the king's business, this was a private action; because of this the arrests were limited in scale and ultimately unsuccessful since they were objected to as a breach of Hanse privileges. The second incident was potentially far more serious, since at first the crown chose to treat it as an insult to itself and the entire English nation. It revolved around the execution in Sluys of Richard Curtys of Bristol, on a charge of piracy brought by a German merchant. The English merchants of the staple represented this to their government as judicial murder, procured by perjury and slander. In July 1351 the liberties of the Hanse were suspended and a wholesale arrest made of goods and debts throughout the country. Individual merchants gradually recovered their property by swearing that they had no association with the German Hanse in Flanders, but a shadow lay over them for several years. The franchises were formally restored by June 1354 at the latest, when an elaborate letter of protection shows that they were then being enjoyed by all members of the Hanse in England.²⁹

The ban imposed on the export of wool in 1336 was relaxed in favour of the Hanse in March 1338, but the trade remained subject to strict controls and was also burdened with a subsidy additional to the ancient custom of 1275 and the new custom of 1303. At first the rate was 20s per sack for denizens and aliens, while the latter were

²⁸ *HUB*, 3, nos. 39, 42, 65, 77–8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 207–11, 214–15, 222, 233, 235, 238, 258, 298.

also required to pay an equal sum as a loan. Later the amount was increased and aliens were frequently required to pay a higher rate than denizens. Various considerations counselled acceptance of this increase in tax beyond the level agreed to in 1303. Subsidy was paid by natives as well as by aliens; there were precedents from earlier in the reign of Edward III and from that of Edward II; consent was obtained, initially from English merchants and at least a few leading aliens, later from parliament. Most importantly, of course, unless he paid subsidy a merchant simply would not be allowed to export wool.³⁰

While there is no evidence that aliens questioned the legality of the wool subsidy, they did not submit so readily to the new taxes on other goods which were introduced in 1347. Most controversial was the levy on English-made woollen and worsted cloths, established by 'common consent' in a great council held in March. Aliens paid 1s 9d for woollen cloths of assise without grain (more for those in grain and half-grain) and 1½d on standard cloths of worsted (more for single and double beds of worsted). The fact that they had to pay this in addition to the cloth duties established in 1303 soon roused protests, probably on the grounds that they had not given consent. As early as October 1347 instructions were given that the new duty was not to be taken at present from members of the German Hanse, although a guarantee was obtained that it would be paid retrospectively should their liability be established. By 20 January 1348 a decision had been made in favour of the merchants and it was ruled that they should pay only the duty of 1303 and be exempt from the new tax. It is far from clear whether this decision was based upon the *Carta Mercatoria* or upon the 1317 privilege of the Hanse. If the German exemption stemmed from the *Carta Mercatoria* one would expect to find parity of treatment between them and other aliens, but this is not the case. There is no record of an order in favour of non-Hanse aliens in 1348, though not until 1351 is it possible to establish whether or not these others were actually paying double duty. From that date there was a lack of uniformity for a number of years. Sometimes non-Hanse aliens paid double duty, sometimes they did not. Whenever they were spared one of the duties it was always that of 1303, not the higher rate of 1347 as in the case of the Hanse. No specific instructions to customs collectors about non-Hanse cloth duties have been found, except for writs sent to Southampton on 25

³⁰ Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 144–92.

October 1356 and to London on 1 February 1357. In both cases the collectors were told to disregard a previous order exempting merchants of Aquitaine from payment of the 1303 duty, since the king's council had now decided that they must pay both that and the 1347 duty. Although these writs refer only to Gascons it is likely, but not certain, that all non-Hanse aliens paid the same rates in any given port. This attempt by the Exchequer to enforce double payment was not altogether successful and the lack of uniformity continued until 1361. From that date until 1381 non-Hanse aliens paid only the 1347 duty in all ports except London, where they continued to be charged double duty.³¹

The stabilisation of non-Hanse rates in 1361 probably resulted indirectly from the settlement of a new dispute with the Hanse, although this left the Hanse paying only the 1303 duty and confirmed its exemption from that of 1347. It is not clear just how and when the dispute began, but some time before May 1358 the king's council ruled that the Hanse merchants should pay 1s 9d on exported cloths of assise. This was interpreted by the collectors of Boston and Hull as meaning that they should pay 1s 9d in addition to the 1s which they were already paying. On 12 May 1358 they were instructed not to collect the 1s until Michaelmas next, since the Hanse had found mainpernors to pay double duty on all cloths exported between the two dates should their liability be established. On 16 May the collectors at Boston, Lynn, Yarmouth and London were ordered to stop demanding 1s 9d per notional cloth in addition to the 3d in the pound *ad valorem* duty which was already paid on straits and pieces of assise measuring less than half a cloth in length. On 16 October the Boston collectors were informed that the Hansards were to pay only the 1s 9d on cloths of assise, since it would be unjust to make them pay double duty. The London collectors were told the same on 2 December 1358, an earlier writ dated 28 November having confirmed that in the case of worsteds the Hanse was to be charged only with the 3d in the pound of 1303 and not with the 1347 duty. Thus far, then, it had been decided that Hanse woollens of assise were to pay only the 1347 duty and their worsteds and straits only the 1303 duty. In London the Hansards, having paid only 1s 9d on assise cloths in 1358–9, paid 1s and 1s 9d in 1359–60. It is clear that the compromise satisfied neither the Exchequer nor the Hanse, and the situation remained confused until 8 February

³¹ *CFR*, 6, p. 28; 7, p. 29. *CCR*, 1346–9, pp. 334, 354. *CPR*, 1348–50, p. 201.

1361. It was then decided that henceforth Hansards should pay only the 1303 duty on whole and half woollen cloths of assise and only 3d in the pound on straits, smaller pieces of assise and worsteds. The agreement was honoured for the remainder of Edward III's reign. Only the bare bones of this dispute between the Exchequer and the Hanse about the 1347 duty can be reconstructed and, as already remarked, it is impossible to determine whether the Hanse justified its position primarily by the *Carta Mercatoria* or by the privilege of 1317, though both were cited in the formal verdict of the king's council in 1361. In truth, neither may have been the deciding factor, since the council stated that it favoured the merchants 'in consideration of services by them rendered in the king's war and elsewhere, of aids oft-times granted in time of his need, and of the readiness found in them beyond other alien merchants in the king's business'. Since Hanse loans to the crown had dried up some years previously it must be assumed that some remnant of gratitude remained or else the council had an eye to the future in acknowledging that such services would not be unrewarded.³²

As well as refusing to pay the permanent new custom on cloth, the Hansards resisted temporary subsidies on other goods, allegedly levied to pay for the protection of maritime trade. The first of these was authorised by the great council of March 1347, the rates being 2s on a tun of wine and a sack of wool and 6d in the pound on general merchandise, to be collected from denizens and aliens from the 18th of that month until Michaelmas. In the event, the tax on merchandise continued until 25 November 1347 and that on wool until the following Easter. In the middle of October the Hanse obtained an order that for the time being its members should not pay this subsidy, just as it gained a respite from the new cloth duty. As we have seen, by January 1348 the dispute over the cloth duty had been resolved in favour of the Hanse, but no record has yet been found of any decision in the other matter. The same problem exists in relation to the second subsidy of tunnage and poundage, which was collected from 28 February 1350 to 28 June and, after a temporary suspension, from 24 September 1350 to 29 September 1351. In April 1350 the subsidy was not charged upon the cargoes of four cogs arriving at Boston, but this may have been an act of special grace. It is clear that during the following winter and spring all Hansards were required to pay the subsidy at the time of export

³² *CCR*, 1354–60, pp. 448, 467, 518; 1360–4, pp. 151–2.

or import unless they found mainpernors to pay later, should it be decided that they were liable.³³ Although no formal record survives of the decision of the king's council in this matter, it appears to have gone against the merchants. Events in the aftermath of the Curty's affair may be indicative. As mentioned earlier, all whose goods were arrested in 1351 gradually recovered seisin, except for Hildebrand Sudermann, alderman of the London Gildhall, whose chattels valued at £207 remained attached and were eventually sold on behalf of the crown. A possible explanation is that Sudermann had pledged members who were unable to put up cash for the subsidy and he remained personally liable until it was paid, so the Exchequer did not need to waste time pursuing recalcitrant debtors.³⁴ Those whom Sudermann pledged had not necessarily failed his trust, since they may have paid him directly and left him to discharge the debt at the Exchequer. If he did not deliver the money then he was himself responsible for his predicament. When a third grant of tunnage and poundage was collected, between 1 December 1359 and 26 June 1360, there is no record of even temporary respite being allowed to Hansards and, given the current dispute about cloth duties, it is most unlikely that they were spared.

In the light of the fact that the privileges enjoyed by the Hanseatics diminished both the king's own revenues and those of his subjects it is somewhat surprising that the question of eligibility did not figure more prominently than it appears to have done for much of the middle ages. The crown was initially content to grant franchises to the 'merchants of Almain', without seeking to define more closely those who fell within this category. Even when it was made aware of the problem caused by the exercise of these liberties it failed to grasp the nettle by giving a clear ruling as to who should enjoy them. Instead, it adopted a pragmatic policy of asking the officials of the Hanse Gildhall in London to say who was or was not a member as the need arose. These tended to acknowledge almost every German merchant in difficulties as a member of their organisation. Eligibility for membership of the Gildhall stemmed from citizenship of certain German towns; later, birth in such towns was claimed by the English authorities to be a prerequisite. Early fourteenth-century sources establish Cologne, Dortmund, Münster, Soest, Osnabrück, Recklinghausen, Lübeck, Hamburg, Greifswald,

³³ *CCR*, 1346–9, p. 334; 1349–54, pp. 167, 259–60, 291, 297.

³⁴ I.-M. Peters, *Hansekaufleute als Gläubiger der englische Krone, 1294–1350* (Cologne and Vienna, 1978), pp. 287–8.

Gotland and Dinant as places from which merchants categorically and successfully claimed the protection of the franchises when their goods were distrained. Harderwijk merchants advanced a claim in 1305, but their distrained goods were released on other grounds, so on this occasion the question of membership was not put to the test.³⁵ Merchants from Rostock, Stralsund, Deventer, Staveren and Attendorn can be shown to have been members by other criteria, such as participation in deliberations of the Hanse at Boston in 1303.³⁶ This list may not include all the towns which supplied members, but it might be a mistake to try to spread the net too wide and claim that membership at this time was open to all German merchants. On the other hand, it is probably more important to stress that it was not limited by any action of the English crown.

Granted that the citizens of an undetermined number of towns were eligible for membership of the Hanse, the question next arises as to whether they automatically became members whenever they came to England or whether they had formally to be admitted into the organisation. If the latter, was membership voluntary or compulsory? Membership was not totally automatic for this would have excluded the possibility of expulsion or resignation, which certainly existed. When a number of north-German ships visited Lynn in 1303 in defiance of a Hanse boycott of the town, the captains and merchants were summoned to appear before senior members of the fellowship at Boston fair and were given the choice either of compounding for their offence or of being expelled from the organisation ('extra iudicium ac libertatem Teutonicorum ponerentur').³⁷ They chose the former. In 1319 a jury found that one Hermann le Skippere had ceased to be a member of the London Hanse, but no further explanation was recorded.³⁸ Karl Engel favours the idea of both formal and compulsory membership and in support cites a Cologne statute of 1324 which provided that its *Englandfahrer* must belong to a Cologne hanse and that wherever four of them were assembled they were empowered to elect an alderman who had authority over all the city's merchants. There is also evidence for the existence in 1328 at Attendorn of a fraternity of St Nicholas, whose members regularly traded with England.³⁹ It seems

³⁵ *Early Mayors' Court Rolls*, p. 78.

³⁶ *HUB*, 2, no. 40.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 40.

³⁸ *CCR*, 1318–23, p. 89.

³⁹ K. Engel, 'Die Organisation der deutsch-hansischen Kaufleute in England im 14 und 15 Jahrhundert bis Utrechter Frieden von 1474', *HG*, 19 (1913), 455–517, especially 458, 469; 20 (1914), 173–225.

likely that disputes about the right to enjoy the franchises would not often have arisen in the case of those who lived permanently in England or regularly visited the main centres of economic activity, but from time to time newcomers must have been challenged. In the late fifteenth century provincial customs officials required a certificate of membership issued by the Steelyard. This they returned to the Exchequer with their accounts as a warrant for allowances. In cases of doubt a similar procedure could have been followed in earlier times, since the London Gildhall was clearly recognised as the chief executive authority of the Hanse before the end of the thirteenth century. When the city of Lübeck complained about the arrest of seven of its ships at Newcastle, Ravenser and Yarmouth in 1295, orders for their release were given after two Englishmen and four Germans resident in London provided sureties that they would not trade with the French and would subsequently account to the Gildhall for their movements.⁴⁰ It is not possible to reconstruct the constitutional relationship between the London Gildhall and the Hanse communities which were established at several east-coast ports, but in practice the latter must have enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy. In large measure they were composed of individuals whose business was confined to these provincial centres and who had little or no interest in the economic life of the capital.

By 1300 the German community permanently settled in London was well over a century old. A few of its members were acknowledged as citizens and denizens and this group probably bore the main burden of administering the collective interests of the Hanse. Its leadership was based not on numbers nor upon current economic strength, but upon the historic role of the community and, more importantly, its proximity to the seat of England's government. Permanent German residents may have been fewer in the provinces, but the number visiting those ports in person or sending goods there in the custody of others was very much greater than in the case of London. Moreover, financial investment in the former places was also greater. During the second half of the thirteenth century the German stake in provincial overseas trade had grown considerably, but involvement in London's trade failed to keep pace with overall growth and in certain sectors there may even have been an absolute decline. The result was that the trade of London-based Germans fell back relative to that of those in the provinces as well as to that of

⁴⁰ PRO, E159/68, m. 61.

other aliens operating in the capital. It is difficult to detect when these trends were reversed. London's share of Hanseatic trade in England may not have increased significantly until after the middle of the fourteenth century, though the total Hanse share of alien trade may have received a boost in the early stages of the Hundred Years War. Apart from the obvious fact that certain nationalities were then disadvantaged by being classed as enemies, many German merchants suddenly evinced an unaccustomed willingness to lend money to the king, which may have been accompanied by an increase in trade.

The most sensitive branch of London Hanse trade was also the oldest – the import of Rhine wine. By the end of the thirteenth century this had largely been destroyed by the competition of French wine. In 1315 the Hanse unsuccessfully claimed that their wine imports should not be subject to prise.⁴¹ During the course of the dispute it was alleged that no vessels now came fully loaded with wine, but only a few tuns were brought in as general cargo. As its wine trade dwindled the London Hanse failed to find a niche for itself in important sectors of import growth. Surviving early fourteenth-century customs accounts show that almost half of all imports taxed on an *ad valorem* basis consisted of small miscellaneous goods classed as mercery;⁴² Germans had no share in these. Their role in the import of cloth from the Low Countries was negligible; between 29 September 1308 and 31 March 1309 Germans brought in fewer than 100 out of a total of 3,626 cloths, and this is their best performance recorded in the surviving accounts.⁴³ Even more surprising is the almost total absence of fish and timber products, which made up the bulk of German imports on the east coast. This was despite the fact that Lübeck merchants were among the permanent residents of London and the former city was still the dominant power in the export trade of northern Europe. Since there must have been a market in London for these goods it must be supposed that many were brought there by intermediaries after being landed first on the east coast.⁴⁴ Those northern products which do appear in the London customs accounts, viz. wax, furs and copper, were not imported directly, but had been stapled in Flanders. These things, together with battery from the Dinant area and weapons, armour and steel from around Cologne, were virtually all that the

⁴¹ *Hanseakten*, nos. 52, 55.

⁴² Lloyd, *Alien Merchants*, p. 54.

⁴³ PRO, E122/69/3.

⁴⁴ The London fishmongers claimed a monopoly of fish imports.

Hanse merchants imported. In all of them the Hanse had a near, though not complete, monopoly, but even when added together they made up only a comparatively small part of London's total imports. Furthermore the trade was not immune from disturbance. In July 1309 a number of Germans were prosecuted for conspiring to increase the price of wax.⁴⁵ It was alleged that since the previous Christmas they had refrained from importing it and consequently prices had doubled. In defence they claimed that the usual practice was for wax to be shipped from Russia and elsewhere to Flanders about Eastertide, but this year none had arrived so they were unable to replenish their stocks. Customs accounts confirm that there was a sharp drop in wax imports not just in London but throughout the country in 1308–9. London imports averaged 1,075 cwt a year between 1303 and 1308, amounted to 451 cwt (including, exceptionally, 112 cwt belonging to a Genoese and a southern Frenchman) between Michaelmas 1308 and 31 March 1309, but only 106 cwt between the latter date and 28 August 1309. In the first decade of the fourteenth century and for some time afterwards London was the chief port of entry for wax, but from the mid-1320s its imports fell catastrophically. Boston became the centre of the trade, though it did not compensate for London's decline, so total imports of wax were greatly reduced. At the same time the general range of alien imports into London fell by over two thirds, so if the Hanse's share of the remaining trade was no higher than it had been previously then its role in the economic life of the capital must have been much curtailed.⁴⁶ Exports were at all times negligible except for wool, but discussion of this activity will be reserved until later.

At the end of the thirteenth century the provincial towns which figured most prominently in Hanse trade were Boston, Lynn, Hull and Ravenser, though other east-coast ports also enjoyed their patronage. The oldest and strongest connections were with the first two places, though in both cases the earliest evidence, dating back to the twelfth century, consists of unspecific references to 'Easterlings' (*Estrenses*). Wool was exported by Germans from Hull at least as early as the 1270s, and in 1294 a general arrest of alien shipping trapped many more Hanse vessels in Yorkshire ports than anywhere else in England. Hull and Ravenser were major competitors to Boston and Lynn for the Hanse trade at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but by the 1320s the threat had receded

⁴⁵ *Hanseakten*, no. 40.

⁴⁶ Lloyd, *Alien Merchants*, appendix A1.9, p. 219.

and the Ravenser connection was eliminated entirely. In 1303 the Hanse instituted a boycott of the port of Lynn which, although not totally effective, lasted until 1310, when the town authorities agreed to the restoration of the merchants' former privileges. Thereafter it again became a centre of Hanse activity. The overall make-up of Hanseatic trade varied from one to another of the provincial ports, but in all of them the range of both exports and imports was wider than in London. The variety of imports was also much greater at the end of the thirteenth century than it had been some fifty years before, though due allowance must be made for the fact that in the interim Hansards were replacing some other groups in important branches of trade. Initially, German imports from northern Europe had consisted largely of furs, hawks and wax; this trade was retained though overwhelmed in significance by more mundane products. Contrary to London practice, furs and wax destined for provincial markets were not necessarily stapled in the Low Countries; in fact most of the furs came directly from northern Europe. In the case of wax the position varied; at Boston between February and Michaelmas 1303, 184 cwt out of 313 cwt came directly from the north, though at other times the proportions were reversed; at Lynn in the 1320s some undoubtedly came from the north, though the immediate origin of most cannot be determined. Copper coming to the provincial ports in the early fourteenth century, as in the case of London, came chiefly from a Low Countries staple.

Two factors in particular were responsible for the transformation of Hanseatic trade with England in the second half of the thirteenth century; these were the intrusion of Hanse merchants into the economy of Norway and the so-called *Umlandfahrt*, the direct sea voyage from western Europe to the Baltic. The principal products of Norway were fish and train oil. Stockfish was caught in the far north, cured in adjacent villages and exported through a staple at Bergen. Smaller, though significant, quantities of winter herring were caught off the south-west coast of Norway and found a market in England at a time of year when stocks of locally caught herring were becoming exhausted. By the end of the thirteenth century Hanse merchants were handling a large part of this trade, but there is no reason to suppose that they originated it. They were probably displacing both Norwegian and English merchants.⁴⁷ Lübeck

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–4.

attempted to monopolise the traffic, and in 1284 the *Englandfahrer* of Stralsund complained of the oppression which they suffered at the hands of merchants from the former city.⁴⁸ The early-fourteenth-century customs accounts indicate that Lübeck still dominated the trade, though it did not have a total monopoly, since ships and merchants of Stralsund, Rostock and Hamburg, as well as those of the northern Low Countries can be identified in it. In the first decade the English staples for stock fish were Boston and Ravenser, and at the latter, though not at the former, Norwegians shared the trade with Germans. By the 1320s both Hanse and Norwegian imports to Ravenser had dried up and Boston became the sole staple for stockfish. Herrings were brought chiefly to Hull and Lynn, and in the 1320s particularly to the latter port. Unfortunately, in the 1320s the nationalities of the shippers were not recorded, but it looks as if this trade was less dominated by Germans than the stockfish trade. The fish traders also imported from Norway, although much less in value, timber, goat and deer skins, butter, wool and coarse woollen cloth.

The earliest specific reference to the *Umlandfahrt* occurs in a Kampen source of 1251. The northern Dutch towns of the IJsselmeer and the rivers which debouched into it were pioneers of the voyage and continued to participate in the fourteenth century.⁴⁹ By then they had been joined in force by the so-called Wendish towns of the Hanse, i.e. those of Hamburg and the western Baltic. Lübeck shared in the traffic, though not dominating it to the extent that it did Anglo-Norwegian trade. Ships from east of the river Oder appear very infrequently in English sources before the middle of the fourteenth century, though the Lynn and Hull customs accounts record visits by several Gotland ships, and those of Hull one ship from Reval in Estonia in 1304 and one each from Elbing and Kolberg in Prussia in the 1320s. The earliest batch of Hull accounts, but no others, are sufficiently informative to provide some sort of quantitative assessment of the participation of various towns. Table 1 shows Hanse ships (including a few exporting wool only) which can be positively identified in Yorkshire ports between 1304 and 1309, though it is very far from being a complete count of those which came there. Before the inception of the *Umlandfahrt*, goods

⁴⁸ *HR*, 1 (i), no. 28.

⁴⁹ F. Petri, 'Die Stellung der Südersee- und IJsselstädte im Flandrisch-Hansischen Raum', *HG*, 79 (1961), 34–57.

Table 1. *Hanse ships in Yorkshire ports, 1304-9*

	Hull			Ravenser			Scarborough	Totals
	In and out	In only	Out only	In and out	In only	Out only	In only	
Stralsund	10	10	7	0	4	1	2	32 ^a
Hamburg	8	4	2	0	8	1	2	25
Lübeck	1	2	0	1	10	0	0	14
Rostock	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	5
Greifswald	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
Wismar	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Visby	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Reval	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	20	20	11	1	28	2	4	84

^a Two ships entered at one port and left at another.

coming from the Baltic were unloaded at Lübeck and carried across the base of Jutland for reshipment at Hamburg. The new route by reducing transport costs encouraged an expansion in those trades in which this was a significant factor, such as timber. The Baltic timber trade was much more varied than that of Norway, supplying not merely hewn and sawn timber, but many artefacts made of wood, such as bowstaves, spade shafts, barrel staves, gates, troughs, tables and chairs, as well as resins and ashes. Another bulky cargo was corn, although England was not a regular importer and it is a moot point whether any came from the Baltic before the 1320s. The German grain imports at Hull in the first decade of the fourteenth century were all carried in Hamburg and Dutch vessels, which allows the possibility that they had originated in north-west, rather than eastern Germany.

The range of goods leaving provincial ports for the north was much narrower than that of imports, though in contrast to London the Hanse merchants did at least have a stake in the non-wool export trade. The only things which really interested them were salt and woollen cloth. Salt, exported from Hull, Boston and Lynn, was handy cargo for ships which might otherwise have to return home with worthless ballast, and was readily saleable at the Skania herring fishery. This explains the prevalence of Stralsund ships, with the salt customed in the name of the masters. Cloth, again found at all three ports, occupied less space but was considerably more valuable,

though falling far short of that taken a century later. This meant that trade between England and Germany was very much out of balance and the Hanse importers had capital to repatriate. Since English bullion laws barred them from exporting cash or specie, the feat had to be accomplished indirectly. The key to the situation may have lain in the provision of finance for England's exports to the Low Countries, particularly Flanders, a substantial proportion of which was handled by Hanse merchants. It must be emphasised that in the early fourteenth century these were not the same merchants who traded between England and the Baltic or Norway, for to all intents and purposes the two groups did not overlap. Only infrequently can 'northerners' be found in Anglo-Flemish trade, even in the case of those like the Thousandpounds at Boston who seem to have had a strong base in England. The interest of the Flanders merchants in direct Anglo-German trade is even less conspicuous. Between 1304 and 1309 none of the regular German wool merchants of Hull traded directly with the north, with the exception of Martin de Raceburgh who exported two small cargoes of salt in 1306. This omission is to be explained by a lack of interest in northern trade rather than a disdain for any commodity but wool. Besides wool, some of the Flanders men exported lead and grain; the latter in particular was not a regular trade, but consisted of occasional, though large, speculations in response to temporary shortages in Flanders, which attracted many other wool merchants besides the Germans. Some of this group regularly imported wax and copper, less frequently furs and infrequently items in which the Hanse had no deep-rooted stake, such as figs, raisins, almonds, rice, onions, in fact anything that might come to hand in the continental marts. Finally it may be mentioned that Hanse merchants owned proportionately more of the woollen cloth imported at the east-coast ports than they did at London, though even here they were not major figures.

Little or no trace survives of business connections between the two groups of merchants distinguished above; such evidence as exists only establishes relationships between individuals or partnerships within one group or the other. Nevertheless, it seems possible that many of those who accumulated surpluses from northern imports lent them to Flanders merchants in return for letters of exchange. If they wished to repatriate money in one transaction rather than several then it may have been advisable to turn to fellow Hansards rather than Italian bankers. The former could have drawn directly

upon north-German towns, whereas the financial business of the latter was directed to the Low Countries. Even so, surpluses from the northern trade added to the proceeds of their own imports from the Low Countries would have been insufficient to pay for all the wool bought by Hanse merchants at the pinnacle of their involvement in this trade in the early fourteenth century. This means that they must have imported bullion or, alternatively, borrowed from Italians and repaid in Flanders after selling the wool. A partial, but very infrequent, alternative was to lend money to the English crown on the continent in return for allowances or assignments in England, thereby reducing the sums which had to be raised on this side of the channel.⁵⁰ The suggestion of extensive use of credit in English business in this period is supported by evidence from other quarters. A century or so later the Hanse is commonly supposed to have set its face firmly against credit operations, though this traditional picture has recently been queried.⁵¹

It is impossible now to determine just when Germans began to export English wool. There appears to be no evidence that they did so before 1270, yet in 1271, when wool could be exported only by licence, merchants of towns which were in the process of uniting as the Hanse received licences for over 2,300 sacks.⁵² Is it simply that earlier evidence has not survived or were the licensees newcomers to the trade, taking advantage of the current enforced absence of the Flemings who had previously dominated it? Another question which needs to be asked is whether an initial speculation in wool more usually came from a business firmly established in England or one rooted in Flanders. In the former category one must surely put John Brilond, citizen of Lübeck and London, who had been importing wax and furs for two decades before he appears as a wool licensee. John also had connections with York, and in 1267 advanced the royal farm on behalf of its citizens. Brilonds still exported wool in the early 1290s and John, or another of the same name, was cited in the parliament of 1290 for allegedly destroying the poor folk of Norfolk by prosecuting them in the King's Bench on behalf of Lübeck merchants.⁵³ Another prominent wool licensee was Gerard Merbode, citizen of London and alderman of the Gildhall in 1282; he was the

⁵⁰ Peters, *Hansekaufleute*, *passim*.

⁵¹ Dollinger, *German Hansa*, pp. 203–6. S. Jenks, 'War die Hanse kreditfeindlich?', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 69 (1982), 305–38. S. Jenks, 'Das Schreiberbuch des John Thorp und der hansische Handel in London, 1457–9', *HG*, 101 (1983), 67–113.

⁵² Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 48–9.

⁵³ *CLR*, 1251–60, p. 37; 1260–7, pp. 190, 277; 1267–72, p. 99. *Rot. Parl.*, 1, pp. 46, 52.

son of Merbode of Dortmund, who died in London about 1265. Merbodes also exported wool until the 1290s. On the other hand, many of the Lübeckers who followed the Brilonds in the wool trade may have had a primary economic interest in Flanders. Their absence from the Anglo-northern trade routes suggests that their Anglo-Flemish trade should be seen as an extension of a Lübeck–Flanders trade. Nevertheless, for some of them the wool trade became very big business indeed, which can have been valued no less than that starting and finishing in Lübeck. In the case of the Clipping family the wool trade may even have been responsible for their removal or return from Lübeck to Dortmund. In the 1270s the Clippings of Lübeck were among the leading wool licensees, though even then described as kinsmen of the Merbodes. In the fourteenth century the Clippings, now even more prominent, seem to have regarded Dortmund as their home town. This is not to say that Lübeck interest in the wool trade was in any way diminished. The Revel and Hacthorpe (alias Clericus) families, and probably that of Raceburg, all among the very top rank of wool exporters, hailed from Lübeck, as did many others who were not so important. Lübeck was the only northern town which had anything but the most casual stake in the wool trade and with that exception most Hanse wool merchants came from a small area of West Germany bounded by Cologne and the river Rhine on the south and west, and Münster and the upper reaches of the river Ems on the north and east. At the geographical centre of the latter region lay Dortmund, whose citizens became more and more dominant among Hanse wool exporters, though the neighbouring towns continued to enjoy a share. The fact that Lübeck and Dortmund were so obviously distinct and separate centres of this trade must not be allowed to obscure personal and business connections between the two, which embraced other families besides the Clippings, and extended back to the foundation of Lübeck.

While the Hanse stake in the wool trade must have received a boost from the Anglo-Flemish dispute of the 1270s, it benefited even more from the Anglo-French war of 1294–7 and its aftermath. As well as further diminishing direct Flemish participation in the trade the conflict seriously weakened the big Italian companies who had dominated it in recent years. The surviving customs accounts of the early fourteenth century make it clear that, for a short period at least, the Germans were by far the most important group of alien exporters and this period saw the high-watermark of their

involvement in the wool trade. From 1303 all alien exporters were required to pay a duty which was 50 per cent higher than that levied on denizens. It is impossible to determine how far the differential was directly responsible for the marked increase in the denizen share of the trade which followed. However, the trade as a whole was experiencing a massive boom, so that the total alien export, from which a German total cannot be isolated, did not begin to decline for several years. The abolition of the new custom in 1311 might have reversed the decline in the alien share if other factors had not soon intervened. These were political, and they may have caused greater discomfort to Hanse exporters than a higher tax bill. The catalyst was the deterioration in Anglo-Flemish relations after the accession of Edward II. Germans, the Englishmen's major competitors in Flanders, could trade in that country with impunity, while the latter did so only at considerable risk. The Englishmen therefore decided that if they could not venture wool directly to Flanders then no one should be allowed to do so. In 1313 they proclaimed a staple at St Omer in Artois, to which all exported wool had to be taken. This was a neutral town, but easily accessible to Flemish buyers so that Englishmen could trade there without prejudice and in fact might be able to direct affairs to their own advantage. In later years a compulsory staple at Calais was to provide Englishmen with a total monopoly of wool exports, except for those which went to Italy. The first staple did not yield such a result, since many exporters defied the law and continued to trade elsewhere. In 1320 a commission of enquiry singled out German merchants as having been particularly serious offenders. Even so the compulsory overseas staples and the abortive home staples of 1326 and 1333 must have inconvenienced aliens and therefore may have been a factor which discouraged many from continuing in the wool trade.

It is impossible to quantify the Hanse wool trade but a careful study of the surviving customs accounts establishes that it was considerably smaller in the 1320s and 1330s than it had been in the first decade of the century. However, it was by no means finished; nor is there any indication of any significant changes in the way it was organised; some leading families drop out of the picture, but some remain and other prominent figures appear. At the beginning of the Hundred Years War the German wool trade, like that of all private merchants, was brought to a standstill, but was permitted again from the spring of 1338 once it became apparent that the

crown could not operate a total monopoly. The trade was closely regulated, but a series of loans to the king's agents in Antwerp and Flanders ensured that those who contributed obtained licences to export throughout the periodic bans on private trade. Repayment of the loans took the form of allowances of duty and grants of wool coming to the king from various levies imposed on his subjects. The Hanse men did not receive all that they were promised from the latter source and the greater part of their stocks continued to come from private purchases. Eventually the sums owing to them became so large that repayments had to be supplemented by a general assignment on the customs and other sources of royal revenue. Although the loans were undoubtedly initiated as a means of obtaining export licences, the later amounts suggest that they had become a commercial proposition in their own right. This is the only period in Anglo-Hanseatic history that the merchants entered into such a relationship with the crown. The series of loans continued until 1350, and a significant change in the method of organisation after the mid-1340s was probably more apparent than real. The earlier loans were put together by a number of separate syndicates, each of which, though not a corporate entity like the Italian societies, was composed of individuals who traded independently but had business connections with one another. The later loans were advanced in the name of Tidemann Limberg, a comparative newcomer from Dortmund, but it is unlikely that he was merely using his own capital. It is safe to assume that he was still drawing upon the collective resources of the Hanse merchants.⁵⁴

Although it is impossible to determine whether the absolute level of Hanse wool exports in the late 1330s and early 1340s was greater than it had been a decade or so previously, there can be little doubt that as a proportion of non-royal trade it was much larger. Thereafter it becomes very difficult to make judgements on such matters. The inventories of Hanse goods arrested in August 1351 contain remarkably little wool, at a time of year when one might expect to find large stocks in hand, but it would be dangerous to read too much into this.⁵⁵ From the autumn of 1352 to the summer of 1357 aliens enjoyed a monopoly of wool exports, but the absence of customs particulars makes it impossible to allocate the trade between different nationalities, while other references to German involvement

⁵⁴ For full details of all loans see Peters, *Hansekaufleute*.

⁵⁵ PRO, E101/127/7; 128/8. PRO, E372/192, m. 47; 197, m. 38. *HR*, 1 (i), nos. 153–7.

are sparse and fortuitous. It may be noted, however, that when home staples were being set up in 1354, four Germans and seven Italians were consulted by the king's council.⁵⁶ The compulsory staple at Calais in the 1360s may have jeopardised Hanse participation, though its members were not totally eliminated. John de Hatfield, who figures in the 1351 inventories and appears as a wool exporter in 1358, traded at Calais as late as 1367.⁵⁷ Other evidence indicates that Hatfield was thoroughly anglicised. The freedom for aliens to go to places other than Calais in the early 1370s led to an increase in their actual and proportionate exports, but again the Hanse share cannot be isolated. The protest made by the Hanse diet in 1375 against the additional taxes which were charged on wool which bypassed Calais indicates that its members had not yet surrendered all interest in the trade. However, surviving customs particulars from the early part of Richard II's reign indicate that by that time Hanse participation was virtually at an end. To what extent this may have been consequent upon involvement in another branch of England's export trade will be considered later.

To conclude this chapter we may examine the question of whether, or to what extent, Englishmen plied a trade with the Baltic before the middle of the fourteenth century. In the light of repeated claims that English vessels were in the Baltic during the thirteenth century it may seem surprising that the question must be put in such a speculative form. Unfortunately, historians all too often borrow from one another without reconsidering the evidence. Some Londoners who appear to have been trading at Copenhagen in or before 1251 probably did not go there in their own ships. The earliest reference to English ships making the voyage seems to be a document tentatively dated to about 1294.⁵⁸ The latter is a request by the town of Zwolle to Lübeck to prevent English ships from entering the Baltic and is generally taken as proof that the latter were in fact making such voyages. However, the letter makes a distinction between Frisians and Flemings, who had visited the Baltic and whom Lübeck had attempted to stop, and English ships whom Zwolle wished to stop. At best this appears to impute a degree of novelty to an accomplished feat, but may indicate nothing more than a fear that Englishmen might try the adventure. Be that as it may, the first half of the fourteenth century provides no further examples of English vessels, or even of English merchants in the Baltic. On the other

⁵⁶ *CCR*, 1349–54, p. 605.

⁵⁷ *CCR*, 1354–9, p. 482; 1364–8, p. 363.

⁵⁸ *HUB*, 1, nos. 405–6, 1154.

hand, since English merchants are known to have freighted goods in Hanse ships from Norway and Denmark it is credible that they also traded with the Baltic by the same means. In 1316 a Ravenser man loaded rye and barley in a Lübeck ship at Ålborg in Denmark, while in 1322 Lynn merchants took goods to Bergen in another Lübeck ship and brought stockfish back in the same.⁵⁹ By 1364 English merchants and ships were venturing as far as Prussia, but it is still necessary to make a *caveat*. At this period the export trade was very strictly regulated, but of hundreds of enrolments of licences to Englishmen to export goods or money a mere handful relate to trade with the Baltic.⁶⁰ The earliest evidence of Englishmen taking up residence in the Baltic is a licence granted in 1373 to John Swerd, bowyer, of York, to send four yeomen and two grooms of his craft to stay in Prussia for four years to fashion bows and send them home. Three years before, Swerd had been licensed to ship wine to Prussia and import wheat and rye in return.⁶¹ Whether or not Swerd actually went through with his plans, within a few years there undoubtedly were English settlers in Danzig and they introduced a whole new dimension into Anglo-Hanseatic relations.

⁵⁹ PRO, SC1/34/62; 36/12.

⁶⁰ CPR, 1361–4, pp. 497, 511, 517; 1364–7, p. 35.

⁶¹ CPR, 1370–4, pp. 60, 264.