CHAPTER 5

Rivalry at Antwerp, 1474–1551

Following the settlement at Utrecht relations between England and the Hanse remained remarkably tranquil until almost the end of Edward IV's reign. During the 1470s the waters around the British Isles were largely free from assaults on shipping. The only piratical incidents recorded are the seizure of a Stralsund ship in 1474 and a Lübeck ship in 1475, while a Danzig ship and its cargo were pressed into the king's service by the admiral, Lord Howard, in 1478. This unaccustomed state of affairs was not, however, unique to Anglo-Hanseatic relations. Overall, there was a dramatic fall in the number of piracies, as a result of the reassertion of the king's authority and the general peace which existed, apart from the brief expedition to France in 1475. A number of Hanseatic ships were pillaged after being wrecked on English coasts, but looters recognised neither friend nor foe, so this activity does not indicate any special animosity against Germans. In any case, the crown ordered the investigation of all reported incidents, and satisfaction was probably given, since few of them reappear in any of the detailed lists of damages submitted to the conferences held to consider such matters during the reign of Henry VII. Hanse merchants were just beginning to sail to Iceland, where the English had half a century's start on them, and a number of clashes occurred between the two groups in these waters, now one side and now the other being cited as the aggressor. From 1481 conditions gradually deteriorated. At first the Hansards suffered a number of losses as a direct or indirect consequence of English naval expeditions against Scotland. In 1481 the Prussians lost a ship to Newcastle sailors; the next year two more vessels were taken from them by the men from the same port and a third was seized by the Duke of Albany, renegade brother of the Scots king.[1]

[1] *CPR*, 1467–77, pp. 493, 605; 1476–85, pp. 23, 49, 145, 344. *CCR*, 1476–85, p. 336. *HUB*, 10, nos. 470, 489, 1201. *HR*, III (ii), no. 509.

The accession of Richard III saw the area of insecurity extended to the southern North Sea and the Channel, as France and Brittany were drawn into the conflict. In February 1484 the Steelyard merchants sent word to Danzig that England, France and Brittany all had warships at sea and that there was little hope of getting compensation for any prizes taken by them.[2] The record of Prussian vessels allegedly seized or robbed by the English was one in 1483, six in 1484 and eight in 1485, while other ships were arrested for long periods. Cologne's losses in these years were limited to relatively insignificant seizures of wine and other goods in 1484 and 1485. Lübeck alleged five separate attacks on her ships between June 1481 and July 1483.[3] Detailed claims for damages sustained by other towns have not survived, but there is evidence of a Hamburg crayer seized by pirates near Dover in January 1484 and of another Hamburg ship taken by a royal squadron; the crown also compulsorily purchased a Lübeck ship at Dartmouth in January 1485.[4]

Richard III confirmed the treaty of Utrecht and the Hanse franchises on 18 July 1484, and on 5 December he agreed that the Steelyard should continue to retain the petty customs until the financial indemnity was fully paid.[5] Nevertheless, the franchises were already being undermined by legislation of parliament and various actions taken by royal and urban officials. How soon and how deeply parliamentary legislation began to bite is uncertain, since the first recorded complaints date from after the accession of Henry VII and relate chiefly to events of that reign. But the first of the Tudors merely strengthened legislation which had been initiated by the Yorkists. This is seen most clearly in the context of the cloth trade. In 1468 Edward IV prohibited the export of unfinished woollen cloth, but at first little or nothing was done to enforce the ban. This was partly because the wording of the act of parliament was deficient and partly because the prohibition sought to be too all-embracing. Henry VII provided clearer definition of what was intended and limited the scope of the ban to a more practicable level. Certain named types of cloth and any generally priced at £2 each or less were exempted from the requirement. This measure was incorporated in a parliamentary statute in the autumn of 1487, but it was

[2] *HUB*, 10, no. 1125.

[3] Full details of Danzig, Cologne and Lübeck losses between 1474 and 1490 were submitted to the Antwerp conference in 1491. *HR*, III (ii), nos. 509–10. *HUB*, 11, nos. 445–6.

[4] *CPR*, 1476–85, p. 425.

[5] *HUB*, 10, nos. 1149, 1172.

put into effect by royal proclamation as early as December 1486.[6] Moreover, steps were now taken to see that the law was obeyed, at least in so far as the Hanseatic merchants were concerned. The Steelyard complained to a Hanse diet held in May–June 1487, citing the testimony of Joris Tack of Duisburg that he had been obliged to have 500 cloths sheared unnecessarily. In April 1489 the London cloth workers, allegedly with the connivance of the customs officers, secured the arrest of cloths which had already been put on board ship. These were released only after the merchants had provided sureties not to export any more unfinished cloth. This incident became a major *cause célèbre*, with the Hansards claiming that the legislation was being used simply to harass them. The Cologne merchants complained bitterly, alleging that not only had they to pay for finishing cloths in England, but also that the work was done so badly that they commanded a lower price on the continent. In 1491 they claimed that since 1485 (*sic*) they had needlessly finished 13,650½ cloths at a cost of 2s each and lost a further two florins (8s 8d) on the sale of each of them.[7]

In 1483, at the request of London silk-women, a ban was imposed on the import of certain articles made of silk. This was aimed chiefly at Italian merchants, and Jews and Saracens were named as the principal manufacturers of the articles in question, but Cologne silks were specifically included in the ban. It was first intended to last until Easter 1487, but after only one year it was extended to 1497 and in 1485 was further extended to 1507.[8] The first recorded confiscation of silk from a Cologne merchant is dated September 1486,[9] but there may have been earlier cases. Legislation designed to increase the import of bowstaves was more of a nuisance than a threat to trade, and in any event there is no evidence that it was enforced at this time, since it does not feature among the grievances voiced by the Steelyard.[10] In London the Hansards fell foul of officialdom when they claimed that their privileges provided immunity against the price-fixing policy which the city introduced for a wide range of goods during the 1480s. The earliest case for which precise details are supplied was in 1484, when a Cologne merchant refused to part with 4,840 bushels of salt for less than 1s 4d per bushel, although the mayor had fixed the price at 1s. Later, he

[6] *Rot. Parl.*, 5, p. 621. *Stats.*, 2, pp. 422, 920. *HR*, III (ii), no. 109.
[7] *HR*, II (ii), nos. 118, 298–301, 508.
[8] *Rot. Parl.*, 6, pp. 222–3. *Stats.*, 2, pp. 472, 493, 506.
[9] *HR*, III (ii), no. 508.
[10] *Rot. Parl.*, 6, pp. 156, 222, 494. *Stats.*, 2, pp. 432, 472, 521.

had to sell at 6d a bushel, when the general price fell and his own stock deteriorated because of poor storage. In February 1486 the mayor closed down four German wine cellars, because the owners refused to accept his assise price of 10d per gallon for Rhine wine. He tried to have the wine condemned as bad and, although this move was defeated by an appeal to the royal butler, a big import of Bordeaux wine brought down the general price level and again the Hanse merchants had to sell at a loss. In the provinces Hanseatics met with most opposition in York and Hull. As early as the first parliament of Henry VII the town's members called for the enforcement of the fourteenth-century employment acts, which required aliens to buy English goods equal in value to their imports. In fact Yorkshiremen tried to enforce a strictly regional interpretation of the acts, demanding that when imports were sold in the 'north parts' the corresponding exports should be bought there and not in other areas of England. The Hanse men resisted this on the grounds that they could not find good quality cloth in Yorkshire. The locals reinforced their campaign by claiming that, since Englishmen going to Danzig were not allowed to go outside that town to trade, Hanse merchants should not go beyond Hull or York. In several ports customs officials began to demand full alien rates of duty on all imports not originating in Hanse towns and upon all exports not shipped to such places.[11] Apart from increasing revenue, this was designed to discourage Hansards from sharing in the trade between England on the one hand and Burgundy, France and such places on the other.

While the growing tension of the early 1480s is clearly reflected in Hanseatic complaints, there is at first little record of English losses, apart from the robbery of two Bristol vessels by one of Hamburg near Ireland in September 1483 and attacks on three English ships off Iceland by another Hamburg ship early in 1485.[12] A long list of English losses submitted to the Hanse in 1491 contains a few undated incidents, which possibly occurred before the accession of Henry VII in August 1485, but the majority belong to the later period.[13] By the time of Henry's first parliament in November 1485 English merchants were complaining bitterly about attacks, chiefly in Norwegian and Icelandic waters. The situation was complicated by the fact that the chief culprits were notorious Hamburg privateers,

[11] *HR*, III (ii), nos. 26, 508. M. Sellers (ed.), *The York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers, 1356–1917* (Surtees Soc., 129, 1917), pp. 107–8.

[12] *CCR*, 1476–85, p. 360. *HUB*, 10, no. 1201.

[13] See below p. 244.

Pinning and Pothorst, who sailed under the Danish flag. The Hanse disclaimed responsibility for their actions, on the grounds that they had long abjured their native city. In his study of English trade in the early Tudor period George Schanz advanced the idea that Henry VII was hostile to the Hanse privileges from the very start of his reign.[14] This view has to contend with various marks of favour shown by the king to the merchants during his first nine months. When parliament met in November 1485 and voted a subsidy of tunnage and poundage a schedule was attached to the grant, to the effect that nothing therein, nor in any other act, statute or ordinance made in the present parliament, should be prejudicial to the Hanse privileges.[15] On 9 March 1486, a few days after parliament was dissolved, the king confirmed the franchises; on 29 June he confirmed the treaty of Utrecht, so that the Steelyard could continue to receive the petty customs levied on Hanse trade.[16] To explain these facts Schanz was obliged to assume that Henry VII acted out of fear – the insecurity of his hold on the throne making him reluctant to antagonise a strong foreign power. Logically, one is then obliged to suggest the same feeling of insecurity as the cause of other actions – the reversal of the anti-Italian trade legislation of Richard III and the confirmation of customs concessions granted to Spanish merchants in 1466. However, any attempt to construct a general thesis that Henry VII's early economic policy was dictated by the fear of antagonising foreigners runs up against other measures taken by his first parliament – the confirmation of the silk act and the imposition of a ban on the import of Gascon wine in alien bottoms. Some historians still accept that Henry VII's concessions to the Hanse were motivated by the initial weakness of his constitutional position,[17] but it is equally or more plausible to argue that any sense of insecurity ought to have caused him to side with his own subjects against them, or at least to play for time as Edward IV did for so long at the beginning of his reign. As we have seen, English merchants brought their protests to Henry's first parliament, so he would have had a good excuse to temporise.

The complaints of the Englishmen and the Steelyard's counter-complaints were discussed in a diet of the Wendish towns on 9 March 1486. On 14 March, ten days after the dissolution of

[14] G. Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik gegen Ende des Mittelalters* (Leipzig, 1881), I, p. 183.
[15] *Rot. Parl.*, 6, pp. 268–70. [16] *HR*, II (ii), nos. 30, 33.
[17] R. B. Wernham, *Before the Armada* (Oxford, 1966), p. 71. S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (London, 1972), p. 235.

parliament, a more up-to-date version of this intelligence was sent to Danzig, together with the news that the king had confirmed the franchises. For the time being, at least, he was prepared to accept the argument that the Hanse had no control over Pinning and Pothorst. But as the reign progressed English shipping losses increased and the victims grew more vociferous in their demands that the Hanse should pay. On several occasions in October and November 1486 representatives of the Steelyard were summoned before the king and council and challenged that they or the Bruges *Kontor*, or the two in concert, were financing Zeeland privateers and buying their spoils.[18] Specifically, they were accused of lending the privateers 3,000 marks and offering to put up another 1,000 marks. Nothing seems to have come of this charge, but the general reference to the role of Zeeland is supported by details of English losses submitted to the Antwerp conference of 1491. These show that during this period Pinning made a speciality of seizing English ships, taking them into the port of Veere and holding them to ransom. It is likely that German merchants acted as intermediaries for ransoms, so that suspicion was bound to fall upon them even if they were not directly involved in the crimes.

In 1487 the Steelyard merchants fell foul of the government as a result of the invasion of England by Lambert Simnel, supported by 2,000 German mercenaries led by Martin Schwarz and financed by Margaret of Burgundy. They were forbidden to import any goods and all their cloth was put under arrest. Fortunately, a general Hanse diet, the only one held between 1476 and 1494, was just assembling at Lübeck, so the merchants had a forum for their complaints. The arrest of cloth topped a long list of grievances, but the letter was sent too early to report the confiscation of goods imported after proclamation of the ban simply because there had been insufficient time to countermand sailing orders. Other complaints related to attempts by the king's council to limit the Hanse customs concession to goods originating in, or destined for, their own towns; attempts by customs officials to change the procedure for valuing merchandise; the ban upon the export of unfinished cloth; poor-quality cloth and the absence of machinery for securing redress; the ban on silk imports; the mayor of London's interference with the sale of wine, herrings and wainscot, and discrimination against Hansards in their disputes with city mer-

[18] *HR*, III (ii), nos. 26, 31–2, 103–6.

chants; the attempted ban on inland trading at Hull; finally, attempts still being made to hold the Steelyard responsible for the actions of privateers sailing under the Danish flag. Discussion of the affairs of the Steelyard occupied the diet for ten days in June, though not all this time was taken up by discussion of the grievances. More effort went into dealing with the Steelyard's account of its stewardship of the retained petty customs and apportioning the balance among those who had suffered losses in England in 1468–9. Eighty four per cent of the 1474 indemnity had been recovered by 22 August 1485, when Henry VII succeeded to the throne. Repayments were slowed down by the trade stoppage of 1487, but by then very little of the debt was outstanding. The diet also set up a committee to draft a protest to the king about the present situation in England. At the beginning of October Henry formally rejected the complaints, saying that the new legislation about unfinished cloth applied to all merchants not merely to Hansards, while the ban on general trade had been purely temporary and had now been lifted. He welcomed the idea of a conference between the two powers and proposed that it should be held in England at Whit 1488. In fact the diet had specifically rejected a suggestion of a conference, on grounds of insecurity of the English throne. The Steelyard merchants, ignoring that decision, had themselves raised the matter with the king, and on 4 November wrote again to the towns urging them to accept his invitation. They predicted that parliament, which was due to assemble in a few days' time, would again be the scene of an attack on the Hansards. This proved correct. The Hull members raised the question of English trade in Prussia and more immediately demanded letters of marque against the Hanse for the loss of two of their own ships. The council turned this down, on the grounds that the Hull claims must wait until a conference was convened. The Hull men were far from satisfied and threatened action against the first Hanse ship to visit their port. Certain members of the king's council privately advised the Germans to avoid Hull, and in February 1489 a diet of the Wendish towns put the port under a temporary interdict, but again refused to take part in a conference.[19]

Early in 1488 the Hansards again fell victim to the dispute between England and Burgundy, being forbidden to send any cloth to or through Burgundian territory. This was particularly hard on

[19] *Ibid.*, nos. 160–1, 188–9, 193, 217–18.

Cologne merchants, for whom trade via north-German ports was time-consuming and expensive. Permission to trade through the Hanse town of Kampen provided some relief, but their request to trade through normal channels went unanswered, despite a promise to pass their wares unopened through Burgundy. This state of affairs lasted throughout 1488 or beyond, since England and Burgundy did not settle their differences until February 1489. By then Hanse merchants were again being harassed for alleged breaches of the law forbidding the export of unfinished cloth. At the end of the 1480s, therefore, it was clearly necessary that there should be a full-scale conference between England and the Hanse. It was not simply a question of trying to reconcile recent English legislation with the Hanse privileges; more serious was the need to prevent privateering from developing into all-out war. In the last two years of the decade the number of incidents increased enormously, and the English merchants continued to hold the Hanse responsible for their losses. They retaliated at first with unauthorised attacks on Hanse ships, but in 1489 they finally persuaded the authorities to issue letters of marque. In March 1490 Henry VII renewed his suggestion of a conference to discuss all outstanding differences, to be held at London, Calais or Antwerp. The Steelyard supported this move on the grounds that it was the only way to disprove the false claims submitted by English merchants to the king's council. By now the leading towns realised that they had no choice but to negotiate, and offered to meet at Utrecht or Antwerp on 1 May 1491. The English finally settled on Antwerp, on the grounds that it was unsafe for their people to go to Utrecht. In October the Wendish diet ordered merchants to submit details of their losses and advised that all towns should limit their trade with England until the conference was concluded, so that there would be a minimal amount of goods held there as hostage to the outcome of the negotiations. Such was the lack of trust among the Hanse members that Danzig would have nothing to do with the advice unless it was made binding on all.[20]

The towns represented directly at the Antwerp conference were Lübeck, Hamburg, Danzig, Cologne, Münster and Deventer, together with the Steelyard and the Bruges *Kontor*. Some other towns had delegated full powers to one or other of those attending, for example Osnabrück to Münster, Königsberg to Danzig, Kampen to

[20] *Ibid.*, nos. 339–40, 360, 375, 405, 407.

Deventer. Others, such as Bremen, Stralsund and Lüneberg, intimated that they wanted nothing to do with the conference. All the Hanse delegates were at Antwerp by the end of the first week of May, but had to wait until the end of the month for the arrival of the English. News that they had got as far as Bruges reached the Hansards only just in time to prevent them from making a formal protest and leaving for home. Many rumours had circulated to account for the lateness of the English, including one that they were deliberately held back until the king knew the outcome of negotiations between England and Denmark. In fact, those talks had been completed and a treaty made by 20 January 1491. The official explanation for the delay was the illness of the leader of the delegation. The conference began badly and ended in total failure four weeks later. Broadly speaking, there were two items on the agenda: first, the question of Hanse privileges in England and the reciprocal rights claimed by the English merchants; secondly, the matter of compensation to be paid for the losses suffered by each side in recent years. Under the former heading the Hanse claims were largely the same as those put forward by the diet in 1487, but there were a number of important additions. One concerned Henry VII's navigation act. His first parliament had designated that Gascon wine should be imported only in ships belonging to the king's own subjects, but it was valid only until the following parliament, when it was not renewed. In any event, the Hanse was provided with exemption by the schedule attached to the grant of tunnage and poundage. The parliament of 1490 renewed the legislation and added Toulouse woad. By August of that year cases were reported of confiscation of German-owned French wine which had not been freighted in English ships. Another complaint was that port officials were levying a great custom (poundage) on Hanse exports of lead and tin, on the grounds that these were staple goods and not covered by the general immunity. Finally, the same officials were demanding payment of duty upon all items recorded in a ship's manifest, regardless of the fact that sometimes goods were not there, because they had been delivered too late to be loaded.[21]

As regards compensation claims, the only surviving lists on the Hanse side are those of Cologne, Danzig and Lübeck. The first, totalling between £15,000 and £16,000 sterling, were absurdly

[21] *Ibid.*, nos. 515, 520.

unrealistic.[22] A few claims dated back to 1427, though the majority fell into the period between 1464 and the present. Almost half of the total was made up of losses allegedly sustained because of the ban on the export of unfinished cloth. Another £1,100 resulted from a robbery committed by forces of the Earl of Warwick during his rebellion in 1471. Danzig, whose case was much more carefully put together, claimed a total of £5,289 for attacks on its ships between 1478 and 1490, plus a few hundred pounds for attacks which had been reported since the main brief was prepared.[23] English claims totalled £14,670, of which well over half were submitted by Yorkshire merchants and fishermen.[24] The total number of incidents was forty-one, though some involved attacks on more than one vessel; ten incidents were undated and thirty-one placed between 1486 and 1490. With the exception of one Sandwich ship, all the attacks were made against vessels belonging to Calais, Lynn, Yorkshire and Northumberland. This imbalance is not explicable by attacks being confined to northern waters, since many were made near the Low Countries and against ships returning from Poitou. There appears to have been a degree of selectivity in Hanse attacks, either because they felt that they were acting legitimately against the ships in question, or because they feared retaliation if they molested ships belonging to ports such as London, where their own merchants still had a large trade.

Given the near impossibility of verifying the financial claims advanced by each side, it is hardly surprising that the conference ended in stalemate – although a later Hanse diet sought to lay the blame on the Steelyard for going inadequately prepared. On 28 June it was formally agreed that the conference should reconvene on 1 May 1492; meanwhile the *status quo* was to continue. Naturally, the English insisted that their rights in Hanse regions should be reserved, using the form of words contained in the Vorrath treaty and the treaty of Utrecht. The Prussians, however, had profited from their experience at Utrecht and their delegates had gone to Antwerp briefed to stand firm against their fellow negotiators on this point. In the event, a compromise was agreed. On 22 June the Danzig delegation made a sworn declaration before a public notary that they dissented from certain articles in the treaty of Utrecht. The same day the other Hanse representatives also made a formal, public

[22] *Ibid.*, nos. 507–8. Confusion and repetition in the two lists precludes an exact total.
[23] *Ibid.*, nos. 509–10. Lübeck's claims are difficult to add up and convert to sterling. *HUB*, 11, no. 445.
[24] *HR*, III (ii), nos. 554–63.

acknowledgement that the relevant clauses should never bear any interpretation other than that given to them by the Prussians. The Danzig declaration stated that the English fellowship had never formally been recognised in their land and that they had never been free to trade with Poles, Letts, Russians and other aliens. On the other hand, it was agreed that they should exercise any rights which they had enjoyed within the previous sixty years. Among these were admission to the *Curiam Artes* or *Artushof*, where international merchants congregated, equality with non-Prussian members of the Hanse and freedom to trade with anyone in Danzig at the time of the annual Dominic mart.[25] German historians have been divided in their opinion as to whether this degree of admission represented any advance on the previous Prussian attitude. Schanz believed that it did; Schulz demurred, arguing that the English were already allowing entry to the *Artushof* and may also have traded freely during the Dominic mart, since the temporary suspension of local monopolies was a common feature of medieval fairs.[26]

The Anglo-Hanseatic conference, instead of reconvening in 1492, was repeatedly postponed, first by one side and then the other, until June 1497. One problem was that for much of that time it was impossible to meet in Antwerp, and neither side was willing to go to a place within the other's domain. In some respects the Hanse's stubbornness was self-defeating, for as Danzig pointed out in March 1495 the current Anglo-Burgundian dispute was a factor which might have served Hanseatic diplomacy. The intervening years were far from trouble free. There were incidents at sea, though fewer than in the 1480s, and there was still official interference with Hanse trade. Most serious were the repercussions of the breach between England and Burgundy. In September 1493 Henry VII imposed trade sanctions on the latter, in retaliation for aid given to the latest impostor, Perkin Warbeck. These applied to aliens as well as to his own subjects, and the Steelyard was required to give a surety of £20,000 that they would respect them. They were forbidden to import from, or export to or through, any part of Burgundy or the neighbouring provinces of Utrecht, Friesland, Kampen or Guelders. The restrictions continued until February 1496. The hardship was greatest for those wishing to take cloth to Cologne or Frankfurt, since they had to make a detour through north Germany. Cologne repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, petitioned the king to open the

[25] *Ibid.*, nos. 497–8, 502, 504–5.
[26] Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*, p. 189. Schulz, *Die Hanse und England*, p. 143.

Zeeland ports, or at the very least to allow them to trade via the Hanse ports of Kampen and Groningen. A Hanse diet at Bremen in May 1494 tried to impose counter sanctions by forbidding both the Steelyard merchants and those of the Bruges *Kontor* to resort to the cloth staple which the English established at Calais, but by the end of 1494 some were reported to be going there. Danzig suggested a ban on the export of Hanse goods to England to hurry along the proposed conference, but though the idea was cautiously supported by Lübeck and Hamburg nothing came of it.[27]

In June 1497 there was a brief encounter between England and Hanse representatives at Antwerp. This was never intended to be a full-scale conference and was little more than a side-show at the formal signing of the Anglo-Burgundian commercial treaty, nicknamed the *Intercursus Magnus*. The talks ran into trouble when the English raised objections to the credentials of the Hanse men. The latter immediately sent to Lübeck for fuller powers, but by the time the messenger returned the conference had broken up, with nothing more to show than a recommendation to meet again in a year's time.[28] Contact was fitfully maintained and on 13 June 1499 the long-overdue conference gathered at Bruges. The English envoys were William Warham, Master of the Rolls, Sir Robert Sampson, Keeper of Calais, and Dr Robert Middleton. After little more than a week's fruitless discussion, the Hansards were ready to abandon the conference, but reluctantly agreed to an adjournment while the English sent home a report of all that had been said so far, together with a request for fresh instructions. Both the report and the response of the king's council have survived.[29] During the first session the English proposed that although their own financial claims exceeded those made against them there should be a mutual cancellation of all claims, because of the difficulty of establishing proofs. This was not acceptable to the Hanse, which resubmitted those brought to the 1491 conference, together with claims for losses incurred since that date.[30] Curiously, most of the resistance came from Cologne, whose own claims would be the most difficult to substantiate, some because they related to incidents so long ago that there could hardly be any living witnesses, but most because they involved nothing so tangible as robbery, but only incidental losses caused by English trade legislation. When the Hanse refused to abandon their claims the English

[27] *HR*, II (iii), nos. 259, 273, 290, 333, 353, 358, 379, 383–4, 386, 394, 401. *HUB*, II, nos. 710–12. [28] *HR*, II (iv), no. 8. [29] *Ibid.*, nos. 145, 180–1.
[30] *Ibid.*, nos. 13–15.

next suggested that individuals should sue for recovery in the courts of the power responsible for their injuries, but to save them expense witnesses should be examined by impartial persons in their own country and sworn depositions accepted as evidence. The Hanse rejected this, because of the possibility that witnesses might be suborned. They wanted the Bishop of Cambrai to act as a neutral judge, with all claimants and witnesses appearing in person at his court. When this proposal was referred to the English council they turned it down. They repeated their preference for mutual cancellation, but said that the furthest they would go in trying to settle individual claims would be to appoint a judge to sit at Calais, if the Hanse would name one to hold a court at Bruges or Antwerp.

When it came to trading rights the English made it abundantly clear that the principle of reciprocity was far from dead, at least in so far as it could be employed as a negotiating pawn. They produced some rather poor testimony of Hull and London merchants who had allegedly been in Prussia where they were forbidden to buy or sell except with burgesses. The Prussians claimed that, while they were willing to allow any rights enjoyed within the past sixty years, the English had never had the freedom to trade with whomever they wished and in that respect were on equal footing with non-Prussian members of the Hanse. The English conceded that it was reasonable to draw a parallel with other members of the Hanse, but urged that it was therefore equally valid to argue that Hanseatics should not be more privileged in England than natives. The Hanse reply was that their franchises had been granted by earlier kings, whose charters could be produced to authenticate them. They defied their opponents to produce evidence in support of the claim that they had once possessed in Prussia a house and corporate organisation like the Steelyard and that Vorrath had promised to restore this to them. The English envoys, referring obliquely to the documents allegedly taken from Thomas Kent, responded that it was unreasonable to rob a man of his evidence and then demand that he produce it in defence of his case. These English arguments were endorsed by the council during the adjournment and the envoys were instructed to persist with the demand for equal rights in Prussia and the restoration of the house allegedly taken from their ancestors.

Statements made by English envoys alleging mistreatment of their compatriots in Prussia are obviously partisan, and cannot be accepted as evidence of the normal conditions under which English merchants were allowed to trade in Prussia at the end of the fifteenth

century. Counter-statements made to rebut these allegations are hardly more reliable. On the other hand, discussions between the Hanseatics themselves must be treated with more credibility. These suggest that Danzig was not hostile to Englishmen prepared to abide by its own rules and, more reluctantly, accepted their right to trade in a limited number of other places. The towns of Elbing and Thorn were anxious to establish their own credentials, and in May 1498 their representatives at a general Hanse diet questioned whether the Antwerp treaty of 1491 confined Englishmen to Danzig.[31] They were assured that this was not the case and invited to send representatives to the next Anglo-Hanseatic conference. In preparation for this the towns enlisted the support of the King of Poland, who in April 1499 published a declaration addressed to the King of England and the Hanse stating that Englishmen were free to trade throughout his Prussian territories on the same terms as non-Prussian Hanse towns.[32] Elbing and Thorn then deputed the secretary of Thorn to represent them at the Bruges conference, but, though he was kept informed of what went on, he was not allowed to participate directly in the negotiations. This decision was probably the result of Danzig's fear that he would concede too much to the English. A declaration of English rights submitted by the Thorn secretary certainly has the appearance of naivety when compared with an amended version prepared by Danzig's secretary.[33] The former stated that Englishmen were free to trade in Danzig, Thorn, Elbing and other places with all inhabitants of Prussia and other members of the Hanse, upon terms as free as had ever existed in past times. The latter stated that they might trade in Danzig, Thorn and Elbing with the citizens of those places, upon the same terms as non-Prussian Hanseatics, and as they had done within the previous sixty years and within human memory. This last condition was clearly intended to overrule claims about the greater freedom alleged to have existed in the early fifteenth century.

At the time of the Bruges conference the English were probably encouraged to press their claims about Prussia by the fact that they seemed about to realise their long-cherished ambition of winning the right to trade in Livonia. This province was still subject to the Teutonic Order and, since its towns had never acceded to the treaty of Utrecht, their merchants were not now allowed to share the Hanse privileges in England. In November 1498 Riga sent an ambassador

[31] *Ibid.*, no. 79. [32] Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*, 2, pp. 414–15, nos. 89–90.
[33] *HR*, III (iv), no. 168.

to London and within no time at all he had negotiated a draft treaty, which, it was hoped, would be ratified within five months.[34] It was proposed that English merchants be allowed to export to Riga and its dependent territories all manner of goods produced in England itself, taking them either in their own ships or by other means. They could abide and trade freely in the province and bring away whatever they wished. All this trade was to be free of Livonian customs duties. Subjects of Riga could trade in the produce of both countries subject to Hanseatic rates of duty, but if they traded between England and a third party then they had to pay alien rates. England would pay the arrears of the financial indemnity promised to Riga in 1409, provided that within four months the city delivered the original English letter of obligation to the governor of the Merchant Adventurers at Bruges or Antwerp. The Steelyard merchants were thoroughly alarmed by this treaty, not because of the prospect of Englishmen trading in Livonia, but because of an undertaking to pay alien rates of duty on third-party trade. If the English were able to enforce it in this instance it would greatly strengthen their hand in trying to make all Hanseatic merchants liable to alien rates upon a large part of their business. Nevertheless, the city of Riga at first proposed to go ahead with ratifying the treaty, and in April 1499 wrote to the Bruges *Kontor* enquiring of the whereabouts of Henry IV's letter, which when last heard of had been at Kampen. The Bruges merchants were unlikely to lend assistance in such a cause and the delay provided time for the Hanse to put pressure on Riga not to go ahead with the scheme. Lübeck claimed that Riga would be entitled to enjoy the Hanse privileges simply by acceding to the treaty of Utrecht and promised to assist her in this. This apparently satisfied Riga and the 1499 treaty remained unratified.[35]

During the discussions at Bruges about inroads recently made into the Hanse franchises in England, neither side was anxious to debate the king's right to annul the franchises. The English did indeed contend that it was fully within his power to do so, and even asserted that the franchises were now founded on nothing more than Edward IV's grant of 1474, since all earlier rights had been forfeited during the troubles. However, they gave assurances that Henry VII had no wish to annul Edward's charter. Their main concern was to establish that recent parliamentary legislation was applicable to Hansards

[34] *Foedera*, v (iv), p. 134.

[35] *HR*, III (iv), nos. 131, 143, 278.

and not in violation of the franchises. The prohibition of Hanse imports of silk and French wines was justified because these were not products of their own lands, while the ban on the export of unfinished cloth was defended on the grounds that no new tax had been introduced. The adjournment of the conference, during which the English delegates consulted their government, failed to produce a softening of attitudes. Talks were resumed on 16 July but broken off only three days later, nothing having been agreed except the recommendation of a two-year truce and a further meeting in July 1501. This conference did not take place, being repeatedly postponed first by one side and then the other.

When parliament met in 1504, for the first time since 1497, it provided that no act, statute or ordinance, either already in existence or made in the future, should detract from the Hanse franchises.[36] The force of this was slightly diminished by a separate schedule attached to the original act of parliament, stating that nothing contained in this act was to prejudice the liberties of the city of London. This left the way open for the city to continue its age-old opposition to the exercise of the franchises. Notwithstanding this reservation in favour of London, the act has puzzled historians, some of whom see it as a complete capitulation on the part of the king. The explanation generally offered is that he was forced into it by the need to cut off possible Hanse support for the White Rose, Edward, Earl of Suffolk, Yorkist pretender to the throne.[37] The parallel drawn with Edward IV and the Hanse in 1471 is questionable. Suffolk was not a king in exile and, anyway, Henry VII probably knew how little the restoration of Edward really owed to the support of the Hanse. The apparent concession was probably little more than a cynical move to put an end to the interminable talk about the need for a major conference to settle Anglo-Hanseatic differences. It enabled Henry to write to Lübeck in May 1504 stating that the Hanse merchants no longer had any cause for complaint and therefore the conference could be adjourned *sine die*. Jubilation expressed in the Steelyard was short-lived, for the act had no practical effect and before the end of the year the English were again riding rough-shod over the franchises.[38]

The main grievance throughout 1505 and into 1506 was another ban on the export of all cloth to or through Burgundy, because of the

[36] *Stats.*, 2, p. 665.
[37] Wernham, *Before the Armada*, p. 73. Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p. 230.
[38] *HR*, III (v), nos. 20–1.

renewal of England's commercial dispute with that country. Financial sureties were again taken from the merchants to enforce their compliance. Unfortunately, the Hanse towns were not now in a strong position to lend much support to the Steelyard, because of their strained relations with a number of European powers. In particular, from 1503 there was increasing hostility between Denmark and Lübeck, which was to result in war breaking out in 1509 between Denmark and the Wendish towns. This could do nothing but harm to English trade, and as early as January 1507 Henry VII backed Scotland's attempts at mediation, but to no avail. In December 1509, and again the following autumn, Denmark tried to enlist the active support of Henry VIII, but this was refused. If aid had been provided, Danish promises of safe-conduct through the Sound would, of course, have been nullified by the attacks of the Hanse. However, even neutrality could not save the English from all injury, and in November 1511 the Steelyard reported that attempts were being made to make it accountable for attacks alleged to have been committed by ships of Lübeck and Stralsund.[39]

Henry VIII succeeded his father on 22 April 1509 but did not confirm the treaty of Utrecht and the Hanse franchises until 20 February 1510, towards the end of his first parliament. In response to a Steelyard petition a *proviso* was also made that no act made in the present parliament should prejudice their franchises. This was necessary because Henry VII's grant of 1504 had run up against the maxim that no king or parliament could bind his or its successor. This was demonstrated firmly by the commons, whose grant of tunnage and poundage contained a declaration that it was applicable to the Hansards. Thereafter Hanse petitions for a renewal of the proviso became a routine precaution whenever parliament was summoned. When parliament next met in February 1512, John Belle, member for Hull, took up the cause of English merchants who had recently suffered losses in the Baltic. A bill condemning the Hanse passed the commons and was read twice in the lords, but then seems to have been stopped. However, the lords may have refused to support the renewal of the proviso, since the Chancellor ruled that the attachment of the great seal was sufficient to warrant it. The proviso was particularly important on this occasion, since the act banning the export of unfinished cloth was renewed, amidst complaints that of late it had been little enforced. As a concession to

[39] *Ibid.*, nos. 29, 217, 518, 533; (vi), nos. 137, 270.

exporters the price of exempt cloths was raised from £2 to 4 marks. Nevertheless, in June 1513 the Cologne merchants were again complaining that they were being forced to comply with the ban.[40]

Despite the attitude of the lower house of parliament and some harassment by officialdom, there is no evidence of general government hostility towards the Hansards until June 1515, when the council accused them of colouring the goods of strangers. Only a few weeks prior to this the house of lords had renewed the proviso, to take account of enactments in Henry's third parliament, though it was not sent down to the commons. ('Domini decreverunt consuetam quamdam provisam pro mercatoribus de Hansa esse sufficientem licet non sit missa in Domum Commune.')[41] From then on the pressure on the Steelyard grew steadily stronger and it was again confronted with the demand that its members confine their trade to the products of their own regions and English goods intended to be sold there. This meant that they should not meddle in trade between England and Burgundy. The merchants were reminded that the king held their bond for £20,000 that they would not export cloth to Burgundy or import anything from there. This had been intended only to secure their compliance with the trade boycott of 1493–6. At Bruges in 1499 the Hanse representatives unsuccessfully asked for the return of the bond. Now the government unscrupulously and illegally threatened to make it forfeit unless the Germans withdrew from the trade between England and the Low Countries even in time of peace.

Contemporary correspondence laid the blame for the attack on the Hansards directly at the door of Cardinal Wolsey. This has been accepted by historians, though no explanation has been provided for the abrupt change in government policy. Moreover, the notion that Wolsey deliberately sought a quarrel with the Hanse may seem difficult to reconcile with the modern opinion that the key to his statecraft was a concern to preserve international peace. Yet the pacific foreign policy pursued by Wolsey once he was firmly entrenched as the king's chief minister may explain the timing of the attack on the Hanse, if not the reason for it. From April 1512 to August 1514 England was at war with France. Throughout this time, and before then as preparations were made, the king was buying munitions from Hanse merchants. The principal items were an amalgam of medieval and modern warfare – bowstaves, copper

[40] *L & P*, I, nos. 381(68). *Journals of the House of Lords*, I, pp. 7, 13–14, 15–17. *Stats.*, 3, p. 29. *HR*, III (vi), no. 484.

[41] *HR*, III (vi), no. 687. *Lords Journals*, I, p. 41.

for artillery and saltpetre for gunpowder. Henry also bought a huge warship from Lübeck. When peace was made, the king was no longer so dependent on the Hansards and he actually refused to take delivery of munitions which had been contracted for.[42] The fact that the king broke his contracts still does not provide a motive for Wolsey's wishing to destroy the privileges of the Hanse. Could he have been impelled by simple economic nationalism? The cardinal does not seem to have been credited with a coherent policy along these lines, but he has been said to have been directly associated with the limited overseas exploration by Englishmen in this period.[43]

In June 1517 the secretary of the Steelyard went to a Hanse diet to complain about the towns' failure to support the merchants. As well as reporting widespread encroachments on the franchises he said that their goods were under threat because of the robberies of 1511. Stralsund now accepted responsibility for the outstanding claims, which related to one ship of Lynn, and agreed to send an envoy to try to settle the affair. This envoy, George Sibutus, came to England at some point during the next twelve months and was referred by the king to Wolsey. The cardinal refused to treat with him and publicly humiliated him for coming armed with letters issued by an 'unknown and inferior prince'. The details of this incident are obscure, but when the Steelyard secretary came again to a diet in June 1518, rather than blaming Wolsey, he chided Stralsund for sending a 'mere *medicus*' as its messenger, instead of a doctor of laws. Following Sibutus' mission, or perhaps before that, Wolsey forced two members of the Steelyard to give a bond of £500 that no merchants of Lübeck, Rostock, Stralsund or Wismar would leave England or export their goods until the case was settled. The matter was finally concluded in the summer of 1519, when the Star Chamber awarded the Lynn merchants damages of £500. About the same time Hull men were awarded £250 on account of a piracy allegedly committed near Wismar as recently as April 1519.[44] The fact that in this case the pirates were Danes seems to have been disregarded.

In 1519 the position of the Steelyard merchants must have seemed critical, for in addition to the Stralsund affair Wolsey decided to press ahead with prosecutions against merchants charged with exporting unfinished cloth. One was fined £126 and fourteen others

[42] *L & P*, 1, nos. 1395, 1513–14; 2, no. 2832.
[43] J. J. Scarisbrook, *Henry VIII* (London, 1968), pp. 168–71.
[44] *HR*, III (vii), nos. 39, 108, 204–7. *L & P*, 3, no. 1082.

compelled to find sureties totalling £18,880 to answer similar charges. Wolsey also made it known that he intended to levy alien rates of duty on all goods which were regarded as lying outside the legitimate area of Hanse trade. If the merchants resisted then the bond of £20,000 levied in the 1490s would be declared forfeit. Worst of all, the Cardinal seemed to have set his face against negotiations. In July 1518 the diet invited the king to send envoys to Antwerp in the following October or in May 1519. In March 1519, no reply having been received, a diet of the Cologne third asked Lübeck to write again, saying that if the king continued to ignore them it would be advisable for the merchants to leave England. In August Lübeck wrote to Cologne and Danzig advising evacuation. Danzig was against immediate action and urged a further approach to the king; Cologne could not reply at once, since its *Englandfahrer* were then away at Frankfurt fair. By the time they returned at the end of September word had been received unofficially that the merchants could enjoy the franchises until midsummer 1521, provided that the Hanse agreed to confer before then on all matters currently in dispute. However, not until November did the Steelyard manage to get Wolsey to send a formal invitation.[45]

Anglo-Hanseatic talks were scheduled to begin at Bruges on 15 June 1520, but the English envoys, Dr William Knight, Thomas More, Sir William Hussey and John Hewster, governor of the Merchant Adventurers, did not arrive until 19 July. Compared with the other affairs of state which engaged the king and Wolsey that summer, this was a mere side-show. In May Henry entertained Emperor Charles V at Sandwich, in June he met Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, in July he conferred again with Charles at Gravelines and Calais. Only when Henry returned to England did his envoys come to the waiting Hansards, representing Lübeck, Cologne, Stralsund and the London Steelyard. Despite their protestations of friendliness there can be no doubt that the English came to Bruges not to negotiate, but to force the Hansards to surrender a large part of their traditional privileges. There is no evidence that they had any constructive suggestions and they did not even get around to tabling any financial claims before the conference collapsed. The general grievances of the Hanse are, for the most part, already familiar to the reader, since they were the same as those raised at earlier conferences. There were, however, a couple of

[45] *HR*, III (vii), nos. 188, 203, 229–31, 239, 254, 257.

complaints which were new. One was that English buyers of their imports often promised payment in gold, but then paid the sum in silver which had a lower intrinsic value, pleading an act of parliament which forbade the delivery of gold to Germans. The other concerned a dispute between Hanse ship-masters and the aldermen of the pilots' gild (the Brethren of Trinity House, incorporated in 1514) about the question of legal liability for ships coming to harbour. These complaints about the franchises, together with claims for damages submitted by private individuals, were handed over to the English on 23 July for them to consider privately. Three days later Dr Knight replied briefly to all the points which had been made. His answers were bound to be unsatisfactory, for in almost every instance he and his colleagues pleaded ignorance of the facts. However, the English attitude is adequately portrayed by the remark which Knight made about the franchises; his team could make no comment on them, since they were not familiar with the privileges themselves. Was ever an embassy so badly briefed? Their bluff was called when the Hanse men presented them with copies of the franchises. After studying or feigning to study these, the envoys demanded that every single Hanse complaint should be justified by reference to a specific clause in the franchises. The Germans were now thoroughly suspicious, but nevertheless agreed to appoint a small committee to sit with the Englishmen to do this. In the next full session, on 4 August, the English orator was Thomas More, but his argument was much the same as that put earlier by Dr Knight. He contended that Henry VIII was sovereign in his kingdom, so that neither Roman civil law nor canon law could be used to judge matters affecting his people, only English law and the natural law of justice and reason. The legislation of parliament did not conflict with natural justice, since it was made for the utility of the whole realm. The Germans attempted to counter this line of argument with the claim that the ban on the export of unfinished cloth served only the interests of the London cloth finishers, but the result was stalemate.[46]

It was now obvious that no more progress could be made and the English proposed that the conference be adjourned. The Hanse had no choice but to accept this, but then came the problem of drawing up a final treaty or communiqué. Each side was determined that there should be a form of words which did not prejudice its own case, and because of this a mutually satisfactory draft was not finally put

[46] *Ibid.*, nos. 332, 337–8, 340–40a.

together until 12 August. One of the main concerns of the Hanse was that all the current legal actions against its members in the Exchequer should be suspended and no more begun. The English said that they could not bind the king to this, but promised to try to persuade him to do so of his free will. When the Hanse kept returning to this point Thomas More produced a trump card. He said that while the conference was under way a copy of the Hanse credentials had been sent to England and had been found to be inadequate. Consequently, the English envoys had been instructed not to commit themselves to anything. Faced with this the Hanse delegation was divided. Some wanted to abandon the conference entirely, on the grounds that the English were deliberately seeking to wear them down with expensive and tedious negotiations. Other counsel prevailed and in the end they accepted a treaty which confirmed the *status quo* until the conference should reconvene on 1 May 1521.[47] The failure of the conference left the Hanse delegates in a pessimistic mood. Before departing from Bruges they warned the Steelyard officials to be ready to evacuate their goods, but not to do so yet and to do nothing to offend the English. To some of Wolsey's advisers the failure offered a good opportunity to break with the Hanse. Spinelli, writing from Antwerp in August after hearing the news, was one of these. He first incited the cardinal by reporting that the Germans were openly retailing English cloth in the city and flaunting the arms of England to advertise the fact. He then suggested that in alliance with the Emperor and the King of Denmark the Hanse might be humbled without open war. Indeed, he had already taken soundings about such an alliance.[48]

At the request of the Hanse the reconvening of the conference was postponed until September 1521, and in the meantime a Hanse diet considered the possibility of evacuating the Steelyard if negotiations failed again.[49] The proceedings opened at Bruges on 12 September with a bromide speech from Dr Knight, in which he referred to the favours showered on the Hanse by all English kings down to Edward IV.[50] Unfortunately, since that time the merchants had abused their privileges and resisted all the appeals of Henry VII and Henry VIII to mend their ways. The English then showed their teeth, demanding to know the names of all towns which belonged to the Hanse, since it was intolerable that they should allow privileges to an undefined

[47] *Ibid.*, no. 336.
[48] *State Papers during the Reign of King Henry VIII* (London, 1830–52), 6, pp. 65–6.
[49] *HR*, III (vi), no. 413.
[50] *Ibid.*, nos. 448, 450.

group. The German delegates, as always, were reluctant to supply such information and attempted to instruct their adversaries about the constitution of the Hanse. The English were unimpressed, and in the face of their persistence the Hansards eventually handed over a list of thirty-eight towns,[51] while insisting that this should not prejudice the rights of any which had been left out. Once this information had been supplied the two sides exchanged details of their complaints against one another. The Hanse grievances were virtually identical with those submitted the previous year,[52] but this was the first time that the English had formally presented theirs. The latter may be divided broadly into three groups; first, private claims for damages; second, general complaints by merchants about treatment meted out abroad; third, complaints by the crown about abuse of the Hanse franchises.[53] In the first group were eight cases of alleged robbery and miscarriage of justice since 1500, and a further two cases dredged up from the dim and distant past, but there appears to have been no reference to the heavy losses of the 1480s and 1490s. Next, the merchants complained that they were denied access to the Cologne mart and Frankfurt fair, that they were denied their rights in Prussia and that within the past ten years Danzig had imposed a new tax on wine imported by Englishmen. The crown's case was very intemperate. It was alleged that the Hanse exported cloth to the Low Countries, despite having given sureties not to do so; that their imports from that region had cost £100,000 in lost revenue; that Dinant's false claim to privileges had cost £40,000; that a further £94,000 had been lost because Cologne enjoyed the franchises while expelled from the Hanse. A general charge that Steelyard merchants coloured the goods of non-members was supported by the allegation that one Gover Slotkin handled imports worth £6,000 for Italians resident in Antwerp and exported cloth worth £4,000 for the same firm; named individuals were said to have been born outside Hanse towns and so to be ineligible for membership of the Steelyard; finally, we find a revival of the ancient demand that aliens should not remain in England for long periods, and the unsupported claim that Hanse merchants were defaulting on payment for goods sold to them on credit.

The two sides deliberated privately for six days and then intermittently spent a week together making replies and counter-replies to specific complaints. As one might guess, no progress was

[51] *Ibid.*, no. 453. Another report (no. 450) states that forty-five towns were named, but these are not printed. [52] *Ibid.*, no. 454. [53] *Ibid.*, nos. 455–6.

made, since all the charges were either denied or justified, or the envoys simply pleaded ignorance of the facts. On 5 October the real English attitude was made abundantly clear by Thomas More. The king could drive the Hansards from his country any day that he chose, but he had no wish to do so – provided that they listened to reason. The choice was entirely theirs – either they must leave England or surrender their ancient privileges and negotiate a new treaty of commerce. Four days later Knight and More were summoned to Wolsey, who was then at Calais, from whence Knight alone returned on 19 November. In the meantime the talks were at a virtual standstill, for the Englishmen who remained could do nothing without further instructions and despite the impatience of the Hanse envoys they refused to write to Wolsey, on the grounds that he was too busy with other matters. However, Knight did not come back to resume the present talks. He brought a letter from Wolsey saying that he understood that the Hansards were ready to negotiate a new treaty, but that since the question of privileges now depended entirely on the king's grace this could be negotiated only in England, whither they were invited to come in May 1522. This astonished the Hansards, who vigorously denied what had been imputed to them and refused to go to England.[54] The delegates lingered in Bruges for a few days more, but when the English refused to reopen the talks they departed, without even the formality of a treaty, which was the usual method of bringing the conferences to an end.

In the spring of 1522 the Steelyard merchants were apprehensive about the future of their franchises and took the precaution of sending Henry VII's charter of confirmation to Lübeck for safe-keeping. But May, the month appointed by Wolsey for the negotiation of a new treaty, came and went and no blow fell upon them. Their reprieve was due entirely to the vicissitudes of English foreign policy. Wolsey had been forced by the king to abandon his policy of studied neutrality, in favour of an alliance with Emperor Charles V against Francis I. He had pledged that England would declare war on France in May 1522 if Charles had not by then made his own peace with Francis. That month Charles came to England to ensure that the promise was kept. There is no record of any representations which Charles may have made on behalf of the

[54] *Ibid.*, nos. 462–4.

Hanse, but it would clearly have been impolitic to take repressive measures against his subjects while he was in England or immediately afterwards. Another factor which Wolsey had to take into account was the revival of the threat to the dynasty posed by the White Rose, Richard de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. Francis I proposed to finance an invasion of England by Pole, launched from the duchy of Holstein and hopefully supported by the Hanse. It was mooted that the Hanse could be won over if Pole promised to pay them the 200,000 angels which they claimed from England, provided of course that his coup was successful. The plan also posited the cessation of hostilities between Denmark and Lübeck and its allies, so that the former might be enlisted against England. The prospects of success appear to have been so slight that it is unlikely that Wolsey felt the need to buy off the Hansards out of fear. However, it would obviously have been an unnecessary complication to curtail their privileges at this particular time. Finally, mention may be made of a £1,000 loan which the Steelyard tactfully made to the king in aid of his war preparations.[55]

In 1525 English diplomacy made another about-turn, when Charles V reneged on his promise to marry Henry VIII's daughter, Mary, in favour of a Portuguese princess. England then made peace with France and the Emperor became the main adversary. This meant that it was no longer necessary to maintain the Hanse franchises merely for the sake of the Habsburg alliance, if indeed this had ever been the case. However, Wolsey was by then losing interest in his plan to destroy the base of the Hanse's economic position in England. In the later years of his life he was far more concerned about the contaminating effect of the Steelyard upon his country's religion. Merchants were uniquely equipped to import heretical writings and from 1526 they were frequently questioned about their reading habits and personal beliefs. After Wolsey's death this harassment ceased, for in the 1530s the king's divorce was the main objective of the government and it was anxious to gain the intellectual support of the Lutherans in this matter.[56]

During the late 1520s there was a revival of economic opposition to the Hanse. A diet meeting at Lübeck in 1530 complained about breaches of the franchises, and in particular about the ban on the

[55] *L & P*, 3, part 2, nos. 2184, 2340, 2483 (p. 1049), 2622.
[56] *L & P*, 4, nos. 1962, 2168–70, 2179. R. Pauli, 'Die Stahlhofskaufleute und Luthers Schriften', *HG* (1871), 153–62.

export of unfinished cloth. This protest had no effect and informations continued to be made against Hanse exporters. However, the main field of conflict was Iceland. English fishermen still had a strong attachment to these waters and they now went there with the permission of the Danish crown and the full support of their own government, even to the extent that the latter sometimes provided escorting warships in times of danger. But the Hanse also visited Iceland and, as we have seen, there were clashes between the two groups in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, which now began again. Frederick I, elected King of Denmark in 1523 after the deposition of Christian II, was also Duke of Holstein, and therefore nominally lord of Hamburg and Bremen. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that he took the side of these towns following a major clash between their seamen and Englishmen in Iceland in 1531, in which forty to fifty Englishmen were killed. In reply to protests, Frederick alleged that the Englishmen had behaved atrociously, so that the Icelandic authorities had legitimately invoked the aid of the Germans as fellow subjects of the King of Denmark. The English did not wish to involve the Danes in the dispute, but they continued to demand satisfaction from Hamburg in 1532.[57]

How far the English government might have gone to enforce payment of compensation, and whether reprisals would have been instituted against the Hanse as a whole, is an open question, since the interests of the English fishermen and merchants were sacrificed to those of diplomacy. Ironically, this new episode, involving at one stage the candidature of Henry VIII for the elective crown of Denmark, was one of the most ill-judged diplomatic ventures of the period. It seems to have resulted chiefly from Henry's exaggerated notion of the power and importance of Lübeck, at that time under the virtual dictatorship of Jürgen Wullenwever. The Hanse as a whole was not involved, only Lübeck and to a lesser extent Hamburg. The episode began with the death of King Frederick I in April 1533. During his reign the Reformation had made considerable headway in Denmark, but the Catholic party sought to check its further progress by preventing the succession of Frederick's elder son, Christian, Duke of Holstein, who had Lutheran sympathies. By delaying the election they hoped to secure the crown for the younger

[57] *L & P*, 4, no. 4740; 5, nos. 768, 1417, 1587, 1633.

son, John, on whom they might exert greater influence. Christian then made an alliance with Mary of Hungary, regent of Burgundy, which promised commercial privileges in Denmark for Dutch merchants. This caused Lübeck to declare against Christian and to prepare a fleet to fight his Dutch allies. On the other hand, Lübeck's support was given not to John, but to the former King Christian II, deposed in 1523 and for some years past a prisoner in Denmark. Charles V, a brother-in-law of Christian II, was not prepared to support him, but maintained the claim of his daughter, the Emperor's niece. She was married in September 1535 to Frederick, Count of the Palatinate and Bavaria, who then became the imperial candidate for the Danish throne. This complicated affair continued to bedevil European politics for many years after the Duke of Holstein secured the election in 1534 as Christian III.

England may have been drawn into the struggle almost fortuitously. In the summer of 1533 a large Lübeck fleet entered the English Downs to await the arrival of a Dutch fleet. It was allowed to revictual, but ordered to respect the neutrality of English territorial waters. Far from doing so, it seized two Spanish vessels and robbed a number of small English ships of goods worth just over £500. The Lübeckers then had the audacity to try to land artillery at Rye, the better to assault some Dutch hulks which had arrived there. The Rye authorities seized and detained the Lübeckers' leader, Marcus Meyer, after which his fleet left without him. The alleged capture of Meyer is suspect, for no attempt was made to rescue him and he was soon being treated not as a prisoner, but as an honoured guest. Henry VIII knighted him, gave him a pension and sent him home in January 1534. These marks of favour cannot have been necessary merely to get Meyer to intercede with his masters for the release of the English and Spanish goods. To achieve that end the threat to distrain property in the Steelyard would have been more effective. It must be presumed, therefore, that during Meyer's sojourn in England the basis was formed for an understanding with Lübeck. Initially, the object of English diplomacy was simply to prevent Lübeck from making peace with the Dutch and reconciling itself with the Emperor. The more Charles V was distracted the better pleased was Henry VIII. Imperial envoys attending a diet convened at Hamburg in March 1534 to negotiate peace were no doubt correct in their claim that it failed to achieve its objective largely because of the support given to Lübeck by

England. They were mistaken, however, in their statement that 30,000–40,000 angels had already been promised to Lübeck to sustain a war against the Emperor. To be sure, Henry VIII seems actively to have encouraged such rumours and even exaggerated the size of the proposed subsidy. He tried to get Francis I to contribute 50,000 crowns towards the cost of electing a pliant King of Denmark, claiming that he had given that much himself.[58]

In June 1534 envoys of Lübeck and Hamburg came to England and after lengthy talks the informal understanding with Lübeck was strengthened into an alliance. The main political objective was the election of Henry VIII or his nominee as King of Denmark. In aid of this project Lübeck was to be lent 20,000 guilders (about £3,333 6s 8d), but the king was reluctant to part with the money without receiving sureties for repayment from the Steelyard merchants, and final details had not been settled by late August. Each side also had other aims. The good doctors from Hamburg and Lübeck were hopeful of converting the king to the Lutheran faith, while he wanted facilities for recruiting German mercenaries to serve in Ireland. The envoys left England in September, evidently with some sort of draft treaty, but in May 1535 the king was complaining that this had not yet been ratified by Lübeck. In July, Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, and Richard Cavendish were sent to north Germany, ostensibly to try to make peace between Lübeck and the newly elected Christian III, but really to watch over the king's interests. Attempts were made to draw England more deeply into the morass of Danish politics, and Henry prepared to send three warships to the Baltic. Then came news that Christian had arrested twelve or thirteen English vessels and pressed three of them into his service, so the king's ships were held back. Henry's cause, such as it was, was lost when Wullenwever was overthrown in October 1535, but it took some time longer to disengage totally. Lübeck's concern ended in February 1536, when it recognised Christian III as King of Denmark and he confirmed the city's commercial privileges in his lands.[59]

The factors which guided English policy towards Denmark and

[58] *L & P*, 5, no. 377; 6, nos. 428, 972, 1012–13, 1018, 1029, 1062, 1510; 7, nos. 394, 397, 697, 958.

[59] *L & P*, 7, nos. 737, 873, 957, 1060; 8, nos. 121, 759, 848, 1065; 9, nos. 287, 290, 434, 831. G. M. V. Alexander, 'The Life and Career of Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, until his Deprivation in 1549' (Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1960), pp. 114–68.

the north-German towns in the mid-1530s were largely political, but economic matters were not forgotten. According to Chapuys, the resident imperial ambassador in England, Hamburg was less willing than Lübeck to send envoys to England in 1535 and did so only because commerce was also on the agenda.[60] Even so, Henry insisted that talks about trade concerned only England, Lübeck and Hamburg, not the Hanse as a whole. As Chapuys makes clear, uppermost in English minds was the fear that Charles V was about to put a stop to trade between England and the Low Countries. This would have meant finding an alternative to Antwerp as a staple for English cloth. Now, as three decades later, the Merchant Adventurers were prepared to consider transferring their business to a north-German port, provided that they were assured of freedom of trade. Any hopes there may have been about secrecy were frustrated, since Chapuys reported that the Hamburg envoys intended to go home via Antwerp, where they proposed to have talks with the regent.

It is unlikely that the Steelyard community derived any tangible gain from the short-lived alliance between England and Lübeck, and within a little while it was again under pressure. Allegations of harassment for exporting unfinished cloth headed a long list of grievances submitted to Henry VIII by a Hanse diet which met in June 1540. Another was that the king's purveyors waited for ships coming from Danzig and Hamburg and took timber at unfair prices – clearly an echo of the great ship-building programme in which the crown was currently engaged. English merchants registered their own complaint at this diet about their treatment in Danzig. It dwelt on the age-old ban on trading with non-burgesses, and there is no evidence of any new restrictions having been recently introduced. The most likely explanation is that increasing numbers of Englishmen coming to Danzig simply strengthened their ambition to recover the long-lost liberties believed to have been enjoyed by their predecessors. Dissatisfaction continued to smoulder until January 1542, when a delegation came before the king's council with a 'book of complaints' against Danzig. Representatives of the Steelyard, who were summoned to answer the charges, denied their validity, but since none of those present were Danzigers they were ordered to write to the city and get a satisfactory rebuttal by Whitsun. A few

[60] *L & P*, 7, no. 871.

days later adventurers of the fishmongers' company complained to the council about Hamburg and Bremen, probably on account of clashes in Iceland. Because of the threat which these complaints posed to the franchises, an envoy of Lübeck, who arrived in June 1542 to discuss terms for repayment of the king's loan to the city, was empowered to suggest a full-scale Anglo-Hanseatic conference to settle all outstanding differences. This was accepted, Antwerp named as the venue and 1 November as the date. In September the Hansards begged to be excused from the engagement, on the grounds that disturbances which had broken out in Antwerp and lower Germany made the region unsafe. England was probably just as willing to cancel the conference, since the country was actively preparing for war with France and Scotland.[61]

In February 1543 Henry VIII concluded an alliance with the Emperor Charles V, though it was kept secret until May. In June, once Scotland seemed to be on the point of submission, he began hostilities against France. In September 1544 Henry was deserted by the Emperor, but England, now herself in grave danger of a French invasion, did not manage to disengage until June 1546. The threat was greatest in the spring and summer of 1545, so that Henry sought the assistance of the Protestant princes of Germany. In April of that year Christopher Mont and John Bucler were sent to try to forge an alliance with the princes and the King of Denmark, though the latter, because he was still at odds with the Emperor, was currently allied to France. The attitude of the German Protestants towards England was determined by the Emperor's intentions against them. As imperial pressure increased throughout the summer they leaned more towards England, so that by August they were almost ready to make a defensive alliance. A precondition was that Henry should deposit 200,000 crowns at Hamburg, to be used when or if the Emperor attacked the Protestants. In return the princes agreed that the king might recruit mercenaries in their territories, though since the Emperor controlled the land routes to Calais these would have to be shipped at Hamburg or Bremen. In July John Dymmock, one of Henry's agents in the Low Countries, went north to try to arrange transport, but it was a fruitless mission. The Landgrave of Hesse had predicted that the Hanse towns would consider nothing more than a defensive alliance, but Dymmock did not find them even that accommodating. A French ambassador had preceded him and they

[61] *L & P*, 15, no. 855; 16, no. 392; 17, nos. 736, 1146. *POPC*, 7, pp. 301, 307, 317. *APC*, 1, p. 11. *DI*, nos. 1317, 1362, 1378–9, 1404.

now declared their neutrality. Pleading an imperial ban on the recruitment of mercenaries they refused either to provide ships or to allow embarkation at their ports. On the other hand they claimed that they had stopped trading with the Scots and would not start again. Dymmock also managed to get permission for five shiploads of victuals and fish to sail from Hamburg to England and four shiploads of corn from Bremen. The latter was originally intended for Lisbon, but was held back after reports that the French were seizing similar south-bound shipments on the excuse that they might fall into English hands.[62] Apart from these provisions the only help that Henry got from the German Protestants as a result of his overtures in 1545 was an unsuccessful attempt to mediate between him and Francis I. Their concern was to put an end to the strife between the only two powers likely to help them when the Emperor finally made up his mind to crush them.

The peace made between England, France and Scotland in June 1546 was so fragile that Henry VIII continued to flirt with the German Protestants, though his true intentions towards them are obscure.[63] Increasingly, the princes became the suitors as the Emperor gained the upper hand over them. After Henry's death in January 1547 the new government was doctrinally sympathetic, but had to tread even more warily so as not to upset the Emperor. The latter was urged by the Pope to support the claim of his cousin, Mary Tudor, to the English throne. Charles was not disposed to do anything so rash, but it would be dangerous for England to help the Protestants too openly. This was foremost in the minds of the council in March 1547 when it received an embassy from the Duke of Saxony and his allies requesting financial aid. A promise was made that if the Protestant league, which included Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen, lasted through the summer then, in three or four months' time, it would receive a loan of 50,000 crowns. Because of the need for secrecy the loan would be made through the merchants of the Steelyard, and could be represented as an advance payment for naval stores. For the English this had the added advantage that Hanseatic trade would provide security for repayment. The stratagem was never put to the test, for on 21 April 1547 Charles V smashed the Schmalkaldic League at the battle of Mühlberg. Despite this reverse the political stance of the Hanse towns continued to be significant, particularly after Protector Somerset invaded

[62] *L & P*, 20, nos. 46, 69.

[63] Scarisbrook, *Henry VIII*, pp. 601–3.

Scotland in September 1547. The towns had to be dissuaded from assisting the Scots, either by way of trade or more directly. Fortunately, the new government had behaved circumspectly towards the Hanse. In June, Henry VIII's charter of 1510 was confirmed and this was repeated in December. Moreover, when in November the Merchant Adventurers persuaded the government to suspend the ban on the export of unfinished cloth, the Steelyard merchants were given the same privilege until Christmas. It may have been with some confidence, therefore, that in December 1547 William Watson, the late king's chief agent for purveying Baltic goods, was commissioned to seek the cooperation of Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck. The following month he reported that he had received assurances from the towns and was satisfied that they were not acting against English interests. However, in March 1548 Dr Nicholas Wotton reported a rumour that the King of France had sent money to Hamburg, Lübeck and other Hanse towns to victual his troops aiding the Scots. Throughout 1548 and into 1549 the Hansards continued to protest they were not involved with the French or Scots, but at the same time refused actively to help England. They again declined the use of their ships and ports for the embarkation of mercenaries, pleading that if they did so their own vessels would be attacked by the French and Danes. Eventually, in May 1549 the Hamburg senate agreed to allow the secret embarkation of mercenaries at Friburg, a small port some seven leagues from their city.[64]

Despite the lack of Hanse cooperation some German mercenaries saw service in the English army in Scotland, and in any event the Hanse could hardly be blamed for the ignominious peace terms accepted in 1550. No doubt resentment was harboured in England, but this cannot be related directly to the blow struck against the Steelyard at the beginning of 1552, particularly since by then Somerset had himself fallen from grace. The new moves were based on commercial and fiscal considerations. An English government had finally steeled itself to execute the plan considered by Wolsey thirty years previously. This was the beginning of the end of the Hanseatic privileges, though in the event it took longer than anticipated to remove them entirely. That is the theme of the last chapter of this book.

[64] *APC*, 2, pp. 60–1, 142–3, 189. *SPF*, 1547–53, pp. 14, 28, 30–1, 33.

Any attempt to describe in a few pages the whole of England's overseas trade between 1474 and the middle of the sixteenth century would be presumptuous. Fortunately, the convention of using cloth exports as an indicator of trade is particularly useful now. In the long run, exports of raw wool continued their remorseless decline, while those of cloth finally realised their earlier promise and came to dominate the export trade completely. Most historians of the late Yorkist and Tudor age have agreed that cloth exports provide the key to an understanding of England's overseas trade. This is particularly true with regard to the Hanseatic share. Far more than in the case of either Englishmen or other aliens, they depended on cloth exports; imports played a declining role in their trade.

The late 1460s and most of the 1470s were a period in which England's cloth exports as a whole marked time (table 15). Hanseatic exports, sustained only by Cologne merchants during wartime, fell to a very low ebb and recovered only slowly after the treaty of Utrecht. Denizen trade, which showed great promise after the ending of the Burgundian boycott in 1467, was blighted by political unrest during the years of Warwick's rebellion and the restoration of Henry VI, and again made a slow recovery. Only the alien sector was buoyant, performing better than it had done since the early 1450s and as well as it was to do until the sixteenth century. A turning-point occurred about 1477, when total exports moved up quickly to the level of the prosperous decade following the Vorrath treaty of forty years earlier. This established what may be regarded as a normal level of trade for the rest of the fifteenth century. It is customary to describe the reign of Henry VII as the beginning of England's domination of international woollen markets, but there was no real leap forward until the end of the century. Earlier than that, but not until Henry had been on the throne for three years, trade simply recovered from a six-year trough into which it had fallen towards the end of Edward IV's reign. That recession was due entirely to the very poor performance of denizen merchants. Even after 1488 the latter did not perform well and until the end of the century their exports, both in absolute figures and as a market share, were significantly down on the years 1477–82. The real achievers were the Hanse merchants, who held their trade in the 1480s and, despite harassment in the matter of unfinished cloth, increased it substantially in the 1490s.

Taken as a whole, the last quarter of the fifteenth century may be

Table 15. *England's cloth exports, 1468–1546*[a]

	Overall total		Denizen			Hanse			Alien		
		Change (%)	Total	Share (%)	Change (%)	Total	Share (%)	Change (%)	Total	Share (%)	Change (%)
1468–74	36,338		22,000	61		2,938	8		11,400	31	
1474–7	41,411	+14	23,384	56	+6	7,713	19	+163	10,314	25	−10
1477–82	59,967	+45	36,848	62	+58	12,288	20	+59	10,831	18	+5
1482–8	46,265	−23	23,200	50	−37	12,445	27	+1	10,620	23	−2
1488–99[b]	57,386	+24	30,679	54	+32	15,611	27	+25	11,096	19	+4
1499–1507	77,953	+36	45,268	58	+48	17,613	23	+13	15,072	19	+36
1507–20	88,153	+13	49,625	56	+10	19,973	23	+13	18,555	21	+23
1520–3	75,943	−14	44,583	59	−10	16,721	22	−16	14,639	19	−21
1523–30	93,456	+23	56,763	61	+27	20,591	22	+23	16,102	17	+10
1530–2	84,293	−10	46,157	55	−19	21,086	25	+2	17,050	20	+6
1532–8	102,816	+30	61,879	60	+34	29,079	28	+38	11,858	12	−21
1538–46	119,081	+17	56,308	47	−9	28,334	23	−3	34,439	30	+190

[a] Using Bridbury's figures until 1544. When he declines to give an annual total (because of gaps in Bristol accounts) figures have been calculated from *England's Export Trade*, and 2,000 p.a. estimated for Bristol. For 1544–6 figures are taken from J. D. Gould, *The Great Debasement* (Oxford, 1970), appendix C, p. 173.

[b] Excluding years 1494–6, because of gap in London accounts.

said to have had an export ceiling of 60,000 cloths a year, no higher than that of the 1440s. The ceiling was raised when the average rose to 78,000 a year in 1499–1507. All three sectors moved ahead, but it may be noted that, while denizens gained most in absolute numbers, their trade was still only 23 per cent up on 1477–82, compared with an alien increase of 39 per cent and a Hanse increase of 43 per cent. In 1507–8 total exports for the first time exceeded 90,000 and did so again in six of the next twelve years, giving an average of 88,000. All three sectors contributed to the surge, but the palm for achievement should probably be awarded to aliens, who were, of course, still handicapped by fiscal discrimination. The early 1520s saw a two- to three-year recession, felt by all groups of exporters and probably a consequence of the war with France. After 1523 trade recovered and exports averaged over 93,000 a year down to 1530. Now the best performers were denizens, increasing their market share at the expense of aliens, whose exports were below those of 1507–20. The 1530s began with a two-year recession, restricted to the denizen sector, but this was followed immediately by the breaching of a 100,000 ceiling. Between 1532 and 1538 exports averaged almost 103,000 a year. Two years into this period alien exports slumped badly, falling back to fifteenth-century levels. The chief beneficiaries were Hanse merchants, whose exports were up 41 per cent on the level of the 1520s, compared with a rise of 9 per cent in the denizen sector.

The slump in other alien cloth exports was dramatically reversed by a change in customs rates made by royal proclamation on 26 February 1538 with effect from 6 April.[65] It was decided that for an experimental period of seven years aliens would be required to pay only denizen rates on all imports and exports. The motive for this is uncertain, though in September 1540 Chapuys, the imperial ambassador in London, claimed that the step had been taken 'for fear of war and stoppage of trade'.[66] It is just possible that the exercise was undertaken to see whether the reduction in alien rates would generate enough extra trade to increase total revenue. On the other hand it is doubtful whether statistical techniques at that time were sufficiently advanced to analyse the result accurately. The government was obviously concerned to monitor the effect on revenue, and it was calculated that in the first year and a half the

[65] P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (eds.), *Tudor Royal Proclamations* (Newhaven and London, 1964), I, pp. 281–3.

[66] *L & P*, 16, no. 5.

total amount of custom remitted to aliens was £15,450 9s 3d.[67] There is no evidence of any attempt to estimate how much of this loss was offset by the increase in the amount of basic tax paid. Early in 1540 parliament sought to mitigate some of the consequences of the grant by ruling that the concession should only be allowed to aliens who imported or exported in English ships, Hanse merchants excepted. Because retaliation was anticipated, enforcement of the ordinance was delayed until September 1540. Inevitably, reprisals led to counter-reprisals. In December the Emperor prohibited all merchants trading within his dominions from lading in English ships. England countered by forbidding Dutch merchants to trade in their own ships even if no English vessels were available, and then imposed further restrictions on trade with the Low Countries, including a ban on the export of wool. The Emperor's response was a ban on the export of munitions of war desperately needed by England at this time. By June 1542 the futility of the action was obvious and England agreed that merchants of Spain and the imperial Low Countries should be exempt from the provisions of the recent navigation act.[68]

The experiment in customs equalisation was allowed to run the full seven years but was not renewed, so that the former rates of duty were then restored. In the interim both Hanse merchants and other aliens were relieved of the petty custom of 3d in the pound on general merchandise imported and exported, while the latter also gained from the ending of discriminatory poundage on tin, pewter and hides and custom of wine. However, the biggest gain was experienced by other alien exporters of cloth, where the specific custom of 2s 9d per short-cloth was cut back to 1s 2d and the poundage of 5 per cent *ad valorem* was completely abolished. This had an immediate and lasting effect on alien exports, chiefly at the expense of denizens. In 1538–9 denizens exported 49,588 cloths compared with 65,229 the previous year, while aliens exported 33,145 compared with 7,717. From 1538–46 denizen exports averaged 56,308 compared with 61,879 over the previous six years, those of aliens 34,439 compared with 11,858. Hanse exports suffered only a slight decline, averaging 28,334 compared with 29,079. Although the general political and military situation in the 1540s was worse than in the 1530s the combined exports of all three groups increased from an average of

[67] *L & P*, 16, no. 90. [68] *L & P*, 16, nos. 374, 484, 511, 524, 838; 17, no. 440.

102,816 in 1532–8 to 119,081 in 1538–46. This strongly suggests that the reduction in alien rates of duty did not simply transfer trade from denizens to aliens, but was directly responsible for a real increase in exports.[69] On the other hand when alien exports collapsed after the end of the experiment in equal customs rates, total exports did not fall back to earlier levels. Exact figures cannot be established because of gaps in the customs records,[70] but alien exports are unlikely to have been much more than 16,000 in 1546–7, even if they reached that figure, while their annual average between 1547 and 1552 cannot have exceeded 3,500. Total denizen exports are not known for 1546–7 and 1548–9, since the London figures do not survive in these years. But for the other years between 1547 and 1552 denizen exports averaged around 85,500, surpassing all previous totals. Hanse exports were also at an all-time record, averaging 41,795 from 1546 to 1551. Then in December 1551 the Merchant Adventurers and the government mounted a fierce attack on the Hanse franchises which brought their trade to a standstill, so that the export figure for 1551–2 was a mere 13,824. The continued buoyancy of total cloth exports after the removal of the incentive to alien trade in 1545 suggests that one or more new factors had been introduced. That which has received most attention is the possibility that currency depreciation cheapened the price of English cloth in overseas markets and so stimulated sales. Fisher contended that depreciation of the pound sterling against the Flemish pound had for many years been the chief factor stimulating cloth exports. This view was rejected by Stone and Gould.[71] Gould made a very detailed examination of the possible effects of exchange depreciation upon exports during the currency debasements of the 1540s. He concluded that even now it was not a significant factor, except perhaps for a short period towards the end of that decade.

The arrangement made for the liquidation of the indemnity agreed in the treaty of Utrecht, namely the assignment to Steelyard officials of the petty custom paid by Hanse merchants, provides for a few years a more complete picture of Hanse trade than in any

[69] J. D. Gould, *The Great Debasement* (Oxford, 1970), p. 147, is firmly of the opposite opinion. But he overlooks the fact that aliens received an abatement of poundage as well as the reduction in custom.

[70] For cloth export figures in the late 1540s and 1550s see *ibid.*, pp. 173–81.

[71] F. J. Fisher, 'Commercial Trends and Policy in Sixteenth Century England, *EcHR*, 10 (1940), 95–117. L. Stone, 'State Control in Sixteenth Century England', *EcHR*, 17 (1947), 103–20. Gould, *Great Debasement*, pp. 114–60.

Table 16. *Hanse trade, 1474–86**

	Excluding Cologne[a], 1474–8			Including Cologne, 1478–86		
	Merchandise (£)	Cloths	Wax (cwt)	Merchandise (£)	Cloths	Wax (cwt)
London[b]	8,478	4,816	1,111	19,705	11,607	1,880
Provinces	2,641	1,128	47	5,006	955	34
Total	11,129	5,944	1,158	24,711	12,562	1,914

* Twelve-monthly averages.
[a] Cologne cloths 2,528, London.
[b] 5 June 1475–4 July 1478.

earlier period. The general starting date for the retention of the custom was 5 June 1475, but many ports outside London effectively distinguish between Hanse and other alien payments from the previous autumn. Until 19 November 1478 the crown kept the custom of Cologne merchants for itself, but thereafter allowed it to go towards the indemnity. This increased the rate of repayment, but has the side effect of obscuring the distinction between Cologne and non-Cologne trade. Once the indemnity was fully paid, which happened very early in Henry VII's reign, no purpose was served by continuing to record Hanse customs payments separately from those of other aliens, and the practice was gradually abandoned port by port. It was not revived until 1538. Full details of Hanse trade are given in appendix 2, but a summarised version is given in table 16.[72] The latter does not go beyond the autumn of 1486, since at that point the normal pattern of trade was distorted by the Anglo-Burgundian dispute.

The effects of the isolation of the Cologners may be gauged from their cloth exports, which were fewer than they had been during the Anglo-Hanseatic dispute and less than half the present exports on non-Cologne merchants. Little can be said about their imports, since at London their customs payments on general merchandise were usually combined with those of other aliens. The only Cologne trade at provincial ports was 33 cloths at Ipswich in 1477–8 and a small amount of merchandise at Sandwich, which in 1476–8 totalled

[72] Derived from enrolled customs accounts, PRO, E356/22–3.

£118. The non-Cologne merchants maintained a regular trade at Hull, Boston, Lynn, Ipswich and Sandwich, but well over 80 per cent of their business was carried on at London. It is likely that these merchants had a slight surplus of exports over imports, though the exact size cannot be determined. The main problem is that of estimating the value of Hanse cloth exports. The figure of £1 per cloth generally used by Hull customs officials in this period is far too low for an overall average, but the £4,005 valuation set upon 1,138 cloths exported from London between 21 August and 17 September 1485 gives almost £3 10s each, which is too high. Putting the overall average at £2 (possibly on the low side) gives an annual value of around £12,000, to which may be added £1,100 for other exports (estimated at 10 per cent of all merchandise paying the *ad valorem* duty). Import values consist of £10,000 for the remaining merchandise and £2,300 for wax (estimated at £2 per cwt). Wine imports are ignored, since no figures are available, but they were not substantial. The annual shortfall of imports was therefore in the region of £800. A similar exercise covering the years 1478–86 (but now including Cologners) gives cloth exports of around £25,000, other exports of £2,500, merchandise imports of £23,100 and wax of £3,800, the shortfall being still around £800. Allowing for margins of error one way or the other it may be concluded that in the early 1480s Hanseatic trade was either roughly in balance or carried a slight export surplus.

The next opportunity to value Hanse trade comes as a result of the customs equalisation of 1538. Throughout the seven years' experiment the Exchequer kept a record of customs remitted, and for most of that time those of Hansards were kept separate from those of other aliens.[73] In London imports and exports were recorded separately, but not in other ports; the latter have been allocated in the same ratio as the former (table 17). At this date cloths cannot be valued at less than £3 each, which gives an annual bill of around £80,500. Exports of other goods averaged around £1,700. To support this trade Hanse merchants imported around £17,600 of general merchandise and 890 cwt of wax, which has been valued at 50s per cwt, giving a total value for all imports of around £20,000. This is less than the comparable figure for the 1480s. Wax imports were currently only one third of those in 1532–8, when the average

[73] See tables in Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*, 2.

Table 17. *Hanse trade, 1538–44*

	Exports				Imports			
	Cloths		Merchandise (£)		Merchandise (£)		Wax (cwt)	
	London	Provinces	London	Provinces	London	Provinces	London	Provinces
1538–9	31,143	7	2,903	346	11,052	1,304	683	38
1539–40	27,261	54	1,473	132	21,909	2,061	679	159
1540–1	27,619	34	1,520	86	18,276	989	850	6
1541–2	23,412	58	751	88	12,538	1,373	542	0
1542–3	24,226	43	1,836	11	12,068	73	1,054	0
1543–4	27,052	21	1,046	27	23,340	655	1,330	0
Averages	26,786	36	1,588	115	16,531	1,075	856	34

was still 2,458 cwt, although even then the trade was much down on earlier years. The most likely explanation is that the influence of the Reformation had already led to a reduction in the demand for church wax, and then came the dissolution of the monasteries which removed many of the chief customers. The massive Hanse trade deficit, in the region of £60,000 or three times the value of the import trade, may have been at an all-time high in the 1540s, but had probably been growing steadily as imports failed to keep pace with the increase in cloth exports.

For the greater part of Henry VII's reign the total value of alien merchandise paying the 3d petty custom (including Hanse and mostly imports) grew comparatively slowly.[74] After 1500 the rate of increase speeded up until 1520, when a decline set in. From 1509 the London record (which accounts for around 80 per cent of the total) distinguishes between imports and exports. This enables us to calculate a rough, overall balance for alien trade (table 18). At first there was a slight deficit of exports which persisted even in the 1520s, when imports began to decline. Thereafter, the continued decline in imports and the growth of cloth exports produced a substantial export surplus, which became massive after 1538. In the last period the Hanse import deficit still exceeded that of other aliens, despite the great increase in cloth exports by the latter. This does not necessarily mean that Hansards had been responsible for all of the earlier decline in imports, but it supports the view that they were the weaker of the two groups on this front.

One of the reasons for the large adverse balance of Hanse trade in the sixteenth century was the failure of the London Steelyard to increase its imports sufficiently to compensate for the decline of the provincial *Kontore*. By the 1480s and throughout the first half of the sixteenth century substantial quantities of stockfish were brought to London, where its import had been insignificant when Boston had been the staple for this trade. Now Hamburg merchants were the dominant force and the fish came from Iceland rather than Bergen, but it did not equal the amount brought to Boston in its heyday. Later, the Londoners failed to take over the great import trade which was established at Hull in the early sixteenth century by Danzig merchants. When this was lost to the Hansards it probably fell into the hands of Englishmen. Of course, it would be unrealistic

[74] P. Ramsey, 'Overseas Trade in the Reign of Henry VII: The Evidence of Customs Accounts', *EcHR*, series 2, 6 (1953), 173–82.

Table 18. *Hanse and alien balance of trade, 1509–44*

	Imports					
	Merchandise (£)		Wax		Wine	
	London	Provinces[a]	Cwt	Value (£)[b]	Tuns	Value (£)[c]
1509–20	84,392	20,597	3,338	8,345	2,245	11,384
1520–3	70,182	14,317	2,102	5,255	1,941	10,664
1523–30	72,544	18,474	5,787	14,468	1,889	10,310
1530–2	61,567	17,936	1,992	4,980	3,118	15,345
1532–8	53,634	12,819	2,448	6,120	1,845	9,216
1538–44	51,338	13,757	856	2,140	2,096	12,535

	Exports						
	Cloth			Wool		Merchandise (£)	
	H	A	Valued (£)[d]	Sacks	Valued (£)[e]	London	Provinces[a]
1509–20	20,138	17,478	94,040	509	8,144	9,980	2,546
1520–3	16,721	14,639	78,400	710	11,360	6,396	1,245
1523–30	20,591	16,102	91,733	322	5,152	12,221	3,007
1530–2	21,086	17,050	95,340	544	8,704	9,142	2,680
1532–8	29,079	11,858	102,343	533	8,528	8,342	1,916
1538–44	26,821	29,250	168,213	438	7,008	12,486	3,439

	Balance		
	Total imports (£)	Total exports (£)	Surplus or deficit of imports (£)
1509–20	124,718	114,710	+10,008
1520–3	100,418	97,395	+3,023
1523–30	115,796	112,113	+3,683
1530–2	99,828	115,866	−16,038
1532–8	81,789	121,129	−39,340
1538–44	79,770	191,146	−111,376

[a] Exports and imports separated in same proportion as those at London.
[b] Valued at 50s per cwt.
[c] Using values suggested by Schanz, namely non-sweet £4 per tun, sweet £6, malmsey, £10.
[d] Valued at 50s until 1538, £3 thereafter.
[e] Valued at £16 per sack, but possibly too low, since Italians now handled only the very finest wool.

to blame the Steelyard for this latter development. There would have been no point in trying to meet Yorkshire's demand for Baltic goods by importing them through London.

It is easy enough to describe the decline of the provincial *Kontore*, but it is more difficult to decide whether they failed from lack of support or because of circumstances beyond the control of the Hanse merchants. Even in the 1450s the role of London in Hanse trade far outweighed that of all the provincial ports, yet the delegates sent to Utrecht in 1473 were briefed on measures to safeguard the latter interests. As well as strengthening their title to the London Steelyard they gained similar rights to substantial properties in Boston and Lynn.[75] At Boston there had been an organised *Kontor* for two or three centuries and the Hanse may already have been in possession of the building in question, though there is no proof of this. At Lynn there does not seem to have been a recognised *Kontor* since the early fourteenth century and there is no evidence that the merchants held property in the town in 1468, though the possibility cannot be dismissed. Any hopes of re-establishing the former glory of the Boston *Kontor* were soon disappointed. From 1474 to 1485 there was a regular but modest trade, averaging 118 cloths a year and £365 in merchandise imported and exported. After a break of two years there was an irregular trade for a further dozen years or so, but after that the Hanseatics were finished with Boston. The return to Lynn was somewhat more long-lasting. From 1474 to 1508 cloth exports averaged 154 a year and were supplemented by other goods, which regularly included lead. Interest in the latter possibly means that the trade in general merchandise, averaging £551 between 1474 and 1490, contained more than the 10 per cent conventionally allotted to exports. Surviving particulars suggest that at first it was mainly Hamburg shippers and merchants who frequented Lynn, but from 1489 they were almost exclusively Danzigers.[76] After 1508 the level of cloth exports was much reduced, averaging only 29 a year down to 1529, when they virtually ceased. At Colchester there was still a Hanse settlement for some years after the treaty of Utrecht, but it failed to generate anything like the previous level of cloth exports from the town's own quay or at Ipswich. The average between 1474 and 1492 was 293, though that of the last six years of the period was

[75] A survey of the properties made in April 1476 is in *HUB*, 10, no. 477. See also V. Parker, *The Making of Kings Lynn* (London, 1971), pp. 114–17.

[76] PRO, E122/97/17; 98/2, 10, 16; 99/2, 6, 9.

as high as 473. The trade then came to an abrupt halt and it is likely that direct connections with this region were severed. Essex-Suffolk cloth was still popular in the Baltic region, but it was now exported from London and probably bought there as well.

The most thriving provincial centre of Hanse trade in the last decades of the middle ages was Hull. Here the merchants not only withstood the hostility of the townsmen in the early years of Henry VII's reign, but afterwards expanded their business, so that until 1530 it was greater than at any time since the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the port was used for Hanse wool exports. The trouble between the town and its visitors caused a big drop in cloth exports for half-a-dozen years, but cloth figures do not adequately tell the story of Hanse trade here. In fact, it is likely that the main impetus to trade did not come from exports, even when a considerable weight of lead was added to cloth, but from imports. Danzig merchants found a ready market for a wide range of east-Baltic products, and the trade imbalance about which Yorkshiremen complained in the first parliament of Henry VII persisted and worsened in the reign of his son, despite an overall increase in activity. From 1474 to Michaelmas 1486 Hanse cloth exports averaged 461 a year, while general merchandise, consisting predominantly of imports though already containing an element of lead exports, averaged £1,790 worth. In the next twelve months only 68 cloths were exported, while the average for the six years down to 1492 was 80. The record of general merchandise in this period, though incomplete, suggests that the import trade was more patchy than that in cloth, but overall not so depressed. In 1486–7 the merchandise total was still as high as £2,509 and in 1491–2 probably not far short of £2,000. Between times it was £319 in 1487–8, probably some £500–£600 in 1488–9 and £1,184 in 1489–90. The merchants disregarded the instruction of the diet to boycott Hull, and only in 1490–1 was there a complete absence of trade, with no cloth exports and almost certainly no other exports or imports.

Despite the failure of the Anglo-Hanse talks at Antwerp in 1491 the merchants returned in force to Hull the following year and may even have gained a temporary victory over the customs officers of the port. The Hanse delegates had complained about the levy of a great custom on lead and tin, by which they probably meant the imposition of poundage on top of the petty custom. In 1492–3 the merchants exported 146½ tons of lead from Hull, and the enrolled

account duly notes that they paid £7 6s 3d in petty custom, but made no reference to poundage. This was the only year in which lead was mentioned in the enrolled accounts separately from other *ad valorem* merchandise, and if poundage had been levied one might expect to find a note to this effect. The customers were obviously unsure of their case, but the silence about poundage probably means that it was not paid this year. The Hanse merchants were still discriminated against in so far as their lead was valued at £4 a ton, whereas that of denizens was always rated at £3 6s 8d. In any event the apparent victory was short-lived, for by the beginning of Henry VIII's reign Hanse merchants were again being charged petty custom and poundage, a total of 5s per ton. This was a subject for renewed complaint at the Bruges conference of 1520.[77]

Between 1492 and 1509 Hanse cloth exports averaged 620 per annum and 697 from 1510 to 1521. The fall to 77 in 1509–10 was either a side-effect of the current clash between Denmark and Lübeck or of Henry VIII's apparent hesitation in confirming the Hanse franchises, or a combination of both factors. In the same year exports from London plummeted and than as abruptly recovered. In 1510–11 cloth exports from Hull totalled 1,150, while around 250 tons of lead, valued at £1,000, was exported.[78] Export values, however, fell far short of general imports worth £7,139 and 171 cwt of wax, the latter pushing the total to over £7,600. This year's cloth exports were the highest ever recorded at Hull in a twelve-month period, but imports were probably higher in 1514–15 and as high in 1516–17. The total value of merchandise paying the petty custom, overwhelmingly Hanseatic and predominantly imports, was £9,190 in 1510–11, £10,768 in 1514–15 and £9,226 in 1516–17; Hanse wax imports in the latter two years were 231 cwt and 94 cwt. The averages for the entire period 1510–21 were £7,186 (Hanse and other alien) and 239 cwt of Hanse wax. These figures establish beyond any doubt that there was a large surplus from the massive imports brought to Hull every summer in a fleet of up to a dozen Danzig ships.

On 2 October 1521 a Danzig ship left Hull with 19 cloths,[79] but in the next two summers the usual fleets failed to arrive and Hanse trade was at a complete stop until after Michaelmas 1523 or even

[77] *HR*, III (ii), no. 506; (v), no. 337.
[78] PRO, E122/60/3. The precise figure for lead is not recoverable, because of damage to the ledger.
[79] PRO, E122/64/6.

until the following summer. This was presumably a result of the failure of the Bruges conference and Wolsey's threat to cancel the franchises. But once their fear on this count was removed the Danzigers returned, cloth exports averaging 530 between 1523 and 1530, general merchandise £5,146 (including other alien) and Hanse wax 283 cwt. After Michaelmas 1530 cloth exports fell abruptly, a year or so after the abandoning of Lynn. In 1533–4 they recovered temporarily to 622, but the overall average from 1530 to 1546 was only 99. There is no obvious reason for this change in commercial practice and, although the Hanse diet of 1530 complained about harassment over the export of unfinished cloth, it is unlikely that Yorkshire cloth was sufficiently valuable to fall within the scope of the law. The Danzigers tried, with limited success, to maintain their imports and these did not fall so much as cloth exports. The average for all alien merchandise from 1530 to 1538 was £3,543 while from 1538 to 1546 the Hanse average was £1,278 and that for other aliens £533. Danzigers retained a favourable balance of trade, but their reluctance to export cloth, and quite possibly lead, must have made it more difficult to dispose of imports, many of which may have depended on semi-barter arrangements. On 2 October 1531 a Danzig ship departed with a piece of worsted and coney skins worth £18 and 56 cloths, the entire cloth export for 1531–2.[80] No Danzig ships came the following summer, but a Hamburg vessel brought in £64 of Baltic wares in July and then seems to have been sold to a Danzig man, before leaving in August with $4\frac{1}{4}$ tons of lead and 24 chaldrons of sea coal. Two Danzig ships finally came in November 1532 with 54 cwt of wax and other goods worth £1,353.[81] They left in January with lead worth £15 7s, coverlets valued at 16s 8d, two cloths and £3 of denizen-owned lead. Four more Danzig ships came in April with 86 cwt of wax and merchandise valued at £1,719, while in May two Königsberg ships brought 8 cwt of wax and £733 of other wares. All of these ships left before the end of May, having acquired only 17 cloths and £103 of lead. More importantly, they re-exported ashes and tar worth £53 and $45\frac{1}{2}$ cwt of wax and were illegally made to pay duty on them. The ashes and tar were charged 3d in the pound, but the collectors seem to have baulked at levying the specific duty of 1s per cwt on the wax and valued it at £2 per cwt, so the

[80] PRO, E122/64/10.

[81] PRO, E122/202/6.

merchants escaped with 6d per cwt. Notwithstanding this surfeit of imports three more Danzig ships came in June and two in July, bringing another £3,558 in wares and 239 cwt of wax. None of these ships left before Michaelmas, and it is impossible to check whether they took away any of the imports. Part of their profits were invested in some, or all, of the 622 cloths which, as already mentioned, were the last major consignment of Hanse cloth from Hull. It is also significant that never again did Hanse imports in a single year approach anywhere near the amount brought between November 1532 and July 1533. The Prussian merchants must have realised that on this occasion they had overreached themselves and were not inclined to repeat the mistake. By the early 1540s denizen merchants were bringing as much Baltic produce to Hull as Prussians were (though their combined effort did not equal that previously brought by the Hansards alone) and Danzig shippers were happy to help them carry it.[82]

In the aftermath of the treaty of Utrecht there was a redistribution of trade among the Hanse towns represented in England, but not all the changes proved to be permanent. For the merchants of Cologne the treaty was a bitter blow. Should it be ratified they faced the prospects of being denied use of the Hanseatic privileges and of having to surrender the London Gildhall, which had been theirs for some 300 years. Before and after the February 1474 meeting at Utrecht they pestered their English friends to intercede with the king and persuaded the imperial authorities to do the same. Edward's initial misgiving at his abandonment of Cologne turned to impatience when the city persisted in showering him with recriminations. He blamed it for failing to make its own peace with the Hanse in the interval which had elapsed since the exclusion of the city was first mooted. Nevertheless, he continued to provide a breathing space. When the current grant of privileges to Cologne expired at Easter 1474 it was first continued until 31 July, and then further extended until such time as the king should recall it. In fact, the grant was not revoked. Meanwhile the city was desperately seeking to be reconciled with the Hanse, playing upon the sympathy of its Westphalian neighbours and again invoking the mediation of the imperial authorities. Reconciliation was the more imperative because in the summer of 1474 all the Burgundian lands were closed

[82] See below p. 288.

to Cologne merchants, in consequence of a quarrel between the duke and the Emperor. This meant that Cologne's overseas trade, including that with England, had to be conducted through Hanseatic ports and was dependent on letters of safe-conduct, which were requested from Hamburg, Bremen, Stade, Groningen and Kampen.[83]

At the beginning of October 1474 Herman Wanmate and Arnold Brekerfield, appointees of the Hanse delegates at Utrecht, came to London to take possession of the Steelyard. This was still held by the Cologne men, for, although the king had originally ordered them to vacate the premises by 31 July, they obtained an extension and did not finally leave until December. Thereafter, they continued to wrangle with the new occupants about things they had left behind, such as glass in the windows of the chambers. For Gerard von Wesel, leader of the Cologners, loss of face weighed more heavily than financial loss, since his windows depicted his family coat of arms and now he feared that his enemies gloated at them. Wanmate and his associates did not actually take possession until April 1475, the delay being caused by the transfer of legal titles, settlement of quit rents and so forth. It will be remembered that by the terms of the treaty the merchants obtained the freehold of the entire Steelyard, which had grown considerably in area since the Gildhall was originally established. Another significant step forward was taken on 12 May, when the common council of London set its seal to a confirmation of all the privileges which the Hanse merchants had enjoyed in the city in former times. In October 1475 the merchants reported that England had now fulfilled all its treaty obligations, save for depriving Cologne of its use of the franchises and paying the £484 indemnity, which had been promised as an addition to the £10,000 being recovered from retention of their customs liability.[84]

The king's determination to keep faith with the Cologne merchants is perhaps slightly surprising, since he was thereby depriving himself of the revenue which would otherwise have accrued from their liability to tunnage and poundage. Meanwhile the city was still seeking reconciliation with the Hanse. After the failure of the overture of 1474 it appealed to a diet which met at Lübeck in May–June 1476. On this occasion the request was denied, but many delegates were anxious that Cologne should be readmitted and it was decided to reconsider the matter at a diet due to be held

[83] *HR*, II (vii), nos. 209, 211, 215–16, 229–30, 279–80. *HUB*, 10, nos. 282, 318, 320, 371.
[84] *HR*, II (vii), nos. 257–9, 287–9, 311. *HUB*, 10, nos. 320, 386–9, 414–15.

at Bremen a few weeks later. Here in September, despite continued opposition from the *Kontore* of London and Bruges, the town representatives relented and Cologne was accepted back into the Hanse as a full member. The London merchants were ordered to admit Cologners into the Steelyard as soon as they returned its archives, which they had removed to Cologne in May 1474. They were also fined £250 sterling, which was to be settled by payment of double scot on their trade. But although Cologne was re-admitted to the Hanse in 1476 it took much longer to reconcile the rival factions in England. The northerners continued to exclude Cologners from the Steelyard, on the grounds that certain documents were missing from the archives. The bulk of these were restored in February 1477, but some items had been mislaid. Even after the discovery and return of one of the most prized items, Henry III's charter to the Gotland merchants, the resistance continued. As late as August 1478 the Cologners were still complaining that they had not yet been readmitted and there was again talk of applying to the king for a separate grant of privileges for their own organisation. However, in November 1478 the reconciliation was finally made, when the Cologne merchants agreed to pay £400 in place of the original £250 fine and also promised to do their best to find an important register that was still missing. The northerners last act of revenge was to exclude from the amnesty Gerard von Wesel and his sons. Not until October 1479 did the Wesels succeed in gaining a ruling from Lübeck and the Wendish towns that they should be readmitted to the Steelyard.[85]

It may be presumed that, in the absence of the Cologners, authority in the Steelyard would be shared out among the merchants of the leading towns, with some regard to their relative numbers and trade. In October 1475 the administrative council of twelve consisted of four merchants of Danzig, four of Hamburg, two of Soest, one of Münster and one of Nijmegen.[86] Diplomatically, the position of alderman was conceded to one of the Soest men, while Hamburg and Danzig supplied two deputies. This arrangement gave equal recognition to each of the thirds into which the late medieval Hanse was divided, but still poses certain questions. The absence of any representative of Dinant, whose citizens had been very active in London in the 1460s, is not particularly surprising, since its status as a Hanse town had always been ambivalent and remained so. In the

[85] *HR*, II (vii), nos. 347, 390, 406; III (i), nos. 31, 35–6, 169, 195. *HUB*, 10, no. 528.
[86] *HR*, II (vii), no. 311.

Anglo-Hanseatic conferences of the 1520s the English went so far as to claim that since the treaty of Utrecht Dinant had enjoyed customs concessions under false pretences. The omission of Lübeck is less easily explained, but if it betokens the absence of its merchants from London at this date the situation did not last long. They soon returned and remained active until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. After their readmission to the Steelyard, Cologne merchants also returned in force and, as we have seen, were vociferous in their complaints about restrictions in cloth exports in the 1480s and 1490s. They remained a major element in the trade of the Steelyard, but had passed their relative peak before the mid-sixteenth-century crisis in Hanse affairs. The surviving London customs particulars are comparatively few in number, but each is vast in size and the precise identification of Hanse merchants depends on intimate local knowledge, which has not yet been applied to this task. Only Hamburg's share of the trade has been studied in detail, and that only for the reign of Henry VIII and later.[87] This shows that in 1513–14 Hamburg merchants handled 12 per cent of Hanse cloth exports from London, but 23 per cent, 21 per cent and 22 per cent in 1534–5, 1545–6 and 1553–4. Their proportion of the import trade cannot be given with such precision, but it was much greater than the former figures. The dominant role played by Hamburg in the reign of Elizabeth was therefore not an entirely new phenomenon; it had been becoming ever more prominent since the 1460s.

There is no evidence that in the late fifteenth century Hanse imports from the Baltic region were burgeoning. This being the case it might seem that there was plenty of scope for enterprising English merchants. Yet accepted historical opinion holds that the treaty of Utrecht effectively closed the door to Prussia against Englishmen, and in so doing was one of the factors which prompted them to target their cloth exports at the fairs of the Low Countries. Against this it must be emphasised that by the 1460s denizen cloth exports to the Baltic were at such a low ebb that the total deflection of an equivalent amount to the Low Countries in the late 1470s would have had marginal significance for the latter region. It must also be repeated that the treaty of Utrecht made no real difference to the legal status of English merchants in Prussia or elsewhere in the Baltic. Had they wished they could have resumed their trade under the same constraints as had existed for many years before the war.

[87] K. Friedland, 'Hamburger Englandfahrer, 1512–57', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, 46 (1960), 1–42.

If denizen trade continued to stagnate in the late fifteenth century, as it probably did, then explanations must be sought either in factors outside the Baltic region, or in conditions there which do not involve the legal status of Englishmen in Prussia. In the latter category the most obvious choice is the state of relations between England and Denmark. Whenever the King of Denmark closed the Sound to Englishmen or licensed privateers to attack their ships then denizen trade with the Baltic was bound to suffer. In 1473 the hostilities which had begun in 1468 were terminated by a series of short truces, the last of which expired on 30 September 1482. The truce was not then renewed and, even before it expired, Denmark had closed the Sound. On the other hand, the fact that English merchants had less to fear from the Danes in the 1470s did not necessarily mean that they flocked to the Baltic. The bitter memory of 1468 must have remained with them. Danzig harbour accounts for 1474–7 record two ships coming from England in the first year, seven in the second and twelve in the third, but none of them seem to have been English.[88] They freighted very little English cloth, though substantially more was brought to Danzig from Lübeck, probably having arrived there by way of Hamburg. English ships did return to the Baltic, however; in November 1481 two Lynn ships returned home with cargoes belonging to both denizen and Danzig merchants.[89] Englishmen also shipped in Hanse vessels until the King of Denmark put a stop to this in September 1482. Correspondence between him and Danzig in 1483 referred to English merchants stranded in the city, because they could not obtain safe-conduct to repatriate their goods.[90]

Peace talks between England and Denmark began in August 1489 and a treaty was sealed in January 1491, but in the intervening years the Baltic was not entirely empty of English ships. Most of the credit for keeping the flag flying should probably go to the men of Lynn. In November 1483 a Lynn ship returned home with wax belonging to a Danzig merchant, probably having broken the Danish blockade.[91] Evidence of Lynn ships in the Baltic after that date comes from the Antwerp conference of 1491.[92] Lynn merchants then submitted claims against the Hanse for losses totalling £2,308 in thirteen incidents since 1485. In a majority of cases there are positive

[88] W. Lauffer, 'Danzigs Schiff und Wahrenverkehr am Ende des XV Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift des Westpreussischen Geschichtsverein*, 33 (1894), 8.
[89] PRO, 122/97/17.
[90] *HUB*, 10, nos. 1003, 1028, 1036–7.
[91] PRO, E122/98/2.
[92] *HR*, III (ii), no. 511.

statements, or prima-facie evidence, indicating Baltic trade. The *Anne* and her cargo (£546) were seized and some men killed while returning from Danzig; William Dreve was robbed while sailing from Prussia in 1489; William Dalle was robbed and imprisoned on the way home in 1490. Richard Paskelle bought a ship in Prussia in 1490 and was robbed while coming home, though apparently keeping the ship. Two denizen merchants freighted in a Danzig ship coming to Lynn in May 1490.[93] All this does not prove a large trade; moreover, denizen cloth exports from Lynn to all destinations averaged only 90 a year between 1482 and 1492. Hull's cloth trade was not so badly decayed as that of Lynn, but Yorkshiremen had abandoned Prussia even more completely. Their claims submitted in 1491 totalled £8,381, but there is no evidence that any related to losses in the Baltic.[94] On the contrary, most are specifically located elsewhere, the worst being the seizure of three ships coming from Poitou, with a loss of £3,000 and forty men killed or wounded. It was this incident which provoked the threat to impound the next Hanse ship coming to Hull, and obviously no Yorkshire ship would risk going to the Baltic. It is perhaps indicative that even in the mid-1470s the York mystery of mercers, once so prominent in the English company in Prussia, made no reference to that body in an ordinance regulating payments to be made to the gild by masters and apprentices at various marts. Those mentioned were Bruges, Antwerp, Barrow and Middelburg, indicating that Yorkshire's cloth trade was now geared to the Low Countries.[95]

The Anglo-Danish treaty of 1491 made it safer for English ships to sail to the Baltic, and the next year the King of Denmark tried to enlist England as an ally in his own dispute with the Hanse.[96] Nevertheless, it is commonly asserted that English trade in the region was now defunct, the earliest (though isolated) Sound toll register of 1497 being cited as evidence that no ships came into the Baltic that year.[97] In fact, at the Bruges conference of 1499 the English ambassadors raised the case of Roger Bussel of Hull, who claimed to have been in Prussia in an English ship of 80 tuns in July 1497.[98] He and his companions came to 'a place called Wistill' (the river Vistula) to buy osmund and flax, where they were set upon for

[93] PRO, E122/98/10.
[94] *HR*, III (ii), no. 511.
[95] Sellers, *York Mercers*, p. 65.
[96] *HR*, III (iii), no. 84.
[97] N. E. Bang (ed.), *Tabeller over Skibsfart og Varetransport gennem Øresund, 1497–1660* (Copenhagen, 1906), I, p. 2.
[98] See above, p. 247.

trading illegally. The Hanse delegates refused to entertain this charge, but their objection was based on the vagueness of the geography and the failure to name the alleged aggressors. There is nothing to disprove the claim that an English vessel was involved in an incident in Prussia in 1497. At the Bruges conference of 1521 the case was raised of another Hull vessel attacked some six miles from Danzig in 1500.[99] An even more interesting case raised on this occasion was an alleged seizure of English goods in Riga.[100] Few details were given, but the famulus of one Thomas Marten was said to have lost goods valued at 1,800 marks of Riga. The Hanse ambassadors commented that this incident was not recent, which may date it back to the 1490s, about the time of the proposed trade treaty with Riga. It was admitted that the property in question was arrested by the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, but his action was a justifiable reprisal for the arrest in Hull of a Rostock ship in which he had merchandise of his own. Thomas Marten was in Danzig in 1517 and became involved in a legal suit which dragged on in Prussia and England from 1511 until the reign of Queen Elizabeth.[101] Scattered evidence of this sort suggests that, while English trade in the Baltic reached a very low ebb in the late fifteenth century, a precarious foothold was maintained. The corporate organisation of the merchants seems to have perished entirely. Yet there were probably a few individuals who persisted in the trade and were able to hand on experience, and possibly business contacts, from one generation to the next. This meant that when English interest in the Baltic revived in the sixteenth century it was not a totally new beginning. The later merchants did not simply inherit empty claims to privileges; they inherited knowledge of the Baltic provinces and their products, and skills in how to acquire them, a valuable legacy from the middle ages.

The build-up of trade in the sixteenth century may have come about much earlier than is generally appreciated. The second surviving Sound toll register (1503) records ten or eleven English ships in the Baltic, and the third (1528) about twenty-nine.[102] Other sources confirm the trading activities of the first two decades of the

[99] See above, p. 257.

[100] *HR*, III (vii), no. 455.

[101] PRO, SP12/90/21. See below p. 356.

[102] *Tabeller over Skibsfart*, pp. 3–4. In the first half of the sixteenth century this source does not distinguish between ships entering and leaving the Baltic. On the assumption that most English ships going there returned safely in the same year the recorded total must be halved.

sixteenth century. Lynn merchants imported goods in a Danzig ship in 1504[103] and Lynn ships were attacked by Stralsund privateers in 1511. In August and September 1512 three Hull ships and one of Newcastle returned to Hull heavily laden with Baltic goods belonging to thirty denizen merchants.[104] When the Hull ships had sailed in April, probably bound for the Baltic, seventeen merchants had contributed to their cargoes of cloth, Scottish salt, coney skins and coverlets. Denizens imported in a Danzig ship at Hull in 1517–18, but there appear to have been no English ships coming there from the Baltic that year, nor in 1521–2.[105] At least one Hull ship made the voyage in 1525–6, but there are none which can be identified confidently in 1531–3.[106] In the early 1540s, ships of Hull, Beverley and Newcastle were employed in the trade and denizens were also importing in Danzig ships, great quantities of rye being brought in 1542.[107] The 1530s, when Danzig merchants seem to have retreated from trade with England, at least in Hull and Lynn, were probably decisive in strengthening the English stake in Baltic trade. In 1535 ships had to run the gauntlet of rival parties disputing the crown of Denmark. At Copenhagen on the outward voyage some were stopped by the Duke of Mecklenburg, a supporter of the deposed Christian II. As well as forcing them to assist him he seized much of their cloth to pay his troops, before allowing them to sail on to Danzig. When they returned in September the Sound was now under the control of Christian III, who arrested twelve or thirteen ships of London and Newcastle and detained three in his service. The merchants blamed rivals at Danzig for their second misfortune. Not only had they been restricted in what wares they might buy, they had been deliberately prevented from sailing until it was known that the Sound had changed hands and that they would be held there. While still detained in Denmark they wrote home urging the arrest of two Danzig ships making for Hull and three for London. Whatever the truth of this tale, a few days later Danzig wrote to Christian III requesting a safe-conduct for English and Dutch ships carrying the goods of Danzig merchants. The English government responded by an indiscriminate arrest of Hanseatic goods, though in the first week of November all but those belonging to Danzigers were released. The latter were detained until 2 February 1536. On 21 November Chapuys reported that some of the Danzig merchants

[103] PRO, E122/98/6.
[104] PRO, E122/64/2.
[105] PRO, E122/64/6; 202/4.
[106] PRO, E122/64/10; 202/6.
[107] PRO, E122/64/15–16.

were quite unperturbed by the arrest and felt sure that they would soon recover double the amount of both principal and interest on their losses. This meant, of course, that they believed the assets owned by Englishmen in Danzig to be greater than their own in England. English goods were still under arrest in Danzig on 25 April 1536, when the king wrote requesting their release.[108]

The troubles of 1535 and 1536 did little or nothing to stem the build-up of English trade in the Baltic. The first surviving sequence of Sound registers records 35 ships in 1536, 51 in 1537 and about 127 over the next five years. In 1543 and the following two years only one ship per year was recorded. This was presumably the result of the defensive alliance between Denmark and France, which required the closure of the Sound to enemies of France in time of war. In 1546 and 1547 seven and fourteen ships were registered, but none up to 9 March 1548, when there is a gap in the series which lasts until 1557. No amount of English cloth exported to the Baltic would justify well over 200 ships being sent there in 1536–42. The explanation is that the principal attraction of the region lay in the imports it provided, which were bulky and required a great volume of shipping. The chief commodities were grain and all manner of ships' stores, but above all cables. Twenty years later cables were still the most desirable merchandise.[109] Nearly half of all the ships (a hundred) belonged to the port of Newcastle, fifty-four belonged to London and way behind in third place was Lynn with fourteen. Newcastle ships doubtless brought grain to their home region, which was not self-sufficient in bread, and to provision northern garrisons, but many of their cargoes went to other English ports. The most likely explanation for the predominance of northern ship-owners is the fact that without a substantial export trade most vessels had to sail to the Baltic in ballast. Tyne coal admirably served this purpose, could be obtained cheaply and sold for a profit in the east. Scottish salt may have provided an alternative.

Because of his naval programme the most important single customer for Baltic imports was the king himself. In the 1530s his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, had an active and personal interest in the region. He was frequently solicited for favours by Danzig merchants, who sent him presents, including live beavers and elks. In 1535 Richard Cavendish, one of the king's masters of

[108] *L & P*, 8, no. 1170; 9, nos. 246, 290–1, 323, 776, 861; 10, no. 283. *DI*, nos. 751, 867.
[109] W. Sharpe, 'The Correspondence of Thomas Sexton, Merchant of London, and his Factors in Danzig, 1550–1560' (M.A. Thesis, London University, 1952), *passim*.

ordnance, accompanied Bishop Bonner to Germany and was charged with buying up whatever naval stores he could lay his hands on. He corresponded directly with Cromwell about his success, one of his purchases being £600 of cable from a Riga merchant.[110] In 1538 William Watson was appointed royal purchasing agent in the Baltic and held this position for the rest of the reign and beyond. Official letters were regularly sent to Danzig asking the authorities to assist him to obtain naval stores for the crown. Watson's career as a Baltic merchant went back to at least 1531, since in 1543 he was in communication with a councillor of Lübeck, whom he described as having been his factor in that city for twelve years. On this occasion the councillor obliged Watson by helping him to get his own and the king's cloth off ships which he had been warned were to be attacked by the King of Sweden.[111] This incident, besides showing that the crown itself sent cloth to Prussia, proves that trade was not totally stopped during the current closure of the Sound, but continued on the Hamburg-Lübeck route.

The confirmation of the Hanse franchises by Edward VI inevitably led to a renewal of the demand for reciprocity by the growing numbers of English merchants trading with Prussia. Relations were further complicated by tension at sea – the usual accompaniment of war between England and Scotland. In the summer of 1547 English privateers seized two Stralsund ships chartered by Danzig merchants, while about the same time and in the same waters Hamburg sailors looted an English ship. The latter incident had serious repercussions, for when the Hamburg captain insolently displayed a captured English flag in Danzig it was rescued by Englishmen, who were thereupon imprisoned by the city authorities. This action alarmed the Steelyard merchants, who feared for their own privileges, and together with Lübeck urged Danzig to release the Englishmen, pay them compensation and acknowledge the principle of equal rights. Danzig very grudgingly made amends to those who had been imprisoned, but did nothing to remove the causes of more general dissatisfaction felt by English merchants. These continued to simmer until another quarrel developed in the summer of 1551. Now, 96 cloths belonging to Thomas Banaster were arrested in Danzig, as an indirect consequence of an alleged evasion of Sound duties. Smuggling, particularly of English cloth, had been a frequent subject of complaint

[110] *L & P*, 10, nos. 240, 527; 13, no. 1450; 14 (i) no. 60; (ii), no. 85.
[111] *L & P*, 18, no. 781. *DI*, no. 1161.

by the Danes in recent years. In October seventeen English merchants used the arrest of Banaster's cloth to make a general protest about their treatment in Danzig.[112] The dispute was beginning to grow to major proportions when it was overtaken by events in England. The Banaster affair may have been one catalyst, but it was probably less important than the question of cloth exports to the Low Countries, and the Merchant Adventurers were more instrumental than the Prussian traders in securing the downfall of the Hansards.

[112] *DI*, nos. 2051, 2056, 2059–61, 2064, 2067–75, 2084–6, 2367, 2370, 2375, 2378–9.