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Title page: an extract from Watkins 1600 complaint detailing alleged illicit imports from Ireland and a table listing alleged extortionate fees levied by Bristol's Customs House.

Introduction

The primary subjects of this thesis are two petitions that were written by Thomas Watkins in 1598 and 1600; both were directed primarily against Bristol's Customer for imports John Dowle. It appears that Watkins apprenticed as a Draper for eight years from 1576. Within Bristol's Apprentice Rolls, he is listed as being a master to apprentice Drapers from 1586. In his petitions, Watkins states that he owned a shop in which he is likely to have operated as a Draper until May 1594 when he became a clerk for Customer John Dowle. Dowle - according to letters of recommendation from William Hubberte, the previous Customer for imports in Bristol - took up his post sometime in 1593. In 1597 a dispute arose between Watkins and Customer Dowle, which according to Watkins was a result of Dowle's various improprieties with regards to the keeping of accounting records. As a result of this dispute and alleged conspiracies of Dowle, Watkins was twice imprisoned, from where he produced two petitions in 1598 and 1600 both directed at Dowle, the Customs House and Bristol's merchant community. These petitions contain around 8000 words that I have transcribed for this thesis; the transcription of which are reproduced in Appendix 1 and 2. Through the use of these documents and other sources from the period I will establish claims made by Watkins, his likely accuracy and honesty, and ultimately what can be derived about Bristol's merchant and customs communities from this information.

Watkins' petitions are set against economic and political upheaval that effected England during the late sixteenth century. The 'Armada War' between England and Spain between 1585 and 1604 led to the prohibition of all trade between the two states - on pain of death in England from 1591.¹ Spain had been the principal trading partner with Bristol for generations as a result of the loss of Gascony in 1453 where Bristol merchants had previously enjoyed extensive privileges; the treaty of Medina del Campo with Spain in 1489 further established the Iberian trade. It was once thought that during this time English merchants heeded the trade prohibition, and ceased to trade with Spain altogether. In 1989 Pauline Croft's *Trading with the Enemy* demonstrated that the quantity of trade was in fact greater than was previously assumed during this period, if

¹ Hughes, P.L. & Larkin, J.F. *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Vol. III* (New Haven & London, 1969) pp. 83-6

one accounts for the evidence concerning illicit trade.² Watkins' petitions include considerable detail of the activities of Bristol's merchants and Customs House that appears to support this. The main focus of Watkins' petitions concerns the alleged activities of Customer Dowle and his immediate associates. Watkins portrays Dowle as being violent and corrupt; a man who in league with other customs men and merchants perpetrated extensive smuggling and fraudulent activities within Bristol. It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that whilst caution must be applied to Watkins' complaints, they represent aspects of the nature of Bristol's Customs House and merchant elite that can be shown to be broadly accurate. Whilst simultaneously indicating that royal power over Bristol's mercantile community is shown to be severely hampered by the corruption of men at Bristol's Customs House.

² Croft, p. 'Trading With the Enemy' in *The Historical Journal* (June, 1989) pp. 281-302

Chapter 1

In this first chapter, the course of events and technical content of Watkins' petitions will be explained. Discussion of supporting evidence, both peripheral and internal, will be avoided in order to focus upon the content. Understanding of this will enable a better discussion of the plausibility of Watkins' claims and their relationship to the historical context, which will be considered in chapters 2 and 3.

The first section of this chapter concerns the circumstances that, according to Watkins, led to his imprisonment, probably late in 1597. It looks at the relationship between Thomas Watkins the clerk and his employer John Dowle, how Dowle forced him into debt and ultimately impoverishment, ending with his arraignment before a court and, through the abuse of Dowle's position and influence, how he was imprisoned without a fair hearing.

The second section will introduce Watkins' allegations of malpractice against Dowle and his associates. Watkins makes numerous assertions about Dowle's nefarious activities. These include embezzlement, extortion and other examples of fraud, illicit trade and smuggling. Although the 1598 document is rather light on details it does make for a good introduction to the more detailed claims of the 1600 petition.

The third section will examine this 1600 petition. There Watkins introduces details of other illicit activities, such as the alteration of shipping accounts to avoid taxes, such as *prisage*. He also provides more details of frauds alluded to within the 1598 petition, such as the embezzlement of the bonds taken out by visiting merchants. The names of many of Bristol's merchant elite emerge within these papers.

Watkins treats the workings of Bristol's customs system without much explanation, and the manner in which he refers to technical language, laws and activities clearly assumes that those he is addressing are familiar with them, including many aspects of the documents that are fraudulent. Complex frauds are explained where necessary in his petitions.

This elucidation – of the sometimes-tangled account that Watkins gives of his story, and the mercantile, regulatory and legal environment it relates to - is essential to allow for the coherent discussion of Watkins' claims that form the chapters 2 and 3

I

Before proceeding to explore the details of Thomas Watkins' allegations of illicit activities carried out by Dowle and others, it is necessary to examine the circumstances surrounding Watkins' imprisonment. This will provide an account of the background to the case, and will help to form an understanding of the relationship that existed between Watkins and Dowle, and the nature of the personal grievances held by Watkins.

In the first section of the 1598 document, Watkins states the circumstances surrounding his debt of thirty pounds owed to Dowle for which he was imprisoned at the time of writing. Watkins' 1598 petition confirms that he was Dowle's clerk from May 1594 and was charged to conduct transactions on behalf of Dowle. He recounts money he had paid to Dowle during this period of employment, stating that he always paid '[money] to him self or to some other for him'.³ Watkins is not specific about what these transactions were for at this stage. These payments may have been the customs fees from merchants arriving in the Port of Bristol, or perhaps money related to the system of bonds collected from merchant strangers to ensure that money made from the sale of their goods was employed to purchase English goods, rather than being exported in the form of specie.

Watkins emphasises the fact that Dowle would not allow him to keep the account books or give him 'acquittance for the half year' for such transactions. Watkins states that he suspected some 'cunning dealing', whereby Dowle would be able to 'hurt' him in the event of 'controversie'. Without proof that Watkins had paid certain sums, Dowle could have conceivably claimed that these sums were never paid at all. Watkins claims this to have transpired in the case of a payment of thirty pounds - paid on behalf of Dowle - that he had paid to 'others' previously. Watkins goes on to claim that Dowle, after receiving £55 10s from Watkins, then forced him to: 'confes I owed him xxx£ and assure him to pay it (or) hee would sue me for all'.⁴

Watkins claims that rather than owing Dowle £30, Dowle in fact owed him £75 10s; £55 10s of which he was forced to pay Dowle under the threat of violence. The

³ Appendix 1, p. 2

⁴ Appendix 1, p. 2

remaining £20 Watkins claims as an outstanding fee for his previous employment. Watkins asserts that by forcing him to pay the £55 10s and retaining his fee, Dowle impoverished Watkins: '*which hee hath done to thintent to undoe me and because I should not have anie means to wage lawe with him*'.⁵ In essence Watkins alleges a two-fold conspiracy to have him imprisoned. Firstly, his financial ability to defend himself in court was removed; secondly, the debt of £30 invented to enable prosecution. The fact that Watkins was 'impoverished' also, of course, meant that he would not be able to pay the £30 to Dowle to avoid this prosecution. Dowle's motives for these actions are not clear at this stage. Watkins implies that: 'beinge broughte to povertye...I shold bee lesse able to Reveal it to her majestie of his (Dowle) sinister and wicked dealinge'.⁶

An aspect of Watkins petition that features prominently are the violent actions of Dowle. Within the 1598 complaint, Watkins accuses Dowle of forcing him to 'confes' to owing the £30 whilst he was bedridden with an illness: 'if I would not confes I owed him that xxx£ hee would then had stabbed me laie his hand on his Rapier'.⁷ Later, on the 2nd January 1598, Watkins alleged that in Corn Street Dowle: 'stroke me calling me a roge and villeyne and then hee drawing his poynard rane after me'. Dowle's 'man' Thomas Yerburie was apparently present on this occasion and Watkins records that he had to 'drue him awaye, or elce surely he would have killed me'.⁸ It is claimed that Dowle used violence as a calculated method of enforcing his interests, as is indicated by the visit to the bedridden Watkins. However, the spontaneity of the incident on Corn Street also suggests genuine anger towards Watkins. The reason for this anger is as unclear as the issue of why Dowle would wish to have Watkins imprisoned in the first place.

Watkins recounts that as a result of this impoverishment and false debt he found himself in the Pipowders Court in Bristol where he was to 'plead' for himself. This was a small market court in which aldermen judged minor disputes that arose within the market place. Watkins records that the plaintiff was John Langton who claimed £20 from Watkins; a debt that Watkins states earlier in the document that he had paid, the receipt for which Dowle had forcibly taken. Watkins mentions that Langton was a clerk for

⁵ Appendix 1, p. 3

⁶ Appendix 1, p. 3

⁷ Appendix 1, p. 2

⁸ Appendix 1, p. 4

Dowle who had adventured merchandise, free of custom, during the previous six years, contrary to law. Although Langton was the plaintiff, Watkins makes it clear that Dowle was behind the prosecution as Langton's 'master'. Watkins claims that Dowle's attorney had previously 'laboured the matter' to the judges, thus ensuring conviction. The case went against Watkins, who claimed: 'I could not bee suffered to speake nor my Evidence could not bee hard'.⁹ Consequently, one finds Watkins petitioning from prison against Dowle, 'the Cruellest customer her highness hath'.

Thus, one can delineate Watkins account of the circumstances that lead to him being imprisoned. He briefly alludes to the transactions handled on behalf of Dowle, the purposes of which are not clear. The ways in which Dowle bankrupted and shrewdly manoeuvred Watkins' position in relation to these payments is indicated. Furthermore, Dowle's violent actions are shown to be calculated in their aims, and often murderous in temper. And finally, as a culmination of these events, Watkins describes his trial, claiming it to be tainted by corruption.

II

From Watkins' account of the events that led to his imprisonment, the documents subsequently focus on the corruption of Dowle and others in Bristol. This of course is the main aim of the petition. Watkins states in the title of both documents that he wished to obtain: 'Justice at yor honnors hands' by 'Revealinge of great abuses offered to her majesties highness by the saide customer'.¹⁰ This next section will present the 'revelations' contained within the 1598 petition. Within the 1598 document there are five main areas of corruption that Watkins addresses, the first of which is Dowle's extortionate charges for customs services.

⁹ Appendix 1, p. 6

¹⁰ Appendix 1, p. 1

	Fees extorted		Fees due
For hee receyved for the Entrye of every Strangers Ship	iiiiis iiiid		viiid
For his band for the officers	is		vid
For his band of ymployments	iiiiis iiiid		xiid
For the discharge thereof	iis	which is but	iiiiid
For his warrant	xiid		vid
For a certificate	iis		is iiiid
For a bill advision	iis		iiiiid
For an Irishmans warrant	is viiid		viiid

11

The above table is included in Watkins' 1598 petition to highlight the fact that Dowle was charging higher fees for performing his official tasks than were permitted by law. He mentions the fact that these charges exceed the rates that applied to the Port of London which, was 'Contrary to lawe or Custome'. He also complains that having to collect the excessive rates from the merchants on behalf of Dowle: 'all the marchauntes (turned) against me for the same because hee (Dowle) durst not be sene in it him self'.¹² The differential between the actual amounts that were collected by Dowle to the prescribed legitimate amounts varied from less than a multiple of one for a 'certificate', to over six for the 'Entrye of every Strangers Ship'. Overall, the table represents an average increase by a factor of 4.3. It is clear from the table that this extortion was directed towards foreign merchants and would have had little impact on denizen merchants of Bristol. At this stage it is sufficient to acknowledge the extortionate charges collected by Dowle; technicalities within the table, such as the 'band of ymployments', will be addressed over the course of this chapter.

The second accusation that Watkins makes is the embezzlement of customs dues by the Customer Controller and Waiters. Watkins loosely claims that the 'Customer

¹¹ Appendix 1, p. 4

¹² Appendix 1, p. 4

Comptroler and the Waitors...doe share her Custome and subsidie and devyde it amongst themselves'.¹³ This accusation of the infidelity of the Controller and Waiters is surprising considering they were paid to prevent customs fraud from taking place at the point of entry and within the Customs House. The Controller was the overseer of all Customs-House activities and was responsible for ensuring that the customer did not abuse his position. Waiters were responsible for boarding ships upon arrival in order to prevent goods being unloaded before the custom was paid. Watkins also accuses the 'Customer and marchauntes' of embezzling between £20 and £30 of customs money from every ship that arrived from the Strait of Gibraltar, (i.e. from Spain and the Mediterranean).¹⁴ These allegations, if true, highlight the co-operation that existed between different divisions of the customs service and the Bristol merchants when defrauding the crown of its rightful revenues.

The third accusation within the 1598 document is levelled directly at Dowle. Watkins describes Dowle's practice of keeping 'entries out of the booke and put them in the half year following...and doth lett it for x percent'.¹⁵ These entries would have been made in the official book supplied by the Exchequer and would record the merchants vessel, master and its port of origin alongside the cargo recorded in the margin. Dowle would have been responsible for these records; by delaying the entry of certain payments made to the Customs House the money could be put to use elsewhere until its re-entry six months later. Watkins alludes to this use with reference to the 'x percent', a typical return of interest on loans or other mercantile investment. Watkins states that these loans or investments could have been up to £100, representing a significant part of the Crown's revenue.¹⁶ This loan would derive £10 of interest for Dowle according to Watkins figures.

Watkins' fourth complaint about Dowle's activity concerns the fraudulent methods by which he profited from the issue of *bands of employment*. The *band of employment* was a bond or guarantee that is described in William Rastell's *collection of statutes* as a 'sufficient surety' to be taken by the customer or controller to ensure that money earned

¹³ Appendix 1, p. 4

¹⁴ Appendix 1, p. 5

¹⁵ Appendix 1, p. 5

¹⁶ Appendix 1 p. 5

from the sale of foreign goods was subsequently employed on English commodities.¹⁷ The Statute states that foreign merchants had to sell their goods within the space of three months, and before leaving had to employ any money they had received on the purchase of local produce.¹⁸ This law was intended to keep gold and silver within England, and increase the export of local produce. This flexibility of the term ‘sufficient surety’ was to ensure that a bond was proportionate to the circumstances of the alien merchant.

Thus, Dowle would have decided the size of the bond and would have been responsible for the entire transaction. There is an evident ease of fraud occurring within this system as its operation depended completely upon the honesty of the Customer. Watkins claims that Dowle had never returned bonds that had been left by alien merchants to the Exchequer ‘unlesse hee hath done it within this twoe yeeres last past’.¹⁹

Watkins asserts that some ‘bands of ymployments’ were kept for up to two years before being ‘discharged’, presumably by the alien merchant’s provision of proof that he had employed his money on English goods. Watkins claims that a ‘friend’ of the stranger might create a ‘bill’ showing that the merchant had employed his money correctly when he had in fact retained the gold or silver specie. Furthermore, the stranger’s ‘friend’ might arrange all this himself, after the stranger had left the city with the gold or silver. Watkins states that Dowle might have received ‘tenne shillinge’ some 20s some 11s and some £3’ for his connivance in this activity.²⁰

The fifth and final major revelation that Watkins produces within the 1598 petition is the brief reference to the adventuring of goods by Dowle and his clerk John Langton. In the case of Langton, Watkins alleges that he ‘adventured both victuoll and other marchandries at any tyme this six yeeres’.²¹ Watkins adds: ‘Dowle is perjured (against his oath as a customs officer) for at the comminge home of Langtons goods hee hath allowed him the cutome free’.²² Subsequently Watkins claims that Dowle personally ‘used merchandice him selfe since hee hath bine Customer’. Unfortunately Watkins does not provide the exact details of the ‘victuoll’ or ‘merchandice’, such as the quantity or its

¹⁷ Rastell, W. *A collection in English, of the statutes now in force* (1598), folio. 280, part. 26

¹⁸ Rastell, W. *A collection in English, of the statutes now in force* (1598), Folio. 280, part. 26

¹⁹ Appendix 1 p. 5

²⁰ Appendix 1 p. 6

²¹ *Ibid*

²² *Ibid*

type, and does not provide any evidence at this stage. It is likely that his aim at this stage was to defame both Dowle and his accuser Langton. Of course, it was illegal for those working at the Customs House to partake in the adventuring of goods. This was to prevent the obvious conflict of interest when a merchant also acted as his own customs collector.²³

The 1598 petition is somewhat lighter in detail compared to the 1600 document. But does however provide the background to Watkins' case, and introduces the methods that may have been employed when deceiving the Crown's customs revenues. Furthermore, his allegations point to the co-operation that may have existed between the customs men and merchants involved in this illicit activity. However, at this stage Watkins chooses not to include the names of individuals not directly involved with his dispute with Dowle. Watkins must have been reluctant to implicate others in any accusations that would create unnecessary enemies within Bristol; his dispute was restricted to Dowle and his close associates such as Thomas Yerburie and Thomas and Ancelm Langton.

Watkins' claims are merely assertions at this stage. The evidence he produces at the end of the document consists of bills purporting to show the £35 10s paid in London on behalf of Dowle, and the £20 paid to Ancelm Langton.²⁴ Watkins cites his servant Richard Griffith as witnessing these payments. There then follows some copies of notes that apparently show Dowle's wish to keep money from the impost of certain ships out of the books by half a year. Evidence such as this will be addressed in Chapter 2.

III

Over the course of this next section, the details of frauds cited within Watkins' 1600 document will be presented as they appear in the original petition. It is clear that in his latter petition Watkins attempts to provide more detailed information about his allegations of frauds and other illicit activity. Watkins proceeds from his focus on the direct circumstances surrounding his imprisonment, and general assertions, towards a

²³ Rastell, W. *A collection in English, of the statutes now in force* (1598), folio 104, part 3

²⁴ Appendix 1 p. 15

more detailed account of those involved, and the mechanics of the illicit activity that he describes. Within this document there are four main parts that highlight the methods of customs fraud that may have been employed by the customs service and the wider merchant community. The first part consists of a list of merchants and customs men who contrived to defraud and embezzle customs money due to the crown from certain shipments.

Watkins devotes the first eight of the nineteen pages of his 1600 petition to the detailed listing of shipments in which the customs dues were, ‘devided...the one halfe to the saide Customer and waitors of the saide Porte, and the other halfe to the marchantes that was owners of the same.’²⁵ Watkins asserts that many of the listed shipments were simply kept out of the books by the ‘consent’ of Dowle and ‘the marchantes’, to be subsequently divided between both parties.

An entry for goods that were imported on the 21st January 1595 appears to demonstrate this practice. Watkins lists money that he received from Master John Barker for Flemish goods that he was to pass on to Dowle. Watkins states that the amount collected on behalf of Dowle was exactly half of the custom that was due for this import. Watkins includes a copy of a ‘bill of division’ written in Dowle’s ‘owne hand’ that he claimed to possess.²⁶ If Watkins did possess this original copy it would clearly show Dowle’s half of the customs payment from a shipment that was not officially recorded, the other half presumably remaining with Barker.

Watkins’ list of imported commodities largely consists of high value goods such as ginger, nutmeg, currants, and dyes such as *woad* and *sumacke* (dyes used for colouring leather and cloth). *Sumach* and *woad* are both listed as being worth 13s 4d per cwt in the 1588 Book of Rates, showing it to be a relatively valuable commodity.²⁷ Watkins alleges that in three separate shipments this dye was entered as madder or salt in order to pay a lower rate of custom. With all these commodities originating from southern Spain as part of the same shipment, this would be a relatively simple operation for the waiters, Inward Customer and Controller, who if in collaboration could have entered what they wished.

²⁵ Appendix 2 p. 2

²⁶ Appendix 2 p. 4

²⁷ Willan, T.S. (ed.) *A Tudor Book of Rates* (Manchester, 1962)

Watkins is far more forthcoming in 1600 when naming those whom he alleges were involved in such activities. Within these first eight pages he names many merchants and customs officers. William Fleet is mentioned numerous times as a continuous offender. Fleet is shown to share in the profits accrued from the division of customs money as a Waiter at the Port. Watkins also claims that he ‘kepeth a ship upon the backside of his house and doth discharge goods’.²⁸ Watkins also refers to a merchant called John Roberts who served as Mayor of Bristol in 1579.²⁹ Watkins claims that Roberts conspired with Dowle to divide the custom payment from the import of six *puncheons*³⁰ of prunes. Watkins also claims that Roberts exported butter to Spain in 1597 and 1598. The export of victuals to Spain had been a treasonable offence since 1591.³¹ Watkins’ complaints include other past and future Mayors, such as John Barker and John Whitson, both of whom Watkins claims to have been in league with Dowle in such illicit activity. Watkins was thus informing on some of the most prominent citizens in Bristol.

The second section of Watkins’ 1600 complaint once again concerns the illicit discharge of *bands of employment*. Watkins refers to the false bills that were made out by denizen merchants for foreign merchants showing that they had employed their money on local goods. He comments on the fact that these bills were made without the foreign merchant being ‘sworne to them and upon them’.³² Watkins claims that such bills could be drawn up and exchanged for whatever bond had been taken whilst the foreign merchant had already left Bristol.

Watkins provides a list of twelve bonds that were discharged by the Customs House illegally. In each instance a payment of between 10s and £3 was provided by someone other than the alien merchant for the discharge of the bond.³³

Watkins makes the extraordinary statement that there had ‘not bene anie one’ bond of this kind returned to the Exchequer between 1594 and 1600.³⁴ This fact could have been easily verified by the Privy Council, and thus the assertion would have been less

²⁸ Appendix 2 p. 9

²⁹ Ricart, R. *Ricart's Kalendar* (Westminster, 1872) p. 60

³⁰ A *puncheon* was a large cask containing between 75 and 120 gallons.

³¹ Hughes, P.L. & Larkin, J.F. (eds.) *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, Vol. III (New Haven & London, 1969) pp. 83-86

³² Appendix 2, p. 10

³³ Appendix 2, pp. 10-11

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11

likely to have been made if false. However, it is likely that Dowle would have simply argued that this was because alien merchants always employed their money on local produce due to the effectiveness of the system.

Watkins asserts that there were around fifty bonds that were out of date and not redeemed at Michaelmas, 1597.³⁵ Fifty bonds of this sort, if representing fifty foreign merchants leaving without purchasing local produce, indicates the detrimental effect on the Counties economy. Watkins alleges that such bonds could be redeemed at any time for the relatively small payment of around 10s, even whilst the foreign merchant was overseas. Of course, the Crown would also have lost out on local export customs as a result of this practice.

The third complaint within Watkins' second petition concerns methods of avoiding the payment of *prisage* for the importation of wines. *prisage* was the right of the Crown to purchase two out of every twenty tons, or one in ten, for the modest price of fifteen shillings per ton.³⁶ This price had been set at the inception of this tax during the thirteenth century, and had not been adjusted according to inflation since then. As the real price of wine was about £15-£20 per ton, *prisage* amounted to a tax of £30-£40 on each shipment of wine carrying twenty tons or more.³⁷ Merchants would have wanted to avoid this threshold in order not to be forced to relinquish up to 10% of their cargo at such a low price.

Watkins displays the method by which merchants distorted customs accounts for their cargoes of wines in order to stay below the threshold of ten or twenty tons for the payment of *prisage*. He provides a detailed account of a shipment on July 30th 1597 that appears to demonstrate this practice.³⁸ According to Watkins, this cargo was transported on the Golden Lion of Bristol, which although was entered from Toulon in Southern France, actually originated from Spain. This illegal practice was a simple and common

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ For *Prisage* see, Sir Matthew Hale, 'A treatise, in three parts. Pars prima, De jure maris et brachiorum ejusdem. Pars secunda, De portibus maris. Pars tertia, Concerning the customs of goods imported and exported. Considerations touching the amendment or alteration of lawes. A discourse concerning the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas' in Frances Hargrave, A Collection of Tracts relative to the Law of England, from manuscripts, now first edited by F. H. vol. 1. (1787) p. 118

³⁷ Simon, A.L. *The History of the Wine Trade in England, Vol. III* (London, 1964) pp.289-91

³⁸ Appendix 2, p. 13

method of defeating the Spanish trade ban.³⁹ Watkins claims that in the Golden Lion, five Bristol merchants, including John Roberts, imported just over twenty-four tons of sweet wines such as *Seck* and *Bastard* in various containers.⁴⁰ Watkins claims that these merchants first altered their *bill of entry*, reducing their cargo by five tons to just above 19 tons. Watkins subsequently introduces William Hunter, who being a non-denizen was not subject to the imposition of *prisage*. Hunter was also importing wines, probably on the same vessel, although this is not mentioned. Watkins claims that the entry in the *bill at large* was again altered, with ten tons from the nineteen belonging to the Bristol merchants being transferred to Hunter's portion of the cargo, thus further reducing their own portion to nine tons, one ton below the minimum *prisage* threshold of ten. Thus, the imposition of *Prisage* was avoided for the whole shipment, which in reality should have yielded two tons *prisage* for the original 24 tons.

Watkins states that Dowle, as the Inwards Customer, was entitled to an eighth part of the *prisage* taken at the port. The merchants may have provided a payment that exceeded this eighth part in order to compensate Dowle for any loss of his eighth part share. Watkins states that the 'prisage master' was responsible for declarations in the customs book and that 'they canne and will mend and alter Entries at their pleasure'. Thus, it is possible that this practice may have been carried out without the knowledge of the Customs House.

The fourth element in Watkins' 1600 petition concerns the illegal exportation of victuals and ordnance to Spain. England and Spain were at war at this time and the export of such goods was hugely profitable. Spain's low agricultural production ensured that the export of commodities such as grain and leather was immensely profitable. Watkins also refers to the export of munitions and ordnance. This probably consisted of iron cannon from the Forest of Dean that fetched a high price in Spain due to its heavy wartime demand. Pauline Croft has produced a study that shows how English merchants traded as Irishmen and Scotsmen in order to gain access to the Spanish market. This appears not to have always been successful, as Watkins claims that seven Bristol ships had been seized in the past by the Spanish 'which had noe small store of prohibited

³⁹ See Croft, P. 'Trading With the Enemy' in *The Historical Journal* (June, 1989)

⁴⁰ In the petitions quantities refer to containers such as the 'pipe', which was a large cask weighing roughly half a ton, and the hogshead that was equal to one quarter of a ton, a 'butte' contained roughly half a ton.

wares'. He then lists fourteen instances of English ships returning to Bristol with Spanish goods,⁴¹ with the implication that they had previously exported prohibited goods.

IV

If accurate, both the 1598 and 1600 documents include information that would indicate extensive corruption within Bristol's Customs House and its merchant and customs communities. Furthermore, the extent of corruption within both these communities is implied by the many different people who were involved; this is apparent within the customs service. Watkins claims that the mechanics of corrupt activity involved all within this service, from clerks collecting fraudulent payments, to the controller, who, although there to act as a check to prevent fraud, apparently had a role in the fraudulent activity himself. Similarly, the positions of those whom Watkins alleges were involved within the merchant community would demonstrate that corruption involved the most important aldermen in the city.

His account of his treatment at the hands of Dowle indicates the power that customs men such as Dowle wielded within Bristol. Indicating this, Watkins claims that Dowle 'doth bragg like wise because hee is the *Lord* Buckhurst⁴² his man that hee neyther careth for the law nor for anie one elce whatsoever'.⁴³ This claim is anecdotal, but represents the autonomous power men such as Dowle probably held within the city. As aldermen of the city, largely free from royal influence, civic leaders whom Watkins describes as 'the best of the Citty' controlled most aspects of city life. What is perhaps more surprising than Watkins' allegation that Dowle manipulated events to ensure his imprisonment, are the many accounts of violent threats at the hands of Dowle. Dowle protected his interests with violent intimidation, alongside his influence within the judicial system and fellow aldermen. A petition of Bristol's tuckers in 1568 highlights

⁴¹ Appendix 2, p. 19

⁴² Lord Buckhurst, Earle of Dorset (1536-1608): Privy Councillor at this time; made Lord Treasurer in 1599

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 14

the violent intimidation that was experienced by those who spoke out against members of Bristol's merchant and customs communities.⁴⁴

Watkins' allegations concerning the fraud that took place within Bristol in the 1598 document are largely anecdotal. In the first petition he merely asserts that activities such as withholding money from the Exchequer and extorting money from foreign merchants took place. He also mentions very few names. This is presumably because he feared this would create powerful enemies within Bristol, making any return to his normal life difficult. However, the document does introduce us to the types of frauds that took place, and also many of the operational mechanisms of the customs service. His referral to the Statutes and Articles that were supposed to be followed are useful in understanding these. The 1598 document largely concentrates on his relationship with Dowle; references to fraudulent activity in the wider community are peripheral to this aim.

The 1600 document perhaps represents a change of tactics by Watkins who enters into far more detail about the frauds he cites. His provision of individual's names, specific shipments alongside more details concerning the frauds, provides for a far more useful document for the historian's purpose. The details he provides about the alteration of custom book entries to avoid the payment of *prisage* and the details of the system of bonds and how they were abused introduces us to the intricacies of such fraud and other improprieties. Furthermore the names he cites are important in that they can often be crosschecked with other records to discover their positions in Bristol. Perhaps Watkins did not attract the attention he wanted with his first record, and so took the risk of implicating the mercantile elite within Bristol to reach his aims in his second.

⁴⁴ Transcribed by: F.F. Fox and J. Taylor, *Some Account of the Guild of Weavers in Bristol: Chiefly from MSS* (Bristol, 1889), pp. 91-4

Chapter 2

The content of Watkins' two petitions was examined in Chapter 1. Information regarding the cited frauds leads to many questions concerning the likely accuracy of Watkins' claims. Many parts of the documents are hard to comprehend due to the lack of clarity of Watkins' language. Furthermore, Watkins leaves out some details that might lead to a broader understanding of his statements. Consequently, much of his petition seems incoherent, leading to further questions about their likely veracity. An overriding concern is whether one can rely on information that solely originates from an interested party.

In this chapter I will attempt to assess the plausibility of Watkins claims through the study of content of the documents, and comparing information Watkins provides with other sources of information about smuggling at the time. The first section demonstrates how certain elements of the documents indicate the truth of Watkins' claims, whilst other parts achieve the opposite. The second section will consider the extent to which our current knowledge of smuggling during the period lends credence or otherwise to Watkins' petitions. Certainly, Watkins claims were not new; other documents show plainly that the Privy Council would have heard much of his information from other sources.

I

In attempting to assess the plausibility of Watkins' complaints in both petitions, one must turn to the evidence Watkins provides, as well as the content of the documents that suggests general plausibility. The consistency and coherence of the information within the documents will help to establish the strength of his case.

The content of the petitions leaves many aspects of Watkins' relationship with Dowle and others unexplained. Why Dowle was so keen to undermine Watkins is unclear. The content of a copy of a letter written by Dowle to Watkins in 1596 indicates a normal working relationship that had once existed between the two; Dowle's familiar signing of

the letter as Watkins' 'loving frend' indicates an amicable relationship.⁴⁵ Furthermore, it is clear from the nefarious content of this letter that Watkins was confidently expected to partake in a fraud that later he so vehemently denounces.

The detail of the £30 debt for which Watkins was imprisoned is not stated. This contrasts with the £55 and 10s paid to Langton and Jenning (money that Dowle then forced Watkins to repay) as limited details and no evidence is provided. Watkins only states that he had previously paid it to others, and that Dowle had forcibly taken the receipt.⁴⁶ Lack of detail with regard to this debt is surprising due to its importance in regard to Watkins' overriding grievance with Dowle.

Another grey area of Watkins' case is the lack of information of the reasons for Watkins imprisonment in 1600. In the 1600 complaint there are numerous references to events that took place in 1599, indicating his liberty in the interval between writing the petitions, but no mention of the events leading to his second imprisonment – in marked contrast to his full account in 1598 of the events leading to the earlier imprisonment.

Watkins' description of his personal circumstances in relation to Dowle is vague and appears to be selective. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that he may very well have wished to conceal aspects of his own affairs.

On the other hand his complaints concerning Dowle's fraudulent activities are coherent and plausible. One such accusation is that of the abuse of the system of merchant's bonds referred to in the previous chapter as *bands of employment*.

Watkins introduces this fraud in his 1598 petition; like most of the content of this document it is merely an assertion without detail. In the 1600 document, Watkins provides the details for twelve alleged bribes given for release of bonds whilst the relevant foreign merchant was abroad, presumably with specie that was supposed to remain within the Realm. Watkins makes an interesting statement within the 1598 in respect to this fraud:

'All strangers bonds which is not employed at three moneths end or
sixe moneths end at the farthest, [*which*] neversince the saide Dowle hath byn
Customer have byne returned at all unlesse hee hath done it within this twee
yeeres last past'⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Appendix 1, p. 16

⁴⁶ Appendix 1, p. 1

⁴⁷ Appendix 1, p. 5

The claim that no failed bonds had been returned to the Exchequer since Dowle took office in 1593 is remarkable. This would be easily verifiable, and would surely have appeared more than suspicious. Claims such as this, and his claim to possess copies of certain incriminating bills and letters can be considered reliable. The likelihood that Watkins would lie in this respect is slight due to ease of verification and possible summoning of the stated evidence.

Below is an example of the detail that Watkins provides for such frauds in his 1600 petition:

dat *xth* die december John paide to him by John Whitsone for discharge iii£ vis viid
6th die may 1593 of Henry Vaule and Thomas Cottellis
bandes of employmente they beinge not there unto sworne⁴⁸

This is a description of a payment made by the well-known merchant, John Whitsone, for the release of ‘strangers’ bonds to ensure the employment of English specie. Its significance is in its detail. Assuming Watkins did not invent this detail he either must have had access to very precise information as it would have been impossible to recount this information from memory. In the 1598 document Watkins writes that:

‘(Dowle) would sue me for all not with standinge his hand to the books, hee not thinkinge that I had anie of them in my keepinge at that tyme’.⁴⁹

It would be a fair supposition that these books might have included records that Watkins could have used for the above entry and the countless other details provided in the two petitions. Indeed, would the Privy Council have taken such detailed complaints seriously without the possibility that they were based on a reliable source? A possible explanation for the more detailed nature of his second record lies in his apparent liberty between his production of both petitions. He may have accessed sequestered records sometime before his second incarceration in 1600, this would have allowed for the inclusion of further details in the second petition.

⁴⁸ Appendix 2, p. 10

⁴⁹ Appendix 1, p.1

As is shown in the Chapter 1, a large portion of Watkins' 1600 petition is devoted to a detailed list of 24 fraudulent inward shipping records. Most concern the division of customs money between merchants and the customs house; in others, Watkins claims that cargos were altered to hide illicit commodities. Again the entry is detailed:

⁵⁰ Teste <i>Master</i> Barker et Thomas Watkins	Paide John Dowle Customer inward iii£ xiiiis viid <i>which</i> I receyved of <i>Master</i> John Barker by Dowles Comandement for certeyne Fleminge goods as apeareth by Dowles bill of division under his owne hand <i>which</i> I have in keepinge and <i>which</i> goods was not entred but the quene deceyved thereby the whole some thereof was-----	vii£-ixs-iid
--	---	--------------

the Coppie of the bill of devision

v£ xixs - iiijd
 i£ - vs - id
 iiiis - xd
vii£ - ix s - iid

division 3£ - 14s - viid 2 - no. 40:

The above entry appears to describe a payment made by Watkins to Dowle for half the customs due for *Flemish* goods and has been discussed in Chapter One. The implication is that the customs money due for this shipment was divided equally between Dowle and the merchant, John Baker. In this instance, Watkins includes a copy of the 'bill of division' that he claims to possess which was presumably written by Dowle.

Without seeing the original 'bill of division' it is hard to determine its strength as evidence, and thus, again one cannot make a definite judgement as to the truth of Watkins' statement. However, if either of these bills, which Watkins claimed to have possessed, showed who was involved and were written in identifiable handwriting, then they would have been strong evidence.

Another aspect of Watkins' petitions that provides extensive details of frauds carried out in Bristol is the alteration of entries of wines to reduce or avoid the *prisage* impost. Another detailed description of one such fraud is included in the 1600 petition:

⁵⁰ Appendix 2, p. 4

⁵¹ **July the xxxth 1597**

In the Goulden Lion of Bristol burthen xl tons william
Fletcher master from Tolon entred but came from Spaine

by the first entrie
in the booke
xix butte. i pipe iihhd⁵²

Thomas Parry George White and John- by the second entrie
Robertes of Bristoll marchantes for nine- [made to defraude her
butte. ihhd of secke i pipe⁵³ ihhd of Bastard- majestie] ix butte⁵⁴ i pipe
iihhd

George Lane	three butte
Walter. Thomas	vi butte.
John Roberte	vi butte.
Thomas Parrie	vii butte
Walter Thomas	ii pipes bastades
The Mariners	one tonne
	19 tons 1 pipe

Again, Watkins is precise with the details of this particular fraud. Watkins' figures appear to add up (except for the *pipe* at the end of his entry), and he is forthcoming with the names of those involved. From this information a contemporary investigator might have examined the original bill of entry to test Watkins' figures. If verified, these figures may have seemed suspicious as all the merchants fell just below the *prisage* threshold. Watkins is not clear how these records were altered. Perhaps the first x of the 'xix butte' on the original entry to the left was etched out to then read 'ix' on the altered entry. Although it seems unlikely that Watkins would have invented such detailed figures, one still must account for the secondary nature of these accounts that detracts from their evidential value.

Watkins' petitions contain little direct evidence to back up his claims. Apart from the few copies of bills and letters that he provides, there is little that could act as definitive proof of his claims. This suggests that Watkins deliberately does not attempt to prove many of his indictments at this stage. The aim of his petition was probably to attract the Privy Council's attention with the details of frauds in order to put pressure on Dowle. Watkins statement that he possessed 'books' that Dowle had not been aware of in the 1598 petition, these books might have represented some form of leverage over Dowle. This further suggests that his petitions were created to attract attention rather than prove a case per se. The inclusion of the few copies of bills and letters are intended to add to the

⁵¹ Appendix 2, p. 13

⁵² Abbreviation of *Hogs Head*, a container containing one quarter of a ton of wine

⁵³ A large cask containing roughly half a ton of wine

⁵⁴ Container containing roughly half a ton or 126 gallons of wine

general credibility of his petitions. The distinct absence of definitive proof of these activities is perhaps compensated by the detailed nature of his accounts that indicate access to good information that he would have once had access to as Dowle's clerk. The inclusion of names, dates, ships and cargoes involved in the various illicit activities certainly suggest that he was well informed.

II

Assessing the veracity of Watkins' claims through his petitions alone is difficult, especially with the paucity of supporting material evidence. Their plausibility however, can be measured by comparing them with what is known about customs fraud in Bristol in the late sixteenth century.

Research carried out by historians such as Jean Vanes and Evan Jones has helped to establish the importance of the illicit trade in Bristol during the sixteenth century. The availability of such sources as the *Ledger of John Smyth* has convincingly shown that in the 1540s the illicit trade of such commodities as leather and grain was major part of Bristol's commercial activity. Illustrating this, Jones has commented that: 'Such was the scale of their illicit activities that in many years the amount of Crown money lost to smuggling would have exceeded the customs revenue actually collected in the port'.⁵⁵ Bristol's illicit trade and the concomitant corruption of the customs house have been shown to be well established in the 1530s, 1540s and 1550s. Documents that relate to the MP William Tyndale can be found from 1558, and show that at this time some of the most powerful men in Bristol were still involved in smuggling.⁵⁶

Studies by historians such as Pauline Croft have shown that smuggling was still a common activity, and probably increased towards the end of the century.⁵⁷ War with Spain between 1585 and 1604 led to a complete ban on all trade. Spain was Bristol's principal trading partner prior to this ban; the sudden cessation of this trade would have seriously constrained mercantile life in Bristol. Perhaps as a result of the importance of

⁵⁵ Jones, E.T. 'Illicit Business: accounting for smuggling in mid-sixteenth-century Bristol' in *The Economic History Review* February 2001

⁵⁶ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publications, Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979), No. 27. p. 46

⁵⁷ See, Croft, p. 'Trading With the Enemy' in *The Historical Journal* (June, 1989) pp. 281-302

this trade to Bristol's merchants, sources point to the continuation of illicit trading throughout the war. Lamentations can be found in the *Tudor Proclamations* that: 'some...having more respect to a private enriching of themselves than to the duty they owe to her highness and to the safety and well doing of the whole state of the realm'.⁵⁸ The highly profitable export of ordnance, leather and grain to Spain and its dominions was enjoyed by Bristol's merchants at this time of war.

Numerous sources from the later sixteenth century survive that detail similar types of customs evasions to those that Watkins describes. A survey carried out by aldermen of the city of Bristol in 1565 shows that the embezzlement of customs impost and alteration of customs entries was a well-documented occurrence at this time.⁵⁹ This commission stated that 18 fully laden ships had arrived from France since the previous November amounting to a total burden of 958 tons. During this same period they claimed that only 398 tons of shipping had been registered in the Controller's accounts. The suggestion is that these ships in reality were fully laden with up to 958 tons of wines; the fact that only 398 tons of shipping was recorded implies mass deception over this period. This would have been impossible to prove as the merchants involved could have easily claimed that they could not find enough wines to fill their returning vessels. However, this is highly unlikely due to the generally reliable supply of wine, and other goods that might be brought back from France or Spain in its place. Thus, one is merely left with the probability of the described frauds occurrence. Whether or not the commissioners were correct in this particular instance, it would appear to support claims of the practice of embezzling of customs money as described in Watkins petitions.⁶⁰

Another source which suggests the ease with which customers could conceal incoming shipments is the petition of the Waiters of Bristol written in 1590. In this petition it is claimed that the Customer Inwards would often 'unlawfully compound for forfeitures' merchandise without the knowledge of the Waiters who were responsible for ensuring that no frauds occurred at the point of entry.⁶¹ The Waiters would subsequently lose their share of the fine of any seizure. Secretly impounding shipments would enable

⁵⁸ Hughs, P.L. & James, L.F. *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Vol. III* (New Haven & London, 1969) p. 29

⁵⁹ PRO E 159/350 Hil. 351 *r,v,seq.*

⁶⁰ Appendix 1, p. 4

⁶¹ PRO E 159/350 Hil. 351 *r,v,seq.*

Inward Customers such as Dowle to divide customs duties with the merchants, or keep fines without the knowledge of other Custom House departments. Customers were likely to have conspired to commit fraud with merchants, acting without the knowledge of other men within the Customs House, such as the Waiters.

Instances of frauds described by Watkins in his petitions can be found in other documents from this period. Watkins complained that merchants could alter their *bills of entry* in order to fraudulently suggest that they were carrying commodities that would command a lower rate of custom. This is echoed by another part of the above-mentioned 1565 document that reports on this practice:

‘And furthermore we fynde that dyverse merchandizes the Custome and Subsedie whereof being smally rated be entred untruly in the place of merchandizes of greate rates to the greate defraudinge of her highness’.⁶²

Similarly, accounts appear to support Watkins’ earlier details of *prisage* fraud. One such account is contained within a report that was sent to Lord Burghley reporting on smuggling activity in the West Country in 1577. In his petition, Watkins complains that Bristol merchants transferred wine to foreign accomplices in order to remain below the *prisage* threshold. The author of the 1577 report describes an almost identical fraud some twenty years prior to Watkins’ first petition:

‘commonlie they doe bringe home in their shippes of wyne whoe is due to paye prisage, ix ton, ix ton pype or ix ton pipe hogshed, and noe more...as by the custome bookes it dothe appeare, and in suche sorte in all the weste partes, and the rest of their ladinge beinge wines suggested to be the goodes of Londoners, of marchauntes aliens’.⁶³

Many of Watkins claims are echoed by other complaints, petitions and official reports from the sixteenth century. One aspect of Watkins account that is more obscure in other documents is the fraud relating to the *bands of employment*. Its obscurity amongst other accounts is surprising when one considers Watkins’ claims of the amounts of money involved, and its prevalence. It is possible that because so few people were involved,

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publication), Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979), No. 23, pp. 43-4.

knowledge of its operation was easily kept away from possible informers, and thus away from the State Papers.

Another major theme in Watkins' account concerns the conspiratorial relationship between merchants and the Customs House. Watkins probably presented this image in order to give an impression of a unified and corrupt Bristol mercantile community, thus heightening the impact of his petitions. Other sources relating to the interface between merchants and different tiers within the customs service indicate that such a pervasive and organised effort against the Crown's interests was unlikely.

A complaint by the Outwards Customer (John Andrews) and Controller, to the Exchequer in 1580 was made against the activities of Bristol's Searcher, it demonstrates the friction that often existed between factions within Bristol's mercantile community.⁶⁴ They complained that whilst the Searcher and his deputy made 'diverse seasures', the records were often missing. Again, the implication of embezzlement of customs money is clear. They claimed that without redress in regard to the Searchers corruption: 'we shall not be hable to do her Majestie service'.⁶⁵ Furthermore, with regard to Lord Burghley's ban on Corn exports in 1584, Bristol's merchants who illegally exported grain also proved challenging to their office, further alienating any claims of a common cause between merchant and Customs House:

'We have taken paynes to make stay of shippinge which hathe ben laden with corne and transported for Spayne, but they resisted us and put us in greate hasarde of our lyves and so passed out of our porte.'⁶⁶

It appears that the above-mentioned Outward Customer, Jon Andrews, eventually found his place within Bristol. He is later implicated with John Dowle in illicit trading activity.⁶⁷ It is clear that customs men and merchants would gravitate between professed respect and blatant disregard for the law, depending on whether it suited the circumstances of themselves or their associates. Watkins is keen to present a unified

⁶⁴ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publication), Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979), No.29, pp. 47-8

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publication), Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979)

body of merchants and customs men who were working against the Crown's interests. However, it is likely that any collaboration depended upon the profit that could be derived from a given situation. Watkins' account is likely to be exaggerated in this respect due to his personal interest and desire to create an allusion of co-operation that did not always exist.

III

As has been shown, Watkins' petitions do not include many attempts to definitively prove his allegations of corruption in Bristol. The most valuable feature of his two petitions is their detail. The four copies of bills and letters that support his case appear to be additions to the documents rather than central aspects of his complaints. Watkins' concentration on the mechanics of the frauds he includes, alongside the indictment of various prominent Bristol merchants and officials, leads to endless speculation and few inferences from the petitions themselves. Their historical value is clearly restricted by Watkins' omission of sufficient evidence that might establish fact from assertion. Furthermore, the claims are one-sided in that they represent the desires of a single interested party.

Furthermore, Watkins does not enter into much detail with regard to the background of his dispute with Dowle. The familiar tone of the letter written by Dowle alongside its nefarious content implies that the pair once enjoyed a productive and no doubt profitable working relationship. Indeed, there is little doubt that as Dowle's clerk, Watkins would have been expected to have assisted in the activities he denounces. Mystery with regard to the origin of the £30 debt for which Watkins was first imprisoned – alongside the reasons for his second imprisonment - further blurs the background to Watkins' story. More information regarding the origins to Watkins' complaint against Dowle would aid the understanding of his aims, motives and previous position with regard to those whom he indicts.

Some of Watkins' claims are likely to be genuine due to the fact that they refer to information that the Privy Council would have had access to, such as the information regarding the failure of Dowle to return any bonds taken from strangers. Furthermore,

the infallibility of the limited evidence that he claimed to possess is likely, as he would have hoped to present this evidence to the Council at some stage. From these few inferences from the original documents themselves, one can make insufficient judgement about the likely accuracy of Watkins' case. However, through the examination of other contemporary accounts of illicit activities, one can reasonably suggest that his account is in all probability largely accurate. Furthermore, complaints of frauds such as those involving *bands of employment* have not been previously recorded, and thus add to the originality of the petitions. That suggests that Watkins was not simply reproducing well-known but inaccurate complaints.

Identical frauds can be found within accounts from the second half of the Sixteenth-Century. It is easy to find accounts of merchants attempting to avoid the payment of *prisage*. Similarly, alterations of *bills of entry* seem to have been common enough for the city's aldermen to consider it safe to pass on to Lord Burghley as inconsequential information in 1565.⁶⁸ The 1565 report also alludes to the embezzlement of customs money that Watkins provides extensive details for in his 1600 petition. According to the commission, between a third and half of shipments were not being entered into the customs accounts. Another aspect of Watkins' claims that are mentioned extensively elsewhere concern the illegal trade with Spain during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. A report produced in 1577 claims that eight shipments left Bristol for Spain containing grain, leather, butter and gunpowder claiming the total value to be £6,600.⁶⁹ Furthermore, a second report of Dowle trading whilst in office is provided by William Dewsbury in 1595.⁷⁰

Although there is no way of determining whether Watkins' assertions are individually correct, by comparing his claims with other contemporary sources, one can make a reasonable judgement as to their veracity. The fact that Dowle is mentioned in complaints such as that of William Dewbury increases the general plausibility of Watkins' complaints. Furthermore, detail for frauds, such as those relating to *prisage* or customs money embezzlement, or for the practice of altering commodity types to pay

⁶⁸ It is highly likely that this commission attempted to gloss over Bristol's illicit activities by giving widely known and un-detailed inconsequential information that, whilst appeared helpful could lead to little action.

⁶⁹ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publication), Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979), No. 23, pp. 43-4

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

lower rates of imposition, are contained in numerous sources from the period. Information from other sources lends credence to Watkins' comparable claims. The frauds for which Watkins provides details seem more than likely to have taken place. The detail alone suggests Watkins had access to reliable information; as he appears to suggest in his first petition. Watkins' petitions are historically valuable due to this unusual detail, which although is supported by little internal evidence, provides a valuable insight into the illicit activities of Bristol's mercantile community and Customs House.

Chapter 3

Both the 1598 and 1600 petitions contain extensive information that suggests the nefarious nature of Bristol's Customs House. Within Watkins' petitions, Bristol's merchant elite are shown to be extensively involved in illicit trading and other fraudulent activity, often with the connivance of the customs men.

Watkins' personal dispute with Dowle provides a graphic, personal account of the methods that could have been used by Bristol's most senior customs officials when enforcing their will. Furthermore, the sophisticated methods by which customs men profited from their positions are highlighted in the details of the mechanisms of the cited frauds. Concurrent financial advantages for the merchants who were involved in such activities are also highlighted within Watkins' petitions. More widely, the petitions highlight the limited governmental power over the activities of Bristol's Customs House and wider mercantile community.

Governmental intervention was clearly not always forthcoming, despite extensive complaints of the improprieties of such groups. It is the aim of Chapter 3 to determine what one can derive about the nature of Bristol's Customs House, the merchant elite and relationship with wider government from Watkins' petitions.

I

Much of Watkins petitions concern the personal dispute between himself and Dowle. Many of Dowle's alleged actions are recounted that indicate the threats, violence and general rough treatment that Watkins suffered at Dowle's hands. Further to this personal history, Watkins implicates other men at the Customs House, who alongside Dowle, were allegedly involved in the illicit activity that Watkins cites. In this first section, the nature of Bristol's Customs House will be considered in light of such allegations.

A large proportion of Watkins' petitions concern Dowle's violent actions, these provide a descriptive account of the wayward nature of Bristol's customs men. However, the difficulty of verifying Watkins individual claims in this regard is almost impossible. Thus, deriving a picture of institutional brutality from the alleged actions of Dowle alone

is impossible. However, consideration of the witnesses cited in Watkins' petitions, coupled with wider knowledge of the violence that was often experienced at this time indicates the probability that Watkins experienced the threat of and actual violence to some degree.

Such complaints demonstrate how men in Dowle's position were able to ensure their positions through threat of, and actual use of violence. Watkins evidently did not have much recourse to such actions when one considers the influence and resources wielded by Dowle. It is this influence that Watkins claims to have affected the speed with which he was originally convicted at the Pipowders Court hearing in 1597.⁷¹ The judges who sat at his trial were William Colston and George Young, who like most aldermen in the city were likely to have been a part of, or had links with the wider merchant community. In Chapter One, Watkins claimed that Dowle's case was previously 'laboured' to the said judges who convicted Watkins without hearing his evidence or allowing him to speak.⁷² As the Inwards Customs Officer, Dowle may have had influence over such men, especially if they were part of Bristol's merchant community.

Watkins petitions imply that both Dowle and his clerk John Langton 'adventured' goods in partnership with other Bristol merchants.⁷³ He alleges that Dowle exported leather and silver to Spain in 1597, both these exports being prohibited at this time. William Dewsbury's complaint of Dowle's involvement in trading further indicates Dowle's guilt in this respect. Such disconnected evidence strongly suggests an established financial link between men at the customs house and Bristol's wider merchant community. Watkins also accuses William Fleet, a Tide Waiter of Bristol, who is alleged to have traded on numerous occasions.⁷⁴ Such partnerships would be immensely beneficial to both parties due to the improbability that Dowle would charge any custom on these occasions. It has previously been suggested that instances of conflict within the mercantile community and customs service indicate that such mutual interest did not always exist between these communities. It seems likely that customs men such as Dowle acted pragmatically. In this way, illicit trade might have been carried out in

⁷¹ Appendix 1, p. 6

⁷² Appendix 1, p. 6

⁷³ Appendix, p. 6

⁷⁴ Appendix 2, pp. 2,4,6,9

league with Bristol's merchants, or in other instances, accounting fraud would have taken place with or without the involvement of the relevant merchants or even other components of the Customs House. This is implied in the complaint of the Customer against the activities of Bristol's Searcher in 1580,⁷⁵ and the complaint of the Tide Waiters in 1590, as illustrated in Chapter 2.⁷⁶

The actions of customs officers such Dowle and others shows that one's loyalty was subject to likely profit or other personal advancement. Such personal interests clearly obstructed the prerogative of the Customs House as the central administrative machine that both produced and protected royal customs revenue. Such individual intentions are detached from the probable reality of its actual nature. It has been the aim of this section to show that the nature of the Customs House was moulded by institutional corruption. Despite this, the Customs House continued to produce a certain amount of revenue, if only to lessen suspicion, and portray a general image of correct operation. Despite the implied scale of the corruption in Bristol, it will be shown that the Crown's best interest was not always served by harsh measures against a community that it often relied on for services beyond the honest payment of import tax.

Watkins' petitions do not solely implicate Dowle in the various illicit activities. Other customs officers are tainted by his allegations, including both the Waiters and Controller. Corruption was not restricted to Bristol, it extended to the Lord Treasurer as shall be shown in the third section. Indeed, all involved at the customs house would have had to receive some share of the profits for their connivance. Without a share, the Waiters, who were responsible for examining incoming merchandise, would have questioned the omission of shipments within Dowle's books for which they had previously produced *Cockets*.⁷⁷ Similarly, Dowle's overseer, the Controller would easily have been able to spot any fraud within 'the books', if he was actually present at the Customs House. Watkins focuses his attentions on Dowle as part of the overriding feud. In reality, all who worked with Dowle would have been equally corrupt, whether they were just passive participants, or active perpetrators.

⁷⁵ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publications, Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979), No.29, pp. 47-8

⁷⁶ See Chapter 2 p. 7

⁷⁷ Documents produced by Tide Waiters in Bristol for merchants at entry certifying that their cargo was what they claimed.

The likely involvement of different men in the Customs House in the alleged illicit activity shows that corruption was not restricted to the actions of Dowle. The system appears to have facilitated the opportunities for making profit for all its members whilst ensuring that the suspicions of the higher authorities were allayed. Watkins' assertions present the methods that members of the Customs House could have certainly have used to attain such goals. The practices that he alludes to were certainly feasible; and indeed, the necessity for all to be involved in some way seems to have been vital for the illicit activity to have been successful.

In an age in which protection against violence was far more limited than today, the violent actions of Dowle were perfectly feasible. Whatever the reasons for Dowle's alleged violence towards Watkins, his violent actions reflect his confidence in his own power. This power ultimately protected the immensely profitable relationship between customs officials and Bristol's merchant elite. This relationship was based on mutual interests that existed with respect to the prospective gains. Watkins presents an image of cooperation that was largely based on local loyalties. Moreover the fraudulent activity required and facilitated the involvement of all members within the Customs House, thus suggesting the likelihood of widespread internal collaboration with respect to fraud and illicit trading.

II

Watkins' petitions contain information that indicts Bristol's merchants as well as those at the Customs House in the illicit activity described by Watkins. A large amount of detail is provided concerning the merchants involved in this illicit activity, in what way, and involving what commodities. This provides a valuable account of the behaviour of Bristol's merchant elite. Moreover, the petitions highlight the benefits available to denizen merchants that appear to not be extended to many visiting 'merchant strangers'. It is the object of this next section to assess what Watkins' petitions reveal about the nature of Bristol's merchant elite.

In his 1600 petition, Watkins names of many of Bristol's merchant elite as being complicit in illicit trading activities and customs evasions alongside Dowle. Watkins lists important men such as John Roberts, John Baker and John Whitson who all had been, or were to become Mayors of Bristol. The majority of the merchants whom Watkins lists appear in the first part of the 1600 petition, in which Watkins lists shipments where the custom had been divided between Dowle, the Waiters, and the merchants who owned the goods. The evidence Watkins provides against these merchants is limited due to its secondary nature. Although, it is unlikely that Watkins would falsely implicate a large proportion of Bristol's merchant community.

Watkins lists goods that were generally kept out of the 'books'. These were high value commodities such as *woad*, ginger, sugar, linen, currants, honey and alum. The practice of not declaring goods at the Customs House involved commodities that made up the proportion of the cargo that commanded the highest rate of custom, or indeed those that originated from enemy territory. The shipments that Watkins describes all allegedly took place between 1594 and 1597. It is unsurprising that these merchants would not want to declare the goods in the Customs House due to the fact that such goods originated from Spain; a state with which it was decreed to be a treasonable crime to trade with in 1591.⁷⁸ According to Watkins' account this did not completely stop the trade during this period. Watkins states that the commodities exported included victuals and ordnance, two of the most important products for Spain's war-effort against England. Huge profits were to be made by such illicit trade with Spain; further evidence that loyalty was relative to personal gain amongst Bristol's mercantile community.

Watkins' petitions indicate the benefits that were available to Bristol's merchant elite. The list of merchants who were involved with Dowle indicates that many benefited from financial cooperation with the Customs House. Another major advantage for Bristol's merchants at this time was the ability to maintain a trading link with Spain during war. The highly profitable imports described by Watkins in his 1600 petition would not have been possible without the cooperation of Dowle and the Waiters. As Bristol's principal and most profitable trading partner, a complete cessation of trade with Spain would have

⁷⁸ Hughs, P.L. & Larkin, J.F. (eds.), *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III: The Later Tudors* (New Haven & London, 1969) pp. 83-6

led to considerable losses for Bristol's merchant community. Continuation of the illicit trade with Spain was essential to the many merchants who had previously derived their incomes from this source during times of peace. The illicit trade between Spain and England would have actually been far more profitable for Bristol's merchants during war due to increased prices on illicit goods and the reduction of customs payments.

With regards to the more staple imports such as wines from both Spain and France, Watkins highlights the control of the merchants over the customs revenues from this trade. Previously the fraud concerning the payment of *prisage* was described; in this account Watkins highlights the fact that 'the marchante themselves are Butlers⁷⁹...and they canne agree and will mend and alter entries at their pleasure'.⁸⁰ Those who were granted licences to become 'prisage masters' were, according to Watkins, members of Bristol's merchant community, who clearly had incentive to abuse their powers. As the most powerful community in Bristol, the merchant elite seem to have enjoyed certain advantages of self-assessment, whilst enjoying advantages with customs men such as Dowle that enabled them to trade in the most profitable areas, whilst simultaneously paying limited dues.

Just as Bristol's denizen merchants operated with the many advantages derived from their influence and cooperation with the customs men, non-denizen merchants seemed to be excluded from these advantages, and were often obstructed whilst legitimately trading. Watkins provides details of extortionate payments that were taken from foreign merchants. Much of these payments relate to over-charging for the entry of 'foreign' vessels and administrative activities, such as the provision of certificates and warrants that allowed goods to be traded in Bristol. Watkins also claims to have been told by the 'stranger', William Dawson, that non-denizen merchants had to pay a premium to be able to sail for Spain.⁸¹ If caught, merchants who sailed with goods for Spain were liable to be executed; payments in order to circumvent the Customs House reflected this risk to those involved.

⁷⁹ A Butler was responsible for the collection of royal impositions on wine imports, i.e. *prisage*

⁸⁰ Appendix 2, p. 13

⁸¹ Appendix 2, p. 17

Another anecdote that Watkins provides concerns a Flemish merchant who possessed the 'Lord Treserers letter for non payment of Strangers Custome'.⁸² Despite this letter being addressed to Dowle by one of the most powerful men in England, it was allegedly ignored, and the 'Fleminge' was made to pay the full custom which Dowle promptly put into 'his owne purse'. Bristol's Customs House was not necessarily an obstacle for non-denizen merchants. The fraud involving *bonds of employment* taken by 'strangers', according to Watkins allowed many merchants to leave Bristol with gold and silver specie. This enabled foreign merchants to choose whether it was more profitable to employ profits on local produce or to simply bribe the customs officer and leave with their money. Whether a foreign merchant was aided or obstructed during his stay in Bristol evidently depended on their connections within Bristol. The fact that privileges were only available to local merchants demonstrates the exclusive nature of Bristol's merchant community.

Watkins' accounts provide information about both Bristol's Customs House and the wider merchant community. Within the documents, the symbiotic relationship between the two is evident. The most prominent aspect to this information is the details concerning the continuation of the Spanish trade during the 1590s. The 1600 petition contains many accounts of Bristol merchants adventuring prohibited goods in Spain. Despite contemporary complaints concerning the loss of the Spanish market due to war; it was during this time that the highest profits could be made. Watkins' petitions demonstrate the extensive benefits that were available to Bristol's merchant elite. Furthermore, the petitions indicate the strong links within this group that were based on local loyalties and connections. Conversely, the exclusive nature of this community is demonstrated by the extortionate charges and obstructive actions that were taken against some foreign merchants; this seemed especially the case with those merchants whom originated from Bristol's rival merchant community in London.

⁸² Appendix 1, p. 17

III

Watkins' petitions reveal much about the nature of Bristol's merchant elite and customs men in the later sixteenth-century. The documents lead to questions concerning the relationship between this community and the government. Watkins petitions were directed towards the members of the Privy Council and were officially recorded amongst the multitude of similar petitions, complaints, surveys and the like concerning illicit trade and fraud within Bristol. Watkins' appeal for justice was aimed at those whom he hoped might intercede on his behalf. However, it is well known that government took something of a *laizez-faire* attitude towards much of the illicit activity in Bristol and elsewhere at this time, and was often unwilling to intervene. Furthermore, the circumstances that led to Dowle's appointment indicate that corruption existed in the very place where Dowle hoped to attain justice.

The content of Watkins' petition appears to be just the kind of information that the Privy Council would wish to hear of. Lists of merchants' involvement, coupled with descriptions of the methods of defrauding the Crown revenues must have commanded some sort of interest at the Council. Unfortunately there is no record of any direct action taken as a consequence of Watkins' information. In his 1598 petition, Watkins states his aims. He hoped that the Council would restore the moneys he had lost to Dowle and release him from prison, he hoped for restitution for the blows and threats he had received from Dowle, and for himself to be replaced as either the Controller or Searcher of the Inwards Customs House.⁸³ Later he alludes to the three or four thousand pounds embezzled by Dowle and the merchants over a seven-year period in order to highlight the losses suffered by the Crown.⁸⁴

Such appeals seem to have been fairly common, as can be seen by the multitude of similar sources that often refer to the same protagonists.⁸⁵ Despite this, there seems to have been little that the Privy Council could, or were willing to do. Watkins must have been aware of the past complaints against the Customs House and merchants, and also of

⁸³ Appendix 1, p. 3

⁸⁴ Appendix 2, p. 12

⁸⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 9, 11

the Crown's previous inaction. His claim to possess accounts that demonstrate extensive frauds within the Customs House might have perhaps appeared more intriguing to those who genuinely wished to stamp out such frauds. Evidence points to the possibility that those who received such information, were in fact unwilling to act in any case.

One cannot in fact disregard the possibility that those on the Privy Council were in fact corrupt themselves. Venality in the form of the sale of customs offices was commonplace at this time. Such is the case with the Dowle's appointment in May 1593. Fortunately, a letter to Cecil Burghley, the Lord Treasurer survives that recommends Dowle to the position of Customer Inwards; within it, one can see that Dowle's appointment was based upon the ability to pay a fee, and the support of the Mayor and other aldermen of Bristol. Dowle's predecessor, William Hubberte, first wrote to Burghley, to recommend Dowle as his replacement:

‘Am willing *with your* honourable favour to resigne the same to John Dowle gent, my nere kynsman a man of honest reputacion & credit & fytt for the place... And for your good lordships favour herein I am willinge to yealde (wheare your honour shall please to dispose) C Angelles’⁸⁶

The provision of the 100 *Angelles* by Hubberte was effectively a bribe, and seems to represent a normal procedure. Hubberte obviously had no concern that this might offend Burghley, or damage Dowle's ‘honest reputacion’. This letter was preceded by another dated 3rd May and signed by Mayor Thomas Aldworth and Aldermen John Brown and Robert Kitchen who further recommended Dowle. Brown, and probable relatives of both Kitchen and Aldworth, are implicated in frauds by Watkins in his petitions.⁸⁷ This represents irrefutable evidence of the corruption of Burghley, the most senior member of the Privy Council, and the holder of the most powerful office of state. Such evidence suggests that this kind of activity was an established method of attaining one's goals in the late sixteenth-century.

A study by Evan Jones has highlighted the strategic importance of the port of Bristol to the Crown, especially in times of war when the provision of merchantmen for both

⁸⁶ The *Angelle* or Angel-Noble was a coin worth around 10s.

⁸⁷ See Appendix 1, p. 15 & Appendix 2, pp. 6, 14

naval defence and the activities of the privateers were extremely important.⁸⁸ This is especially so when fighting the immense maritime power of Spain; the threat of another Spanish armada was ever-present. Furthermore, the capture of a single Spanish treasure ship could transform government finances. The capture of one such vessel in June 1602 provided relief from ‘endles and exhausting expenses’ according to Berkeley.⁸⁹ Maintaining the good graces of those who owned such a large part of the Queen’s naval abilities clearly took precedence over the injustices of an imprisoned clerk, and even extensive fraud. Bristol’s ship owners and merchants probably used this as leverage, this is shown by a certain subtle indications, such as that contained in a 1597 petition to Burghley; in this, merchants of Bristol indicate that they cannot maintain a number of ships without the opening of new trade routes.⁹⁰ When Watkins’ petitions are placed in this wider context, they seem futile when compared with this strategic relationship between Bristol’s merchant elite and the Crown.

Throughout this Chapter, some of the wider implications of Watkins’ petitions have been suggested. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the documents concerns the nature of the relationship between various sections of those connected with Bristol’s Customs House. Watkins account and other sources infer the triadic nature of this relationship, involving the merchants, customs men, and the government. It is apparent that the nature of this triad was determined by venality, corruption and influence. In short the shifting opportunities for prospective personal gain that determined the actions of those operating in and out of Bristol – and in higher government - what was considered to be in both the Realm’s, and certain individuals best interests.

In Dowle’s case, these interests were protected by the alleged violent actions towards Watkins. His ability to falsely incarcerate Watkins demonstrates the power of an individual who was used to the manipulation of minor debts. Dowle’s actions were ultimately a part of the wider corruption that pervaded Bristol’s mercantile community, and extended outwards to the most powerful men in England. His connivance with his

⁸⁸ Jones, E.T. *The Bristol Shipping Industry in the Sixteenth Century* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis)

⁸⁹ Cited in Rivkah, Z. ‘Sackville, Thomas, first baron Buckhurst and first earl of Dorset (c.1536-1608)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004)

⁹⁰ Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society Publications, Vol. XXXI, Kendal, 1979), No. 13, p. 37

Controller and Waiters in the alleged frauds highlights the institutional nature of corruption in Bristol during the sixteenth-century.

Watkins' petitions provide valuable details that concern the continuation of trade with Spain during war. Within the Spanish State Papers one can find repeated references to this continuance of trade; in most cases, English merchants with factors in Spain traded as Irish or Scots.⁹¹ Watkins mentions this method, naming those involved, and listing the commodities that were traded. This is but one of many advantages that were available to Bristol's merchant community, who effectively operated with the Customs House to ensure a continuation of trade, whilst limiting custom payments to the Crown wherever possible.

⁹¹ See Hume, M.A.S. (ed.) *Calendar of State Papers* Vol. IV. Elizabeth, 1587-1603 (London, 1899) p. 186

Conclusion

The full transcription of Watkins' two petitions has resulted in a detailed view of Bristol's Inward Customs House. Watkins' clear interest in revealing the fraudulent activities of Dowle and his associates has proved to be both informative, and problematic considering its origin from an interested party. With past studies concentrating on the prolific illicit export activities during the sixteenth century, Watkins' complaints against Customer Dowle provide an almost unique source for understanding the ways in which fraud was likely to have been continued within the import trade of Bristol.

Chapter 1 was solely dedicated to an explanation of the detail of Watkins' allegations. Watkins wrote specifically to those members of the Privy Council who would have been familiar with such terms as *bonds of employment* and *prisage*; Watkins does not make much provision for explanation. Subsequently, to understand the laws, statutes and rules that were allegedly broken, one must look to contemporary material, such as the works of Sir Matthew Hale and William Rastell; and the *sure guide to merchants...customs officers* that provides a valuable insight into the procedures set out for customs officers.

Watkins' petitions include details of frauds that have not previously been studied. He describes sophisticated fraudulent accounting devices such as keeping customs payments out of the accounts and subsequently loaning or investing them until the following financial period. The details of Watkins' claims suggest the extensive nature of illicit activity in Bristol during the late sixteenth century. Watkins' allusion to his possession of 'books' in the 1598 petition seems to confirm the origin of his detailed information. Referring to these accounts in his petitions suggests that Watkins possessed evidence in the form of original accounts, probably originating from his period as clerk to Dowle.

The impoverishment and subsequent imprisonment of Watkins provides a unique window on an affair that displays the extent officials might have gone to protect these activities, and persecute enemies.

Once the personal story, its immediate context and the technical background are understood, the veracity of his statements was explored. In Chapter Two, Watkins' personal complaint against Dowle was examined by way of introduction to his wider claims. Determining the background of his personal experiences has proven to be

difficult. This is largely due to his concentration on the limited information concerning Dowle's violence and financial manipulation. One is left with an incomplete picture of the origins of this dispute. The full extent of Dowle's improprieties has been examined with caution due to Watkins' obvious interest in exaggerating Dowle's corrupt activity.

Current knowledge of general smuggling in the sixteenth-century appears broadly to vindicate Watkins. Examples of identical occurrences of frauds can be found in other documents from the period. Frauds such the embezzlement of customs monies by merchants and customers; alteration of *bills of entry* and *prisage* accounts for incoming shipments are all recorded in separate complaints from the sixteenth century. The continuation of the Spanish trade, despite the royal ban, has been the subject of major studies such as Croft's *Trading With the Enemy*.

Overall, the quantity of peripheral evidence, the feasibility of the alleged frauds being carried out, alongside the suggestion of the possession of original documents strongly suggests the general veracity of Watkins' claims.

The personal dispute between Watkins and Dowle provides an interesting insight into the methods that were perhaps employed by Bristol's most senior customs officers. The actions of Dowle reflect the power that was wielded by such men. Watkins' appeal for justice to one of the highest courts in the realm indicates the impossibility of obtaining justice in Bristol, where the merchant elite (including the Customs House men) appear to have been all but untouchable.

Watkins' petitions demonstrate the extensive benefits that were available to denizen merchants of Bristol. Lists of individuals in Watkins' petitions concerning those who were allegedly involved with Dowle in illicit trading and accounting fraud indicate a network based on mutual financial interests and local loyalties. Many documents from the period refer emphatically to 'foreigners' and 'strangers' when referring to non-denizens and towards foreign merchants there is often marked disfavour.

The petitions strongly suggest the close terms upon which Bristol's merchants and Customs House worked. The violent actions of Dowle towards Watkins, and the exclusive nature of the merchant community against outside interference and competition suggest Bristol's fierce independence, particularly from royal authority. Throughout the sixteenth century, and especially during the late sixteenth century, the political situation

in Europe ensured Bristol's strategic importance. This rested almost entirely on its naval capacity. Royal power over communities such as Bristol's was to a very great degree, nominal. Practical influence and control was clearly limited by lack of communication, and depended on the honesty of men whose position gave great opportunities of highly remunerative corrupt practises. Such a culture appears to have existed within Bristol's merchant elite. The petitions give a clear insight into the means by which they evaded customs and royal authority, and exercised their power in Bristol.

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Appendix 1 – Watkins’ 1598 Petition – SP12/267/39

Transcription Conventions – SP12 267/39 & SP12 274/57

Italics are used to complete contemporary abbreviations: e.g. *maties* = *majesties*. Where words are illegible in original document the word is replaced by _____. Pagination follows the original documents although contemporary page numbers are replaced.

Layout is reproduced as accurately as possible to the original documents.

– Transcriptions by Oliver Dunn

To the righte honorable Lords of her
majesties moste honorable privie Counsell and
the right Ho. Sr. Robert Cecill
Secretary to the Queens moste
excellent majestie

Your honors poore petitioner Thomas Watkyns
beinge nowe laide in prison for the space of
this halfe yeere and more and there yet remayneth
by the Cruellest customer her highnes hath
by reason I have taken her highnes *parte* in
Revealinge of great abuses offered to her
majesties highnes by the saide customer in wch
his sinister dealings in his office of
Customership in Bristoll as here after
ensueth this booke craveing but
Justice at yor honors hands
against the sayde customer

Instrucions to shoue to her *majesties* Ho. counce
against John Dowles Customer Inwards in
the Porte of Bristol at the suite of Thomas Watkyns
late his clarke there.

First I beinge Dowles servant three yeeres and a half cominge to him in May
1594 allwaies as I receyved anie moneys I did either pay it to him selfe or to some
other for him and then he would sett his hand to the booke for receyte thereof and at end
halfe yeeres end I did passe my accountes and make even with him and then hee would
neyther lett me have these booke in my keepinge nor give me an acquittance for the
halfe yeere wherein hee had noe good meaninge for I paide him in the tyme I was with
him not small some of moneys

Secondly I seinge his intent demanded either these booke in my owne keepinge or else
give me an acquittance for the same *which* hee denied me whereof I begune to mistrust
some cunninge dealinge in him, intendinge to hurte me in tyme if wee should chauce to
bee at controversie

Thirdlie on a tyme the Ryghte *Honorable* the lord Buckhurste sendinge downe for a Rowle of
prisage *which* was to bee done onely by these booke which hee had taken from me *which*
by meanes hereof I then gott in my possession soe that then I considered it behoved not
to kepe them because he denied to let me have them for my discharge neyther would give
me anie acquittance for the same *which* booke I did kepe in deed thinckinge them to bee
better then none at all and bicause I kept them hee sent woord by his man that unless
I would deliver them hee would hall me out of my owne house whereuppon I did
deliver them

Fourthly it soe fell out that hee woulde and did charge me with xxx£ which I ought him not
and uppon my denial there of bicause I had paide it to others for him and xxx£ more which
hee will not allowe me and have theire bills to shoue for in October in Anno _____
Elizabethhe xxxixth I paide xx£ to one Langton and had his bill for Recete thereof
and the saide Dowle forced me to give it him and xxx£ xs *which* I paid _____
for him and have his bill to shoue. And when I showed it hee would have _____
I showed it anie more soe that I paide him 55£ xs and cannot have it allowed me
hee callinge me Rascoll and villegne in my owne house swearinge unlesse I would
confes I owed him xxx£ and assure him to pay it hee would sue me for all not
with standinge his hand to the booke, hee not thinckinge that I had anie of them in
my keepinge at that tyme and towhome I had laide out moneys for him hee
would not allowe me which I have gott to shoue which is to my utter undoeing

Fifely hee did likewise threaten me in myne owne house when I was sicke and not
able to stand that if I would not confes I owed him that xxx£ hee would then had
stabbed me laieye his hand on his Rapier, By meanes whereof I beinge in such
present danger of my life did acknowledge to pay it him but as I had paide it
him once before whereuppon shortly after I delivered him three bands uppon
the same Condiscon which nowe I am in execution for twoe of them All which hee doth
to tothint I may not reveale his sinister and cruell dealinge towards her
majestie but threatneth to undoe me if I doe reveale anie thinge against him which
hee hath done already and swearinge hee will buy it out with his money

Sixtely hee promised me at my first comminge to him that I should not bee charged to
receyve anie moneys butt to keepe the booke onely for *which* I should have v£ and iid for
every Entrye Bill but if I receyved anie moneye that then I should bee Recompensed
to my owne content which hee hath not allowed me./ but that the marchants
allowed me xxxiiis 4d and iii£ and I was to have of Dowles accordinge to
poundage for *which* three yeeres and a halfe I demanded but xx£ and
cannot have it yet hee forced me to bee Chargeable for the moneys

Soe that by this extremity of his I am wantinge of that I should have of him the xx£ that xxxv£ xs and the xx£ for my fee *which* is in the whole lxxv£ xs all *which* hee hath done to thintent to undoe me and because I should not have anie meanes to wage lawe with him beinge broughte to povertye and that I shold bee lesse able to Reveale it to her *majestie* of his sinister and wicked dealinge I pray that I may have justice and lawe against the saide Dowles and that I may have Restitution hereof for the mightyie wronge he hath done me and besides I paide him in the last yeere I was with him of the three yeeres and a half great somes of money amounting to about 1000£ for ymposte and would not once have his hands for receyte thereof nor for anie *parte* of it by *which* means hee did the more wronge me and showed his wicked practice towards me in his hard dealinge And alsoe I pray that I may have Remedy against him fyrst for puttinge me in feare in myne owne house and secondly for striking me in the streete when hee would have killed me of *which* I was not in longe tyme after well by reason of his blowe and for feare and danger of my lyfe thirdly to bee discharged out of Prison with my Charge I have bene at and my saide three bands out of his hands and in regard that I am undone by him I Crave that I may have a way to place in Bristoll an comptroler or Morgan Williams place and of the *Serveyors* whose fee is xx£ by the yeere and if I doe not her *majestie* better service in anie of the saide places lett me bee punished in example of all other officers whatsoever.

Seaventhlye hee caused me to receyve Extorcon fees for him soe longe till all the marchauntes were against me for the same and because hee durst not bee sene in it him selfe, therefore hee charged me that I should receyve them of the marchauntes and then hee himselfe receyved them of me *which* is Contrary to lawe or Custome and besides hee is sworne to receyve noe more than is Receyved in the porte of London but doth yet receyve cruell extorcon contrary to lawe and his oath and to the hurte of her *majestes* subjects

	fees extorted		fees due
For hee receyved for the Entrye of every Strangers Ship	iiiiis iiiid		viid
for his band for the officers	is		vid
for his band of ymployments	iiis iiiid		xiid
for the discharge thereof	iis	<i>which is but</i>	iiiid
for his warrant	xiid		vid
for a certificate	iis		is iiiid
for a bill advision	iis		iiiid
for an Irishemans warrant	is viiid		viid

All these fees the saide Dowles doth still receyve, in Receyvinge whereof hee is in Compasse of Perjuirye

Soe that the verye fees is an honest mans lyvinge as hee Rateth them and is Receyved of noe Customer in England for his fees of the house, her *majestie* mighte bee better served for the fees of the house onelye then hee doth and save har *majestey* 50£ a yeere *which* shee alloweth him and xl marks a yeere to the Comptroler, the Customs fee is worth by the house 40£ a yeere and the Comptrolers 30£ and beter

Eightly when he sealed my acquittance in one George Whites house hee then swore that if I had come thither hee had then surelye stritken of my necke but when hee did meete mee he swore hee would stabb me

Nynthlye on the second day of Jannarie last past hee meetinge me in the through house betwene Corne street and Saint Nicholas street in Bristoll & as I passed by him hee stroke me callinge me Roge and villeyne and then hee drawinge his poynard rane after me and would have stabbed me and then I runinge from him till I had gotten uppa stone bicause I had nothinge aboute me but a pen and inkhorne and as I was stopinge for the stone if his man Thomas Yerburie had not bene *with* him hee had surelye stabbed me before I had tyme to turne uppon him and all this hee doth to make not to reveale anye thinge that hee hath done in deceyveinge her *majestie* of her Custome and Subside and ymployments of moneys which I canne showe in myne owne custodye when and howe soe that if this bee not looked unto her *majestie person* is both in danger of her lyfe and in tyme the utter overthrowe of her Countrye by this Cruell practice in lettinge money passe for consideracon and noe ymployments made to anie purpose *which* I will sufficiently averre and prove as this honorable Court shall awarde.

Tenthlie the Customer Comptroler and waitors deceyveth her *majestie* in that they doe share her Custome and Subsidie and devyde it amongst themselves as though it were there owne treasure, lightlye in any shipp some that hath anie thinge at all to accounte of./

Eleventhly the saide Dowles hath used continually altered the half yeeres end to kepe out entries out of the booke and put them in the half yeere followinge sometymes to the value of iC£ and sometimes lesse to thintent her *majestie* should staie at least half a yere longer for her money then shee should, not withstandinge hee is sworne to the contrary and doth lett it for x£ *perCent*

Twelvethly by his meanes (hee beinge *partener* of the Prisage and Butleradge) her *majesty* is dyvers and sundry tymes deceyved of her Rent of iii£ *per tonne* for when shee should have twoe tonnes then the Prisage *masters* will cut of one tonne *which* is iii£ loste to the Queene and all is done to hinder her *majestie* of her Righte and favour themselves bicause what they take from her *majestie* they allowe to the marchaunte & soe take their owne allowance full and this will bee used as longe as the Prisage *master* in Bristoll bee Butlers & the Customer *partener* for better were it for her *majestie* that another that is noe officer or Prisage *master* were Butler for then shee could not bee soe deceyved, yf this Chance to bee spoken of then a man shall have nothinge of Dowle but the stabb and shalbee ymprisoned and oppressed to make him holde his peace or elce hee will begger him and with such threates and manassinge words by which Cruelly towards me and sinister dealinge I have loste by him above iiC£ and nowe at laste hee seeketh my life by his oppression

Thirteenthly my petition is that the saide Dowles may bee called in to this *Honorable* courte and that I beinge soe used at his hands may have lawfull remedy against him for my great hinderance and losse *which* I have suffeyred in payenge moneys for him by his Commandement & cannot have it all owed me agayne *which* is to my utter overthrowe and that hee may bee approved what at a cruell officer hee is to her highnes *person* in deceyvinge her of her highnes Custome and Subsedie Contrary to his oath and alsoe voweing that hee careth for none that canne hurte him for his sinister dealinge to her highenes in his office of Customer shipp

Fourteenthly there is not a shipp *which* Cometh from the straighte but it hath byn used still by the Customer and marchante to devyde xx£ xxv£ or xxx£ amongst them selves and take it from her *majestie* as apeareth by my booke to bee sufficiently proved by the wittnes therein sett downe in the margent

Fiftenthly the Customer is sworne both by Statute and her *majesties* orders in the Exchequor every halfe yeere to Retorne upp in to her highnes Courte of Exchequor All strangers bonds *which* is not ymployed at three moneths end or sixe moneths end at the farthest, [*which*] neversince the saide Dowle hath byn Customer have byne returned at all unlesse hee hath done it within this twoe yeeres last past *which* is a hurte to her *majestie* in her Custome and by that meanes shee oughte to have the twentyth *parte* and the moneys kept within the Realme

Sixteenthly I have knowne my selfe some bands of ymployments have bene a yeere and twoe yeeres before they have bene discharged *with which* the customer oughte not to entermeddle but have returned them upp as aforesaide yea and when these bands have bine discharged they have bene done contrarye to lawe good order and contrary to his oath for this was his order, a bill shold bee made by some marchant beinge a frinde for the stranger, the stranger being vC leagues of, or if hee had byne in Towne allwais one for the bill should have bene made that the stranger had ymployed it soe and soe *which* in deed was nothinge soe for her *majesties* booke will showe to the contrary And beside that

it should have bene done without the oath of the Stranger or his Frynde
whoe did for him and yet not with standinge at the lower end of the bill there
should bee entred the stranger by his name Jurath when neyther hee was there
nor none other for him in Consideracon whereof the Customer sometymes Received
tenne shillinge some xxs some xls and some iii£ And this moneys is suffered to
passe against her highnes lawes and good of her Countrye, all which I will averre
and prove/.

Sevententhly least I should reveale all this to her highenes hee hath used
very hard dealinge against me to thintente to undoe and ympoverishe my estate
which indeede hee hath done already And on the ixth day of October 1599 the saide
Dowle spoke to one John Eyton and told him that yf hee did hange me hee did
thincke hee should not offend god and hee doth bragg like wise bicause hee is
the *Lord* Buckhurste his man that hee neyther careth for the lawe nor for anie
one elce whatsoever

18. Alsoe Dowles arrestinge me into the Pipowders courte when I was to plead
for my selfe at the triall of my matter in courte I could not bee suffered to
speake nor my Evidence could not bee hard what I or they could saye
conceringe Dowles forceinge me to seale the saide bands William Colston
beinge shreve and George Younge beinge steward judges of the same courte
and one Edward Hollister beinge attorney for the saide Dowles for Dowle had
laboured the matter to the saide Shreve and Steward over nighte And in
face of the Courte the saide Shreve called the saide plaintiffe man John
Langton and Rounded him in the law. and tould him the matter should goe
well on his *masters* side beinge Dowles by *which* meanes the matter went
against me because I could not bee harde and hee hath me in execution
for twoe of these bonds

19. Item the saide Dowles hath kept one John Langton as his Clarke and is a
marchant and hath adventured both victuoll and other marchandries at any
tyme this sixe yeeres *which* is Contrary to the Statute in that case and *provided*
wherein Dowle is *perjured* for at the Comminge home of Langtons goods hee
hath allowed him the Custome free

20. Item the saide Dowle hath used marchandice him selfe since hee hath bine
Customer *which* is Contrary to the lawe wherin hee is *perjured*

Besides all this in Regard my wife have had some hard measure at Dowles
hands shee did not spare to tell him of his sinister dealinge towards her *majestie*
Sithence *which* tyme hee hath Contynually threatned her that if I happened
To dye before her hee would plague her the like shee was never plagued in her
lyfe for *which* I pray that this *honorable* courte will take some good order for him here
in & I shall bee bound to pray for *yor honors* prosperous estate and longe contynonce
to the glory of god all this saide Dowle doth because hee will
impoverishe me that I shall not bee able to *traverse* lawe againste
him I doe crave but Justice and lawe of him as I and her *majeste*
loyall subject

A briefe colleccion of those Statute *which* are
against the Customer Inwards (*which*) John
Dowle beinge Customer Inwards in the
Porte of Bristoll is bounde to doe & *performe*
the *which* in his office hee hath lefte undon
contrary to lawe and his oath as followeth in
the other page

In tittle of Custome Customers and comptrolers

parte
3.4.5.7.8
11.13.2 parte
Rastals folio 103 - 104. 105. 106 in concealinge Custome It noe
Customer nor Clarke bee noe merchants nor victuelers nor kepe wharfe
nor Receyves extortion in fees

In tittle of Accounte

4 - 20 parte
11 0:
folios - in Concealinge Custome and subsidy etc.

In tittle of merchante and merchandice

parte
24.26.38.
40.44.47
folio 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. concerninge
landinge and ladinge of merchandice duotye of Customers in entring
shippes employments within three moneths with out coven & to preserve
gould and silver within the land and transporting of skyns leather tanned
iind in the shilling per alien 14 parte concealment 285 parte 45

In tittle of officers & office

parte
6.7.13
folio 313. 314 concerninge Customers Comptrolers Searchers absent
from their offices and not to buy nor sell their office

In tittle of Custome Customers Comptroler

folio 104. parte .8

In thechequor orders and in tittle of Extorcon

folio 1.66. parte 4. for takinge extorcon fees & not reterninge bands of
employments & not to conceale Custome or Subsidye

In tittle of Money

folio 298. no. 4 concerninge carieng plate or silver over seas
folio 300. no. 39 concerninge transportinge of money
folio 301. no. 42 concerninge transportinge money or plate

In tittle of Anon popular

folio 4. no. 4: in exception concerninge Custome Subsid tonnage &
poundage
folio 156. no. 2: toward them in Custome in the margent noe Customer
may bee deputed Butler./

**Exceptions in her mate parden made in the parliament in
Anno Regni Reigne Eliz. 39**

- 30 Exception. Concealment wrongfull deleyinge of Custome and Subsidie due to her majestie accounte petitions and suite made for the same
- 31 Exc: All accounte of Subsidie Custome and all Utrue accounte & all other thinge sued uppon the same Accounts
- 36 Exc. All somes of money graunted to the Queenes majestie by way of subsidie all frauds and concealments by *which* her majesty is deceyved
- 22 Exc. All forfeitures penaltyes proffits accrewed to the queenes majestie by offence misdemeamer contempt or other acte comitted or done Contrary to any statute against the Comon lawes of this Realme
- 43 Exc. All offences contempts disorders covens frauds deceyts misdemeaners whatsoever comenced in the Starchamber
- 44 Exc. All offence of Perjury etc.
60. Exce: And excepted all offences in takinge away ymbesseling or purloyninge and the queens majesties goods money Chattells ? munition armour ordinance or other habillaments of war

Parte of the Articles and orders under her majesties
seale of Exchequor Unto which the Customer Inwards
vizt John Dowles is both bounde to the Quene to *performe*
and alsoe precisely sworne to the same, *which* on his *parte*
are to *performed* and kept *which* hee hath not done

Article 2

There shalbee a shippers booke Inwarde wherin every
shipper cominge in, by way of mechandice or with Comodities of the
Realme from anie other porte by Certifficate shall enter
openly in the Custome house the name of his shipp the *master*
the burden of whence and from what place it is freighted
And the saide *master* and purser of any shipp the cominge in by
way of *merchandice* shall deliver under his hand and
oath accordinge to the Statute openly in the Custome
house to the Customer Collector and Comptroller one
bill of his whole ladinge and *merchants* names that have
laden therein to bee entred by the Customer and Collector
in the Shippers booke after the entrye of the Shipp &
to bee fyled and kept together by the Comptroler after the
order they bee entred in the saide Shippers booke *which*
bookes shall remayne and bee safelye keperte in the
saide Custome house

5

Every Stranger that entreth anye *merchandice* broughte
from beyond the Sea beinge noe denizen shalbee bounde
for ymployment Accordinge to the Statute by bonds
taken by the Customer Collector and Comptroler &
subscribed and delivered with good
suerties openly in the Custome house thereof to bee kept under
there severall keys of severall wards and to bee there like
wise discharged acordinge to the Lawe in *which*
case bills of the exchange shall not bee allowed for
ymployment And such bands as bee expired and the
ymployments thereof not made accordinge to their condicon
shall bee delivered in to theschequoir half yeerely by the
saide Customer Comptroler and Surveyour that execucon
for the queene may bee had there uppon

Every *merchant* and other person that hath anie wares that came in from beyond sea or Comodities of the Realme that came in from anie other Porte shall have a warrant by him selfe made *particulerly* as they bee entred and shall be sealed subscribed and delivered openly in the Custome house by the Customer Collector and his Comptroler and by theire deputies attendant *which* for Bristowe to the waiters there and for all other Ports and Creeke to the Searcher and his servants where they themselves doe not serve to take upp the wares or Comodities out of the shipp or vessel they bee laden in *which* warrants shall bee present at the takinge upp thereof And shalbee kept & fyled together after the order of theire dates from tyme to tyme by the saide Wayters Searches and Deputies and only Custome Collectors & Comptroler that maketh anie such *warrant* for takinge upp of anie wares or *merchandice* Inwards Contrary or Disagreinge to the entries in the originall booke; shall accordinge to the quality of the Faulte be fyned and punished by the discrecon of the *lord* Tresorer of England the Chauncelor and vice treasurer of the Eschequor for the tyme being

Parte of other orders and Artecles amongst orders for
the Collectors in oute Porte to bee on his *parte*. *performed*
and kept *which* hee hath not done

Articles 1

That they bee sworne and put in bands to execute their place
faithfully and truly and also cause their deputies and all
others servinge under them to doe the like

3

That your booke of Entries bee not made with outerlyninge or
erasures but bee kept nice for avoydinge of all colourable
practice

4

That you all subscribe *every* particuler entrie as they stand in
your booke and cause the *merchant* that makes his entrie to doe
the like

7

That you deliver noe warrant to marchant owner *master* or
Purser of anie Shipp or anie man elce before the *Sercher*
bethroughly made acquainted there with And that you
have accordinge to the lawes of this Realme sworne them in
such cases as you are bounde

12

That none shipp out or bringe in anie goods with out paieng
anie Custome though it bee for her *majestie* in here owne shipp
or the Lorde Admiralty tenths in anie of them unlesse it
bee by her *majestie* or the *Lord Tresarer* expresse warrant

13

That you exact not of the *merchante* anie fees more than
such as are usually taken in London by the officers of the
Custome house

14

That you call uppon the *Seachers* and wayters
to be watchfull to search and fynde out all such as make not
conscience to purloyne from her *majestie* her Custome & to
bringe true notes of the burthen of all shipps soe that the
money due for Tonnage may be truly answered

Articles

16 That you *permit* not any goods or *merchandise* to bee eyther shipped or landed before the same bee duely entred & if case of necessitye shall require the lading of anie goods before entrye bee made thereof That then you cause the same to bee Comitted to her *majesties* Storehouse & to noe other place nor to the possession of the *merchants* untill the same goods shall bee duely and instlie entred and surviyed

17 That the Righte *Master* of every shipp and purser bringing in anie goods from the beyond the seas be first sworne before you take the *merchants* entrye whether hee have landed anie of the saide goods since his arryvall *with* in this Realme before his entrye

18 That the *Master* & purser goeing beyonde the seas bee sworne at their Retorne to give in a bill of Averidge that it is a true note of all the goods *which* hee unladed beyond the Seas as in statute they are bounde if in case you see it soe necessary elce to forfeit 100£. primo Elizabethhe.

The neglectinge of the execution of this xviiiith article is the onely cause that soemuch *prohibited* wares marchandice victualls and munition is caried to her *majestys* enimies and unlesse the officers bee better tyed to see that *performed* at every shippes comminge home when shee entreth Inwards it will breed a great hinderance & damadge to her *majesties* Country & subiecte./

21 That you suffer none to lade or unlade at their owne backe sides but at the upper keys or Wharfe in yor ports unlesse it bee by leave, for the *merchante* ease & in yor presence

22 That you looke carefully that Strangers make their ymployments of money as they Receyve for their goods *which* they bringe inwards in to the lande

A note and cobby of the bills I paide moneys
for Dowles *which* I cannot have allowed together
with some *parte* of Custome *which* Dowles left out
in one halfe yeer and put in the other halfe
yeere and a Cobby of his letter to that effect
under his owne hand writinge for some
Custome leavinge out

Showe this boke yf you bee called
before her *majesty*e or her Counsell table

**A copy of the bill which Thomas Watkyns paide
money for Dowles & cannot bee allowed it againe**

Re. of Thomas Watkyns the xxth of may 1597
by the appoyntment of *Master* John Dowell to bee
paide in London xxxv£ xs

xxxv£ xs

wittnes hereof Rich. Griffith
sevante to the said Tho. watkins

Perme Thomas Jenninge
per the use of my *master*
Robte Chandelers

This is under Dowles owne hand writing
Thomas watkyns pay to this bearer *Master* Barte Sheward xls. 3d

John Dowles

more by an other bill paide to one Ancelme Langton
xx£ by Dowles appoyntment *which* bill hee forced me
to give him and would not allowe it but would sue me
for all the moneys I paide him in three yeeres before
if I would not give him that bill -----

xx£

Then I should have had xx£ for gatheringe the -----
yimpost moneys *which* I had not-----

xx£

Teste to all these 3 bills
Rich. Griffith servient Thom: Watkyns
predic

lxxviii£ - xs -iiiiid

A note of some moneys *which* should have been
put in Easter half yeeres booke & Dowles
kept it out & put it in Michelmas halfe
yeere whereby he had the use of the moneys
longer by half a yeere then bye lawe and his
oath hee should have had

primo die octobris 1596

In the Prize called the bone Jesus of Luxborn
Robert Aldworth marchant whose Custome was

ii C ix£ - ix s - iid

more eodem die

In the Spread Eagle of Embden
John Spilbridge merchant strangers & others whose
Custome came to -----

v£ xvs, & xif 8s ix d

more dodem die

In the Spread eagle
Peter et Lambert Hastart & others merchants
strangers whose custome came to-----
And *every* halfe yeere did keepe out some & put
it in the other halfe yeere followinge *which* is
a Contynuall practize of him

iiii£ xvs / & xviiiis ix d

xxiiij due Aprilis 1595

In the Saint Anthonie of Luxborne

Alen Tompson and others *merchants* whose

Customes came unto ----- lxxv£ xvis viiid
which should have bene in the booke *which* was put in
to the Exchequor at Easter-----

The Coppy of a lie under Dowles hand
writinge concerninge leaving out Custome
in one halfe yeere & put it into another.
Directed to Thomas Watkyns from Dowles
when the saide Tho: was Clarke in
the Custome house for him

Thomas Watkyns I pray you bee very earnest with all
except Mr. Barker for the ymport, money for I meane to
Ride upp to London before Easter; Call uppon John Slocombe
for the vi£ iis hee should have paide me longe since for Jon
Love and will my man *William*. to goe to Giles Goughe for my
ix£ and lett him send me worde by this bearer whether the
Earle of Essex bee in Bristoll and when hee goeth away
& if hee bee not yet come when they looke for him to bee
there. The Custome for the Salte of the Fleming
but in to the bookes of the next halfe yeere and soe with
my Commendacons I bid you farewell In halfe
from tinesborrough this xi *day* of March 1596

Yor Loving frend
John Dowles./

To Thomas Watkyns in Corne
Streete in Bristoll Scrivoner
give thes: /

Exbit *per* me Thomas Watkins
him Clerk pro John Dowles

et Rich. Griffith sevent pro Tho: watkyns/

The saide Fleminge did *procure* my *Lord* Treserers letter for non payment of Strangers Custome because hee was free of the Stilliard together *with* a line from the Stilliard to the same effect *which* lines were delivered and directed to the Customer of Bristoll beinge the saide Dowles *which* hee would not accept nor allowe of no the presence of the Fleminge but made him pay the Strangers Custome and afterwards kept it out of the booke and put that moneys into his owne purse

teste Thoms. Watkins
et Riche Griffith

Appendix 2 – Watkins’ 1600 Petition – SP12/274/57

Transcription Conventions – SP12 267/39 & SP12 274/57

Italics are used to complete contemporary abbreviations: e.g. *maties* = *majesties*. Where words are illegible in original document the word is replaced by _____. Pagination follows the original documents although contemporary page numbers are replaced.

Layout is reproduced as accurately as possible to the original documents.

– Transcriptions by Oliver Dunn

To the Right honorable Lordes of her
majesties most honorable privie Counsell and
the Right ho. Sir Robert Cecill
Secretary to the Quenes most excellent
majestie

Your honnors poore petitioner Thomas Watkyns
benig nowe laide in Prison for the space of this
halfe yeere and more and there yet remayneth by the
Cruelst Customer her highnes hath by Reason
I have taken her highnes *parte* in Revealinge of
great abuses offered to her *majesties* highenes
by the saide Customer in his sinister dealinge in
his office of Customershipp in Bristol/ as here
after ensueth in this booke. Craveing but
Justice at your honnors hands againste the
saide customer

In Portu Bristoll
fatria vt seguitur

An accounte of parte of such Customes and
Subsedies as John Dowles Customer Inward
in the Porte of Bristoll, and the marchante
have consented to deceyve her *majestie*, and devided
it, the one halfe to the saide Customer and
waitors of the saide Porte, and the other
halfe to the marchantes that was owners
of the same.

in Anno domini 1594

Teste Thomas
Watkins et
William Fleete

In the Joseph of Bristoll as much goods not
entred, as the Customer and Subsidie there
of came to xv£ *which* was the third parte of the
ladinge of the same shipp

xv£

xvi die Marchij 1594

Teste Thomas
Warkins et
William Fleete

In the Unicorn of Bristoll as much goods
not entred as the Custome and subسدie
thereof came to vi£ xiiiiis viiid, whereof the
marchante allwaies hath thonehalfe and
the officers the other devided amongst them

vi£ xiiiiis viiid

xxii die January 1594

Teste *Master* John
Barton et
Tho. Watkins

In the Redlion a strangers shipp
Received of *Master* John Barter, v£ for *Staplers* v£
goods of london *which* was not entred by
Dowles Comandement - the whole thereof was x£

iiiiith die Aprilis 1595

Teste Thomas
Watkins et
William Fleete

Received of Allen Thompson of london merchant
by Dowles Commandment for the overplus
of sugers not entred in the Prize called
the St Anthonne of the same of
The whole same thereof was -----

xiii£ vis viiid

xxvi£ xiiiiis iiiid

Per me Thomas Watkins _____
Clerk ? John Dowls

Quarto die May 1595

Teste
Tho. Watkins

In the Lillie of Bristoll eighte bagges of
Spanishe wooll not entred the Custome &
Subsidie thereof came to i£ xiiis iiiid &
the ymposicon thereof of came to ii£ xiiis iiiid
amounte in the whole to -----

iiii£ vis viiid

primedie Octobris 1595

In the Prize called the boneJesus of luxborn
Robert Aldworth marchant for v tons of
ginger not entred *which* owed her *majestie* vii£
xs *perton* subsidie soe the whole amounte to.-
For prooffe whereof John Dowle Customer
and William Fleete confest to Tho. Watkins
that Thomas Taylor the deputie *Serveyor*
had it for his *parte* to Content him because
hee had noe share not of long tyme before.

xxxviii£ xs and
xviii£ xvs the halfe

sixth die Janury 1595

Teste Robert
Aldworth et
Thoms. Watkins

In the Pellican of Bristoll
Robert Aldworth and John Love entred
three tons of Sumacke and paide the
Custome and ymposicon thereof but the
Customer entred madder in stead thereof
and kept v£ ymposicon to himselfe-----
as it apeareth by the Coppy of the entrie
bill here under written as followeth

v£

In the Pellican of Bristoll of the *burthen* of
xl tons Richard Maylard *master* from welvey
Robert Aldworth and John Love *merchante*
for xxx serons of Sumacke *contrary* iii tons
subside -----

ii£

Per me Tho: Watkins
parte

xxith die Januarie 1595

Teste Thoms
Watkins of George:
Stanburye
marchant of
Barnestable

In the George of Barnestable
George Standburye and John Delbridge
marchante left with John Olyver merchant
of Bristoll. iii£ to pay to the Customer
inward for sugers not entred *which* John
Olyver paide and was but thone halfe
of the Custome thereof due the whole
same came to -----
vi£

Teste *Master*
Barker et
Thomas Watkins

Paide John Dowle Customer inward
iii£ xiiiiis viid *which* I receyved of *Master* John
Barker by Dowles Comandement for
certeyne Fleminges goods as apeareth
by Dowles bill of division under his owne
hand *which* I have in keepinge and *which* goods
was not entred but the quene deceyved
thereby the whole some thereof was-----
vii£-ixs-iiid

the Coppie of the bill of devison

v£ xixs - iiijd
i£ - vs - id
iiiiis - xd
vii£ - ix s - iid

Division 3£ - 14s - viid 2 - no. 40:

xiiiith die May 1595

Teste William
Ellis William
Fleete Thoms
Watkins et Roger
Hurte factor

In the Roeaburke of Bristoll xx£ Custome
keparte from the Queene, and paide to me
and William Fleete by *Master* Hughe Griffith
by the appoyntment of *Master* William Ellis
for Dowles use and the waitors
beinge x£ whereof I paide Dowle
v£ and the waytors v£ but as I thinke
the *Quene* had not xxx£ in the saide shipp
William Fleete waitor nor v£ for himselfe
& his fellowes waitors
xx£

per me Tho Watkins
parte

Teste Thomas
Watkins the *merchante*
et John Collyns

In the daysie of Bristoll for lynen cloth
not entred v£ xis whereof John Collins
had the waytors *parte* of me. Tho: Watkins
and the rest I paide Dowle -----
these goods was discharged at the key

v£ xis

Secundo die Separtembris 1594

Teste Thomas
Watkins *William* Fleete
George: Holland et
Arthur Patur

In the Hercules of Bristoll tenne tones
of greene woade not entred by consent of
John Dowle, the waytors and Robert
Aldworth and after was in the *chequor*
for it the Custome whereof came to v£

v£

Teste
Thomas: Watkins

Item payde Dowles for Currantes not
entred in the Grace of Garnesey
Thomas Guilliam *Master* from Saint
Malloes *iiii£* *which* was but thone halfe
which I receyved of Walter Williams the
whole some thereof was

viii£

Secundo die July 1597

Teste. Arthur
Patur whoe
conselled it & yf
they were entred
prunes at *gloucester*
& never came out
of Kingrod *which* is in the
Porte of Bristoll
& besides as he saide the
Customer of *Gloucester* came
to see them landed

In the Peacoke of Amserdam
John Whitesone entred v puncheons of prunes
contrary xx*C* waighte but it was Currante
amountinge to some lxxx*C* *with which*
the Custome & ymposicon thereof came
to --- xxvii£

xxvii£

Per me Tho. Watkins
parte

xix die May 1597

Teste Thoms
Watkins William
Fleete et William
Eyton

In the Fortune of Brest
John Olyver & Hughe Griffith entred xii
tonnes of Salte *which* was xii tons of a
Sumacke or better Comoditie but noe
salte by the Consent of the Customer soe the
Quene: had xiis god knoweth for howe much as
apeareth by the Coppy of the bill of Entry
here under written it could not be lesse
than xx nobles or x£

In the Fortune of Brest *burthen* xx tons
John Daniell *Master* from Brest
John Olyver and Hughe Griffith of
Bristoll marchante for three tons of Sumake iii£
and xii tons of Salte xiis
Notwithstandinge it was entred in the
name of Salte to deceyve her *majestie* of
the ymposicon and subsedie therefore due

Jan Denies

xvjth die January 1596

Teste
Thomas Watkins

In the Lilly of Bristoll
John Robertes and John Browne marchantes
for twoe tones of honie not entred by the
Consent of Dowles *which* amontes to xxiiiis xxiiiis

xxvith die Marcij 1596

Teste Thomas
Watkins William
Fleete waitor et
Geo: Wilkins wife

In the Clement of Bristoll
George Wilkins for twoe punchears of
Currantes *contrary* xxx C *with* whereof was entred
but x C *with* by Dowles consent the Custome
and ymposicon of the xx C amounte to vi£ xs

Per me Thomas Watkins
parte

xiiiith die Januavij 1596

Teste Thomas
Watkins Rich
Pyne et John
Roberts

In the Fraunces of Ryvellad
John Roberte marchant for vi puncheons xiis
of Prunes con xxxiii C *with which* was not entred
twoe tonnes of honie *which* was not entred-- -----if iiiis
Richard: Pyne one tonne of honie -----xiis
twoe tonnes two hoggeheads turpentyne-----xiis
All *which* was kept out by the Composicon
of Dowle and the saide Roberte

xiiiith die May 1597

In the Josephe of Bristoll
William Ellis, Hughe Griffith, John
Whitsone John Barker and company
marchante for xv tons of Allome in xxv£
Roome *which* was intrusted subsidie is
more twoe barrells of Nutmegge not
entred
which I have the marchante bill under their
owne hands to showe as by the Coppy of
the same bill hereunder written apereth

In the Joseph

Teste Thomas:
Watkins william
Bigge et Rich.
Griffiths

William Ellis Hughe Griffith John
Whitsone John Barker of Bristol xxv£
merchante for xv tons of allom in Roome 4. no. 60:
more twoe barrells of Nuttmegge
contrary iiiii C waighte -----xxs iiiid

Per me Thomas: Watkins

parte

xxiiiith die Separtembris 1597

In the Katheryn of little sani

Teste Willm
Clarke Jon Austen
and his wife and John
Howlette wife et
Tho: Watkins et
Tho: Jeninge
___ Corsley being
a _____
Bristoll _____
the 4 chalises

Thoms Bramley
William Brian bounde
wittnes to the bill
George: White
Thomas Watkins et
Ric Griffiths

Teste Robert
Smyth whoe
was then in the
same shipp

Thoms Hopkyns Robert Chandler and Jon
Dowle Customer Inward, *merchante* for
Spaine and sent saddles thither as it
was reported by *william* Clarke their
factor and alsoe sent foure Challices of silver
to gyve to the prieste there, and yf the saide
Dowle had a third *parte* thereof & allsoe ___
John _____ & John _____
Besides all this Dowles had a Deputacon
to transporte skynnes *which* is Contrary to
the lawe for a Customer to doe, and bee
a marchant & besides hee did adventure
skyns some three yeeres agoe or there
aboutes and had wyne broughte home for
them and solde these wyne to one
William Bryan of Brampstone in the
County of Worcester in holder For the *payment*
whereof Thomas Bramley of Bristol
marchant stood bound, *which* was to the some
of xlv£ the xxii of Julye 1595 the bill
Dated the first of Marche 1594 ano
Reigne Elizabeth 37th the wyne was
entred in the name of George White
when they came home bicause Dowle
would not have it knowne./

John Robertes of Bristoll marchant
had a shipp called the Lillye and sent her
for Spayne in *Ano* 1598 and hee had
to the value of one hundred kinderkes
of butter or verie nere there aboute as
some that were in the same shipp at
the tyme will Justifie uppon their oath
& shee & all their virtuall & goods was
there Confiscate

Per me Thomas Watkins
parte

In Anno Domini 1598

John Robertes of Bristoll marchant had alsoe another Barke named the Content *which* was bounde for Spayne with butter in her and Cominge there hence was Cast away at sea I canne showe by specialtye *that* some of the Company that was in her at that tyme had some butter in her

xxth die May 1595

Teste
Thomas: Watkins et
John Pitts

In the Thomas of Bristoll John Pitte paided i£ xvs for woade not entred *which* was but halfe, the whole some thereof due was soe that when ane shipp cometh home *which* mighte yeld her *majestie* 50£: or 60£ subsiie shее shall at least have 20£ or 30£ devided amongst the officers *which* is a Contynuall practize./

iii£ xs

Teste Phil

Thomas: watkins
_ Lavington
Comptroller

William Fleete beinge one of her *majesties* Waitors in the saide Porte of Bristoll kepeth a shipp uppon the backside of his house & doth discharge goods contrary to her *majestes* order and the statute being hee is an officer whereby oftentimes the Queene is deceyved & not knowne to the other officers of the Porte./

Per me Thomas: Watkins parte

The Amounte of *parte* of such abuses *which* is comitted by John Dowles Customer Inward in the Porte of Bristoll in dischargeing of Strangers bande of ymployments, [contra legene] for money when in deed they make little or none at all, and soe by *which* means money is conveyed out of the land, but maketh false bills of ymployment^e and noe bodye sworne to them and uppon them, entred Jurath Such a one beinge the *merchant* of the goods to bee ymployed and hee beyond the seas or not there present, yf they bee there present they bee not sworne/

xth die January 1596	Inprimis paide by William Murrieu in my shop to John Dowle for the discharge of his band of ymployment ^e hee being not there unto sworne	xs
	Item paide to him by Mathew Haviland in the <i>Custom</i> house, for the discharge of James Pression his band of ymployment ^e hee beinge not there unto sworne	xs
dat iiiird die February 37 Elizabeth Reigne	Item paide to him by John Collymore for the discharge of John Furnews twoe bands of ymployment ^e hee beinge not thereunto sworne	xxs
dat <i>xth</i> die december 6th die may 1593	John paide to him by John Whitsone for discharge of Henry Vaule and Thomas Cottellis bandes of ymployment ^e they beinge not there unto sworne	iii£ vis viid
dat xiiiiith November dat iiiith decemb 1593	Item of John Barker hee receyved for discharge of Jaques Joslyne his twoe bands of ymployment ^e hee beinge not thereunto sworne	xvis
dat xxth die junii 1593	Item of Thomas Holcome for discharge of Symon Lucas band of ymployments hee beinge not thereunto sworne	i£
dat 17th Aprill 1593	Item of Thomas Holcome for discharge of Patricke Shewyn his band of ymployment hee beinge not thereunto sworne	xs
dat 2nd January 1594	Item of John Whitsone for discharge of Henrie Vaules band of ymployment ^e hee being not thereunto sworne	ii£

Per me Thomas Watkins

dat 2nd January 1594	Item of John Whitsone for discharge of Christopher Gat see his band of ymployente hee beinge not thereunto sworne	ii f
dat 2nd January 1594	Item of the skipper of the Red lion for discharge of his band of ymployente hee beinge not there unto sworne	xvi s
dat 19th Juny 1596	Item of Mathew Haviland for discharge of Michell Mingards band of ymployments hee beinge not there unto sworne	xs
dat 4th February 1595	Item of In Roberte for discharge of Abraham Vesche his band of ymployment hee being not thereunto sworne	xs

Soe the Officers may bee *permitted* to discharge bands of ymployente for moneys yf they bee not tyed *every halfe yeere* to retorne them in to the *exchequor* *which* is not ymployed within their tyme according to the *exchequor* Orders under her *majestes* seale of Exchequer in the *partchment* booke whereof the Officers hath one, her highnes shall have but small *proffitt* or Custome of Strangers goods outwards because of that mightie abuse soe divers and sundrie tymes Comitted against her *majestie* as *parte.ly* by the Custome booke outwards is and may bee easilie *perceyved* for comonly strangers carry little Comoditie from Bristoll exceptinge Coles or some tyme lead, but rather Iron Ordinance and butter and such other *prohibited* wares to the hurte of the Countrye *which* is a Comen Course. For there was at michelmas in Anno 1597 at least xl or l bands of ymployments *which* had their dates out and the monys not ymployed according to the Statute & alsoe there hath not bene anie one band of ymployente there tyme being out within these sixe yeeres last past returned unto the *excheqor* as it oughte to bee

Per me Thomas: Watkins
parte.

Every halfe yeere *which* doth her *majestie* great harme in that moneys & great share of gould is by strangers conveyed out of the land for want of good execution of that order & lawe & soe the officers make agayne of the bande continually from tyme to tyme and will still yf it bee noe better fore some then it is, for it is a greater hurte & damage to her *majesties* Countrie and subiectes then it is taken for, inthat strangers, desire rather to carrye awaye moneys then to ymploye it here in England and care not what they give for exchange of gould soe they may have it *which* thinge in tyme will make moneys skant and gould skant in England if it bee not the better fore seeneunto

Of all *which* abuses yf a poore man chance to speake in her *majesties* behalfe yea but of the least some one or another will seeke to over throwe their estate yea and put them in danger of their lyves unlesse it bee such as bee authorized from her *majestie* or anie her honorable Counsell & threaten their undoinge By *which* meanes her *majestie* is deceyved of mane thinge in a yeere by reason of such manassinge & threateninge because they dare not, in that they have not where with all towage lawe with the officers and *merchants* For often tymes under a Colour goode is entred in Englishmens names when in deed it is Strangers goods and soe defeat her *majesties* of Strangers Customes & of the ymployments of the moneys

Per me *Thomas Watkins*
parte

Her *majestie* hath loste to her *parte* within this sixe yeeres at the least three of foure thousand pounds seisures *which* the officers mighte have had to her *majesties* use and their owne yf they had done her highnes that service *which* they are bounde and sworne to doe what in prohibited wares and others *which* her *majestie* never had custome/.

is but ~~iiii~~ and a comon course or practice is made thereof by reason the marchante themselves are Butlers and the Customer inward hath an eighte *parte* both of Prisage and Butleradge by virtue of a graunte to him made from John Olyver John Barker Mathew Haviland Abell Kitchen and John Rowberoe bearinge date the xxth day of September in the Seaven & thirteth yeere of the Raigne of *our* Sovereigne ladye Queene Elizabeth: *which* is soe much the worse for the Queene in that they make the bill as the marchante and they canne agree and will mend and alter Entries at their pleasure and sometymes in such strangers names as have noe goods in the shipp [All *which*] is a forfeiture of their grante made from the Righte honorable the Lord Burkhurst and wilbee used soe longe as they bee butler [*which* yf they were not] they could not soe easilie practice that hard measure against her *majestie* as they doe in deceyving her of the same prisage *which* is for her highnes *provision*. The *paper* booke wherein the butlers bill is will shewe howe it was mended to the effect afore saide for it is under my hand and I did it by the Commandment of the Prisage *master* and John Roberte the *merchant* whoe deceyveth her *majestie* and her countrye in divers kinds of Abuses

The Copy of the bill of Entrie whereof *parte* of the goodes was entred in Strangers names whoe had not goods there to the intent to defraud her *majestie* of the Prisage

xviiiith Aprill 1597

In the Minikin Alexander Seward *master* from Tolon John Love, *Richard*: Batt, Rich Powle, *George*: Lane Regnald Williams and William Grovis marchants for xx tons i barr of secke and upwards Entred thereof in Charles Balford and William Dawson names stranger for 4 tons secke at the least yf it were not more but had none at all by that meanes the *Quene*: lost one tonne prisage

Test
Geo. Lane

Per me. Thomas Watkins
parte

& viith die Juny 1597

In the Petter of Milford Otwell Allen *master* from Ireland
Richard Jones iiii butte secke not entred by Consent of John Robertes
deputie for Thomas Parrie Collector of sweete wyne
for the Righte *honorable*: the Earle of Essex

A note of such extorcion fees as John Dowles
Customer Inward doth receyve and comande
his marn to take; and sworn by the exchequer
orders to take noe more then is taken in the
Custome house of London [*which*] is not *performed*
as by exchequer order it aught

Taketh	Extorcon	fees due
For Entrye of Strangers shipps	iiiiis iiiid	iiiiid
for the band of ymployments	iiiiis iiiid	xiid
for the discharge of that band	iis	iiiiid
for the bill of veiwe	iis	iiiiid
for the Certificate	iis	is iiiid
for the warrant for Strangers	xiid	iiiiid
for the warrant for an Irishman	is viiid	viid
	xvis iiiid	iiiiis iiiid

Per me *Thomas watkins*
parte

Her *majestie* mighte bee better served in place of her Custom Inwards
Customer outwards and Comptroler for the very fees of the Custome house
and save all theire Stipend *which* her *Maiestie* doth give and allowe them
which is to the Customer Inwards 50£, to the Customer outwards 50£.
To the Comptroler 40 marks, all *which* were better in her
majesties purse then in theires for the service they doe her *majestie*
For the Customers fees Inwards of the house is worth by the yeere 40£
the Customers fees outwards by the yeere is worth xl Marks and the
Comptrolers fee is worth by the yeere xl Marks all this is nowe in
tyme out of trade and peace and when it was peace and trade it was worth
a great deale more by the yeere/.

vij die Decembr 1597

John Dowles Customer Inward in the Porte of Bristoll did threaten me and sent his man William Eyton to me to threat me and to tell me that what I ? other could lay against him for ane thinge wherin hee deceyved her *majestie* of her Custome & Subsidie that his money should buy it out and that hee cared for none that could lay any thinge against him And if I did Reveale anie thinge that his *master* would with his money ? me And further willed me not to thincke much for delivering of that message from his *master* to me for in that hee sent him uppon purpose to threat me and Comanded him to tell me much more but that hee would not use to me such threate as his *master* sent me by him although hee Comanded him to doe; in prsence of my wife and my servant in my owne house in Bristoll

Since *which* tyme hee threatned me that yf I would not assure him for certeyne moneys *which* I oughte him not, hee would stabb me & in the end, forced me to bee bounde to him for xxx£ *which* I had paide to others as I had theire bills to showe and would neyther allowe me it nor suffer me to sue the *partie* I paide it to, & had theire bill for Receipt thereof but toke the bill from me and forced me to become bounde besides tohim most wrongfully and moreover threatened me that yf hee had met me before I came bounde to him hee would have killed me this was spoken in George Whites house in Corne Streete in presence of *George* White, my wife, and my servant *Richard* Griffith when he sealed myne acquittance

Sithence *which* tyme alsoe on the second day of Juanary 1598, I meetinge the saide Dowle & his man Thomas Yerburye in Bristoll hee strocke me and ranne after me, threatninge to stabb me, And I having not anie thinge in my hand but a pen and ynckhorne Ranne from him tyll I founde a stone And then I turned against him to defend my selfe and still threateninge to stabb me and soe his man drue him awaye, or elce surelye hee had killed me at that Instant tyme and all bicause I should not reveale his sinister dealing towards her *majestie* & doth threaten still to kill me and Cut of my nose

Per me *Thomas* Watkins
parte

John Andrewes the Customer outwards in the Porte of Bristoll kepeth one William Magoth as his Clarke in the Custome house of Bristoll whoe kept victueling and lodged marchants and others aswell strangers as Irishe men & doth buy and sell divers kinde of Comodities as secke and such other thinge contrary to her *majesties* lawes for Custome Causes *which* is a meanes to deceyve her *majestie* of her dueties and alsoe letteth out moneys to Irishe men by waie of adventure for iiis iiiid the pounce

There is comonlye more butter carried and transported from Bristoll in a yeere to them that are not her *majeste* frinds as in to Spayne & other places, then from anie other Porte besides in England to the hurte of her *majeste* Countrye & subiecte for there went out of Wales this last yeer 1598 in a French man viii C kinderkins of Butler laden by marchantes of Bristol and others as it is all the Countrye over in Comon speech but yf a poore man speake there of in Bristoll hee shall bee ill thoughte of forever by the *merchantes* & besides the bills of Averidge is not executed in such sorte by the Customer outwards as the lawe requireth him to doe whereby victuelles and other *prohibited* wares passeth the more a great deale then they would or could doe yf her her *majesties* orders of the *exchequer* were kept or the statute *performed* by the officers in that case *provided.*

Moreover yf the Customer outwards knowe of anie shipping going for Spayne before their entrie bee taken in the Custome house hee will not enter their shipp unles hee may have xl or ls for his labor and then hee will enter it, this was spoken by William Dawson of Bristoll stranger in Thomas Watkins shopp in Bristoll in Anno 1598 since Michellmas 1598 whoe is *parte* owner of a shipp that went for Spayne whoe willed me not to tell Andrewes nor his man thereof but yf they shold Chaunce to aske me, whether they were bound by their *Chartre partye* yf I should say for France or elce they should pay money to him before they passed yf he know otherwise./

Per me Thomas Watkins
parte

Item the saide Dowle kepeth one John Langton as his Clarke in the Custome house of Bristoll whoe doth nowe adventure to sea dyvers kynds of Comodities and hath used it a longe tyme although hee oughte not soe to doe beinge that hee is an officers Clarke for hee hath byne under the Comptrolers moste parte anie tyme this sixe yeeres And nowe is Clarke for the saide Dowles whereby her *majesty* is often tymes deceyved.

Yf all these and other abuses be not better forsene unto, then they bee in her *majeste* Porte of Bristoll it will bee to the greate endamaging of her highenes Countrye and the strengthninge of her enemies

There is never a shipp *which* Cometh from the Straits *which* will yeld her *majesty* 50£ or 60£ Custome but the saide Officers and Waitors devideth xx£ or xxv£ of the saide shipp yelding soe much and if it be lesse then they take xx marks and this is a Contynuall and comon practyce

Besides there be nonesince Michellmas 1599 gone for the Straights dyvers shippes laden with noe small store of Candels Tallowe and tanned leather and Corne for Spayne to her *majesties* enimies *which* will breed an ill inconveynience if it bee not prevented and pore men in Bristoll may not once speake against these abuses for his privie if hee doe hee shall bee undone by the best of the City

And there bee likewise gon out of Bristol since Michellmas 1599 shippes laden with corne for Spayne Contrary to her *Majestes* pleasure and the lawe for some *merchants* have lycence to transporte grayne but it is to her *majestes* frinds and have their *Coquettes* made accordingely and yet not *withstanding* they Carrye it to her *majestes* utter enimies *which* is & willbee used to her highnes unlesse the Statute made in Primo of her *majeste* concerning the *delivery* of the bill of Averrdge at the comming home of the shipp by the *master* purser or marchant bee executed *which* nowe is not as it should bee for they doe before they goe out deliver a bill of Averidge to the officer but it is of nothinge more than is entred And after that then the marchants ladeth their munitioun victualls and other prohibited Wares & soe her *majestie* is yerely deceyved & her Country injured yf that Statute may bee putt in use nowe at the Cominge home of the Shippes from Spayne and the Streits there will bee founde such a pece of worke for *prohibited* goods as was not in Bristoll this xx yeeres and before when the *merchant* goe for Spayne and will not have it knowne, when the shipp cometh home they will enter the shipp from France or from the Streits Contrary to the lawe and her *majesties* orders with Consent of the Customer Inwards there hath byne noe lesse then seaven shippes of Bristoll taken in Spayne as Confiscate *which* tradinge thither as scotts & Irishemen *which* had noe small store of *prohibited* wares as

Edward Lewis Thomas Badmelge Walter Thomas John Walts Regnold
 Barnesley John Fynnes & others canne certifye the same, Besides one
 Thomas Pauer an aldermans sonne of Bristoll hath since Michellmas
 1599 fraighted a shipp with Corne from Uphill to the Islands in Spaine & one
 Edward Yeroth a hooper hath alsoe freyghted another barke as one Walter
 Knighte of Sante Ives in Cornewall canne Certify the
 same; yf these thinges bee not prevented it will breed a great danger
 & if poore men speake of it in Bristoll hee is noe honest man & all the
 meanes that may bee shalbee Wrougte to hurte him.

**A note of some shippes which came from Spayne
 with Englishe mens goods unto Bristoll**

February the viith 1599

In the moone of St Malloes *burthen* lx tons
 Thomas Locat *Master* from St Lucas
 Robert Aldworth of Bristoll marchant for
 49 butte secks 10 pipes teynt 42 pipes
 bastard the purser 4 buttes

the same daye

In the Sallomon of Ganvile in france *burthen*
 lxxii tons Lewis Debellion *Master* from St Lucas
 Bennet sharpe of Southampton *merchant*
 for lxxi tons of secks

the xviiiith day

In the Flower deluice of St Malloes *burthen*
 xxx tons Peter Beter Beshet *master* from St Lucas
 Bernet sharpe of Southampton *merchant*
 for & xviii tons of Secks

the same daye

In the Antelopp of Carcady in Scotland
burthen C tons James Leere *Master* from Cadez
 Richard James sixe butte secks
 George White xii buttes
 John Roberts xxvi butte
 Migaell Quicke John Simple & Vincent
 Sadamar 126 buttes

the sixth day

In the Desire of Buraeeth from St Lucas
 James Dawne of Barnestable. 43 tons secks
 John Barker of Bristoll - 4 tons secks

the xxist day

In the James Desire of monitresse from Cadez
 John Hopkins John Fowers William Greaves
 and Thomas White for 38 butte serke

the 26th day

In the James of Saint Malloes from St Lucas
 Thomas marchant of Southampton for 100 butte seckes

the xxvth of Marche 1597.

In the Pellican of Bristoll from Welvey
 Robt Aldworth Mathewe
 Haviland Christopher Cumey Peter Goughe
 Richard: Powell *merchantes*.

Aprill the 13th

In the Violet of Bristoll from Welvey
 Robert Aldworth John Aldworth John Hopkins
 Richard Powell, Mathew
 Haviland and William Paddy *merchantes*

the 18th

In the minikyn of Bristoll entred from
 Rochell but came from Welvey
 John Love and Company *merchants*

the sixth

In the Swanne of Gloucester entred for
 Tolon but came from the Cannaries or
 ? george: white & John Robertes *merchants*

the xxth

In the hercules of Bristoll from the
 Canaries Robert Aldworth John Barker
 Mathew Haviland & Company for 83 pipes
 Canary wyne

xxist day

In the John of Bristoll entred from
 Tolon but came from the Canaries
 William Cole and Company xxxix pipes
 Canary wyne

4th July

In the harry of Bristoll from St Michell
 John Younge & Company *merchants*

In the gouldon lyon of Bristoll
entred from Tolon but came
from Aymounty in Spayne.
George White John Roberts
Walter Thomas and *george*: Lane *merchants*