

The Chesters of Bristol:

A Tudor Merchant Dynasty



Contents:

○ Introduction	3
○ Methodology	7
○ William Chester the Elder	12
○ James Chester and William Chester the Whitawer	21
○ Thomas Chester	22
○ Dominick Chester	45
○ Conclusion	52
○ Bibliography	58

Illustrations:

○ Figure 1 – Ordinance List Positions	8
○ Figure 2 – Thomas Chester’s property on Broad Street	24
○ Figure 3 – Thomas’ Almondsbury Estate	25
○ Figure 4 – Mercantile representations on the Common Council	35
○ Figure 5 – Composition of Bristol Council	36
○ Figure 6 – Thomas Chester’s Council influence	43
○ Figure 7 – Arms of the Society of Merchant Venturers	49

Introduction:

The Chesters of Bristol can be traced back to Henry Chester, Fourteenth-century merchant and bailiff of the city, but it was not until the life of his grandson William that they came to full prominence. From this foundation they were to develop into one of the most affluent mercantile dynasties of Sixteenth-century Bristol, influencing all facets of city society, politics and economics.

In attempting to construct a detailed picture of such a large and sporadically documented family, depth of analysis will most often be constrained by availability of source material. For some characters it will be possible to get a full and detailed picture of their personal situation, marriages, offspring and death, but little or no information about their business or political dealings. For others one may uncover material that will describe their professional or political life without giving any indication of their beliefs or personal characteristics. The scope of examination may occasionally seem arbitrary but, due to the limitations of source material, this is not without reason.

Whilst the examples of families such as the Chesters are interesting in their own right, the most important function of biographical investigations such as this is to elucidate not only immediate Bristol history but wider economic, political and social issues of the day. Over the course of this thesis it will be crucial to connect individual events in the family's life with trends and themes running throughout the period. For example, did the rising wealth of the Chesters cause them to take their place as part of the rising 'urban gentry' or did they, like so many before and since, long for the security and prestige of joining the landed classes? This, along with many other issues, will be considered throughout the investigation.

The initial divisions of the thesis will be character-based rather than thematic. This is because, as suggested earlier, neither the economic, social or political elements of life existed in a vacuum; they were interlinked to the degree that a chronological ordering of all the facets of the life of the period is more fruitful than a self-contained view of any one theme. Therefore each member of the family will be dealt with in turn, with an overarching thematic analysis in the conclusion.

The Sixteenth century was a period of turbulence and change not just in the city of Bristol but all across Europe. As the 1400s drew to a close, having already lost the certainties of the Bordeaux wine-cloth exchange, Bristol entered what Sacks refers to as a 'bleak new season in its economic history'.¹ This was to prove instrumental in the long run success of the city however as the diversification of Bristol's trade and its recasting as a centre for export and the import and redistribution of 'foreign wares'² was to lay the foundations for the city's vast prosperity in the centuries to follow. No longer could Bristol's hundreds of merchants rely on steady trade and good returns from a familiar English dependency; trade had to be found and profits created in what was to prove a period of harsh mercantile 'natural selection', which eventually more than halved the number involved in overseas trade.³

This vast shift in the quantities of merchants operating in Bristol clearly did not occur without a consequential shift in the socio-political makeup of the city. Gone was the Fifteenth-century dominance of the cloth trade, replaced by close-knit fellowships of merchants, later to be formalised as the 'Merchant Venturers'. The nature of the merchant community was predominantly a function of the trade in which it was involved; more adventurous enterprise required credit agreements and joint ventures, the consequences of which were the formation of closer ties and the concentration of trade.

¹ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700*, (California, 1991) p.24

² See E.T. Jones, 'Illicit business: accounting for smuggling in mid-sixteenth century Bristol', *Economic History Review*, 54 (2001) and D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.52

³ For a full discussion of the depression of Bristol's trade see D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, Chapter 1

The end result of this was the long-run political domination of the city by the 'mere merchants', with decisions made for their benefit by the councils that they dominated. The formation of such groups and subsequent recasting of society will prove to be amongst the defining events of the period and one which will be returned to time and again.

The religious upheavals of the Sixteenth century are well documented, and the underlying reasons for their occurrence are not directly relevant to the story of the Chesters.⁴ What is important however are the various social, political and economic consequences of the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries, one of the most significant events in England since the Norman invasion. These cataclysmic events were important not only because of their impact on individual spirituality, but also because of the opportunities they created for those willing to exploit them.

In order to structure the investigation properly, a set of standard issues will have to be dealt with for each individual, invariably answered only as fully as the available material allows. The first of these will be their personal life: when were they born; when did they die; were they married and if so to whom; did they have children; what do we know about their place of residence; do we have any evidence as to what they may have been like and finally who were their friends? Although of little wider significance this will create the skeleton of each life, providing a context for more important social and economic issues .

The second issue, and possibly in the context of the period the most important, is their economic life: What trade were they involved in; where did they operate; how significant were their businesses; with whom did they associate themselves; were there any particularly revealing episodes that we know of;

⁴ For a full discussion of the reformation and its causes see J. Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, (Allen & Unwin, 1971)

were they corrupt in their dealings; did they inherit any money and finally to whom did they leave their wealth?

Thirdly, and partially intertwined with the previous section, is an investigation into the political side of their life: were they ever a public official; what responsibilities did they have; were they ever corrupt in their actions; who were their allies and opponents, and are there any particularly interesting periods or occurrences in their lives?

Finally, an analysis of the religious side of each character must take place: how did they react to the Reformation; what, if any, were their professed beliefs; did they profit from the sale of monastic lands; what were their involvements with religious groups; and finally, what can be inferred from the religious preamble of their will?

Naturally, most of these questions must necessarily remain unanswered for most members of the Chester family. It may even be the case that there are some areas of the family's past which will forever remain hidden. As has been suggested already, any picture which is painted will depend almost solely on the quantities of material available. If the evidence is not there then the story cannot be told.

Methodology:

Individual influence as demonstrated by the City Ordinances⁵

When Bristol's civil administration passed new laws they were recorded as city ordinances, signed by all councillors present. The mayor's name came first, followed by all other members. Although at first these lists may seem to be useful only as an indicator of the composition of the council it is possible to interpret the signatures in such a way that an added layer of information can be gained from them. The fact that the mayor was the first name on the list leads on to the possibility that the order in which one signed was a mark of seniority. In order to test this hypothesis it is necessary to take the position in which the name appears and the year of the ordinance and establish a relationship between them. When this is done for a selection of councillors over number of years it becomes clear that list position is indicative of council influence.

For the period in which the lists of names are available there is not a regular Chester presence on the council, with the possible exception of Thomas. For this reason the relationship between list position and significance must be established using characters outside of the family and then applied to the Chesters where possible.

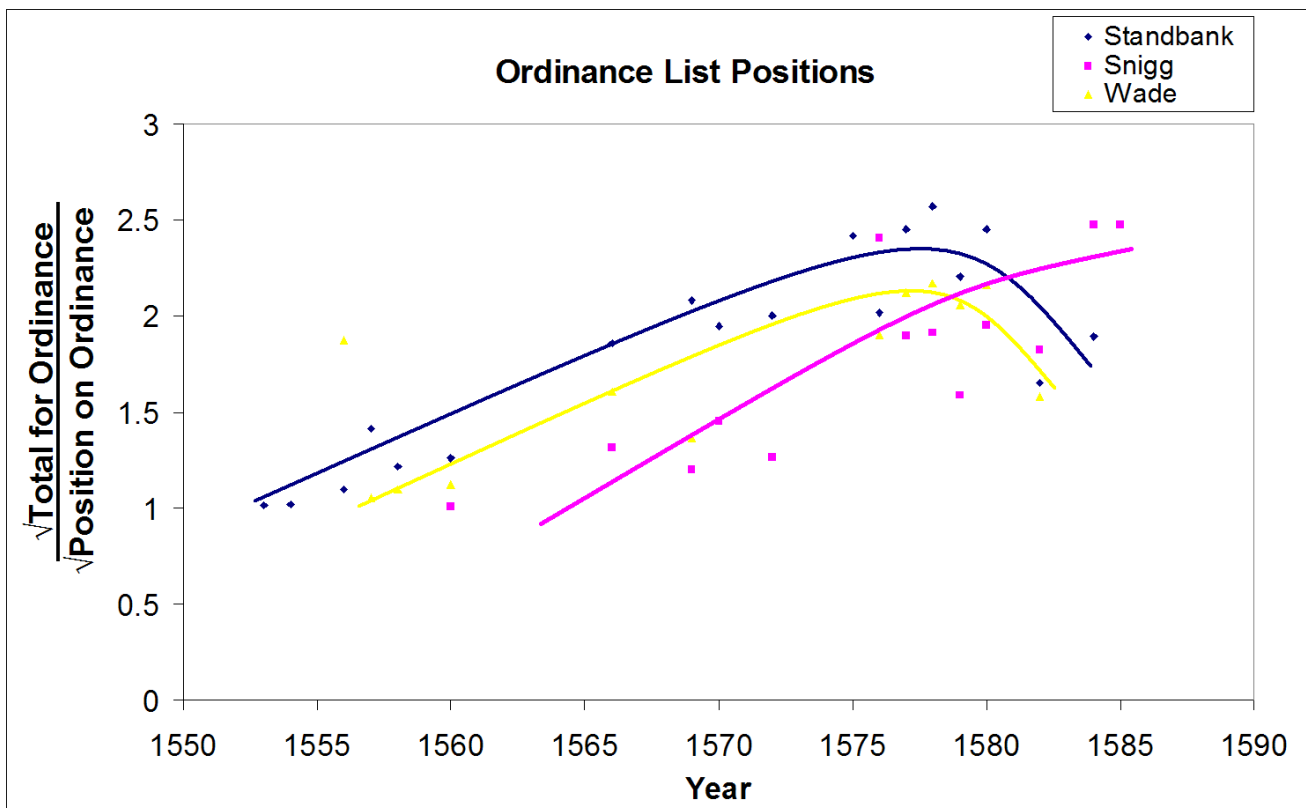
The three councillors chosen for this purpose are Anthony Standbank, John Wade and George Snigg. All were contemporaries of the Chesters, and more importantly, all make frequent appearances on the lists. In order to establish the significance of the ordinances the relationship between each man's position on the list and the ordinance year must be established.⁶ Firstly their distance from the top must

⁵ See Appendix 1

⁶ Implicit in this analysis is the assumption that as time progresses a councillor will tend to become more influential

be calculated, and then adjusted to take into account the total number of signatories.⁷ In order to do this a function of the former is divided by a function of the latter. This function takes the simple form of the square root; this makes the data more presentable without in any way distorting the results.⁸ The product is called the ‘influence coefficient’. The coefficients are then plotted onto a scatter diagram against the ordinance year, giving a long run trend of ‘influence coefficients’.

Figure 1:



When this is done and trend lines are calculated a very clear pattern is visible, with a strong positive correlation between the year of the ordinance and each man’s adjusted position on the list. This continues until the end of their career; at which point a slight downward trend is observed, confirming

⁷ If this adjustment did not take place then there would be no difference between being half way down a list of forty and at the bottom of a council of twenty

⁸ End formula = $\sqrt{\text{total members}}/\sqrt{\text{individual's position}}$.

that position on the list was not a direct mark of seniority, but more likely of influence. As each man aged (for example Standbank was most likely well into his 60s by the 1580s) it is probable that his influence on council waned, signified by his fall down the list.⁹ In the case of Standbank a separate study has shown that his power, measured in terms of wealth and offices held, grew until the later 1570s, and waned thereafter, in his old age, conforming to and confirming the trend demonstrated by the graph.

Now that it has been shown that a councillor's position on the ordinance list can be used as a proxy for his importance within the council it will be possible to get a fair idea of how important each member of the Chester family was within the civic administration. Although this will by no means be a perfect measure it will enable a more accurate snapshot than would otherwise be achievable.

Composition of Council¹⁰

When the 'influence coefficients' for various groups and professions on the city ordinance lists are aggregated it is possible to calculate a fair approximation of the balance of power within the council at any one time. The 'influence coefficient'¹¹ is calculated for every councillor on each list, which each 'coefficient' then worked out as a percentage of the 'total influence'¹² of the list.¹³ Using the apprentice records the professions of each man is established, with the 'influence coefficients' then aggregated for each group. It is then possible to see not only what percentage of the council was comprised of different professions, but actually how senior the positions that each profession held were. This will be

⁹ Only applicable to Snigg and Standbank as Wade appears to still be in the ascendancy when the records end.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2

¹¹ See 'Individual influence as demonstrated by the City Ordinances' for discussion of 'influence coefficient'

¹² Aggregate of the 'individual influences' – naturally this will vary depending upon the size of the list.

¹³ Because the 'total influence' varies, in order to make lists of various years comparable (as each list has a different number of total members they give different aggregates of individual influence coefficients) each individual influence is calculated as a percentage of the aggregate, rather than as an absolute value.

especially important when it comes to the 1560s debates over the extension of the letters patent of the Merchant Venturers.

Apprentice records¹⁴

There exist detailed records of every apprenticeship undertaken in Bristol from 1532 to the end of the Sixteenth century. As well as the names of the master, his wife, the apprentice and his father, they also describe the trade of the master. Because of the information each entry provides they can be an invaluable tool for identifying the occupation of an individual, and because of the complete nature of the entire set of documents they can help to identify trends in the employment of the city and each man's place within it. Whilst a lack of documented apprentices does not necessarily signify a small business, a large quantity of apprentices is certainly indicative of a large-scale operation. Each man taken on not only had to be kept busy with work, but also had to be maintained for the duration of their apprenticeship. One final point that must be made concerns the age at which apprentices would be taken on. Apprenticeships could not be offered until the master was a freeman, which required the undertaking of a period of apprenticeship which would last seven years and last until at least the age of 21, and secondly until a business had grown to the extent that an apprentice could be maintained. Because of this, anyone who was supporting a trainee would have been at least in their mid-20s.

Therefore apprentice records will be used throughout the course of the investigation not only as indicators of profession, but also occasionally of prosperity, and even to provide a rough indication of date of birth.

Religious preambles as statements of belief

¹⁴ See Appendix 3

Wills can provide a bounty of information, much of which is not immediately apparent. One example of this is the preamble. In the tempestuous religious atmosphere of Sixteenth-century England it was not just an introduction but a statement of religious beliefs. It may be fruitful to examine these preambles with the aim of extracting as much as is possible about the personal spirituality of the Chesters.¹⁵

Wills

One of the most useful building blocks for any biographical study is the Last Will and Testament of the character in question. At the start of the investigations for this thesis a number of wills for the key figures in the Chester family were transcribed in order that they might serve to illuminate various areas of the family's life. Shortly after the completion of this task an old and obscure genealogy of the Chester family of Bristol was discovered, within which could be found a selection of transcribed wills for various Chester's from the Fifteenth to Seventeenth centuries. Whilst generally serving to reinforce the transcriptions already completed, the book did add new characters to the picture, as well as adding documents and records seemingly no longer available. Whilst the analysis of the genealogy is very brief its facts and dates, generally already known, seem reliable and have helped to confirm and supplement what has already been discovered.

¹⁵ For a full discussion T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds.) *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and interpreting the probate records of early modern England*, (Oxford, 2000)

William Chester (The Elder)

Described variously as the ‘the naturaleste Cytizen that was in bristow in our tyme’¹⁶ and ‘that double knave’¹⁷, William Chester was indisputably one of the most prominent merchants and citizens of early Sixteenth-century Bristol. By the end of his years he had left his father’s respectable All Saints townhouse for a far larger property in St. James and held properties ranging from a Dominican friary to a country estate.

As is often the case in this period, it is not possible to know William’s exact date of birth, although rough estimates are possible. We know his father John died in 1489, and this means that William must have been born nine months after this, at the very latest. The next clue is given by the date of his term as sheriff, 1522. Because, as Sacks says, ‘New members of the council were usually chosen as sheriff as a form of entry fee’¹⁸ it is possible to guess that he would have been a moderately young man when he served his term, most likely not far past his 30th year. We can therefore set an approximate period of between 1485 and 1489 on William’s birth, most likely leaning towards the later date. Fortunately, dates of death are far easier to establish, with William’s Will proved on the 8th November 1559. We can therefore estimate that at the time of his passing William would have been in his early 70s, a very respectable age for the period.

Over the course of his life William was married twice, first to Anne Chester, daughter of either Maurice Large or former mayor John Ware.¹⁹ Following her death he was to marry Maude Chester,

¹⁶ *Complaint of the Bristol Tuckers, 1568*, p.92, tr. Fox, F.F. & Taylor, J. in *Some Account of the Guild of Weavers in Bristol: Chiefly from MSS* (Bristol, 1889), pp. 91-4

¹⁷ Letters foreign and domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 14, Folio 184 (3)

¹⁸ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.163

¹⁹ Waters, R.E.C., *Genealogical memoirs of the families of Chester of Bristol, Barton Regis, London, and Almondsbury, Descended from Henry Chester, Sheriff of Bristol 1470*, (Reeves and Turner, 1881), p.9

widow of William Pykes, a prominent citizen and another former mayor. With Anne he fathered five children, James, William, Thomas, Mary and Dominick, all of whom survived into adulthood.

The next area of William's personal life to be investigated is his real estate. Once he had the means to do so, William was to leave his familial home in All Saints Parish for a larger dwelling in St. James Parish, three properties he had converted into one glorious mercantile house.²⁰ On top of this we know that he was the owner of 'houses and lands called Rodford in the parish of Westerley', 'Hayette [House] and the grounds about the house within the hedge, and 15 acres adjoining' 'the Black Fryars at Bristol', a 'great orchyarde at the [Black] Fryars with the little garden, where the cloister there was', 'the lodge and two gardens on Mychal Hill, behind the White Fryars', 'two houses upon St James Back', 'a house before St Stephens Church door' and finally 'houses and gardens in St. Phillip's parish'²¹. As wealthy merchants approached the ends of their lives it was not uncommon for them to invest their money into real estate, and to have acquired a portfolio of property as significant as William's demonstrates a man of quite considerable means, especially when coupled with the extravagant household belongings left in his will. Vast quantities of gold, hangings, gilt items, clothes and various valuable apparel are mentioned, further demonstrating William Chester to be a man of considerable wealth. Although the exact nature of his holdings would seem to be for the most part of purely academic interest, this may not turn out to be the case. The issue of 'gentrification' in the sixteenth century is one to which more attention will be paid later, with information of this nature possibly invaluable.

Although it is nigh on impossible to get a full picture of a person's character from the sort of records available, there are a few pointers as to the kind of man William may have been. Foremost among these

²⁰ *Will of William Chester, Alderman of Bristol, Gloucestershire, 8/11/1559 PROB 11/42B*

²¹ *Will of William Chester, Alderman*

are the charitable bequests left in his will. He leaves not only ‘six pence every week for ever to the six poor people in the Almshouse which is upon St. James’ Backe’, but £10 for the ‘to the poor householders and poor people’.²² He is also not neglectful of interests of his own, offering 40 shillings ‘towards the repaying of the hyghways to Westerley’,²³ the location of his country estate. One very interesting detail of William’s will concerns his bequests to ‘the parish church of St. James’, to which he leaves ‘a chasuble of grene velvett and a cloth of Tyssue: and to the parish priest there fyve shillings and eight pens.’²⁴ This donation becomes very interesting when seen in the context of the religious environment of the day, combined with what will emerge about William’s spirituality. The charitable donations found in his will appear to be moderately generous for the period, roughly comparable with those of the wealthier John Smythe.²⁵

Now that the bare skeleton of William’s life has been constructed it is possible to begin to add some flesh. There are few explicit and consistent records as to his trading interests, especially since he was not a regular business associate of John Smythe.²⁶ Despite this it is possible to deduce his profession: there is one record of ‘William Chester Pointmaker’ doing a deal with Smythe; there is an apprentice record from 1545 listing him as pointmaker;²⁷ and the customs account records him shipping £257 worth of diverse goods between 1542 and 1546.²⁸ The only possible conclusion is that he was a merchant and a pointmaker, making and selling ‘points’ (laces)²⁹ as well as involving himself in a variety of overseas ventures. Upon inspection of the customs accounts it is also possible to tell that William was not trading overseas in 1515/16, due to the conspicuous absence of his name. The customs

²² *Will of William Chester, Alderman*

²³ *Will of William Chester, Alderman*

²⁴ *Will of William Chester, Alderman*

²⁵ Vanes, J. (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, (London, 1974), Introduction

²⁶ *The Ledger of John Smythe* is one of the best sources for information of this sort concerning mid-16th century Bristol

²⁷ Ralph, E. & Hardwick N.M. (eds.), *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book, 1532-1565: Part 2, 1542-1552*, (Bristol Record Society, 1980), n.577

²⁸ *Bristol customs accounts: 1541/2 1542/3 1545/6*: TNA e122 21/10, 199/4, 21/5 (Information received from Dr Evan Jones)

²⁹ Points were an integral component in the manufacture of all varieties of garments and shoes and a traditional trade of Bristol.

accounts not only reveal when he traded, but also where. As one may expect, his main ports of call were located in Ireland and on the Continent. It appears that William's trade with the Continent involved exporting large quantities of cloth to exchange for wine and salt. These were returned to Bristol where they would have either been sold or, on a smaller scale, re-exported to Ireland. Returning from Ireland, William appears to have brought raw goods, primarily fish to be sold or deer, sheep and lamb skins, most likely for manufacture of export goods.³⁰

As has already been suggested, in Sixteenth-century Bristol professional success would not only have determined income but social status and political influence.³¹ Therefore, when attempting to determine the scale of William's trade the best indicator is the eventual size of his fortune and political influence. As was previously demonstrated by examining William's will, when he died he was a man of quite considerable wealth, leaving very significant quantities of liquid and landed property, and can therefore be seen to have ended up as a very significant merchant.

The second indicator, William's political position, is far better documented, with explicit references to his time as alderman, mayor and even Member of Parliament scattered throughout sources of the period, as well as numerous events of interest and significance. The first role William took on was that of sheriff in 1522; from this date on it is almost certain that he was a permanent fixture on the city Council, although this cannot be known due to gaps in the city ordinance lists until 1551.³² We do know however that William was mayor of the city during one of the most interesting and tumultuous periods of its history. The Reformation of the Church was undoubtedly one of the defining events of early modern English history. Vast monastic estates all over the country were sold off, representing a huge proportion of the total private property of England. Inevitably much of the responsibility for each

³⁰ *Bristol customs accounts: 1541/2 1542/3 1545/6*

³¹ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p.195 n.1

³² Stanford, M (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol 1506-1598* (Bristol Record Society xxvi, 1990)

area fell to local administrations, which in Bristol's case were the mayor and Common Council. Because of this it was not uncommon for the men responsible for action on the ground to significantly benefit from the sale of monastic properties. This was no different in Bristol, where "The Black Friars had already been granted to William Chester, who as Mayor had taken part in the negotiations of 1538-39"³³ and had paid only £37 10s for the property, well below the market price.³⁴ The actions of William were not always self-interested. After arguing that it was built by 'the foundations and purchasing of the town, built by ancient burgesses at their cost',³⁵ William and his fellow councillors requested the use of the Grey Friars for communal good. They argue that 'Many tenements in the town are fallen into decay for want of timber and stones, and the quay and town walls are in like ruin, which we purpose to repair and also to make a wharf.'³⁶ Surprisingly their proposed use of the friary seems to have been put into practice, possibly indicating that the cynicism with which councils are usually judged is not appropriate in this case.³⁷

It was established in 'Methodologies' that the order in which councillors signed city ordinances was indicative of their influence on the council. Unfortunately William's name only appears three times on the lists,³⁸ making it impossible to construct any form of time series. Some analysis is still possible however. Because his first appearance on the list is fifth we can assume that he was a prominent councillor by this time, although given that he had been mayor twelve years previously this should be no revelation. Both his other appearances on the list occur in 1553 and both times he is third, reinforcing the picture of William as a very senior councilman of the period. The evidence provided by the ordinance lists is naturally only circumstantial, but it certainly corresponds with the picture of

³³ Latimer, J. (ed.), *Calendar of the charters &c. of the City and County of Bristol*, (Bristol, 1909), p.26

³⁴ Latimer (ed.), *Calendar of the charters*, p.26

³⁵ Letters Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII, Volume 13, Folio 322 (Vol. II)

³⁶ Letters Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII, Volume 13, Folio 322 (Vol. II)

³⁷ Latimer (ed.), *Calendar of the charters*, p.27

³⁸ These three entrances constitute every list that exists until around 1555; unfortunately there is simply a lack of ordinances!

William that is emerging: a prominent local citizen who involved with the running of Bristol at the very highest levels.

It is also worth noting that in 1555 William served a term as MP for Bristol. Although it appears that no evidence remains of his actions, this once again serves to reinforce the emerging picture of a man of influence.

In a time when religion was highly politicised, personal beliefs could hugely influence the decisions a man made and the outcomes he achieved. There seems to be no finer example of religious a pragmatist than William Chester. This flexibility was not always admired. One radical reformer wrote:

I call Davy Broke knave, and gorbelly knave, and that drunken Gervys, and that lubber Antony Payne, and sloven William Yong, and that double knave William Chester, for sometimes he is with us and sometimes he is with the knaves: but he shall be a long knave for it, and his wife a foolish drab; for she is the enemy of God's word.³⁹

This implies that Chester was neither radical Protestant nor Catholic, with fluid allegiances and opinions that he would adapt to the situation at hand. This is reinforced by his bequests to the parish church. The 'chasuble of grene velvett', 'an ecclesiastical vestment, a kind of sleeveless mantle covering the body and shoulders, worn over the alb and stole by the celebrant at Mass'⁴⁰ is an item no true protestant would have left to a church. The same can be said of the 'cloth of Tyssue'. This was the most valuable material available at the time, with the 1558 Book of Rates valuing it at £3 6s. 8d. per

³⁹ *Letters foreign and domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 14, Folio 184 (3)

⁴⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*

yard.⁴¹ Contrast this with a cloth of Gold, valued at only 26s. 8d., and it becomes clear quite what an extravagant and ostentatious gift this was. It is only possible to speculate as to the motivation behind these gifts: it is possible that they were an unwanted remnant of his purchase of the Dominican friary; they could have been an inheritance from his uncle John,⁴² or he could have purchased them himself in order to leave it to the church. Whatever his reasons, it is clear that William was no fanatical Protestant reformer.

Despite his obvious leanings, it appears to be equally true that William was not a devout Catholic. His will does not contain the references to the Saints or Virgin as would be found in a strict Catholic will, nor does it contain the traditional requests for penitential practices that would appear in a traditional will. On top of this he does not request the reestablishment of any monastic houses.⁴³

One final point of note is the particular insult levelled at William's wife by the radical Protestant. She is called 'an enemy of God's word', which is an explicit reference to her faith. Protestantism was characterised by preaching from the Gospels, considered to be the actual word of God. By suggesting that she is an enemy of 'God's word', the attacker is suggesting that she is against the Protestant methods of preaching and therefore has High Church or Catholic leanings. The full implications of William's lukewarm or flexible religious beliefs and their relationship with his involvement in the dissolution may prove to be very interesting and will be discussed in the conclusion.

It seems that William's spiritual pragmatism was not always to the detriment of his townfolk. Seyers writes that the riots that followed the religious reforms of Edward VI 'were for the most part quenched

⁴¹ T.S. Willan, *A Tudor Book of Rates*, (Manchester, 1562), p.16

⁴² His father's brother John Chester was Prior of Barlynch

⁴³ His will was written in a period when this would have by no means a risky or unusual sentiment – nearly ten monasteries had been reformed under the reign of Mary Tudor.

by the industry of Mr. William Chester, who took great pains likewise to secure pardon for the unruly citizens who were guilty [of riot]'.⁴⁴

Examples of this kind are interesting not just for the light they shed on William's religious views, but also on the kind of man that he may have been. Although there may have been ulterior motives for his actions, the most likely explanation is one of well intentioned civic concern. This picture of William Chester is reinforced by the 1568 'complaint of the Tuckers'. In an attack upon Thomas Chester's role in the monopolisation of trade, William Chester is held up as an example of a most decent, public spirited man, 'who wolde wee beleeve have spent mucche monney in the Cyties behalff'. Quite clearly the tuckers regarded William as a civic-minded man, possibly opposing the monopolisation of trade. This analysis of William's character will later be confirmed with his identification as the probable author of a document of 1552 recommending a larger membership to the Society of Merchant Venturers. Although this issue could be discussed here its relevance to a larger and more significant debate of the period necessitates its postponement until the later section on Thomas Chester.

William Chester has been shown to have been one of the most powerful and significant citizens of early Sixteenth Bristol. Pointmaker and merchant, he achieved a status in the economic, civic and political life of the city matched by few of his contemporaries. He appears to have been a decent, civic-minded and anti-monopolistic man, generous in both his will and his civic dealings. He was responsible for pardoning rioters, imprisoning 'Gentlemen' who raped 8-year old girls⁴⁵ and securing the repair of civic buildings. He was clearly not loved by all however; ambiguous and lukewarm in his religious views, he was more than happy to purchase desecrated friaries for well below their worth, despite his

⁴⁴ Ms. Calendar of Bristol, quoted by Seyer in his *Memoirs of Bristol*, vol. II, p.231

⁴⁵ *Letters Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 13, Folio 110 (Vol. II)

apparent Catholic leanings. Despite this, he appears to have been a popular and trusted man, as demonstrated by his long council career, two mayoralties and his four years as an MP.

James and William the Younger

William's eldest sons appear to be peripheral characters in the story of the Chesters, serving primarily as contextualisation for their more significant relatives. Despite being moderately prosperous, their political dealings were very limited, with William never appearing on a City ordinance and James only present once. What is important to mention is both men's trade: James was a mercer⁴⁶ and William was a Whitawer,⁴⁷ and both men conducted prosperous business. This information will be relevant to the debates concerning the monopolisation of trade.

⁴⁶ See appendix 3

⁴⁷ See appendix 3. A whitawer was a worker of skins, converting them into white leather.

Thomas Chester

It is with the life of Thomas that the Chester family was to reach the apex of its Sixteenth century significance. He became even more noteworthy than his father, working at the very highest levels of both civic and private enterprise.

As usual it is hard to pinpoint an exact date of birth, although estimates can always be made. As the third son of William Chester we can assume that he would not have been born before 1515, at which point his father would have been approximately 25.⁴⁸ In 1544 Thomas took on his first apprentice; because this required not only being free of the city but, as stated earlier, enough capital to establish a business⁴⁹ it is likely that he would have been into his mid 20s,⁵⁰ therefore providing 1520 as the latest realistic date of his birth. We can estimate that Thomas Chester was born sometime between 1515 and 1520, with 1517/8 seeming most likely.⁵¹ As ever, a date of death is far easier to establish, with his burial taking place on the 24th September 1583, when he was aged around 65. Although there is no other supporting evidence still available, Waters suggests that Thomas may have died during an epidemic of some sort, with his death occurring in the same week as those of two other Alderman, all of whom ‘lay unburied at the same time’.⁵²

Thomas did not produce children in the same quantity as the rest of his family, with only one male heir, William, alive at the time of his death.⁵³ Thomas’ daughter Anne also survived him and within his

⁴⁸ Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p.9

⁴⁹ Although businesses could be also funded through inheritance or marriage, it is unlikely that either would have been available to Thomas; he was not to access his fathers’ estate until 1558 whilst his wife was not from a family of significant enough wealth that they could have provided him with an immediate business.

⁵⁰ Thrupp, S., *the merchant class of Medieval London: 1300-1500* (Chicago, 1948), pp.192-194

⁵¹ This tallies with Water’s unreferenced date of Thomas’ birth

⁵² Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p.32

⁵³ *Will of Thomas Chester, Alderman of Bristol, Gloucestershire, 9/2/1584, PROB 11/66*

lifetime married to John Caplin, MP for Winchester. His second son Edward did not outlive his father, although it is not known how or when he died.⁵⁴

By the terms of his father's will Thomas was to inherit '[a house called] Hayette and the grounds about the house within the hedge, and 15 acres adjoining'.⁵⁵ The house was most likely part of the lands of Rodford in Westerleigh left to Thomas' elder brother James. Unfortunately no confirmed records of Hayette exist, although the attachment of 15 acres of land suggests a medium-sized farmhouse. A property of this description and location is mentioned in a history of the rural houses of the area, although whether this is Hayette is not known.⁵⁶ It is clear that any inheritance from his father was to become insignificant however, since his eventual property holdings dwarfed those of the rest of his family. The first of his acquisitions came in 1558 when he purchased a significant amount of property on Broad Street. It is known for certain that he acquired numbers 33, 34, '34 behind' and number 36, with strong evidence that he added to these numbers 49, 50, 29, 30 and 37 at around the same time; by 1571 numbers 49 and 50 were in his ownership, with records of his son William selling 29, 30 and 37 in the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ Because there is no record of the Chester's purchasing any of these properties at any other time, it seems logical that all the land on Broad Street was part of one acquisition of 1558.

⁵⁴ Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p.32

⁵⁵ *Will of William Chester, Alderman*

⁵⁶ Hall, L. J., *The rural houses of North Avon and South Gloucestershire*, (Bristol, 1983)

⁵⁷ Leech, R.H. (ed.), *The Topography of medieval and early modern Bristol, Pt.1: Property in the early walled town and marsh suburb north of the Avon*, (Bristol Record Society, 1997) pp.36-9

**Figure 2:**

Thomas' first truly significant purchase occurred in 1566 and consisted of the Manor and Hundred of Barton Regis. This included 1,380 acres of woodlands,⁵⁸ clay pits and coal mines on the outskirts of Bristol, assets the Chesters were clearly quick to exploit. Little records: 'the Kingswood coalpits

were exploited by a host of "squatters", but some, like the Chesters and Players, were in business on a large scale'. The output of the field was perhaps 6,000 tons a year by 1560'.⁵⁹ As one would imagine the purchase of such a significant property was no small matter for even the wealthiest of merchants. Thomas married his son William to Katherine, infant daughter of the current owner Richard Dennys, in order to facilitate the purchase.

Thomas' second noteworthy purchase was the former Carmelite Friary which stood in the plot now occupied by Colston Hall. Once again this was a truly impressive property, by far the most extensive of the desecrated monastic houses in the area. This transaction occurred in the year of his mayoralty, 1569, although there is nothing else to suggest corruption. The Friary was soon sold on to Thomas'

⁵⁸ Latimer, J., *The annals of Bristol in the seventeenth century*, (Bristol, 1900), pp.61-2

⁵⁹ B. Little, *The City and County of Bristol: a study in Atlantic civilisation*, (Wakefield, 1967), p.109

close associate John Young who constructed in its place a ‘Great House’ grand enough to house Queen Elizabeth and earn its owner a Knighthood. Young will prove to be a key figure in Thomas’ story and his role will be investigated further.

Figure 3:



Shortly after the Carmelite Friary Thomas was to make his most significant purchase, one which would eventually transform the Chester family from wealthy merchants to landed gentry. Purchased from Sir Henry D’Arcy, the great Estate of Almondsbury in Gloucestershire was to become the family seat for the following centuries. Formerly owned by the Augustinian Abbey of Bristol, it had also housed the notorious Sir Miles Partridge as well as temporarily belonging to the Crown. It was a truly magnificent property, as is demonstrated by **Figure 3**.

Considering his great wealth it is unsurprising that in his later life Thomas was to become a significant benefactor to the city. This philanthropy began in 1582 with the donation to the common council of two houses on St James' Back, with the precondition that from the yearly rent £7 16s would be paid to the poor of St. John Baptist, £2 per annum to the poor prisoners of Bridewell and one shilling a year to his father's almshouses on St. James' Back.⁶⁰ One added caveat was the Thomas himself would never again have to carry the duties of mayoral office, although this is not a particularly unusual request given the labours involved. This high level of generosity was to be matched by his Will, with his total charitable donations to the needy poor totalling £27, coupled with vast levels of assorted donations to extended family, friends and servants.⁶¹

Now that the basic elements of Thomas' life have been established the next task is to determine the nature, scale and location of his business. Although it seems that Thomas started his career as a mercer, it is clear from the abundance of records and documents that by the end of his life Thomas was a 'mere merchant'.⁶² This is initially established from the apprentice rolls, with five men training under him over the course of 11 years.⁶³ This conclusion is then reinforced by a vast body of evidence, with his positions on various mercantile bodies the most conclusive.⁶⁴

Following on from this, the scale and destinations of his business should be identified. As was the case with his brother James it seems that he was involved in the cloth trade, although he did not stay confined to this. Although at present it is not possible to confirm any other areas in which Thomas traded, it seems almost certain that he maintained a varied and extensive portfolio of goods. The vast

⁶⁰ Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p. 32

⁶¹ *Will of Thomas Chester*

⁶² For a full description and discussion see Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, pp.125-6

⁶³ See appendix 3

⁶⁴ As well as being a very senior Merchant Venturer, Thomas was high up within the Spanish Company of founded in 1577

fortune he amassed is circumstantial evidence, strongly reinforced by some of the examples of his entrepreneurship.

The two regions into which there are clear records of Thomas venturing are, unsurprisingly, the Iberian Peninsula (he was a founding member of the Spanish Company in 1577)⁶⁵, and more interestingly ‘the costes of Guynne’.⁶⁶ On top of this it is known that he had a financial interest in the Martin Frobisher’s voyages in search of the North West Passage.⁶⁷

His attempted voyage to Guinea with Giles White was an endeavour expressly forbidden by the Crown.⁶⁸ The West Coast of Africa was an area rich in resources: ivory, gold, gum Arabic and slaves. The only record of the voyage is found in the Act of the Privy Council for 1556, a summons to appear concerning the ‘sending fourthe of two shippes into the costes of Guynne’.⁶⁹ We can assume therefore that this was no voyage of exploration, since the sending of two ships indicates that the voyage had an intended aim and destination. Beyond this, there is little else that can be said. The first explicit slaving voyage did not occur until 1562, under the leadership of John Hawkins. There are no records of slaving as an explicit aim of Thomas’ voyage, although the possibility cannot be ruled out. The matter could be partially clarified if import trade statistics for the period were available. If records of Guinean goods could be found then it would be likely that these, rather than slaves, were the fruit of the voyage.

⁶⁵ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.207

⁶⁶ Dasent, J.R. (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1542-1631, Vol.5* (1890-1964), p.358

⁶⁷ Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p.31

⁶⁸ The Fifteenth century ‘Line of Tordissilias’ divided the non-Christian world into two sections; that which belonged to the Spanish and that which belonged to the Portuguese, with the West Coast of Africa falling into the latter. In 1556 Mary Tudor was on the throne, married to Philip II of Spain and sympathetic to Iberia; any voyage which violated the Portuguese monopoly was forbidden. In the early stages of the voyages the English attempted to prosecute any wayward merchants, a policy which later declined.. As volumes increased the Spanish began to seize English ships, with the conflict eventually escalating to the point that Drake uttered his famous phrase; ‘No peace beyond the line’.

⁶⁹ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.5*, p.358

Little is known of Thomas' involvement in Frobisher's voyages, save the amount he invested: £25 was supplied, never to be seen again.⁷⁰ Following on from the failure of his first investment, Thomas was not to risk his capital a second time, a decision which proved to be most prudent when Frobisher repeated his failure. Although these episodes of Thomas' life do not provide a large amount of detail, they do indicate a man with not only a sense of risk and entrepreneurship, but also with a large measure of acumen. These conclusions fit perfectly with the emerging picture of the prosperous businessman.

When it comes to discerning the size of Thomas' business interests the only evidence which is really needed is the vast fortune which he built up over the course of his career. If further reinforcement were required however then this can be found in the form of the political positions he held: Senior Alderman, Mayor, MP for Bristol, Bristol Assistant to the Spanish Company,⁷¹ Knight of the Shire, High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, senior Merchant Venturer⁷² and almost certainly Master of the Society.⁷³ As Sacks argues, political influence corresponded very closely to economic power – it would take a man of great prosperity indeed to command the influence that Thomas Chester did.

Unfortunately there does not exist for Thomas the detailed time series economic data that can be found for some other merchants of the time. For this reason the most profitable avenue of investigation is one that examines in detail various snapshots of his life and attempts to extrapolate from them a wider picture. There appear throughout the course of Thomas' life a wide-ranging and varied set of events, seemingly unconnected yet actually all tiles in one of the largest and most complex mosaics of the early modern period: the monopolisation of trade. In the Sixteenth century there emerged a breed of 'mere' merchants, professional traders specialising in the transportation and exchange of goods. As the power

⁷⁰ Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, pp.30-3

⁷¹ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.207

⁷² In the 1561 granting of feoffees Thomas appears among the senior members of the society. See McGrath, *Merchant Venturers* p.18, n.23

⁷³ As well as reputedly representing the interests of the Society, Thomas was also its most prominent member. Although there is no explicit record of his Mastership, it seems highly unlikely that it would have not occurred.

of this group increased they sought to exclude traditional retailers and artificers from overseas trade, much to the economic detriment of the latter groups. This was to prove a one of the defining disputes of Sixteenth-century economic life, with conflicts over monopolies occurring in many areas. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in Bristol. The 1552 charter granted to the Merchant Venturers gave them a monopoly on all overseas trade, despite objections from most other sections of society. In 1566 this was confirmed by an act of parliament, now granting the Merchant Venturers even greater rights and the ability to punish those who infringed its monopoly. This was repealed in 1570 after a period of serious conflict. Thomas appears to have been a key player throughout the troubles and through an examination of some of the aforementioned snapshots some light will hopefully be shed on this most fascinating of tales.

One of the many controversies that surrounded the formation of the Merchant Venturers society concerned the breadth of its membership. Because, in theory, only members of the society would be able to trade overseas, every freeman conducting foreign trade was keen not to be excluded. It appears that there were two opposing schools of thought on the matter: the ‘exclusive’ group who would have membership restricted exclusively to professional ‘mere’ merchants who had been apprenticed ‘to the same Arte by the space of seaven yeares’⁷⁴, and the ‘inclusive’ group who wanted to open membership not only to the city’s ‘mere merchants’ but to all retailers, artisans and craftsmen as well. The latter point of view can best be identified through a document dating from around 1552 and found slipped into the back of the Ledger of John Smythe. It is a list of ‘Suche as be marchauntes and hath sponrage of marchauntes I thinck not be denyed to be of the mystery’,⁷⁵ and can almost certainly be seen as representing the views of the ‘inclusive’ group. From combining this document with a record of a ferocious argument between Smythe and Thomas Chester, as well as a certain amount of circumstantial

⁷⁴ J. Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1903) p.49

⁷⁵ Vanes, (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe*, pp.315-7

evidence, Sacks comes to the conclusion that both men were involved in the debate concerning the membership of the society, with Smythe wanting an ‘inclusive’ list and Thomas an ‘exclusive’. His case for the identification of the protagonists proceeds as follows: the list representing an ‘inclusive’ list was found in Smythe’s ledger, therefore ‘we can assume it represents the views of one of his circle’;⁷⁶ Thomas Chester was ‘mayor of Bristol when the society was founded, [and] one of the most ardent harrowers of retailers later in his life’⁷⁷ and finally there was ‘a matter in variaunce between John Smythe and Thomas Chester’⁷⁸ in 1552, which he reasons was connected to the foundation of the society.⁷⁹ Based on these three points Sacks comes to the conclusion that in 1552 there was an argument between Thomas Chester and John Smythe over the membership of the newly formed Merchant Venturers, with Thomas arguing for an ‘exclusive’ group and Smythe opposing him, with the latter man eventually winning out.⁸⁰

However upon a closer examination of Sacks’ argument it appears that his conclusions may not be correct. He is evidently accurate in identifying the ‘inclusive’ membership list. However from this point on it appears that new evidence could call into doubt his succeeding points. His identification of Thomas as arguing for an ‘exclusive’ list has four bases: Thomas and Smythe had a ferocious argument in 1552, Thomas was mayor in that year,⁸¹ Thomas was a monopolist in later life⁸² and finally the list was representative of the views of John Smythe.⁸³

⁷⁶ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.62

⁷⁷ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.96

⁷⁸ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.3*, p.485

⁷⁹ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.97

⁸⁰ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, pp. 62, 97

⁸¹ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.97

⁸² *Complaint of the Bristol Tuckers, 1568*, tr. Fox, F.F. & Taylor, J. in *Some Account of the Guild of Weavers in Bristol: Chiefly from MSS* (Bristol, 1889), pp. 91-4

⁸³ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.62

While the first point is indeed correct, there is no firm evidence to indicate the nature of the argument. His second point is simply incorrect. Whilst indeed there was a Chester in the mayoral seat in 1552, it was not Thomas but his father William. Thomas did not even serve his period as sheriff until 1559⁸⁴ and was not mayor until 1569. So this is simply a case of mistaken identity, most likely originating with Adam's Chronicle of Bristol.⁸⁵ There are numerous records of William serving as mayor in 1552, not to mention the evidence provided by his positions on the ordinance lists.⁸⁶

Thirdly, Sack's characterisation of Thomas as a monopolist in 1552 is based on nothing more than an extrapolation of circumstantial evidence concerning his standpoint almost twenty years later. At the time of his 1552 argument he was still a small businessman: he was not mentioned in the 1540s customs accounts,⁸⁷ he had never appeared on the council,⁸⁸ and he was even still occasionally described as a mercer.⁸⁹ Not only would Thomas not have been a figure of enough significance to have argued with Smythe over a matter concerning the society but it would not even have been in Thomas' interests to have an 'exclusive' membership. Although it is true that in his later years Thomas did act as one of the key proponents of 'exclusivity' it is highly likely that this was a position he adopted later in his life when he was powerful enough be sure of his own inclusion. In 1552 both William his father (Pointmaker) and James his brother (Mercer) would have been excluded from an 'exclusive' membership list as artisan merchants, so the interests of the family were best served by inclusion. By 1568⁹⁰ Thomas's father and brother James had died and he and his brother Dominick had become 'mere merchants'. It was now in the interest of Thomas and his family to see a mere-merchant

⁸⁴ Little, *The City and County of Bristol*,

⁸⁵ Adams, W. (ed.), *Adams's Chronicle of Bristol*, (Arrowsmith, 1910), p.101

⁸⁶ Although there are no ordinance lists for 1552, it is known that William was 5th in 1551 and 3rd in 1553. Although as ever this is only circumstantial, it is very strongly indicative.

⁸⁷ *Bristol customs accounts, TNA*

⁸⁸ He is not on a list from 1554. His first appearance appears to be in 1560.

⁸⁹ See Appendix 3

⁹⁰ 1568 was the year of the complaint of the Tuckers which accused Thomas of acting as a monopolist.

monopoly. There was a rationale to the actions of Thomas. Always behaving in his familial and personal interest was not necessarily admirable, but it certainly was both believable and consistent.

The final point concerns the identification of the list as in some way indicative of Smyth's views. Whilst this may indeed be the case, it is equally possible that the converse is true. Indeed, as will be demonstrated later, it is most likely that the list represents the views of Smyth's opponents.

One fact which would prove central to the debate is the identity of the author of the list. The document of 1552, not in Smyth's hand, would have been written by someone who not only had an interest in an 'inclusive' list but was a person of enough influence and power to have their correspondence read and retained by Smyth.

As has been established already, William was not only one of the city's most prosperous pointmakers but a significant overseas trader; exactly the kind of man an 'inclusive' list would have included.⁹¹ He was also mayor of the city in 1552, the year of the list, and therefore not only a man of significant power and influence, but also with an almost unique position and responsibility to be in the centre of debates of this sort. The crucial point however is the fact that William is excluded from the list. Whereas three of his sons, all far less significant at this point, are on the list, William is nowhere to be seen. This cannot be explained by his being too obvious an inclusion; Smyth himself is there after all. There is no way he could have been considered unsuitable; the nature of his business has already been discussed and men of far lesser business standing are included. The only persuasive explanation for William Chester's absence from the list is that he wrote it himself. As it was a correspondence written in the first person, taking the form 'people who I think should be in the society', it is perfectly possible that William thought that his own inclusion could be taken as read. There is no other convincing explanation of the absence of his name from the inclusive list.

⁹¹ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.201

As a prominent craftsman, overseas trader and civic administrator William took it upon himself to put to the City's most prosperous merchant a list of recommended Merchant Venturers which he felt was in the best interests of both himself and the City. More corroborating evidence comes in the form of the previously cited complaint of the Tuckers. In this William is held up as an example of a fine, 'inclusive' man, 'the naturaleste Cytizen that was in bristow in our tyme'⁹² – unsurprising if he championed the cause of the tradesman. Obviously the evidence for this argument is circumstantial, although it does seem highly probable that William was the author. If an example of William's writing could be found and compared to that found on the list, this might put the case beyond all doubt. As already stated, the 1552 list is crucial to understanding the arguments surrounding the formation of the Merchant Venturers and, if accepted, William's authorship could have significant implications for what we know about the early years of the society.

On the strength of these arguments, the following hypothesis can now be put forward: In his capacity both as mayor and as a powerful merchant-craftsman with a vested interest in an 'inclusive' Society, William Chester sent his preferred list for the Merchant Venturers to John Smythe, the city's richest merchant. Smythe disagreed with his list, supporting a more exclusive group that favoured his position as the City's leading 'mere merchant'. With Smythe's considerable support the more 'exclusive' policy was eventually adopted, much to the distress of William and his 'inclusive' contemporaries. The 1552 'matter in variaunce' between Smythe and Thomas Chester did not directly concern the membership of the society of Merchant Venturers. Thomas, not only too junior to be fighting battles on this level, but with a personal and familial interest in 'inclusivity' was yet to take on the monopolistic role he would adopt in his later life. The argument probably concerned a personal or financial matter, and although disagreements over the formation of the society might have exacerbated the dispute, the relationship

⁹² *Complaint of the Bristol Tuckers, 1568*, tr. Fox & Taylor

between the argument and the 'inclusive/exclusive' debates of 1552 must be reconsidered. It now seems very likely that the inclusive list was written by William, the head of the Chester family, and that Smyth was a supporter of the ultimately victorious exclusive position.

The debates of 1552 were ultimately to prove all but irrelevant, since violations of the Merchant Venturers' monopoly occurred frequently and went unpunished.⁹³ This was primarily a function of the inadequacies of the measures provided by the founding letters for restitution following violations. It was this fact which was to prove central to the argument which, it will be shown, was to tear the council asunder eighteen years later.

In 1566 Thomas was elected MP for Bristol, and it was in his term of office that the Merchant Venturers society gained its extended privileges of that year. Thomas Chester and his fellow Member of Parliament William Corrie argued that because of widespread violations of the 1552 charter, 'the cheffe decay of Bristowe was for the marchauntes and the navigacion of the citie and the porte weare in decay'. This case seemed to have been persuasive enough, and in 1566 Queen Elizabeth confirmed the letters, while parliament passed an act which gave the society the ability seize transgressors' goods, offering meaningful punishment for the first time. It was this fact which was eventually to lead not only to both men's vilification by the society of Tuckers, but indeed to a change in the rules for the election of the council and to one of the most important disputes in the history of Sixteenth-century Bristol.⁹⁴

One of the most interesting documents concerning the life of Thomas Chester and the monopoly of the Merchant Venturers is the often-cited 1568 'Complaint of the Tuckers'. Written to the mayor and aldermen of Bristol, it levelled against the 'chosen Burgesses of parliament', Thomas Chester and

⁹³ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.197

⁹⁴ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.198

William Corrie, the charge that through ‘some subtle fetch’ they had broken their promise to aid the ‘Commons’ of the city, harming their business to the engorgement of the ‘mere merchants’ coffers. This document demonstrates not only some of the tactics employed by the Merchant Venturers, but the Tucker’s understanding of and objection to them. Whilst they could not do anything immediately, the city’s ‘artisans’⁹⁵ knew who their enemy was, what their tactics were and how to combat them. It was these facts that were to lead to the fight back of 1570 and the schism of that year.

In 1569 Thomas was elected Mayor of Bristol, possibly marking the highpoint of mercantile influence on the council. As will be later demonstrated, in this year merchants held more positions of authority on the council than they seem to have done at any other time, although this was not to last. The awareness demonstrated by the complaint of the Tuckers had transformed itself from frustration to determination, and manoeuvrings to wrest control of the council from the merchants had already begun. By the end of 1570 the prominent grocer William Tucker had been appointed mayor and under his control the council was to return two anti-monopolist MPs to the next parliament. Although Thomas and Carrie had lost their seats they were not completely defeated, and it took almost a full year of parliamentary dealings to repeal the Act of 1566.⁹⁶

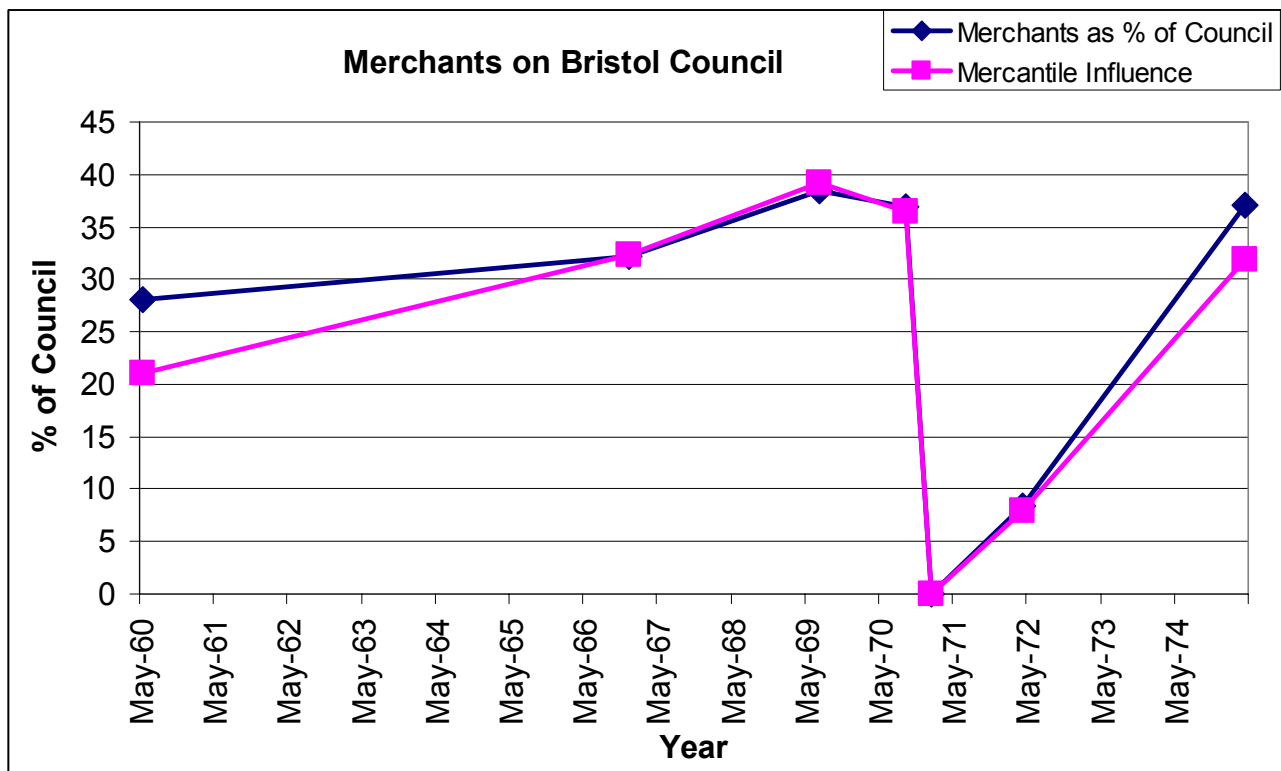
All of this, especially Chester’s loss of office, has long been known. What is not known is the extent to which the Merchants, reeling from their loss of power, fell out with the council. When the much consulted city ordinances are examined in conjunction with the city’s apprentice records a fresh picture of the position of the various groups attending the Council and signing ordinances can be gained. When this is done the proportion of the council which is explicitly described as ‘merchants’ by the City’s apprentice records is revealed. Signified by the blue line on **Figure 4**, the percentage of council

⁹⁵ Artisan is a common term used to describe members of the Anti-monopoly group, although in characterising them as craftsmen as opposed to retailers it may be a misnomer.

⁹⁶ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.198-9

signatories who were mere merchants gives a crude measure of their activity on the council. The most striking feature of **Figure 4** is the total collapse of mercantile attendance in 1570. Starting as 37% of a thirty-eight man council, by the end of the year the merchants did not have a single representative actively taking part in a council comprised of only twenty men. This is clear evidence of the rift of 1570, the ‘bitter rivalry’ mentioned by Sacks.⁹⁷ A more detailed picture of the composition of the signatories is shown in **Figure 5**.

Figure 4:



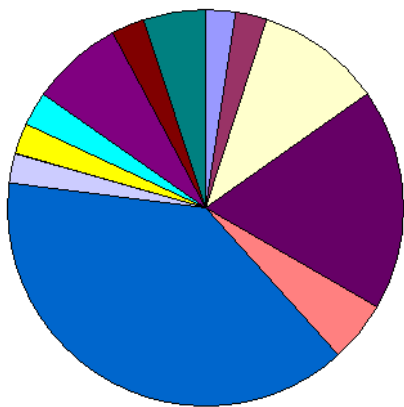
There are two possible explanations for this tumultuous period: either the merchants were expelled from the council or they staged a wholesale walkout in protest at their defeat. Given that there is an explicit record of the 1573 firing of Aldermen David Harris and Roger Jones it seems highly unlikely

⁹⁷ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.204

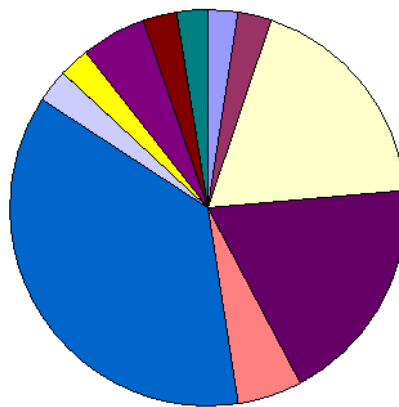
that the forced removal of fourteen aldermen would go unmentioned. This is reinforced by the fact that when the merchants reappeared on the council in 1575, nine out of the fourteen ‘deserters’ were present. It seems almost certain therefore that as a response to their defeats on 1570 the Merchant Venturers of Bristol abandoned the council, with most of them not having returned in May 1572.

Figure 5:

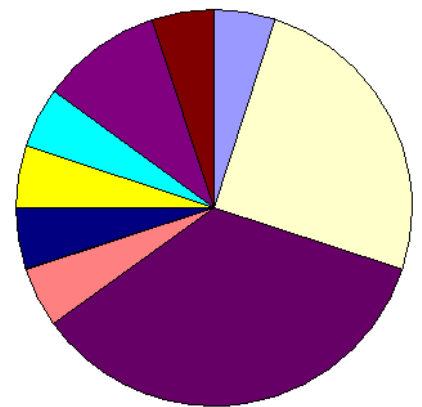
Composition of the council 19/07/1569



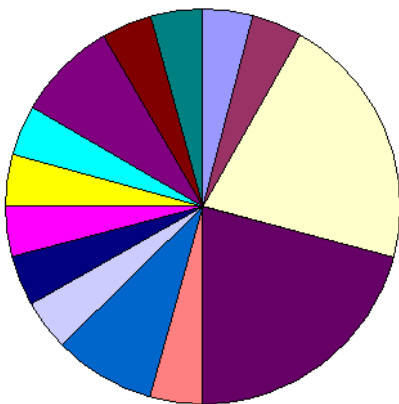
Composition of the council 12/09/1570



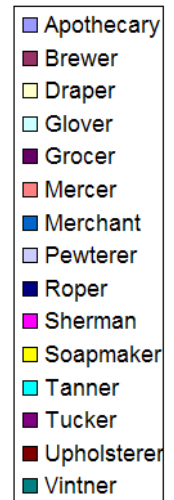
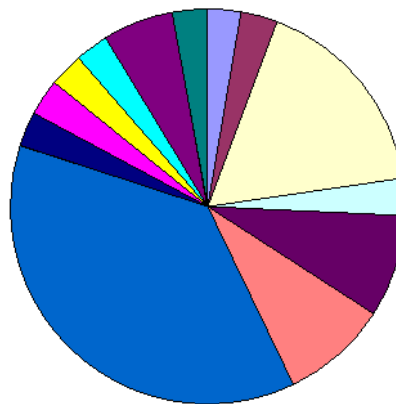
Composition of the council 16/01/1571



Composition of the council 30/04/1572



Composition of the council 15/04/1575



Although the simple percentage measure of influence is interesting, it is cruder than is necessary. As was discussed in ‘Methodologies’, a more interesting measure can be achieved through the combination of the council lists and the ‘influence coefficient’ as developed for the investigation of individual councillors. When the coefficient is calculated for every council member over the period and

aggregated for professions a very interesting trend develops. Whilst for the most part the influence of the merchants, as represented by the pink line, is comparable to the trend of the initial simple calculation, its two deviations do suggest something potentially interesting. Before the election of two merchants to parliament and the act of 1566 the merchants were proportionally less influential than one would expect. From 1566 onwards they have obviously taken more powerful positions within the council, signified by the overtaking of the blue line by the pink. Upon the merchant's return to the council post 1572 they are once again proportionally less influential.

If the trend represented by the graph is accurate then the following hypothesis is suggested: the merchants tended to occupy less influential positions on the council; in or just before 1566 they managed to secure the more powerful positions; following on from this they gained the two parliamentary seats; using this they secured the act of 1566, much to the detriment of the rest of the council; their anti-monopolist opponents were in disarray until around 1570, typified by the mayoralty of Thomas Chester and higher than usual mercantile influence; in anticipation of the upcoming parliamentary elections the Artisans rallied, defeating the Merchant Venturers in 1570. Owing to this defeat the Merchant Venturers abandoned the city council *en masse*, returning some time after 1572 although with diminished influence. If this hypothesis is accepted then the debate over the act of 1566 would take a very different slant. It would not be seen as the powerful merchants abusing their power but rather as an unexpected coup by a rather less powerful body, quickly reversed by the majority artisans once their tactic had been discovered and the opportunity had arisen. For the most part this view coincides with that of Sacks, although he does not go as far as suggesting that the mercantile dominance of 1566 was an unexpected coup.

Of course there are issues of methodology that must be addressed, although the trends suggested do tally with known events and can therefore be seen as indicative quantifiers of the period. In order to

examine the issue fully it would be prudent to apply the methodology to the rest of the period and compare the results to better documented periods of council politics.

It is clear that Thomas was aware not only of the tensions within the council, but also of his role in them. After the schism of 1570 he made a trip to the Privy Council in an attempt to improve relations between the two warring groups. The council ordinances recorded that:

Mr. Thomas Chester hadd movid certeyne of the Lordes of the Privie Councell to have reasonable articles drawn as well for the norishinge of amytye betwene the marchantes of this citie, and othere inhabitantes of the same, as for makeinge and concludinge of good orders for the common welthe and profett of the same citie⁹⁸

What his true motivations were is impossible to know, although Sacks argues that now artisan dominated council was clearly sceptical about his professed good intentions. In the context of the new hypothesis it would seem likely that Thomas was genuinely attempting to ease tensions, probably as an exercise in damage limitation following his defeat at the hands of the retailers and artisans.

One of the interesting actions of Thomas as Mayor concerned the process for the election of his successors. From as far back as the Fourteenth century the election of mayor had been announced on the 1st September, with nominations and voting both taking place on the 15th of September.⁹⁹ As Sacks says, the principles upon which the election was based were openness and, most importantly, spontaneity. This was to change under Thomas, since his act of 1570 provided a fifteen day break

⁹⁸ Stanford (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol*, p.46

⁹⁹ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, pp.172-173

between the nominations and elections, relocating the former to the 1st September.¹⁰⁰ Although it is only possible to hypothesise on the matter, given the context it seems almost certain that this act was part of Thomas's and the merchants' process of consolidating and guaranteeing their power.¹⁰¹ One reason for desiring a break between the nominations and elections could be the opportunity for bribery; as a wealthy minority the merchants would utilise the fifteen day gap for the purpose of buying votes for their chosen candidate. This is reinforced by the fact that whatever his motivation was, it was not favoured by Thomas's successor. William Tucker reversed his changes to the procedure in 1571, returning to a one day nomination and election process.¹⁰² Although the exact details are unclear, it seems almost certain that this episode can be seen as further evidence of the tactics pursued by the Merchant Venturers in their conflict with the retailers and artisans of the City.

Thomas may have lost the battle for monopolisation through council dominance but evidently he was unwilling to concede the wider war. In 1577 he was party to the formation of the Spanish Company, serving as one of the three Bristol Assistants.¹⁰³ The Company's Letters Patent granted Members the sole trading rights with the Iberian Peninsula, effectively depriving uninitiated Bristol merchants of the mainstay of their trade. It is to the Spanish company that McGrath attributes the responsibility for the atrophy of the Merchant Venturers society in the latter Sixteenth century, partially due to the restrictions but also because of the involvement of seventy-six Bristolians. Presumably as a function of his role within the Company Thomas sent letters demanding adherence to the monopoly, a task not only familiar to him, but given his form no doubt one he was happy to undertake.

¹⁰⁰ Stanford (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol*, p.41

¹⁰¹ The election of 1570 would have had the rare feature of competition. The high stakes and political tensions of the period meant that the two groups vying for power would be competing for votes in a way that was unusual for the City. (see Sacks pp.173 & 198)

¹⁰² Stanford (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol*, p.47

¹⁰³ McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p.20

It seems that controversy was by no means alien to Thomas. By the end of his career he would have been a familiar figure in the Privy Council. On the 10th February 1564 the Privy Council recorded the allegation of the convicted coiner Hugh Partridge that ‘one Coldwell... told him that he had coyned grete sommes of money... for John Yong esquire; which money, as he said, was uttered by meanes of one Thomas Chester of Brystowe, merchant, who was also pryveye, as he affirmed, to the same coyninge.’¹⁰⁴ The subsequent investigation found ‘all the said allegacions touching the said Yonge and Chester were utterlye false.’¹⁰⁵ The implications of this episode of Thomas’ life could be threefold: the allegation was in fact true and despite his professed innocence Thomas was indeed guilty of receiving and using false coins; the allegation could have been false, and made with the intention of discrediting prominent merchants in general; finally, the accusation could have again been false but this time directed towards Chester in an attempt to discredit or harm both him and Young in some way. In order to identify which of these possibilities is most likely to be correct it is first essential to examine his accuser, Hugh Partridge, in order to discover some possible motive. Thomas’ co-defendant John Young must also be examined so it can be confirmed that any possible motive would have applied to both men.

The key to examining the accusation is its date: 1564. This is not a particularly politically sensitive year, falling in between parliaments and before the 1566 act. On top of this Young and Chester were on opposite sides of the monopolisation debate, with Thomas orchestrating and Young vocally opposing the actions of the Merchant Venturers.¹⁰⁶ It has already been mentioned that Young and Chester were involved in property dealings, although these did not happen until at least 1570 and therefore cannot

¹⁰⁴ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.7*, pp.193-4

¹⁰⁵ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.7*, pp.193-4

¹⁰⁶ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.197

have been connected. There were also property dealings between members of the Chester family and Hugh Partridge, although again these were distant enough to be seen as almost irrelevant.¹⁰⁷

None of the readily apparent reasons for wishing to attack both men seem to stand up, suggesting that the motivation would not have been to discredit them. It may prove to be impossible to separate the other explanations, since we cannot now discover whether Thomas and Young were guilty of the charge. If innocent then they could have been targeted for the purpose of blackmail or to ease the pressure on the already-convicted Partridge. If they were guilty then Partridge was obviously shopping his partners in exchange for leniency. Whatever his motivation, it clearly failed. Both men were acquitted, and although Hugh Partridge's fate is unknown one can assume it would have been a grisly one!

The first documented civic role performed by Thomas was that of Collector of the Subsidy, a post previously held by John Smythe and one which could prove very profitable.¹⁰⁸ Along with John Willy he was also responsible for negotiating Bristol's independence from the jurisdiction of the Welsh Marches. They were successful in their task, arguing on the grounds that Bristol was a 'County Palatine'.¹⁰⁹

Thomas does not make his first appearance on the list of city councillors until 1560, by which time he was already a prosperous merchant. Whilst the possibility that he had been an alderman for many years yet had for some reason failed to sign any documents must be considered, this seems very unlikely, especially given that it was not until 1559 that he served as sheriff.¹¹⁰ The fact that when his name does

¹⁰⁷ Leech, (ed.), *The Topography of medieval and early modern Bristol, Pt.1*, pp.130, 137

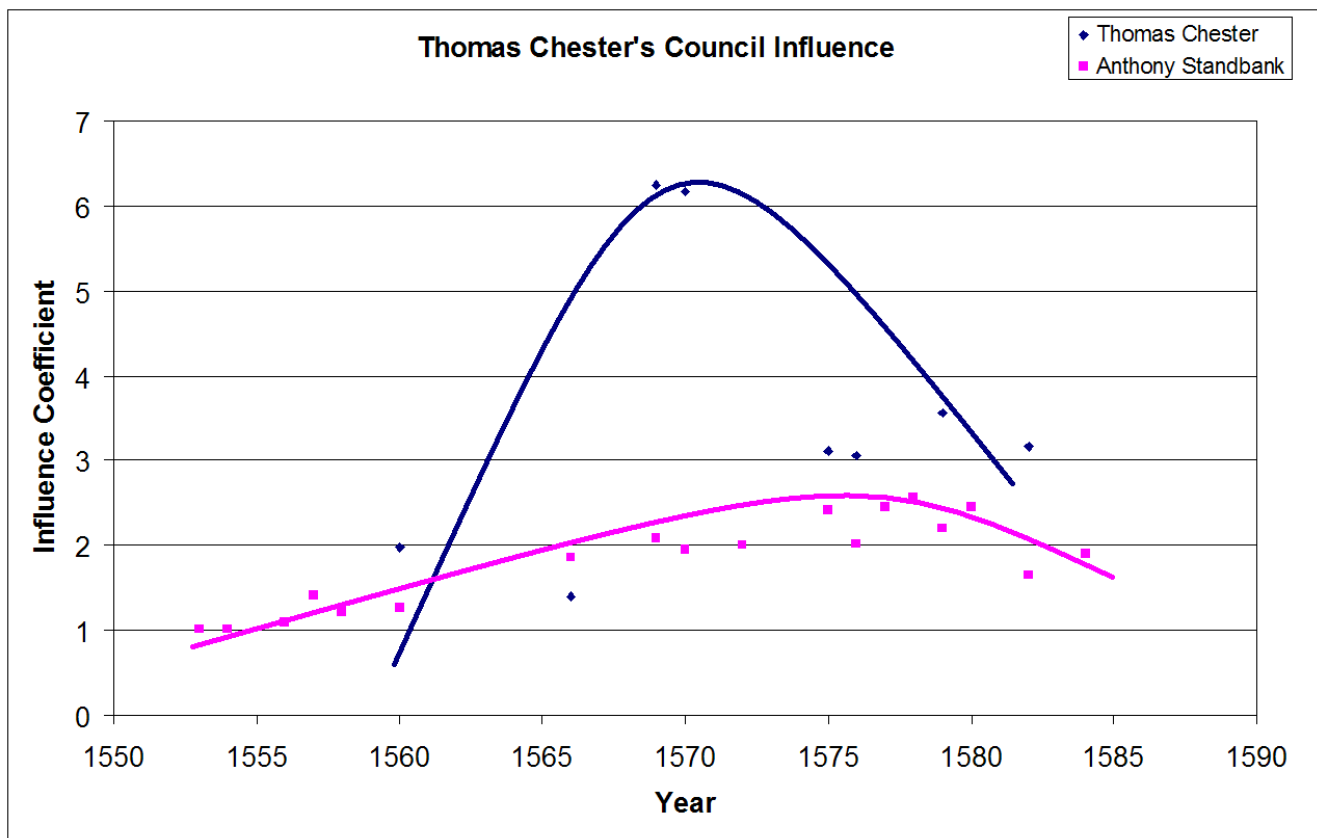
¹⁰⁸ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.6*, p.159; Vanes, (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe*, introduction

¹⁰⁹ Ralph (ed.), *The Great White Book of Bristol p.102*; Adams (ed.), *Adams's Chronicle*, p.107

¹¹⁰ Serving as a Sheriff was considered highly undesirable and was seen as a service performed by novice councilmen

eventually appear it is at around eighth on the list would indicate that he was a man of import who simply chose not to take part in civic life. Despite the late start to his political career, he was selected as mayor in 1569, a choice which has already shown to have been highly controversial at the time. The graph demonstrating Thomas' 'influence coefficient' is an interesting one, and although it is clearly mildly exaggerated it still demonstrates the extent to which he dwarfed another powerful councilman. Although it is as ever circumstantial evidence, it fully corroborates the picture of Thomas which has been emerging: he was clearly one of the wealthiest and most significant merchants and citizens of the entire city, taking a leading if controversial role in every area of Bristol life.

Figure 6:



For an indication of a man's social standing, one good measure would be the people by whom he was trusted. In December 1573 there is record of Thomas Chester receiving £32 for putting up the family of

the Earl of Desmond for 29 weeks.¹¹¹ Because Thomas was no innkeeper it can be concluded that this would have been some kind of personal agreement, and therefore indicative of a connection between the two men. For Chester to have been known and trusted by a man as significant as the Earl of Desmond would certainly suggest that he was a merchant and citizen of some standing. This sort of evidence only serves to once again reinforce the picture of Thomas Chester which has already been painted.

Unlike his father Thomas was not a man attracted to offices on the City council; he was late to start his political career and when he had the means he successfully opted out of future positions.¹¹² He was instrumental in the creation of one of the largest political conflicts in sixteenth century Bristol, attempting but failing to secure a permanent trading monopoly for the mere merchants at the expense of his fellow townsmen. He was eventually to at least partially succeed in his aims, taking a key role in the establishment of the Spanish Company, although the Anglo-Spanish Wars of 1585-1604 would ensure that his efforts were in vain. He was clearly not always inflammatory however, following his father as a pragmatic keeper of the peace, although possibly acting more out of self-interest than community spirit. Controversy was never far behind him and by the end of his days he no doubt had a fine array of powerful friends and enemies.

¹¹¹ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.8*, p.161

¹¹² Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p.32

Dominick Chester

The youngest son of William Chester, Dominick Chester is among the most documented members of his family. As the fifth child of a father born approximately in 1489, it is unlikely that his birth occurred significantly before the early 1520s. It is also known that he took on his first apprentice in 1553, by which point he would have most likely been in his mid 20s. Once again these two pieces of information can be combined to suggest that he was born between 1520 and 1530, probably leaning towards the earlier date. It is however known that Dominick died of the ‘pestilence’ in July 1575¹¹³ leaving no Will, and with four sons and four daughters, all apparently under age. The eight children were left orphans following the death of their father, because Dominick’s wife Mary had died in 1572. Fortunately they were well looked after, with Edward Chester taking over the running of the Black Friars estate under the conditions of the Will of William Chester. Of the children of Dominick only Charles Chester was to be worthy of note, eventually achieving a level of notoriety to rival almost any other member of the family.¹¹⁴

Presumably as a function of his Christian name, Dominick was left the desecrated Dominican friary by the Will of his father. This was a substantial property and was to remain with his descendants for the term of 89 years. It was often said that a curse of bad luck befell the owner of former monastic houses,

¹¹³ Seyer, S., *Memoirs historical and topographical of Bristol and its neighbourhood, from the earliest period down to the present time*, (Bristol, 1821-3) p.246

¹¹⁴ Although not of direct relevance to the story being told, Charles Chester is deserving of at least a footnote. Waters records that ‘Charles Chester made the voyage... in Martin Frobisher’s expedition... If he ever returned he died soon after unmarried.’ As it transpires, Waters is almost entirely mistaken in this, and Charles led one of the most interesting lives of his entire family. The first clue to his existence came from his purchasing of a house in 1581, a relatively hard task for man who has died! When some light research was undertaken it turned out that Charles had been so fascinating he had earned himself an entrance in the *DNB*. Charles seems to have had a compulsion to ‘talk, to entertain and in particular to insult’, no doubt the reason why Sir Walter Raleigh tried to ‘have him walled up alive’. ‘Chester-like eloquens’ became synonymous with ‘worthless abuse’ and he was to inspire the character of ‘Carlo Buffone’ in Jonson’s ‘Every man out of his Humour’. Clearly controversial, Charles is a more important figure more in literary than socio-economic history, although his obvious interest cannot be denied.

and whatever its cause Dominick was to suffer his share of misfortune in his life, ending with the eventual extinction of his branch of the family.

The career of Dominick Chester seems to be littered with controversy and intrigue. The exact nature of his business is possibly clearer than for any of the other members of his family, with explicit mentions of not only his voyages, but also of his cargoes and their worth. This is thanks to the repeated misfortune he suffered at the hands of foreigners; records abound of his conflicts with both French and Portuguese merchants. Although the full implications of these will be examined later on, the information they provide concerning the scale and nature of Dominick's trade is relevant now. It can be asserted with certainty that Dominick followed his family in the role of a merchant, not only from the apprentice records but from his position as Master of the Society of Merchant Venturers.

From the Bristol customs accounts¹¹⁵ we know that in 1547 he had not yet begun trading abroad in his own name, although he had probably acted as a factor as part of his apprenticeship. This situation would have almost certainly changed by 1553 when Hugh Hamorsley came to learn the mercantile trade from him.

Although he would have most likely been a prosperous merchant by this point, it is not until 1564 that Dominick is explicitly mentioned: 'prosperous merchants like Dominick Chester sent frequent [ships]' 'to the south of Spain with Westcountry cloth and Mendip lead [in 1564 and 1565]'.¹¹⁶ This account of his trade tallies with the further evidence available. The reports of his struggles with foreign merchants

¹¹⁵ *Bristol customs accounts, TNA*

¹¹⁶ Little, *The City and County of Bristol*, p.106

locate his business around the south of France and across the Iberian Peninsula, notably La Rochelle and San Lucas.¹¹⁷

At the same time as confirming the direction of some of his business, the Privy Council reports also serve to elucidate the nature and sizes of some of his cargo. It has already been suggested that Dominick exported ‘Westcountry cloth and Mendip lead’,¹¹⁸ and it seems that the imports financed by this included large quantities of the dyestuff green woad.¹¹⁹ The evidence for this is circumstantial, although logical. In 1571 a letter was sent in support of the Admiralty Court’s agreement for Dominick Chester to seize ‘such grene woade as shuld come from Rochell’ on the grounds that Chester lost a great quantity of the material at the time of the Wars. Finally, the same Privy Council volume records that a single voyage contained goods valued at £1,700, all of which were lost. Whether Dominick ever recovered them is not recorded.¹²⁰

It seems that voyages of adventure were not unknown to Dominick, since he provided financial backing for ‘Grenville’s South Sea project of 1573’ and his son invested in the ill-fated voyage of Martin Frobisher.¹²¹

As was suggested previously, Dominick appears to have repeatedly encountered trouble at the hands of foreign merchants. There are Privy Council records of his not only receiving injustice from the French, but also the Portuguese. Dominick was clearly not a man to relax in the face of adversity however, with numerous records in the Acts of the Privy Council detailing extensive and proactive efforts to reclaim his lost property. The first of these takes the form of ‘A letter to the Judge of thadmiraltie to give ordre

¹¹⁷ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.8*, p.160

¹¹⁸ Little, *The City and County of Bristol*, p.106

¹¹⁹ Ralph, E. (ed.), *The Great White Book of Bristol* (Bristol Record Society, 1979), pp.7-8

¹²⁰ Ralph (ed.), *The Great White Book of Bristol pp.7-8*

¹²¹ Little, *The City and County of Bristol*, p.107

that Dominicke Chester... may receive into their handes so much of Portugals goodes as is arrived ... in any parte of this realme [from 1571]'.¹²² The Judge of the Admiralty was not the only powerful man to whom Dominick made his complaints. The Privy Council also holds a record of 'a letter to... the Queen's Embessadour in Fraunce, with a supplication excibited by Dominick Chester, merchaunt of Bristow' concerning another conflict in the same year, this time involving the French.¹²³

Although it is not recorded whether Dominick recovered any of his goods, it certainly seems that his concerns were properly dealt with. The Privy Council ordered that his case was to be handled in the same manner as those of two other complainants, Robert Christmas and John Barnes.¹²⁴ Letters were sent to all Mayors, Vice-Admirals and Justices as well as the 'Commissioners for Causes of Portugal' on Dominick's behalf calling for the seizure of Portuguese goods lost in San Lucas.

The fact that the concerns of Dominick Chester were able to arouse the actions of so many important men is strong evidence of his prominence as a merchant and citizen. What the causes of the conflicts were cannot be confirmed, although it would seem highly likely that they were part of the larger wars which characterised Anglo-Spanish relations in the latter Sixteenth-century.¹²⁵

The state was not always to look favourably on the many varied events of Dominick's life, as the Privy Council records from 1573 clearly show. Dominick was accused by Edward Waterhouse, secretary for the Earl of Essex, of misappropriating the supplies for the Earl's actions in Ireland, although towards what end is not specified. What is known is that Dominick was hauled in front of the Privy Council at Hampton Court more than once and made to explain himself. Upon his second appearance and the

¹²² Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.8*, p.23

¹²³ Dasent, (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council, Vol.8*, p.32

¹²⁴ Ralph (ed.), *The Great White Book of Bristol*, p.7

¹²⁵ P. McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p19

provision of his account book he was referred to the court in Westminster, although at this point the investigation is lost from sight.

It appears that Dominick Chester was not involved in traditional civic life to the same degree as either his father or brother Thomas, although this is not to say that he was not a significant political actor; at one of the key moments of its history he was president of the society of Merchant Venturers, as well as apparently serving as MP for Minehead in 1572.¹²⁶

Figure 7:

Dominick served his time as Sheriff in 1567, one year after his first appearance on the list of city ordinances and probably around his 40th year.¹²⁷ Like his brother Thomas he was a merchant of some significance when he made his debut, although clearly not to the same extent; his name sits 26th out of 31 (as opposed to Thomas who debuts at 9 of 27). He also never became mayor of Bristol, and only once does he appear in the upper half of the city ordinances. Although as ever the ordinance positions only offer circumstantial evidence they do strongly suggest that Dominick never wielded a significant level of influence at Bristol Council.



¹²⁶ Seyer's *Memoirs of Bristol*, Vol. II p.231

¹²⁷ Stanford (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol*,

Although there is no list of the Masters and members of the Merchant Venturers society in the Sixteenth century it is possible to know two of the positions held by Dominick over the years. This is only because both terms coincide with events of note in the history of the society. His period as warden included the 8th July 1566¹²⁸ and the confirmation of the letters patent whilst the Merchant Venturers Coat of Arms was awarded in 1569 whilst Dominick was Master.¹²⁹ (See **Figure 7**)

Although these are the only roles we know that Dominick filled for certain, it would seem a reasonably safe guess that these do not comprise his full quota of positions. We only know what we do because of the documenting of events which by chance coincided with Dominick's periods in office; if he served terms in which little of note happened they could have been forever forgotten, and this does seem likely.

One final event to note in Dominick's life was his role in the City's entertainment of Queen Elizabeth in 1574. One year before his untimely death Dominick was paid £81 8s 4p for 'charges of the ij [two] fortes with other busyness as by his accompt'.¹³⁰ When she arrived in the city, Elizabeth was entertained by the sight of 200 arquebusiers and 100 pikemen assaulting two forts that had evidently been constructed by Dominick Chester. The fact that Dominick was given such a prominent role in an event so desperately important is testament to the prominence which he had achieved by the end of his life; although he may not have matched Thomas he had probably surpassed any other member of his family. Ironically if it were not for the repeated pains of his trade it is possible that we would be almost completely ignorant of the life of Dominick Chester, although as it is we can see not only that he was involved in the Iberian trade, but that his cargoes were worth close to £2000. Although it must of

¹²⁸ Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p.46

¹²⁹ Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p.51

¹³⁰ McGrath, P. (ed.), *A Bristol miscellany* (Bristol Record Society, 1985), p.10

course be remembered that this could be a vastly exaggerated estimate made in order to increase his compensation, his position as one of the city's leading Merchant Venturers would suggest that it would not be an unrealistic cargo for Dominick to have dealt with.

Conclusion:

Coming from comparatively modest origins, the Chesters of Bristol, Rodford, Barton Regis and, most significantly, of Almondsbury were to develop into one of the most powerful and prominent mercantile dynasties of Sixteenth-century Bristol. They were central players in some of the most interesting and controversial periods in the life of the city: desecrators of monasteries; keepers of the peace and securers of pardons; defenders of free trade; self interested monopolists; entertainers of Queens; victims of ‘pestilence’; hosts to aristocracy; Lords of Manors and, most importantly, merchants. For over a century the family sent ships laden with West Country goods across Europe, returning with exotic wares for resale. They were also true Merchant Venturers, for not only did they sponsor voyages of adventure but, through Thomas and Charles Chester, the family even undertook them.

As with many families in their situation the lure of the life of gentleness was to prove too strong to resist. Within a generation of Thomas’ lifetime the Chesters of Almondsbury had turned their backs on the mercantile ways of their forefathers and had retreated to their country seat, Knole House, which they were to occupy until at least the late 18th century. It is interesting to note that this process of gentrification did not occur until the family had achieved the high levels of wealth that it did under Thomas. William also purchased a country estate, yet despite his extensive property portfolio it is possible that the lure of the land was not enough to compensate for the loss of a mercantile income. An alternative theory could focus more upon upbringing and social expectations – it is only once a family had been wealthy for a few generations that expectations altered to the extent that gentrification was feasible or desirable. A widespread study of merchant families might establish a correlation between the size of fortunes, the generations across which the fortunes spread and the timing of gentrification.

This is obviously far beyond the remit of this thesis, but it may be that the discoveries made here could contribute to wider understanding.

One of the interesting truisms of Bristol civic life which the history of the Chesters serves to illustrate and confirm is the tight interplay between economic power and political influence.¹³¹ Thomas, by far the wealthiest of the family, was a political actor to an extent no other Chester could match. He was followed by his younger brother Dominick who, whilst not taking the traditional route, adapted to the situation in which he found himself to wield a significant level of power. Close behind was William the Elder, while the small levels of political power of James Chester and William the Whitawer matched their less significant fortunes. It must be noted however that once Thomas had reached the peak of his power he was keen to avoid office, as demonstrated by the conditions attached to his exceedingly large donation to the city.¹³² Any civic office acted as a means to an economic end, and once that end had been achieved a burdensome administrative post became more hindrance than help.

The roles played by various members of the family in the debates over monopolisation have proved to be fascinating and often unexpected. William Chester, it has been suggested, was involved in the initial debates with John Smythe over membership to the Merchant Venturers, with William actually arguing in favour of a more 'inclusive' group and Smythe opposing him, contrary to the previously accepted interpretation of the episode. This tradition of anti-monopolisation was to be abandoned by Thomas and Dominick however, and both men played central and often divisive roles in the debates of the 1560s and 1570s. Thomas in particular can be seen as responsible for the coup of 1566 and the council schism of 1570, the extent of which can now be fully seen. Although the exact actions of Dominick are

¹³¹ See D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.195 n.1

¹³² Waters, *Genealogical memoirs*, p.32

unknown, his position in 1570 as brother of William and Master of the Merchant Venturers can only have served to antagonise those resisting the monopoly.

Without doubt, one of the building blocks of the flourishing Chester fortune was the sudden availability of the large monastic estates, presenting an opportunity which William Chester with his wealth, political power and religious flexibility was well placed to seize. Whether the acquisition of monastic estates was the cause or the consequence of the Chester fortune is unknown, although the most likely situation would be some combination of the two: William was already a prominent figure in 1537, a situation which enabled him to acquire monastic land. This acquisition was undoubtedly useful for the growing merchant, in turn helping to increase his fortunes.

Unfortunately, due to lack of records it has not been possible fully to discover the means by which Thomas in particular amassed his quite staggering fortune. Although in time a clearer picture may emerge, at the moment it must be assumed that it was through the same means as his forerunners, the reliable yet highly profitable trades as conducted by the Smythes, Jays and Tyndalls of the City. Another problem that this lack of continuous data causes is equally vexing. Because it is not possible to see accurately how the family's trading destinations shifted throughout the period there is no chance of determining the extent to which exogenous factors influenced choice of trading location. However the existence of wider data on shifting trading patterns relegates its significance here to a purely personal level.

Thomas Chester's forays into Guinea mean that the possibility that he was an early slave trader cannot be ruled out, although there is no real evidence for this. The fact that there are no records of altercations

with the Spanish or Portuguese in the New World¹³³ would suggest that it is likely that if any slaves were taken they were seized as an afterthought, almost certainly not being taken to the Americas.

Inevitably many of the suggestions put forward by this thesis are based upon speculation and circumstantial evidence, although that does not mean that they should be ruled out as possibilities. For example, the details of the conflicts of 1570 could be seen to throw interesting light onto Sacks' assertions about unity as the primary social good of the later Sixteenth century. He reasons that, following the divine nature of unity, the magistrates of Bristol strove for a harmonious society above all else.¹³⁴ When the events surrounding the catastrophic rift caused by the Merchant Venturers' charters are placed into this context it seems that this search for unity perhaps motivated the reconciliatory actions of Thomas Chester in 1570,¹³⁵ and the eventual reintegration of the defeated Merchant Venturers' into the Common Council by 1575. Although it has been conceded that this is only circumstantial evidence, it does corroborate Sacks' theory, further suggesting that unity was being sought from all corners.

One area into which the discoveries of this thesis could potentially shed light is the nature of communal action by the mere merchants. It has been shown that following their defeats of 1570 every merchant ceased to play an active role on the council for a number of years, apparently of their own volition. Although the formation of the society of Merchant Venturers shows that they acted communally in a professional sense, this kind of concerted group action on the council is very interesting, although perhaps not surprising: the very existence of the Merchant Venturers society demonstrates a clear group

¹³³ As exist for the first recorded English slaving voyage, that of John Hawkins. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hawkins

¹³⁴ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, pp.194-195

¹³⁵ Stanford (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol*, p.46

consciousness on the part of the mere-merchants, and an understanding that their collective interests might be at odds with those of the rest of the community.

Following on from this, the tactics employed by merchants to secure their monopolies have proved interesting. It has been suggested statistically that the Merchant Venturers were not the politically dominant force that they often appear, with 1566-1570 more the product of a surprise coup than a steady accumulation of power. Despite their apparent minority status they endeavoured to secure power and privileges through manipulation of the system. Once this had been achieved they attempted to consolidate their power, as demonstrated by Thomas' revoked laws for the election of Mayors¹³⁶ and the upward trend of **Figure 4** between 1566 and 1570. Even after their defeat they battled on, employing parliamentary representatives to argue their case and delay the repeal of their act.¹³⁷ Once this final stand had failed many of the Merchant Venturers were involved in the formation of the Bristol section of the Spanish Company, following the London trend towards monopolies based upon geographical location rather than socio-economic groupings.¹³⁸

One final area into which the lives of the Chesters might hopefully have shed a little light is the Reformation. For many years the standard picture of those responsible for the dissolution of the monasteries has been of religious zealots, driven by their Protestant ideals to destroy the Catholic church.¹³⁹ It has been clearly demonstrated that far from being a radical Protestant, William Chester was, if anything a lukewarm Catholic. He was denounced by reformers, his wife was implicitly accused of opposing gospel teaching and he left his parish church ostentatious High Church vestments. It seems that the man responsible for dissolving the Bristol monastic houses was not acting out of religious

¹³⁶ Stanford (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol*, p.41

¹³⁷ D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate*, p.199 for discussion of the parliamentary debates of 1570

¹³⁸ R. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, p.51

¹³⁹ For a good example of this perspective, see A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, (London, 1989) (as quoted by E.H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English reformation*)

principles, but economic pragmatism and perhaps obedience to his sovereign. When the opportunity to acquire a large amount of valuable land for himself and his city arose William grasped it, sacrificing his principles at the altar of profit. Although in the context of the recent reformation historiography this is by no means a revelation, it does support the modern interpretation of the period.¹⁴⁰

Historical understanding of Sixteenth-century Bristol can be compared to a vast mosaic in which only a proportion of the original tiles remains. It is hoped that this investigation into the Chesters has been able to add one or two more tiles to the whole, occasionally helping to fill in old sections, perhaps even starting some new ones. It is tempting, but it would be mistaken, to contrive to combine all of the evidence into a single grand narrative. The pieces of information I have gathered do not tell the whole story of this important mercantile dynasty, but they do illuminate their activities in several fields, personal, commercial, political and criminal, and, I hope, breathe life into some powerful and fascinating characters who until now were little more than names on dusty lists and ledgers.

¹⁴⁰ For a full discussion see E.H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English reformation*, (Cambridge, 2003)

Bibliography:Manuscript Sources:

- *Will of James Chester, Merchant of Bristol, Gloucestershire*, 12/6/1560, PROB 11/43
- *Will of Thomas Chester, Alderman of Bristol, Gloucestershire*, 9/2/1584, PROB 11/66
- *Will of William Chester, Alderman of Bristol, Gloucestershire*, 8/11/1559 PROB 11/42B
- *Will of William Chester of Bristol, Gloucestershire*, 7/3/1573, PROB 11/55

Primary Sources:

(Arranged alphabetically according to document title)

- Dasant, J.R. (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1542-1631* (1890-1964)
- Adams, W. (ed.), *Adams's Chronicle of Bristol*, (Arrowsmith, 1910)
- *Bristol apprentice book. Vol. 1, 1573-1579* tr. McGregor, M., (Bristol & Avon, 1992)
- *Bristol apprentice book. Vol. 2, 1573-1579* tr. McGregor, M., (Bristol & Avon, 1992)
- *Bristol apprentice book. Vol. 3, 1573-1579* tr. McGregor, M., (Bristol & Avon, 1992)
- *Bristol apprentice book. Vol. 4, 1586-1593* tr. McGregor, M., (Bristol & Avon, 1994)
- *Bristol customs accounts: 1541/2 1542/3 1545/6*: TNA e122 21/10, 199/4, 21/5
(Information received from Dr Evan Jones)
- Hollis, D. (ed.), *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book, 1532-1565: Part 1, 1532-1542*, (Bristol Record Society, 1949)
- Bush, H., *Bristol town duties: a collection of original & interesting documents, intended to explain and elucidate the above important subject* (J.M. Gutch, 1828)
- Ralph, E. & Hardwick N.M. (eds.), *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book, 1532-1565: Part 2, 1542-1552*, (Bristol Record Society, 1980)
- Ralph, E. (ed.), *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book, 1532-1565: Part 3, 1552-1565*, (Bristol Record Society xii, 1992)
- Latimer, J. (ed.), *Calendar of the charters &c. of the City and County of Bristol*, (Bristol, 1909)
- Livock, D.M. (ed.), *City chamberlains' accounts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, (Bristol Record Society, 1966)
- *Complaint of the Bristol Tuckers, 1568*, tr. Fox, F.F. & Taylor, J. in *Some Account of the Guild of Weavers in Bristol: Chiefly from MSS* (Bristol, 1889), pp. 91-4
- Vanes, J. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, (Bristol Record Society, 1979)
- Ralph, E. (ed.), *The Great White Book of Bristol* (Bristol Record Society, 1979)
- Veale, E.W.W., (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol: pt. I*, (Bristol Record Society, 1933)
- Veale, E.W.W., (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol: pt. II*, (Bristol Record Society, 1938)
- Veale, E.W.W., (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol: pt. III*, (Bristol Record Society, 1951)
- Vanes, J. (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, (London, 1974)
- *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London, 1862-1910)
- Stanford, M (ed.), *The Ordinances of Bristol 1506-1598* (Bristol Record Society xxvi, 1990)
- Vanes, J. (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, (London, 1974)
- Willan, T.S., *A Tudor Book of Rates*, (Manchester, 1562)
- Leech, R.H. (ed.), *The Topography of medieval and early modern Bristol, Pt.1: Property in the early walled town and marsh suburb north of the Avon*, (Bristol Record Society, 1997)

Secondary Works:

(Arranged alphabetically according to Author)

- Arkell, T., Evans N., and Goose N., (eds.) *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and interpreting the probate records of early modern England*, (Oxford, 2000)
- Brenner, R., *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas traders, 1550-1653*, (Cambridge, 1993)
- Carus-Wilson, E.M., *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London, 1954)
- Jones, E.T., 'Illicit business: accounting for smuggling in mid-sixteenth century Bristol', *Economic History Review*, 54 (2001)
- Latimer, J., *The annals of Bristol in the seventeenth century*, (Bristol, 1900)
- Latimer, J., *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1903)
- Latimer, J., *Sixteenth-century Bristol* (Arrowsmith, 1908)
- Little, B., *The City and County of Bristol: a study in Atlantic civilisation*, (Wakefield, 1967)
- McGrath, P. (ed.), *A Bristol miscellany* (Bristol Record Society, 1985)
- McGrath, P.V., *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* (Bristol, 1975)
- Sacks, D.H., *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700*, (California, 1991)
- Seyer, S., *Memoirs historical and topographical of Bristol and its neighbourhood, from the earliest period down to the present time*, (Bristol, 1821-3)
- Thrupp, S., *the merchant class of Medieval London: 1300-1500* (Chicago, 1948)
- Waters, R.E.C., *Genealogical memoirs of the families of Chester of Bristol, Barton Regis, London, and Almondsbury, Descended from Henry Chester, Sheriff of Bristol 1470*, (Reeves and Turner, 1881)
- Youngs, J., *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, (Allen & Unwin, 1971)

Appendix 1: Positions on Ordinance lists

Year	1553	1554	1556	1557	1558	1558	1560	1560	1566	1569	1570	1570	1572	1575	1575	1576	1576	1576	1576	1577	1578	1579	1579	1580	1582	1584	1585	
Total	43	30	35	40	25	36	27	27	31	39	38	20	24	35	29	27	26	29	24	36	33	38	26	42	30	43	43	
Stanbank	42	29	29	20	18	23	17	17	9	9	10		6	6				7	6	6	5	7	6	7	11	12		
Wade							26	27	18	27	19	9	15			11	10	12	1	10	9	11	15	11	9	7	7	
Snigg			10	36		30	21	22	12	21						8	6	9		8	7	9		9	12			
T Chester							9	7	16	1	1				3	3		3				3			3			

Year	1555	1556	1557	1558	1559	1560	1561	1562	1563	1564	1565	1566	1567	1568	1569	1570	1571	1572	1573	1574	1575	1576	1577	1578	1579	1580	1581	1582	1583	1584	1585	1586	1587
Standbank	1.012	1.017		1.099	1.414	1.179		1.26						1.856			2.082	1.949		2			2.415	2.035	2.449	2.569	2.33	2.449		1.651		1.893	
						1.251		1.26																2			2.082						
Average	1.012	1.017		1.099	1.414	1.215		1.26						1.856			2.082	1.949		2			2.415	2.018	2.449	2.569	2.206	2.449		1.651		1.893	
Snigg								1.019						1.312		1.202	1.414		1.265					1.567	1.897	1.915	1.859	1.954		1.826		2.478	2.478
							1										1.491							1.612			1.317						
																								1.555									
																								4.899									
Average								1.01						1.312		1.202	1.452		1.265					2.408	1.897	1.915	1.588	1.954		1.826		2.478	2.478
Wade				1.871	1.054	1.095		1.134						1.607			1.363							1.837	2.121	2.171	2.055	2.16		1.581			
								1.108																2.082									
																								1.795									
Average				1.871	1.054	1.095		1.121						1.607			1.363							1.905	2.121	2.171	2.055	2.16		1.581			
T Chester														2			1.392		6.245	6.164				3.109	3		3.559		3.162				
Average														1.964										3.109									
Average								1.982						1.392			6.245	6.164						3.109	3.055		3.559		3.162				

Appendix 2: Composition of the Common Council

Influence					Influence						
#	coef	%	Surname	Forname	Trade	#	coef	%	Surname	Forname	Trade
1	5.196	11.08	Jones	Roger	Grocer	1	5.568	10.24	Cutt	John	Merchant
2	3.674	7.832	Pacy	Thomas	Mercer	2	3.937	7.241	Harris	David	Grocer
3	3	6.395	Adams	Robert	Tanner	3	3.215	5.913	Saxie	Robert	Draper
4	2.598	5.538	Harris	David	Grocer	4	2.784	5.12	Pepwall	William	Grocer
5	2.324	4.954	Saxie	Robert	Draper	5	2.49	4.58	Jones	Roger	Grocer
6	2.121	4.522	Pepwall	William	Grocer	6	2.273	4.181	Carrie	William	Draper
7	1.964	4.187	Chester	Thomas	Merchant	7	2.104	3.871	Northull	John	Pewterer
8	1.837	3.916	Maunceill	John	Grocer	8	1.969	3.621	Stone	John	Brewer
9	1.732	3.692	Brampton	John	Unknown	9	1.856	3.414	Standbank	Anthony	Vintner
10	1.643	3.503	Gurney	John	Merchant	10	1.761	3.238	Langly	Phillip	Grocer
11	1.567	3.34	Harris	Thomas	Merchant	11	1.679	3.088	Aldworth	Thomas	Merchant
12	1.5	3.198	Teynt	Edward	Vintner	12	1.607	2.956	Snigg	George	Merchant
13	1.441	3.072	Stone	John	Brewer	13	1.544	2.84	Tucker	William	Draper
14	1.389	2.96	Milward	Roger	Grocer	14	1.488	2.737	Browne	John	Merchant
15	1.342	2.86	Jones	William	Merchant	15	1.438	2.644	Pruett	John	Tanner
16	1.299	2.769	Williams	Nicholas	Draper	16	1.392	2.56	Chester	Thomas	Merchant
17	1.26	2.687	Standbank	Anthony	Vintner	17	1.35	2.484	Kelk	Thomas	Merchant
18	1.225	2.611	Pykes	John	Mercer	18	1.312	2.414	Wade	John	Upholsterer
19	1.192	2.541	White	Egidus	Unknown	19	1.277	2.349	Colston	Thomas	Mercer
20	1.162	2.477	Shipman	Thomas	Merchant	20	1.245	2.29	Belsher	William	Mercer
21	1.134	2.417	Griffiths	John	Roper	21	1.215	2.235	Young	Thomas	Grocer
22	1.108	2.362	Snigg	George	Merchant	22	1.187	2.183	Davis	Richard	Merchant
23	1.083	2.31	Tucker	William	Draper	23	1.161	2.135	Jones	Edmund	Draper
24	1.061	2.261	Browne	John	Merchant	24	1.137	2.09	Young	William	Merchant
25	1.039	2.215	Pruett	John	Tanner	25	1.114	2.048	Jones	John	Draper
26	1.019	2.172	Willie	John	Vintner	26	1.092	2.008	Chester	Dominick	Merchant
27	1	2.132	Wade	John	Upholsterer	27	1.072	1.971	Yemens	William	Grocer
	46.91	20.99				28	1.052	1.935	Halton	Robert	Merchant
						29	1.034	1.902	Smythe	Robert	Mercer
						30	1.017	1.87	Blake	Nicholas	Soapmaker
						31	1	1.839	White	John	Turner
							54.37	32.28			

#	Influence		Surname	Forname	Trade
	coef	%			
1	4.472	13.17	Tucker	William	Draper
2	3.162	9.31	Harris	David	Grocer
3	2.582	7.60	Pepwall	William	Grocer
4	2.236	6.58	Jones	Roger	Grocer
5	2	5.88	Barnes	John	Tucker
6	1.826	5.37	Griffiths	John	Roper
7	1.69	4.97	Pruett	John	Tanner
8	1.581	4.65	Sowdley	Michael	Apothecary
9	1.491	4.38	Wade	John	Upholsterer
10	1.414	4.16	Colston	Thomas	Mercer
11	1.348	3.97	Roberts	John	Grocer
12	1.291	3.80	Young	Thomas	Grocer
13	1.24	3.65	Jones	Edmund	Draper
14	1.195	3.51	Slocombe	Thomas	Draper
15	1.155	3.39	Jones	John	Draper
16	1.118	3.29	Langly	Phillip	Grocer
17	1.085	3.19	Kirkland	Thomas	Tucker
18	1.054	3.10	Yemens	William	Grocer
19	1.026	3.02	Blake	Nicholas	Soapmaker
20	1	2.94	Porter	Edmund	Draper
	33.97	0			

#	Influence		Surname	Forname	Trade
	coef	%			
1	4.899	11.85	Stone	John	Brewer
2	3.464	8.37	Harris	David	Grocer
3	2.828	6.84	Pepwall	William	Grocer
4	2.449	5.92	Jones	Roger	Grocer
5	2.191	5.29	Northull	John	Pewterer
6	2	4.83	Standbank	Anthony	Vintner
7	1.852	4.47	Cutt	John	Merchant
8	1.732	4.18	Tucker	William	Draper
9	1.633	3.95	Warren	Thomas	Mercer
10	1.549	3.74	Hassold	Randolf	Sherman
11	1.477	3.57	Griffiths	John	Roper
12	1.414	3.42	Browne	John	Merchant
13	1.359	3.28	Pruett	John	Tanner
14	1.309	3.16	Sowdley	Michael	Apothecary
15	1.265	3.05	Wade	John	Upholsterer
16	1.225	2.96	Roberts	John	Grocer
17	1.188	2.87	Jones	Edmund	Draper
18	1.155	2.79	Jones	John	Draper
19	1.124	2.71	Langly	Phillip	Grocer
20	1.095	2.65	Kirkland	Thomas	Tucker
21	1.069	2.58	Barnes	John	Tucker
22	1.044	2.52	Blake	Nicholas	Soapmaker
23	1.022	2.47	Porter	Edmund	Draper
24	1	2.41	Bird	William	Draper
	41.34	7.89			

#	Influence		Surname	Forname	Trade
	coef	%			
1	5.916	9.564	Snigg	George	Merchant
2	4.183	6.763	Saxie	Robert	Draper
3	3.416	5.522	Stone	John	Brewer
4	2.958	4.782	Harris	David	Grocer
5	2.646	4.277	Cutt	John	Merchant
6	2.415	3.904	Standbank	Anthony	Vintner
7	2.236	3.615	Tucker	William	Draper
8	2.092	3.381	Browne	John	Merchant
9	1.972	3.188	Kelk	Thomas	Merchant
10	1.871	3.024	Saltren	William	Merchant
11	1.784	2.884	Halton	Robert	Merchant
12	1.708	2.761	Griffiths	John	Roper
13	1.641	2.653	Pruett	John	Tanner
14	1.581	2.556	Sowdley	Michael	Apothecary
15	1.528	2.469	Colston	Thomas	Mercer
16	1.479	2.391	Jones	John	Draper
17	1.435	2.32	Langly	Phillip	Grocer
18	1.394	2.254	Aldworth	Thomas	Merchant
19	1.357	2.194	Pikes	Walter	Draper
20	1.323	2.139	Kirkland	Thomas	Tucker
21	1.291	2.087	Young	Richard	Merchant
22	1.261	2.039	Rowland	Thomas	Merchant
23	1.234	1.994	Cole	Richard	Mercer
24	1.208	1.952	Hickes	William	Merchant
25	1.183	1.913	Barnes	John	Tucker
26	1.16	1.876	Warren	Thomas	Mercer
27	1.139	1.841	Hassold	Randolf	Sherman
28	1.118	1.807	Gittons	William	Merchant
29	1.099	1.776	Kitchin	Robert	Merchant
30	1.08	1.746	Porter	Edmund	Draper
31	1.063	1.718	Bird	William	Draper
32	1.046	1.691	Blake	Nicholas	Soapmaker
33	1.03	1.665	Pepwall	Michael	Grocer
34	1.015	1.64	Deconson	Thomas	Merchant
35	1	1.617	Ashe	John	Glover
	61.86	31.84			

Appendix 3: Apprentice Records

As Master

Date	Master	Profession	Wife	Appretice Term	Other	Book	Entry
September 9 1553	Dominick Chester	#Mercer	-	Hugh	88 Marks f 4/6	CBAB III	140
25th December 1561	Dominick Chester	Merchant	-	William	8 f 4/6	CBAB III	1335
					16		
September 15 1570	Edward Chester	Merchant	Bridget	Thomas	8-	Vol 1 BAB	-
October 1 1578	Edward Chester	Merchant	Bridget	John	7-	Vol 2 BAB	-
					15		
September 3 1545	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	Robert	820/- f 4/6	CBAB II	568
October 2 1548	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	George	8 f 4/6	CBAB II	1249
October 6 1550	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	Thomas	940/- f 4/6	CBAB II	1681
August 27 1551	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	Robert	9 f 4/6	CBAB II	1800
May 5 1553	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	Richard	7 f 4/6	CBAB III	86
September 28 1553	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	William	7 f 4/6	CBAB III	146
June 6 1554	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	John	10 f 4/6	CBAB III	424
July 26 1554	James Chester	#Mercer	Margery	Richard	8 f 4/6	CBAB III	266
September 14 1554	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	Robert	11 f 4/6	CBAB III	304
October 19 1554	James Chester	Merchant	Margery	Philip	8 f 4/6	CBAB III	333
January 1 1555	James Chester	#Mercer	Mary	Nicholas	740/- f 4/6	CBAB III	485
April 14 1555	James Chester	Merchant	Mary	Richard	8 f 4/6	CBAB III	518
					100		
September 12 1544	Thomas Chester	Merchant	-	John	9 f 4/6	CBAB II	386
October 21 1546	Thomas Chester	Merchant	Alice	William	1040/- f 4/6	CBAB II	833
May 25 1553	Thomas Chester	Merchant	Alice	Henry	7 f 4/6	CBAB III	96
September 1 1554	Thomas Chester	#Mercer	Alice	William	940/- f 4/6	CBAB III	339
April 18 1557	Thomas Chester	Merchant	Alice	John	740/- f 4/6	CBAB III	717
					33		
June 2 1545	William Chester	Whitawer	Helen	Edward	14 13/4 f 4/6	CBAB II	504
September 26 1545	William Chester	Pointmaker	Helen	Andrew	830/- f 4/6	CBAB II	577
March 15 1546	William Chester	Whitawer	-	Thomas	820/- f 4/6	CBAB II	679
March 8 1548	William Chester	Whitawer	Ellen	Robert	926/8 f 4/6	CBAB II	1118
September 28 1548	William Chester	Whitawer	Helen	Robert	10 f 4/6	CBAB II	1217
September 30 1548	William Chester (Jr)	Whitawer	Margery	Nicholas	11 33/4	CBAB II	1223
June 23 1554	William Chester	Whitawer	Matilda	John	926/8 f 4/6	CBAB III	230
July 20 1554	William Chester	Whitawer	Matilda	Thomas	720/- f 4/6	CBAB III	377
September 28 1554	William Chester	Whitawer	Joan	Henry	933/4 f 4/6	CBAB III	311
April 8 1558	William Chester	Whitawer	Joan	Edward	835/- f 4/6	CBAB III	847
February 11 1560	William Chester	Whitawer	Joan	John	8-	CBAB III	1129
December 20 1569	William Chester	Whitawer	Joan	William	8-	Vol 1 BAB	-
July 28 1554	William Chester (Jr)	Whitawer	Joan	John	726/8 f 4/6	CBAB III	268
March 7 1555	William Chester (Jr)	Whitawer	Joan	Robert	926/8 f 4/6	CBAB III	467
November 10 1559	William Chester (Jr)	Whitawer	Margery	Lewis	130/- f 4/6	CBAB II	1523
May 20 1577	William Chester (Jr)	Whitawer	Jane	Henry	1026/8 f 4/6	CBAB III	737