

**Margaret M Condon and Evan T. Jones (eds.), ‘Bristol 1483, January: Particulars of Account of John Walshe, controller: Introduction’ (University of Bristol, Research Data Repository, 2019)<sup>1</sup>**

### **Text and comment**

This small and very badly damaged fragment of an account (see photographs below) is one of several newly discovered and identified in the course of work on the Cabot Project (University of Bristol, 2009-2019). The format of the document identifies it as a Bristol account, and as a controlment rather than a ledger.<sup>2</sup> The format is important evidence here, because it makes it possible to distinguish between the front (recto) and back (dorse). This, in turn, establishes the chronological sequence of the entries, and gives some sense of how much material is missing. The normal pattern of a Bristol controlment is that the recto reads downwards from the triangular head of each membrane, the point at which all the separate membranes were joined, and the dorse reads downward from the square ‘foot’ towards the triangular head.<sup>3</sup> This means that the bottom portion of the recto is missing (after the entry for William Girdeler); and the top portion of the dorse is similarly lost. There is thus a substantial break in the record between entry 22 on the spreadsheet (for Girdeler) and the unknown ship and merchant of entry 23. The entries *do not* flow on from each other. Membranes could be short or long; but even if this membrane was shorter than average, at least half of its original length and perhaps sixty or more individual entries have probably been lost.<sup>4</sup>

### **Dating the account**

A number of features of the account help to date the document. Extreme outside dates can be determined by the denizen status for customs purposes accorded to Castilian merchants. These commenced in 1467, and continued until abrogated by the Treaty of Medina del Campo in 1489.<sup>5</sup> It seems unlikely, however, that the account is later than 1484, since it includes William Bird: a well-established Bristol ship-owner and merchant, who died that year.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the document cannot relate to either 1478 or 1480, since ‘particular’ customs accounts survive that cover January for both those years.<sup>7</sup>

The handwriting of the document bears no resemblance to the only known controlment for John Donne, the controller of the late 1460s, nor to that of Daniel Sheldon, controller in 1471, or those of Guy Westcote, controller 1472-1475.<sup>8</sup> So, by elimination, a date in the late

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives: Public Record Office, UK [TNA], E122/176/27 (part). This transcription is an output of the ‘Cabot Project’ (University of Bristol, 2009-2019), funded by Gretchen Bauta, a private Canadian benefactor, and others.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript has the triangular ‘head’ typical of a controlment, records ‘vini’ for wine rather than subsidy paid, and omits details of customs paid for cloth, all characteristics identifying a controlment rather than a ledger of particulars.

<sup>3</sup> The controlments for 1485-6 and 1486-7 are exceptions: both front and back run from the head, an arrangement that makes these two rolls much more inconvenient to use: TNA, E122/20/6, E122/20/7.

<sup>4</sup> The fragment measures approximately 250 x 248 mm (height x width).

<sup>5</sup> Wendy R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978), pp. 53-5.

<sup>6</sup> E. W. W. Veale (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol III* (Bristol Record Society, xvi, 1951), pp. 152-4. Will made 20 April 1484, proved 25 June 1484.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, E122/19/13, E122/19/14.

<sup>8</sup> Particulars for 1468: TNA, E122/19/5, E122/172/17 (part); Daniel Sheldon E122/174/3; for Guy Westcote in 1472 and 1475, E122/174/3 (part), E122/176/27 (part), E122/18/39.

1470s or early 1480s would seem more likely. That would fit well with the merchants listed, many of whom are known to have been active during that period.<sup>9</sup>

Fortunately, it is possible to date the fragment with near certainty, by virtue of the three entries that concern the export of substantial quantities of beans by factors of ‘John Shipward’. On 10 January 1483, John Shipward ‘gentleman usher of our chamber’ was granted a licence to purchase and export 200 weys of beans either himself or through factors.<sup>10</sup> Licences for the export of beans and wheat were recorded on the Treaty Rolls of Chancery (C76), which provide a complete and continuous record, unless the grantee himself did not seek enrolment. The grant of 1483 is the only such licence recorded in Shipward’s name. Although the licence does not specify the port of export, it clearly took place through Bristol. This is apparent from the registration of the licence of 10 January in the *Great Red Book* of Bristol.<sup>11</sup> Edward IV died 9 April 1483, at which point the licence would have become void. It thus seems highly probable that the export of beans from Bristol, recorded in the particular account in Shipward’s name, occurred in January 1483.

### Exporting the beans

The licence to Shipward is not only useful for dating the particulars. It also throws light on the administrative processes and difficulties involved in the export of foodstuffs. In this period the export of grain from England was only permitted without licence when domestic prices were low. In 1437 this had been defined as times when wheat cost less than 6s. 8d. per quarter and barley less than 3s. per quarter.<sup>12</sup> The granting of the licence to Shipward for the export of the beans in 1483 thus implies that the price of grain was higher than this. What made this licence highly unusual was that John Shipward was the customer of Bristol – a post he held from 18 April 1481 to 23 July 1483.<sup>13</sup> Customs officers were normally barred from engaging in overseas trade.<sup>14</sup> The licence thus appears to have been an exceptional privilege, most likely obtained as a reward for unrelated duties Shipward had performed in the King’s service. It seems though that Shipward was concerned that his nominal engagement in trade while serving as a customs officer might cause him problems. So on 7 February 1483 he obtained a writ of *non molestandi* to bolster his grant. This was issued by Chancery at the verbal command of the King.<sup>15</sup> The effect would have been to forestall any potential prosecution of Shipward in the Exchequer in relation to this matter.

The Bristol particulars for this year are unusual for being the only late medieval customs account to specify the export of foodstuffs by a factor of a named licensee. Although the beans in the account are recorded as Shipward’s property, it seems almost certain that this was a legal fiction, with the Spanish factors listed being the true owners. Shipward could have sold shares

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Blenkinsop appears in 1465/6, but more substantially in 1487 and 1492-3 shipping to Ireland and Lisbon; Robert Sampson’s only known shipment is in August 1483: TNA, E122/19/4, fo. 5v (3v); E122/20/7, m. 24r; E122/20/9, fos. 4r, 26r, 37v; E122/20/1, fo. 5r. If the master of the *Davy* of Tenby can be read as Brian Cole, then his only other known mention is as the master of the *George* of Tenby in 1480. John Stevens or Stephens (of whom there was more than one) was, like Bird, a constant throughout the period. John Porter was engaged in the Irish trade in 1473 and, in greater volume, in 1479-80, E122/19/10, fo. 10r; E122/19/14, fos 6v, 10v, 38r. William Girdeler, however, is last noticed in 1473.

<sup>10</sup> C76/166, m. 8.

<sup>11</sup> E. W. W. Veale (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol II* (Bristol Record Society, viii, 1938), p. 155. The licence itself does not specify a port. Ordinances regulating the lading of beans and wheat in Bristol were made in 1474-5 and confirmed 1481-2, with heavy penalties for non-observance: *ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. 2, pp. 295-6, 331-2.

<sup>13</sup> *Cal. Fine Rolls 1471-1485*, pp. 215-6, 254-5; TNA, E356/22, rot. 11.

<sup>14</sup> 20 Hen VI c. 5: *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. ii, p. 319.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, C76/166, m. 4.

in his original licence to the foreign merchants: a practice that is well-documented in the sixteenth century. All would have been aware that this had happened but, for the sake of legal form, Shipward was recorded as the owner of the grain, with the foreign merchants listed as factors. That was, of course, permitted by the terms of his licence. Such punctiliousness may have seemed desirable given that Shipward was employed by the Crown. They were also common form: the same conventions were observed, for example, in the records of the export of tallow by ‘factors’ of the Treasurer of England.<sup>16</sup> Shipward, however, had particular reason to be careful, since he had been presented by a Bristol jury in September 1481 for the alleged export of cloth despite being a customs officer.<sup>17</sup>

Food exports to Spain were irregular during this period, and made in response to local shortages. They seem to have peaked in western and southern ports from 1473-5, and in more modest amounts thereafter: in 1482, for example, licences were granted for 1,600 quarters of wheat to go to Spain because of the great shortages there. Beans were always a lesser export, but were sent in significant quantities from Western ports between 1477 and 1482.<sup>18</sup> The granting of a licence to export beans to Spain in January 1483 makes sense given the high demand for arable produce at this time. It also implies that Shipward could have demanded a high price for the shares he sold in his licence. Surviving business accounts from the 1540s indicate that shares in wheat licenses could cost as much as 5s. per quarter, equivalent to sixty per cent of the price of the grain.<sup>19</sup> Shipward’s 1483 licence granted him the right to export 1,200 quarters (200 wey) of beans. So, while it is impossible to determine how much he sold his rights for, he is likely to have made a very handsome profit on the deal.

Beans, like other arable produce, varied in price markedly from year-to-year depending on the success of harvests at home and abroad. In general such price fluctuations are not apparent in the ‘particular’ accounts because the customs houses by this date were clearly valuing goods according to a set ‘book of rates’, rather than by market valuation.<sup>20</sup> This short account may, however, be an exception. Two entries in the fragment, although barely legible, indicate that the beans had been valued at £1 per wey rather than the more usual 13s 4d. This might have been felt politic if prices were particularly high in England, or the customer might simply have felt that merchants would not jib at the higher valuation if they expected to make a good profit.

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<sup>16</sup> TNA, E122/19/14, fos. 10r, 11v (1479-80).

<sup>17</sup> In this instance the jury concluded that the cloth was exported for the maintenance and repair of his ship, and not by way of merchandise: TNA, E122/19/18. While this would have meant that his actions were legal, such entanglements might explain his apparent wariness in 1483. The barons of the Exchequer, however, took until October 1486 before finally discharging Shipward from prosecution for his 1481 shipment of cloth: TNA, E159/259, Recorda, Mich 23 Edw IV, rot. 6-6d and contd.

<sup>18</sup> Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 96-9, p. 103 n.95. Childs does not notice Shipward’s licence of 1483. The Bristol merchant Richard Sherman shipped 30 weys beans in 1476, E122/19/12, m. 1r.

<sup>19</sup> E. T. Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy: Reconstructing the Smugglers’ Trade of Sixteenth Century Bristol* (Ashgate, 2012), pp. 100-104.

<sup>20</sup> Books of rates do not survive from this period but can be inferred from the way that valuations for particular products listed in the ‘particular’ accounts rarely change from year to year. The use of books of rates, some of which have been published, is well attested for later centuries. See: T. S. Willan, *A Tudor Book of Rates* (Manchester, 1962), pp. xviii-xliii.

## Ship descriptions

One distinctive feature of the account is the use of the term ‘Balinger’ as the name of the navicula or ‘little ship’ of Zumaya. Whilst the banal explanation is that it is likely that a clerk had failed to record the actual name of the ship (and there are other examples in which a specific ‘ship type’ is recorded as a ship name) the term ‘balinger’ does not commonly appear in Bristol’s customs accounts. ‘Balingers’ of Brittany are recorded in Bristol butlerage particulars for the 1460s, which could be thought to be evidence for the date of the fragment.<sup>21</sup> But the term also has a direct connection to the 1480s and to Shipward’s fellow customer, Thomas Croft, in 1481. Both men, and their clerks, were presented for alleged irregularities. In Croft’s case the jurors excused the customer by asserting that the ‘navis sive [or] balinger’, the *Trinity*, and the ‘navis sive [or] balinger’, the *George*, had been freighted with salt by the Bristol customer Thomas Croft in order to search for the island of ‘Brasil’.<sup>22</sup>

## Identifying the controller

There is no heading to the fragment. The conclusion that the controlment belonged to John Walshe rests on the assumption that it dates from January 1483.<sup>23</sup> When Walshe, as controller, and John Shipward and Thomas Croft, as customers, submitted their particulars of account for Bristol customs for the closing months of Edward IV’s reign, they covered the six-month period from Michaelmas 1482 to 9 April 1483.<sup>24</sup> The surviving fragment would thus have formed part of a much larger and now lost whole.

## Editorial practice

All entries in italics, including extensions of abbreviations, have been supplied by the editors. The transcription into Microsoft Excel follows the pattern set by Evan Jones for his ESRC-funded project on Ireland-Bristol trade in the sixteenth century.<sup>25</sup> These conventions are summarised in the introduction to the account for 1461. In particular, surnames and ships’ names follow the manuscript; quantities of any particular commodity have, as far as practicable, been standardised to a single unit, calculated if necessary to two decimal places. Wine and cloth of assize have been notionally valued at £4 and £2 respectively, unless specifically valued in the manuscript. In order to preserve the viability of the spreadsheet for purposes of data analysis, zeros have been entered in italics where quantities and/or values are lost because of document damage.

The presence of editorial comments is marked by a red triangle in the upper corner of any cell, and appears on mouse hover.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, a similar usage is the navicula the ‘carvilo of Calvo’ [carvel] of 1471, TNA, E122/19/8, fo. 3r; for butlerage, citing both balingers and carvels, E101/82/7, 8.

<sup>22</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages* (Bristol Record Society, vol. VII, 1937), pp. 161-5; TNA, E122/19/18.

<sup>23</sup> Walshe was appointed controller 9 April 1481, *Cal. Patent Rolls 1476-1485*, p. 270.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, E356/22, rot. 10d.

<sup>25</sup> Databases at <http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/Ireland/datasets.htm> (accessed 29 January 2014); these were reformatted and published with indexes and abbreviated glossaries as Susan Flavin and Evan Jones, *Bristol’s Trade with Ireland and the Continent 1503-1601* (Bristol Record Society, vol. 61, 2009). Editorial conventions are repeated at pp. xxii-xxv.

**Photographs of the manuscript**

*Recto*



*Dorso*

