

Margaret M. Condon and Evan T. Jones (eds.), ‘Bristol 1474: Particulars of account of Thomas Croft and John Langston, customers, 10 April 1474 to 29 September 1474: Introduction’ (University of Bristol, Research Data Repository, 2019)¹

Text and Comment

This ledger, like other particulars of account for the mid-1470s, has added significance because of the absence of enrolled accounts for the port of Bristol from 14 December 1472 to 29 September 1477.² Its covering dates are based on the liturgical calendar: it runs from Easter (10 April) to Michaelmas (29 September) 1474.³ The customers, Thomas Croft and John Langston, had been in office since 1473.⁴ They would have been the authors of this document.

The ledger is generally in good condition, but the first folio has been badly damaged by both damp and gall. For this reason, a number of merchant names are lost, as are details of their shipments; and the name of one Bristol ship can no longer be determined with certainty.⁵ In most instances the quantity/value of goods shipped, where illegible in the manuscript, can be reconstructed from subsidy paid. The calculated figures have been entered in italics, with a comment in the commodity cell. With a few exceptions, here entered as ‘unknown’, the commodity names are identifiable with the aid of ultra-violet light, even in those instances in which the word is not legible in its entirety.

The ledger is written throughout in an elegant and distinctive hand characterised by the fine hair-strokes of the ascenders and descenders. The same hand is evident in the customers’ particulars of 1473 and 1475. The clerk is also distinguished by a more frequent use of English for commodity names.⁶ In some accounts his habit can be used to clarify a translation that is ambiguous when used in other accounts. For instance, in 1474 the scribe usefully enhances the description of horses being imported from Ireland. The horses were ‘hobyez’ – hobbies.⁷ The hobby was a small Irish horse or pony, variable in value.

For reasons discussed elsewhere, the 1474 particulars of account were not subject to the normal process of audit in the Exchequer, which included the recording of the summary of the account in the enrolled accounts.⁸ This does not mean, however, that the account was not audited. Indeed, a closing annotation in an Exchequer hand reveals that the particulars

¹ The National Archives, UK [TNA], E122/19/10A. It was previously referenced as E122/161/33. This transcription is an output of the ‘Cabot Project’ (University of Bristol, 2009-), funded by Gretchen Bauta, a private Canadian benefactor, and others. The transcription was completed in advanced draft in 2014. We are indebted to Professor Wendy Childs and to Dr. Flávio Miranda (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) for their generous assistance with the identification of Iberian place and personal names.

² TNA, E356/22 rots. 8d-9r; Michaelmas 1471 to 20 November 1472 is also missing. The lacunae in the enrolled accounts are discussed in the introduction to the particulars of account of the same Bristol customers for Easter to Michaelmas 1473, Margaret M. Condon and Evan T. Jones (eds.), ‘Bristol 1473: Particulars of Account of Thomas Croft and John Langston, customers, April to September 1473: Introduction’ (University of Bristol, Research Data Repository, 2019) <https://doi.org/10.5523/bris.3jsyg8gbv830k2clorj6obakjb>.

³ The date of the first entry, for a small ship exiting to Ireland, is uncertain because of document damage. A tentative reading is 14 April 1474.

⁴ Condon and Jones, ‘Bristol 1473’, pp. 1-2.

⁵ Some of the illegible entries might be readable under infra-red. However, the necessary equipment is not currently available in the UK National Archives. Ultra-violet light is seldom of assistance in reading gall-damaged documents.

⁶ Bristol customs officers commonly used English words for commodities that had no known Latin equivalent – such as ‘hake’, ‘pollock’ (MS ‘pulloke’) or ‘cotton’. This clerk, however, also used English for commodities such as ‘malte’, ‘fflour’, ‘knyves’ ‘pewter vessell’, which other officers would have described as ‘braseum’, ‘farina’ ‘cultelli’, ‘electrum’.

⁷ TNA, E122/19/10A, fo. 7v.

⁸ Condon and Jones, ‘Bristol 1473’, pp. 1-2.

were compared by an Exchequer auditor with the parallel roll maintained by the controller, Guy Westcote.⁹ Westcote's controlment does not survive. The ledger otherwise lacks the characteristic marginal annotations of Exchequer audit; and the summaries of receipts at the foot of each page appear to be in the hand of the accountants' scribe and not of the Exchequer's auditor.¹⁰

Whilst not immediately apparent from the ledger as now extant, the particulars for Easter to Michaelmas 14 Edward IV (1474) are but one half of a larger ledger that ran from 15 September 1473 to Michaelmas, 29 September, 1474.¹¹ At some point the two halves must have become separated, with only the second half surviving. This may explain the absence of the original cover to the ledger.¹² The full account was declared before Hugh Fenne (d. 1476), one of the auditors of the Exchequer, rather than subjected to audit according to the ancient course of the Exchequer. Allowances claimed by the customers included £104 paid to William Grey, bishop of Ely, in part repayment of over £2,500 loaned by him to Edward IV between December 1469 and June 1470. [Cf. *Fig. 1*] The Exchequer's records do not, unfortunately, give totals of either receipts or the accountants' discharge, and even the reference to the payment to the bishop of Ely is no more than an aside in a lengthy narrative of the audit of a Bristol customs account for 1477-8.¹³ Croft and Langston must, however, have acquitted themselves to the satisfaction of the Exchequer's auditor, since they were granted a discretionary reward of £93 6s 8d for the period Michaelmas 1473 to Michaelmas 1474.¹⁴ Usual practice suggests that this sum would have been additional to the

⁹ TNA: PRO, E122/19/10A, fo. 11v. The only marginal addition is against an entry amended by erasure. Subsidy due had been underestimated by a shilling requiring, as noted in the left-hand margin, 'xij d plus' to be added to the duty column. In consequence, the right-hand figure for duty is crudely amended, and 'Item xijd' added to the page summation at the foot of the folio. Although in a different hand to that of the ledger entries, it is not clear whether the amending hand is that of the Exchequer's auditor or of the accountants themselves: TNA, E122/19/10A fo. 10v.

¹⁰ For typical annotations of an Exchequer auditor see the several editions by Stuart Jenks of London customs accounts for the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. Jenks notes all such additions at the foot of each page of his published transcripts: Stuart Jenks, *The London Customs Accounts* (Hansischer Geschichtsverein, 74.iii.1-6), *passim*; <https://www.hansischergeschichtsverein.de/>. This is the pattern also of the single volume of transcripts (for 1445/6) published in hard copy, Stuart Jenks, ed. *The London Customs Accounts 24 Henry VI (1445/6)* Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Hansischer Geschichtsverein, NS 74 (Cologne, 2018).

¹¹ TNA, E368/252, States and Views Mich 19 Edw IV, rot 6 contd.

¹² The modern paper cover protects an original blank bifolium on which a nineteenth century clerk, Thomas Green, has written his initials and a temporary sorting number. Since this parchment bifolium surrounds the written folios, it suggests that the loss of the cover, and the separation of the two portions of the account, had occurred before the nineteenth century. For a full-year account in which the Easter term similarly begins with a heading in an engrossing hand, see, for example, TNA, E122/20/5, fo. 16r. Thomas Moses Green (d. 1856) was one of the long-serving clerks working under the Revd. Joseph Hunter – a sub-commissioner with the Records Commission and, from 1840, an Assistant Keeper under the terms of the Public Record Office Act of 1838. Green was involved in sorting the records of the King's Remembrancer's office at a time when those records were housed at Carlton Ride. For Green, John D. Cantwell, *The Public Record Office 1838-1958* (London, 1991), pp. 16, 50, 153, 176; for Hunter, David Crook, 'Hunter, Joseph (1783-1861)', *ODNB* (2008).

¹³ TNA, E368/252, States and Views Mich 19 Edw IV, rot 6 contd, dorse. In the previous year (1472-3) the Bristol and Hull instalments due to Grey were in arrears, leading the king to order an advance payable to Grey from the clerical tenths due from his diocese, TNA, E404/75/3 no. 49. Croft and Langston's payment(s) must in part have been of arrears, since £64 of the £100 due to the bishop during their term of office was paid only in June 1478, by which time Langston had been replaced by Thomas Norton. The bishop's original receipt for that payment survives as TNA, E122/19/17 [*Fig. 1*]. Croft and Norton seem to have made no claim for the sum, although their account for 1477-8 ended in an excess of expenditure over income, E356/22, m. 9r.

¹⁴ TNA, E405/59, m. 3d. Guy Westcote's reward as controller for the same period was £16 13s 4d. The two searchers, Thomas Benet and John Peke, received £26 and £13 6s 8d respectively. One reason that the rewards have been so little observed is, as Stuart Jenks notes, because they are not included in the formal enrolments of the customs accounts: Jenks, *London Customs Accounts 24 Henry VI*, p. xxv. Jenks notes only the Issue Rolls

customary fee for their office.¹⁵ On this occasion the reward was paid within six months of the close of their account. Although the sum is large, and required authorisation every year that it was granted, it followed established precedent. The reward allowed for officials in any port was based on the perceived importance of the port. The collectors of the neighbouring port of Bridgwater, for example, received only £16 13s 4d as their reward for a fifteen-month period ending at Christmas 1474. By contrast, in Hull, with its valuable wool, Baltic, and Iceland trade, the collectors and the controller shared one hundred marks (£66 13s 4d). The Exchequer sanctioned the rewards by an authority delegated by the king.¹⁶ Occasionally the ‘treasurer and lords of the council’ authorised a further reward to be taken in addition to the customary amount. There was a particularly generous instance of the latter in the previous year, in favour of the same Bristol customers. They were awarded an additional £40 9s 2d, over and above their usual reward and customary fees, for their ‘diligent labour’ by land and by sea, and their costs and expenses.¹⁷

Trade

The growing importance of Anglo-Spanish trade in the late fifteenth century has been discussed by Professor Wendy Childs and others.¹⁸ It is evident in this account. The chief import, at least in terms of weight, was iron. A characteristic export of northern Spain, over 500 tons were imported by denizen and Basque merchants within the period covered by this ledger. While iron imports to Bristol are significant throughout the first half of the 1470s, this tonnage is greater than for any surviving Bristol particulars other than for the full year 1492-3.¹⁹ That year over 700 tons were imported, including 12.33 tons iron carried by Castilian merchants from Bordeaux. The latter might reflect voyages that had commenced in the Basque country before proceeding to Gascony to pick up wine.²⁰ By way of comparison, the 514 tons of iron imported into Bristol in the summer of 1474 was a full sixth of the total amount exported by Spanish merchants from Bilbao to London 1482-1501, as revealed by

(TNA, E403) as a source. As will be obvious from the above, the tellers’ rolls (TNA, E405), despite their many gaps and imperfections, supply some of the lacunae in the series of Issue Rolls.

¹⁵ The fees of customs officers at Bristol had long been set at 10 marks (£6 13s 4d) a year to the customers, and at £5 to the controller, taken at source provided that it was authorised by the Exchequer. Allowance of the fee (or the occasional refusal of the Exchequer so to do) was part of the process of audit.

¹⁶ The immediate authority in the 1470s was a writ of 1471 under the privy seal (mentioned 17 February 1478, TNA, E403/849).

¹⁷ TNA, E405/57, m. 4.

¹⁸ Wendy R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978), pp. 85-90, 104-42, 206-7; Wendy R. Childs, *Trade and Shipping in the Medieval West: Portugal, Castile and England* (Porto, 2013), pp. 84-95, 158-61; Hilario Casado Alonso and Flávio Miranda, ‘The Iberian Economy and Commercial Exchange with North-western Europe in the Later Middle Ages’, in Evan. T. Jones and Richard Stone, eds, *The World of the Newport Ship: Trade, Politic and Shipping in the Mid-Fifteenth Century* (Cardiff, 2018), pp. 216-23. Casado Alonso and Miranda had access to unpublished draft versions of the Excel spreadsheets. Unfortunately, tonnage and poundage records for the port of London, which would have facilitated direct and detailed comparison with the trade of Bristol, seem not to have survived for the 1470s, leaving only the summary returns in the series of enrolled accounts to be used for statistical purposes.

¹⁹ The figures reported by Casado Alonso and Miranda for iron imports into Bristol 1461-1504 are misleading in that they appear to be a total for rateable value rather than, as suggested, duties paid: Casado Alonso and Miranda, ‘Iberian Economy and Commercial Exchange’, p. 219. Re-exports to Ireland have been excluded from both sets of figures.

²⁰ A further 36.75 tons iron said to be carried from Bordeaux were the property of Bristol merchants. Apart from John Herries’ shipment of 3 tons iron on the *Marie Belhouse* of Bristol the remainder of the Bordeaux iron shipments, both Spanish and denizen, were on Basque ships.

Spanish sources.²¹ In 1474, war with France was less than a year away; while shipbuilding activity in Bristol is known to have increased in the mid-1470s. It seems possible that politics and commercial opportunism contributed to the spike in iron imports visible here. Rosin, too, was an essential resource for shipbuilding and repair, and in summer 1474 came mostly from Basque Spain although, as in other years, it was also listed on ships coming from Bordeaux.²²

Since this is a summer account, imports of wine are limited in quantity: just over 150 tuns, including nine tuns of sweet wine imported by a Spaniard, Álvaro Cervino.²³ Half the wine imports came from Bordeaux, and most of the remainder from Spain. Thirteen tuns were brought in small boats across the Severn from Chepstow. These small-scale shipments would have avoided prisage, a per ship levy on denizen merchants of one tun on a ship carrying ten tuns of wine, or a maximum two tuns on a ship carrying twenty tuns or more.²⁴ The wine probably came from Iberia: either Portugal or Spain.²⁵ Woad was imported in quantities similar to wine. Its high price (woad was valued at £5 the pipe at customs rates) means that the total value of woad imports recorded in this account relative to that of wine was more than double. Woad, like wine, was listed on ships said to be coming from both from France and from northern Spain. Given Castilian dominance of the trade in Toulouse woad, the woad said to be coming from ‘Spain’ was probably also French. More unusually, the ledger includes imports of cotton and seam (fat or grease: possibly fish oil), as well as black soap or *smigmates*, carried on a ship hailing from the Galician port of Noja, but whose origins were surely further south.²⁶ Luxury goods imported included dates, liquorice, sugar, and the expensive dye-stuff, kermes. Such trade would become increasingly evident through the decade.²⁷

The account includes fish and pelts of various types. Most were imported from Ireland, although some entered Bristol via the coastal trade.²⁸ Both were common imports, although beaver skins came only from Spain.²⁹

²¹ For the Bilbao averías, Casado Alonso and Miranda, ‘Iberian Economy and Commercial Exchange’, pp. 221-2. In contrast to Bristol, much overseas trade through London (other than in wool and wool fells to the Staple at Calais) was conducted by alien rather than denizen merchants.

²² Of the rosin, 51 tuns came from Basque Spain, 15.5 tuns from Bordeaux. From the pattern of shipping as recorded in the 1474 account the 4 tuns carried across the Severn from Chepstow on 10 May might also have been Spanish rather than French in origin.

²³ Sweet wine incurred a higher rate of duty when imported by aliens, being charged double the 3s due on tonnage. This increased rate was confirmed to Edward IV for life in 1463, following earlier precedent by which Henry VI has been granted the increased rate, albeit for limited terms: *Rotuli Parliamentorum* IV, p. 369; V, p. 508. The rateable value is not easily determined.

²⁴ For the use of Wales to avoid prisage, Evan T. Jones, *Inside the Illicit Economy: Reconstructing the Smugglers’ Trade of Sixteenth Century Bristol* (Routledge, 2012), pp. 187-90.

²⁵ Cf. Childs, *Trade and Shipping*, pp. 123-4.

²⁶ TNA, E122/19/10A, fo. 8r; see also Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 104, 111. Galician ships were infrequent visitors to Bristol, Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, p. 154; E. Ferreira Priegue, *Galicia en el comercio de marítimo medieval* (A Coruña, 1988), pp. 618-33, 876-9, 895-6. Tables of pilgrimage licences in this book also show how Bristol’s early dominance in the pilgrim trade to Galicia (for Santiago) in the mid-fourteenth century was soon overtaken by ports further west, such as Plymouth and Dartmouth, and smaller ports of the Devon-Cornwall peninsula. Yet Bristol was still supplying large pilgrim ships, albeit infrequently, up to the end of the fifteenth century, including Robert Sturmy’s *Katherine* in 1457, and Bristol’s *Mary Grace* and *Katherine* in 1484.

²⁷ See Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 105-6, 110, 123-6; Childs, *Trade and Shipping*, pp. 98-9, 154.

²⁸ For longitudinal studies of Anglo-Irish trade, particularly that between Ireland and Bristol / Bridgwater in the later fifteenth century, Wendy Childs, ‘Ireland’s Trade with England in the Later Middle Ages’, *Irish Economic and Social History*, no. 9 (1982), pp. 5-33, esp. pp. 15-31; and for the dominant position of Bristol as an importer of fish, Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘The Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries in Medieval England and Wales’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, xv (2003), pp. 212-7. See also, Tim Bowly, ‘“Herring of Sligo and salmon of Bann”: Bristol’s maritime trade with Ireland in the fifteenth century’, in Richard Gorski, ed., *Roles of the Sea in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 147-166.

Trade with Portugal is represented largely by outbound ships, both denizen and Portuguese owned, exporting cloth. This is a typical pattern for a post-Easter account.³⁰ The main exception is an in-bound voyage of the navis/navicula the *James* of Bristol, entering at the beginning of August.³¹ She carried high value goods, including oil, sugar, and kermes ('greynez'), for just two Bristol merchants: possibly suggesting that one or both men were the ship's owner.

It will already be apparent that trade with Bordeaux remained viable despite the increasing intensity of Edward IV's preparations for war, which included plans for an English invasion of France.³² All the ships recorded in the account sailing to Bordeaux were denizen owned. Most, if not all, of these were Bristol vessels.

Brittany at this time was an independent duchy, often at loggerheads with France. Commerce with Brittany is represented by a single voyage in a Bristol ship carrying mostly Welsh woollen cloth.³³

Editorial Practice

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.³⁴ 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. All entries in italics have been supplied by the editors. These include extensions of abbreviations. The presence of editorial comments is marked by a red triangle in the upper corner of any cell, and appears on mouse hover. Comments on discrepancies in value/quantity have been attached to the 'commodity' where they are more clearly visible.

²⁹ Beaver was used for waterproof outer clothing, and its fibres for felting in hat-making, Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 139-40.

³⁰ Richard Stone, 'Bristol's overseas Trade in the Later Fifteenth Century: the Evidence of the "Particular" Customs Accounts', in Jones and Stone, *The World of the Newport Ship*, pp. 190-5; Wendy R. Childs, *Trade and Shipping*, p. 162. For an analysis of Portuguese trade 1461-1504, including aggregated totals of Portuguese imports by month, see also Flávio Miranda and Hilario Casado Alonso, 'Comércio entre o porto de Bristol e Portugal no final da Idade Média', *Anais de História de Além-mar*, xix (2018), pp. 11-36.

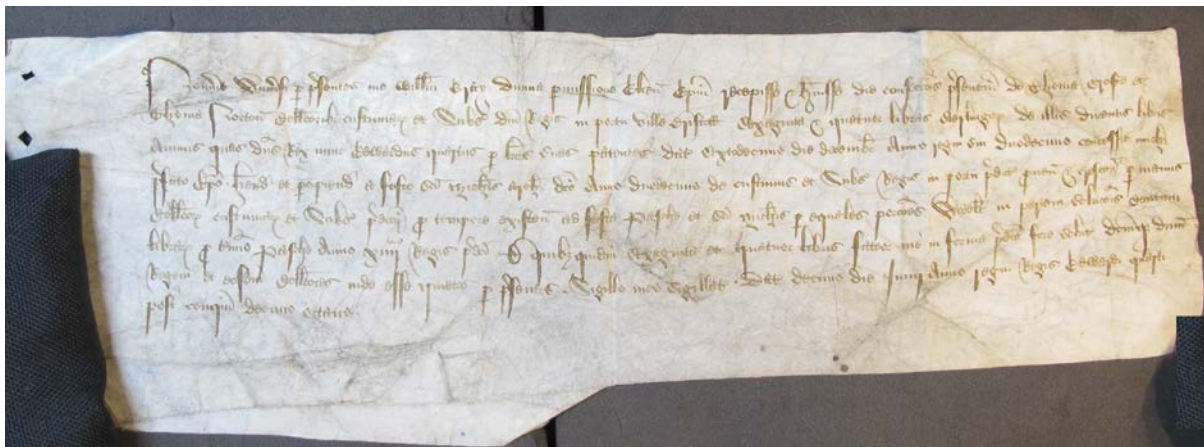
³¹ TNA, E122/19/10A, fo. 9r.

³² For Anglo-French relations 1472-74 see C. D. Ross, *Edward IV* (London, 1974), pp. 205-14. An offensive alliance with Burgundy against France was concluded by the Treaty of London of 25 July 1474.

³³ TNA, E122/19/10A, fo. 9v.

³⁴ 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.

Fig. 1: Receipt of William Grey, bishop of Ely (d. 4 August 1478), for £64 part of £100 due to him during the period of this account, but which was paid only in June 1478 by the then collectors of customs in Bristol, Thomas Croft and Thomas Norton: TNA, E122/19/17.



TRANSCRIPTION: Noverint universi per presentes me Willelmum Gray diuina permissione Eliensis Episcopum recipisse et habuisse die confeccionis presencium de Thoma Crofte et Thoma Norton Collectoribus customarum et Subsidiarum domini Regis in portu ville Bristoll' Sexaginta & quatuor libras sterlingorum de illis ducentis libris annuus quas dominus Rex nunc Edwardus quartus per litteras suas patentes datum sextodecimo die Decembris Anno regni sui duodecimo concessit michi prefato Episcopo habendum et percipiendum a festo sancti Michaelis archangeli dicto Anno duodecimo de customis et Subsidiis Regis in portu predictae proueniens & crescens per manus Collectorum customarum et Subsidiarum predictorum pro tempore existencium ad festa Pasche et sancti Michaelis per equales porciones, Videlicet in partem solucionis Centum librarum pro termino Pasche Anno xiiij^{mo} Regis predicti. De quibus quidem sexaginta et quatuor libris fateor me in forma predicta fore solutum dictumque dominum Regem et eosdem Collectores inde esse quietos per presentes. Sigillo meo sigillatum. Datum decimo die Junij Anno regnis Regis Edwardi quarti post conquestum decimo octavo.

ABSTRACT: Receipt and quittance in common form, given by William Grey, bishop of Ely, in favour of the king, Edward IV, and the collectors of customs and subsidies in the port of Bristol, Thomas Croft and Thomas Norton. The bishop acknowledges that on the day of making the receipt, he had received from Croft and Norton the sum of £64 towards the two hundred pounds due to him yearly from the customs and subsidies arising in the port Bristol, and payable by two equal instalments of £100 at Michaelmas and Easter under the terms of the grant made to him, the bishop, by letters patent dated 16 December 12 Edward IV [1472].³⁵ This payment of £64 was part payment of the £100 due in Easter term 14 Edward IV [1474]. Sealed with the bishop's seal [missing] and dated 10 June 18 Edward IV [1478].

COMMENT: Not claimed by Croft and Norton in their account for 1477-8, although they did claim for (late) payments to Gray for Michaelmas 1474 (£57 18s 7d) and Easter term 1475 (£42 17s).³⁶ Gray's original receipt is thus a particularly useful survival. The filing holes on the left-hand side suggest that it was included in a file of receipts prepared by the customers for presentation in the Exchequer as a part of their particulars of account.

³⁵ Cal. Patent Rolls 1467-1477, pp. 337-8.

³⁶ TNA, E356/22 rot. 9. Further payments were made the following year, presumably to Grey's executors.