

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)¹

This account of Thomas Croft and John Langston, serving as customers of Bristol, runs conventionally (at least according to its clearly written legend) from Easter to Michaelmas. That is, the account covers the period from 18 April to 29 September 1473. The ledger, like other surviving particulars of account for the mid-1470s, has added significance because there are no enrolled accounts for the port of Bristol from 14 December 1472 to 29 September 1477.² That means that for the period the ledger covers it is the only record of import and export through the port. The enrolled accounts are the Exchequer’s formal record after audit. They take the form of summaries and totals of receipts, payments into the Exchequer, payments mandated to a third party, and allowances. The absence of an enrolled account in this instance, and for the four years following, is not the result of archival loss, and is specific to Bristol. However, the reasons for the deviation from long-established Exchequer practice are only partially explained by surviving documents.

John Langston had been appointed as one of Bristol’s two customers on 10 November 1472, serving with Nicholas Warynges. The two men accounted in the normal way for their three-week period of joint office, which ended 14 December the same year: albeit that after an initial appearance in the Exchequer in Michaelmas term 1473 full accounting appears to have been delayed until Michaelmas 1475, by which time Langston had left office.³ Thomas Croft replaced Warynges by letters patent of 12 December 1472, necessitating a new period of account and a new ledger.⁴ The first ledger of Croft and Langston, presumably running from 14 December 1472 to Easter 1473, is not extant. The second ledger runs, as noted above, from Easter to September 1473. But although an Exchequer writ went out in July 1473 in the accustomed form, to compel the customers to make their account, and although they duly appeared the following Michaelmas term, further process was halted by the king.⁵ A privy seal writ ordered the Treasurer and barons to ‘surceasse of all manere processe made

¹ The National Archives, UK [TNA], E122/19/10. 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 draft in 2014. We are indebted to Professor Wendy Childs for her generous assistance with Iberian place and personal names.

² TNA, E356/22 rots. 8d-9r; Michaelmas 1471 to 20 November 1472 is also absent from the roll.

³ *Cal. Fine Rolls 1471-85*, pp. 39-40; E159/250 Precepta Mich 13 Edw IV, dorse; attornies Mich 13 Edw IV, dorse (IMG 726, 748); E356/22, m.8d. Langston continued as customer until early September 1475, when he was replaced by Thomas Croft, whose service as customer of Bristol was briefly interrupted for the summer of 1475, quite probably on account of participation in Edward IV’s invasion of France. For the warrant naming Croft as Langston’s replacement 6 September 1475, TNA, C81/1638 no. 18.

⁴ *Cal. Fine Rolls 1471-85*, pp. 39-40; TNA, C81/1636, no. 108. Croft continued as a customer of Bristol for the remainder of Edward IV’s reign, apart from a brief interruption in July-September 1475, as noted above. A warrant of 20 July 1475 shows that he was replaced by Nicholas Warynges, the man he had himself replaced in 1472: TNA, C81/1638, no. 9. In November 1475 Croft added the deputy butlership of Exeter and Topsham to his fiscal responsibilities: *Cal. Patent Rolls Edward IV, 1467-1477*, p. 548. Cliff Davies refers to this in his account of the Crofts, albeit Davies incorrectly describes this as ‘wine customs’: C. S. L. Davies, ‘The Crofts: Creation and Defence of a Family Enterprise under the Yorkists and Henry VII’, *Historical Research*, lxxviii (1995), p. 250.

⁵ The process of summons began with a writ of *distringas* addressed to the appropriate sheriff to distrain customers to appear at the Exchequer to make their account. For this and the further armoury of writs available in the event of non-compliance, see Stuart Jenks, ed. *The London Customs Accounts 24 Henry VI (1445/6)* Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Hansischer Geschichtsverein, NS 74 (Cologne, 2018), pp. xxiv-xxxi. An interval of a year or more between the end of an accounting period and the summons to render a final account was not uncommon.

or to be made....vnto the tyme ye haue otherwise in commaundement from vs'.⁶ Marginalia in the ledger in an auditor's hand, indicating whether the goods were cloth, wine, or merchandise (the latter subject to poundage), and whether their owners were denizen or alien, suggest that audit had begun conventionally.⁷ [Fig. 1] Yet it is likely that, as with subsequent accounts down to Michaelmas 1477 (in all of which Croft was one of the two named customers), the account of Langston and Croft was heard, not by the ancient course of the Exchequer, but by a declaration made on oath before one of the Exchequer auditors. One consequence of this deviation in practice was to reduce the final account to its bare essentials, stripping out much of the detail that commonly appears in the enrolled accounts. A declaration also tended to be weighted towards details of payments rather than receipts, although the latter would have been totalled.⁸ The Bristol summary account for the year that follows, based on ledgers produced by the same customers, was certainly made by declaration.⁹ Moreover its commencing date of 15 September could suggest that the 1473 account did not, despite its contemporary heading, continue until Michaelmas (29 September) but ended mid-September. The last entry in the ledger beginning at Easter 1473 was for the *Mary Clyff*, exiting to Bordeaux on 2 September. For there to have been no further ship movements in this busy port for the rest of the month would have been highly unusual. An end date of 15 September would therefore be a better fit.

The 1473 ledger is severely damaged by damp, which has caused parts of the parchment to rot away [Figs. 2, 3]. Despite this, much of the trade in commodities can be reconstructed by extrapolation from details of customs and subsidies paid, or from descriptions of quantities and goods shipped. Such reconstructions are noted by annotations to the text and by the use of italics in the Excel spreadsheet. There are only two folios where the severity of damage is so great as to make reconstruction impossible or unwise.¹⁰ This damage is particularly detrimental to the record of the lading of three ships. On 20 August and 23 August both denizen and Basque merchants imported iron, woad, and possibly honey, from northern Spain on two Basque ships, the *Magdalen* and the *Elizabeth* of Erretereria. In most instances the *value* of individual shipments making up the cargo can be reconstructed from subsidies paid, since these were calculated at 12d. in the pound sterling of value, valuation being made at generally understood rates. However other surviving details in these same entries are insufficient to ascertain the commodities.¹¹ The third vessel was one of Bristol's great ships, the *James*. She exited for Bordeaux 25 August 1473 with a cargo of cloth for twenty Bristol merchants. Parchment loss on this folio nears 40 per cent, with consequent loss not only of quantities shipped but also of customs or subsidies paid, again

⁶ E159/250 Recorda Mich 13 Edw IV, rot 9 continuation, dorse
http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT2/E4/E159no250/bE159no250dorses/IMG_0622.htm. All subsequent references to images take the form AALT followed by the image number for the document cited.

⁷ 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/>.

⁸ For an example of a *declaracio* on an interim account, taken part-way through the accounting period, in this instance for the port of Poole 1452-3, see Jenks, *London Customs 1445/6*, p. xxxvii.

⁹ The original declaration does not survive. For its existence and date of commencement, E368/252 States and Views Mich 19 Edw IV, rot 6 contd.

¹⁰ E122/19/10 fos 16-17 are the severely damaged folios.

¹¹ Since woad was valued at £5 the pipe, and iron at £2 10s. the ton, unless the quantity and unit are preserved the two cannot be safely distinguished if the description of the goods is also lost. Both commodities were major imports from Biscayan Spain. Honey was a less common import, but also usually valued at £2 10s. the tun. Honey was imported to Bristol from Biscayan Spain in 1474, TNA, E122/19/10A fo. 5r.

making reconstruction impossible.¹² Details of merchants shipping and of ships are lost throughout the manuscript, and have been entered as ‘*Unknown*’. Approximately 10 per cent of merchants’ names are illegible or wholly lost through damage, and two ship names are irretrievably lost.

The 1473 account is one of many to demonstrate Bristol’s continuing engagement in trade with Portugal. Because of the time of year, entries for the Portuguese trade are solely for ‘out’ voyages, carrying Bristol’s major export, woollen cloth.¹³ In the summer of 1473 her merchants laded on Bristol-owned ships, on a Tenby vessel, and on the *Saint John* of Pasaia. The latter was mastered by a Basque, Martin Gildo, who frequently sailed into both Bristol and London.¹⁴

Castilian trade to the port increased in the 1470s, following the Anglo-Castilian treaty of 1467, and is evidenced in this account. The Spaniards of the account were Basques, as is typical of Bristol’s trade. As subjects of Castile, the 1467 treaty allowed them to pay customs as if denizens.¹⁵ This ledger, in common with other Bristol particulars, is not always consistent in recording their special status, possibly because, from the customers’ point of view, it mattered little – although the omission could have left them open to challenge at audit.¹⁶ It is thus impossible to be sure, for example, whether the two ‘denizen’ merchants exporting on the *St Benet* of Moguer were Spanish or native: the entry itself is damaged. The ship, under an Italian master, was an unusual visitor from this southern Spanish port, which lay near Huelva.¹⁷ Breton ships, in small numbers, were a presence in Bristol throughout the decade, with three being recorded between late April and June 1473.¹⁸ The ledger also includes both legs of a summer voyage of the *Mary Forster* to Iceland. She returned 27 July with stockfish and salted fish for her owner, John Forster, the Bristol merchant then most

¹² TNA, E122/19/10, fos. 16r, 17r. In order to maintain the stability of the spreadsheet as a tool for analysis, zeros have been entered in numerical columns where information is missing and cannot be reconstructed. Some of the reconstructed ‘Cloths of Assize’ may be dozens or dozens strait; but the equivalence in whole cloths of assize was employed also by the Exchequer at the audit of customers’ accounts and enables year on year comparisons over time. Previous economic historians using this data have of necessity also followed this practice, but without caveat, as in the tables of E. M. Carus-Wilson, *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the later Middle Ages* (2nd edn., London, 1967), pp. 291-6.

¹³ For Bristol’s trade with Portugal in this period Wendy R. Childs, *Trade and Shipping in the Medieval West: Portugal, Caastile and England* (Porto, 2013); Flávio Miranda and Hilario Casado Alonso, ‘Comércio entre o porto de Bristol e Portugal no final da Idade Média, 1461-1504’, *Anais de História de Além-mar*, xix (2018), pp. 11-36; and for the distinctive patterns of seasonality in Bristol’s trade, Richard Stone, ‘Bristol’s Overseas Trade in the Later Fifteenth Century: The Evidence of the “Particular” Customs Accounts’ in Evan T. Jones and Richard Stone, eds, *The World of the Newport Ship: Trade, Politics and Shipping in the Mid-Fifteenth Century* (Cardiff, 2018), pp. 181-204, esp. pp. 190-5. Miranda and Stone both used the data from earlier drafts of the Excel spreadsheets of Bristol customs accounts 1461-1492, including that for 1473.

¹⁴ For Martin Gildo or Geldo, Wendy R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978), p. 227.

¹⁵ Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 53-6.

¹⁶ Bristol’s clerks used the simple form ‘de Hispania indigena’ rather than the more elaborate formulae of London’s customs clerks: Stuart Jenks, *The London Customs Accounts 1472/3-1476/7* (Hansischer Geschichtsverein, 74 iii no 3 (2016), pp. vii-viii: <https://www.hansischergeschichtsverein.de/> . In the Bristol 1473 account the merchant-shipmaster Jammot de Mounthaut is ‘de Hispania’; John Renamandy is merely ‘indigena’: E122/19/10 fos 7r, 16r, v.

¹⁷ TNA, E122/19/10, fo. 3v. The merchant names are lost, and the *St Benet* must have entered before Easter, which in 1473 fell on 18 April. We are indebted to Professor Wendy Childs for her identification of the port, for which see Konrad Kretschmer, *Die italienischen Portolane des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1909), p. 579. From the late 1470s the larger port of Huelva is named as a destination for Bristol’s ships and merchants.

¹⁸ None of the numerous letters of protection for Breton ships entered on the Treaty Rolls applies obviously to entries in the 1473 ledger: TNA, C76/156, 157.

prominently engaged in the Iceland trade.¹⁹ The document opens with a less fortunate voyage. The *Mary Grace*, one of the largest ships in Bristol's marine, exited for Lisbon on 24 April, six days after Easter. On her return journey she was captured by French pirates off the coast of Portugal and put to ransom at a cost, so it was alleged, of 1250 marks (£833 6s 8d).²⁰ Such attacks were not unusual in a period of pronounced enmity between England and France. Yet despite this, merchants of both countries traded profitably between Bristol and both Bayonne and Bordeaux. To do this safely it was, however, advisable to seek both letters of protection (from the sovereign power of the port of destination) and licences to trade (from the merchant's own sovereign), adding to the cost of commerce.²¹

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.²² These conventions are summarised in the introduction to the account for 1461.²³ 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. This includes 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. Editorial comments are frequent for this document in consequence of the poor condition of the original manuscript. Some quantities/values have been interpolated. The supplied element is given in italics, and the entry annotated in the spreadsheet. It is possible to supply these values if the commodity is known and either the quantity or value is also legible. It is also possible to quantify both these numeric elements from subsidy paid where this is legible, and the commodity is known. Where neither option is possible, zeros have been entered in order to preserve the viability of the spreadsheet for purposes of data analysis.

¹⁹ TNA, E122/19/10, fos. 3v, 13v; licence to John Swancote and John Forster to trade to Iceland, valid for one year, 12 November 1472: Carus-Wilson, *Overseas Trade*, p. 144; Wendy R. Childs, 'England's Icelandic trade in the fifteenth century: The role of the port of Hull' *Northern Seas* (1995), p. 22. See also Evan T. Jones and Margaret M. Condon, *Cabot and Bristol's Age of Discovery* (Bristol, 2016), pp. 8-10, 36-8, 94.

²⁰ TNA, E159/253, Brevia Directa Eas 16 Edw IV, rot. 3: images at AALT, IMG 0024 and IMG 0025; *Cal. Patent Rolls 1467-1477*, p. 450.

²¹ For safe conducts see W. Childs, 'The Overseas Trade of Bristol and its Regions in the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in Evan T. Jones and Richard Stone, eds, *The World of the Newport Ship: Trade, Politics and Shipping in the Mid-Fifteenth Century* (Cardiff, 2018), pp. 170-4.

²² 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.

²³ Margaret M. Condon and Evan T. Jones (eds.), 'Bristol 1461: Particulars of Account of Thomas Gibbes and Robert Strangways, customers, 26 March to 29 September 1461: Introduction' (University of Bristol, PURE, 2016) <http://hdl.handle.net/1983/dcde8ca4-6163-4d80-9505-704807acf03b>.

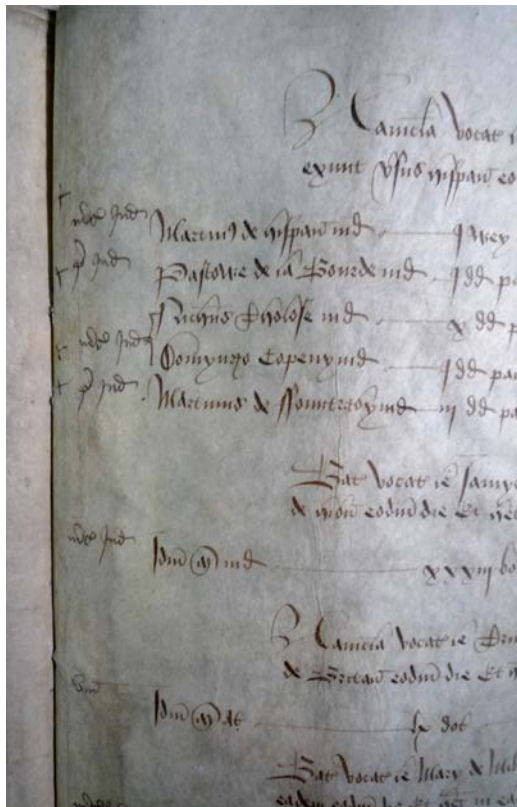


Fig 1: E122/19/10 fo. 5r:
Detail showing auditor's annotations

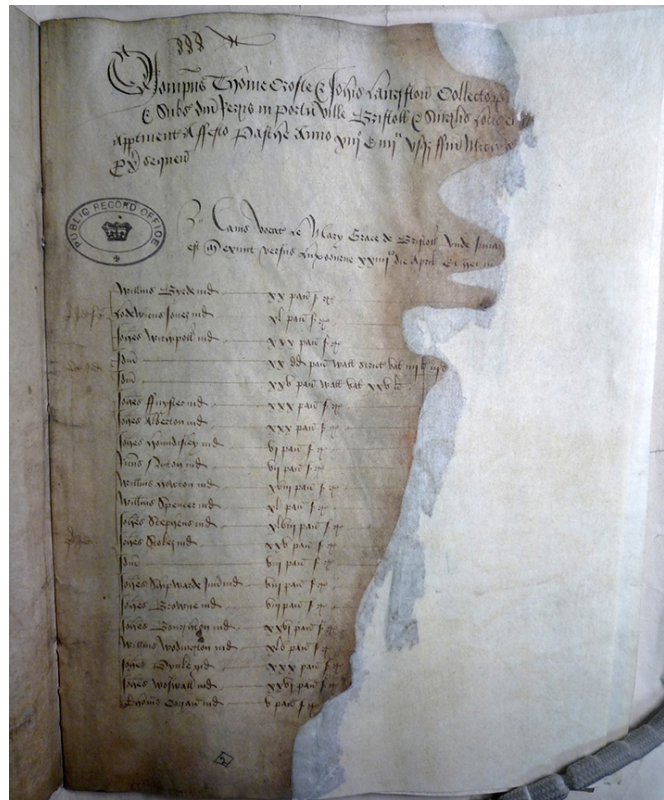


Fig 2: E122/19/10 fo. 2r



Fig 3: E122/19/10 fos. 17v-18r