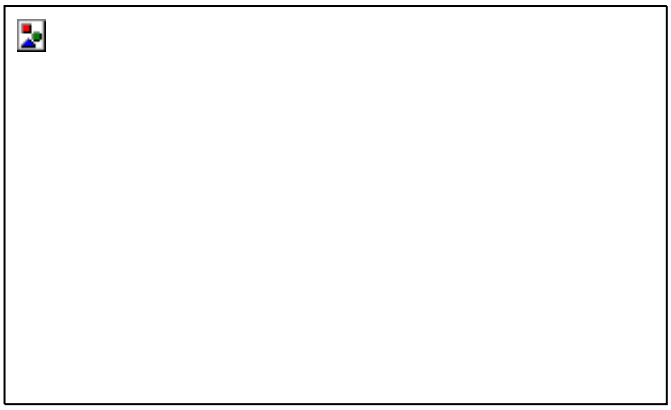


14 JUNE 2007

LONDON: THE FORGOTTEN HANSEATIC CITY
WELCOME ADDRESS

Professor Tim Connell

A) English overseas trade

In this modern world of the G8, the WTO and the IMF it is heartening to see that international trade has always been a major factor in world affairs. And the expansion of the European Union should, perhaps, be looked at in terms of an earlier world where power lay in the hands of cities rather than states, and goods were traded by river and sea. So, as a Man of Kent, let me start with a story set along the Thames Estuary. **[PIC1 RECULVER]**

In 1786 a local antiquarian noticed that the fishermen's wives in the Kentish town of Whitstable had a special recipe for Ash Wednesday, a pie which was always cooked in a dark red earthenware pan, which looked just like a piece of Roman Samian ware pottery. On closer inspection it transpired that it was Roman Samian ware pottery, which had been dredged up in large quantities from the legendary Pudding Pan Rock, which lies about three miles WNW of Reculver. Evidently a merchant ship had sunk there in Roman times, which is proof of regular trade (by river and sea) between the Continent and Britain some 2000 years ago.[i]

International trade and travel in the Middle Ages were also extensive.

[PIC2: CHAUCER PILGRIMS]

In the Canterbury Tales Chaucer's Shipman has sailed as far North as Gotland and as far South as Finisterre. The Knight has served in Turkey, Alexandria and modern-day Algeria, plus Lithuania and Russia, which is important for today's story.[ii] The Knight's son has been on raids in Flanders, Artois and Picardy.[iii] The gat-toothed Wife of Bath has been to Jerusalem three times (which seems a bit far-fetched), but she has also been on pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, Cologne and Rome, which is where the Pardoner has just been. The Merchant worries about the security of the narrow seas between Harwich and the Hook of Holland, which indicates regular trade. And all of that in the 1380s.

[PIC3: 2 MAPS OF BALTIC - early and late]

Today's topic involves a detailed look at the North: the Baltic, Scandinavia, Northern Germany, Russia, Poland and Ukraine, and not forgetting the Low Countries. The political shape of the Baltic, of course, was very different from that of modern times. Poland was a major player, and Denmark the dominant Scandinavian power. The Livonian Federation was the consequence of the Crusade that Chaucer's Knight served in, and was controlled by the Teutonic knights we see in the Battle on the Ice in Eisenstein's classic film Alexander Nevsky.**[iv]**

[PIC3 TEUTONIC KNIGHTS]

Sweden was the main military power, and it was not until the Great Northern War (1700-1721) that Russia became dominant in the region.[v]

In these sparsely populated expanses, cities rather than states predominate. The lost city of Birka, not Stockholm, is for many centuries the key city in Sweden, for example,[vi] while Novgorod and Kiev are more significant than Moscow, and of course St Petersburg is not founded until 1703. Rivers, predictably, are more important than roads amidst these wild expanses.

[PIC4 THE RIVER TVER]

B) Trade in the Baltic

In early times, trade in the Baltic was extensive, but more between cities than states. Visby on Gotland, Hedeby in Denmark and Kaupang in Norway are tangible evidence of the extent of trade across the region and beyond.[vii]

[PIC5 VIKING TRADING SHIP]

The Vikings, we now know, traded as much as they fought, and their links extended as far as Byzantium where the Varangian Guard included Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons.

The merchants of Novgorod and Kiev also create a link between North-Western Europe and the East. They trade in natural raw materials rather than luxury goods, although Novgorod comes to prominence because of the squirrel fur trade, much in demand for use as the trimming on cloaks.

[PIC6 NOVGOROD]

England and Flanders become known for the wool trade, a major economic driver in the Middle Ages, hence the mediaeval pack bridges, and those enormous churches in East Anglia, like this one at Lavenham.[viii]

[PIC7: WOOL CHURCH]

The expansion of both the English merchant fleet and the Royal Navy leads to a growing demand for timber, pitch and cordage, hence the later significance of the Baltic Convoy.

The importation of silver is of increasing importance because of the need for coinage, itself an indication of the growing importance of a system of trade and reflects the need for a more formal commercial system, which is a factor in the emergence of the City of London.

[PIC8: ROYAL EXCHANGE]

C) Trading systems & London

Trade with Germany and the Low Countries has a lengthy past. They appear in Saxon documents (King Canute, of course, was on friendly terms with the Emperor Conrad II) and they may have owned property on the river bank, oddly enough near the later Steelyard site. There is a clear link with Cologne in a charter of Henry II, dated 1157.[ix] By the Thirteenth Century they were able to elect their own aldermen, and legend has it that they could also vote for the mayor, although out of delicacy they always voted for the winning candidate. A charter of Henry III in 1260 refers specifically to the Hanse, and it was at this time that they began to acquire a significant amount of property.[x] Privileges and high commercial standing led to some friction with the guilds, and their rights were revoked initially in 1551, though they were not finally expelled until 1598 (not 1578 as some sources indicate).[xi] There are sources which suggest that Sir Thomas Gresham himself was behind the expulsions, but although his Royal Exchange perhaps obviated the need for one national or

regional group to have its own trading centre, this is less likely than as a result of the expansion of the Merchant Adventurers and the desire to wrest the wool trade from German merchants. Some of them continued to live in the vicinity of the Steelyard, however, and they were given land by Charles II to build a church.[xii] There were attempts up to the time of William III to re-gain their former privileges, but with only limited success in the form of exemption from some taxes.

The Steelyard itself was largely taken over by Elizabeth I for her Navy, but trading carried on there in a wide range of commodities, one of which was iron. The buildings were finally demolished in around 1865 and Cannon Street Station built on the site.[xiii]

London was clearly a focus for foreign trade and overseas enterprise from the early Modern Period. The exploits of early English navigators are well known in both the North Atlantic and Far East, with the setting-up of the Levant Company, the East India Company and the Hudson Bay Company, all of which bear the imprint of the City of London.

In today's context, the Muscovy Company is of particular significance. Ironically, it was set up as part of a scheme to find a North-East Passage to China and was linked to the Cathay Company, in which the Mercers and Sir Thomas Gresham were leading shareholders. In 1553 Sir Hugh Willoughby and Richard Chancellor led an expedition to Northern Russia. Willoughby was lost, but Chancellor was well received by Ivan the Terrible. Anglo-Russian relations were cordial because Ivan wanted a counter-balance to the trade controls of the Hanseatic League.[xiv] There was even a suggestion at one time that he might be a suitor for Queen Elizabeth I, which would have changed the course of history somewhat.[xv]

[PIC9 MUSCOVY COMPANY]

But this is all about English trade reaching outwards, whereas the Hansa is a quite remarkable story of free trade and enterprise, based more on individuals and towns rather than states.

Our speakers today will be covering the Hanseatic Leaguefrom a variety of angles. We will have time for discussion at the end of the day, formally before we close the proceedings, and informally over a glass of wine.

[PIC10: HANSA SEAL WITH COG]

[i] Thomas Pownell in Archaeologia, 1778. I know this is true as my Grandfather had one of the pots, in such good condition that you could read the maker's name on the underneath. Samian ware came mainly from along the River Rhone, in the vicinity of modern-day Clermont-Ferrand.

[ii] A contemporary audience would have recognised him from these actions as a mercenary, a member of the notorious White Company. He was in fact anything but a parfit gentil knyghte... See Chaucer's Knight,Methuen 1994 by ex-Python Terry Jones.

[iii] Again, these cross-border raids were far from chivalrous.

[iv] Oddly enough, the Battle on the Ice was filmed outside Moscow in a heatwave in June 1938.

See N Swallow (1976) Eisenstein, a documentary portrait, George Allen & Unwin.

[v] For more on the Great Northern War seehttp://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/great_northern_war.htm

[vi] http://everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1498283

[vii] All three, like Birka, are world heritage sites:

Visby: http://www.bingeby.com/

Hedeby: http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Places/Place/337622

Kaupang: http://www.kaupang.uio.no/eng/index.html

[viii] For more on the Staple and the trade in East Anglia, seehttp://www.norfolkbroads.com/focus/historical/wooltowns

[ix] See http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=63322

[x] One difficulty in tracing the Hanse in London is that documents can be in a variety of languages, and both the Hanse and the merchants are referred to variously as Easterlings, homines et cives Colonienses, or even Homines Imperatoris qui veniebant in navibus suis. The Steelyard appears variously as Esterlingeshalle, Le Steelyerde, Styleyard, Stiliardeand even the Haus zu Calner.

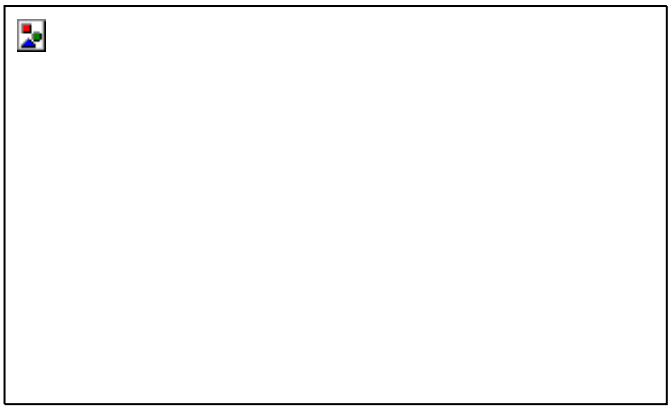
[xi] And Gresham, of course, died in 1579.

[xii] This was on the site of Holy Trinity the Less. (See Note 9 above.) Nowadays, of course, German-speaking Lutherans may attend services at the Church of St Agnes and St Anne.

[xiii] A picture of the Steelyard in 1540, from Van Wyngard's Plan for Philip II of Spain, is to be seen at http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=45069 on page 31.

[xiv] The Muscovy Company flourished until 1698 and was not finally wound up until 1917.

[xv] Elizabeth I actually appears as a character in the Eisenstein film ofIvan the Terrible (1944.)



14 JUNE 2007

THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE

PROFESSOR RAINER POSTEL

The Hanseatic League has been strongly investigated for a long time. Nevertheless, confusions and misunderstandings continue to exist concerning its age, its characters and its members. On the other hand, the Hansa often is glorified as a political, national or liberal alliance. Hamburg, Lübeck and Bremen have called themselves Hanseatic cities since about 1815, although the Hanseatic League at that time had not existed for centuries. Obviously, the title Hansa or Hanseatic tends to be connected with old and favourable traditions. The subject of this conference shows some uncertainty as well, and naming Bruges among the Hanseatic cities in its announcement points to the same direction. There was an important difference between Hanseatic cities as members of the Hanseatic community and cities abroad harbouring its trading ports, like the London Steelyard. Perhaps it might be less desirable to belong to the old Hanseatic League having a more rational view about it, but even its contemporaries found it difficult to get clear about it, and the Hansa showed little readiness to give exact information about itself and the number of its members, to say nothing of the different status of those members within the community. Just because there is neither a concrete year of foundation nor an exact date of death, the Hansa history is hard to grasp, and its definition has always been equally hard.

Having deteriorated in the course of the 15th Century, English Hanseatic relations reached their lowest point when, in the summer of 1468, seven English ships were seized in the Sound by Danish vessels. The Hansa was suspected to at least have favoured the attack. The private council straightaway gave order to imprison the Hanseatic merchants in London and to confiscate their goods. In order to compensate the English merchants, the Steelyard was partly destroyed. The Hansa, King Edward IV explained, was a society cooperative or cooperation originating from a joint agreement and alliance of several towns and villages, being legally responsible and liable as joint debtors for the offences of single members.

This, the Hansa rejected. The Lübeck Sydic stressed that it was neither a society nor a cooperation, that owned no joint property, no common cash box, no executive officials of its own. It was merely a tight alliance of many towns and municipalities to pursue their respective own commercial interests securely and profitably. The Hansa was not ruled by merchants, every town having its own ruler. It also had no seal of its own, as sealing was done by the respective issuing town. The Hansa had no common council, discussions rather being held by representatives of each town. There even was no obligation to take part in the Hansa meetings, and there were no means of coercion to carry through their decisions. So according to the Lübeck Sydic, the Hansa could not be defined by Roman law, and was not liable as a body.

This statement was in fact correct, and at the same time, deliberately covering up that the Hansa was frequently urged to give a self-definition as well as the exact number of its members. The term Hansa itself does not lead us anywhere, as it meant merely a group or community as well as the common law.

In London, for instance, in 1266, the Hamburg merchants were allowed by King Henry II to form a Hansa of their own, just like the Lübeck ones in 1267 following the example of the Cologne merchants. Before, in 1282, the German

merchants in London were mentioned as Hansa Almaniere for the first time. On the other hand, historical sources, more or less casually, offer numerous terms to characterise the Hansa, like the lions, assembly, association, brotherhood, confederation, society and so on, often in combination, but they do not explain the subject, only indicating some kind of connection.

As nowadays it is mostly assumed, the Hansa was a community of lower German towns, whose merchants participated in the Hanseatic privileges abroad, such as having their own stalls and trading posts, and their own administration and law, freedom of customs and freedom of trade in the country. Where politically convenient, it stressed the solidarity of its merchants, and at the Lübeck meeting in 1418 following a couple of local uprising and external threats, there were repeated efforts to obtain a firm federal constitution, and its membership required unrestricted political power of the City Council.

On the other hand, the Hansa was lacking the essential legal element of a federation. There was no pact of alliance, no statutes, no obligation for certain economic and political aims, no chairmen with representative authority, and no permanent official until Dr Südermann became Hansiatic Sydic in 1556. No document designated Lübeck as head of the Hansa, although it was nearly all the time. There were no means to punish disobedient members, apart from exclusion, whereas externally, locate, embargo and even war were measures taken. So in some way, the Hansa resembled a federation, but it was more a legal community as to its privileges abroad. Even such conferational concept is not beyond doubt as institutional strength was missing and clashes of interest within were evident, partly irreconcilable.

So, more recent views are quite cautious. A von Brandt, Lübeck historian, spoke of a community of interest existing and being in individual cases able to act at a time only insofar as the interests of the individual towns or citizens really coincided. Its only aim was to obtain privileges abroad and to secure their undisturbed use by its members.

Klaus Friedland called it a trade alliance for eventual case of emergency. Obviously, the Hansa cannot be described in terms of national law.

As I already said, it is difficult as well to find out its members, at least nearly impossible to have a complete list at a certain time. The Hansa left this deliberately unclear and avoided giving precise details about which towns belonged to it, that is which merchants were admitted to its privileges. In fact, exact information would have been hard to give, as final decisions on membership were made by the foreign trading post that sometimes ignored the decisions of the Hansa Assembly. The membership was in a permanent change. From the 15th Century on, there exist numerous lists of members for different purposes, out of which a core of about sixty towns between the rivers Isar and Narva emerges, but those lists are neither complete nor reliable and partly contradictory. Literature offers between seventy and about 200 members. Depending on the intensity and durations of participation in Hanseatic activities, one can also distinguish different degrees of attachment. Since the 15thCentury, often 72 member towns are mentioned.

Besides that, there were a number of smaller and economically weaker towns unable to send representatives to the Hanseatic meetings on their own. They were represented by bigger neighbour towns. So there was a smaller circle of Hanseatic towns that took part in trade, were invited to the meetings and influenced their decisions, and a wider circle whose merchants also benefited from the Hanseatic privileges. Attending the meetings was no exclusive right, but rather a tiresome and expensive duty one liked to evade.

To become a member, first, the town's merchants had to take part in Hanseatic trade. From the middle of the 14th Century, the Hanseatic meetings had to decide on applications for admission. Their decision depended on whether approval would be advantageous to the Hansa or not. So in 1441, Kampen was admitted again but was refused by another town in 1451. Smaller towns could be admitted informally by one of the bigger ones. A special case was Nuess in 1457 being raised to the rank of a Hanseatic town by an imperial privilege. In fact, future members had to be German, in the broader sense of course. In 1379, an English application for membership was refused explicitly because the applicants were strangers, not Germans.

Elimination occurred by not using Hanseatic privileges, by voluntary withdrawal, or formal exclusion, the so-called 'verhansung', in case of serious violations of Hanseatic principles or interests, and whether a member was admitted or excluded, this did not concern a confederation of towns but privileges or German law. In most cases, it is hard to find out and sometimes a contentious issue when admission took place.

Above all, it is unknown when the Hansa began to exist. There was no founding date or act. Its age was a question for contemporaries as well. A law student in 1418, in Cologne, searched for a founding charter in vain. We know about important pre-conditions - the German medieval colonisation of Eastern Europe, the opening of the Baltic area, the founding of Lübeck in 1133 to 1159, and the forming of a commercial cooperative in Gotland, but none of these were the foundation of a community of merchants and towns. The mentioned Hansa Almaniere from 1282 in London concerned merely the London Guildhall. A communal spirit beyond such single trading posts became apparent only decades later when, in 1343, the Norwegian king granted freedom of trade and from customs to the Wendish towns and to all merchants the of the German Hansa. Soon afterwards, members of the Hansa appeared in various places, self-confidently standing up against hindrances for their trade. Hansa now meant the north German merchants in the North Sea and the Baltic as a whole.

Yet signs of a common Hanseatic awareness appeared already one century earlier, when in 1252/53, delegates from Hamburg and Lübeck, in the name of all German merchants trading in Flanders, negotiated with Countess Margarita, even though the different regional groups got separate copies of their privileges. Obviously, all persons affected saw their interests looked after by these negotiators.

On the other hand, mainly in London, distrust and frictions arose between Cologne having been privileges here since the middle of the 12th Century and the so-called 'die Osterlinge', from Hamburg and Lübeck, who appeared some decades later. Reconciliation only took place just before the already mentioned Hansa Almaniere was founded in 1282. Then the Guildhall became their common trading post. Since the 15th Century it was called Steelyard, located at the place of today's Cannon Street Station. This Guildhall community was an important nucleus of the later Hansa.

Yet another one was the early connection between Hamburg and Lübeck that in the 13th Century gained the leading role in the Baltic trade, thus preparing the leadership in the Hansa itself. This was reflected by the statutes of the big trading posts abroad. So for instance, in 1293, the St Peter's Court in Novgorod asked Lübeck to be its court of appeal. Generally, these trading posts were regulated more strictly than the Hansa as a whole. Here, the statutes of the Bruges office from 1347 are of special interest, as they divided its merchants into three rather independent groups related to their origin.

This indicated considerable differences of interest and anticipated in some way the organisational division of the Hansa into thirds in the 15thCentury. First, the Wendish and the Saxonian towns, headed by Lübeck; second the Westphalian and the Prussian towns, led by Dortmund, later Cologne; and third, the Gotland and Livonian towns, led by either Visby or Riga, each third having its own meetings. This division was somewhat differing from the ones the big trading posts in London, Bruges, Bergen and Novgorod adopted.

Then in 1554, the Hansa was even divided into quarters. This showed the increasing divergences within the Hansa.

Delegates of the Hanseatic towns first met in Lübeck in 1358. At the same time, this may be regarded as the beginning of the European importance of the Hansa. The assembly had to discuss violations of rights and privileges in Flanders and impose an embargo on that county. This was completely successful. Privileges were restored, legal security was achieved and extended to the whole country, and compensation was paid. For the Hansa, this not only meant an increasing prestige; it showed the considerable independence of the northern part of the Holy Roman Empire as well, and even the imperial city of Lübeck kept some distance to the right.

It encouraged the Hanseatic towns particularly with regard to the Danish king, Valdemar IV. He had come to power only with Lübeck's support, but later expanded his powers in the Baltic to the detriment of the Hanseatic trade and conquered the island of Gotland by destroying the Hanseatic Visby. The Wendish and Pomeranian towns broke off their trade with Denmark and resolved to react militarily. Although they tried to ally with some European princes, the main burden was to be borne by the Wendish towns - Lübeck, Rostock, Wismar, Stralsund, Hamburg and Luneburg. Under Lübeck's command but lacking further support, they failed in besieging Helsingborg in 1362 and had to agree an unfavourable armistice. The Lübeck mayor, Wittenborg, was made responsible for that and beheaded. Though continuing the war with privateers, the Hansa could not avert a disadvantageous peace in 1365. This brought no end to King Valdemar's hostile trade policy that now also provoked resistance among Prussian and Dutch towns.

From their alliance, joined by most Wendish towns, in 1367, there originated the Cologne Confederation containing 75 towns and the Netherlands. For nearly two decades, this was a firm federation of the most important Hanseatic towns, though not including Hamburg and Bremen. It was financed by a special customs duty and entered alliances with

Mecklenburg, Sweden, and the counts of Holstein. Its members made extreme efforts, raising a fleet and army even bigger than their contractual commitments. For the Hansa, the new war on land and sea, beginning in 1368, became the most splendid success it ever had, made manifest in the well known peace of Stralsund in 1370. Former Hanseatic trade privileges were renewed, being valid no longer for separate towns but for the confederation as a whole. For fifteen years, compensation was to be paid to the towns which held as a pledge Malmö, Helsingborg and other castles and fortresses on the Sound.

The Hansa was even entitled to have a say in the next Danish king's election. By leaving the last unused at the death of Valdemar in 1375, the Hansa, at least its majority, showed its main goals to be economic. Its towns now gained supremacy in the Baltic trade. They controlled the Sound and temporarily drove out the Dutch and the English from the Baltic, while particularly the Prussian towns demanded the further occupation of the Sound fortresses and the continuation of the Cologne Confederation. By urging of the Wendish towns and the Dutch, those were returned in 1385 and the confederation not prolonged. Obviously, the majority of the towns did not want a formal confederation with its duties and burdens, but rather a community of interests without power politics. This corresponded to the diversity of members and interests as well as of good and trading areas, from the Baltic and Russia to the Iberian Peninsula.

Furthermore, it showed the contrast between the Prussian towns and Lübeck, that tried again and again to prevent their direct trade via the Sound to Flanders and England, stressing its claim that all ships have to land in Lübeck to offer their goods there.

The Prussian towns found support in the Teutonic Order of Knights being a member of the Hansa as well. It is the only non-urban member of the Hansa. But this order faced increasing pressure from the rise of the Polish Lithuanian Rahn, and Prussian trade to the West met more and more difficulties since the Danish Queen, Margarita I, ascended to the Swedish throne in 1389. Headed by Danzig, the Hanseatic towns imposed an embargo on Denmark and Stockholm, with little effect. In 1397, Margarita proclaimed the union of the three Scandinavian kingdoms in the Kalmar union.

It was a rival for the Swedish throne, Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg, who from Wismar and Rostock employed pirates, the notorious 'Italian Bruder', in order to hurt the Baltic shipping. Together with Prussian towns, the Teutonic Order defeated those pirates on Gotland, driving them out of the Baltic Sea. Their scattered survivors still heavily menaced merchant shipping. Finally, they were overcome by Hamburg sailors in the North Sea. This caused Denmark to renew Hanseatic privileges in the realms of the Kalmar union. The Teutonic Order, however, already had passed the peak of its political power. Its defeat by the Polish in 1410 shook its position in the Hansa permanently.

For many historians, the Hansa in the early 15th Century had reached its heyday, the peak of its economic and political development. Nevertheless, increasing threats emerged. The North European countries were on their way to become national states, trying to raise and protect a competitive trade of their own. The North German territorial states exerted growing pressure on the Hanseatic towns, causing some of them to lose their independence already in the 15th Century. As I said, this led to the futile attempt to get a closer alliance in 1418, and privateers as well as piracy stayed to be a permanent problem.

The following clashes with Denmark, 1426 to 1435, already proved Lübeck and the Hansa unable to preserve the influence over the Scandinavian countries they had achieved in 1370. On the other hand, disagreement and lagging solidarity within the Hansa obviously, in most cases, let only the most affected towns to be active. Here and more often the Wendish towns proved as the Hanseatic nucleus, primarily interested in the Baltic trade, to Scandinavian privileges, and frequently acting politically or militarily for the entire Hansa.

All efforts to resist the growing princely pressure unanimously failed until in 1442, Berlin -Köln, the Cologne part of today's Berlin, lost its independence by a surprise coup of elector, Frederick II. A meeting of North German princes in the following year indicated the menace of joint princely actions against cities. This finally gave the impetus to set up the first Hanseatic Tohopersate - it is a Lower German term which means sticking together. This happened in '43. This was a three-year defensive alliance against internal and external threats and highway robbery, which in fact was practised or at least tolerated by some princes as well. 38 towns took part, passing their test successfully already in the next year in the feud between the town Kolberg at the Baltic and the Duke of Pomerania. Therefore, in 1447, this alliance was prolonged. Its membership expanded, and in 1451, it was renewed again as princely threats persisted. Beyond preserving the freedom of some towns, it was about the fundamental problem to keep the towns' council rule unchallenged inside and outside, this being the precondition of Hanseatic membership. Only few cities were imperial cities such as Lübeck, Cologne, Goslar and so on, so remaining lay in territories that were practically independent because of their political and economic

strength. By obtaining important sovereign rights, they had achieved far reaching emancipation from territorial rule. Depriving the councils of power was a reason for exclusion, as was explicitly stated in 1418. With that, the Hansa was an association for the defence of the councils' oligarchies too in order to maintain the leading, sometimes patricians, families of merchants or guild masters in power. This could be threatened by civic uprisings as well as by princely attacks.

There were also clashes of interest between coastal and inland towns, as coastal towns, instead of the initial idea of common trade on land and sea, tended to take over the more profitable trade on the Northern Baltic Sea, putting down the inland towns to mere suppliers. Especially Hamburg and Lübeck by this contributed to the dissolution of the Hanseatic community.

In addition, internal conflicts increased because of demands of political participation and social contrasts.

Due to internal clashes of interest, the growing threat of princely power caused no strengthening of the collective Hanseatic federation impetus. The Tohopersate alliances for the longer term were of little use and were no remedy for problems in trade policy. Instead, the more regional leagues of towns were stimulated, particularly in the Wendish quarter where Lübeck was still dominant.

The external threats intensified, especially due to the serious conflict with England that I mentioned in the beginning. For the Hansa, it was embarrassing that the Cologne merchants in England left the Hanseatic line as England was the most important trading partner for Cologne. Its conflict with the Hansa arose already in 1468, when Cologne declined the taxes decided by other Hansa towns and the Netherlands as too high, Cologne having extensive trade relations in that area. Obviously, its egoism was prevailing. The conflict with England arose from decades of discussion over the legal position of English merchants in the Hanseatic towns and over the Hanseatic privileges in England repeatedly ending up in acts of violence. When finally the Steelyard was destroyed, this meant war, in the course of which, in 1471, Cologne was excluded from the Hansa. Fortunately for the Hansa, England too was weakened by internal fractions. Even the king was expelled to the Netherlands in 1471 and could regain his throne only by support from the Hansa. So in spite of several heavy defeats suffered by the Hanseatic fleet, the Hansa achieved a very favourable peace in Utrecht 1474. In fact, this was the last big success for the Hansa, though mainly resulting from lucky circumstances. Hanseatic privileges were confirmed, and Hanseatic trade in England once more secured for nearly a century. Soon after, Cologne was readmitted, but it had to accept severe financial conditions.

This success could not conceal that the Hansa was facing increasing problems. More inland towns had been subjugated by princes or anxiously fled into neutrality, while repeated attempts to ally in a stronger way failed. The great Hanseatic trading posts were losing significance. Compared with Antwerp, Bruges suffered decay, mostly due to the silting of its river. After increasing troubles, the Novgorod office was finally closed by Ivan III in 1494. The privileges of the office in Bergen and Norway were hurt even by Lübeck and Hamburg themselves trading directly with Iceland since 1476 and thus showing how self-serving interests were prevailing.

Lübeck's military efforts against Denmark and the Dutch could not stop the loss of privileges and markets in that area, and the Hansa had no suitable answer to the rise of the big South German trading firms, although they became considerable competitors even in the North.

It seems impossible to say when the decline of the Hansa really began as its factors had existed for a long time: the rise of the national and territorial states detrimental to their freedom and trade; the growing up of centrifugal forces inside the Hansa; and its permanent loss of members; the further development of trading forums and the increasing competition by England and the Dutch, which caused a shifting of the main trade routes and markets to the West, further reinforced by the discovery of America.

A new factor was the Reformation. The spreading of the Lutherian teaching in the early 1520s was common to most Hanseatic towns, but where it linked with political and social questions, this soon could become, or at least be seen, as serious menace to security and established order. The diverging attitudes of neighbouring princes and the varying resistance of the town councils made the Reformation a rather individual problem for each town. At the Hansa Assembly in 1525, Lübeck tried in vain to set up a common defence front against Lutheranism. This advanced partly violently, but in most cases, successful. In some places, iconoclasm occurred - in Stralsund, Stettin, Brunswick and Goslar, for instance, not to talk about Munster. At last nearly all Hanseatic towns followed the Reformation, except Cologne, thus increasing its inner distance.

More detrimental to the Hansa were some of the political consequences of the Reformation. In the Lübeck Reformation struggles, the merchant Jürgen Wöllenweber ascended even to the mayor's post, overthrowing the old leading class of the town in 1533. His efforts to regain the powerful position Lübeck once had ended in a disaster, still diminishing the significance not only of his town but of the entire Hansa. His endeavour to expel Dutch trade from the Baltic matched the Lübeck interest, not that of the Prussian towns. His privateering warfare against Dutch trading vessels grew into a large war against Denmark and Sweden, the so-called Gräfenfeder, or Founts Feud. This war went far beyond Lübeck's forces, as even the Wendish towns kept sceptical distance. Wöllenweber's search for allies failed. Finally, Hamburg and Luneburg mediated a peace in 1536, while in Lübeck, the old council's power was restored. Wöllenweber himself underwent a quite symbolic show trial by the Duke of Brunswick, and was executed.

Some of the Hanseatic towns took part in the Schmalkalt Federation, founded in 1531 to protect Lutheranism, but its defeat by Emperor Charles V in 1547 meant heavy financial losses to them. The old Protestantism could be maintained in Northern Germany.

In those years, there was even an intensive cooperation of the Wendish towns to defend Lutheranism against Anabaptism and other religious challenges, but doubtless all this was dividing as well, as some towns stayed Catholic some kept away from the Federation, and when later on Bremen shifted to Calvinism, it was for some years excluded but re-admitted again and afterwards prevented common religious statements.

Even more depressing were the international developments. In the Baltic, once dominated by the Hanseatic trade, Denmark and Sweden gained preponderance, more infusing foreign trade and fighting against all efforts to restore Hanseatic trade to Russia to its former extent. King Christian IV of Denmark and Norway, he reigned from 1588 to 1648 - extremely long - was a rigorous adversary of liberties, harming Hanseatic trade and politics with all his might. In 1604, he cancelled the Hansa's exemption from duty in the Sound. He vexed Lübeck's trade and shipping in the Baltic, compelled Hamburg to deny claims to be subject to the Emperor only in 1603, and in 1616, built up a fortress on the Elbe in order to hurt Hamburg trade. For decades, he did just this.

In the West, the London Steelyard faced more violent attacks against privileges of position by the English merchants. The Dutch revolt against Spain and a Dutch conflict with England before led to the expulsion not only of numerous Dutch immigrants but also of a company from Antwerp. Both of them found favourable conditions to settle in Hamburg, bringing profit to the city but breaking Hanseatic rules that forbade free trade for strangers in Hanseatic towns. Even merchants from other Hanseatic towns were restricted. With that, Hamburg showed that economic success was no longer based on old Hanseatic rules. Protests from other towns had little effect. Lübeck even appealed to the Kaiser to proceed against the English monopolists and to rise, but the imperial intervention only caused the closing of the London Steelyard. This happened in 1598. Although it was returned in 1606, it never regained its former significance.

The Dutch War of Independence against Spain since 1567 quickly meant the end of Hanseatic positions in that area, though the Antwerp trading posts of the Hansa, transferred here from Bruges before, moved into a new residents-only in 1568, the biggest secular building the Hansa ever erected. It was to be used only for a few years. Disturbance, Spanish plundering, and the siege of Antwerp in 1584/85 drove out the last merchants. So while some cities had profit from the Dutch refugees, the attempt at re-establishing of Hanseatic trade in the Netherlands failed definitely.

Obviously, the development was in more than one respect contradictory, as it shows the weakness and internal contrast of the Hanseatic community, while some of its members, above all Hamburg, were rather prosperous, gaining profits by the Dutch and trading even with Catholic Spain. In 1607, Lübeck, Danzig and Hamburg achieved a very favourable commercial treaty at the Spanish court. Because of the advancing infirmity of the Hansa since the middle of the 16th Century, plans and repeated efforts were made to restore its community. Since support from outside was not available, consolidation was tried as to its own organisation. Meetings of all Hansa towns as well of its new quarters - Lübeck, Cologne, Brunswick and Danzig were the head of those quarters. Those meetings were to be held more frequently, though this succeeded only for a short time.

In 1557, a confederation of 63 towns was raised for ten years and prolonged after, but its statutes had little respect. Debates about its revision led to a diluted version only in 1604, which was signed by but a handful of towns.

Since 1554, for the first time, annual dues were charged inside of the Hansa, due to the respective prosperity of each town, yet readiness to pay proved to be poor and arrears soon went up.

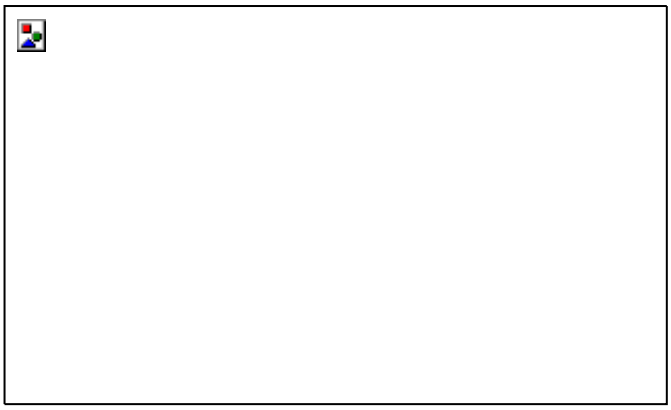
While therefore all these measures had more or less small effect, a last one seemed to be a real progress. In 1556, as I already mentioned, Dr Heinrich Südermann from Cologne was appointed the first Hanseatic Syndic, competent for law questions and external negotiations, a distinguished lawyer, though with little possibility for action. After his death in 1591, the Syndic office stayed vacant for a longer time, mainly due to its costs. Nevertheless, there was still some common spirit, as shown by the successful intervention of several towns when Brunswick was besieged and attacked by its Duke in 1605/06, and in 1616, they even achieved a defensive treaty with the Netherlands. This, however, proved to be worthless when war began.

The Thirty Years War seemed to accelerate the decay of the Hansa. Obviously, the respective towns depended entirely on themselves, only some of them being sufficiently fortified. Wallenstein, imperial commander-in-chief, occupied Wismar and Rostock. The remaining towns mostly were in danger too, particularly since Sweden had joined the war in 1630. Therefore, the Hansa Diet in 1629 authorised Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg, being the most active and well-to-do members, to act for the entire Hansa, as it was impossible to assemble in any time necessary. This mandate of trust then concerned Wallentsein's siege of Stralsund but remained unspecified and was never cancelled. In 1630, these three cities agreed on a defensive alliance, providing help for all member towns in danger. Lucky enough, this was never tested, and facing the war was clearly unrealistic.

Still, this alliance later was prolonged decade by decade. Though in the 19th Century this was the link for nostalgic Hanseatic traditionalism, the decision of 1629 was rather an act of resignation, not a reform. By the end of the war in 1648, several Hanseatic towns were under Swedish rule - Wismar, Rostock, Stralsund, Stettin. Magdeburg was totally destroyed. On the other hand, Hamburg and Danzig had grown, Hamburg mainly profiting from its recent fortification and its bank founded in 1619 that made it a secure market, a place for diplomatic negotiations, and financial transactions, when the Swedish war was [sponsored] by France, and Hamburg was a shelter for refugees.

Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg attended the Westphalia peace conference, referring to their commission from 1629, and by skilful diplomacy, they achieved a remarkable success. In order to re-establish Hanseatic trade and privileges, which suffered many losses during the war, it was their aim to explicitly include the Hansa in the peace treaty. This was at first denied by the German princes and the Kaiser, but in 1645, the Hanseatic negotiators managed to be included in the Swedish/Danish peace at Brömsebro. In 1646, they renewed the defence treaty with the Netherlands, thus paving the way to be included too in the Dutch/Spanish peace treaty in early 1648, restoring the Spanish commercial treaty at the same time. So finally the Hansa was included too in the famous Westphalia peace treaty in late 1638. In fact, this was the very first time the Hanseatic League was mentioned in an official document of the Holy Roman Empire. The paradox could not be greater. At this constitutional recognition of the Hansa met by no means its actual condition. To stablise it once more, forces were lacking as well as, in many cases, political freedom. There was no help when Macklenburg was conquered in 1666, no means to rebuild the Steelyard burnt down in the same year.

Lacking attendance delayed the next Hansa meeting until 1669, Thirty years after the previous one. Merely six towns were represented, having long discussions without a single decision, so this remained the last Hansa Diet, the end of a four centuries' history. Only Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg kept in contact, executing the Hanseatic estate and maintaining Hanseatic traditions.



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THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE AND EASTERN ENGLAND IN THE MIDDLE AGES

DR PAUL RICHARDS

The principal English seaports for Hanseatic merchants outside London were those east coast towns whose role in the national economy developed significantly in the 12th and 13th centuries. Lynn, Boston, Ipswich, Colchester, Yarmouth, Hull, York, Ravenser, Beverley and Newcastle all deserve attention, but the first two will receive most in this synopsis. Lynn and Boston had the oldest and strongest Hanseatic connections. Here there are unspecific references to 'Easterlings' in the 12th century and links between these Wash ports and German traders strengthened in the 13th century. German merchants at times had royal protection for journeys to English fairs as at Lynn in 1242 for example.

As well as bringing fish and forest products to sell in the English market, north German merchants were attracted by the international fairs of the eastern counties, along with Italian, Spanish and Flemish men. Boston, Lynn, Stamford, Northampton and St Ives were the places to buy the highly valued English wool in particular. At St Ives in 1270 were several Esterlings including Gottschalk, alderman of the Germans in Lynn, where he had become a burgess. Yet in 1271 Simon Stavoren is likewise a burgess and Alderman of the Roman Empire at Lynn acting on behalf of Lübeckers trading in England. The Wash ports were in fact gateways into England for many European merchants because of their position at the head of river systems giving access to the towns and fairs of the interior. A Lübeck man was a member of the Trinity Guild at Lynn before 1300 and other Germans were burgesses here.

The commercial dealings of the English east coast ports with traders from the North German towns, Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen, Stralsund, Wismar, Rostock and Danzig above all, were slowly but surely superseded by London. According to Lloyd, the London Kontor overtook that of Boston in economic importance at the end of the 14th century, the Lincolnshire port having been the principal provincial harbour for the North Germans. By 1450 Hanseatic trade through the capital was probably larger than all England's provincial ports together (Sandwich and Dover were more or less outports of London). Nevertheless, the east coast ports continued to host small German communities whose members exported cloth throughout the 15th century, England's great export commodity which had surpassed wool by 1400. It should also be noted that the German delegation at the peace talks at Utrecht in 1473, convened to end several years of Anglo-Hanseatic sea warfare, wanted to repossesses not only their London Kontor but also the old one at Boston and to establish a new one at Lynn.

Hanseatic communities in Europe are frequently identified by the term Kontor (plural Kontore) but the English ones are often referred to as steelyards (London so named from 1384). The derivation of the word 'steelyard' is debated but a Kontor or steelyard was simply a trading post or commercial/business headquarters. For consistency this synopsis will use Kontor. Outside London there were Hanseatic Kontore in Lynn, Boston, Hull, Ipswich and Yarmouth; in Colchester and Newcastle the German traders seem to have rented houses. These provincial Kontore were to a great extent subject to London whose representatives at the Lübeck Hansetag in 1476 insisted that this dependency should continue in accordance with custom. An annual tax or Schossgeld was paid by them to London.

In the course of the 13th century German towns of the North Sea and Baltic coasts formed alliances against pirates and local territorial princes for mutual protection and strength, leading to that confederation of towns known in England as the Hanseatic League. It made its formal entry onto the international stage with the first Congress or Hansetag at Lübeck in 1356. Groups or hanse of German traders from any number of towns travelling abroad had initiated the process which led to an urban confederation which was to negotiate with European Kingdoms and be granted commercial privileges. Such privileges acquired by Cologne merchants in London in 1157 were extended to Hamburg and Lübeck men in 1266/67 when the word 'hanse' is applied to the North Germans for the first time.

The first reference to an untied German Hanse in England is in 1281. Lloyd has shown how these Hanseatic merchants won economic privileges in England via a series of royal charters granted in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Other aliens enjoyed similar reductions or freedoms from English customs but the geopolitical strength of the Hanseatic League allowed it to retain such advantages. Its membership encompassed at least 80 North European towns at any one time; It supplied western Europe with essential supplies of timber, pitch, wax, fish, corn, iron and grain during bad harvests; it accounted for over half of English cloth exports by 1400. English Kings dealt with the London Kontor before 1356, when the first Hansetag met at Lübeck, after which German merchants in England referred complaints to Lübeck first. The first embassy of the Hanseatic League sent to England was in 1375.

A new age in Anglo-Hanseatic relations opened in the late 14th century when English merchants began to sail into the Baltic with cargoes of cloth. Wax, pitch, timber, canvas and cereals were the commodities sought by the Westerners. Danzig in Prussia was the commercial hub of the East Baltic and foremost supplier of forest products and foodstuffs to Western Europe. Here the English settled as a little colony not unlike German communities in English seaports. Inevitably, they wanted similar economic privileges that Hanseatic traders enjoyed in London and English east coast towns like Boston. Not surprisingly, the Danzigers were reluctant to concede such commercial preference, thus Anglo-Hanseatic relations deteriorated. Merchants from Hull, York, Beverley, Boston and Lynn clashed with German traders for predominance in the hinterland of Danzig over the supply and retail of English cloth. Embassies were sometimes despatched by English Kings to Prussia where their counterpart was the Master of the Teutonic Knights (Deutsche Orden) at Marienburg who ruled Danzig until 1454. One sailed from Lynn in June 1388 to negotiate a settlement of trade disputes: a Prussian embassy came to England in 1389 for similar reasons. Anglo-Prussian treaties in 1388 and 1437 were unfortunately too imprecise or vague to make satisfactory progression on the issue of reciprocity or equalisation of commercial privileges.

Trade disputes between English merchants and Prussian authorities from the 1380s damaged Anglo-Hanseatic relations thus fostering further confrontation. Hopes of a settlement through diplomacy were dashed in 1449 when English freebooters captured a big fleet of about 120 ships (nearly 50% were Hanseatic) carrying salt from the Bay of Bourgneuf to the North. This gross act of piracy was seemingly with the connivance of the English government. The ships were taken to the Isle of Wight and the Hanseatic vessels asset stripped. There was another English attack on the Hanseatic salt fleet in July 1458 when 18 Lübeck ships were amongst the prizes. Though Lübeck prepared for retaliatory action against England, the support of the Prussian towns was lukewarm, no doubt because they did not wish for war or cessation of trade. But worse was to follow when a relatively minor incident in 1468 led to a sea war between England and the Hanseatic League. The Danes seized a small English fleet in the sound as it headed into the Baltic. The Danish King blamed the English, and merchants from Lynn in particular, for illegal intrusion into Iceland and the murder of his governor there. No Hanseatic conspiracy seems probable, though Danzig privateers were in the service of the Danes. Political circumstances in London made it convenient for the English government to blame the Hanseatic League for international piracy which led to a sea war 1468 - 1473. Peace was secured when Anglo-Hanseatic delegations met at Utrecht in 1473/4. The episodes or events or 1449, 1458 and 1468 obviously disrupted Anglo-Hanseatic trade. England's east coast ports were badly affected because such a large proportion of foreign trade was in the hands of the Germans. Boston's economy was severely undermined because the Lübeckers, who had been central to the import/export trade of the port, decided to more or less retreat from England.

In 1294 there was a general arrest of alien shipping in England and there were more Hanseatic vessels in Yorkshire ports than elsewhere in England. Wool was exported by German traders from Hull but cloth had surpassed wool by 1400. It was manufactured in York, Beverly, Halifax and other regional centres. Salt was exported from Hull, Boston and Lynn to the Skania (Southern Sweden) herring fishery in the Baltic. Yorkshire men were themselves shipping cloth to the Baltic by the 1380s and were the largest group amongst the English whose goods were seized in Prussia in 1385. Hull was, however, less dependent on Hanseatic commerce than Boston or Lynn. From the 1390s, and for several decades, the Germans nevertheless imported significant amounts of timber, canvas, furs, iron, flax and pitch into England via the Humber. Sometimes up to a dozen Danzig ships arrived from the Baltic each summer. Ravenser had been an early destination for Hanseatic vessels carrying fish, but it fades from the picture by the 1320s. Beverley likewise hosted German ships but was too near the much larger Hull to grow in importance. York merchants were usually based in Hull.

Medieval Newcastle sent coal, lead and salt south to London and the East Anglian ports in return for fish and grain. Foreign trade was probably less significant than the coastal trade for Tyneside merchants. Yet Danzig ships came to Newcastle in the 15th century with bulk cargoes like fish and timber in exchange for coal, lead, wool and a little cloth. Newcastle vessels sometimes sailed to the Baltic; by the 1530s they were taking coal in ballast as well as salt. The overseas trade of Newcastle was modest compared to that of Hull though, similarly, the North Germans accounted for a large slice of it.

Cloth manufactured in East Anglian villages was exported through Ipswich and Colchester in the 15th and 16th centuries by native merchants and Germans. Hanseatic traders from London established a Kontor in Ipswich and rented houses in Colchester. They sent cloth to the Low Counties and the Baltic mainly out of Colchester (Ipswich was in the same customs jurisdiction). It was probably brought from London rather than purchased locally. The Germans seems to have abandoned their premises in the two towns by the 1490s, only exporting the occasional cargo from these ports thereafter. Bulk imports from the Baltic continued to be landed in Ipswich and Colchester, however, including wax, timber, iron, fish and bowstaves, with Hamburg men prominent. Some shipments were clearly destined for London. Cologne merchants from the capital had been the most frequent visitors or residents of Colchester and Ipswich in the 15th century; German ships had delivered cargoes of wine and salt for them in the 1460s for example. This demonstrates that Hanseatic trade through Ipswich and Colchester had been mostly an extension of the activities of the London Kontor, though the Germans did not dominate the overseas trade of the two ports.

Yarmouth (Blakeney and Dunwich were in its customs districts) was a destination for Hanseatic ships, particularly from Hamburg, with timber, flax, pitch, iron and fish imported in the 15th century. As the Norfolk town was the hub of the English herring fishery, the import of fish by German merchants represented serious competition! Yarmouth was also the outpost of the cloth manufacturing city of Norwich whose merchants exported cloth to Europe from the 15th to 18th centuries. Some cloth was taken out by Hanseatic traders. Their Kontor at Hanseatic traders. Their Kontor at Yarmouth must have been a modest affair, managed by Hamburg men, but they withdrew from the town in the early 15th century, seriously damaging its overseas commerce. These German merchants declined an invitation to return in 1416. Hanseatic interest in Yarmouth had waned by the 1480s and 1490s when only a few Danzig and Hamburg ships visited the port. Some brought Bay salt to this Norfolk harbour for sale to both English and German merchants. Hans Schomaker imported a cargo of wainscots and pitch at Yarmouth in October 1451, returned there with salt the following spring, and left again carrying cloth for example.

Medieval Boston had no powers of self-government so lacks a borough archive for the period which disadvantages historians. The Lincolnshire port was the home of a major international fair in the 13th century and still amongst the top ten most populous English towns in the late 14thcentury. Boston exported more wool than any other English port before 1300, though this flow had dwindled by the 15th century, cloth having largely replaced wool in England's foreign trade. However, the significance of the Wash port in the later Middle Ages should not be underestimated as a recent publication confirms (S. Rigby ed. The Overseas Trade of Boston in the Reign of Richard II). No less that 22 local men joined a consortium to export 5781 sacks of wool from Boston in 1377 - 8. In 1383 - 4 Bostonians were also importing dyes and alum from the Low Countries to supply the regional cloth industry.

Boston's special connection with the Hanseatic League was via the Bergenfahrer form Lübeck and other West Baltic towns like Rostock. These Hanseatic traders controlled the huge fish trade at Bergen where a Kontor had been established by the 1360s after trade agreements made with Norwegian Kings. These Bergenfahrer turned Boston into their English distribution centre for fish. Other commodities imported into the Lincolnshire harbour were timber, iron, grain and pitch from Baltic, largely by Danzig men in the late 14th century. Cloth and salt were exported from Boston by the Bergenfahrer to Bergen and the Low Counties at first, then by the Danzigers to the Baltic (increasing quantities of cloth were leaving Boston for Danzig in the late 14th century).

About 1400 Hanseatic imports from Bergen still amounted to at least 70% of all alien imports into Boston. The Germans were likewise dominant in the export trade of the Wash port. The Bergenfahrer, and L'beckers in particular, became much less involved in Boston as a result of the trade disruption caused by the Anglo-Hanseatic hostilities in the mid-15thcentury.

By 1500 the Lübeckers had deserted Boston and its harbour was becoming far less attractive for the Hanseatic League. The final surge of Hanseatic trade at Boston was in 1491/92 after which activity was minimal; London now dominated the wool and cloth trades to the detriment of Boston and other provincial ports. Yet the official records do not tell all; clearly, some German merchants were still living in Boston about 1500. In 1487 Lübeck men were disposing of the property of a certain Hans Brinck, a Bergenfahrer recently deceased there. His business activity embraced leather and cloth but his name is absent from surviving English customs records. In the 14th century and later Lübeck merchants in Bergen often

had managers or agents in Boston but others were resident. Though the majority of German merchants living and working in Boston were from Lübeck and other Baltic seaports, there is a fine limestone memorial in St Botolphs to a merchant from Münster called Wissel Smalenburg who died in the town in 1314. Such men enrolled in local guilds and were benefactors of Boston's friaries, the Greyfriars above all. It should be noted that Smalenburg was so well assimilated in England that his mortal remains were not taken back to his home country but a high status monument was ordered from Belgium and transported to Boston. Wissel wanted to be buried in the Lincolnshire town at the Greyfriars like many of his Hanseatic companions.

What of the Hanseatic Kontor at Boston? Leland indicates that there was a significant number of Germans living in Boston where they apparently founded the Greyfriars and 'many Esterlinges' were buried there. They kept 'a great house and course of merchandise' at Boston until a local man killed one of them in the reign of Edward IV resulting in the departure of the Germans 'and syns the towne sore decayed'. When Leland wrote about 1530 the Kontor 'remayned' but was unoccupied. It has already been seen that the gradual withdrawal of the Lubeckers from Boston was a key factor in its decline as a Hanseatic destination. At the same time the Germans insisted on the return of their Boston Kontor in the Treaty of Utrecht (1474) which concluded the sea war between England and the Hanseatic League. The Bergenfarer authorised their secretary, Christian de Ghere, to assist in the negotiations for taking repossession of it, a process completed by 27 April 1475. The Kontor was an old house or complex with 10 rooms and seven chimneys and associated rear buildings in which there were 11 booths. It was described as 'dilapidated' and needed a good deal of repair to secure it against the winter of 1475/76. It could not have been used for several years and had probably been vandalised. In 1481 both the buildings and the wharf were again in such a state of disrepair that the Hansetag granted the Bergenfahrer at Boston £20 to cover necessary work. In 1505 the London Kontor once more paid for repairs to the Kontor and requested Lübeck to encourage the Bergenfahrer to return (obviously they did not stay long after 1475). The Kontor at Boston was located just to the south of the town centre on a bend of the river Witham.

By the early 13th century Lynn had become a significant English market town and seaport, having grown rapidly since 1101 when Bishop Losinga of Norwich recognised it as a settlement on his Gaywood estate. He had endowed the Benedictine monks of Norwich Cathedral with the lordship. Their Priory Church of St Margaret was, nevertheless, only to be built and rebuilt through the wealth of Lynn's mercantile community, though the Norwich bishops were determined to retain their grip on the town. They had founded a second town and market in the 1140s on the Newland to the north of the first and assumed the lordship of both centres - of Bishop's Lynn - in 1205. When Lynn received its first royal charter of borough freedom in 1204, giving its merchants a degree of self-government, it was already the third or fourth port of the Kingdom.

Lynn's prominence in the Middle Ages depended on its extensive hinterland embraced by the River Great Ouse and its tributaries including several counties at the heart of the nation (the great river had been diverted from Wisbech to Lynn about 1265). This privileged geographical position was reinforced by its location on English's east coast facing Europe across the North Sea, with London and Scotland within easy reach by ship too. It is therefore no surprise that German merchants from the East are visiting Lynn in the course of the 13th century, following traders from Gotland. Professor Friedland has also referred to Lynn and Boston as destinations for Hanseatic merchants trying to establish themselves in the West. The Norfolk town accepted them as 'the fraternity of the German Hanse' (fratres de hansa alemanies in Anglia existentes, Lynn 1302). In 1271 Lübeck merchants were already acting in Lynn as a group or hanse and some individuals were enrolled as members of the Trinity Guild, the commercial and civic hub of the town's elite, rebuilt in 1422 and still standing on the Saturday Market Place. Probably about 1271 German merchants from Hamburg and the Baltic secured trading privileges at Lynn and these were confirmed, after some local disputes, in 1310. The right to maintain their own houses was a critical concession other alien merchants had to lodge with native burgesses).

Herring, grain, timber, wax, iron and pitch were imported into England via Lynn in Hanseatic ships which sometimes carried grain from the Wash to Flanders. Wool, skins, cloth and lead were commodities taken back to Danzig and other German harbours. Lynn merchants sent cargoes to Prussia in Danzig ships and to Bergen in Lübeck vessels but none appear to have been resident in Norway or Hanseatic cities until the 1380s. Lynn was soon more heavily dependent on the Prussia trade through Danzig than any other English port. Lists of English losses in trade with Prussia in the late 14th century demonstrate that Lynn then accounted for about one third of all English damages.

A number of Lynn merchants and their associates seem settled in several Baltic seaports by the early 15th century, particularly in Wismar, Stralsund and Danzig. That Lynn treated independently with the Hanseatic cities in the resolution of disputes or grievances testifies to a not inconsiderable presence. Details of this commercial and diplomatic interaction can be found in the memorandum book belonging to William Asshebourne, Lynn's town clerk. In 1408 he received a letter from Lynn men in Danzig setting out their ordinances recently drawn up for 'their company' there. The son of Margery Kempe married a Prussian woman and both travelled to Lynn in 1431, leaving their child in Danzig.

Unfortunately, Margery's son died in Lynn and she escorted her daughter-in-law back to Danzig. There appears also to have been an exchange or transfer of sailors and artisans between Wash and Baltic seaports. A sizeable group of German shoemakers were living in Lynn by the 1420s.

It has already been seen how the Hanseatic towns untied against England after a major international incident off Denmark in 1468 in which Lynn ships were involved and Lynn men accused by the Danish King of heinous crime in Iceland. Peace was negotiated at Utrecht in 1473/4 following several years of sea warfare and the German delegation achieved most of its aims. It insisted on a free gift of their former Kontore at London and Boston and of a new one at Lynn. The Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1474 and Herman Wanmate and Arnd Brekerfeld were then appointed by Lübeck to take possession of the three Kontors and organise the moving in.

At the peace negotiations at Utrecht during 1473 the Germans accused men of London and Lynn and Boston of being the main culprits in the outbreak of hostilities in 1468. Hence they argued that these towns should cede properties or commercial premises as compensation for all past damages as an act of Anglo-German reconciliation. Edward IV was prepared to accept these terms to end war at sea; in addition £10,000 was to be paid. He granted the titles of the existing Kontore in London and Boston and to a new house at Lynn to the Germans in the Treaty of Utrecht (February 1474). In April 1474 Danzig was asked to send representatives to take possession of the Lynn Kontor by the Hansetag meeting in Lübeck thus confirming the trading connection between the two towns (Danzig did not ratify the Treaty of Utrecht until 1476). Why had there not been a Kontor in Lynn before this late date? Lloyd says that the explanation may lie in the fact that its merchants were keen to exploit the Anglo-Baltic trade on their own account and did not welcome foreigners. They were also in the vanguard of English opposition to German control of the Bergen fish trade.

A privy seal letter from Edward IV about the peace terms contained in the Treaty of Utrecht was read before Lynn Council at the Town Hall on 3 November 1473. It empowered a local commission to work with the King and his Council. William Wales (the Mayor), Walter Coney, Thomas Leighton and Thomas Thoresby were its members. It is clear that this group identified the site now occupied by St Margaret's House for the proposed Hanseatic Kontor. Thoresby lived next door (now the vicarage garden) and had been involved in trade with Prussia like his colleagues who wanted to restart commercial dealings with Danzig.

It should be appreciated that the German diplomats did not get exactly what they wanted in Lynn. Their preference was for a riverside property on King Street or 'Le Chequer' which had become the most advantageous location for local merchants whose warehouses ran down long plots to the Ouse. Here was deeper water than elsewhere in the town. Even the King could not purchase a house for the Germans ion King Street!

The Lynn premises opposite St Margaret's Church were sold by local merchants to Edward IV who passed the title deeds to the London Kontor on 29 April 1475 where they remained for 125 years before going to Lübeck. It is almost certain that the Germans redeveloped the site, but no references to building work exist. Fudge notes that 'the original buildings' at Lynn were described as 'very old' in 1476 and consisted of seven houses with 10 rooms and eight chimneys. A kitchen, hall and courtyard were also listed. From this account it is clear that redevelopment must have taken place, though no doubt in stages, and pre 1476 elements survived. The three storey brick warehouse on the north side of the courtyard was indeed largely rebuilt in the 16th century, but one of its doors is much older. The warehouse of two storeys on the south side is of timber and brick and constructed about 1500. The shorter western range overlooking the Ouse has a small hall which may have been the dining room of the Germans and also erected post 1476.

Whenever the architectural character of the Lynn Kontor by 1500, it functioned simultaneously as a counting house, living quarters, warehouse and distribution centre for the town and its hinterland. Fish, pitch, tar, iron, furs, wax, flax, hemp and timber products arrived in Kogge from Hamburg and Danzig in exchange for wool, cloth, hides, lead, beer and (sometimes) cheese. After the Treaty of Utrecht the Port of Lynn emerged as the key crossroads of both the import and export trade of the Hanseatic League in East Anglia with Prussia the crucial connection. The Mayor and Common Council of the town soon entered into negotiation with 'the merchants of the Hansa called Esterlynges residing at Lynn in le Stileyerd' over local commercial privileges.

Although the Kontors in Lynn and Boston were occupied by Hanseatic merchants after 1474, there appears to have been few Germans resident in these Wash ports by the early 16th century, and both trading ports were eventually rented by local men. Parts of the Lynn Kontor were used by English merchants before the entire complex was let out by the London Kontor to Robert Daniel in 1571.

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