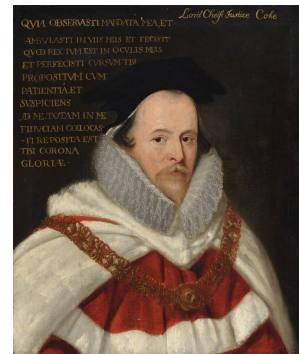


THE EASTLAND COMPANY OF YORK

As an island, Britain from ancient times has been dependant upon ocean trading and in the sixteenth century the privilege of encouraging this trade lay with the monarch. In 1579 Elizabeth granted a charter to the Eastland Company of York ‘to enjoy the sole trade through the Sound into Norway, Sweden, Poland, Lithuania (except Narva, which was reserved to the Russia Company), Prussia, and also Pomerania, from the river Oder eastward to Dantzick, Elbing, and Konigsberg; also to Copenhagen and Elsinore, and to Finland (here called an island), Gothland, Barnholm, and Oeland. They shall have a Governor, deputy, or deputies, and twenty-four assistants, who may make bye-laws and impose fines, imprisonment, etc., on the non-freemen trading to those parts.’ In hindsight historians have questioned if this type of protection was needed in the Baltic where free trade was carried on among fairly peaceful Christian nations without the threat of Barbary pirates that harassed trade in south at this time.

While the Eastland Company was headquartered in York, the majority of their trade was carried on through London and unfortunately most of their records were kept in London with the result in a major loss of their history with the 1666 Great Fire of London. The main trade item during the first half of the seventeenth century was cloth and the Calendar of State Papers contain numerous references to issues relating to this trade.

In the early 1600's during the reigns of James I and Charles I the corruption involved with the buying and selling of monopolies was disrupting trade so significantly that the British Parliament strove to curb the power of the King to lessen the disruption of trade through the use of tradable monopolies. Primarily due to the efforts of Sir James Whitlock's neighbour and friend Sir Edward Coke, by the 1630's Parliament's efforts were well on their way to resulting in the Civil War and execution of Charles I due to issues of Supremacy. Other issues were involved as well including the independence of the judicial system. Sir James Whitlock had been sent to jail for speeches made in Parliament challenging the King's power on issues of trade and imprisonment or execution without trial. During his progress from Scotland to England in 1603 to claim the throne James had sentenced a man to die and had him hung without trial, a right the British felt was guaranteed by the 1215 Magna Carta. The process to a Parliamentary democracy took several centuries.



Wikipedia

In the 1650's Oliver Cromwell cancelled the government's charter with the Eastland Company, but later realised this was a mistake and re-instated it. Eventually the Eastland Company's control of trade in the Baltic was undermined by Parliament when they ruled that any merchant trading in this region was entitled to become a member of the Eastland Company for a fee of two pounds.

Many of the London merchant families traded with Prussia and in 1580, Sir James Whitlock's brother Richard Whitlock (1565-1624) was sent to Dantzic (now Gdansk) in Prussia to be trained in trade by his uncle Christopher Colte the son of John Colte of Little Munden, Hertfordshire. Christopher Colte was the brother of Sir James' mother Joan Colte. There are references to Richard Whitlock working for the Eastland Company but so far the only records I have found referring to Richard Whitlock are in the East India Company Court minutes for 1614-1618 with Whitlocke being chief merchant in 1616 and a report of his death in 1618 in Jacarta. In 1614 Rich. Whitlocke is "referred as probably fit to attend on Sir. Thos Roe". The other two references just say "Whitlocke" but it is assumed it is the same person. It is also assumed that the report of Richard's death in 1618 was false as Sir James records the death of his

brother Richard in Spruceland, Sweden in 1624.

Richard Whitlock of Prussia is the person who Apr.20, 1592 was granted the right to use the Whitlock Coat of Arms and Crest of the Whitlocks of Wokingham by William Dethick, Garter. This family is W02H, the descendants of John Whitloke & Agnes Dela Beche of Wokingham who were married about 1454. See article in the December 2003 issue of the Whitlock Family Newsletter detailing the descent from Richard Whitlock and Katherine Dambits in Prussia and Sweden to the 1850's.

Sir Thomas Roe (c1581-1644) mentioned in the article had a very interesting life. In 1610 he was sent by Prince Henry to the West Indies and visited Guiana and explored deep into the Amazon river. In 1615 The East India Co. persuaded King James to send Sir Thomas to Agra as a Royal Envoy to the court of the great Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Sir Thomas spent three years there and resulted in the East India Co. gaining the Mughal's protection at Surat. The good relationship fostered by Sir Thomas between the Mughal and the East India Co., lasted for years.



Sir Thomas had a long diplomatic career and was successful in negotiating several other treaties of benefit to both Britain and the East India Co. In 1631 he sponsored Luke Fox's expedition to the Arctic and Roes Welcome Sound bears his name.

Sir Thomas Roe (c1581-1644)

Wikipedia

SOURCES: GH120,121,134,136; R0063/11,38; R1935; X0492/8; archive.org

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The Records of the Eastland Company have had a calamitous history. After the fire of 1666, when many of the documents of the London Company were destroyed, the local Residencies were asked to send to the central Court any authentic records they had.³ The fact that these, too, were apparently mislaid, accounts for the scantiness of the documentary evidence concerning a Company that during the first half of the seventeenth century, was an important factor in the export of England's greatest industry, cloth, and to whose importance as a commercial organisation the constant references in the State papers of the seventeenth century give ample testimony.

The principal towns of the Eastern Baltic, Dantzic, Elbing, Braunsberg, Konigsburg, the Polish ports of Rye and Revel, and the Danish towns of Copenhagen and Elsinore are specially mentioned in the Charter as being reserved to the Eastland Company.

the term Merchant Adventurer is used specifically of the Company or generically of all merchants dealing with foreign countries. The Eastland Merchants in York are only once alluded to in the Municipal Records; they are then spoken of as 'The Merchant Adventurers of the Eastland Company.'

Still, it is abundantly clear that, although the two Societies occasionally co-operated, they always remained entirely separate organisations. In York the Adventurers held their meetings in Trinity Hall,² the Eastlanders in the old Hall on Ousebridge. Merchant After the Civil War the two Companies entered into closer con- a s# nection than at any other period of their history. Merchant Adventurers were constantly present at the meetings of the Eastland Company. These amalgamated meetings were an innovation ; the Secretary, in making up the minutes in the Eastland Court Book, always notes the

presence of the Merchant Adventurers, and generally adds, ' This meeting is also entered in the Merchant Adventurers Court Book.

Page -38-

business of the separate Societies. It is possible that adversity was the bond that drew the two Fellowships together, for these examples of common action all took place immediately after the inauguration of the Commonwealth, when the holders of power were inclined to look askance at bodies that owed their privileges to royal authority.¹ Both Companies probably recognised that to keep up any jealous distinctions, in face of the common danger of withdrawal of all privileges, was unwise. Nor was the danger imaginary. Cromwell, in spite of the yeoman services rendered to the Parliamentary cause by the great City Companies, on his first assumption of power had practically deprived them of their privileges. The Eastland Company had the exclusive right of importing hemp, pitch, tar, cordage, rosin, deal boards, and masts,² but a comprehensive Order in Council had been issued that those articles could be brought into the country ' by anyone in any ship from any port

Page -44-

To Gustavus Adolphus, anxious alike to secure a base of operations against Poland and a hold on the trade of the Baltic,⁴ the possession of Dantzic, a wealthy commercial city, with only a nominal allegiance to Poland, was a matter of the utmost importance. He made three attempts to take it, but the Dantzickers seem to have stolidly pursued their business in spite of sieges, and even to have turned the state of affairs to their own advantage, for they procured an Act that no foreign cloth should be sold in Poland unless it had first been sealed at Dantzic.⁵ This blow struck the Eastland Company in a vital part, for cloth was their chief export. Still, the blow was not unexpected

Page -47-

Even in the early Commonwealth days, when the Eastland Company was practically deprived of its privileges, their assistance was sought when the recently founded power wished to find a suitable man to send privately to Sweden to discover its feeling towards the Commonwealth.² The Eastland Company, however, did not always figure as the grateful recipients of royal favours. The influence of the commercial classes as focussed in the great City Companies in determining the result of the Civil War has never been underrated. Even Charles recognised that his alienation of the merchants had been an important factor in his overthrow.

Page -51-

Cromwell had modified his policy with regard to the great trading Companies ; in the early days of his power he had deprived them of their privileges, but he realised his mistake. Later he increased the powers of the East India Company and restored the Merchant Adventurers to their former status.² He gave support, too, to the Eastland Company, for their trade tended indirectly to diminish the power of the Dutch,³ who were England's successful rivals in the Baltic trade.⁴

Page -55-

It is difficult to get at any trustworthy estimate of the amount Gradual of trade done by the Eastlanders, so much of the evidence is of an ease of ex forte nature. But even in the early seventeenth century foreign mercantile enterprise was not conducted on a meagre scale. In 1617 the bankruptcy of two houses

at Elbing and Hamburg, holding eighty thousand pounds worth of English goods, caused great loss to the Eastland Merchants.¹ Wheeler says the annual export from England by the Merchant Adventurers in 1601 was one million pounds.² The Eastland Company never claimed to equal the Adventurers in their output; in 1619 they petitioned to be lightly assessed against pirates, as the trade was only one-eighth of that of the Adventurers.³

Page -57-

The result of their representations was the refusal by the Council of the skimmers' demand. Early in the reign of James I. the export of skins by the Eastlanders had been such an important feature of their trade that the Skinners' Company, who at that time were opposing a proposed patent for the tanning of grey coney skins, had argued that the monopoly would result in the King of Poland driving the Eastland Company from their residence in his territory.²

The early chartered companies : (A.D. 1296-1858)
by Cawston, George; Keane, A. H. (Augustus Henry), 1833-1912

Page -79-

* Whereas the Eastland Company have, by the space of fifty years at least, had a settled and constant possession of trade in the said Eastland parts in the Baltic Seas, and have had both the sole carrying thither of our English commodities, and also the sole bringing in of all the commodities of those countries, as, namely, hemp-yarn, cable-yarn, flax, pot-ashes, rope-ashes, Polonia wool, cordage, Eastland linen, cloth, pitch, tar, and wood, whereby our kingdom hath been much enriched, our ships and mariners set on work, and the honour and fame of our nation spread and enlarged in those parts.

Pg 61

in the time of Elizabeth, when the Baltic was constituted a closed sea in favour of an amalgamated English trading association, appropriately called the Eastland Company.

This corporation received its first charter in 1579, being described as 'the Fellowship of Eastland Merchants' By this document they are privileged 'to enjoy the sole trade through the Sound into Norway, Sweden, Poland, Lithuania (except Narva, which was reserved to the Russia Company), Prussia, and also Pomerania, from the river Oder eastward to Dantzick, Elbing, and Konigsberg; also to Copenhagen and Elsinore, and to Finland (here called an island), Gothland, Barnholm, and Oeland. They shall have a Governor, deputy, or deputies, and twenty-four assistants, who may make bye-laws and impose fines, imprisonment, etc., on the non-freemen trading to those parts.