

RECORDS OF THE EASTLAND COMPANY, YORK RESIDENCE.

INTRODUCTION

In 1597 when Elizabeth I granted a charter of privileges to the newly formed Eastland Company, it was one of the various English organisations engaged in foreign trade.¹ The Eastland Company's area of influence and trade was Scandinavia and the lands bordering the southern shore of the East Sea or Baltic where the Merchant Adventurers of York had established a Trading centre at Elbing and in the 1630s at Danzig and Koenigsberg. Because of this traffic the Adventurers claimed membership of the new Eastland Company:

“For that it is our greatest trafecke to Danzyke, and thes partes, for that we serve the north partes with flax, and other commodities growing in this contree.”²

Their claim was granted. The original Eastland Company numbered 65 charter members, with their headquarters in London, and branches, or ‘residences’ in English cities such as York, Hull and Newcastle. Since York listed 66 citizens in 1579 who took part in Baltic commerce,³ London no doubt welcomed this addition to their membership.

It is to be noted that more than twice the number of members had earlier served the eight or nine years of apprenticeship without either applying for, or being admitted to, membership of the Eastland Company. Further, there are instances of members admitted on recommendation from London: “Hillary, Robert having compounded with and paid his redemption to the fellowship at London, was this day by their order admitted and sworne and paid onely officers fees here, viz. to the Secretary 2s 6d and Bedle 18d.

SOURCES

The surviving records of the York Residence of the Eastland Company are in the custody of the Company of Merchant Taylors at their Hall in Fossgate, York. They have been described in D.M. Smith, *A Guide to the Archives of the Company of Merchant Adventurers of York* (Borthwick Texts and Calendars 16, York, 1990), p.165-6. The Book of Acts and Ordinances and extracts from the first Court Book have been printed by Dr Maud Sellers in her *Acts and Ordinances of the Eastland Company* (Camden 3rd se, vol. XI, 1906).

¹ See the introduction to M. Sellers, ed., *The Acts and Ordinances of the Eastland Company* (Camden Society 3rd Ser., vol XI, 1906); also G.D. Ramsay, *English Overseas Trade during the Centuries of Emergence* (London, 1957); W.S. Unger, ‘Trade through the Sound in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 12 (1959), pp.206-21; R. Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th centuries* (London, 1972).

² In a letter of 25 October 1579, pd in M. Sellers ed., *The York Mercers and the Merchant Adventurers 1356-1917*, (Surtees Society, 129, 1918), p.209.

³ *York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers*, pp.201-2.

The register of admissions into the freedom of the fellowship of Eastland merchants residing in York is to be found on folios 234v-247v of the first Court Book (ref. Eastland 2/1) and covers the period November 1646 to December 1689; the register of apprentices is in the same volume, folios 213v-225r, and covers the slightly longer period March 1642 to June 1696. In addition the first Minute Book of the Merchant Adventurers, 1677-1736, contains in its apprenticeship section details of Eastland apprentices (mostly but not entirely duplicating the information contained in the Eastland Court Book).

Lists of members and apprentices were compiled by Anna B Bisset and published in *The Eastland Company York Residence: Register of Admissions to the Freedom 1646-1689 and register of Apprentices 1642-1696*, as Borthwick List and Index 17, 1996. These lists have now been re-keyed and are available on the website of the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.