

## SANDWICH IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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For the constitutional historian of the Cinque Ports the thirteenth century was a time which saw critical developments in self-consciousness and prestige, a time during which they became accustomed to treatment as a unit both politically and administratively, and a time from which they emerged as a confederation of corporations.<sup>2</sup> As Dorothy Gardiner has shown in her *Historic Haven: The Story of Sandwich* the rôle of that port in these developments was considerable. She has argued that from the earliest years of the century the men of Sandwich had struggled to rid themselves of the overlordship of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, which had been theirs from at least as early as the tenth century. Granted temporary respite during the period of Interdict (1207–13) they ‘began to display a growing desire for a greater share in the conduct of local affairs’.<sup>3</sup> Seizing all available opportunities, they joined with the other Cinque Ports in strongly supporting Simon de Montfort and the popular party against King Henry III. ‘The local interests of Sandwich are merged into the national struggle for liberty. Yet this in itself is indicative of a growing independence of spirit to the point of turbulent revolt.’<sup>4</sup> From this period of the so-called Barons’ War (1258–67), it seems, the Priory was to emerge the loser and in 1290 Henry de Eastry, under mounting pressure, agreed to an exchange whereby the coveted rights and liberties in town and port were relinquished to the Crown.<sup>5</sup>

As it unfolds from the surviving evidence of disputes and inquisitions the story is a dramatic one. Yet when it is told little has been said of the daily life of the people of Sandwich or of the changing prosperity of port and town and their influence on constitutional and political developments. Consequently, little may be said of the motives of those Sandwich men who took part in the struggles of the century unless they be described simply as manifestations of a ‘growing

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Cathedral Archivist, Miss Anne Oakley, for her assistance in producing mss and for her unfailing willingness to discuss points of detail.

<sup>2</sup> K. M. E. Murray, *The Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports*, Manchester, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> D. Gardiner, *Historic Haven: The Story of Sandwich*, Derby, 1954, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39.

independence of spirit' and desire for liberty. For less dramatic and more mundane activities, however, the survival of evidence for thirteenth-century Sandwich is poor. Perhaps the single most important source, in this respect, as Dorothy Gardiner recognized, is the accounts for income and expenditure at Sandwich drawn up by the officials of the Cathedral Priory. These accounts, however, have been misunderstood, and it is proposed here to discuss them in detail and reconsider their contribution towards a better understanding of developments in town and port in this period.

Twenty-two accounts survive for Sandwich in the thirteenth century, spanning the period 1224–1289.<sup>6</sup> They survive in two forms, as enrolled and abbreviated accounts in the central accounts of the Cathedral Priory known as *Assisæ Scaccarii*,<sup>7</sup> and these comprise eighteen of the twenty-two, and as full and original accounts drawn up by the Priory officer responsible.<sup>8</sup> The recorded income was derived principally from the Prior's jurisdiction over trading activities ('De portu') but also from property owned in the town and jurisdiction on the quayside ('De domibus et kaio'), from the 'leading-in bell' ('Cymba ductrici'), and from perquisites of court. Expenses consisted of the regular livery of cash to the Prior's Treasury, the cost of lodging and maintaining Priory officials and other guests, the cost of building and repairing the Prior's property in the town, and the wages of the officials.

The rights and privileges in Sandwich restored to the Cathedral Priory in the late tenth century were confirmed and given general description in Cnut's charter of 1023.<sup>9</sup> There it was set out that Christchurch had sole right to the profits in port and haven accruing from customs and from the 'toll of all vessels whatever coming into the haven, to whomsoever they belong and whencesoever they come', as well as control of the 'small boat and ferry of the haven'; and 'if there be anything in the sea without the haven, which a man at the lowest ebb can reach with a sprit, it belongs to the monks: and whatever is found in this part of the mid-sea, and is brought to Sandwich, whether clothes, net, armour, iron, gold or silver, a moiety shall be the monks and the other part shall belong to the finders'. In so far as the surviving accounts record the profits from these rights and privileges they

<sup>6</sup> 1224–25, 1229–30, 1230–31, 1235–36, 1236–37, 1243–44, 1244–45, 1251–52, 1252–53, 1253–54, 1254–55, 1255–56, 1256–57, 1257–58, 1258–59, 1259–60, 1260–61, 1275–76, 1276–77, 1277–78, 1286–87, 1288–89.

<sup>7</sup> MSS. Dean and Chapter Library, Canterbury Cathedral, A.S. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 16; Register H, ff. 176v–214v.

<sup>8</sup> MSS. D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., *Chartæ Antiquæ*, S. 266c, 277, 279 and 282.

<sup>9</sup> See W. Boys, *Collections for an History of Sandwich in Kent*, Canterbury, 1892, 548–551.

provide information which throws light on the pattern of merchant activity and trade in the thirteenth century.

Any attempt, however, to draw general conclusions from these materials must allow for the importance of Sandwich's rival port of Stonar. From early in Sandwich's history, and possibly from as early as the late seventh century, the co-existence of harbours at Sandwich and Stonar provoked competition and conflict, a conflict exacerbated by the rival overlords of the Abbot of St. Augustine's and the Prior of Canterbury Cathedral. Just how active trade was in the port of Stonar bears directly upon any conclusions which might be drawn from the evidence of commercial transactions in Sandwich, and certainly in the early twelfth century there seems to have been a growing community concerned with trade and levying toll and custom of ships coming to its harbour.<sup>10</sup> Yet this evidence of the inquisition of 1127 suggests that the activities at Stonar were of fairly recent origin and that problems of jurisdiction were clearly settled at that time in favour of the Cathedral Priory.

If Stonar continued to act as a port, and doubtless it did to some degree, then it did so either with the consent of the Priory and acknowledging its financial jurisdiction or it did so illegally and secretly. Early in the thirteenth century Stonar's withdrawal from the protection of the lordship of St. Augustine's Abbey and its unification with Sandwich made still more certain the financial control of the Priory and a settlement of 1242 between Christchurch and St. Augustine's Abbey further clarified their separate rights.<sup>11</sup> The Priory granted 'free access by ship to the channel of Minster by the river of Sandwich and free return' and retained all the maritime tolls in Sandwich port, on both sides of the river, by virtue of its charters. Any ship dropping anchor before reaching the channel of Minster must render the appropriate customs and profits but, in future, the Prior would claim no such rights in the channel itself where the dues belonged to St. Augustine's Abbey. To the Abbot and Convent, but not to their tenants, the Prior granted freedom of passage in the port of Sandwich. And, though relations between the various communities involved continued to be uneasy at best,<sup>12</sup> the Prior's control over the commercial life of the port seems to have been established.

The revenues received by the Priory, therefore, are a measure of the economic life of Sandwich and as such may help to explain the actions

<sup>10</sup> See Boys, *op. cit.*, 551-555; Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 8-9; MSS. D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., Chartæ Antiquæ X.1.

<sup>11</sup> Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, A. H. Davis, Ed., *William Thorne's Chronicle of St. Augustine's Abbey*, Oxford, 1934, *passim*.

of its citizens. Income from customs, tolls and other dues<sup>13</sup> may be seen to have exhibited a distinct trend. Where neither the original accounts nor those enrolled in the *Assisæ Scaccarii* have survived attempt has been made to indicate the relative size and movement of incomes by extracting the sum of the annual cash livery to the Priory from its Treasurers' Accounts.<sup>14</sup> It may be seen by comparing these sums with the annual income *de portu* and the total annual income (where all three totals survive) that the size of the liveries normally bears a simple and direct relationship to annual income in the port and may, therefore, be used as a guide to the general trend of revenues.

Using the evidence of the cash liveries and the totals of annual income from the accounts it would seem that the income from Sandwich, though fluctuating between *c.* £53 and *c.* £77 in the 1220s and 1230s, exhibited a marked upward movement in the 1240s which was sustained into the 1250s and maintained at highest levels of *c.* £104–116 between 1255 and 1261. Between 1261 and 1272 no evidence survives among the Cathedral Priory archives to indicate economic developments though it seems that while the town was in the King's hands in the late 1260s, 'the customs accounts show reduced profits'. And to Dorothy Gardiner this indicated 'the shaken confidence brought about by the barons' turbulent behaviour. Merchants were naturally afraid to trust their cargoes to the warehouses and quays of Sandwich in revolt'.<sup>15</sup> Certainly from the 1270s it would seem that there was a distinct downward tendency in total annual receipts, the accounts for the 1270s recording figures of *c.* £80–85 and those for the late 1280s showing totals of *c.* £64–66. The indication given by the sums of cash liveries, which survive throughout the period 1272–90, reinforces the impression given by the accounts. If there was a loss of mercantile confidence in the late 1260s, it was a profound one whose effects were to be felt progressively during the next twenty years.

This pattern of economic fortunes, of growth in the first half of the century and contraction in the second, is largely to be seen as a reflection of trading activity in Sandwich for it is the income *de portu* which constitutes the overwhelming preponderance of the total income

<sup>13</sup> See Table I: 'Income of Canterbury Cathedral Priory from Sandwich Sources'. For a description of customs, tolls, etc., see MSS. D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., Register H, ff. 161v–162v.

<sup>14</sup> MSS. D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., MA 1, 1272/3–1290. In dealing with the account materials, Gardiner makes reference to various sums received as 'profit', being totals entered under the heading 'profectus'. This is a misunderstanding, 'profit' and 'profectus' being quite separate concepts. For an explanation of the term 'profectus' see E. Stone, 'Profit and Loss Accountancy at Norwich Cathedral Priory', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 36, citing P.R.O. MSS, Pipe Roll 3 Edw. I Residuum Kanc. and 2 Edw. I m.18.

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TABLE I: INCOME OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL  
PRIORY FROM SANDWICH SOURCES

	'de portu'			'de domibus et aiko'			total			liveries to Ch.Ch. treasury		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1224-25	(60	6	8)	—			60	6	8	21	1	6
1229-30	(53	3	11)	2	11	3	55	15	2	43	3	10
1230-31	(74	0	0)	3	7	3	77	7	3	60	10	0
1235-36	(52	13	4)	0	8	2	53	1	6	35	( )?	
1236-37	61	16	1	nothing			61	16	1	45	0	0
1243-44	68	15	4	1	3	6	69	18	10	34	13	4
1244-45	76	8	8	3	7	0	79	15	8	60	0	0
1251-52	83	5	9	5	7	0½	92	11	4½	68	10	0
1252-53	87	3	0	4	1	11½	95	18	3½	69	0	0
1253-54	74	16	7	5	2	10	80	10	11	55	15	0
1254-55	83	4	0	5	15	4½	91	1	8½	73	12	2
1255-56	101	11	6	7	5	4	110	18	2	80	2	6
1256-57	95	9	0	6	2	2	103	12	3	91	9	6½
1257-58	96	6	8	5	18	3	104	5	9	84	6	0
1258-59	96	12	3	7	14	2	116	7	2	86	5	0
1259-60	99	7	0	6	11	7	107	18	7	88	10	1½
1260-61	99	10	3	6	6	3½	107	16	6½	92	0	0(?)
1272-73	—			—			—			62	13	0
1273-74	—			—			—			31	5	0
1274-75	—			—			—			50	2	3
1275-76	—			—			80	14	5	64	0	0
1276-77	69	3	9	10	18	0	84	10	5	67	0	0
1277-78	69	10	0	9	5	0	84	2	8	66	3	0
1278-79	—			—			—			46	0	0
1279-80	—			—			—			47	10	0
1280-81	—			—			—			51	0	0
1281-82	—			—			—			46	0	0
1282-83	—			—			—			59	13	0
1283-84	—			—			—			34	8	0
1284-85	—			—			—			35	0	0
1285-86	—			—			—			49	12	0
1286-87	57	9	11	4	8	9	65	15	6	53	10	0
1287-88	—			—			—			41	4	0
1288-89	50	16	10	8	16	5	63	10	0	50	0	0
1289-90	—			—			—			111	0	6½

received in the accounts. Here again, the growth of revenue to the heights of the 1250s is a marked feature as are the suggestions of decline, a decline to levels of income perhaps even lower than those of the early thirteenth century. In simple terms it meant fewer ships, smaller cargoes, and fewer merchants in the town.

The revenues received by the Priory, therefore, being a measure of the economic life of Sandwich, may be used to illuminate other developments in town and port in the thirteenth century. In the light of

the expansion of the first half of the century the 'growing desire for a greater share in the conduct of local affairs' may assume a new perspective. Certainly, the importance of the period of Interdict should not be argued from silence. Equally, what once appeared to be the Priory's loss in the exchange of 1290, now seems a settlement characteristic of the financial acumen of Henry de Eastry. As an explanation of the political actions of the men of Sandwich the 'struggle for liberty' begins to look restricted.

The implications to be drawn from the profits of trade, however, must themselves be subject to qualification. Just how close the connection between the volume of trade and the general prosperity of a port is impossible to estimate without knowledge of the profitability of hosting, agencies, victualling, chandlery and repair and maintenance work, and the opportunities they provided.<sup>16</sup> Still more difficult to determine is the relationship between the incidence of trade and the size of population. How long sustained a period of expansion or contraction in trade might need to be before a concomitant demographic reaction is extremely difficult to measure. Whether Sandwich should be imagined to be dwindling in size in the second half of the thirteenth century cannot simply be decided by an examination of the revenues *de portu*.

Unfortunately, the account materials do little to resolve the problem. The only possible guide to general prosperity comes from the income received by the Priory from its property in the town and the attitude it showed towards such investments, always allowing that this property, because of its location, may have benefited more than most from trading activities. Receipts from urban property, 'de domibus et kaio', do seem to have risen in the course of the century until 1260-61 and the still higher levels of 1276-77, 1277-78, and 1288-89 may indicate continuing growth though the figure for 1286-87 points a warning.<sup>17</sup> As for the policy of investment it is noticeable that after 1255-56 there is no surviving evidence of new building, though payments for repairs may conceal improvements. The largest single expenditure, indeed, was made in 1224-25 when £29 7s. 1d. was spent on building a new house which the account of 1229-30 reveals to have been built of stone.<sup>18</sup> In 1243-44 a further outlay of £20 16s. 6d. was made on new houses,

<sup>16</sup> For comments on this see O. Coleman, 'Trade and Prosperity in the Fifteenth Century: Some Aspects of the Trade of Southampton', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvi (1963-64), 9-22. For a contradictory view see C. Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, London, 1973, 163.

<sup>17</sup> See Table I. It should also be recognized that the position as regards arrears is not clearly stated in these accounts.

<sup>18</sup> MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., A.S. 1 and 2.

which probably included shops,<sup>19</sup> and in 1251–52 £3 18s. 11d. was spent on new works ‘in nova venella’ in front of the great house.<sup>20</sup> The next two years saw the expenditure of 39 marks (£26) given by John Pikenoth to the Priory for building a house in Sandwich, and £1 10s. 3½d. for building a new wall.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in 1255–56, a new stable was constructed at a cost of £5 17s. 6d. and work on a cellar was carried out for £1 8s. 0½d.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the period, as far as may be judged, repair work was sustained at a high level, the greatest sum in any single year being spent in 1277–78 when £5 9s. 3½d. was disbursed, amounting to well over half of the income from rent.<sup>23</sup> If these matters are any assistance it may be to confirm the impression of expansion in the first half of the century, especially after 1240, and possibly to suggest a town declining in prosperity while maintaining or even increasing its population after the 1260s.

The constitutional development within the Cinque Ports in the thirteenth century has rightly been recognized as of the first importance in the history of that confederation but it will not be understood until the townmen’s desire for liberties is recognized as having mundane origins. The creation of the mayoralty<sup>24</sup> came, after all, at a time when in Sandwich and elsewhere expanding urban communities were seeing the emergence of ‘a far from insignificant class of traders whose enterprise had won them solid substance’.<sup>25</sup> The involvement of townsmen in the national struggles of 1258–67 probably came at the peak of their prosperity and influence. As for subsequent developments, they may owe much to the tensions which arose as successive crises of climatic and demographic origin, compounded by the fortunes of war, caused a restructuring of the economy.

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<sup>19</sup> MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., A.S. 9. The account for the following year, 1244–45, refers, for the first time, to income ‘de scopis’, MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., A.S. 16.

<sup>20</sup> MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., A.S.7.

<sup>21</sup> MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., Register H., ff. 176v and 179.

<sup>22</sup> MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., Register H., f. 185.

<sup>23</sup> MSS D. & C.L., Cant. Cath., Chartæ Antiquæ S. 277. Part of this sum may have been spent on improvements.

<sup>24</sup> Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> For a general discussion of urban developments in this period, see E. Miller, ‘The English Economy in the Thirteenth Century’, *Past & Present*, no. 28, July 1964, 21–40.