

ENTREPÔT POLICY VERSUS PROJECTS
FOR PERQUISITES IN THE
ADMINISTRATION OF DOVER HARBOUR:
THE DISPUTE OVER CHARGES FOR
PASSING THE BOOM, 1635–1638

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I

During the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) an international entrepôt developed at the port of Dover.¹ It was the product of the English government's attempt to tax Continental Europeans for their use of English neutral shipping. England's neutrality during most of the period made her merchantmen more attractive carriers than the relatively more efficient Dutch *fluit* ships which had previously dominated the European carrying trade. After the renewal of warfare between Spain and the United Provinces in 1621, the lightly armed and manned *fluits* were no match for Spanish privateers operating from Dunkirk. As a result, English vessels were employed by merchants of the Continental belligerents for commodity trade through the English Channel and by Spanish government financiers for shipping silver from Spain to Hapsburg armies in Flanders. Except for the years from 1625 to 1630 when England was at war with Spain and France, the English government used naval power and diplomacy to force the two branches of this carrying traffic into Dover to pay taxes. The government's action eventually produced an entrepôt for both commodities and silver.

¹ The first section of this article is based on my book, *The Exchange of Christendom: The International Entrepôt at Dover, 1622–1651* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976), chapters I–IV; appendixes D–F, and I. See also my "Fiscal Aspects of the English Carrying Trade during the Thirty Years War", *Economic History Review*, 2nd. ser., XXV (1972), 261–83, and Harland Taylor, "Trade, Neutrality, and the 'English Road', 1630–1648", *Economic History Review*, 2nd. ser., XXV (1972), 236–60.

The commodity entrepôt developed in the early 1620's and again after the Anglo-Spanish peace in 1630. The Channel Fleet, acting for the Customs Farmers, forced into Dover English ships carrying directly between foreign ports and foreign vessels seeking to reload their goods into English merchantmen in the Downs. When these ships entered Dover harbour, the Customs Farmers' agents assessed their cargoes. A group of factors resident in the town paid the required re-export duties on behalf of the European merchants involved. Many of these foreign merchants soon realized, however, that their factors in Dover could be put to better use than merely paying duties on goods in transit. They increasingly preferred to send their goods in foreign or English ships directly to factors in Dover for storage. They would then order their factors by "letters of advice" to reshipe the goods in English vessels at a later date. The advantage of this system was that the factors, unlike their Continental employers, always had a supply of English shipping immediately available at Dover and could thus ship goods more quickly to take advantage of favourable market conditions.

The basic *modus operandi* of the silver entrepôt was also established in the 1620's. Before the outbreak of the Anglo-Spanish war in 1625, the Channel Fleet seems to have made no deliberate attempt to force English ships carrying Spanish silver into Dover. When these silver carriers did call at an English port, however, the government would not allow them to continue their voyages to Flanders until the silver had been coined at the Mint in London and Mint charges had been paid. This procedure was formalized by Anglo-Spanish diplomatic accord in 1632. It provided that English vessels freighting Spanish silver should always stop at Dover in order to unload two-thirds of their cargoes for coinage in London. The silver removed from the ships was transported over the Dover Road to the Tower Mint, and London factors for the Spanish government financiers paid the Mint charges for coinage. The factors then used the new coins to buy bills of exchange from London merchants redeemable in Flanders. The silver remaining in Dover was usually re-exported immediately for Dunkirk.

Before 1635 only these silver shipments from Dover to Dunkirk had been convoyed by the Channel Fleet. Commodity carriers had had to rely merely on their status as neutrals when they met Dutch warships or Spanish Dunkirk privateers. The entry of the French into the Thirty Years' War in May 1635 forced a change in this convoy policy. Unlike the Spanish and Dutch, the French did not try to court England's support by respecting her neutrality. French warships began to stop and even to seize unconvoyed English vessels, and the Dutch and Dunkirkers quickly followed suit. As a result, the Customs Farmers convinced the government to apply its *Mare Clausum* policy to protect

commodity shipping at Dover. By August 1635 the Channel Fleet, strengthened by Ship Money, was providing effective periodic convoys for all commodity carriers using the Dover entrepôt. The English warship captains received fees from merchant shipmasters for this service, but the barges were probably no more than one per cent *ad valorem*.

From Christmas 1635 to the end of March 1636 the Customs Farmers initiated another new policy at Dover by reducing re-export duties on the commodity traffic, an action which they termed "composition". Acting under pressure from the pro-Spanish government in London, the possible adverse effect of the new convoy charges, and an increasing tendency by English vessels in the foreign carrying trade to attempt to avoid Dover because of high duties, the Farmers "compounded" their charges downward from $6\frac{1}{4}$ per cent to $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{3}$ per cent on Spanish and Flemish goods while leaving the rates unchanged on Dutch, German, and French products (except wines). Ironically, the government permitted the Farmers to compensate themselves on the more secure silver traffic by applying a $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent duty on all Spanish silver re-exported directly from Dover to Dunkirk.

The new policies of convoy protection for commodities and customs rate reductions had gratifying results for both the Farmers and the town of Dover. Shipping in the entrepôt trade carrying cargoes from Dover harbour jumped from 153 vessels in 1635 to 307 in 1636 and 369 in 1638. The Farmers saw their revenue from commodity re-exports increase from £11,000 in 1634 to over £18,000 in 1636 and to £23,000 in 1638. The Corporation of Dover had its harbour dues increase from £490 in 1635 to £1,118 by the end of the next year.

It is impossible to determine precisely whether the new convoys or the lower customs charges had the greater influence in increasing the volume of shipping and revenue at Dover. There is, however, one piece of evidence that suggests an answer. The French were at war with Spain from May 1635, English convoys were operating at Dover from August of that year, and no French wine was re-exported from the entrepôt. At the end of 1635 re-export duties on French wines were cut by more than half, and during 1636 over 3,000 tuns of French wine were re-exported. If the behaviour of French wine re-exports is typical, it would seem that lower duties did indeed cause the volume of shipping to increase more than proportionately to the amount of rate reductions, producing a greater total revenue. In any case, the Farmers believed that the flourishing condition of the commodity entrepôt after 1635 resulted from lower charges on shipping, and they wanted no meddling with this policy from outsiders.

Such meddling, however, was inevitable. The increase in shipping traffic at Dover was a tempting sight for government officials seeking

to increase their inadequate incomes. It was obvious that a sizeable sum could be made simply by placing a boom across the harbour's mouth and charging a fee for passing it. Such a scheme had foreign precedents and fitted in with the Crown's policy of allowing officials to augment their salaries by means of perquisites.²

The object of the remainder of this article is to describe the projects for establishing a boom at Dover, the resulting disputes over its custody and the charges to be laid for passing it, and the significance of these controversies with respect to the Farmers' policy of minimizing shipping charges to maintain the commodity entrepôt.

II

The first attempt to erect a boom at Dover occurred in May 1635, just after the French entry into the Continental war. About 1st May one Daniel Smith petitioned the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports for the establishment of a boom. Under the proposal, Smith was to be boom-master and was to receive reasonable fees for passage. Smith justified himself by claiming that such a boom was in use at Dunkirk and other foreign ports.³

On 11th May, 1635, the Mayor and Jurats of Dover petitioned the Privy Council in opposition to Smith. They requested that if such a boom was to be erected, they should be allowed to maintain it at their own expense without charging any passage fee. They claimed that charging a fee for passing the boom would discourage masters of ships from entering the harbour and would make it impossible for vessels in the Channel to take speedy refuge if attacked by their enemies in the Downs. Finally, they stated that Smith had initiated the whole project simply for his private profit.⁴

The Council decided on 27th May not to permit the establishment of a boom at that time. It provided, however, that if it should become expedient in the future to erect a boom, "the said Towne shalbe preferred before any other, for the keeping and maintaining thereof" without fees.⁵

The Customs Farmers soon decided that a boom without charges for passage would, after all, be a good idea. They informed the Council that it would aid in "securing ye Customes at Dover". On 10th July, 1636, the Council ordered the Corporation of Dover to carry out its

² Professor Aylmer estimates that Charles I's civil servants collected fees and gratuities from private persons to the amount of £250-400,000 a year. See G. E. Aylmer, *The King's Servants: The Civil Service of Charles I, 1625-1642* (London, 1961), chapters II-VI, *passim*.

³ C[alendar of] S[tate] P[apers] D[omestic] 1635, 51.

⁴ C.S.P.D. 1635, 65-66.

⁵ P.R.O. P[rivy] C[ouncil Register] 2/44/290.

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earlier pledge. The town was to “make, keepe and maintaine ye said Boome at their own Charge, without any fee at all from his Majesty his Subiectes, or any other person for ye generall good of Trade. . . .”⁶

The town complied with the order immediately. The position of the new boom may be seen on the map below, which is based on a graphic survey of Dover harbour made in 1641.

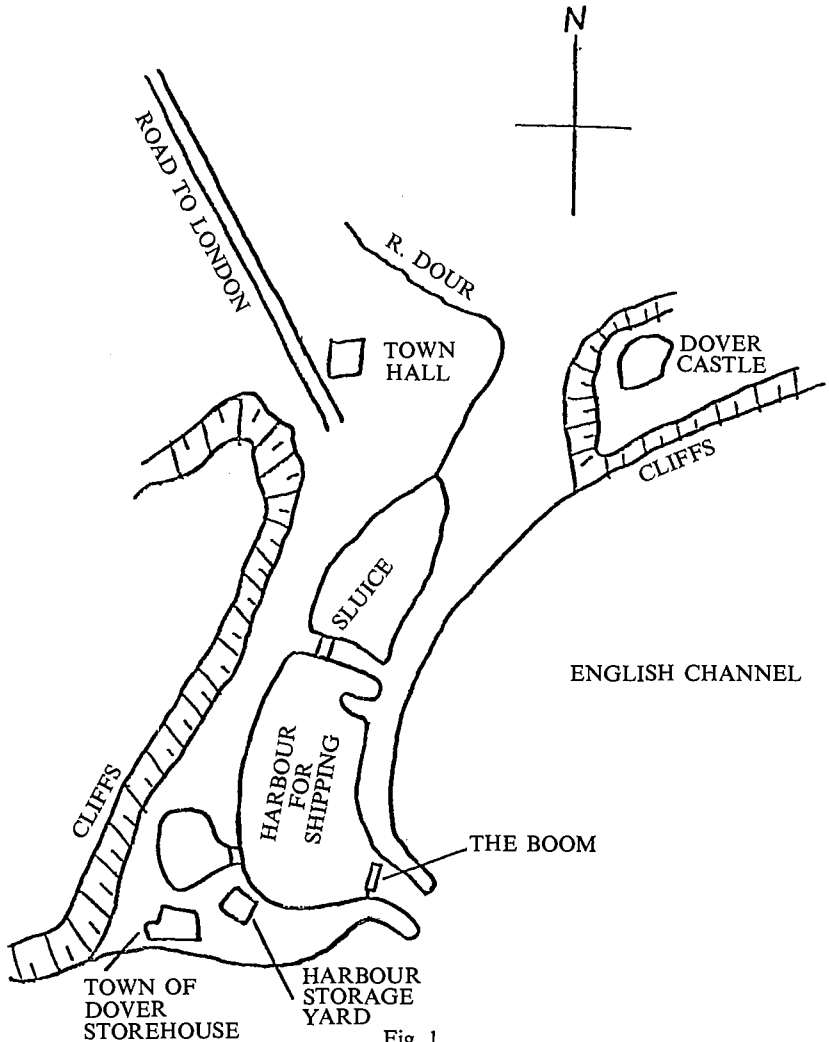


Fig. 1.

Source: William Eldred, MS Plans of Dover Harbour and Town (1641), Dover Harbour Board, Drawings, Nos. 7478; 10,675.

⁶P.R.O. P.C. 2/46/157.

No further attempt was made to exploit the boom for private gain until 1638. In June of that year Sir John Manwood, the Lieutenant of Dover Castle, petitioned the King for custody of the boom and the right to charge duties for passing it comparable to those levied in other countries. He claimed in his petition that the boom had become too important to be entrusted to the town and that it ought to be given over to him because he governed the harbour for the Lord Warden, whose authority stemmed from possession of admiralty jurisdiction over the Cinque Ports. Manwood further contended that he was the best man for keeping the boom because he "hath not any Ships of his owne to lett in or out at the said Boome nor standes in any particular relacion to the Marriners of the said Towne. . . ."⁷

Manwood filed a separate brief with his petition stating in detail why the boom was important and why it should be removed from the control of the Corporation of Dover. The boom could be used to stay passengers such as Jesuits and traitors. In case of war between England and France or another power, it would prevent night attacks on the harbour and town. It would also prevent ships from carrying out forbidden exports and keep seamen from escaping the press. Control of the boom by the town had prevented or delayed the Lord Warden from getting notice of depredations by Calais and Dunkirk privateers upon English ships in the Downs. Finally, Manwood held that booms were kept at Dunkirk and other foreign ports, "and fees for the same allowed to the chiefe Officers that command their Boomes there."⁸

It seems clear that Manwood was somehow trying in his brief to justify his request for collecting fees by emphasizing the strategic importance of the boom to the defence of the Kingdom. He conspicuously avoided mentioning its most important function, *viz.*, the aid it gave to the Farmers in preventing ships in the entrepôt traffic from slipping out of the harbour without paying re-export duties. This omission suggests that he was hoping to gain approval for his project without involving the Farmers, who would certainly have contended that the boom was viable only without fees.

Manwood's petition was taken in hand by Secretary Windebank.⁹ Through the Secretary's influence Manwood received a royal letter under the signet seal on 23rd June, 1638. It rehearsed the entire previous history of the boom and then proceeded to grant its custody to Manwood during the time of his Lieutenancy of Dover Castle. The

⁷ P.R.O. S[tate] P[apers] 16/537/141. Manwood may have been telling the truth about his shipping interests at the time of this petition, but it is known that by 1639 he was sending out fishing busses from Dover. See P.R.O. P.C. 2/53/50; *C.S.P.D.* 1640-41, 123-24.

⁸ P.R.O. S.P. 16/537/141, I.

⁹ H.M.C. *XII Report*, App., Pt. II (Cowper: Coke MSS.), 187.

commissioners of the harbour, a body incorporated by James I in 1606, were to determine the fees on the basis of those charged abroad. After Manwood ceased to be Lieutenant of Dover Castle the Lord Warden was to award the office of boom-keeper to each successive Lieutenant.¹⁰

The Farmers were now confronted with a *fait accompli*. Nevertheless, they decided to use their influence with the government to seek an abrogation of Manwood's grant. On 7th July, 1638, Sir Paul Pindar and Sir John Wolstenholme, the most influential of the Farmers, wrote to Secretary Coke stating that Manwood's plan to charge fees for passing the boom would endanger trade at Dover. They asked the Secretary to see to it that no new charges were laid.¹¹ Coke was senior to Windebank, who had acted for Manwood, and the two Farmers no doubt hoped that the senior Secretary would be able to reverse the action of the junior.

There is no evidence for Coke's rôle in subsequent events, but there is no doubt that someone with considerable authority acted on the Farmers' behalf. On 17th July the Corporation of Dover suddenly presented Manwood with an order in the King's name commanding him to return the boom to the custody of the town. The reason given in the order was that Manwood had not reminded the King in his petition that a previous order of the Council had awarded the keeping of the boom to the Corporation.

Manwood immediately drafted another petition to the King which he sent to London on 20th July. He stated that both he and the King had been the victims of sharp practice because his original petition as well as the King's signet of 23rd June had taken full notice of the earlier Council order granting the boom to the town. He also noted that neither he nor any representative of the Lord Warden had been heard when the town obtained its new order relieving him of the boom. Manwood's new petition requested that the King re-grant the boom to him. In addition, he sent along an authorization from the commissioners of the harbour allowing him to establish boom rates equal to those at Calais, Dieppe, and Dunkirk.¹²

The whole matter received a full airing before the King and Council on 5th August, 1638. After a full debate the King ordered that the boom be given into the custody of the Lord Warden; the order expressly stated, however, that the Lord Warden and his subordinates were not to charge any fees whatever, "as if noe such Boome were at all there

¹⁰ *C.S.P.D. 1637-38*, 527; *H.M.C. XII Report*, App., Pt. II (Cowper: Coke MSS.), 187.

¹¹ *H.M.C. XII Report*, App., Pt. II (Cowper: Coke MSS.), 187

¹² The preceding two paragraphs are based on information summarized in Manwood's petition to the King of 20 July 1638 and its enclosures. *C.S.P.D. 1637-38*, 569.

kept." This state of affairs was to continue while the whole question of fees was given further consideration.¹³ Lord Treasurer Juxon and Lord Cottington, Chancellor of the Exchequer, then received an order to make an investigation. They were to determine precisely what benefits accrued from the boom and what Englishmen paid abroad for passage of booms in foreign harbours. They were also to find out what charges had been made at Dover and whether or not the boom-keepers were guilty of abuses.¹⁴

While Juxon and Cottington were making their investigation, the dispute between Manwood and the town continued. On 24th September, 1638, the Corporation of Dover petitioned the King requesting another hearing before the Council. The Corporation stated that it had just become aware that the King's grant of the boom to the Lord Warden had been made upon Manwood's contention that the harbour was in the jurisdiction of the Admiralty of the Cinque Ports. The town claimed that it was in their own jurisdiction by virtue of their charter. The King decided to hear the case again on 30th September.¹⁵

The new hearing before the Council resulted in the Lord Warden being confirmed in his custody of the boom. Juxon and Cottington were now specifically charged with determining what fee should be fixed.¹⁶ From Manwood's point of view, this last action was important. It meant that the King and Council had finally approved boom charges at least in principle.

While Juxon and Cottington were trying to fix the level of boom fees, the Farmers were forced to make further reductions in their re-export charges on commodities at Dover. The main reason for their action was increased Dutch competition in the European carrying trade. Dutchmen were obtaining licences to sail their ships as vessels belonging to the neutral King of Poland, and the English government refused to force these Dutch impostors into Dover to pay duties for fear of offending the Poles and thus endangering the trade of the English Eastland Company.¹⁷ On 8th December, 1638, therefore, the Farmers negotiated a "composition" agreement with the foreign factors at Dover which was to take effect at Christmas. The agreement reduced the re-export rates on French, German, and Dutch goods to parity with those which had been levied on Spanish and Flemish commodities since 1636.¹⁸ From the Farmers' standpoint, it was now

¹³ P.R.O. P.C. 2/49/183.

¹⁴ P.R.O. P.C. 2/49/183; *C.S.P.D.* 1637-38, 587.

¹⁵ *C.S.P.D.* 1638-39, 27.

¹⁶ P.R.O. P.C. 2/49/217; *C.S.P.D.* 1638-39, 36.

¹⁷ See my *The Exchange of Christendom*, chapter III, part (i).

¹⁸ B. M. Stowe MS. 325, fols. 176-78. The text of the agreement is printed in my *The Exchange of Christendom*, appendix B.

more important than ever that no boom fees be placed on shipping at Dover since such charges might jeopardize their new agreement.

Juxon and Cottington finally made their report on 11th December, 1638. In their presentation to the King the two lords could not bring themselves to settle the issue of a fee for the boom. They were of the general opinion that any fee would damage trade, but decided to refer the whole matter back to the King for further consideration. Despite its inconclusiveness, the report is important because it summarizes the final arguments of Manwood, the Farmers, and the town, and contains a compromise proposal which was ultimately adopted. The relevant passages are worth quoting in full:

'Upon Conference first with Sir John Manwood, we find he desires a fee upon all Strangers (as well where Booms are kept as where there is none) and upon English likewise. The first part whereof, we conceave very dangerous, since there being noe Booms neither in France nor Spain, a like duty (or rather a greater) might be layd upon your Majesties Subjects in those Parts (where by reason of the warrs betwixt these two Crowns the English shipping is in so numerous and advantagious a manner employed). For the second, for laying of it, on all your Majesties subjects, there being soe great a trade in that Port, and so many small vessels, that make soe often returns thither, we apprehend the burthen wilbe great. But Sir John further prayed, there might be an injunction on all shipss, not to go out with out the Lord Wardens passe, alleaging the like in those Places, where noe Booms were, and said he hoped we would make this a braunch of our Reference. But our chief care being to sett no greater a fee upon this Boom than might well defray the charge, and modestly reward him that kept it, we did not harken to him therein. . . .

Your Majesties Farmers, gave many reasons how dangerous it might be for trade if any great fee were layd upon Strangers, Or, any, upon English. They further alleaged that their Composition which was intended to increase Trade (they feared made it seeme soe easy, that it invited on these burdens, which [trade] was, not withstanding, upon the now [new] settment thereof, faine to be abated upon Some Comodities So that if new dewties were now Layd, they should be forced to resume the old and full Customes. And that not only they, but your Majestie would suffer by it, in Your Impositions.

The Townsmen brought in many reasons, presented a Bill of the Sundry charges on a shipp, received viz., Slusage, Tonage Capstenance Ballastage Harbarage Cranage and all droits of the Towne and for repaire of the peere: They showed that in Queen

Elizabeth's tyme a Boome was in that Towne, but layd down againe, though but two pence per shipp demanded. They used some of the former reasons that a new dewty might decay trade, and so the shipping, and disable them in keeping the peere in soe good a sort [as] they now doe, and at last offered, That whereas the keeping the Boom formerly stood them in but 10 l. per anno they would now allow 40 l. per anno, to the Boomkeeper, the Lord Warden should appoint. The Farmers likewise praied the charge of keeping it might be reduced to an annuall fee, and not be leavied by tonnage or any charge of Trade; Wherein (if need required) they would undergoe some charge.

So that by these offers the Custody being left where your Majestie in your Wisdome had disposed it, and the charge thereof, desired to be defrayed, both by the Towne and Farmers, and the reasons they used being of waight with us, we hope your Majestie will interpret it our dewty, to demonstrat it, as we have done.¹⁹

Although Manwood, acting for the Lord Warden, continued to make plans to charge fees for passing the boom equal to those imposed abroad,²⁰ there is no evidence that any such duty was ever collected at Dover. Instead, it appears that Manwood agreed to accept the offer of the town and the Farmers as reported by Juxon and Cottington, under which the town would pay him £40 a year in lieu of any direct fees on shipping. The Dover Corporation Accounts show that payments to Manwood of £10 a quarter for custody of the boom were made retroactive to Michaelmas 1638 and continued until Midsummer 1640²¹ when he was replaced as Lieutenant of Dover Castle by Sir Edward Boys.²² Boys continued to receive the same £40 a year until Michaelmas 1641.²³

III

Manwood's decision to accept the town's offer of a nominal perquisite thus provided a somewhat anti-climactic outcome to the dispute over assessment of fees for passing the boom. His action, nevertheless, was of great importance in preserving the Farmers' policy of minimal

¹⁹ P.R.O. S.P. 16/404/53.

²⁰ C.S.P.D. 1638-39, 175.

²¹ Abstracts from Dover Corporation Accounts, Edward IV to William and Mary, B.M. Add. MS. 29,621, fol. 221.

²² See S. P. H. Statham, *History of the Castle, Town and Port of Dover* (London, 1899), 417.

²³ Abstracts from Dover Corporation Accounts, Edward IV to William and Mary, B.M. Add. MS. 29,621, fol. 223.

charges on commodity shipping at Dover. It meant that no additional fees would be laid on vessels in the entrepôt commodity traffic during the critical period in late 1638 when the Farmers were reducing their re-export rates still further in order to increase the attractiveness of English shipping *vis-à-vis* new Dutch competition. Even a minimal boom charge at this time might have shaken foreign merchants' faith in the Farmers' announced intentions. Needless to say, a high passage fee would almost certainly have caused significant reductions in entrepôt commodity shipping and the revenue it produced. Thus, the Farmers and the town must have felt themselves fortunate that Manwood was "bought off" so easily.

Another important effect of Manwood's settlement for safeguarding the Farmers' entrepôt policy was that he stopped pressuring the Council for a decision concerning his fees. The withdrawal of this pressure worked greatly to the Farmers' advantage because they could not be certain that the Council would rule in their favour. Manwood himself probably thought that the Board would deny his claim after hearing the Juxon-Cottington report; such an attitude would account for his acceptance of the town's offer. That the Farmers did not subscribe to Manwood's view is shown by their willingness to share with the town the cost of providing his perquisite. Their action suggests that they felt their arguments sent to the Council through Juxon and Cottington might not be sufficient to prevent Manwood's project. The Council had, after all, already agreed to boom charges in principle, and Manwood had the backing of the Lord Warden. It is possible, therefore, that only Manwood's underestimate of his position prevented his success and allowed the Farmers to retain control of the level of charges at Dover.

That the Council could have seriously considered permitting boom fees at Dover during 1638 suggests that its members did not understand the importance of maintaining minimal charges on shipping for the preservation of the commodity entrepôt. One might speculate that such misunderstanding resulted from a lack of mercantilist philosophy at the highest levels of the English government,²⁴ and this may be true. It is equally possible, however, that the Council's failure to grasp the situation resulted from the habitual secrecy with which the Farmers surrounded all their operations in order to avoid criticism of their

²⁴ For the contention that the English government followed no consistent policy of "mercantilism", see B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England 1600-1642* (Cambridge, 1959), 223 ff.; D. C. Coleman, "Editor's Introduction", in *Revisions in Mercantilism*, ed. D. C. Coleman (Debates in Economic History; London, 1969), 1-18.

immense profits from customs collections throughout the kingdom.²⁵ This mantle of secrecy seems to have been extended to the management of the Dover entrepôt. Certainly all contemporary pamphleteers who described the entrepôt displayed no knowledge whatever of its differential charges.²⁶ If this analysis is correct, the exact nature of the commodity rate reductions of 1635–1636 and 1638 may not have been widely known in England to anyone except the Farmers and the factors at Dover. In any case, the behaviour of the Council makes it clear that it was not the central government as a whole but only the Farmers who appreciated the complexity of forces acting on the commodity entrepôt and formulated detailed policies accordingly. A thorough pre-occupation with entrepôt policy would not become a vital conciliar matter until the Commonwealth period when the merchant-dominated Council of State attempted to appropriate the emporium of Amsterdam first by union, then by navigation legislation, and finally by war.²⁷

²⁵ See F. C. Dietz, *English Public Finance 1485–1641*, 2nd. ed. (2 vols.; London, 1964), II, 359; Robert Ashton, "Revenue Farming Under the Early Stuarts", *Economic History Review*, 2nd. ser., VIII (1956), 319, note 2. Cf. Lewes Roberts, *The Treasure of Traffike* (London, 1641), 86; *C.S.P.D. 1644–45*, 214; and Thomas Violet, *The Advancement of Merchandize* (London, 1651), 6.

²⁶ See, e.g., Thomas Violet, *The Advancement of Merchandize* (London, 1651), 3; Benjamin Worsley, *Free Ports, the Nature and Necessitie of them Stated* (London, 1652), 4.

²⁷ See J. E. Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community", *Economic History Review*, 2nd. ser., XVI (1964), 442, note 8; *Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1647–52*, 237.