ENCLOSURE

D What did the government do?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes on how the government:

- protected, regulated and stimulated crafts and industries
- attempted to maintain law and order by dealing with the growing numbers of urban poor.

14D Important social legislation passed during Elizabeth's reign

Date	Act	Details	Significance
1563	Statute of Artificers	Seven-year apprenticeships were made compulsory in all urban crafts. A regulated number of apprentices was permitted per master and journeyman. Maximum wage rates were fixed.	The main objective was to maintain high standards of craftsmanship and to tie industrial activity to the guild system. Trying to create employment and tie a man to one trade also showed the government's preoccupation with the notion that unemployment meant vagrancy, which in turn meant social unrest.
1572	Vagabonds Act	Severe penalties were to be enacted against vagrants. JPs were to keep a register of the poor in their parish and raise a poor rate to provide a shelter for the elderly and the sick.	The government's fear of the vagrant class was clearly illustrated by this Act, which allowed whipping, boring through the ear, and finally the death penalty for a third offence. On the positive side the wording of this, and the 1576 Act for the Relief of the Poor, showed some government awareness that the plight of the poor was not always their own fault. A move had been made toward the government's accepting some responsibility to help people: to find work for the unemployed, or, where this was not possible, to provide poor relief financed by contributions from those in work.
1576	Act for the Relief of the Poor	The able-bodied poor were to be directed by JPs to find work. Those refusing to do so would be sent to a house of correction.	See above.
1598	Act for the Relief of the Poor	Four overseers were to be appointed to supervise the administration of poor relief. They were to secure apprenticeships for children, provide employment or materials for adults and build hospitals for the old and sick. Finance was to be raised through a compulsory poor rate paid by the inhabitants of each parish.	This Act was passed against a background of rising population, war with Spain leading to high taxation and disruption to trade, increasing urban poverty, and a series of disastrous harvests which pushed up the price of corn by 80 per cent. Riots broke out in London, Oxfordshire and Norfolk. It was to remain in force until 1834 and was based on the earlier Acts of the 1570s and on the experiments to cope with poverty carried out by towns such as Norwich. The degree to which the Act worked is difficult to assess. Certainly nothing had been done to investigate or remove the actual causes of poverty: the 1598 Acts against the further conversion of tillage to pasture were a cynical exercise by a landowning class who had little intention of enforcing them, even assuming that enclosures were the main cause of poverty.
1598	Act for the Punishment of Rogues	JPs were to establish houses of correction for rogues and vagabonds. Rogues were to be whipped before being returned to their own parishes.	This Act enabled the authorities to contain poverty and vagrancy and therefore to try to reduce the likelihood of social unrest which threatened political stability.

How significant were changes in agriculture during the period 1553-1603 ?

"Our multitudes do infect our country with poverty. Our land hath not milk sufficient in the breast to nourish all".

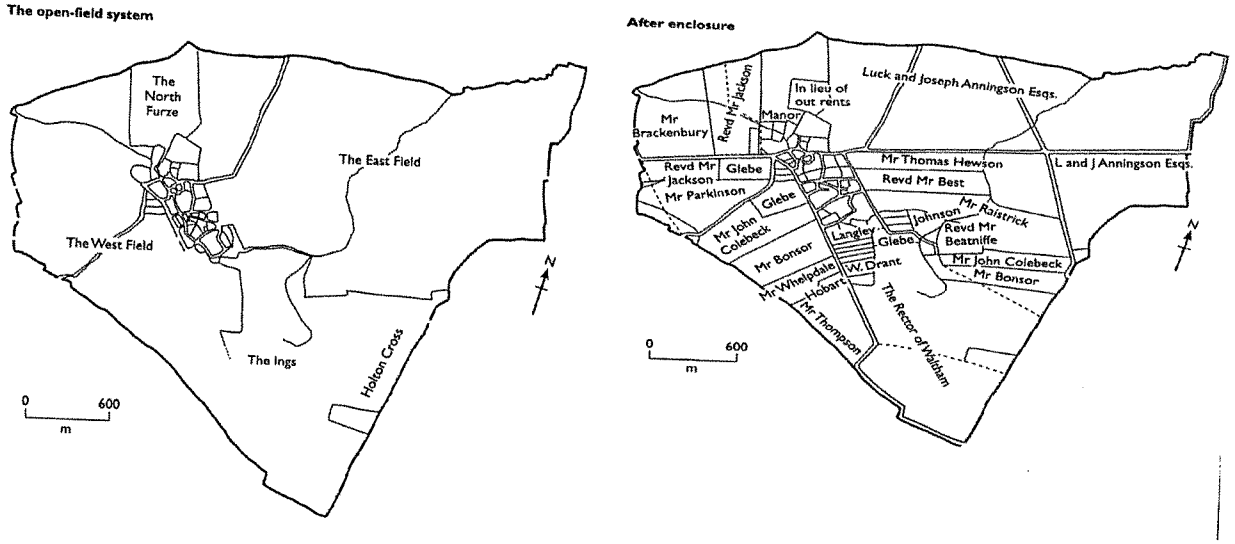
As the quotation above from Elizabeth's contemporary **Robert Gray** suggests, the need to feed the growing population (see figure 6) and the rising food prices that this caused (see figure 7) were the major challenges for agriculture in the period. We need to understand how this "**overwhelmingly agricultural country**" (**D Murphy**) responded. In particular, we must consider the two major agricultural developments – the continued move to enclose fields and the local embrace of new agricultural methods.

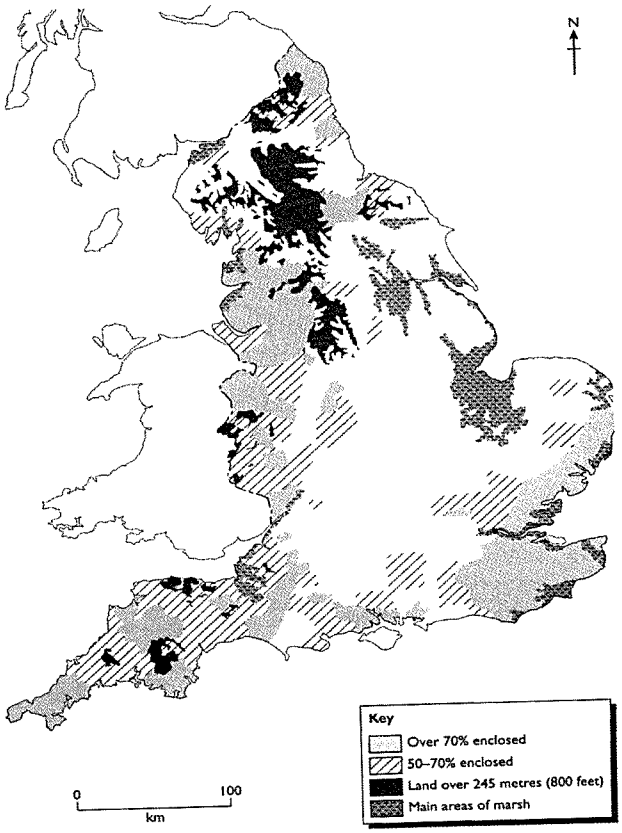
Enclosure

"The poor at enclosing do grutch because of abuses that fall, Lest some men should have but too much and some again nothing at all"

As consideration of figure 16 suggests, enclosure is a general term for the act of hedging, ditching and fencing the medieval open fields, common land and wasteland into consolidated and self contained private farms. This was a controversial process which pre-dated Elizabeth's reign, and continued into and beyond the Stuart age. At the time, as **Thomas Tusser** (above) suggests, it was certainly unpopular with many, and was often blamed for rising grain prices. The actions of the "**grasping men**" (**Clapham**) had led to Kett's Rebellion in 1549, there were local anti-enclosure riots in 1597.

Figure 16. A village before (left) and after (right) enclosure





Why was enclosure so unpopular ?

- The fencing and hedging of common land meant that the very poorest lost their rights to graze their livestock. In times of shortage owning a goat or a cow could be the difference between life and death, and for this reason labourers fought hard to defend their common land rights.
- Another flash point was that tenants (the people who rented their land) had no legal claim to the land that they rented. This meant that they could face summary eviction and the destruction of their way of life by enclosure.
- If enclosure led to a move away from arable (crop) farming to pastoral (sheep) farming then many of the evicted would be left without jobs. This often increased the ranks of the urban poor – much to the concern of both the government and contemporaries.
- Finally enclosure was blamed – wrongly – for rising prices.

Why did landlords want to enclose their fields ?

The simple answer to this was that it usually was very profitable.

- The increased demand for English wool meant that the move to pastoral farming was rarely a risk. Moreover, sheep farming required far fewer labourers and thus had lower overheads.
- In addition, more recently historians have stressed that enclosure was followed by landlords to increase the amount of land under cultivation.

So was enclosure really a problem ?

Figure 17. A map to show the extent of enclosure by 1600

The most common charge against enclosure was that it turned crops into sheep pastures because wool was a more profitable commodity. This led to the landowners profiting at the expense of the tenant farmers and labourers. In other words agricultural labourers were driven from their land by greedy sheep farmers.

Today few historians accept this argument. AGR Smith is typical when he describes this as "**exaggerated and misleading**". As figure 17 shows, there were very real regional differences in the amount of enclosure undertaken. In addition, it is important to note that in Elizabeth's reign "**enclosures were usually carried out to increase the efficiency of arable farming**"... because... "**the increase in population meant that corn was more profitable than wool**" (**B Mervyn**). Thus, the policy that was blamed for rising prices in the food riots of 1595 – 1597, probably helped grain production to keep pace with the rising population.

However, in the as the the case study below show, locally enclosure could be very unpopular.

Case study– 1602 – Robert Cecil and the enclosing of the Royal Park Brigstock

In 1602 the royal deer parks at Brigstock were granted by the Crown to Sir Robert Cecil with permission to enclose them. This effectively removed the rights of the villagers of Brigstock and Stanion within the parks. The pasturing of cattle and gathering of fuel were a crucial part of the village economy and the deer a valuable, if illegal, supplement to the diet. The community strongly resented the loss of these rights and were further incensed when Cecil promptly set about cutting down and selling the timber and underwood from Great Park. He also intended removing all the deer from Great to Little Park and leasing it to Sir Thomas Tresham.

There were protests, some of which escalated into riots. Cecil's officers were attacked, deer were killed and carried home and at one point a 'troop of lewd women of Brigstock' were brought in to pressure the workmen in the parks! By the middle of 1603 the 'bad people of Brigstock' had by a combination of threat and persuasion been appeased, enabling Cecil's enclosure and agricultural improvement to proceed.

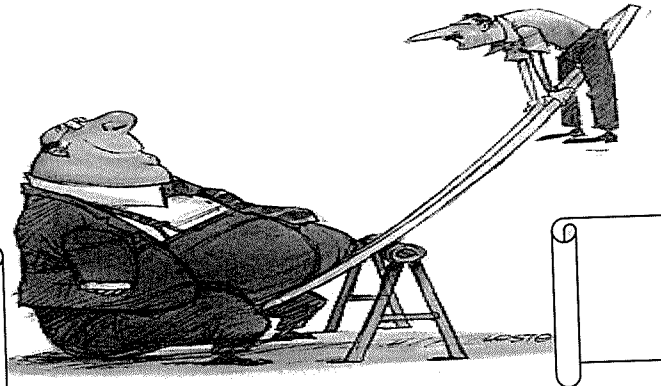
So what should we think about enclosure ?

Today enclosure is not seen as a major economic problem for the Elizabethans. We think that by 1603, only 9% of England's farmland had been enclosed. Moreover, there were no wholesale depopulation of villages in the reign. It was, at worst a local problem which hit the very poorest hardest because access to the common land was disproportionally important to them. Ironically, enclosure probably helped to create larger and more efficient arable farms. In addition, enclosure allowed new crops such as woad (used in dying) coleseed (used as fodder) and even tobacco to be experimented with. Moreover, where land was converted to pasture, it was often unsuitable for crops. The wool produced was usually exported, thus bringing European wealth into the country.

The picture is further muddled because the government was so confused about enclosure. As reference to Figure 12 shows, in 1563 they tried to legislate against it in the Act for Maintaining Tillage. The 1592 – 3 Statute regarding the Export of Corn repealed this law, and then in 1598 – after the food rits - the Statute against the Conversions to Pasture and the Statute Against the Emgrossing of Farms again tried to outlaw enclosure.

An analysis to contrast the advantages and diadvantages of Enclosure

Now label the see saw and explain your choice in the box below (remember the heavier argument is the better argument)



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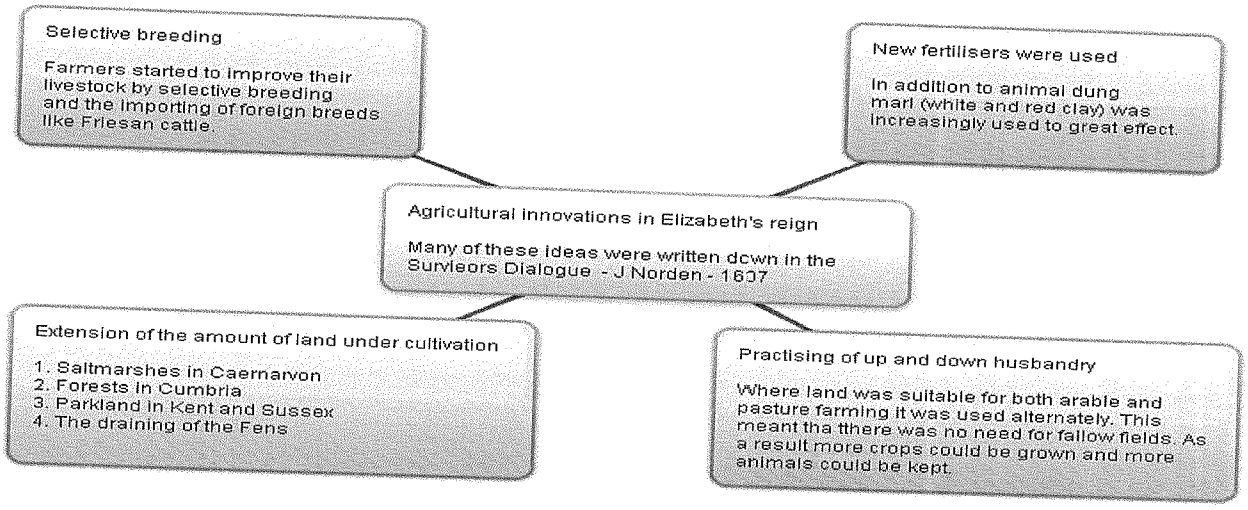
What other changes were there in agriculture in Elizabethan England ?

Perhaps more significant than the emotive topic of enclosure where the other agricultural innovations that were happening across England at this time.

Task

12. Study Figure 18 with care. Rank these four improvements in order of importance (where 1= most important). Then write a paragraph below to explain your decisons.

Figure 18. A spider-diagram to show other agricultural innovations in Elizabeth's reign.



In addition, as London grew, the countryside of the Home Counties increasingly saw the development of specialised maket gardens to keep the capital supplied with fresh fruit and vegetables. As **William Lambarde** described in his 1576 text **A perambulation of Kent**, there were "**orchards of apples and gardens of cherries**".

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How far reaching were these changes ?

For **Eric Kerridge** these changes were substantial and of great importance. He went so far as to argue that "**the agricultural revolution took place in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries**" (from his 1968 work **The Agricultural Revolution**).

Today few would share this view, with **G.E.Mingay** and **J Thirsk** suggesting that he goes too far. **Mingay** arges that the rise of modern farming "**can be seen as stretching back to the Sixteenth Century**" but the important changes "**gather pace later**". **Thirsk** sees the developments of the Elizabeth countryside as part of a broader Tudor "**continuum**" (i.e. it was not revolutionary). **A.G.R Smith** finds a comprise between these views by arguing that "**we do not need to accept the concept of an agricultural revolution in early modern England to agree that during the sixteenth century English agriculture responded in notable ways to the challenges imposed by a rising population**".

A What was England's trade like?

FOCUS ROUTE

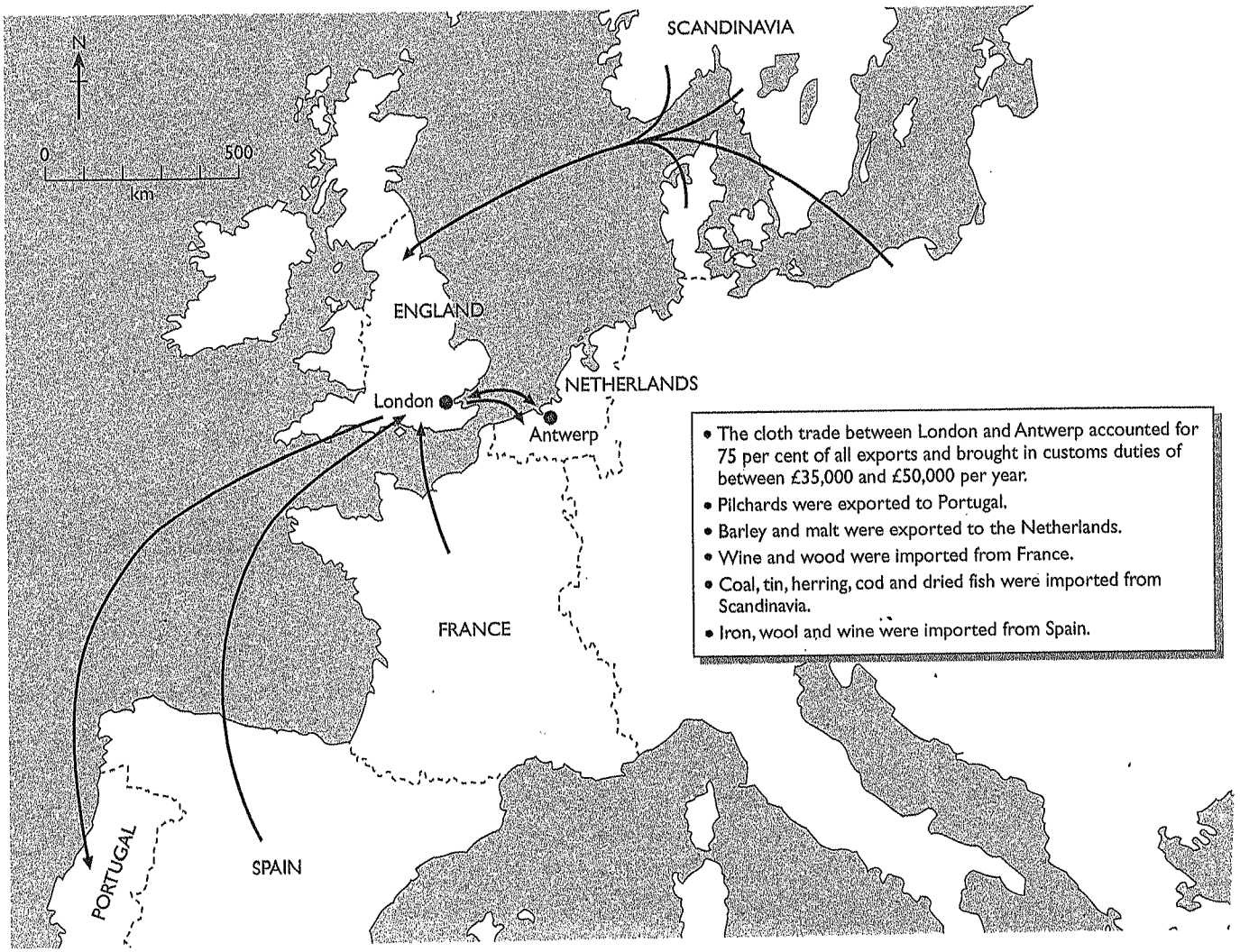
a) Describe how trade between England and Northern Europe developed in the years between 1559 and 1600.
b) How successful was Elizabeth in building up overseas trade during her reign?

In 1558 trade was dominated by the London–Antwerp cloth trade. The dangers of relying on a single market had already been demonstrated in the 1550s when, following the debasement of the coinage, trade with Antwerp slumped. As early as 1564, following the establishment of the trade embargo, Cecil argued for a reduction in the number of luxury imports and the diversification of the cloth market. Some attempts were made to encourage the establishment of new industries in England, such as glass making, by attracting foreign craftsmen. As clashes with Spain intensified, however, the search for new foreign trading partners accelerated.

The crown's motives were to maintain, and possibly increase, its customs revenues and support its merchant class politically and financially. New trading companies would also receive backing from Elizabeth as a private financier and she would expect to make profitable returns on her investment. The impetus for changes in trade throughout the reign therefore came from the crown and the Privy Council.

There is evidence that the government was successful in its search for new markets, especially if the number of voyages and new trading companies alone are considered. However, historians remain divided on the economic significance of these new markets.

SOURCE 24.1 England's main imports and exports before 1558



SOURCE 24.3 D. M. Palliser, The Age of Elizabeth, 1983, p. 339

Historians used to depict the state of Elizabethan trade as buoyant and expansive, but since the 1940s the dominant view has been more sombre, stressing that the search for new markets was a desperate reaction to the stagnation of the traditional cloth trade with Germany and the Netherlands, and that the new markets accounted for only a modest share of total exports and imports.

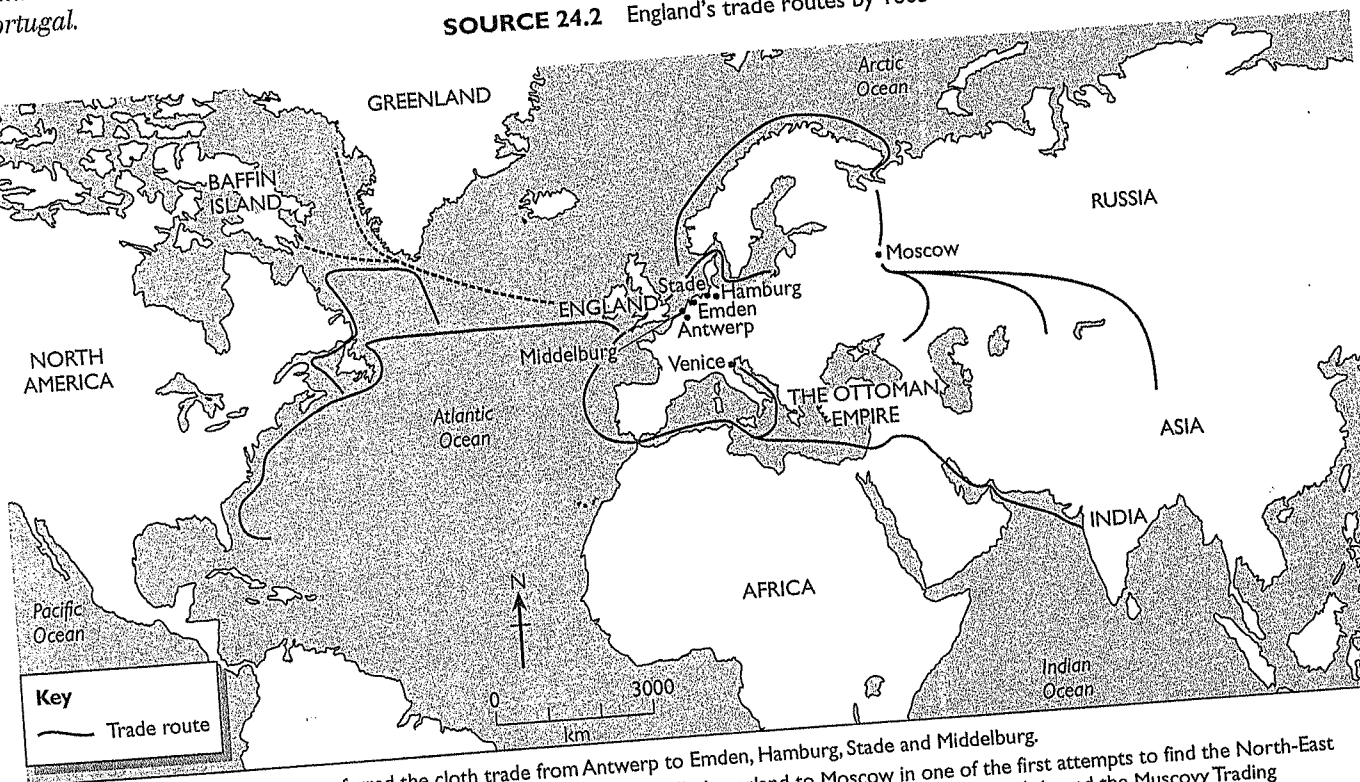
SOURCE 24.4 Spanish ambassador to England, 1586

The whole country is without trade, and knows not how to recover it; the shipping and commerce here having mainly depended upon the communication with Spain and Portugal.

Expansion into new markets was a long-term enterprise. Many of the new trading companies would eventually thrive, while England's declining commitment to European-based trade would allow ports such as Hull, Exeter, Bristol, Newcastle and Southampton to regain some of the initiative that had been lost to London. These results, however, lay in the future. Elizabeth, like her privateers, saw the need for quick profits. Consequently she did nothing to prevent men like Drake from attacking Spain's monopoly in the New World. Although Drake vanished from the scene between 1573 and 1575, when Elizabeth was trying to restore relations with Spain, his circumnavigation of the globe in 1577 not only had royal backing but he sailed with instructions from Elizabeth, kept secret even from Cecil, to attack the Spanish empire.

Such actions – including allowing volunteers to join the Dutch rebels, financing John Casimir's mercenary force, and controlling the French army in the Netherlands via her courtship with Alençon – show Elizabeth's growing awareness that war with Spain was inevitable. Her reluctance to commit her forces until the last possible moment is understandable when England's military resources are compared with those of Spain.

SOURCE 24.2 England's trade routes by 1603



- The Merchant Adventurers transferred the cloth trade from Antwerp to Emden, Hamburg, Stade and Middelburg.
- In 1553 Willoughby and Chancellor crossed the Arctic Ocean and travelled overland to Moscow in one of the first attempts to find the North-East Passage to Asia. From 1558, overland trading expeditions under Anthony Jenkinson travelled through Russia to Asia, and the Muscovy Trading Company – heavily backed by the court – exported cloth, lead, tin, food and pewter, and imported cabies, cordage, tallow, wax and furs. This trade was worth an estimated £25,000 per year.
- The Eastland Company was established in 1579 to import goods, mostly naval supplies, from the Baltic. Cloth made up 75 per cent of England's exports to the Baltic.
- From 1573 onwards, taking advantage of a dispute between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, English ships began importing luxuries such as silk, spices and oils from the Mediterranean. In 1592, the companies trading with Venice and the Ottoman Empire amalgamated to form the Levant Company, which mainly traded English cloth for raw silk, but also exported some lead and tin and imported carpets.
- The growing domestic demand for luxury goods such as sugar and spices, which generated high profits, drove men to find the North-West Passage to Asia. In 1574, Martin Frobisher reached Baffin Island and believed he had found such a passage and in 1587 John Davis explored the west coast of Greenland. These voyages produced no commercial gains, but they did provide a wealth of geographical information about the coastline of North America.
- In 1583, John Newberry and Ralph Fitch journeyed overland to India and established the East India Company. Despite the establishment of these new trade routes, 74 per cent of all imports still came from the Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire and Spain. English maritime enterprise was more concerned with illegal trade in the New World than with legal trade in the east.

22 Economic development in Elizabethan England

EXTRACT 1

The land which had neglected oceanic exploration, while the Spanish and Portuguese had carved up the globe between them, had begun its world-wide expansion. Henry VII had patronised John and Sebastian Cabot in their explorations of the North American coast; Henry VIII had shown no interest, and Sebastian Cabot had gone to Spain instead; but in 1548 Sebastian accepted an invitation from some royal councillors to return to England. He was involved in the first expeditions to Morocco in 1551 and to Muscovy in 1553: thereafter, there was no stopping. American colonisation was first openly discussed in England in the 1550s, and attempts at settlement began in 1585. The East India Company was founded in 1600, and in the same year William Adams reached Japan. In short, England was already developing some of the advantages that were to lead to commercial supremacy.

Adapted from David M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the Later Tudors, 1537–1603*, 1983

ACTIVITY

Evaluating historical extracts

What view does David Palliser advance in this extract? Summarise his main argument in one sentence. As you read through this chapter note the evidence which might help to support or refute the argument contained in this paragraph.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the continuing importance of trade to the English economy
- exploration and colonisation
- prosperity and depression in Elizabethan England.

KEY QUESTION

As you read this chapter, consider the following Key Question:
How far did English society and economy change and with what effects?

Trade

The pattern of trade

The absence of reliable statistical evidence makes it difficult to be absolutely certain about the value to the economy of trading activities during the reign of Elizabeth. However, four points can be made with relative certainty:

1. The value of internal trade considerably exceeded that of foreign trade. The biggest single development in internal trade was the growth in the shipping of coal from the Tyne to the Thames to meet the growing demands of the London market, though some coal was exported across the North Sea, including a rapidly developing trade with France.
2. A wider range of foreign luxury goods came to be imported during Elizabeth's reign. This suggests that such goods were becoming affordable for a wider range of the population.
3. The cloth trade with the Netherlands, while remaining important, declined relatively as part of the economy. The Antwerp cloth market had declined from the early 1550s. In any case Sir William Cecil was anxious for political reasons to end the dependence on a single market. An alternative trade was developed, based on the north German port of Emden, but the major move was to Amsterdam, whose commercial growth came at the expense of Antwerp which remained under Spanish control.
4. Though attempts to establish new overseas markets did take place, for example in Russia, these remained economically marginal.

Attempts to expand trade

The main centre of African trade was Guinea, and it was Guinea that became used as the starting point for John Hawkins's move into the Americas. In the process, he invented the English slave trade. He made three expeditions

CROSS-REFERENCE

To look back on trade and exploration in the reign of Henry VIII, reread Chapter 11.

A CLOSER LOOK

The inventory of a shopkeeper from remote Kirkby Lonsdale in Westmorland included Spanish silk, French garters and Turkish purses.

ACTIVITY

Use a map to plot the trade routes discussed in the following section.

CROSS-REFERENCE

Sir John Hawkins is profiled in Chapter 20, page 198.

Fig. 1 *John Hawkins*

A CLOSER LOOK

There were several attempts to widen English trade, which began in Mary I's reign but continued under Elizabeth. For example, Mary had encouraged the foundation of the Muscovy Company in 1555, which had sponsored a trading expedition to Russia under the leadership of Richard Chancellor.

joint-stock companies: businesses which are owned by their shareholders, who profit in proportion to the relative size of their shareholding

Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) was an ambitious though unpopular and ineffective courtier. His attempt to establish a colony on the North American mainland failed, as did his attempts to find treasure in South America. He was reputed to have introduced both the potato and tobacco to Europe. He completely lost favour under James and was imprisoned and executed.

from 1562, acquiring slaves in Africa that he then transported and sold in South America. His first two expeditions proved to be financially successful, although he succeeded in irritating the Spanish authorities. By the time of the second expedition in 1564, Hawkins had secured investment from prominent courtiers including the Earl of Leicester, as well as support from the queen who supplied ships – for a price. The third expedition also attracted royal support but went disastrously wrong when Hawkins's fleet was blockaded in the Mexican port of San Juan de Ulúa, although some of the gold did get back to England. Hawkins's activities antagonised further the already strained relations between England and Spain. The fact that the queen was prepared to become involved suggests that she was willing, in return for profit, to run the risk of antagonising Philip II.

The main changes in English trading patterns in the 1580s were twofold. First, the main markets for English wool moved from the southern to the northern Netherlands and there was an increase in trade with the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. England, however, remained, according to David Palliser, relatively backward in its exploitation of trading opportunities in Elizabeth's reign.

A number of trading companies were set up, with varying degrees of success, to widen England's trading interests.

- The Muscovy Company had been incorporated in 1555 to trade with Russia and northern Europe, though it failed in the long term to compete effectively with the Dutch.
- The Eastland Company was set up in 1579 to trade in the Baltic but had a similarly limited effect.
- The Levant Company, founded in 1581 as the Turkish Company, enjoyed success in its attempts to develop trade with the Ottoman Empire.
- The East India Company was set up in 1600 to trade with Asia, but it had less investment compared with the Dutch East India Company, and therefore found it very difficult to compete in the short term.

By the end of Elizabeth's reign these were still relatively modest organisations. However, there was a significant change in that, the Eastland Company apart, they were all **joint-stock companies** owned by their shareholders in a model of organisation which would prove essential to future capitalist development.

Exploration and colonisation

What was of little importance at the time, but assumed greater significance in the light of subsequent developments, was the extension of trade to the mainland of North America and the attempt to form a colony in Virginia. The suggestion that England should start colonising North America originated with the entrepreneur and explorer Humphrey Gilbert. The process was encouraged by Richard Hakluyt in *A Discourse of Western Planting*, published in 1584. Hakluyt, a clergyman and geographer, was closely linked to Gilbert's half-brother, **Walter Raleigh**, and, through Raleigh, presented the *Discourse* to the queen.

Raleigh gained the support of a number of prominent investors, including **Sir Francis Walsingham**, and in 1585 he received from the queen a patent to colonise what would become known as Virginia. Two expeditions eventually made land on Roanoke Island in what was to become North Carolina. Unfortunately for Raleigh's investors, and even more unfortunately for those settlers who died in the attempt, the attempts at colonisation proved to be disastrous, from a combination of poor organisation, ill luck and reluctance by the queen to give the matter priority when she was faced by war with Spain. Permanent English colonisation of Virginia had to wait until the reign of James I.

CHANGE AND CONSEQUENCE

30 How did the pattern of English trade change during the century?

This chapter is mainly about overseas trade, which historians have tended to concentrate on, rather than internal trade between different parts of the country. Trade with foreign countries is much better documented, through port books, and accounts kept by customs officials. However, it has been estimated that the internal market may have been at least ten times as large. Much was carried by water, either by navigable rivers or along the coast. For instance, Newcastle exported thousands of tons of coal annually to London and other east-coast ports. There was also considerable transport of goods by road, although this was far more expensive. The costs of land-carriage ranged from 4d [1.5p] to 12d [5p] per ton-mile, as compared with 1d or less by water. Therefore cities such as York, Gloucester, Exeter and Norwich utilised their rivers to carry much of their trade in small ships to the coastal ports.

Roads cannot have been all that bad, as the accounts of merchants and shopkeepers indicate that they traded widely throughout the country. For example, those of William Wray, a mercer from the small North Yorkshire town of Ripon, show that in the 1580s he regularly bought goods wholesale from York, Beverley, Coventry and Norwich. Packhorses were the main method of road transport early in the century, but the first horse-drawn passenger coach appeared in 1555, and the first long, four-wheeled goods wagon shortly afterwards. Undoubtedly, too, internal trade increased, as agriculture became more specialised and commercial during the second half of the century.

The cloth trade

Throughout the Tudor period England's exports were dominated by one commodity – woollen cloth. In earlier centuries the main export had been raw wool, which was sold through Calais by the 'merchants of the Staple', but the wool trade was in decline, partly due to over-taxation. In 1485 the English customs duty on wool amounted to nearly one-third of its value, whereas that on cloth was about 3 per cent. The loss of Calais in 1558 was a further blow to the wool trade.

Woollen cloth was exported in rolls of 24 yards (22 metres) or more in length, known as 'cloths'. It was mostly undyed, because English cloth-finishing and dyeing was not as technically advanced as on the Continent. The cloths came from many parts of the kingdom, but the best known were the heavy west-country broadcloths, from Gloucester, Somerset and Wiltshire, and the lighter kerseys from Berkshire, as well as from the West Riding and from Devon. By the end of Henry VII's reign 82,000 cloths were being shipped abroad annually, a figure which rose to a record 133,000 in 1550.

The cloth trade was entirely in the hands of the **Merchant Adventurers**. It was also increasingly focused on London. By the close of Henry VIII's reign about 88 per cent of cloth exports were shipped from London – although some of these might have originated from the 'outports', as other English ports were called. The 'mart' or 'staple' for the cloth was Antwerp (see Figure 30.1), which by this date had become the commercial and financial capital of western Europe, and was easily reachable from London. Antwerp was a truly international city, in which there were permanent colonies of foreign merchants. It was also a banking centre, so that an English merchant could not only find there an Italian, German or Spanish buyer for his cloth, but might also obtain credit, or change his money into a foreign currency.

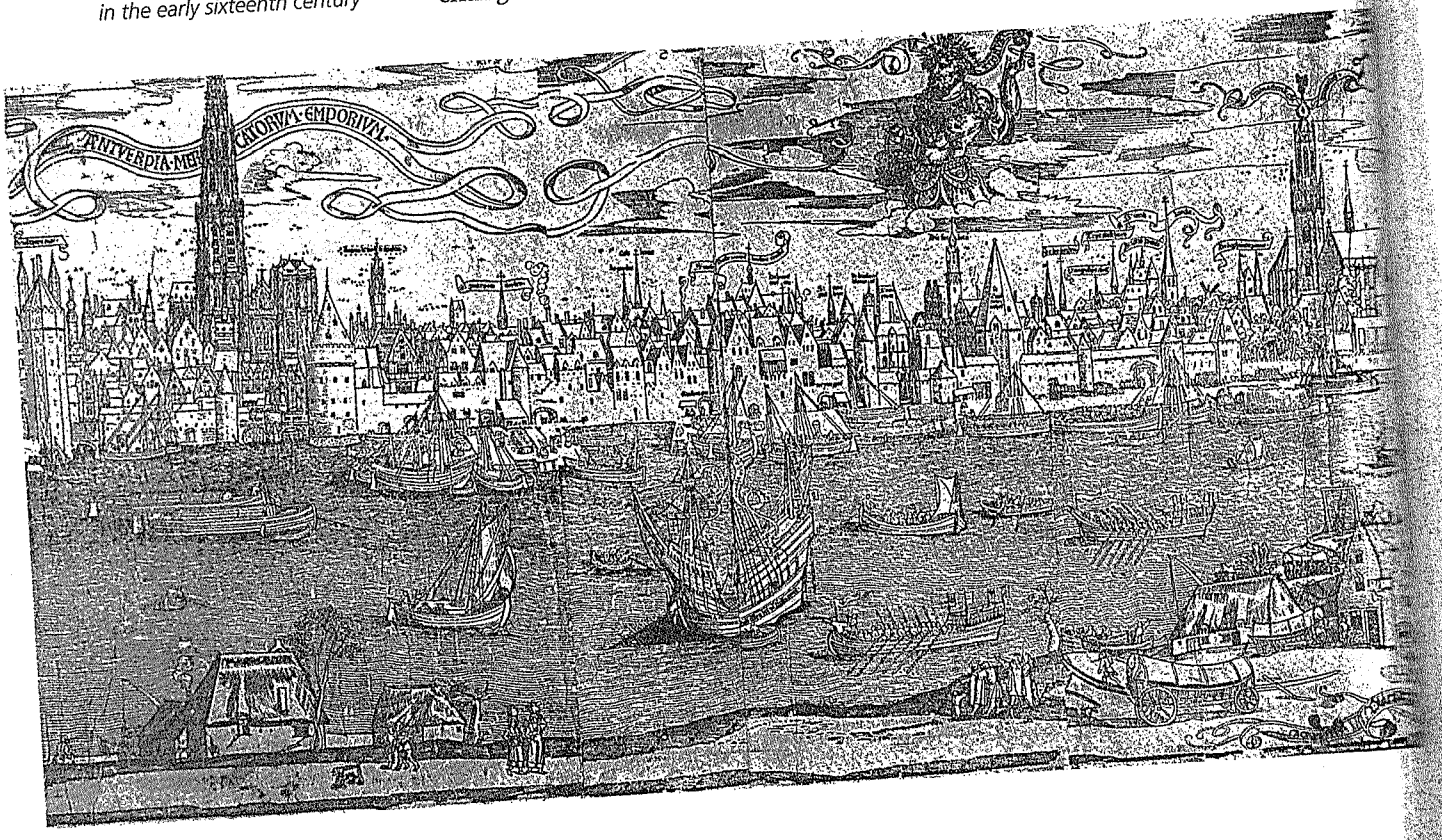


Figure 30.1 The port of Antwerp in the early sixteenth century

KEY TERM:

Merchant Adventurers

The **Merchant Adventurers** were a regulated company, meaning that they were a group of merchants trading individually but under an agreed set of regulations. They shipped their cloths jointly in periodic fleets, and displayed them together at Antwerp on specified days. But each merchant kept his own balance sheet; if he went bankrupt he could not expect help from the company.

The Adventurers were far from living up to their name. They pursued a safety-first policy of easy profits in an established market, and they did not – at least until after the decline of Antwerp – try to find new markets. Their business methods were conservative; one of their main objectives was to stop 'interlopers' challenging their monopoly. This highly concentrated trade was therefore very vulnerable to any crisis which might hit the single market.

The Antwerp trade was all the more important for England's economy because other export markets had declined for various reasons. For instance, Henry VIII's breach with Rome had led to some victimisation of English merchants in Seville, and consequently Anglo-Spanish trade had suffered. Again, by the early sixteenth century English ships in the Mediterranean were coming under increasing attack from Turkish galleys, or from their allies, the Moslem pirates who operated from bases along the coast of North Africa. Thirdly, England's important Baltic trade, which involved commodities such as timber, tar and hemp – all vital for shipbuilding – had been for some time under the control of the powerful Hanseatic League of North German cities.

All this meant that by the middle of the sixteenth century there was a quite unhealthy reliance on the narrowly-based cloth trade through Antwerp, to finance the variety of goods which England needed to import from abroad. The welfare of this trade was, too, an important factor behind Tudor foreign policy, which, from Henry VII's reign until well into Elizabeth's, tended always to try to maintain friendship with the Habsburgs, who controlled the Netherlands, rather than with other powers such as France or the German Protestant princes.

Decline

Cloth continued to be England's main export throughout the century, but the Antwerp trade suffered a series of setbacks which resulted in some diversification of trade, and particularly in a search for new markets during the second half of the century.

1 Successive debasements of the English coinage, especially after 1543, led to an artificial boom in cloth exports, with the result that the market for English broadcloths became saturated, and the Adventurers could no longer sell the cloths piling up in their Antwerp warehouses.

2 This was compounded by the government's clumsy attempt to deflate the currency in the summer of 1551, which damaged the credit of English merchants and led to an increase in the price of English cloth. Nevertheless, the consequences were not catastrophic. Cloth exports fell back for a time, but by the end of the 1550s they had recovered, and remained at a steady level of about 100,000 cloths a year for the rest of Elizabeth's reign.

3 It was the declining status of Antwerp that permanently altered the pattern of English trade. This was due to various events:

- The bankruptcies of both the French and Spanish crowns in 1557, after a long period of war, dealt a blow to the international banking system.
- Religious persecution, followed by the outbreak of the Dutch revolt against Philip II in 1566, shook the city's prosperity.
- In 1576 there occurred the 'Spanish Fury', when unpaid and mutinous Spanish troops sacked Antwerp.
- In 1585 Dutch rebels finished off the remains of the city's trade by blocking the mouth of the Scheldt, Antwerp's outlet to the sea.

4 Long before this final blow, English merchants had been looking for an alternative to Antwerp as a mart for their cloth. They tried Middleburg at the mouth of the Scheldt, and various German ports, including Hamburg and Stade. These had the advantage that they were outside Philip II's jurisdiction, because in 1568 Philip had tried to bring pressure on the English government through a trade embargo (see chapter 22).

New trade routes

Due to these developments certain English merchants, encouraged by the government, and in particular by the far-sighted William Cecil, started looking for new markets for their cloth. Some of these were to involve long and dangerous journeys into unknown areas of the globe.

1 In the Mediterranean a new trade with the independent Moslem kingdom of Morocco developed from the early 1550s, based on the exchange of cloth for sugar. In 1585 a regulated company, the Barbary Company, was set up under the leadership of the Earl of Leicester. However, in spite of the growing demand in England for sugar, Leicester's company failed to make a profit, and trade with Morocco remained fairly small scale.

2 Trade with the Guinea coast also developed in the 1550s. The first black slaves were brought to England in 1555, but the slave trade only took off when John Hawkins started a series of slaving voyages to Spanish America, selling slaves from Guinea to the Spanish settlers. This lucrative enterprise ended sharply when Hawkins' fleet was attacked at St John of Ulua in 1568 (see chapter 22).

3 After about 1570 English merchants also resumed contact with the eastern Mediterranean, as the Turkish sultan was interested in English lead and tin for armaments, as well as grain and fish. The Turkey

Company, incorporated in 1581, prospered, and a permanent English agent was installed at Constantinople. In England, exotic luxuries from Turkey were much in demand: the Countess of Shrewsbury had 32 Turkish carpets at Hardwick Hall by 1601.

4 Because the Hanseatic League had been weakened by war with Russia, it became possible to reduce its special privileges in England, and English merchants were able to penetrate the Baltic and bring back naval stores such as timber and tar. In 1579 the Eastland Company was set up to coordinate their efforts.

5 The Russia, or Muscovy, Company of 1555 came about as a by-product of attempts to find a 'north-east passage' round Asia to Cathay (China). The voyage of Willoughby and Chancellor (1553) failed to find the passage, but Chancellor entered the White Sea and made an overland journey to the court of Ivan the Terrible in Moscow, where he was granted the right to trade throughout Russia. However, this trade was never very substantial; also, efforts to trade with Persia via the Volga and the Caspian Sea were unsuccessful.

6 The most ambitious venture of all was the creation of the East India Company in 1600, in order to rival the Dutch by trading with India and the Far East. Four ships under James Lancaster, who had already made an earlier voyage to India, set out in 1601 to sail to Java via the Cape of Good Hope and India. This enterprise, again, was fairly small scale, but it did make a profit for those who had invested in it.

The new markets compensated to some extent for the decline of Antwerp, but probably English foreign trade did not expand overall. Also, English cloth continued overwhelmingly to be the main export. There was, however, some change in the types of cloth sold. Heavy broadcloths continued to dominate the market, but lighter cloths, more suitable for the Mediterranean and the East, were being produced on an increasing scale. These 'new draperies' came mainly from East Anglia, where many immigrants from France and the Netherlands had settled, fleeing religious persecution at home, and bringing their skills with them.

One must not think in terms of a 'commercial revolution' at this period; the real importance of the new trade routes, as of the new **joint-stock companies**, lay in the future. Nevertheless, the pride in the achievements of his contemporaries of Richard Hakluyt, the Elizabethan scholar who did so much to record and popularise the new exploration and trading ventures, is justified:

KEY TERM:

Joint-stock companies

The Muscovy Company and the East India Company were institutions of a new kind, in which merchants no longer traded as separate individuals, but instead invested in a joint project. Their capital was used to provide both the ships and the goods for the expedition. One advantage of this arrangement was that anyone could contribute who possessed the necessary funds. This meant that the circle of commercial investment was widened. Peers, courtiers, and even Elizabeth herself, invested in these voyages, and shared in the profits. Another advantage was that the risk was equally distributed, and because contributions were limited it was unlikely that failure would lead to individual bankruptcies.

1. What reasons can you give to explain why inflation occurred in Elizabeth I's England?
2. What policies did Elizabeth I's government take to control inflation?
3. How successful was Elizabeth I's government in dealing with inflation during her reign?

What actions did Elizabeth's government take to deal with inflation?

In December 1560 the government ordered that all debased money be returned. This was replaced by new coins containing more silver, thus returning the quality of coinage to the position it held before the debasement of 1542–44. The recoinage was completed by October 1561. This policy had the effect of limiting the money supply and re-establishing public confidence in the coinage. Fortunately for Elizabeth I her stocks of silver were increased by the acquisition of the Genoese loan in 1568 (see Chapter 11).

The government also attempted to limit demand through controlling wages. The Statute of Artificers of 1563 set wage limits for skilled workers. Unfortunately, the reappearance of inflation in the 1590s meant that the standard of living of these workers fell as the cost of living rose.

12.4 How did Elizabethans deal with the issues of poverty and vagrancy?

In an article in *The Reign of Elizabeth I* entitled 'Poverty and Social Regulation in Elizabethan England' Paul Slack stated: 'After the Anglican Church, the English poor law was the most long-lasting of Elizabethan achievements.'

During Elizabeth I's reign a long list of Acts were passed to deal with poverty and vagrancy. In 1563, 1572, 1576, 1597 and 1601 Parliament introduced laws which lasted, with minor alteration, until 1834. The twin issues of poverty and vagrancy did not only interest central government. Many towns dealt with these issues through local laws. Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge were three East Anglian towns which introduced laws dealing with the poor. Policy at national and local level had to deal with two problems. Firstly, how should the government punish and deter vagrants and beggars? Secondly, what should they do to help 'the deserving poor' such as orphans, the elderly or the infirm?

1. What message is this woodcut trying to convey about beggars in Elizabethan England?
2. Use the information in this section. How did Elizabethan government attempt to deal with the types of beggar shown in the woodcut?

A contemporary woodcut illustration of beggars. The title reads (from left to right): 'Beggers Bush', 'A Maundering [travelling] Begger' and 'A gallant Begger'. The two people under the 'begger's bush' are physically handicapped.

What were the causes of poverty in Elizabethan England?

In a study on poverty and vagrancy in Tudor England (published in 1994), the historian John Pound notes various reasons to explain poverty. He states that the rise in population (43% between 1550 and 1600) helped put pressure on limited food resources. This was most important during the 1590s. In addition, harvest failure created famine or near-famine (dearth) conditions. The worst decade for these problems was the 1590s. However, there were poor harvests earlier in the reign, such as 1556 and 1586. As a result, dearth conditions existed across England in 1555–57, 1586–87 and 1596–97.

Another cause of poverty was the outbreak of illness, including plague. The reign began with the effects of the influenza epidemic, which had affected the end of Mary's reign. There was also a smallpox epidemic in 1562 which almost took the life of the Queen. Throughout the reign there were severe outbreaks of plague in towns. The plague outbreak in London in 1563 accounted for the deaths of over 20% of the city's population. There was also epidemics in 1583–86 and 1590–93.

The enclosure and engrossing of land (see pages 111–19) in the past has been blamed for creating poverty in the countryside. However, by the start of Elizabeth I's reign the enclosure of common land had passed its peak. It was only during the crisis of the 1590s that the issue of **husbandry and tillage** was again regarded as a major economic problem. In 1598 Parliament passed the Act on Husbandry and Tillage which attempted to retain tillage, and with it employment, in the countryside.

Husbandry and tillage: Husbandry refers to pastoral farming, tillage refers to arable farming.

The problem of inflation also caused poverty through the rise in the cost of living. During Elizabeth I's reign the Statute of Artificers had placed an upper limit on the wages of skilled workers. At the same time, the standard of living of most town workers fell as a result of rising prices. Unemployment in towns was also made worse by the embargoes on wool exports to the Netherlands in 1563–64, 1568–73 and in the 1580s.

Finally, the end of warfare placed large numbers of soldiers and sailors in a position of poverty. For instance, after the cancellation of an attack on Portugal in 1589, large numbers of discharged soldiers and seaman roamed the southern counties of Kent and Sussex.

Who were the poor?

According to the historian A. L. Beier about half the population of Tudor England were unable to support themselves. These included those members of society who were incapable of work, such as the very young or very old. Also included were the infirm, such as the blind or physically disabled. It also included widows – a social group who found it very difficult to find work. During periods of harvest failure and depressions in the cloth trade, the numbers would be increased with the inclusion of families who merely fell 'on hard times'. These groups comprised 'the deserving poor'.

Poverty was at its greatest in towns. In a census in Norwich, made in 1570, the poor comprised approximately 25% of the population (500 men, 850 women and 1,000 children). Added to this list were the 'undeserving poor' who were seen as a threat to social order. They included rogues and villains who made a living from crime. There were also beggars. Former soldiers and sailors were often reduced to begging or a

life of crime. This group was feared, in particular, because they were usually armed. Finally, this group would also include migrants who would leave their own area to look for work. Cities such as London and Norwich had large numbers of migrant workers.

Under the terms of the 1576 Poor Law Act a third category of poor was created: the deserving, able-bodied unemployed. These were given the opportunity to work in return for some **poor relief**.

Poor relief: Giving assistance to the poor. This could be money, housing or work.

What actions were taken to deal with poverty and vagrancy?

The actions by the national government in Elizabethan England to deal with these issues stand as a major example of government intervention to maintain social control and order.

A major theme of government policy was to deter and punish the undeserving poor. The 1563 Act continued the policy begun earlier in the Tudor period of whipping able-bodied beggars. This was followed, in 1572, by an Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the Poor. This was the harshest law of Elizabeth I's reign. It was passed following the Rebellion of the Northern Earls (1569–70). The government feared more outbreaks of disorder. This Act declared that all vagabonds above the age of 14 were to be whipped and burned through the right ear unless some honest person took them into **domestic service**. The Act also allowed for imprisonment for a second offence for vagabondage and the possibility of execution for persistent offenders. Any children of a convicted beggar were to be placed in domestic service. Ear-boring and execution were not removed until 1593.

Domestic service: Work in a household which usually involved cooking, cleaning etc.

A vagrant being whipped through the streets of a town. In the distance (left) is the gallows – a reminder of what might happen to the vagrant.

1. Use the information in this section. Which Acts of Parliament encouraged the treatment of vagrants shown right?

2. Study the two illustrations on vagrancy and beggars (here and on page 299). Why do you think these two woodcuts were produced in Elizabethan England? You might consider the audience for each illustration.

A more enlightened approach was put forward in the 1576 Act for the setting of the poor on work, and for avoiding idleness. For the first time towns were required to give the unemployed some work. This would involve setting up stocks of wool and other commodities for the poor to work on. If any member of the poor would not work then they were to be placed in a local prison. The prison would be financed from a local tax, the rates.

However, during the economic crisis of the 1590s Parliament was forced into passing harsher laws against the 'undeserving poor'. In 1597 the Act for the Punishment of Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars was

passed. The Act demanded that all counties and cities should have local prisons to house these groups. In addition, anyone caught offending for the first time was to be whipped and then sent back to the parish of their birth. Those individuals who continued to re-offend were to be sent to the galleys, or could be executed.

Galleys: A type of warship with sails and oars. Large numbers of oarsmen were required. Once sent to the galleys, offenders were rarely freed.

In addition to deterring the undeserving poor, the Elizabethan government extended the power of the central government on matters relating to helping the poor. The 1563 Act declared that anyone who refused to pay for the aid of the poor could face imprisonment. It also introduced fines from £2 to £20 for officials who failed to organise help for the poor. The 1572 Act established, for the first time, a national poor law rate (tax). This Act was a turning point in helping the poor. For the first time towns were given the responsibility for providing work for the able-bodied unemployed.

Finally, the 1597 Act for the Relief of the Poor laid the foundations for the poor law for the next 250 years. It declared that each parish should appoint an 'overseer of the poor'. This official had the task of finding work for the young unemployed. He also had to hand out help to the 'deserving poor'. The Act also gave overseers the right to take away goods and property from anyone who refused to pay taxes to aid the poor.

Apart from Acts of Parliament the central government took other actions to aid the poor. The Privy Council made efforts to increase the food supply during periods of food shortage. In 1576 it ordered the government of the City of London to buy corn. It also intervened to prevent the export of corn during the 1590s.

Town governments also played a major part in providing assistance for the poor. The historian D. M. Palliser notes that, by 1569, the East Anglian town of Ipswich had established a compulsory poor tax, a school for the young poor, a local house of correction and a hospital for the poor. England's second city at the time, Norwich, followed with a detailed town plan to deal with poverty and vagrancy in the 1570s. In London five hospitals were established, including the Bethlehem hospital for the insane, the Bridewell for vagrants and Christ's for orphans.

An important source of aid for the poor came from private charity. The most important groups to provide aid were merchants and tradesmen. Aid was usually made in a bequest in a will.

How successful were government actions?

The fact that the 1597 and 1601 Poor Law Acts remained in force for over 250 years is a measure of their success. By the time of Elizabeth I's death central government had accepted the responsibility of providing a minimum level of subsistence for the poor. In addition, one of the main aims of the Poor Law was to prevent major disturbances and outbreak of disorder by the poor. Even though Elizabeth's reign saw periods of great food shortages, there were no major disturbances. As historian Penry Williams states in *The Tudor Regime*: 'Even the combination of war and harvest failure in the 1590s produced no serious eruption by the dispossessed.'

However, John Pound takes a more moderate view on the effect of government action in *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England*. He believes that contemporaries exaggerated the problem. He notes that 'both poverty and vagrancy were fairly well contained, and to say that either created a dangerous national situation would be to strain the evidence'.

1. *What caused poverty and vagrancy in Elizabethan England?*
2. *What actions were taken to help the deserving poor and deter vagrancy?*
3. *How successful were government policies in dealing with poverty and vagrancy?*

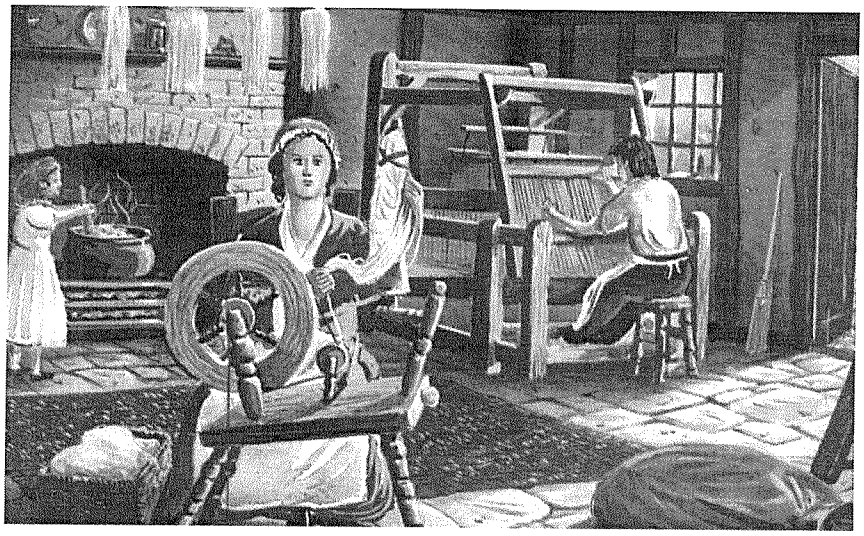
INDUSTRY

How significant were changes in industry during the period 1553-1603 ?

In the mid-Twentieth Century, **J.U.Nef** argued that Elizabethan England saw "**a first industrial revolution**". He suggested that the development of coal and capitalism led to a change in the structure and organisation of industry as English manufacturing specialised and moved towards the factory system and the modern world.

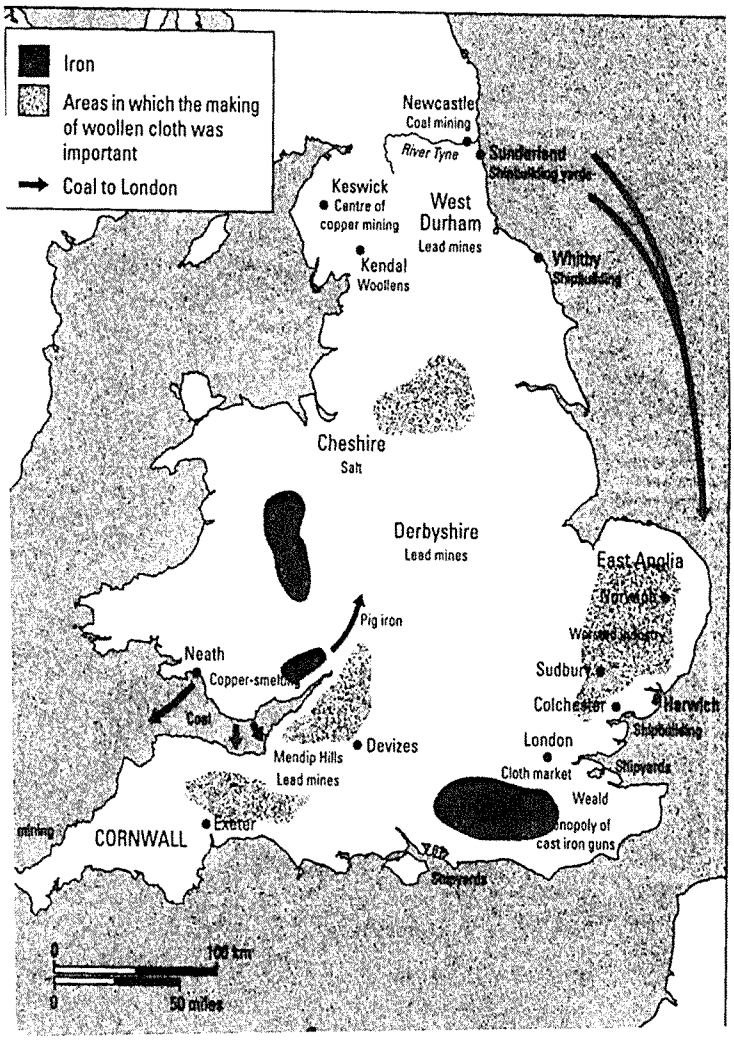
Today few historians would accept such bold claims. Most coal was used for domestic heating (much of it was imported from Sweden) and the main sources of industrial power were water and wind. Elizabethan England was really still a pre-industrial society, where much of what was manufactured "**consisted of the direct processing of agricultural products**" (**D.C.Coleman**). As such, many brewers, millers, builders and above all textile workers also worked in agriculture as well as in industry. There was not really a clearly defined industrial sector. Rather, most industries were family businesses run by craftsmen (artificers). It was often seasonal, casual and labour-intensive work in a number of craft industries. Moreover, as Figure 19 suggests, most manufacturing processes were carried out in the home. This was known as the domestic or cottage system.

Figure 19 – a 1990s school history book's representation of the domestic system in the production of broadcloths.



How did industry change n Eizabethan England ?

1. **The Textile industry**. By far the most significant industry in Elizabethan England was the textile industry. This included spinning, weaving, and dyeing (all shown in Figure 19 above) as well as tailoring and hatting. It was the biggest source of employment after agriculture, and, as Figure 20 shows, it was particularly important in East Anglia, the West Country and Yorkshire.



At the start of Elizabeth's reign, England was noted throughout Europe for the production of broadcloths. These were thick woollen cloths which were usually exported unfinished.

However, whilst there was no major technical innovation in the industry in the reign, the migration of fleeing European Protestants from northern France and the Spanish Netherlands bought new skills and trading links. In particular, it led to the development of lighter fabrics known as the new draperies. From the 1560s, this industry sprang up in East Anglia and the South East. The thinner product was very popular in the warmer (and rich) southern European markets. At the same time, enclosure ensured that the English textile industry had the cheapest raw wool in Europe. As such, this was a time of growth and progress for the English textile industry.

and iron

2. **Coal and metal production**. The production of coal and iron was already well established in 1558. The main coal producing areas of England were Tyneside and Durham, and as Figure 20 suggests, 163,000 tonnes was shipped from Newcastle to London in 1597 – 1598 alone. Today it is thought that the sharp increase coal production shown in Figure 21 was not evidence of Nef's "**first industrial revolution**", but rather the consequence of the rising population shown in Figure 6.

At the same time, war with Spain from 1585 onwards contributed sharply to the increased demand for iron from the Weald in Kent. In 1560 there were only three iron smelting furnances in the county. By 1590 this had risen to twenty six. By the 1590s London, Sheffield and Birmingham were

all developing metal working industries. Equally, lead was required for shot, and from the 1580s production in the Mendip hills sharply increased.

Finally, the Privy Council itself deserves credit for encouraging foreigners with special skills to settle in England. They did this by giving them monopolies and patents. Perhaps the best example of this was that the copper industry in Cumbria was first developed by **Daniel Hochsetter** from the Tyrol region of Austria.

Figure 21. Two tables to show the increased production of coal and metal goods in Elzabethan England,

*Figure 21a. A table to show English and Welsh coal and iron output 1550 – 1650 (adapted from **S.J.Lee's The reign of Elizabeth I**). In tonnes per annum.*

Year	Coal extraction	Iron production
1550	170,000	5,000
1650	2.500,000	24 ,000

*21b - A table to show English and Welsh mining output 1500 – 1600 (adapted from **DM Palliser's Age of Elizabeth**). In tonnes per annum.*

Year	Lead	Tin	Copper
1500	625	600	3,300
1580	3,300	660	9,620
1600	12,400	550	11,860

Questions

Reread pages 34 to 36, and then write a paragraph to answer each of the following questions.

12. Why do few historians now accept Nef's idea of a "first industrial revolution" ?

13. "War was the only cause of increased industrial activity in Elizabeth's reign". How far do you agree ?

Did the growth of London harm industry in the rest of England ?

Whilst England remained an overwhelmingly rural country, Elizabeth's reign was marked by Londons grow with mounting speed. In 1550, its population was thought to have been 120,000. By 1600 this had risen to 200,000, with 6,000 migrants arriving each year. Most of the newcomers came from the countryside. Some were the surplus population produced by enclosure looking for work. Others were the sick and poor hoping for relief or charity.

In 1598 **John Stow** produced his **Survey of London**. It described the fastest growing city in Europe as a commercial power house with over sixty craft and trading guilds. This diverse economy also meant that some areas were becoming associated with specialised trades and crafts; for example Islington was the centre of the brick and tile making trade, whilst a shipbuilding industry was growing on the banks of the Thames. At the same time the power of the Merchant Aventurers Guild ensured that London was England's greatest port.

Questions

14. Today historians disagree about the impact of London on other cities. Was London's growth built at the expense of other cities ? Consider the two arguments below. Which do you agree with more ? Explain your answer.

Yes	No
The only English industry of any note was the textile industry. The London-based Merchant Adventurers had a monopoly on cloth export, and shipped it in protected convoys from London. By the 1590s 93% of cloth exports went from London. This reflected much provincial decline. Smaller ports such as Rye and King's Lynn complained that London took their trade. Finally, as London was four times bigger than the next English city it had economies of scale. Migration meant that it had a never-ending suppy of cheap labour, whilst banking, shipbuilding, brewing, catering and leisure industries grew up around the docks. No other city could compete.	However, it is important to note that some towns gained from the growth of London. Newcastle provided the capital with coal, whilst Manchester sent all its cloth there. Moreover, whilst some provincial ports declined, others, such as Exeter and Bristol flourished with the new trade routes. Moreover, some inland towns also began to specialise. Nantwich grew up as the centre of the salt industry, whilst Reading developed a large leather and tanning business. As such, the picture was mixed, and to claim London snuffed out other towns and cities is an unhelpful generalisation.

SLAVERY

The Elizabethan slave trade

Hawkins and the trade

Britain's involvement in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people from West Africa to the Americas began during the reign of Elizabeth I.

John Hawkins – a merchant adventurer and later a naval administrator – was the first English trader. In 1562, while on a voyage to Hispaniola (Haiti), Hawkins added the transportation of captured Africans to his family's trading interests in West Africa.

Sir John Hawkins. © *NMM*

Royal support for Hawkins

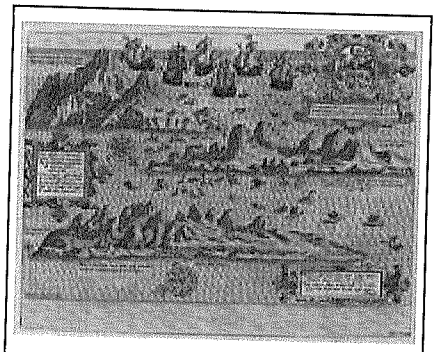
A number of important people supported the venture, including:

- Benjamin Gonson, the Treasurer of the Navy
- Sir Thomas Lodge, who was Lord Mayor of London and the Governor of the Russia Company.

Elizabeth I also backed the voyage, expressing a hope that the Africans would not be enslaved without first giving their free consent. She believed that capturing Africans against their will 'would be detestable and call down the vengeance of Heaven upon the undertakers'.

Elizabeth I, 1533-1603, supported Hawkins and profited from slavery. © *NMM*

The first slaving expedition



A map of the West Indies, c.1590. © *NMM*

Hawkins took three ships from London to Sierra Leone in West Africa. Despite whatever assurances he gave to Elizabeth I, Hawkins seized some 300 Africans 'by the sword, and partly by other means'. Many were taken from Portuguese boats.

Hawkins then crossed the Atlantic, selling the Africans into slavery in the Spanish West Indies. He returned to England with tropical produce such as ginger, sugar, pearls and hides, which he then sold to City merchants. Hawkins made a fortune in the process.

Hawkins' second slaving voyage

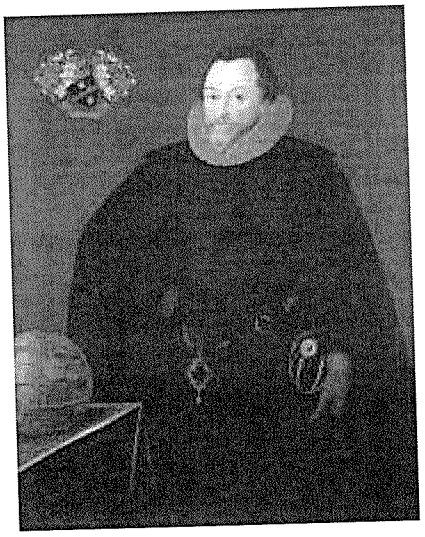
Such was the success of his first slaving voyage that Hawkins undertook a second in 1564-65. This time, Elizabeth I lent Hawkins a royal ship, the 700-ton *Jesus of Lubeck*. A group of wealthy London merchants and noblemen backed the expedition, expecting a healthy return on their investment.

Hawkins went back to Sierra Leone. He took about 400 captives through a combination of force, negotiation with African rulers and seizure from Portuguese vessels. Again it was highly profitable, producing a return of 60% on the original investment.

John Hawkins. © *NMM*

Hawkins made huge sums selling the enslaved Africans to the Spanish and then selling tropical goods in England. As a result he was knighted.

Hawkins' third and unsuccessful voyage



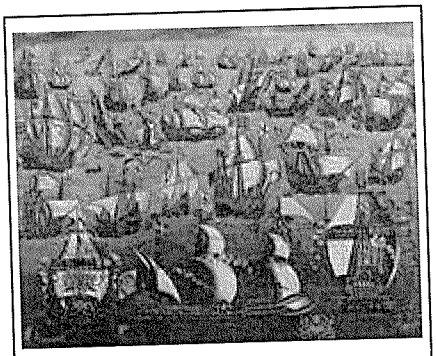
A third slaving voyage in 1567-68 was a disaster. Hawkins sailed with six ships, including two royal vessels. Between 400 and 500 Africans were captured. Hawkins also seized a Portuguese slave ship.

On the return voyage, bad weather forced the ships into a port in Mexico. A Spanish fleet trapped the English adventurers there and the Spanish captured both the queen's ships.

Only Hawkins' ship and that of the young Francis Drake returned safely. All the English cargo was taken and the profit from the expedition was lost.

Sir Francis Drake, went on a slaving voyage in 1567-8. © *NMM*

The trade in enslaved people and war with Spain



English ships and the Spanish Armada, August 1588. © *NMM*

Hawkins' activities irritated the Spanish. They objected to the English breaking their monopoly of West Indies trade.

This growing dispute was one of the reasons for the long war between England and Spain from 1584 until the Peace of London in 1604.

During the conflict, English ships continued to target Spanish colonies in the Americas. This disrupted Spain's commerce, including its trade in enslaved people. However, Hawkins' failure brought an end to organized English involvement in the trade for some years.