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## Bristol and Newfoundland 1490-1570 (eprint)

Evan Jones

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When people discuss the Cabot voyages, there is a tendency to concentrate on the personal and particular: the character of Cabot, the story of the voyages, the location of the landfall. Yet although these aspects of the explorations grab the imagination, they provide little information about why the expeditions were mounted or what the nature of England's early involvement in North America was. This paper will attempt to rectify this imbalance by asking and seeking to answer some of the questions about the voyages that are rarely posed. In particular it will address the issue of why Bristol's merchants became interested in westward discovery in the first place and why they then lost interest in Newfoundland until the late 16th century, leaving the exploitation of the fisheries to the French, Portuguese and Spanish.

To address these issues will first require an examination of how Bristol's commerce was changing in the late 15th century and why its commercial development prompted an interest in westward discovery. There will then be a consideration of what Bristol's merchant's were trying to achieve during the ten years they were involved in the exploration of the New World. After 1508, Bristol's interest in North America faded. Since the city had an early lead in the exploration of the region, the paper will seek to establish why the city failed to become involved in the Newfoundland fisheries. To do this, it will first be necessary to establish the actual level of England's involvement in the fisheries. It will then be possible to address the issue of why the country as a whole and Bristol in particular failed to engage in them before the 1570s.

By 1450 Bristol was already one of the most prosperous and successful towns in England. The city was heavily engaged in the manufacture of woollen cloth and it exported both its own cloth and that of the West Country, the Midlands and Wales. Yet, although the city's merchants traded as far afield as Iceland and Portugal, the Gascon trade dominated their international commerce. The reasons for this were essentially political. One factor behind the importance of the Gascon trade was that until 1453, this part of western France was English territory. As a result English merchants had special privileges in the region's commerce that allowed them to virtually monopolise the export of its most valuable product, claret wine. Since this trade was highly lucrative, and England's political control over Gascony meant that the trade was never subject to embargoes or political interference, Bristol's merchants had allowed themselves to become comfortably dependent on Gascony.<sup>1</sup> However, although Bristol benefited from the trade, France's determination to take control of Gascony restricted the city's trading opportunities elsewhere. This was because the resulting conflict between England and France, known as the Hundred Years War, prevented English merchants from trading into other parts of France, while Castile's support for France limited the development of England's trade with Spain. Since trade into the Mediterranean was controlled by the

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'The Overseas Trade of Bristol' in E. Power & M. M. Postan *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1933), pp. 201-09

Italians, and Iceland and Ireland offered only limited opportunities for Bristol merchants, they were effectively forced to concentrate on Gascony.

As politics shaped Bristol's commercial concerns in the first half of the 15th century, it was politics that determined the realignment of Bristol's trade in the latter part of the century. The key event behind this shift was the end the Hundred Years and the consequent loss of Gascony to the French. On one level this was a disaster for Bristol's merchants since it severely depressed the Gascon trade for the next twenty years and it meant that this trade was thenceforth no more secure than any other branch of Bristol's foreign trade. However, in the long term the loss of Gascony was beneficial to Bristol's commerce, since the loss of this secure market forced Bristol's merchants to broaden their commercial base, while the end of the war opened-up new commercial opportunities to them.

For Bristol, the most important side effect of the end of the Hundred Years War, was that Anglo-Spanish relations improved. In 1466 a formal peace treaty was signed between England and Spain in the decades that followed a political alliance developed between them. As this occurred, both countries made an effort to stamp-out the piracy which had plagued their trade, and the increased security of the seas, along with the higher level of commercial confidence which the alliance engendered, created the conditions in which Anglo-Iberian trade could flourish. Of those merchants who took advantage of this development, none did better than the merchants of Bristol, who increased their trade to Spain ten-fold between the 1460s and the 1490s.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of the voyages of discovery, the growth of Bristol's trade with Iberia was important for two reasons. First, it brought Bristol's merchants into closer commercial and cultural contact with the people who were leading Europe's exploration of the Atlantic. Second, it gave the city's mariners a greater experience of long ocean voyages, as they began to trade, not only with Spain and Portugal, but with the newly colonised Atlantic islands. Between 1431 and 1460 Spain and Portugal had discovered and colonised nine islands in the Canaries, Cape Verdes and the Azores. By 1480 Bristol men were trading with Madeira, and woad was being brought to Bristol direct from the Azores. After the signing of the Treaty of Medino del Campo in 1489, English merchants were allowed to trade to all the islands north of Cape Verdes.<sup>3</sup> The late 15th century thus saw Bristol's commercial horizons expand and made its merchants aware of the benefits that could be reaped by those who discovered new lands. That it was this contact which encouraged them to begin their own voyages of discovery is indicated by the way their first voyages, of 1480/1, were aimed at discovering the island of Brasil, which was believed to lie somewhere to the west of Ireland. Since this mythical island was reputed to be a source of a wood valuable to dyers, it appears that Bristol was trying to emulate Iberia by seeking out islands which could be exploited commercially. Whether their explorations met with any success is uncertain, but there is some evidence to suggest that Bristol's merchants had reached North America before 1497 and that it was their success at, as well as their attitude towards, oceanic exploration that attracted Cabot to the city.<sup>4</sup>

That Bristol provided the support for the voyages of John Cabot in 1497 and 1498 is well known. It is also clear that Bristol men were the major backers behind voyages made in 1501

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<sup>2</sup> W. R. Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978) p. 64

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 10, 14-16

<sup>4</sup> Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII*, pp. 19-32

and 1502 under a new patent and that Bristol was heavily involved in the creation of the 'Company Adventurers to the Newfoundland' in 1502. It is unclear when this company ceased to operate, but it certainly made voyages in 1503, 1504 and 1505, which took its members far enough down the American coast for them to find mountain-cats and popinjays.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, although it is probable that Bristol was involved in Sebastian Cabot's expedition of 1508-9, after this expedition Bristol's substantiated interest in North America fades. England was involved in further expeditions of discovery in 1517, 1527 and 1536, but these were all Crown financed and did not involve Bristol men.<sup>6</sup>

To understand why Bristol was so intensely involved in the exploration of the New World during the first decade after 1497, and why it then dropped its involvement, it is necessary to appreciate what the voyages were meant to achieve. As noted earlier, Bristol's voyages of discovery during the 1480s aimed at finding an island in the Atlantic which offered similar economic potential to the islands discovered by the Iberians. However, once Cabot had persuaded Bristol's merchants that they might be able to push a route through to the Orient, the purpose of Bristol's voyages changed. The discovery of a route to the Orient was the avowed purpose of both the 1497 and 1498 voyages of Cabot and the subsequent voyages from Bristol. This remained the purpose even after it became clear that the new lands were not part of Orient, for although North America might offer some economic potential, it seemed that the greatest rewards would go to those who could identify and control a trade-route to the East. It appears to have been with this purpose in mind that the 'Company Adventurers to the Newfoundland' was established. Although little is known about the company, its title indicates that it was commercially orientated and from what is known about its activities it seems that it may have tried to establish bases along the American coast. Such a strategy should not be surprising given that it was not known how far the new world stretched, or how far it was to the Orient. Indeed, since Portugal had succeeded in reaching India by establishing a series of commercial bases along the African coastline, the activities of the men of the Newfoundland Company was entirely logical. Trade thus remained the primary intention of Bristol's merchants and given that by 1508 they had established that between the Ice and the Spanish territories there lay a continual landmass, inhabited by people who possessed nothing worth trading, it is unsurprising that Bristol's merchants became discouraged. Nevertheless, having failed to establish a commercial link with the Orient, what needs to be determined is whether they tried to exploit the new lands in any other way. In particular, what needs to be determined is whether they followed-up their 1497 boast that 'they could bring so many fish that this kingdom would have no further need of Iceland, from which place there comes a very great quantity of the fish called stockfish.'<sup>7</sup> This will be the subject of the second part of this paper.

Although it is widely accepted that the French and Portuguese were the primary movers in the development of the Newfoundland fisheries, it has always been assumed that the English retained a fishery there and some have assumed that it came to replace the old Iceland fisheries.<sup>8</sup> However, since little evidence has been provided to support such arguments, it

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<sup>5</sup> Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII*, p. 134

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Williamson (ed.), *The Voyages of the Cabots and the Discovery of North America* (New York, 1970), pp. 245, 256, 268

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Raimondo de Raimondi de Soncino to the Duke of Milan, 18 December 1497: J. A. Williamson (ed.), *The Voyages of the Cabots and the Discovery of North America* (New York, 1970) p. 31

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Judah, *The North American Fisheries and British Policy to 1713*, Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, Vol. XVIII, nos. 3-4 (Illinois, 1933) pp. 12, 15; H A Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International*

needs to be established whether anything that can be described as an English fishery did exist before the 1570s.

The most general form of evidence that has been used to support the existence of an English fishery comes from port-books. In her study of England's Newfoundland fishery, Gillian Cell notes that 'port book evidence suggests that only a handful of vessels went annually to Newfoundland during the greater part of the sixteenth century'.<sup>9</sup> By noting this she downplays the importance of the English fishery but apparently also establishes its existence. Unfortunately, what this fails to appreciate is that any Newfoundland fish recorded in an English port book could not be a product of an English fishery. This is because fish caught by Englishmen and brought straight home was not liable to pay custom and was thus not recorded in the port books. So, by definition, Newfoundland fish recorded in the port books must be imports from a third country, such as France.

The earliest specific evidence that has been put forward for an English fishery are two letters written on 21 August 1522 from Vice-Admiral Fitzwilliam to Henry VIII and Wolsey. The letters were written while England was at war with France and they refer to plans to send English ships westwards to meet with a fleet returning from Newfoundland. Biggar interpreted these letters as orders for naval ships to meet-up with and escort the English Newfoundland fleet home.<sup>10</sup> However, these documents, and an earlier letter that Biggar did not note, do not state that the Newfoundland fleet was English or that the naval ships were dispatched in order to escort, or 'waft', the fleet home.<sup>11</sup> Given this, letters could be referring to an intended attack on the returning French Newfoundland fleet. That this was in fact the case is indicated by the way Fitzwilliam notes in one letter that a certain Captain West could not go on the mission because he did not have enough victuals; 'whereof I am right sorye; ffor I assure your grace, by that that I can here perceyve, he have doon his dutie here right well, and is worthy thanks'.<sup>12</sup> Now this is significant, for right up till the 19th century, the way a commander gave thanks to a good captain was not by sending him on convoy duty, but by sending him on a cruise that offered the possibility of a prize. The desirability of this commission is further demonstrated by the admiral's attempts to persuade the King that Fitzwilliam's own protégé, Baldwin Willoughby, should go instead, despite the fact that he had only recently joined the navy.<sup>13</sup>

The next evidence that has been cited to support the existence of an English fishery is that relating to Hore's voyage of 1536. Although Hakluyt records this as a voyage of exploration,

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*Economy* (Toronto, 1954), p. 13; G T Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 3, 22; B. E. Gelsinger, *Icelandic Enterprise. Commerce and Economy in the Middle Ages* (Columbia, 1981) p. 194

<sup>9</sup> Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland*, p. 22

<sup>10</sup> H. P. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier 1497-1534* (Ottawa, 1911), pp. 142-3

<sup>11</sup> The earlier letter was written by Fitzwilliam on 4 August and discusses the merits of sending particular ships into the west. It suggests 'The *Gabrell* of Topsham and the *Trinitie George* would do better service in the West Sea, as well for the return of the fishermen from the New Found Land, as for the going of the French into Scotland, than the others in the narrow Sea.' *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. III, pt. ii, No. 2419. The term 'wafting' is the one normally used to describe the convoying of the Iceland fleet: *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. IV, pt. i, 1524-26, No. 571, 691

<sup>12</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, p. 143

<sup>13</sup> Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier*, p. 142. Willoughby is described by Fitzwilliam as 'my servant' as late as January 1522. His first appointment as a captain of one of the King's ships was in April: *Letters and Papers – Foreign & Domestic*, Henry VIII, Vol. III, pt. ii, 1519-23, No. 1946, 2193

it has been suggested that it was an ordinary fishing voyage, for a contemporary court record indicates that while away Hore 'caught fish or caused them to be caught.'<sup>14</sup> However, since Hakluyt's account indicates that the ship went far further north than would be normal for a fishing expedition and since a large number of gentlemen accompanied the vessel, Hore's ship cannot have been part of an ordinary fishing fleet.<sup>15</sup>

The next piece of evidence that has been used to justify the existence of an English Newfoundland fishery is a 1548 'Acte againste the exaction of money or other thinge by any officer to traffike in to Iceland'.<sup>16</sup> This Act concerned 'suche merchaunts and fysshermen as have used and practysed the adventures and journes into Iselande Newfoundland Ireland and other places commodious for fyshinge, and getting fishe' and provided that they should be free of exaction's from officers of the Admiralty. By mentioning Newfoundland, the legislation suggests that Englishmen did at least sometimes go there. However, since the legislation was general in its application, and the places mentioned are only referred to by way of illustration, it would be wrong to infer from this that England had a large and established fishery there.

The last pre-1570s evidence for a Newfoundland fishery is that in 1563 a London merchant, John Link, is reported to have sustained losses while returning from a voyage to Newfoundland.<sup>17</sup> This indicates that by this time at least some Englishmen were travelling there but it is unclear whether Link's voyage was typical for its time.

Turning to other sources of evidence which should throw light on whether there was an established English fishery in Newfoundland, it may be noted that if such a fishery existed, it should be possible to find some mention of it in England's surviving state papers of the 16th century. The calendars of these papers provide summaries of hundreds of thousands of official letters and reports, and although the great majority of them have nothing to do with fishing, they are dozens of references to both the English Iceland fleet and the French Newfoundland fleet. However, they contain no references to an English fleet or fishery in Newfoundland before the 1570s. This is peculiar because many of the matters dealt with in the papers concern issues which should have cropped-up if the English had maintained a fishery in Newfoundland. For instance, the papers dealing with the Iceland fisheries include references to disputes between English and foreign fishermen, concerns over the security of the English fleet in time of war, notification of the seizure of vessels by foreign privateers, and references to the Crown's right of prisage (a form of tax of fish) on ships returning from Iceland.<sup>18</sup> Apart from these tangential references there are also a few complete lists of the English ships returning from Iceland and a mid-century report on the state of England's fisheries; which mentions the fisheries in Iceland, Scotland and the North Sea but, significantly, makes no mention of Newfoundland.<sup>19</sup> For their part, the English reports on the French Newfoundland fisheries mention the illegal stopping or seizure of French ships

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<sup>14</sup> E G R Taylor, 'Master Hore's voyage of 1536' *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. LXXVII (1931), pp. 469-70

<sup>15</sup> Williamson, *The Voyages of the Cabots and the Discovery of North America*, pp. 268-71

<sup>16</sup> *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. IV pt. I (London, 1819), pp. 44-45

<sup>17</sup> Judah, *The North American Fisheries*, p. 27

<sup>18</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. I, pt. ii, 1513-14, No. 1971; Vol. III, pt. ii, 1519-23, No. 2431; Vol. IV, pt. i, 1524-26, No. 549, 571, 615, 2220; Vol. IV, pt. ii, 1526-28, No. 4740; Vol. V, 1531-32, No. 1231; *Calendar of State Papers – Domestic*, 1547-80, p. 94; *Calendar of State Papers – Foreign*, 1561-62, No. 302; 1563, No. 1088; 1578-9, No. 577

<sup>19</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. IV, pt. ii, 1526-8, No. 5101; Vol. VI, 1933, No. 1380; *Calendar of State Papers – Domestic*, 1601-3 & Addenda 1547-65, p. 426

carrying Newfoundland fish, intelligence reports about the French Newfoundland fleet, and wartime accounts of the capture of, or attempts to capture, French vessels on their return from Newfoundland.<sup>20</sup> However, despite the fact that England was frequently at war with France during the 16th century, and the French were dominant in the Newfoundland fishery, concerns are never expressed about the safety of English vessels in Newfoundland. There is also never any mention of English vessels being captured while operating in, or returning from, Newfoundland.

To conclude, the evidence for England's involvement in Newfoundland fishery from the 1500s to 1570 rests on two references: a 1548 Act of Parliament, which only mentions Newfoundland by way of illustration, and a 1563 reference to the activities of a single London merchant. Since the State Papers of the period contain no further references to an English fishery in Newfoundland, despite the frequent references which are made to the French Newfoundland fishing fleet and England's other fisheries, there is no reason to believe that an established English fishery existed in Newfoundland before the 1570s. In this light it is much less surprising that on his voyage to the New World in 1527 the English explorer, John Rut, observed off Newfoundland '50 Spanish, French and Portuguese fishing-vessels' but no English.<sup>21</sup> It is also easier to comprehend Anthony Parkhurst's analysis of the fisheries in the 1570s. Parkhurst was a Bristol man who made at least four voyages to Newfoundland in the 1570s.<sup>22</sup> In a letter written in 1577 or 1578 he wrote of England's Newfoundland fishery that it 'ys well amended within v yerres from iiiii sayle of small barkes to fortye, whereof the one halfe ar worthy shippes, so that I dare be bolde to affirme to brynge home as mutche fysshe in some one of these as all the navy did before'.<sup>23</sup> Given that there is very little evidence of an English fishery before the 1570s, it seems likely that even the four small barks of the early 1570s may have represented an improvement over earlier decades.

If England had no involvement, or at least no significant involvement, in the Newfoundland fisheries until the 1570s, the question that needs to be addressed is why there was a lack of interest in the fisheries. This issue is best addressed in two parts, first by examining the general lack of interest in England as a whole and then by examining why Bristol's merchants failed to live-up to their 1497 claim that they could bring fish home so many fish from Newfoundland that England would have no further need of Iceland.

On the first point, it appears that the lack of interest in the nation as a whole was due in large part to England's continued ability to acquire stockfish from Iceland. Although England's involvement in Iceland has been portrayed as a phenomenon of the 15th century, this is only because England lost its near monopoly over the Iceland stockfish trade in the latter part of that century.<sup>24</sup> However, while Hamburg became the leading player in the 16th century,

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<sup>20</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. IV, pt. i, 1524-26, No. 83; Vol. V, 1531-2, No. 627; XVII, 1542, No. 738, 835, 1220; Vol. XIX, pt. ii, 1544, No. 302; Vol. XXI, pt. i, 1546, No. 1445; *Calendar of State Papers – Domestic* 1547-80, p. 565; *Calendar of State Papers – Foreign*, Vol. III, 1560-61, No. 120, 1569-71, No. 340

<sup>21</sup> Rut's failure to find any English vessels is apparently confirmed by his dispatch of a letter to Henry VIII on one of the foreign vessels he found at St Johns: Williamson, *The Voyages of the Cabots and the Discovery of North America*, pp. 105, 107

<sup>22</sup> E. G. R. Taylor (ed.) *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts* (2 vols. Hakluyt Society, 1935) Vol. I, p. 128

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts* Vol. I, p. 123

<sup>24</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'The Iceland Trade' in E. Power & M. M. Postan *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1933), pp. 177-82; Gelsing, *Icelandic Enterprise. Commerce and Economy in the Middle Ages*, p. 194

England remained heavily engaged in Iceland and may even have increased its trade there. The extent of England's involvement in Iceland is indicated by the way in 1528, 149 English ships visited Iceland; in 1533, 85 ships, mostly of 50-100 tons burden went there, and even in the 1550s, after a period of falling demand for fish, 43 English ships still visited the island.<sup>25</sup> England's dependence on Iceland is expressed by a letter written in 1523, when Lord Surrey wrote that if the Iceland fleet were intercepted by Scottish privateers 'the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk will be undone and all England destitute of fish next year'.<sup>26</sup> This reliance on Iceland could still be noted in 1578 when Anthony Parkhurst wrote of England's Newfoundland fisheries that 'The trade that our nation hath to Island maketh that the English are not there in such numbers as other nations.'<sup>27</sup>

Having explained England's general lack of interest in Newfoundland in terms of its ability to acquire stockfish from Iceland, it might be assumed that Bristol's lack of interest in the region is also explained. However, what is interesting about Bristol is that although England as a whole maintained its trade to Iceland, Bristol dropped out of the Iceland trade in the second half of the 15th century. Indeed after 1460, only one Bristol merchant maintained a significant trade with Iceland and among the three surviving customs accounts of the 1480s and 1490s; there is only one reference to a ship sailing there from Bristol.<sup>28</sup> The city thus lost interest in Iceland well before 1497 and, for that matter, well before any possible discovery of the Newfoundland fisheries in the 1480s.<sup>29</sup> Bristol's failure to develop the Newfoundland fisheries must thus have a deeper cause than access to Icelandic stockfish. To understand what underlay its lack of interest requires a renewed appreciation of just what was happening to Bristol's commerce in the late 15th and 16th centuries.

In the first part of this paper it was noted during the late 15th century Bristol was expanding its commercial horizons. Although this included voyages to such exotic locations as Madiera and the Azores, the greatest growth was in the Spanish trade. This is significant because it seems that it was the expansion of the Spanish trade that lay behind the reduction of Bristol's Icelandic trade. The reason for this is that although Bristol had been the dominant player in England's Icelandic trade from the 1420s-50s, the Icelandic stockfish trade had always been a subsidiary component of the city's overall trading interests. As noted earlier, Gascony dominated the city's trade until 1453. Nevertheless, since the Gascon trade occurred almost entirely during the autumn and winter, it meant that the capital and ships of Bristol's merchants were underemployed during the spring and summer. The Iceland trade, which occurred during the summer, thus provided a commercial outlet at a slack time of the year. However, as the Bristol's Iberian trade expanded, the opportunities for summer trading increased. This was because some of the goods that could be imported from Iberia, and in particular the iron from Northern Spain, could be traded at this time of year. So Bristol appears to have lost interest in Iceland because it was more profitable to trade Spanish iron than Icelandic stockfish.

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<sup>25</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. IV, pt. ii, 1526-8, No. 5101; Vol. VI, 1933, No. 1380; *Calendar of State Papers – Domestic*, 1601-3 & Addenda 1547-65, p. 426

<sup>26</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Henry VIII, Vol. III, pt. ii, 1519-23, No. 3071

<sup>27</sup> R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* Vol. VIII (Glasgow edition, 1904), p. 11

<sup>28</sup> W. R. Childs, 'England's Icelandic trade in the fifteenth century: The role of the port of Hull' *Northern Seas* 1995, pp. 21-22

<sup>29</sup> Quinn, among others, have explored the possibility that Bristol discovered the fisheries on or after 1481: D. B. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481-1620* (London, 1973) pp. 5-23

Bristol's loss of interest in Iceland can thus be ascribed to its increased commercial opportunities in Iberia and the Iberian colonies rather than a desire to engage in the Newfoundland fisheries. That this condition remained the norm for most of the 16th century, is observable from the way that Bristol never again engaged in Iceland and, as has been seen, there is no evidence that it engaged in the Newfoundland fisheries before the 1570s.<sup>30</sup> It was thus only when Bristol's trade to Iberia was cut-off in the late 16th century by England's war with Spain that it became worthwhile for Bristol, along with the other West-country ports, to renew its interest in Newfoundland.

## Biography

Evan Jones is an archaeologist and economic historian engaged in the study of 15th and 16th century British history. His main interests are in urban development and transport economics. For the last two years he has been working as an archaeological researcher in the Centre for Urban History, Leicester University. He is currently based at Edinburgh University, where he is writing-up his doctoral thesis on the shipping industry of 16th century Bristol. He has articles accepted for, or published in, *Northern Seas*, *The Journal of Historical Geography* and *The New Dictionary of National Biography*.

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<sup>30</sup> The 16th century customs accounts provide no indication that stockfish was imported to Bristol from Iceland. The only references to stockfish in these accounts are 'pisc de nova terra' (Newfoundland fish) apparently imported from France: P.R.O. E122 199/3, 21/10, 199/4, 21/15. In her study of Bristol's 16th century trade, Jean Vanes apparently found no evidence that Bristol continued to trade with Iceland at this time: J. Vanes (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century* (Bristol Record Society Publications, Vol. XXXI, 1979)