

# The maritime economy of north west England in the later eighteenth century

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## Abstract

Maritime historians have not followed the trend set by other disciplines towards regional studies which has become an established practice over the past ten years. Some excellent work has been done on individual ports but no one has attempted to establish the relationship between the sea trade and the land based economy on a regional basis. This thesis corrects the omission for the region of the North West of England. A study of the coastwise trade and the trade with Ireland in the late eighteenth century, it provides evidence which argues for the existence of an integrated maritime economy in the Irish Sea region in the period 1750-1810. Altogether, it demonstrates that a complex regional trade existed alongside increasing overseas trade.

The sources to identify coastal trading activity in this period are scarce. With few exceptions, records of the King's Remembrancer Exchequer Port Books are no longer

available, while the run of records of the Customs Bills of Entry has not started. One of the challenges, therefore, was to identify alternative sources from which the necessary information could be drawn. Shipping lists published in local newspapers were the principal source used. Other key sources included trade directories, trade reports and business papers.

The study of ownership uses the shipping registers from 1786 and examines ownership and relationships with the local economies in greater detail than has been undertaken previously. Research into local sources assisted in identifying the specific business interests of owners, particularly those designated as 'merchant' and 'gentleman' in the registers. A key finding is that a complex shipping investment pattern existed within the region related to the characteristics of the local economies.

Case studies based on surviving business records give insight into the business practices underpinning regional maritime commerce, particularly the use of information networks, methods of payment and the roles of the merchants. The importance of the trust in business relationships is the most prominent characteristic to emerge from these case studies.

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