

Wright, Sam (2024) The trade of the port of Hull under the Hull Dock Company, 1830-1860

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The trade of the port of Hull under the Hull Dock Company, 1830-1860

From the 1770s to 1894, the port of Hull found itself under the almost exclusive control of the Hull Dock Company [hereafter HDC] a private enterprise formed during the port's desperate attempts to construct its first commercial dock. The impact of the HDC on Hull's maritime development can be observed from several angles, but perhaps the clearest comes through the growth of the port's trade. For the purposes of this article, this analysis will concentrate on a case study period of 1830 to 1860. As with any significant collection of statistical information, the sources used here must be approached with some degree of caution as they could possibly suffer from inaccuracies caused by human error, but they nevertheless can provide an interesting and useful impression of the state of Hull's maritime activity during these years.

For Hull, the period 1830-60 saw a general upward trend in annual seaborne trade (see table 1). In 1860, for example, an additional 835 vessels entered the port of Hull than had done so in 1830, and 1,470 more vessels cleared the port in 1860 than thirty years previously. The tonnage of trade also experienced a notable rise during the case study period. In 1860, 711,828 tons entered the port, a whole 494,550 tons more than 1830, and a further 408,962 tons of shipping cleared the port in 1860 than had done so at the start of the case study period. In terms of value, this growth meant that the declared value of exports from port of Hull nearly doubled, reaching £14,487,676 in 1860. In isolation therefore, the seaborne trade figures for Hull suggest the HDC had a somewhat positive impact on the port and, it must be said that the work of the Company during the case study period did result in an increase in trading prosperity for the port. However, the impact of the HDC appears more negative when compared to the growth of seaborne trade in other ports, particularly Liverpool, one of Hull's major port rivals. (See Table 2).

Table 1: Seaborne Trade of the Port of Hull, 1830-1860

Year		Inwards		Outwards		Declared Export Value
		Ships	Tonnage	Ships	Tonnage	
1830		1,462	217,278	1,047	161,404	-
1835		1,731	267,053	1,263	208,117	£7,295,959
1840		2,418	349,073	1,831	276,912	£8,994,430
1845		2,166	398,815	1,585	291,289	£10,798,338
1850		2,485	466,430	1,764	369,743	£10,366,810
1855		2,058	414,839	1,629	358,340	£10,679,671
1860		2,297	711,828	2,517	570,366	£14,487,676

Sources: *Returns of Number of Vessels inwards and outwards at Twelve Principal Ports of United Kingdom; Official Value of Imports and Exports for the years 1816-50, 1855 and 1860.* Parliamentary Papers Online

The year 1860 saw a further 2,192 vessels entered Liverpool than had done so in 1830, and a further 2,489 vessels cleared that port in 1860 than in 1830, figures that certainly take the shine off the growth experienced in Hull. Furthermore, tonnage figures from Merseyside also illustrate a far more impressive scale of growth, with inward tonnage well over quadrupling to reach 2,773,439 tons in 1860. Similarly, for outward tonnage, the 2,899,474 tons of 1860 represented a significant increase of 2,241,359 tons from the levels of 1830, a scale of growth that Hull would never come close to. This growth meant that the declared export value of the trade of Liverpool reached £65,419,732, a figure that not only dwarfed that of Hull, but was also more than double the £30,837,688 export value of London.¹

Table 2: Seaborne Trade of the Port of Liverpool, 1830-1860

Year	Inwards		Outwards		Declared Export Value
	Ships	Tonnage	Ships	Tonnage	
1830	2,710	640,731	2,869	658,115	-
1835	2,978	787,009	3,065	796,766	-
1840	3,492	1,042,232	3,808	1,103,956	£23,882,748
1845	4,045	1,406,541	4,197	1,412,473	£28,427,767
1850	4,531	1,605,315	4,807	1,656,938	£34,891,847
1855	4,197	2,074,108	4,483	2,223,044	£46,333,444
1860	4,902	2,773,439	5,358	2,899,474	£65,419,732

Sources: *Returns of Number of Vessels inwards and outwards at Twelve Principal Ports of United Kingdom; Official Value of Imports and Exports for the years 1816-50, 1855 and 1860.* Parliamentary Papers Online

In comparison to Liverpool therefore, the growth of trade in Hull during the case study period looks rather bleak, and the image does not improve when comparing Hull to the UK more widely. During the case study period, much of the statistical information on seaborne trade focused on the “twelve principal ports” of the UK - London, Liverpool, Hull, Bristol, Newcastle, Southampton, Leith, Glasgow, Greenock, Dublin, Cork and Belfast - in order to gain a larger UK perspective. The same shall be done here (see table 3).

Table 3: Seaborne Trade of the Twelve Principal Ports of the United Kingdom in 1830 and 1860

Year	Inwards		Outwards	
	Ships	Tonnage	Ships	Tonnage
1830	12,133	2,236,071	11,251	2,131,316
1860	29,629	8,607,894	27,526	8,226,563

Sources: *Return of Number of Vessels inwards and outwards at Twelve Principal Ports of United Kingdom; Official Value of Imports and Exports, 1816-50*

Return of Number of Vessels inwards and outwards at twelve Principal Ports of United Kingdom; Official Value of Imports and Exports, 1860

¹ *Return of Number of Vessels inwards and outwards at twelve Principal Ports of United Kingdom; Official Value of Imports and Exports, 1860.* Parliament Session: 1861. Paper Series: House of Commons Papers. Paper Number: 334. Volume: 58. Collection: 19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers. Parliamentary Papers Online.

In 1830, the seaborne trade of Hull represented around 9.7 percent of the inward tonnage total of these twelve ports, and 7.6 percent of the outward tonnage total. By 1860, however, Hull's share of these totals had fallen, accounting for only 8.3 percent of total inward tonnage and 6.9 percent of total outward tonnage of the twelve. With regards to the total number of vessels moving inwards and outwards from the twelve principal ports in 1860, Hull only accounted for 7.8 percent and 9.1 percent respectively whereas Liverpool accounted for 16.5 percent and 19.5 percent. Ultimately, this meant that Hull only accounted for 11.8 percent of the £122,980,817 value of the export trade from the twelve ports. Liverpool accounted for over half of that total. Unfortunately for Hull, the situation had not improved by 1894 and the end of the HDC's reign. For example, in 1894, 2,087 vessels with cargo and in ballast [hereafter WCIB] equalling 1,723,102 tons cleared the port of Hull engaged in the foreign trade.² In Liverpool, however, 3,406 vessels WCIB equalling 4,997,251 tons of foreign trade shipping had cleared the port during 1894, a whole 3,274,149 tons more than Hull.³ The situation in the coastal trade was just as bleak. For Hull, the total tonnage of vessels with cargo only [hereafter WCO] that cleared the port engaged in the coastal trade during 1894 only accounted for just under 2 percent of the 19,765,639-ton total of England and Wales.⁴ Liverpool accounted for 11.5 percent.

Clearly, the Hull Dock Company years were marked with a rather mixed bag of results of the port of Hull. When viewed in isolation, Hull experienced notable growth in its coastal and foreign trades, and in the value of such trade under the HDC. However, when we take a step back and look at the bigger picture, its growth lagged noticeably behind its port rivals of Liverpool and London. The HDC certainly contributed to this situation, and its attitudes and approaches to managing the port, as mentioned in article one of this two-part series, undoubtedly caused more problems than it solved.

² D.J. Starkey (ed.) *Shipping movements in the ports of the United Kingdom, 1871-1913: A statistical profile* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999) 147

³ Starkey, *Shipping movements in the ports of the United Kingdom*, 155

⁴ *Annual Statement of Navigation and Shipping of United Kingdom, 1894*. Parliament Session: 1895. Paper Series: Command Papers. Paper Number: C.7696. Volume: 95. Collection: 19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers. Parliamentary Papers Online.

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