THE IPSWICH TOWN GOVERNORS AND THE PRIVY COUNCIL IN THE 1620s

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Summary

As a large port on England's east coast with well-established trading routes, Ipswich was badly affected by Charles I and the Duke of Buckingham's naval expeditions in 1625 and 1626. This situation exacerbated the difficulties that the town's economy was already experiencing from the impact of the European wars upon its trading activities. The fiscal measures that the king and the Privy Council enforced upon the coastal towns and their counties would shape Ipswich's relationship with the State and also the relationship between the town and the county administration in Suffolk.

THERE HAD BEEN great rejoicing and festivities after the safe return in October 1623 of Prince Charles and the duke of Buckingham from their disastrous embassy to Madrid and the failure of negotiations over Charles' proposed marriage to the Infanta of Spain.[1] Negotiations had been first begun in 1614, the year after the marriage of the prince's sister Elizabeth to Frederick V, the Elector Palatine. The Spanish Match (as it became known) had been viewed by King James I as a way to politically balance his daughter's Protestant marriage with a Catholic Spanish alliance.[2] However, as Spanish Catholics were viewed as representing the most ardent opponents of the Reformed religions, many in England saw James I's policy as a dangerous course to take. With the onset of the Thirty Years War in Europe in 1618 and the subsequent occupation of the Palatinate by Imperial and Spanish troops, the marriage negotiations also came to encompass the restoration of Frederick and Elizabeth to their titles and lands.[3] Affronted by what he considered as Spanish transgressions upon his honour during his visit, and now realising that his proposed marriage would not guarantee the restitution of the Palatinate to Protestant rule, Charles sought to abandon the Spanish Match and commence military conflict with Spain.[4]

When Parliament was called in 1624, Charles and his supporters aimed to persuade the Commons to terminate Anglo-Spanish treaties and vote upon supplies for a war with Spain.[5] An unprecedented six subsidies were at first requested, and MPs were reluctant to vote for such large taxation, which they considered excessive.[6] Finally, three subsidies were agreed upon, with the stipulation that the monies were only to be spent on the war. The Cadiz expedition in the following October was therefore poorly funded, with badly prepared soldiers and shipping, and the outcome was a disaster.[7] The Privy Council looked for other ways to finance the war with Spain, and in July 1626 they requested 'ship money' from the coastal towns, using as their precedent the county rate which had been levied in January 1596 to provide ships for a previous expedition to Cadiz.[8] Whilst the coastal towns must have fully appreciated the need to finance the navy, particularly as protection for their merchant shipping, they were still suffering from the costs of their previous naval support.

Twenty-four Ipswich ships and their crews had been pressed into the king's service for the 1625 expedition to Cadiz. Two petitions were sent to the Privy Council by Ipswich ship owners and masters, seeking recompense for their losses and also asking for a strong guard on their coastline to combat the attacks on their shipping by the Dunkirkers.[9] Since the late sixteenth century, privateers and pirates operating from the port of Dunkirk had posed a serious threat to Dutch and English merchant shipping and fishing fleets.[10] Attacks had

escalated in the early seventeenth century, and it has been estimated that during the period 1624 to 1630 three hundred English vessels were captured by the Dunkirkers.[11] The owners and masters stated that they had spent £80 to £100 on each of their ships, for which they had not yet been recompensed, and the pressed mariners were receiving 9s 4d per month instead of their usual merchant service monthly pay of 25s. Some of the Ipswich ships had been lost at sea whilst on the king's service, and others had been taken by the Dunkirkers. Many mariners pressed into the king's service were absent for over a year, leaving behind wives and children to be maintained by their parishes. Wives whose husbands had died whilst in the king's service did not receive any allowance in lieu of the time their husbands had served, as would have been the case if the men had been serving on a merchant ship.[12]

With the great number of Dunkirker ships lying in wait along the eastern coast, the shipping of the town of Ipswich lay up in the River Orwell, to the detriment of the coal trade with Newcastle, the trading with other ports, and the fishing fleet to Iceland. Attached to the second Ipswich petition was a list of fifty-eight ships 'which lie in the river of Ipswich, and dare not put forth to sea for fear of the Dunkirkers'. The petition stated that three Ipswich ships had recently been lost: the *Long Robert* which had been lost in a storm with all hands while it was part of the king's fleet, together with the *Patient Endeavour* and the *Michael and John,* which had been taken by the Dunkirkers. It was understood that only the two masters of the ships and three other men had been taken as prisoners to Dunkirk to be ransomed back to the town, with the remainder of the crews and the ships having 'perished'. The loss of the mariners taken by the Dunkirkers was described as being 'a very great impoverishing to our Nation and strengthening of our enemies'.[13]

It was reported in March 1627 that five Ipswich ships with cargoes worth £5000 had been taken, with the crews held in Dunkirk for ransom.[14] The following month an entry in the Ipswich Assembly Book for 15 April 1627 recorded a petition from the inhabitants of St Clements' parish asking for a collection to be made within the town towards the payment of a ransom for several men being held by the Dunkirkers in Bruges.[15] Therefore, not only were the Ipswich authorities facing extreme demands upon the poor relief within the town to support the mariners' families left destitute, but they were also having to raise monies to ransom back those men held by the Dunkirkers. Many other East Coast ports suffered during this period. King's Lynn had lost twenty-five of its ships, worth an estimated £9000, to the Dunkirkers, and its Icelandic fishing fleet had been badly affected.[16] Great Yarmouth had petitioned the Privy Council over its lack of ordnance and the poor state of its walls and ramparts, describing itself as a 'frontier town' and fearful of enemy invasion as it was 'within fourteen hours sail of Dunkirk'.[17]

Ipswich's petition also reported that the town's shipbuilding industry had been damaged by events along the East Coast, with work stopped since the previous Michaelmas. This second petition to the Privy Council had been signed by sixty-six owners and masters of Ipswich ships, of which five were widows, and endorsed by the bailiffs of Ipswich as 'knowing the truth of these Grievances ... set our seal of office, as a testimony of the truth thereof'. The bailiffs were obviously hoping that, by adding their prestige and support to the petition, some action would be taken by the Privy Council to alleviate the distress that the town's inhabitants were experiencing.[18]

Not only did the king and Privy Council's fiscal impositions upon the East Coast towns and their counties greatly affect Ipswich during the 1620s, they also created a strain in the relationship of the town governors with the county administration in Suffolk. In December 1626 the Ipswich bailiffs petitioned the Privy Council in respect of the ship money demand for the provision of two ships for the king's service.[19] The charges for one ship were to be borne by Harwich, Ipswich and Woodbridge, together with the 'maritime towns and villages of the

county of Suffolk', and the charges for the second ship were to be borne by the county. The petition reported the varying responses the town had received following their approaches to the other maritime Suffolk towns and villages. Some had not answered, and some had replied that they were 'no ways able to join in any such charge'. Others had endeavoured to withdraw from paying the charge when they discovered that they were expected to find the equivalent of seven or eight subsidies, whereas 'to conjoin with the county would not cost one subsidy'.

In respect of Ipswich itself, five specific reasons were given for the town's inability to pay its share of the charge. Firstly, payment for twenty of the town's ships involved in the recent naval expedition was still outstanding, and because of this many of the inhabitants whose finances were tied up in these ships were refusing to pay their part of the charge. Secondly, Ipswich had suffered the loss of a ship worth more than £1000 in the naval expedition. Thirdly, as a result of the stopping of trade during the previous year due to the 'great sickness in London and other parts', at a time when the town's ships were still being taken by the Dunkirkers, 'the Inhabitants were very much Impoverished'. Fourthly, by reason of the continuing halt in the Eastland trade many merchants, clothworkers and others dependent upon the cloth trade were facing 'great hazard of the utter overthrow of their estates'.

Fifthly, and last of all, the chief inhabitants of the town had already recently 'disbursed moneys upon Privy seal'. This refers to the Privy Seal Loans, which had been levied using personal letters sent out by the Privy Council to selected individuals, requesting a loan and giving them terms for repayment.[20] This device had previously been used as a means for raising additional revenue outside of parliament. However, on this occasion the Privy Council sent letters out to all subsidy men, individually assessing them at the equivalent of five subsidies, with no precise terms for repayment. This was, therefore, not a loan but a tax being levied, and severe measures were then taken by the Privy Council to enforce its collection. The decision to raise money in this particular way reflected the king and Privy Council's need to generate revenue without summoning a new parliament, which they were reluctant to do since they feared new attacks upon the conduct of the duke of Buckingham.

In the final paragraph of their petition the bailiffs reiterated the devastating effect the Dunkirkers had had upon the town's shipping, with several ships of great value taken, others lost through shipwreck, and some presently detained in France. The bailiffs also referred to the Eastland trade, which they had previously hoped 'had been but at a stand', but was now due to the Continental wars 'wholly shut up', and the town's merchants had been 'charged presently to lend the King of Sweden £500 at the least'. This refers to the loan of 15,000 rix dollars (approximately £3500) which the Eastland Company had been obliged to give to King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and which they had then, with the permission of the Privy Council, levied amongst their merchant members in London, Hull, Ipswich, Newcastle and York.[21]

The Ipswich petitioners concluded by acknowledging that, notwithstanding all the reasons given by the town for their backwardness in collecting their share of the charge, they were now willingly paying five entire subsidies upon the late loan to the king. This, they hoped, would allow them to be discharged from the full payment of their ship money charge. Ipswich's petition was probably prepared following a visit to the town by a delegation of Privy Councillors to ensure payment of the loan by offering some concessions. As a corporate town, Ipswich would have been well-versed in the process of negotiation with the king and Privy Council, and of agreeing to pay loans and benevolences in order to achieve concessions in other matters. When the town's Assembly met on 9 December 1626 it was agreed that a banquet and a hogshead of wine be bestowed upon the earls of Suffolk and Salisbury at 'their coming to this Town upon Inquiry next upon his Majesties Commission at the Charge of this Town'.[22]

On 14 December 1626 the two earls and Robert Naunton, Privy Councillor and MP for Suffolk, wrote giving instructions in respect of the outstanding monies, stating:

> Whereas diverse of the inhabitants of the Towne of Ipswich & the liberties thereof have not as yet subscribed to the loans whose names my lords & the each of the Commissioners would be very loath to certify them or any of them to be defaulters in this service.[23]

The bailiffs were respectfully requested to collect the rest of the loans and give them to the Commissioners 'with the best speed they may'. Attached to this document is a draft heading for a certificate of the names of defaulters within the town, but with no names entered. There then follows a list of the wards within the town and its liberties with the sums of money due, making a total of £557 13s 4d. It could therefore be suggested that, following the various meetings held within the town between the 12 and 14 December, an understanding had been reached between the two earls, the Commissioners and the bailiffs, that the town governors would ensure that those outstanding subscribers paid their loan contributions, in order that the town would then have a sympathetic hearing of its grievances over the ship money.

The Ipswich bailiffs' difficulties in collecting the ship money charges reflected not only the dire national economic situation that afflicted the coastal towns, but also the scepticism of many counties over the legality of the king's request for them to provide four subsidies to be paid as a benevolence in July 1626.[24] Many felt that the king's action in appealing directly to the counties to raise taxes threatened the requirement of parliament's agreement to national taxation.

Ipswich had experienced difficulties previously with the county leadership in Suffolk when seeking enforcement of the 1596 ship money demand. Then only £200 of the £500 had actually been collected two years later, despite the bailiffs complaining to the Privy Council. Two of the deputy lieutenants from the west of Suffolk, Sir Robert Jermyn and Sir John Higham, were particularly hostile to the demand for the county to contribute to the provision of a ship from Ipswich. In a letter to Lord Burghley, Sir Robert complained of the town 'profiteering in building ships, of unjustly taxing gentlemen who came to live in Ipswich for short periods, and of engrossing corn for export in years of dearth'.[25] The reference to the engrossing of corn possibly refers to the Corporation's policy of purchasing corn to make bread for the poor of the town in times of great hardship. On 21 February 1596 the Assembly agreed that three hundred combs of rye would be bought for the poor, and this arrangement was recorded again on 29 November 1630 when it was agreed to purchase two hundred combs of rye.[26] The Assembly entry noted the agreement for a man to travel to various ports to purchase the corn at his own discretion, and that the charges and 'the loss that shall be made in the sale of the said Corn shall be borne by this Towne'.

The county's hostile suspicion of Ipswich would continue into the seventeenth century, as evidenced by a Remonstrance prepared in April 1627 by the Inhabitants of the County of Suffolk giving reasons why they should not be forced to contribute towards the provision of two ships from the town. It listed thirteen reasons why they should not contribute towards the two ships 'pressed upon the town of Ipswich', and complained about the wealth and privileges that the inhabitants of the Suffolk corporate towns enjoyed:

> They travel not out of their Towns to any Assizes or sessions of the peace. They are not summoned out of their Towns of any juries. They are not called forth by Commissions or other Commandment for his Majesty's service for the benefit of the County but all things are Done at their home dwelling without any great Charge to them, & burden to the County.[27]

Complaint was also made about the Ipswich town governors. Despite being 'great owners and occupiers of lands in the county', they did not contribute to the county's annual charges. Furthermore, men in Ipswich enjoyed 'great annuities and privileges that they have amongst themselves by his Majesty's grant'. Throughout the Remonstrance runs the county's overriding anxiety about the corporate coastal towns' wealth and power, gained through their privileges and independence of action. It was sourly noted that 'there be sundry within the corporate towns that for their gain & yearly commodity can & do get forth three or four ships'. This observation refers to the towns of Aldeburgh, Southwold, Dunwich and Walberswick, which had secured the duke of Buckingham's intervention on their behalf in persuading the king to approve their petition for the provision of an escort of four warships, paid for from their contribution to the 1626 Loan.[28] The four coastal towns' co-operation with the king and Privy Council over the Loan had brought them both favour and concessions in return. This event only confirmed to the county that the leading men within the corporate towns were extremely adept in manipulating the political system.

The most important of the responsibilities of a town's governors was the wellbeing of the people they governed and the enforcement of order and harmony within their community.[29] Members of a corporation were expected to make their orders and regulations through decisions that were reached by discussion and compromise amongst themselves. Consensus had to be reached in such a way as to avoid conflict, which would have drawn the attention of the Crown and Privy Council into the corporation's affairs.[30] All corporations were acutely aware of their direct responsibility to the Crown for the keeping of order within their communities and the satisfactory performance of the tasks expected of them.[31] Unity was paramount in the efficient execution of a corporation's official business. Any corporation showing weakness of division and disunity faced unwelcome attention and interference from both the county and national government.[32] Town governors therefore had an active interest in ensuring that their corporation maintained its dominance over its local community as well as fending off intrusion and interference from outsiders.[33]

In 1626 the Ipswich Corporation had, like the other corporate towns, exploited their connection to the duke of Buckingham, which had been made during his stay in the town the previous year. Buckingham was at that time cultivating close relations with the Puritan circles at Court, Parliament and Cambridge, based upon a common hostility to Spain.[34] He had spent several days in Ipswich, and had attended a sermon preached by the Ipswich Town Preacher Samuel Ward.[35] It has been suggested that the duke's attendance at Ward's sermon was possibly intended to endorse his relationships with the Puritan faction at Court.[36] The duke had been very well received in Ipswich. The town governors had presented him with a banquet costing £12 with £3 4s worth of assorted wines, as well as firing off a salute at his arrival in the town.[37]

Unfortunately for the town governors, there were then two reported incidents in which remarks had been made against Buckingham in Ipswich. The first was in December 1625. The town governors had arrested Francis Baxter, one of the king's Gentleman Ushers, for alleged scandalous speeches about Buckingham, accusing him of 'imputing gross profligacy.[38] The earl of Pembroke had written requesting information from the bailiffs regarding Baxter's arrest. Pembroke's hostility towards Buckingham was well known at this time and, as one of the wealthiest peers in England, he was able to wield his power and prestige in opposition to the duke.[39] The Ipswich town governors had therefore proceeded very carefully where these two peers were concerned. It had been agreed at the town's Assembly on 12 December that two of their number, Mr Edmund Day and Mr Robert Knapp, would travel to the earl with the town's 'narrative and relation enclosed in a letter', and also with a letter to the duke informing him of the situation.[40] Nothing further appears to have been reported about this matter,

suggesting that the town governors had been able to satisfactorily resolve the situation without further damage to their interests.

The second incident reported to the Privy Council in August 1626 of alleged remarks made against Buckingham concerned one of the Ipswich ministers. He was reported to have said in a sermon that:

> The Kingdom have need to pray and that all things do not prosper so well as formerly hath done and that they might so by the breaking up of the Parliament that there something was done by a great person to be the means for the dissolving of ye which if it were or should prove a dishonour to God he wished and desired that God would cut him off in time.

Fortunately for the Ipswich town governors, it was concluded that the minister was 'but a plain man whose tongue had outrun his wit', and the town was cleared of any ill will toward Buckingham.[41] Samuel Ward added his assurances to Buckingham's secretary, Edward Nicholas, in October 1626 when he wrote that the duke should not take notice of the vulgar rumour of 'some malevolent neighbour willing to leave some surmise and cast some aspersion upon the minister'. The purpose of Ward's letter was to introduce the town governors' representative, portman Tobias Blosse, who was seeking an audience with Buckingham. Ward wrote:

> So bold hath your former love made me as to presume of your readiness to gratify our Town in their reasonable suite for which I should not but they will be respectfully thankful.[42]

The timing of this request suggests that the Ipswich town governors were seeking Buckingham's assistance on their behalf in respect of the 1626 Forced Loan, following his intervention on behalf of other Suffolk coastal towns.[43]

The experiences of the king's naval expeditions in the 1620s had convinced Ipswich and other East Coast towns that through petitioning and negotiation came compromise and concessions in other matters. By developing and maintaining connections with influential men in the Privy Council and at Court, the town governors cultivated a direct route to national power and patronage. Ipswich's pursuit of the assistance of the duke of Buckingham provides an example of a corporation adept in entertaining and exploiting a relationship with the important people that passed through its town. However, these actions must have exacerbated the Suffolk county administration's fears over the corporate towns' privileges and independence of action, and, in particular, the Ipswich town governors' adroitness in manipulating the political system to their own best advantage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful to David Allen, Nicholas Amor, and Robert Malster for reading the draft of this article and for their helpful comments and suggestions. Acknowledgements are also due to The British Library, Cambridge University Library, The National Archives, the Albert Sloman Library at the University of Essex, and the Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich branch.

NOTES

1 Cogswell 1989, 107–9.
2 Cogswell 1989, 111–12. It should also be noted that the Infanta's proposed dowry was greater than James I's annual income.
3 Pursell 2002, 703–4.

4 Pursell 2002, 716–18, 720.
5 Cust 2005, 38–39.
6 Russell 1971, 298–99; see also Smith 1999, 111–12. Subsidies were taxes assessed on the value of an individual's annual income (usually from land), the capital value of their movable goods, and wages. Whilst an individual was assessed on all the categories they were liable for, they would only pay on the category that yielded the most tax to the Crown: Schofield 1965, 490–91.
7 Rodger 1998, 356–59.
8 Sharpe 1992, 13–14; MacCulloch 1986, 274–75.
9 TNA, SP16/304/85 and 86.
10 Hebb 1994, 204. The Dunkirkers were also part of the Spanish Monarchy's Flemish fleet, sometimes known as the Flanders flotilla: Stradling, 2003, ix-x. See also Ritsema 2008.
11 Stradling 2003, 59. It has been suggested that this equates to 15–20 per cent of English shipping at this time.
12 TNA, SP16/42/138.
13 TNA, SP16/34/86.
14 TNA, SP16/56/66.
15 SROI, C/4/3/1/5, f. 81 v.
16 TNA, SP16/61/81.
17 TNA, SP16/61/85.
18 TNA, SP16/34/86.
19 TNA, SP16/42/138.
20 Cust 1987, 2–3.
21 Hinton 1959, 14, 70, 73.
22 SROI, C4/3/1/5, fol. 79v.
23 SROI, HD36/A/109.
24 Cust 1987, 2.
25 MacCulloch 1986, 275–78.
26 SROI, C/4/3/1/3, fol. 72r; C/4/3/1/5, fol. 100r. A comb was a dry measure of volume for grain, usually equal to four bushels, but could vary in weight due to the different densities of oats, barley and wheat – see Yaxley 2003, 50.
27 TNA, SP16/60/3.
28 TNA, SP16/42/145.
29 Schilling 1970, 3.
30 Paterson 1998, 6.
31 Schilling 1970, 7–9; Miller 2007, 35.
32 Patterson 1998, 4–5.
33 For examples see Gauci 1996, 23–24, 36; Miller 2006, 1026–29.
34 Willson 1971, 166–67.
35 BL, Harley MS 389, Vol. 1, fol. 506. It was reported that Buckingham arrived on the night of Friday 29 October, 'on Saturday and Sunday the Duke was private and heard Mr Ward preach but on the Monday for 4 days was very Royal at his Inn'.
36 Quintrell 1983, 102.
37 SROI, C/3/3/2/54 (unfoliated). The Chamberlains' Accounts for 1625–1626 list six gallons of claret wine, six gallons of white wine, six gallons of sack, and three of hippocras – 'bestowed upon the Duke of Buckingham's Grace at his being within this town'. Also listed were twelve quires of paper to put powder in 'which was delivered at the Lord Dukes coming to Town' together with the cost of 'bringing the powder from the hospital to the hill'. This entry refers to Christ's Hospital in Ipswich where the gunpowder was stored.
38 TNA, SP16/11/58.
39 Willson 1971, 183.
40 SROI, C/4/3/1/5, fol. 73r.
41 TNA, SP16/33/87.
42 TNA, SP16/38/20. Portman Tobias Blosse was from one of the wealthy Ipswich merchant families and had been bailiff three times. He was also captain of the Ipswich Train Band in the 1620s, and there is a portrait showing Blosse in his captain's uniform in the Colchester and Ipswich Museums' collection at Christchurch Mansion: see Bennett 1989.
43 Buckingham had successfully intervened on behalf of Aldeburgh, Dunwich, Southwold and Walberswick.

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