“Pirates, robbers and other malefactors”

The role played by violence at sea in relations between England and the Hanse towns, 1385 – 1420

Submitted by William Marcus Edward Pitcaithly to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Maritime History, February 2011

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signed:
ABSTRACT

The period 1385 – 1420 was an eventful and significant one in Anglo-Hanseatic relations. At its beginning, the English mercantile presence in the Hanse towns was only a few years old, and no real basis for a trading and diplomatic relationship had been arrived at, when an English act of aggression brought into play the issue of piracy and other violence at sea, which would henceforth be one of vital importance in Anglo-Hanseatic relations; it saw the heyday of several notorious pirates, and new policies for their suppression on both sides of the North Sea. Hitherto these years have been treated in this context only as part of examinations of much longer periods.

I approach the subject thematically, with some chronological divisions within chapters, examining separately violence by English, Hansards, and third parties, non-violent reprisals, regional and social divisions within England and the Hanse, the Vitalienbrüder, the role of the law, and other factors.

This thesis will argue that the impact of specific phenomena, particularly the activities of the Vitalienbrüder, on Anglo-Hanseatic relations has been not only neglected but misunderstood, and that attention to English sources can help flesh out our understanding of the Vitalienbrüder’s history. The thesis will further argue that the most important factor in determining the nature of both violent incidents and the response to them, and the broader tenor of Anglo-Hanseatic relations, was the political and economic rise of the English merchant class in the decades following the Black Death. I propose that the two principal issues in Anglo-Hanseatic relations, reciprocity of resident merchants’ rights and piracy, were inextricably entwined with the fact that the group principally affected by both wielded, in this period, greater political influence
than ever before. Hence, the study of piracy’s role in Anglo-Hanseatic relations is a window into the wider social, political, and economic history of the period.
## CONTENTS

*List of tables*  
p. 6

*Abbreviations*  
p. 7

*Word count*  
p. 7

*Summary*  
p. 9

*Introduction*  
p. 13

**Chapter I:** *Violence committed by Englishmen against Hansards*  
p. 52

**Chapter II:** *Violence committed by Hansards against Englishmen*  
p. 95

**Chapter III:** *Violence committed by or against third parties*  
p. 110

**Chapter IV:** *The Vitalienbrüder*  
p. 137

**Chapter V:** *Internal divisions*  
p. 177

**Chapter VI:** *The role of the law and the courts*  
p. 207

**Chapter VII:** *Non-violent reprisals for violent incidents*  
p. 231

**Chapter VIII:** *Other factors*  
p. 248

**Chapter IX:** *1420 and after*  
p. 274

*Conclusion*  
p. 287

*Appendix*  
p. 296

*Bibliography*  
p. 299