



British Mercantile Trade Statistics, 1662–1809

Collection Summary

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BRITISH MERCANTILE TRADE STATISTICS, 1662–1809

Containing over 47,000 images drawn from files at The National Archives (UK), *British Mercantile Trade Statistics, 1662–1809* charts nearly 150 years of British trade and shipping in remarkable detail. Throughout this period, Britain's increasing naval capabilities and the expansion of lucrative maritime trade networks fuelled significant economic growth. Frequently built upon exploitation and enslaved labour, the establishment of British trading outposts and plantations throughout Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Caribbean laid the foundations for a worldwide empire and secured access to sought after commodities, such as sugar, tobacco, and textiles. This **comprehensive collection includes trade ledgers, registers, and indexes that supply detailed statistical data on trade throughout the “long eighteenth century”**, a pivotal era in the development of British and global commerce.

A key theme can be identified within this period: a growing determination on the part of British governments to record, regulate, and promote maritime trade. The Board of Customs was established in 1671. In 1696, William Culliford was appointed the first Inspector-General of Imports and Exports. The **official records in this collection catalogue the receipt and shipment of goods at ports across England, Scotland, and Wales**. The sources likewise document Britain's balances of trade with other countries and provide information on numerous vessels and their voyages.

This collection also boasts the official registers of “Mediterranean passes”. From 1662 until the early 1820s, these were issued to British ships by the Lord High Admiral. A form of diplomatic passport, supported by a complex treaty system, passes granted immunity from Barbary privateers patrolling the waters of the Mediterranean, as well as those around North Africa, North America, and throughout the West Indies. The pass system thus helped to facilitate Britain's rise to a commercial and maritime power. None of the passes have survived. Thankfully, **the registers detail which vessels were issued passes, their port of embarkation and destinations, as well as additional information on their size, crew, and defences**.

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British Mercantile Trade Statistics, 1662–1809 will appeal to those investigating the colonial, economic, and maritime dimensions of British history throughout this period. It should also interest those exploring broader themes, such as the escalation of global trade and the development of the fiscal-military state. A rich and versatile resource, it forms a natural evidential counterpart to many of BOA's collections relating to the theme of "[Colonialism and Empire](#)".

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