

Bristol Aliens in the 16th Century

Surviving returns for Bristol identify resident alien taxpayers for the 1520s, 1540s, and the period from 1571 to 1590. These returns give the street or ward in which the taxpayer lived, and this information has been plotted on the figures below.

Immediately apparent from these maps is how few aliens were assessed. There seems not to have been any substantial increase in their numbers since the 15th century. Nor was there an alien 'ghetto': the small size of Bristol's alien community hardly allowed for the formation of

a 'foreign quarter' in any case. The origins of these aliens offer few surprises. Most are French (including Bretons) or Dutch (including Flemings and Germans). There are a few interesting exceptions. Simon a Portingall and Anthony Dies were Portuguese, Francis Ryvera either from the Iberian peninsula or Italy, while Francesco Borsa was an Italian. Angeretus Nogay, 'denizen', had presumably acquired a letter of denization from the Crown, giving him approximately the same standing as a native-born English subject, but he



Aliens in Bristol, as recorded in Tudor subsidy returns: the 1520s.

was still noted by the subsidy collectors. A letter of denization from the Crown and a parliamentary act of Naturalisation were the two ways one could become an English subject.

Nogay and Borsa were among the very small number of wealthy Bristol aliens. The spelling of personal names might vary in this period, even for the English-born, and Bristol scribes sometimes mangled foreign names, so it is seldom possible to make a positive identification between those individuals recorded on the subsidy returns and those

appearing in other records, but in a few cases we are able to make reasonably confident identifications, and arrive at basic biographies for some of the city's aliens. Borsa, for example, became a leading member of his parish of All Saints', while the life story of Philip Scapulis, assessed in 1571 and 1581, can be reconstructed to some degree, and yields some fascinating details.



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