

1440 Alien Subsidies

Resource Guide

Medieval England – Context

The Medieval period in England is traditionally viewed as starting after the fall of the Roman Empire in the British Isles at the beginning of the fifth century and ending in 1485 with the defeat of King Richard III, the end of the Wars of the Roses and the beginning of a new Tudor Dynasty.

The British Isles in the Middle Ages:

- England's capital city was London.
- Wales had been under the rule of the English sovereign from the late thirteenth century, and in the later fifteenth century was managed by the Council of Wales usually presided over by the heir to the throne (the Prince of Wales)
- Ireland was under the rule of the English sovereign as Lord of Ireland.
- Scotland was an independent kingdom, under the rule of the Scottish sovereign.
- The Channel Islands, technically still part of the Duchy of Normandy, were ruled as a possession of the English Crown.
- The Isle of Man was a dominion of the English Crown from the fourteenth century.

For more details, see the programme's set text, W.M. Ormord and R. Horrox, *A Social History of England*.

Major migration events in Medieval England:

c.200-c.400	Roman invasion and settlement
c.400-c.1000	Anglo-Saxon and Viking invasion and settlement (<i>for details, see the articles on the VLE</i>)
1066	Norman invasion (<i>for details, see the articles on the VLE</i>)
1290	Jewish expulsion (<i>for details, see the articles on the VLE</i>)
1550	Huguenot and other Protestant, Jewish and Gypsy refugees (<i>for starting information on this later period of history that we will not be covering, see www.huguenotsociety.org.uk/history.html</i>)

Between 1290 and 1550 it would seem that no significant migrations took place. However, while there were no major events, migration did continue at a steady pace for a variety of reasons, including better wages and opportunities in England. As a result of this steady stream of migrants there were periods of tension in England, not dissimilar to tensions felt today. The following time line summarises the key events of the period and responses to immigration:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Monarch</u>	<u>Major Event</u>	<u>Immigration Policy</u>
1307	Edward II		
1327	Edward III		
1337		Beginning of The Hundred Years War	
1348/9		The Black Death	
1377	Richard II		
1381		The Peasants' Revolt	
1399	Henry IV		
1400		Beginning of the Welsh Revolt	
1413	Henry V		Oath of Fealty – Welsh
1415		End of the Welsh Revolt	
1422	Henry VI		
1436			Oath of Fealty – subjects of the Duke of Burgundy
1440			First Alien Subsidy – all non-native born residents
1453		End of the Hundred Years War	
1455		Beginning of the Wars of the Roses	
1461	Edward IV		
1470-1	<i>Henry VI</i>		
1471	Edward IV		
1483	Edward V		
1483	Richard III		
1485	Henry VII		
1487		End of the Wars of the Roses	Last Alien Subsidy
1509	Henry VIII		

The Fifteenth Century

The focus of this guide is on immigration policy in England in the Fifteenth Century. This was a century of political unrest, with the Hundred Years War between France and England, and the Wars of the Roses, dynastic wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster. The Hundred Years War, a series of battles and campaigns fought over English controlled territory in France, had begun during Edward III's reign in the previous century, and ceased in 1453. The crown changed hands nine times between 1399 and 1485, but only twice without contention, and the dynastic feuding was stopped only with the defeat and death of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth and the assumption of the throne by Henry VII, starting a new Tudor dynasty.

The population of England was very small in the fifteenth century. The Great Famine of 1315-21 and the Black Death of 1348-9, together with subsequent outbreaks of plague, meant that the population fell by anything up to a half, to around 2.75 million people by the late 1370s. The population then remained more or less static for a hundred years or more, and only began to show clear signs of recovery in the sixteenth century. The resulting changes to the economy led to social unrest and changes in the social order, with a new class of prosperous peasants emerging and a new importance of the town and trade. International trade bloomed during the late Medieval Period, and, during the fifteenth century, England enjoyed profits from a successful wool and cloth trade to Europe. Exotic products such as spices and fabrics from Africa and the Middle East became increasingly commonplace in English markets. The Church remained central to everyday life, although the troubles which would later lead to the Protestant Reformation were already beginning to emerge. Advances in technology and thinking helped manifest the beginnings of the Renaissance in fifteenth century Italy, with shock waves all over Europe, and in 1492, Columbus discovered the Americas.

The 1440 Alien Subsidy: Introduction

What was the 1440 alien subsidy?

In 1440, the English Parliament levied a tax on 'aliens' (non-native born people residing in England). This alien subsidy was the beginning of a series of taxes levied upon first-generation immigrants into England during the second half of the fifteenth century, and are unique in both English and European history.

Why did the alien subsidy happen?

During the 1430s, a string of military and diplomatic setbacks in the Hundred Years War with France had seen a growth in tensions between the native population and 'foreigners' living and trading in England. Parliament had even been presented with a series of anti-alien petitions, and in 1436, the author of the treatise *The Libelle of Englysche Polycye* had proposed the imposition of massive restrictions on the freedoms of aliens within the realm.

These concerns came to a head in the Parliament of 1439-40, when actions were finally taken against what were seen by many as an often unwelcome and even potentially dangerous group within English society. Measures were first taken against the activities of foreign merchants trading in England, designed to counter the feeling that the nation's wealth was disappearing overseas and the belief that aliens resident in England possessed greater wealth than native-born people, but were not being taxed proportionately.

Who had to pay the alien subsidy, and what did they pay?

The final session of Parliament in January and February 1440 agreed that a tax should also be paid by all non-native born people residing in England over twelve years of age. This was payable at two different rates: 'householders' (generally artisans, tradesmen and other relatively settled people) were to pay 16d. (pence) each per year, while 'non-householders' (mainly servants, apprentices, agricultural and general labourers or other migrant workers) were to pay 6d. per year.

Did any non-native person avoid the tax?

Exemptions were relatively few:

- Welshmen
- Alien women married to English or Welsh husbands
- Alien wives of alien husbands were not explicitly exempt, but while they are often found recorded with their husbands in the returns, they were not generally charged.
- Anyone who had purchased letters of denization from the crown
Letters of denization were issued by the Crown from the 1370s onwards. Recipients would pay a fee and take an oath of allegiance to the Crown, and in return were to be treated and considered in the same way as any English subject born within the realm.
- Members of religious orders, though not priests, chaplains or other parish clergy.

How was the tax assessed and collected?

Assessment was to be conducted by the Justices of the Peace (JPs), who were to return the names of those liable to pay to the Exchequer, which would then issue lists to the relevant sheriff or civic officials, ordering them to collect the tax. They used juries made up of local men to identify the alien residents in their area.

A jury was not formed as it is today. There was no fixed number of jurors on a jury, which could number far more than twelve men. It usually consisted of local men who were well respected in their community and had a good knowledge of their community.

The tax was originally to be collected in two annual instalments, payable at Easter and Michaelmas (29 September), but in most areas these were soon combined into a single annual payment, assessed and collected as and when the officials decided.

How long did the taxation policy on aliens last?

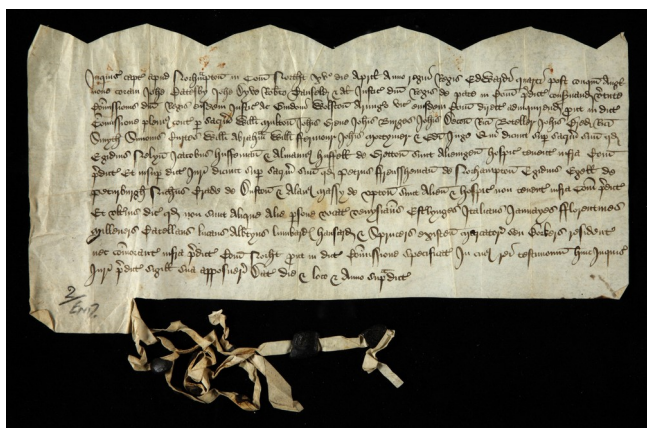
The 1440 alien subsidy was to be collected for three years, but it was decided that the tax should continue, and in 1442 a second parliamentary grant extended the tax for a further two years. The rates applied and the collection process remained relatively unchanged, but exemptions were quickly broadened specifically to include the Irish and the Channel Islanders, both of whom had protested successfully that, as subjects of the English king, they should not be liable. The tax continued to be renewed and revived sporadically until 1487, but significantly the enthusiasm for the collection of the tax diminished very quickly, and very few people contributed to these later payments. This is what makes the 1440 alien subsidy records so important, as they form the most comprehensive national assessments of the immigrant population in England.

Summary

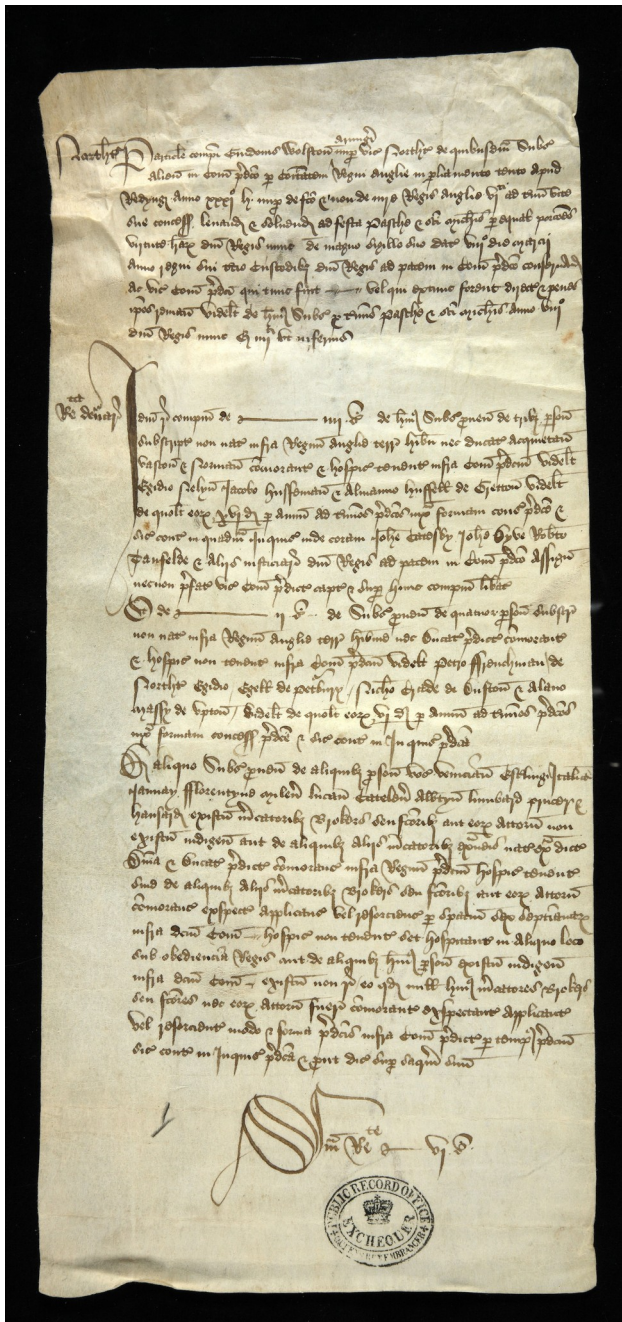
The alien subsidies were the first attempt to take account of the immigrant population, something which would not happen again until the first full census in Great Britain in 1801. In this regard they give an unprecedented and indispensable view of immigration in medieval England, and mark an important milestone in the history of British immigration.

The 1440 Alien Subsidy: The Sources

The process of levying and collecting the alien subsidy left a large paper trail for the historian to utilise in many different ways. Assessment documents survive at The National Archives for most English counties, and provide a rich source of information on the individuals assessed to pay, although the level of detail varies considerably from place to place. No specific instructions were given to local officials about what they should record, and thus the records produced varied considerably in their content and form, showing that attitudes towards immigrants and the alien subsidy varied across England.



This document is an inquisition, which lists the names of people identified as aliens by the jury, which is also listed.



This document is a particulars of account, which summarises how many aliens were assessed to be in one place, and how many were householders and how many were non-householders. This was sent as a fair copy to the Exchequer with the inquisition for it to be recorded in an account roll.

A remarkably full picture of the alien tax-paying population across the country in 1440 can be compiled using a combination of the above records and the Exchequer's account rolls summarising the tax collection, showing that over 17,275 individuals were assessed in that year, roughly 6,900 householders and around 10,400 non-householders, as well as the geographical distribution within counties, nationality, occupations, gender and social status and of the alien population. They provide an unparalleled source for the study of England's immigrant population across this period, and give historians of England a unique insight into the size and breadth of that population, on both a local and a national scale.

The 1440 Alien Subsidy: What information does it hold?

The information contained in these tax returns, together with details from a variety of other records, has been entered into a highly-searchable database by the England's Immigrants project, and is now freely available at www.englishimmigrants.com. This database allows users to analyse this information in a huge number of ways, and has a powerful search facility, allowing users to search the data using fields such as personal name, date, place of residence, nationality, town or country of origin, occupation or social status.

Information by County or City

Examining the data by county is a good way of beginning to understand the medieval immigrant population. The historic counties and their borders were often quite different from how they are today, with counties like Westmorland and Huntingdonshire having since been incorporated into neighbouring counties. The Cinque Ports, a series of coastal towns in Kent and Sussex, originally formed for military and trade purposes, were also administered and taxed separately from the rest of their counties.

Returns do not survive for all parts of England. For example, there are no surviving records from the towns of Hull or Coventry and the figures for large parts of Lincolnshire do not survive. Also, no data is available for Durham and Chester, as they were palatine counties, jurisdictionally separate and outside the usual system of parliamentary taxation.

Palatine counties were areas which had been granted special jurisdictional privileges, with various freedoms from crown control. The County Palatine of Durham, controlled by the bishops of Durham, and the County Palatine of Chester, ruled by the earls of Chester, were the greatest of these, with the most extensive privileges, and even though Chester had by this period reverted to the Crown, it retained its autonomous status. Lancashire was also a County Palatine, though with rather fewer privileges, but while it was not exempt from this tax, collection was practically non-existent.

Below is demographic data of resident immigrants in the 1440 subsidy by county:

County	Count
Bedfordshire & Buckinghamshire	507
Cambridgeshire	235
Cheshire	-
Cornwall	318
Cumberland	309
Derbyshire	68
Devon	675
Dorset	758
Durham	-

Essex	422
Gloucestershire	958
Hampshire	1127
Herefordshire	58
Hertfordshire	319
Huntingdonshire	77
Kent	1777
Lancashire	5
Leicestershire	97
Lincolnshire	438
London	1835
Middlesex	661
Norfolk	282
Northamptonshire	349
Northumberland	684
Nottinghamshire	108
Oxfordshire and Berkshire	710
Rutland	26
Shropshire	72
Somerset	377
Staffordshire	178
Suffolk	497
Surrey and Sussex	1472
Warwickshire	165
Westmorland	105
Wiltshire	477
Worcestershire	124
Yorkshire	1109

Information about nationality

Despite there being no clear instructions to the assessors, many of the original subsidy returns include details of the nationalities of individual taxpayers, and this information can be extremely useful to historians. Most are relatively clear and straightforward, such as 'French', 'Irish' or 'Scot', but many are more complicated, and some are difficult to interpret. The England's Immigrants database has therefore attempted to standardise these terms wherever possible, and has added in nationalities wherever possible based on states or towns of origin, or other information such as 'surnames' like 'Frenchman' or 'Brabanter'. This will allow more accurate analysis of the data by anyone interested in the origins of immigrants into England.

Information about occupations

Many of the surviving records also included details of the occupations of the assessed taxpayers, and this information also provides a fascinating insight into the alien population in medieval England. It is important to note that the tax only applied to *resident* immigrants, so the large numbers of foreign merchants who were trading in the ports and markets of England's towns and cities do not generally appear here. It is also notable that over 75% of the immigrants recorded with occupations in 1440 were servants, a very broad term which hides a wide variety of people and roles. Many were servants to English masters, while others were servants to alien masters, and this term did not necessarily mean a domestic servant, but could just as easily mean someone assisting a craftsman with their work.

What do they tell us about male and female migrants?

The analysis of the gender of those assessed for the alien subsidy gives an unusually good perspective on the female population in particular, who often go unrecorded in the records of the medieval period. It is important to note that single alien women were liable to pay the subsidies. Many women appear in the database, especially from the early years of the tax, and predominantly as domestic servants or workers for specific masters. Alien women married to English or Welsh men were explicitly exempt from the tax, so do not appear. Alien women married to alien men were not exempt, but they were not charged, yet many assessors still noted the names of alien wives alongside those of their alien husbands, and hence many appear in the database. However, some of the returns just recorded the alien man 'and his wife' (meaning that many women appear in the database with no forename, just the husband's surname), and others did not record marital status at all. Recording of wives declined over the course of the subsidy, and so the 1440 subsidy provides by far the best impression we have of the gender of the immigrants in medieval England.

Closer investigation of the resource

What enquiry questions can we ask of the data we have available? The following case study intends to give some examples of the questions we as academics have asked of the data. They provide a close focus on specific areas of the data, but there are going to be many wider questions that you may want to ask of the whole data, such as:

- How many foreigners were in England (or a specific county) at a particular time?
- Where did they come from?
- What were they doing in England (or a specific county)?
- What can their story tell us about our own history?
- What can we learn about social structure and/or attitudes (such as economic change, religion or gender)?

- What can migration tell us about major events such as the Hundred Years War, the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt?

Aliens in Hampshire in 1440 – an example case study

One way in which we can start to answer these questions is by looking at one county as a case study. The county of Hampshire is a particularly rich example, since it not only contains the major port of Southampton and the important city of Winchester, but also large rural areas which were remarkably well populated by non-English born residents.

For an 'academic' analysis of the county of Hampshire for the whole of the alien subsidy period, see the paper by Jessica Lutkin in Hampshire Studies (2015)

The Hampshire return for 1440 recorded the names of 1127 immigrants living there, the third-largest of any single administrative unit after Kent and London.. Below is a table of the numbers by place of residence in Hampshire, which uses the historic administrative unit, the 'hundred'.

Hundreds were first implemented by the Saxons, and were so called probably because the land was enough to provide for 100 households. They remained for judicial and military purposes until 1894.

Where they lived across the county:

Place of Residence	Count
Southampton	145
Winchester	81
King's Somborne hundred	68
Titchfield hundred	44
Winchester Soke	37
Thorngate hundred	32
Portsdown hundred	32
Andover hundred	31
Christchurch hundred	29
Finchdean hundred	25
Buddlesgate hundred	22
Basingstoke hundred	22
Alton hundred	22
Mainsbridge hundred	20
Bishop's Waltham hundred	20
Evingar hundred	16
Fawley hundred	11
Bosmere hundred	11
Fordingbridge hundred	10

Micheldever hundred	9
Meonstoke hundred	9
New Forest hundred	8
Redbridge hundred	7
Odiham hundred	7
Bermondspit hundred	7
Ringwood hundred	5
Chuteley hundred	5
Barton Stacey hundred	5
Kingsclere hundred	4
Holdshot hundred	4
Wherwell hundred	3
Selborne hundred	3
Overton hundred	3
Hambledon hundred	3
Pastrow hundred	2
Bountisborough hundred	2
West Medina hundred	1
East Medina hundred	1
<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>361</i>

Immigrants were most numerous in Southampton and Winchester, though those two places made up just 34% of the county's immigrant population who have their residence recorded. The other 66% lived in the small towns and villages of the rest of the county, a fact that has potentially important implications for the study of the immigrant population at this time. Traditional studies have focussed on the main industrial areas, such as ports like Southampton, while the evidence for Hampshire (and many other counties) suggests that a large proportion of resident immigrants were living in more rural communities.

The occupations of Hampshire's alien population:

One of the reasons why immigrants may have settled in the more rural areas of Hampshire was its cloth trade. Southampton's economy had a revival in the fifteenth century, spurred on by trade through the port, before it was overshadowed by London's pre-eminence in the early sixteenth century. While this had a great influence on the residence of some of its immigrants, there were also other areas of manufacture and trade which drew in immigrants.

Romsey, a borough in King's Somborne Hundred, was a centre for the cloth trade and of the eight resident immigrants identified as living there in 1440, two were identified as weavers. Nicholas Wyse and John Fernell were both assessed as householders but unfortunately, as is often the case for the 1440 assessment, neither of their nationalities was recorded. It was also noted that Nicholas Wyse had a servant, named Michael, who was also assessed to pay

the alien subsidy. There were 9 weavers in total assessed in Hampshire in 1440, though this was by no means the most prevalent occupation for an immigrant in Hampshire at that time.

Occupation	Count
Servant	605
Labourer	26
Weaver	9
Merchant	5
Carpenter	3
Baker	3
Tinker	1
Souter (shoemaker)	1
Skinner	1
Scholar	1
Parish clerk	1
Millward	1
Husbandman	1
Chaplain	1
Butcher	1
<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>467</i>

The table above shows that 91% of those occupations recorded was 'servant'. Some were recorded as being servants of other aliens, while the larger portion were servants to native Englishmen and institutions.

The nationalities in Hampshire's alien population:

93 out of 1127 individuals have their origin positively identified in the records in 1440. While this may seem a low number, it offers a good indication of the national groups living in the county.

The majority were French, who were widely dispersed throughout the county, rather than settling as a group in one place, as Italians did later in the fifteenth century in Southampton. There are many more in the records whose name suggests their nationality, though none was recorded, such as Martin Florens, assessed in King's Somborne hundred, or Thomas German, a weaver assessed in Mainsbridge hundred, both in July 1440.

A comparison of male and female aliens living in Hampshire:

Examining the data further, it can be seen that the vast majority of Hampshire and Southampton's recorded resident aliens were male. 92% (1,043) of those assessed for the tax were male, with only 8% (83) being female (one person's gender was unrecorded). Of these women, fifty-five were servants, while seven are identified as wives of alien husbands.

The 1440 Alien Subsidies: Understanding the bias of the material

'Absence of evidence isn't evidence of absence.'

All sources are biased, and in turn resources highlighting a source are likewise biased. The database, and the evidence of the 1440 subsidy, provide just a snapshot of certain information. Our discussion of the data from 1440 alone has its own bias, as it provides the most comprehensive and complete dataset compared to other years. Yet it still has its limitations, and the roots of these limitations lie in the way the tax was assessed and collected:

- People identified as aliens were done so by local juries, so it was only the opinion of a group of men (and only men) with what was believed to be a good knowledge of the area. So when a juror in Buckinghamshire called Thomas Fyssher could only identify his neighbour as a certain Irish tailor living next door to him, questions can be raised as to the reliability of this information.

Modern censuses are carried out in a targeted way, door to door or at least through postal addresses. Even these have to rely on the honesty of the interviewee. Advanced students could be posed the conundrum of just how reliable a census is, either now or in the past. How has the information been collected? Is it consistently done? Who is collecting the information? Why is the information being gathered?

- The information was gathered by Englishmen who were not required to do any more than provide the most basic of information. Some were more thorough in their task than others, and some were more honest than others. There are specific pieces of information that were down to the opinions of these men:
 - Choice of name: many of the names have been Anglicised, some to the extent of which they have probably been changed altogether by an Englishman who could neither pronounce nor spell a foreign name. We therefore have to view the names with a great deal of scepticism.
 - Understanding of nationality: the idea of nationality was still in its infancy, and national borders were not fixed as they are today. Many assessors chose not to identify nationality at all, as it was not required, while others put their own interpretation on what they thought a person's nationality was. We therefore have to view the nationalities with a great deal of scepticism too.
- The inclusion of alien women married to alien men is hit or miss. Some areas therefore look much more populated with women than others, when this was not necessarily the case. Again, it all boiled down to whether the jury was interested in having this information recorded.