

1752.

R E P O R T

U P O N T H E

P E T I T I O N S

Relating to the

M A N U F A C T U R E

O F

H A T S.

R E P O R T

UPON THE

PETITIONS relating to the MANUFACTURE of HATS.

THE Committee, to whom the Petition of the Manufacturers, and others concerned in the Making and Vending of Beaver Hats, and Hats made of Coneys-wool, Goats-wool, and other Materials, whose Names are there underwritten, on behalf of themselves, and the rest of the said Trade in *Great-Britain*; and also the Petition of the Manufacturers, and others concerned in the Making and Vending of Beaver Hats, and Hats made of Coneys-wool, Goats-wool, and other Materials, in and near the City of *Chester*, whose Names are there underwritten, on behalf of themselves, and the rest of the said Trade in *Great Britain*; and also the Petition of the Manufacturers, and others concerned in the Making and Vending of Beaver Hats, and Hats made of Coneys-wool, and other Materials, in the Town and Neighbourhood of *Manchester*, in the County of *Lancaster*, whose Names are there underwritten, on behalf of themselves, and the rest of the said Trade in *Great-Britain*; were referred; have, pursuant to the Order of the House, examined the Matter of the said several Petitions; a State whereof is as follows:

In order to shew, that the Art of making Hats hath arrived to great Perfection in this Kingdom; and that considerable Quantities have been heretofore exported; the Agent for the Petitioners called

Mr. *James Rossiter*, Hat-maker: Who said, That the making Beaver Hats in *England* hath arrived at very great Perfection; and that, about Twenty Years ago, our Hats were in greater Reputation abroad than the *French* Hats, or any other; but that of late the *French* Hats are in greater Credit than ours: That he had employed *French*, *Germans*, and *Swiss*; but he esteems *Englishmen* the best Workmen:

That the Reason the *French* Hats are now in greater Credit than ours, is, There is a great Manufactory set

up in *France*; and the Manufacturers there can get Beaver-wool for 18 s. a Pound, that we give 32 s. for, and which formerly used to be at 13 or 14 s. a Pound; by which means they can use more Beaver, and consequently make their Commodity better, at the Price, than we can do:

That he had been concerned in exporting Hats upwards of Thirty Years; and has exported small Parcels to all Parts of *Europe*, but principally to *Spain* and *Portugal*, to the annual Amount of Eight or Ten thousand Pounds: That this Trade used to be very advantageous to the Publick; for that, in the House whereto he belonged, they used sometimes to employ 100 poor Persons.

Mr. *Henry Butler*, Hat-maker, said, He had been concerned in exporting Beaver Hats upwards of Twenty Years: That he formerly exported them to *Spain*, *Portugal*, *Holland*, *Germany*, and all up the *Streights*, and sometimes to *France*, to the Amount, in the Whole, of from Four to Six thousand Pounds *per Annum*; the Beaver in which was worth Two thousand Pounds: That he speaks to all sorts of Hats; but that the major Part of them had Beaver in them, more or less:

That, in this Trade, he used to employ near an Hundred Persons; and that now he does not employ above Fifty or Sixty, having lost the *Dutch* Trade, on account of the Dearness of Materials; That the Witness is acquainted with the State of the Trade in general; and that it is upon the Decline, and has been so these Two Years, owing to the Dearness of our Materials, particularly Beaver:

That there are several Manufactories of Hats set up abroad; particularly a very great one in *France*, which, of all others, is the most prejudicial to us, as the *French* now buy Beaver for Six Shillings a Pound, upon

the Pelt, for which we give Eleven Shillings; and consequently they under-sell us at Foreign Markets.

Mr. *William Estcutt*, Hat-maker, said, That he had been in Business about Twenty-five Years, and had exported Hats to *Holland, Portugal, Spain, and Leghorn*: That he used to export from Four to Six thousand Pounds Value *per Annum*; but that our Foreign Trade is upon the Decline, and has been so since the Conclusion of the Peace; and the Dearthness of Beaver is the principal Cause:

That the *French* out-work us, as they have their Materials (particularly Beaver) cheaper than we; and, by that means, they make their Manufactures finer than ours, as they can afford to put more Beaver in them.

That Beaver-wool is Thirty-two Shilling a Pound, which (except the last Year, when it was from Forty to Fifty Shillings a Pound) is much the same Price it has been at these Two or Three Years; but that, about ten Years ago, the Average Price was from Sixteen to Twenty Shillings a Pound; and that, in a Hat worth Seven Shillings, at the Price Beaver now is, the Manufacturers can't afford to make use of any:

That the Witness had Advice, the latter End of last Summer, from his Correspondent in *France*, That the Price of Beaver-wool there was from Sixteen to Eighteen Shillings a Pound; and at that time it sold here, at the *Hudson's Bay* Sale, from Forty to Fifty Shillings; nor could the Manufacturers get it at that Price, Foreigners buying it from them; and it is to Foreigners being allowed to buy it, that the Witness attributed the Rise:

That the Reason of its Rise within these Three or Four Years, is owing to the small Importation and the large Exportation thereof; for that, in general, the Importation is less, as well from *Hudson's Bay*, as from other Places:

That Beaver is exported to *Holland* and *Flanders*; but that, if the Exportation was prohibited, we should be the Manufacturers of Hats for those Places.

Mr. *Richard Crafton*, Hatter, said, That he had been concerned in exporting Beaver Hats, on his own Account, about Ten Years; and with his Father, before that time, Seven or Eight Years: That he used to export them to *Holland, France, Leghorn, Spain, and Portugal*, to the Amount of about Four thousand Pounds *per Annum*; but that the Trade of the House in which he is concerned, is considerably on the Decline, and has been so these Six Years; and at present they don't export One-half of what they did:

That several Manufactures have been set up abroad; particularly a very great one in *France*, which is the Manufactory that affects our Trade the most; and the principal Reason why the *French* Manufactory affects our Trade the most, is, They have their Beaver much cheaper than we, and, by that means, under-sell us at Foreign Markets: That Parchment Beaver has advanced here, within these Two Years, upwards of 75 *per Cent.*; that in *France* it is from 6*s.* to 6*s.* 6*d.* a Pound, upon the Skin; and here, the last *November* Sale, it was 11*s.* or thereabouts: and the *March* Sale before that, it was upwards of Sixteen Shillings:

That the Manufacturers here mix Beaver with other Materials, upon account of the Fineness of the Goods, as well as the Colour; and the excessive Price of Beaver

has obliged them to put less of it in the Hats, and consequently make them worse:

That, the last *March* Sale, the Price of Parchment Beaver was, upon an Average, about 16*s.* a Pound, and Coat Beaver 7*s.* 3*d.*; and, at the last *November* Sale, the Parchment Beaver was about 11*s.* and the Coat Beaver then about 8*s.*:

That he believed, upon an Average, rather more than Half the Coat Beaver imported is again exported, and all the Cubs, and most of the Parchment.

And being asked, How he knew what Quantity of Beaver was exported? he said, That there were some Brokers, who, he apprehended, always bought for Exportation; and from the Quantity they bought he formed his Judgment.

Then Mr. *Roffeter* was asked, What the Price of Coat Beaver was in 1745? He said, it was about 4*s.* 6*d.* a Pound.

Mr. *Crafton* said, That the Importation of Coat Beaver is not above One Quarter of the Importation of Parchment; and that Coat Beaver is never used but in Hats:

That the Average Price of Hats, usually exported from his House is about 9*s.* apiece; and, when Beaver is cheap, he puts in such a Hat about an Ounce and Half, besides about Four Ounces of Coney-wool, and other Materials.

Mr. *Thomas Lawford*, Hat-maker, being examined, said, That he was bred in the greatest House for the Exportation of Hats in *Europe*: That his Master traded up the Straights, and, he believed, did not export thither so little as 12,000*l.* worth in a Year; but that he speaks to Twenty Years ago; and at that time they used to employ about 120 or 130 of all Sorts of People: And, upon Inquiry, he does not find any of that Trade here now.

Captain *Richard Pridie* said, He had carried Hats to *Cadiz*, some in the Year 1749, worth from 8*s.* to 18*s.* 6*d.* apiece; and was forced to bring them back, tho' he offered them at prime Cost; and the Reason he could not dispose of them was, that the *French* Hats were 10 or 15 *per Cent.* better than his, even at prime Cost; but that this was the only time he ever carried Hats to sell at *Cadiz*.

Mr. *Roffeter* said, The Reason of the Advance of the Price of Beaver was owing to the great Demand for Exportation, and also the Decrease of the Importation: That he apprehended one Reason of the great Demand for Exportation of Beaver, from hence was, That the *French* prohibited the Exportation of Beaver from thence; so that this was the only Market for Foreigners: Another Reason was, That there is an Encouragement of a Drawback of 4*d.* $\frac{4}{12}$ on each Skin; and that the Duty on each Skin is 7*d.* $\frac{1}{2}$; and that the Duty and Drawback are the same on a Cub's Skin as on a full-grown Skin, altho', upon an Average, Two Cubs Skins don't weigh One full-grown Skin: So that, in Effect, the Drawback is double on Cubs-wool, to what it is on the Wool of a grown Skin: And this, the Witness said, he apprehended, was the Reason, why Foreigners always gave a larger Price, in proportion, for Cubs than grown Skins, tho' the Quality of the Wool of a Cub is not so good as the Wool of a grown Skin:

That,

That, if the Drawback was taken off, he imagined Cubs would not be bought for Exportation; and that would leave a larger Quantity of Beaver in the Market, and, of Consequence, somewhat lower the Price to Manufacturers:

That he had heard, That, in the Year 1749, the Quantity of Beaver imported into *France*, upon the Skin, was 200,000 Pounds Weight; and that Beaver is prohibited from being exported from thence under very severe Penalties; and That, the Witness said, he apprehended, was another Cause of the Decrease of our Trade, as the *French* bought it at Seven Livres and a Half a Pound upon the Skin in the Year 1749, when at the same Time it was here upwards of Sixteen Shillings; and that they can buy Beaver at any Time, and in any Quantity they please, when we are confined to the Sales of the *Hudson's Bay* Company, which are only twice a Year, and to a small Quantity that comes from *New York*: It is to this, together with the Difference in the Price of Labour, he attributes the *French* being able to under-sell us: And that he had received frequent Advices from abroad, that we were in Danger of losing our whole Export Trade: And he said, We have already lost the *Cadiz* Trade:

That, in his own Export Trade only, he consumed 600 Pounds of Beaver Wool annually; but that, if Beaver here was at the Price it used to be, and now is in *France*, he should be able to extend his Export Trade to three Times what it is at present, and, consequently, consume a much larger Quantity of Beaver, and Cooney-wool also:

That formerly he had large Orders for Beaver Hats, from 25 to 27s. apiece, for Exportation; and had exported 1000 such in a Year: But that Trade is now entirely lost, and in the Hands of the *French*.

Mr. *Estcutt*, being again examined, was asked, To what Cause he attributed the advanced Price of Beaver here? He informed your Committee, That, as this was the only Market open to Foreigners (the *French* prohibiting Beaver from being exported), it was that, together with the Diminution of the Importation into *England*, and the great Demand for Exportation, he looked upon to be the Cause of the great Advance of the Price of Beaver: And that, he apprehended, the Reason of the great Demand of Beaver for Exportation was owing to several Manufacturies set up abroad, which take a great deal from our Market, and to a great Quantity exported to *Russia* for Cloaths, and to the Drawback allowed on Exportation; and that there is the same Drawback on a Cub as on a grown Beaver, which makes almost the Whole of the Cubs exported:

That the Wool of a Cub is not quite half so much as that of a grown Beaver; so that the Drawback on the Cubs-wool is above double to that on the grown Beaver:

That, if the Drawback was taken off, he thinks it would lessen the Exportation of Beaver, as by that means all the Cubs would be left in the Market, and, consequently, would somewhat lower the Price of Beaver: That, if Beaver was at the Price it used to be, he should use more than triple the Quantity he now does in his Trade.

And being asked, If the Price of *New York* Beaver had not risen of late? he said, It always rises in proportion to the *Hudson's Bay* Beaver, though it is not so good in Quality:

That he was informed by his Correspondent in *France*, that there were annually imported thither, by their *Ca-*

nada Company, 120 or 130,000 Skins of Parchment-beaver; which, as it is prohibited to be exported from thence, he looked upon as another Cause of the great Demand for Exportation from hence:

That the Witness desired his Correspondent to let him know the Price of Beaver in *France*, at the Time Beaver was sold here at 16s. a Pound; and he was then informed it was sold in *France* from 6s. to 6s. 6d. a Pound: This was in *October* 1750, and it continued so for Nine Months; which, he said, was a Demonstration to him that no Beaver was exported from *France* in that Time:

That the *French* Manufacturers have the Advantage of buying Beaver at any Time, and in any Quantity they please, of their *Canada* Company; and that we can only buy it of the *Hudson's Bay* Company twice in a Year.

That he believed the Company sold all their Beaver at those two Sales; yet, nevertheless, he thought the *French* had the Advantage of us, as they can always buy a Lot at a Time: That the *French East India* Company fix the Price of their Beaver from Five to Seven Livres a Pound; which Price continued for Nine Months the last Year.

And being asked, If a fair publick Sale is not the likeliest Way to find the Value of a Commodity? he said, No doubt but it was.

And being asked, If the *Hudson's Bay* Company were to fix a Price on their Beaver, it would not be for the Benefit of the Manufacturers? he said, He thought it would, if it was a moderate Price.

And being asked, If at a publick Sale there was any such thing as a Person keeping up the Price of a Commodity? he said, No doubt but there was; and there was scarce One publick Sale without it: And that he thought, if the Exportation of Beaver was prohibited here, it would not bear the Price it does.

And being asked, If the *Hudson's Bay* Company were to fix a Price on Beaver, at 100 per Cent. Profit to themselves, it would be so dear as at present? he said, He thought not; for he believed they got above 100 per Cent.

He was then asked, If he thought they got 50 per Cent. exclusive of all Expences? He said, He believed they did; and that if the Exportation of Beaver was prohibited here, it certainly would not bear the same Price it now does: But he could not tell whether, if the Price was reduced, we should have the same Quantity from *New York* we now have; yet he thinks, if we had Beaver as cheap as they have in *France*, we could under-sell the *French* at Foreign Markets, notwithstanding the Difference of the Price of Labour:

That formerly we used to export Beaver Hats of 27s. apiece; but that very few of that Price are exported now; and that if Hats of the same Quality were made now, they would cost near 40s. apiece:

That the Witness has had frequent Advices from abroad, that we are in Danger of losing our Export Trade; and that he feels it very sensibly, having lost great Part of his own:

That he attributes the Loss of our Export Trade in general to the high Price of Beaver; for, with the fine Hats, we used to send coarse ones; and now the coarse Trade is lost with the fine:

That

That the Price of Labour is much the same of late as it had been some time; and he did not think the Number of Hat-makers had greatly increased: That there were indeed a greater Number at *Manchester* than usual; but that they are gone from other Places to fix there.

Mr. *John Butler*, Clerk of the Hatters Company, said, He had been Clerk of the Company Seven Years: That the Jurisdiction of the Company reached Ten Miles round *London*; and within these Limits none but a free Hatter can work, if the Company please: That no Hatter, though free, can have above Two Apprentices at a time; and he has known Persons prosecuted for working within the Limits of the Company's Jurisdiction; and upon that they have been convicted; and that no Person, not being a Freeman, can work as a Journeyman, even with a free Hatter: yet, he said, That, though this is the Law, it is sometimes winked at: That one *Duffield* was prosecuted, and convicted, for working within the Company's Jurisdiction; and said, He believed, if the Company were informed of any Person working within the said Limits, they would order him to be prosecuted: That he spoke in relation to the Master Hatters, and not to the Journeymen, though there is a Penalty on both: The Penalty on the Journeyman being 20 s. a Month, and on the Master who employs him 5 l. a Month.

Mr. *Escutt*, being asked, if it would not be of Benefit to the Trade, if the Penalty was taken off? he said, he believed it would; but he did not think the Freeman desired to have it taken off: That, at present, he himself employs Six Foreigners to One Freeman; and that, in general, more Foreigners than Freeman are employed; and he does not hear of any Prosecutions likely to issue on that Account.

Then the Agent for the Petitioners observed to your Committee.

That, by the Accounts laid before your Committee, from the Commissioners of the Customs, it appeared, That from *Christmas 1729.* to *Christmas 1739.* there were annually imported, upon a Medium, 86,063 Skins.

And that the annual Exportation, in that time, was 32,294 Skins:

So that there remained in the Market, for the Use of the Manufacturers, annually on a Medium, during these Ten Years, 35,769 Skins.

And from *Christmas 1739.* to *Christmas 1749.* the annual Importation, upon a Medium, was 63,510 Skins:

And the annual Exportation, on a Medium, was 34,441 Skins:

So that there remained in the Market, for the Manufacturers annually, for these last Ten Years, upon a Medium, only 29,069 Skins.

The Difference between the Quantity at Market, during the first Ten Years, and the last Ten Years, is annually, upon a Medium, 24,700 Skins.

The Importation in the Year 1750. was 62,043 Skins, and the Exportation 35,393; so that there only remained for the Use of the Manufacturers, in the Year 1750. 26,650 Skins.

From which it appeared, that there remained annually, for the Use of the Manufacturers, from *Christmas 1729.* to 1739. on an Average, more than twice as many as remained in the Year 1750.

And, by an Account of Beaver-wool exported, it appeared, that from *Christmas 1729.* to *Christmas 1739.* only 8,008 Pounds Weight of Beaver-wool was exported.

But from *Christmas 1739.* to *Christmas 1749.* the Quantity of Beaver-wool exported was 13,921 Pounds Weight; which is an Increase of the Exportation, in these last Ten Years, of 5,913 Pounds Weight of Beaver-wool.

And, with regard to the Loss the Publick sustain by the Exportation of unmanufactured Beaver Skins and Wool.

Mr. *Roffeter* said, He had made a Calculation on his own Business upon 6,000 *Hudson's Bay* Beaver Skins, by which it appeared, That 6,000 Skins, sold at 6 s. a Pound, would amount to 2,700 l.; and the Charge (chiefly Wages) of manufacturing them into Hats, from 7 s. to 12 s. or 13 s. apiece, mixed with Coney-wool, and other Materials, would amount to 3,750 l. besides the Coney-wool, Goats-wool, and other Materials, about 3,075 l. more; to which he added a Profit of about 8 per Cent. and that makes the Beaver, and the Wages upon the Beaver, exclusive of the Coney-wool, Goats-wool, and other Materials, to bring in 7,212 l. to the Nation, on the Exportation of 6,000 Beaver Skins manufactured into Hats; but if 6,000 Beaver Skins are sold, for Exportation, at 6 s. 6 d. a Pound, they will bring into the Nation only 2,810 l. so that the Difference to the Nation on 6,000 Beaver Skins, manufactured into Hats for Exportation, is 4,402 l. This Difference is exclusive of the Coney-wool, which, if worked up with it, will be an Addition of 2,750 l. and in this Manufacture of 6,000 Skins, 120 People would be employed all the Year, work as hard as they could.

Besides, there are Numbers of Persons employed in Warrens, and dressing of Pelts, or Beaver Skins, which, when dressed here, pay a Duty to the Revenue of 2 s. a Dozen; which is a loss to the Nation, if exported unmanufactured: And to them may be added, People employed in making Blocks, and other working Utensils, and of Linings of Silk and Linen, and other Trimmings: Therefore, he apprehends, the Loss to the Publick on 6,000 Skins, taking in all Circumstances, is about 8,000 l.

And he said, he valued the Coney-wool, which would be worked up with these 6,000 Skins, at 9 s. a Pound unmanufactured: But, if the Beaver Hat Trade for Exportation was lost, the Price of Coney-wool would be so reduced as not to sell, unmanufactured for Exportation, at more than 5 s. 3 d. or 5 s. 6 d. a Pound.

That he had made this Calculation upon his own Business only; but that it would be the same on any other House:

That he is very certain, if we could get Beaver upon as reasonable Terms as the *French*, we could regain our Export Trade, we having much the Advantage over them in Ingenuity:

That, if Beaver continues here at the Price it now is, we shall lose our Export Trade to all Parts of his Majesty's Dominions:

That, he thinks, if we could get Beaver upon reasonable Terms, it would be for the Benefit of the Landed Interest, as, by increasing the Consumption of Coney-wool, it would make Warrens more valuable:

That the whole Trade use about 30 or 40,000 Skins in a Year: That in a Beaver Hat, made for Exportation, the Witness said, he generally put about 10 or 12 Ounces of Beaver; but that in the general Run of such Hats, for Home Consumption, he puts about 7 or 8 Ounces; which Hat is worth from 23 s. to 25 s.

Mr. *Lawford* said, That, since Beaver was so dear, few Hats were made all Beaver for Home Consumption; but that there are few made for the Town Consumption with less than 9 or 10 Ounces: That he paid for dying upwards of 500 Dozen of Hats the last Year, and that above 250 Dozen of them were above One half Beaver.

That, if Beaver was at 6 s. or 6 s. 6 d. a Pound, upon the Skin, we could consume it all in the Manufacture of Hats; but the Demand for Hats abroad now fails.

And being asked, Why they did not consume it all in the Years 1737. 1738. and 1739. when it was at 5 s. a Pound? he said, He thought the Reason was, our Hats being then very narrow, and low Crowns. And the Agent for the Petitioners observed, upon this Occasion, That in those Years the Quantity left in the Market, for the Use of the Manufacturers, was, upon a Medium, near equal to the Quantity imported in the Year 1750.

Mr. *Crafton* said, That if Beaver was at 6 s. or 6 s. 6 d. a Pound, he thinks the Trade would consume all that has been imported for Seven Years: That, he thinks, the Body of Hatters would contract for it all, for that he would be one that would.