**Exploration in Henry’s reign**

Spanish and Portuguese explorers had opened much of the world in the 15th Century and Portuguese had developed from the spice trade.

Although English sailors were much slower to engage in such activities, merchants and seamen from Bristol were interested in transatlantic exploration; there is evidence that in 1480 Atlantic exploration was taking place but on a small scale and unsuccessfully.

In 1494 or 1495, Bristol fish merchants were looking for a new place to fish as they had been excluded from Icelandic waters by the Hanseatic League. It was around this time that John Cabot arrived in Bristol.

***Cabot***

Cabot received authorisation from Henry to “search out any isles, countries, regions or provinces of heathens.” Cabot met Columbus in 1493 and his navigational intuition led him to believe that a more northerly course across the Atlantic would reach land more quickly.

Cabot sailed in 1497 and located what became known as Newfoundland. He also reported the existence of extensive fishing grounds. He set off on a second voyage the following year but was presumed lost at sea.

His overall objectives were unrealistic but paved the way for Bristol fishery and established that a “substantial land mass did exist within reasonable sailing from Europe.”

It’s almost certain that Cabot didn’t set food on America but it is likely that Bristol merchant William Weston did in 1499/1500. Even if not, Cabot was the first Englishman to lead an expedition to the New World.

John Cabot’s son Sebastian received sponsorship from Henry VII to find the “north-west passage” to Asia in 1508 but he was unsuccessful.

***Henry VIII***

North Atlantic exploration tailed off with the succession of Henry VIII as he had little interest.

The newly discovered fishing grounds became the preserve of Portugal and the Basque region of northern Spain seamen.