

SUMMARY: The identity of the recipient of Oxford's letter below is unknown. However it seems likely that it was the Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, Sir Edmund Anderson, whose involvement with the tin monopoly is mentioned in both CP 71/26 and CP 71/23, and who would have had the knowledge of the law mentioned by Oxford in the letter ('by the knowledge of her Majesty's right in law'). Although the letter is undated, Oxford writes that his suit involving the tin monopoly had begun 'two or three years' earlier. Since the chief competition for the tin monopoly occurred in 1595, and since internal evidence in other documents addressed to the same individual seems to assign them to April 1598, it seems likely that this letter dates from April 1598 as well. In the letter Oxford reviews the history of the recent competition for the monopoly, saying that a group of suitors had in 1594 or 1595 offered the Queen 1000 marks [£666] a year for it, an offer which she accepted. The existence of this offer was unknown to Oxford when he happened upon the same suit independently, and offered to pay the Queen £3000 a year for the tin monopoly. Shocked at the discrepancy between the £3000 offered by Oxford and the 1000 marks which had been offered by the group, the Queen stayed her grant. Oxford then inquired more closely into the offer which had been made by the group, and found that there were in fact two separate suits, the second of which was a so-called 'lesser suit' by Sir George Gifford on behalf of the Company of Pewterers which would have given the Pewterers the very lucrative right to cast all tin into bars before it was exported. If a merchant chose to export tin without having it cast into bars, he would be required to pay the Pewterers a halfpenny a pound. Oxford estimated the value to Gifford and the Pewterers of this so-called 'lesser suit' at £6000 per year, an enormous sum. The so-called first suit was for the tin monopoly itself, and once Oxford's offer of £3000 became known to the Queen, his competitors raised their original offer of a mere 1000 marks to £20,000 a year, which forced Oxford to drop out of the bidding. However, the resulting profit to Oxford's competitors was now so small that they had no intention of going forward with their offer. Nonetheless, they did not want to withdraw it, because the Queen might then grant the monopoly to Oxford. They therefore persuaded the Queen that the tanners in Cornwall were set against any 'innovations' in the tin trade, and that she should not grant the monopoly at all for the time being. At the time of Oxford's letter below, however, his competitors had renewed their efforts, and had succeeded in having the Queen grant the Pewterers' suit on 15 April 1598, an event which gave rise to the letter below from Oxford. It is evident from the details in the letter that Oxford was still conversant with the situation, and that his personal records were well organized. In the letter he promises that he will locate various earlier memoranda on the subject, and provide the information in them to the unnamed lord within a day.

My very good Lord, it is now two or three years since that her Majesty was sought unto for the farm of her tin by two sorts of suitors. The one sort were many, the other was only myself. They (having given a very slight estimation thereof, and devised many reasons to move her Majesty to pass it) had wrought it so far that, seeming to her Majesty that they had made a very hard bargain, gave her with much ado a thousand marks by

year, and so her Majesty had yielded unto it. At which instant I, ignorant of their proceedings, chanced to light upon the same suit and earnestly solicited her Majesty therefore, desiring to be her farmer for three thousand pounds a year. These offers were so unequal as then her Majesty made a stay of her former deliberation, further told them she was offered by me so much, and showed, for more confirmation, my letter unto them. They seemed to answer that sure I mistook it in writing and, for haste, had missed the number of my ciphers, for I had written it 3000 and they thought I meant but 300. Whereupon her Majesty caused the Lord Treasurer [=Lord Burghley] to send unto me, and write whether I meant. I affirmed the 3000, whereupon the matter then was stayed, and put to further consideration. Thereupon I was fain to look more exactly into the nature of the suit, which I found of two natures. The one was a suit to her Majesty which ran under the name of Mr George Gifford in the behalf of the Company of Pewterers, and this suit was called the lesser suit which was, in effect, that there should be no tin carried out of the realm but that it should be cast into bars or lingots by the Pewterers, or else the merchant should pay one halfpenny to them for the pound. This suit was so blemished and painted out so small as it was to be passed for Mr Gifford at a very low rate, of little value, and fit for such a gentleman as he, that had run his fortune in her Majesty's court. But your Lordship knows better than I how the tin is her Majesty's commodity, and how she is to take custom thereof. This year wherein these occurrences of suit happened was transported fifteen hundred thousand pound weight of tin (so far I affirm to your Lordship, but by tomorrow at night, by that time I have had recourse to my notes and memories, I think I must affirm to your Lordship not pounds, but blocks). Blocks oft to be 250 lb. apiece, but now they cast few under 400 lb. apiece, & most 5, 6 and 700 lb. Now, my Lord, then you can well judge, if her Majesty grants this suit that seemed so small, what it comes unto, if so many pounds weight, so many halfpence, so many halfpence pound's worth. I am sure it cannot be less than £6000 a year, but when your Lordship shall consider of it, you will find it more. For this, her Majesty should have had nothing; great persons, great shares; a number of meaner persons, a hundred, two hundred, three hundred fifty pounds, and such sums, all passed, signed, sealed, and assured by the Masters and Wardens of the Pewterers, seen by myself and able to be proved, and was so. Of great persons, a thousand and two thousand to one, and as much to another. Now, my Lord, how little this suit is may appear.

The other nature of the suit (which had been passed, as I said before, for a thousand marks), to write shortly to your Lordship at this time, was brought to twenty thousand pound a year rent to be given, but for that I could not follow it, and they that thought to get it among themselves being more in number, in place, and authority, when all their objections were refelled and there was nothing to make but for her Majesty's profit, then they quenched the heat thereof, said it was no time for her Majesty to lay new impositions on her subjects and that it was her Majesty's pleasure to hear no more thereof. Whereupon I have surceased ever since, till lately these persons themselves have revived the matter to her Majesty and, thinking me to be so discouraged that I thought no more thereof and that her Majesty had now forgotten all former contradictions, they have used all mine answers to their objections for reason to her Majesty to grant this suit unto the Company of Pewterers. These reasons, whilst they were mine, could be by no means in her Majesty's behalf accepted. But now, to serve their turn, they have used them for

very reasonable & forcible, insomuch as, I being informed that her Majesty had passed this suit, I thought it good to know the truth & to put her Majesty in remembrance of what was past; hereupon I understand from her Majesty that it is true she hath signed the same, but now upon this remembrance from me she hath stayed the writing.

Now I thought, my good Lord, the case standing thus, that there was nothing so fit to be done as to acquaint your Lordship with the whole cause that you, being fully possessed therewith, by the knowledge of her Majesty's right in law, the examination of what number of tin is transported, may easily and perfectly discern what the weight or lightness of the matter imports. And forsomuch as they have wrought so cunningly that (before ever I could have knowledge thereof) they had gotten her Majesty's hand the sudden, cannot give me opportunity to gather up so many remembrances as is necessary to unfold a matter so full of objections, deceits, and false apparences, but I hope (sith it hath pleased her Majesty to stay the writing) by tomorrow at night or next day to give you so good heads and general informations of these matters that, if you shall have cause to speak with her Majesty therein, that you will think reason that it is not fit that her Majesty should so suddenly, and without further advisement, pass it. Thus desiring your Lordship to pardon my long discourse urged by this matter, I leave to trouble your Lordship any farther this afternoon.

Your Lordship's to command,
Edward Oxford