

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 7 June 1595 from Oxford to Lord Burghley concerning his offer to increase the Queen's profits from the tin mines. In the letter Oxford says that if he had not already known of Richard Carmarden's dishonesty, he would have been the more surprised at Carmarden's recent lies to the Queen. He recites Carmarden's previous deceits: Carmarden had pretended to be opposed to the offer made by Thomas Sackville (c.1536-1608), 1st Baron Buckhurst, had been the first to urge Oxford to undertake the suit to the Queen for the imposition of a customs tax of a crown [=5s] per 100 lbs. of tin, had untruthfully assured Oxford that the total production of tin in Devon and Cornwall was 1,500,000 lbs. per year and had promised to also assure Lord Burghley of that fact, and had 'run a double course' with all three – Oxford, Lord Burghley, and the Queen. Oxford says his objective is now to expose Carmarden's dishonesty, and he therefore no longer requests that Lord Burghley further his suit, since that would put Lord Burghley in a difficult position. Rather, he asks that Lord Burghley, as a member of the Queen's Privy Council and her Lord Treasurer, judge objectively of the evidence he will put forward concerning Carmarden's deceits and the manner in which the Queen is defrauded of her customs taxes on tin.

Oxford says that the Queen's decision to send Thomas Middleton (1549x56-1631) into Cornwall to investigate matters will be counterproductive, since Middleton is of the same party as Carmarden. (For Oxford's earlier mention of Carmarden and Middleton in connection with the Queen's plan to sell them the demesnes of Denbigh, see BL Lansdowne 68/6, ff. 12-13.)

As an example of the manner in which the Queen is defrauded of her customs tax on tin, Oxford mentions the common practice in Devon and Cornwall by which slabs of tin, amounting to perhaps 100,000 or 200,000 lbs. in total, are taken by individuals for their personal use or for barter, and are never entered in the Customer's books, with the result that the Queen receives no customs tax whatever for them.

Oxford then turns to the issue of obtaining an accurate estimate of the total production of tin in Cornwall. He indicates that, leaving aside these slabs of tin which are of lesser weight, tin is now commonly cast into blocks of 300, 400, and 500 lbs. in weight (and because the Queen's weights and the merchants' weights differ, in actuality 700 lbs.), and suggests that the Queen appoint some impartial person to survey the blocks of tin now in London in the warehouses of Alderman Soame, Alderman Taylor, and others, to determine whether most of the blocks are not in fact 300 lbs. in weight or more. The weight of an average block would appear to have been crucial in obtaining an accurate estimate of the annual tin production in Cornwall because the total production was apparently estimated by multiplying the number of blocks by the weight of an average block (see CP 31/54, in which Oxford mentions 4050 blocks). Using this method of estimation, if an average block weighed only 250 lbs., as it had in former years 'by ancient custom' (as Oxford says in EL 2335), the estimate of the total production of tin would obviously be far smaller than if an average block weighed 400 lbs. Oxford says that the total tin production in Cornwall is 1,300,000 lbs., although he does not give the number of blocks or the average weight per block by which he arrives at this figure.

Oxford suggests that, to establish an accurate estimate of the total production of tin and to prevent the Queen being defrauded of her customs tax on that weight of tin at the next coinage, a messenger who would have equal authority with Middleton be sent into Cornwall with an order from the Queen directing that no tin be sold prior to the date of the midsummer coinage. Oxford requests that he be authorized to appoint the messenger.

My very good Lord, if I had not had already sufficient knowledge of Carmarden's honesty, I would have the more wondered at this impudent [=impudent] part of his, to avow before her Majesty so manifest & intolerable untruths. But when I remember how earnest he was against my Lord of Buckhurst's proceedings in this matter, how he was the man which set me on to move her Majesty and your Lordship for the imposition of the crown upon the hundred, how he was the first that assured me that at the least, in his knowledge, the quantity of tin came to 15 hundred thousand, how he promised me to inform your Lordship faithfully and assure you thereof, & that sithence that time he hath run a double course with her Majesty, with your Lordship and myself, I do the less regard his treachery and the more trust unto the truth of mine actions, which I will answer to her Majesty and your Lordship.

And for that I go about now to lay open his evil and corrupt service, I will not for mine own particular hereafter move your Lordship's furtherance, but if I shall deserve anything in this action I will leave the whole consideration thereof to her Majesty. But as a principal councillor of hers and as one holding the place of her Treasurer of England, who doth especially look into her profit, I shall desire your Lordship that those matters which I allege and bring forth to be judged by you, that they be so pondered that reason be not oppressed with a vain confidence in a light person, nor truth smothered up rather by false apparence than assisted by indifferent hearing, nor that her Majesty's former trusts be now made the very instruments of her infinite loss.

It is true, I confess, that Carmarden avows in part, that is, there be some slabs of tin (for in that he calls them blocks, therein he speaketh ignorantly) which are but 50 lb., 100 lb., 150 lb., 200 lb. weight.

But whereas he saith her Majesty is not paid in respect of their small quantity, he should have said, for that she hath nothing at all for such slabs.

And herein is the deceit, that under the colour of some to have a slab of tin for their household provision or to send into France for wine for their houses and suchlike colours, that they may not forfeit them, they have the lion stamped on them, and such slabs, although they mount to the number of a 100 or 200 thousand weight, are not put into the Customer's books, whereby the quantity of tin cannot truly appear.

And whereas it seems your Lordship heard him avow this the reason that her Majesty is not paid, your Lordship, I know, can easily see that he doth err by the part to account the whole, & this is a foul abuse.

But for the blocks, which I affirm in Cornwall to be 13 hundred thousand, that they be commonly 300, 400 and sometime 500 lb. weight and odd, adding that her Majesty's weights are more than the merchants', whereby I may well account one with another 700 lb. weight, I appeal and fly to your Lordship's justice and care of her Majesty's revenue, that she be not abused by the so(?) cunning of such a merchant, who doth abuse her trust.

And therefore, as well for her Majesty as for my discharge, I do crave and exhort your Lordship that you will be content and procure her Majesty to appoint some whom she knows will prefer her profit before any respect either to me or the other side, to survey the blocks of tin which are to be seen now in town, as well in Alderman Soame's warehouse as in other places, and at this present a shipful newly come in laden with blocks of Alderman Taylor's, and then if your Lordship shall find more blocks of 300 lb. weight and upward than of slabs, I pray you hereafter in her Majesty's behalf that the rest of mine informations be the better heard.

For the sending down of Middleton alone, a man wholly disposed to that party against which I inform, I do not think myself indifferently dealt withal, and though not for me but for her Majesty's better and more certain information it should not be amiss and not against equity that another whom I would have named might have been sent with him, that this devise might have had no suspect of corruption.

But I shall desire your Lordship for her Majesty's better service that whereas by delaying of time her Majesty may chance to leese this coinage and so, in conclusion, the benefit of the whole year, that your Lordship would procure a letter to be sent down wherein order may be given that no tin be sold or bought till July, which is the first coinage.

And this is agreeable with their old custom that no tin should be bought or sold till all the merchants were come together, and by the breach of this custom many abuses creep in which are neither profitable to the realm nor to her Majesty in especial.

And for that I would proceed to the proof of the exact number of tin, I shall desire your Lordship that I may appoint the messenger, and that he may have from her Majesty equal authority with Middleton in his service, which shall take away all ambiguity which may grow through suspect of partial and unjust dealing, hoping that her Majesty will have an equal regard, in her countenancing the cause, as well to them that study her profit as they which covet nothing more than their own. This 7 of June, 1595.

Your Lordship's to command,
Edward Oxeford

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable and his very good Lord, the Lord Treasurer of England; (2) vijmo Iunij 1595, Earl of Oxford to my Lord; (3) (in Lord Burghley's hand) For the tinworks.