

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 14 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 his earlier request in letters of 7 and 13 June that someone of his appointment be sent down with Thomas Middleton (1549x56-1631) to Cornwall to accurately estimate the annual tin production is not his chief concern. His principal concern is that, as mentioned in his letter of 7 June, an order from the Queen be sent into Cornwall to Sir Francis Godolphin (c.1534-1608) directing that no tin be bought or sold prior to either the end of June, or St. James' tide [=25 July]. Oxford says that, in fact, the entire idea of sending someone to Cornwall to estimate the true quantity of tin production is frivolous because the true quantity can better be determined in London by an examination of the rent (at 40s the 1000 lbs. of tin) paid to the Queen by Sir Francis Godolphin. Oxford says that the fraud against the Queen occurs when the blocks are transported, because according to 'ancient custom' (as he had mentioned in EL 2335 and TNA SP 12/252/57) blocks were to weigh only 250 lbs., with four blocks equalling 1000 lbs. Nowadays, three blocks could easily equal 1000 lbs., so if custom tax to the Queen is paid per four blocks, as of old, then at least 350 lbs. of tin goes through without any custom tax being paid on it. This letter of Oxford's appears to be closely related to Oxford's undated memorandum to Lord Burghley (TNA SP 12/252/49), since both deal with a new proposal under which the Queen will appoint two men as her agents, one in London and one in Cornwall, to buy up all the tin by pre-emption and resell it to the tin merchants. In both this letter and in SP 12/252/49 Oxford suggests that the agent for Cornwall should be Alderman John Catcher's son-in-law, one Roberts. In this letter the agent suggested for London is Alderman Houghton, whom Oxford says made inordinate profits for 12 or 14 years from the impost on sweet wines under 'his master', apparently the Earl of Leicester, who held a licence for the import of sweet wines. Oxford estimates the gain on the tin monopoly to be £24,000 or £25,000.

My good Lord, although it is all one in mine opinion whether her Majesty send down or not to have anybody join with Middleton for that I am not acquainted with the points of his message (which, if they be but as I do hear, are little to the advancement of this service, but rather a delay and hindrance thereto), yet concerning the main point upon which I most force, that is that her Majesty should not leese the benefit of this year, to that part of my desire I hear of no ear given. Wherefore, assuring myself that your Lordship will further her Majesty's profit and assist them that shall go about the same earnestly, I would gladly put your Lordship in remembrance that the chiefest part of my request was to have her Majesty's letter for the stay of tin, that none should be bought or sold till this month be past, or about St. James' tide, in which time she may have leisure to consider what course will be most for her benefit, and not to suffer a matter of such moment as this (which is too great for any subject) for a small trifle to herself, by too much haste to slip her hands.

The matter of time to busy about the quantity is but frivolous, and I know not to what purpose, sith it might be easilier known here than by examination of Sir Francis

Godolphin's rolls, for the deceit there cannot be perceived, that will only stand upon affirming and denying without control.

The money which he yearly pays to the Queen declareth sufficiently, for if he pay to her Majesty £2400 rent, then is that after 40s the 1000 lbs. weight, 1200 thousand pound weight, and if the remain which is to come to the account of the year following, if it be a hundred or two 100 thousand tin, that is but a 200 or £400 matter more of money, which is too small a trifle to stand upon at this present.

The deceit lies where the tin is transported and when the blocks be underrated as, where 4 blocks should be a thousand, it is commonly seen that three blocks attain to that quantity.

Wherefore, my Lord, I insist still to crave her Majesty's letter for the stay of the tin, that none be bought and sold till her Majesty be thoroughly satisficed what will be her pleasure. And in the mean season, that if her Majesty shall find how that, appointing of a couple of agents, it shall rise much more to her benefit than otherwise, then I am to advertise Roberts to draw in his money, whereof I know, at his last being in town, he left here a good sum. About this matter I must, and(?) so he is determined, to send Alderman Catcher down, who I know will not be negligent in this behalf. And if her Majesty sees that he shall be ready with his moiety to perform the service, then there is no let but to appoint another to join with him for the other moiety, and if Alderman Houghton be ready to take such a charge upon him alone, then is it much more easier being joined with another. And sith he hath already deceived her Majesty of 40 thousand pound, as when he had for 12 or 14 year together the impost of wines under his master, why should he think much to recompense the same now in her Majesty's service, raising to her so great a commodity and to himself no small revenue?

If 40 thousand pound laid out yield some four or five and twenty thousand pound gain (as the return and the use of the money comes to no less), why shall it not be thought, if her Majesty hath half with them, and they five or six thousand pound a year, that it is the best way for her Majesty, and a reasonable commodity for them, whose proportions few noblemen in England attain to the like in their livings? I do not doubt but Houghton may very well be satisficed(?) with five or six thousand pound a year, a portion that may content any subject in the land.

Wherefore, my Lord, this is my request in short, that I may have her Majesty's letter to Sir Francis Godolphin for the stay of the tin, that none be bought or sold till her Majesty hath declared her pleasure. And whereas I am acquainted with the sending down of divers merchants of their men to buy up the tin beforehand, that expedition may be used of the same, and for that Alderman Catcher is now at this present to go down about this business between me and Roberts concerning the setting forward of this service, I would gladly obtain that he might carry down the letter, for I would be loath that her Majesty, being drawn on with frivolous devices, should leese some eight or ten thousand pound this year, and after be said that it was through my vain motions, when indeed it shall be their practice who would have her Majesty be content with a little that they may deceive

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her of much. And to prevent this disgrace, I crave both in mine own behalf, as well as in her Majesty's, your Lordship's true and honourable help. This 14 of June, 1595.

Your Lordship's to command,  
Edward Oxenford

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable his very good Lord, the Lord Treasurer of England; (2) 14 Iun{ij} 1595, tin, Earl of Oxford, Alderman Catcher