

CLAY, BUTTER AND BANG

Port Books survive at the National Archives from 1565 and they list crockets (receipts) for payment of duty for overseas trade and as evidence for coastal trade on which duty was not liable. Head Ports, as was Aldeburgh, covered havens such as Orford and creeks like Butley, including Boyton Dock. Frank Britton, writing about clay being exported from Boyton to Holland, included an extract from the Aldeburgh Port Book of 1687. Edmund Warner, whose daughter founded the Boyton Almshouses, exported fine clay at certain times to Holland but regularly to potters in London, and three such entries are shown. Between 30 and 35 tons of clay were sent on a ship named "The Boyton", master John Youngs, and "The Blessing from Dover" carried 20 tons. The Boyton also carried butter, and there was an extensive farm called the Dairiehouse in Boyton recorded in documents starting with Robert Forth's will of 1601. The reclaimed salt marshes which are now arable, were mostly used for grazing cattle for at least two hundred years, and Suffolk butter was highly regarded, although its cheese was derided.



a coin weight and an apothecary's weight



various weights

The extract from the Aldeburgh Port Book contains other interesting information. John Thurston was sending butter and cheese to Chatham in Kent on a ship called "The Constant John", John Stevens of Orford being the master. One shipment was 140 firkins of butter and 900 cheeses. Chatham was a Royal Naval port and the hard cheese, known as Suffolk bang, was used on ships, probably grated over meals or melted beside a fire, since it was said to be 'too hard to bite and too large to swallow'! John Stevens or Stephens made his will in 1699, leaving his son and five daughters his furniture and household goods, but one of them, Ann, was also bequeathed 'two parts in my vessel or High' which were to be sold. I puzzled over 'High' for ages, but it must be 'hoy', a coastal trading ship. What a delightful example of the Suffolk accent deceiving whoever wrote the will. The name Thurston is of interest since so far there has been no local connection found between Mary Thurston, whose 1659 trade token, showing a pair of scales, was presented to the Museum and reported in the Bulletin in 2009, and anyone of the same surname. Notes and Queries in Issue 19 (2012) of the Bulletin also dealt with Mary, who was believed to have been a grocer in Orford. Farmers made their own butter and cheese, but no individual farmer produced enough to be able to send cheeses numbering well over 2,000 to Chatham on three voyages within a period of three weeks in 1687. A dozen milk cows would have been quite a large herd in the Sandlings, requiring three milkmaids and producing about 300 cheeses a year. Therefore it seems likely that John Thurston was a factor dealing in cheese and perhaps Mary Thurston was related and also a dealer.