

SOUNDS FAMILIAR BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN ?

The Editor

There is plenty of scope for using the Journal to present, in full, selected documents in order to show the kind of material that is available for the study of local history. The document selected for this first issue dates from the 16th century and can be seen in the Public Record Office at Kew.¹ Kenneth Allen, whose extensive notes on the Glaven villages are in the Norfolk Record Office, had noted its existence but had not transcribed it in full, perhaps because its significance is not immediately clear. Readers are invited to see what they can make of it – letters to the Editor suggesting a solution would be very welcome!

To the right worshipful the Chancellor general surveyor and Chanacellor of the courte of The Augmentations and revenues of the kinges marjtiis crowne.

In their most humble wyse then — and complaynithe unto your mastershippes the poore Inhabitanntes of the kinges Majesties townes of Cley and Blakeney in the Countie of Norff That where the haven of the said townes of Cley and Blakeney whiche ys a comon porte for shippes to ryde in and hath been a very saufegard for the shippes of the said townes and all other shippes and vessells havying passage by those partes and stondesth in the myddis of the Cuntry of Norff and where the chef provysions for grayne be made for to them the kinges highnes and no other havenn nere unto yt ys in greate decaye by reason of importunate sandes gathered and heped in the same haven by the vyolence of the sees the decaye whereof is like to be the utter undoying of the said townes of Cleye and Blakeneye and the Cuntrey adjoynng to the same havying the course ofbyeing and selling ladying of grey[n] and merchandyzes to the same haven and the losse of many shyppes and other vessells in tyme to come that mongst there be in harbour and savetie without any perill And also the kinges majsties is lyke by the decaye there of to lose his gracs customes to the value of a hundred pounds by yere besydes the profyite of ysdonde shippes belonging to the same haven and in whiche haven a great porcion of the kinges majesties provysions of greyne and other vytualls in all the tyme of warres were loden and shipped and for the redy reparacion of the said haven their adjoyneth a lyttell parcell of a mershe to the quandtie of xl rods in lengthe and xviiij thlike in breddythe among other mershes holden of the right honnerable lady Richmonds grace as of the manor of Marston in the said Countie of Norff for terme of her naturall lyfe of the gyft of the kinges majestie of famous memorie henry theight late king of England and sumtyme parcell of the possessions of the Bysshopyrche of Norwiche in the said countie whiche lyttell parcell of mershe of quantitie as is aforesaid if it shall lyke your good mastershipps to gyve and grannt the same to the said Inhabytannts they with the hoipe of the contree adjoynng wolde and do intend to make a gote through the said lytell parcell of mershe which shuld be no hinderanc to the rest of the grounds apperteyning to the said manor of Marston in the wante of the same mershe any hindrance to the yerely rent or ferme of the said manor of Merston And by the makying of the said Gote the course of the sees runnyng into the same got shulde entre into suche parte of the haven as by the vyolence thereof the sands in the said haven shulde be repelled [di]mynyshed and washed into the sees agayne which

shulde be the contynuall maynetenanne of die kynges majesdes custom there and of the Iselonde shippes appertyning to the same haven and all other shippes havying passage by the same allso a comon welthe for all the contrey adjyning for the maynetennce of merchandys and the lodyng of greyne at the said port wherefore for asmoche as the said lady Richmond is right well contented that the said gote shalbe cutt onle inform above said Maye it therefore please your good masterships the premeysse consydered to grannte unto the said Inhabytantes by his patents or otherwyse by your maesteships dyscretscycons — to cut out the said goot accordyngly In doing whereof as ye shall admynyster unto the kynges highnes ryght good and thankfull servyce so shall you do unto the said In habytantes and contrey greate pronytte and pleasure which die will not fayle to requite widi continuell prayers for preservicons of your good mastershippe in — long to endure.

A — is made to my lady Richmond according to this Request.

[endorsed] xxjii vijs xd ob [£21 7s. 10½d]

Comment

The reader will have all sorts of questions in mind by now, such as:

- what is the date of the document ?
- what is a 'got', 'gote' or 'goot' ?
- where was it to be made ?
- was it done?
- can it be identified ?

Some research might provide some of the answers – or possibly not.

There are clues to the date: the handwriting is 16th century. Henry VIII is already dead, and lady Richmond will be in the records somewhere. Blomefield, for example, says of Morston that 'Mary Duchess of Richmond and Somerset, widow of Henry Fitz-Roy, natural son of Henry VIII, had an interest here; and by an indenture dated 10 April 30 Henry VIII demised and let to Richard Fulmerston, Gent, her two fold courses in Langham and Merston, with her salt marshes in Merston.'³ Reference to Cheney³ shows that the year of the indenture was 1539.

At least the 'gote' is easy – allowing some latitude in sound and spelling – for a modern dictionary gives as the meaning of 'gat' a narrow channel of water and the term can be seen on some sea charts today.

But where was the channel to be cut? The document refers to Morston marshes and it is likely that this was an intentional description: parish boundaries were important in determining land rights and have changed little up to the present century. Morston marshes now extend from Stiffkey freshes almost up to the Low Quay at Blakeney, with the boundary between Morston and Blakeney following the main channel, so that the beach and sandhills become 'Blakeney' Point. The document also says that it is the inhabitants of Cley and Blakeney who are asking permission to make the cut, and the implication must be that they expect to benefit from it. Yet it is difficult to see what new channel in Morston marshes could have benefited shipping bound for Cley.

Having reached this point, the editor recently chanced upon a document in the Norfolk Record Office which was contained in some other material relating to Wiveton.⁴ The full text of this runs as follows:

Marry duches of of Richmonde and Somerset and Countus of Notingham by her — under her hande and seale dated the last of Januarye anno Ed 6 I doth assent and agree at the mocion and request of Sir Edward North knight Sir Thomas Moyle and Sir Walter Mildmay knights surveyors of the same, in the k. majestys behaulfe for preservacion of the haven of his townes of Cley and Blakeney upon the humble sute of the inhabitants of those towns that a gothe be cutt and made throughghe a pace of morish grownde conteyning 40 rodd in length and 18 foote in bredth being parcell of the manor of Morston which was the duches for tearme of lyfe and the k. in revercion,

[endorsed] Lycence to cutt a goate in Morston marshes.

Comment

At least this gives a date, for 31st January in the first year of the reign of Edward VI fell in 1547 – just three days after his accession. But a new question arises – what was the size of the proposed new channel? As a “rod, pole or perch” was 5½ yards the main document is talking of a cut 220 yards in length and 99 yards wide. This must be an error – and the second document appears to correct it in the most economical way: by reducing 18 rods to 18 feet. A channel only 6 yards across seems too narrow for any kind of commercial shipping but it would be sufficient to allow a new tidal movement from one part of the marsh to another. Was the proposal to link Morston Creek with Blakeney Creek so that more water could be made to flow through Blakeney? Or was it really to be major improvement in the main channel – perhaps in the vicinity of ‘Gatefare Beacon’ as shown on the 1586 map of Blakeney haven (and illustrated on the back cover of *The Glaven Ports*⁵) ?

One thing at least is clear: sand was building up in the channel and something would have to be done about it. Sounds familiar

Notes

- 1 PRO, E 321 7/3.
- 2 C.Parian, *An Essay towards the Topographical History of Norfolk*, Vol IX, William Miller, 1808. (A continuation of F.Blomefield’s *History of Norfolk*.)
- 3 C.R.Cheney (Ed.), *Handbook of Dates for Students of English Local History*, Royal Historical Society, 1978. (A later edition exists.)
- 4 NRO, MS19880Z.2.F.
- 5 J.J.Hooton, *The Glaven Ports: A Maritime History of Blakeney, Cley and Wiveton in North Norfolk*, Blakeney History Group, 1996.