

A LONDON TANKARD AND THE DUTCH WARS

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A pewter tankard from the Thames foreshore, in the Museum of London collections (Acc. No. 78.132), bears the inscription, 'John Kennett in Sheerness Fort suttler 1669' (Pl. 1). This is a reference to the small fort at Sheerness begun in April 1666 as a defence during the second Dutch war (1664–1667), a sutler being responsible for provisions. The tall quart pot has twin incised bands and a solid handle. There is a touch mark in the base of a bird between the initials 'WC', and the date 164? This is one in the earliest dated London pewter tavern pots.

Sheerness Fort consisted of a battery of twelve 18-pounders at Garrison Point, Isle of Sheppey (Pl. 2). The uncompleted fort was attacked on 10 June 1667 and then abandoned to the Dutch who destroyed it and carried off the naval stores, completely disorganising the dockyards being established there for the cleaning of large ships.¹ The English version of the incident is recorded in contemporary accounts including that of Edward Gregory, a clerk of the cheque, later a member of the Navy Board and Commissioner for Chatham.² Alarming though unfounded reports that the Dutch had landed at Dover, Plymouth and Dartmouth caused panic in London. 'By God', wrote the harassed Samuel Pepys, 'I think the Devil shits Dutchmen'. From Greenwich he could clearly hear the gunfire at Sheerness.³

The City, alarmed at events in the Medway, immediately promised a loan of £10,000 for the erection of a strong fort at Sheerness, of which £7,612 6/8d was spent.⁴ Operations were supervised by Prince Rupert but workmen were hard to come by and provisions scarce in this ill supplied and remote spot. Application was accordingly made to the wardens of the City Companies of Masons and Bricklayers to provide men so that the fortifications might be completed before the winter. So great was the lack, that workmen and waggons had to be impressed. Men found themselves working three miles from any fresh water or small beer, and with only one house for the purchase of any provisions. There was also a regiment of militia to be provided for.⁵

Work was continuing in the summer of 1669, according to a Major R. Manley in his letters to Charles Stuart, Duke of Lenox and Richmond, then absent from his nearby home, Cobham Hall:

This summer there hath bene made a good progress in ye workes att Sheere-ness, & the Forts att Gillingham & Cockham-wood side, both these are likewise to have Towers in them, which besides the keepeing of Stores are to bee a retreat to the Soldiers in case of necessity; they are to have fifty peeces of Cannon in each of them, the least of which is to carry twenty four pound ball. Sheerness is to bee fortified with 250 gunnes of ye same size.⁶

It was at this period that John Kennett, as sutler, was supplying provisions to workmen and soldiers at the fort—at times a difficult task judging from contemporary complaints at the slowness of victualling ships there.⁷

Sheerness Fort was still in operation during the third Dutch war (1672–1674) with a garrison of some 60 men. Garrison Point Fort (1860–70) and a torpedo defence (c. 1885) was ultimately built on the site.

NOTES

1. A blockhouse was first built at Sheerness c. 1545 as part of Henry VIII's coastal fortification defence scheme. The dockyard and fortifications were subsequently designed and staked out by Sir Bernard de Gomme, the military engineer. Contract, dated 6 March 1666; cost £1,360: BM Sloane MS 2448 f.44.
2. Edward Gregory, reputedly one of the seven men who remained in the fort and subsequently taken prisoner by the Dutch, the rest of the garrison deserting. John Copland *The Taking of Sheerness by the Dutch* (Sheerness 1895) 14.
3. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* eds. Latham & Matthews 8 (London 1974) 258, 10 June 1667. On 13 June the Dutch fired some ships laying off Chatham dockyard. Much blame for these events was laid on the lack of protection from the unfinished fort at Sheerness.
4. Corporation of London Record Office, Repertory 72, fos. 124, 126b, 135b, 146. Letter to the Mayor 1 July—*Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1667* (London 1890) 256. The King to the same, 12, 20 and 29 July—*Ibid*, 288, 310, 339. Pepys thought the necessity to borrow such a small sum contemptible, 'a very poor thing that we should be induced to borrow by such mean sums'. The Common Council ordered (13 June 1667) every able-bodied man in the City to enlist, and the same day Charles II reviewed the City's militia on Tower Hill. CLRO Journal 46, f.163.
5. John Evelyn, the diarist, a commissioner for the care of the sick and wounded in Kent, records that fossils were excavated during the building: 16. (July 1668) To Lond: returnd: 19 our Doctor as before. 23. Went to R: Society, where were presented divers *Glossa Petra's*, & other natural Curiosities, found in digging to build the fort at Sheere-Nesse, they were just the same (as) what the(y) bring from Malta, pretending them to have ben Vipers teeth, whereas in truth they are of a Shark: as we found by comparing them to one in our Repository. E. S. de Beer ed. *The Diary of John Evelyn* 3 (Oxford 1955) 511.
6. BM Addtl MS 21947 f.269 18 September 1669: Major R. Manley was one of the witnesses of the will of Charles Stuart, the last Duke of Lenox and Richmond.
7. a) *Calendar of S.P. Dom.* Car. II, 232, No. 37; 5 Jan. 1668: The De Ruyter and Leopard are in danger near Sheerness. Ask an order to the Victualler, being in great straits for victuals for them.
b) *Calendar of S.P. Dom.* Car. II, 282, No. 32; 14 Jan. 1670: The Adam and Eve has sailed from Sheerness and might have been at Hull, but by the victuallers not having sea victuals eight days were lost. Friction between the naval and military forces is recorded in a quarrel which grew out of the beer selling privileges of the porter of the yard: PRO, Outletter, Orders and Instructions, ADM2, 1, 17 Sept 1673.
See also *The Victoria County History: Kent*, 2 (London 1974) 326–331.

I am grateful to Victor Smith for supplying dates for Garrison Point Fort and the torpedo defence.