

Paying for gold with chocolate

Thomas Simon and a gift for the Swedish ambassador in 1656

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IN APRIL 1654 BULSTRODE WHITELOCKE, Cromwell's ambassador to Sweden, negotiated a treaty between England and Sweden designed to offset the alliance of Denmark and the United Provinces which threatened English interests. Cromwell had good relations with the Swedish king Charles X Gustav, and both were committed to forge a Protestant alliance against Rome and Spain, particularly after the Catholic persecution of Protestants such as occurred in the Piedmont valley in Italy in April of 1655. In July of 1655 the king of Sweden dispatched Christer Bonde to London to serve as his ambassador extraordinary. His basic instructions were to formalise the alliance between Sweden and England and tidy up matters left unsettled in Whitelock's treaty of 1654.¹ In the main Bonde succeeded in his diplomatic task, although no formal agreement was signed by the time Bonde departed from London at the end of August 1656².

On 1 August 1656 Oliver Cromwell and the Council of State decided that a gift worth £1,500 was to be offered to Bonde (see Appendix, doc. 1). The gesture was in recognition of the close working relationship that had been formed between the Swedish ambassador and the Lord Protector over the previous thirteen months. Five members of the Council, Gilbert Pickering, Charles Fleetwood, William Sydenham, John Lisle and Walter Strickland, were appointed as a committee to determine the quality of the gift and to direct its preparation. A number of possibilities were discussed as gifts suitable to the occasion, but by 3 September 1656 the renowned engraver Thomas Simon had been engaged to provide an engraved jewel for the Swedish ambassador (Appendix, doc. 2). On 11 September 1656 the Council of State again discussed the matter, ordering that Simon be paid £863 18s., a slight increase on the original amount, and that this should come out of the Council's contingency fund (Appendix, doc. 3, lines 8-9; also doc. 4).

The question of how this gift for the Swedish

ambassador was ultimately to be paid for remained a challenge for Oliver Cromwell and the Council of State. In the weeks that followed Bonde's departure several solutions were put forward to deal with it. In the end, it was a windfall from a most unusual quarter that proved to be effective. In early September 1656 a state-owned ship, captained by Thomas Bunn and laden with cocoa nuts from Jamaica, arrived in English waters and it was decided to use the proceeds of this highly prized commodity to help pay for the gift. So how did this load of cocoa nuts come to be aboard the *Great Charity*? Fortunately, there are some letters among the Rawlinson manuscripts in the Bodleian Library that shed light on this question.

According to a letter written by Admiral William Goodsonn to secretary of state John Thurloe and dated 25 June 1656, the capture of the cocoa ship ('a smal vessel of about 80 or 90 t[on]s') took place on 21 May 1656,³ as the admiral was returning to Jamaica from his excursions in Colombia. Goodsonn states here that the cocoa ship was 'comeing from S[an]to Domingo and bound for New Spaine' (p. 458). Apparently Goodsonn took the captured Spanish vessel containing the cocoa nuts with him back to Jamaica, where the precious cargo was transferred to the *Great Charity* in early June in preparation for her journey back to England under the command of Captain Bunn.

The man who bought the *Great Charity*'s cocoa in London was a merchant named Martin Noel. Several surviving documents chronicle the arrangements made for his receipt of the cocoa. For example, on 25 September three of the Admiralty Commissioners wrote to the Navy Commissioners requesting that a trusty person be appointed to work alongside Captain Bunn to oversee the weighing of the cocoa and its delivery to Noel (Appendix, doc. 5). The name of the man appointed to assist Captain Bunn was John Ives and he prepared a meticulously detailed account of the 870 bags of cocoa contained on the *Great Charity*. Bunn had been

appointed by the Admiralty Commissioners themselves and was responsible for making sure that there was no embezzlement of the valuable cargo (lines 9-11). Meanwhile, the Council of State also met on 25 September and again discussed the matter of the cocoa shipment (Appendix, doc. 6). In particular, they ordered Colonel Sydenham to speak with Martin Noel about advancing some of the money that he was going to pay for the cocoa (lines 1-4). This was to enable Thomas Simon to be paid £863 18s. for his work on the jewel given as a gift for the Swedish ambassador (lines 5-8).⁴ Interestingly, the payment to Simon is specifically said to be 'in the first place' (line 6), stressing its priority in the Council's considerations.

Colonel Sydenham reported back to the Council of State on 1 October 1656 (Appendix, doc. 7). He stated that Martin Noel had agreed to make the payment to Simon and another to the Office of Works Surveyor, John Embree, as requested (lines 1-7). The Council also ordered that the contract between Noel and the Commissioners of the Admiralty and the Navy be confirmed (lines 10-15), and that the Commissioners of the Admiralty and the Navy were to inform the Treasury how much money they were to expect from Noel for the cocoa (lines 16-21).

Some indication of the value of this cargo of cocoa is provided by a sales record dated 28 July 1658.⁵ This records a Mr Beckford selling a large quantity of cocoa nuts at the rate of £5 per hundredweight. If it were sold at this market rate, the 145,334 pounds of cocoa unloaded from the *Great Charity* would yield approximately £6,500, the equivalent to about £890,000 today.

Having completed his diplomatic mission, Christer Bonde was to leave London at the end of August 1656. In his last letter from London, written in Swedish, dated 22 August and directed to King Charles X Gustav, who was waging war in Poland, Bonde described the elaborate ceremonies orchestrated by Cromwell

for his departure.⁶ Included in the letter is a passing reference to Cromwell, described as 'His Highness' ('His Hogheet'), who offered him 'a handsome royal gift' ('een anseenligh present regale').⁷ Further mention of Simon's medal is contained on page 639 of Bulstrode Whitelocke's *Memorials of the English affairs* of 1682, who also explains the reason for the postponement of the ambassador's departure.⁶ The entry for 20 August reads:

The Swedish Ambassador designed to have gone away this day, but his Jewel & other present of twelve hundred pounds of white Cloth which the Protector gave him, not being ready, he was well contented to stay for them; and they were now resolved to be bestowed on him, since the news of his Masters great Victory against the King of Poland.

According to Whitelocke the gifts were presented to the Ambassador by Cromwell on the occasion of their last meeting together, which took place at Whitehall on 22 September. Bonde left London the next day, accompanied by several members of the Council of State, who escorted him to Tower wharf. In his description of the event Whitelocke provides the fullest description of Thomas Simon's jewel, noting that Bonde was wearing it when he left:

The Ambassador wore the rich Jewel which the Protector gave him, tyed with a blew ribbon to his button-holes. The Jewel was his Highness Picture in a case of Gold, about the bigness of a five shillings piece of Silver, set round the case with sixteen fair Diamonds, each Diamond valued at 60*l.* in all worth about 1000*l.*⁸

Simon is not known as a miniature painter and the word 'picture' is therefore unlikely to have referred to a painted image but rather to a medallion portrait. The tradition of using medals as diplomatic gifts was long-standing, and this gift would appear to be a direct response to the

1. Simon: *Lord Protector Cromwell*, 1653, gold, 39mm., British Museum.



presentation to Whitelocke and his delegation at the end of their visit to Sweden of a gold, jewel-encrusted box inset with a portrait of Queen Christina and some gold chains fitted with 'a medal of gold of the Queen's picture'.⁹ The reference to the Cromwell jewel as the size of a silver five-shilling piece (forty-five millimetres) suggests that this piece may have been Simon's Lord Protector medal of 1653 (fig. 1), which he reworked accordingly.¹⁰ The gift to the ambassador would then have taken the form of the medal set in a jewelled case. The 'Heneage jewel', now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 2),¹¹ shows what Whitelocke may have meant when he says 'in a case of gold' and, with its painted portrait combined with a medallion portrait set with precious stones, presents another possible model. Whatever the exact nature of the work, Cromwell would have appeared with all the magnificence of a monarch.

The arrival of the *Great Charity* in Woolwich in September of 1656 was one of the very first instances of cocoa nuts being available in large quantities. The drinking of cocoa was soon to be all the rage in the streets of London, which makes the idea of using chocolate to pay for a gold medal perfectly understandable. 

Appendix

TNA, SP = The National Archives, State Papers

Document 1. The Council of State agrees that a gift to the value of £1,500 is to be given to the Swedish ambassador extraordinary, 1 August 1656 (TNA, SP 25/77/part 2, p. 306).

[Page 306]

That a present to the value of Fifteene hundred pounds be provided for the Lord Ambassador Extraordinary from the King of Sweden and yt it be referred to Sir Gilb[er]t Pickering, the Lord Deputy [Charles Fleetwood], Col[onel] Sydenham, the Lord Visc[oun]t Lisle, the Lord Strickland, or any two of them to Consider of the

[5] Quality of the sayd present, and to give direct[i]on for preparing the same accordingly.

Document 2. The Council of State orders the payment of £850 to Thomas Simon for providing an engraved jewel for the Swedish ambassador, 3 September 1656 (TNA, SP 25/77/part 2, p. 360).

That it be offered to his Highness as the advise of ye Counsell That his Highness will please to issue his Warr[ant] to the Com[mission]rs of his Highness Th[reasure]ry for empowering and requiring them out of such moneys as

2. Elizabeth I (the 'Heneage jewel'), c.1595, enamelled gold, diamonds, rubies and rock crystal, 70 x 51mm., Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photo: ©V&A Images)



shall come into the Receipt of his
Highness Exchequer to Satisfy and
[5] pay to Thomas Symons the Graver of his
Highness Mynt and Seales
the Sum of eight hundred and fifty
pounds in full Satisfact[i]on for
a Jewell provided by him for his Highness
Service to be p[rese]nted to ye
Lord Amb[assado]r Extraordinary from
his Ma[jes]ty of Sweden.

[Marginal note at line 1]
appr[oved] in p[er]son

[Marginal note at line 3]
[10] ro ac alt[er]ed by a subse-
quent order 11th

Document 3. The Council of State orders the payment of £863 18s. to Thomas Simon for providing an engraved jewel for the Swedish ambassador, 11 September 1656 (TNA, SP 25/77/part 2, p. 387).

Whereas it was ordered, on the 3d
Sept[embe]r instant, to be offered to his
Highness
that a Warr[an]t might be issued to ye
Com[missione]rs of his Highness
Th[reasure]y for
paying of eight hundred and fifty pounds
to Mr Thomas Symon
[5] Graver for his Highness Mint and Seales
in satisfact[i]on for a Jewell
for the Amb[assado]r Extraordinary from

his Ma[jes]ty of Sweden. Ordered
That the sayd order be vacated, And that
in satisfact[i]on for the s[ai]d
Jewell, there be paid unto him, out of ye
Counsells Contingencyes, the
Sum of Eight hundred sixty three pounds
eighteene shillings, and
[10] That a Warr[an]t to Mr Frost be in that
behalf issued.

[Marginal note at line 1]
war[ran]t ill nd Symon
23[rd]

Document 4. The Council of State issues a warrant for the payment of £863 18s. to Thomas Simon for providing an engraved jewel for the Swedish ambassador, 20 September 1656 (TNA, SP 25/106, p. 11).

In pursuance of an order of the Counce
of the xith of this Instant
Sept[embe]r Theise are to will,
and require you out of such Monyes
as are or shall come to your hands on
accompt of the Councells Con-
gencyes forthwith to satisfie and pay unto
Mr Thomas Symon,
[5] Graver of his Highness Mynt and Sealles,
the Sum of
Eight Hundred sixty three pounds eightee
ne Shillings being
in full satisfact[i]on foe a Jewell for the
Ambassador extry-
ordinary from his Ma[jes]ty of Sweden,

NOTES

1. Barry Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 129–30, discusses this.
2. Barbara Lewalski, *The life of John Milton: a critical biography*, revised edition (Oxford, 2003), p. 335, notes the frustrations Bonde experienced in his dealings with Cromwell's Latin secretary John Milton.
3. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson A 39, pp. 457–62.
4. Roy Sherwood, *The court of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1977), p. 114, incorrectly identifies the recipient of the jewel as Peter Coyet, who was Bonde's diplomatic predecessor.
5. National Archives, State Papers 18/192, p. 93r.
6. A copy of the letter is contained in British Library, Add MS 38100, pp. 410r–412v.
7. A translation is offered in Michael Roberts, *Swedish diplomats at Cromwell's court, 1655–1656: the missions of Petr Julius Coyet and Christer Bonde* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1988), p. 331. Roberts translates the critical phrase as 'a considerable present', which somewhat downplays the regal nature of the gift. One might describe it as a 'gift fit for a king'.
8. Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell, our chief of men* (London, 1973), p. 548, says that Kiffen's gift of cloth was 'a hundred pieces of white cloth (worth it was said £4000)'. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the source for such a statement.
9. B. Whitlocke, *A journal of the Swedish embassy in the years 1653 and 1654*, new edition

Hereof you are not
to faile and for soe doing this shall be
your war[ran]t. Given at
[10] Whitehall this 20th of November
September

To Gualter Frost esquire Signed
He[nry] Lawrence President

John Disbrow Gil[bert] Pickering
Phi[lip] Jones Charles Fleetwood
[15] J[ohn] Lambert Nath[aniel] Fiennes

[Marginal note at line 5]
Thomas Symon
863li 18s od

[55] for the Mannagement of the Affaires
of the Admiralty & Navy
Att Whitehall

Document 5. The Admiralty Commissioners write to the Navy Commissioners, asking them to appoint someone to work alongside Captain Thomas Bunn and oversee the unloading and weighing of the shipment of cocoa recently arrived from the West Indies, 25 September 1656 (TNA, SP 18/145/part 2, pp. 172r–173v).

[Page 172 recto]
Gentlemen,
The Cacao brought home in the great
Charity being sold to Mr
Martin Noell, Wee desire you will appoint
some trusty person
to joyne w[i]th such as he shall send on
board to see the said Comodity
[5] weighed and to take a due accompt
thereof & thereupon to deliver
the same to Mr Noell or such as he shall
appoint to receave
it. Wee have enclosed sent the bill of
ladeing yt came home
in ye said ship to the end you may know
ye true Contents
thereof & wee have appointed Capt[ai]n
Bunn to be present at
[10] the delivery of the Cacao. It having

been committed to his Charge
to see it preserved from embezzlement.
Wee remayne
Whitehall 25 Sept[ember] 1656
your very affection[a]t[e] friends

John Clerke
Edw[ard] Hopkins
[15] Tho[mas] Kelsey

[Page 173 verso]
To their verie loving friends
the Com[missione]rs for the Navy
These

25 7ber 1656
[20] for appointing a
trustie p[er]son
to attend the
weighing of a parscell
Cacao brought from
[25] India in ye great
Charity & sold to
Mr Nowell

Document 6. The Council of State discusses arrangements for Thomas Simon to be paid £863 18s. for producing the jewel given to the Swedish ambassador through the sale of a shipment of cocoa recently arrived from the West Indies, 25 September 1656 (TNA, SP 25/77/part 2, p. 407).

Ordered by his Highness the Lord Protector
and the Councell
be referred to Col[onel] Sydenham to
speake w[i]th Mr Noell about
advance-
ing forthw[i]th soe much money as he can
at present upon his bargain
Cocho lately come from the West Indies.

[5] That out of the first moneys that shalbe
rec[eive]d of Mr Noell upon his
said bargain there be paid, in the first
place, eight hundred sixty
three pounds eightene shillings to Mr
Thomas Symon, in Satisfact[i]on
for the Jewell provided for the Swedish
Amb[assado]r.

(London, 1855), ii, pp. 200-202, quoted in B.J. Cook, 'Showpieces: medallic coins in early modern Europe', *The Medal*, 26 (1995), pp. 3-25, at p. 21.

10. Edward Hawkins, *Medallic illustrations of the history of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1885), i, p. 409, no. 45.
11. Victoria and Albert Museum, M.81-1935. Given by the Rt Hon. Viscount Wakefield CBE, through The Art Fund. See Roy Strong, *Artists of the Tudor court. The portrait miniature rediscovered 1520-1620*, exh. cat. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983), p. 129, no. 208.

That of the moneys that shalbe rec[eive]d of Mr Noel, upon his said bar-[10]gaine, there be paid, in the next place after Mr Symon Satisfyed, the, Some of Two thousand pounds to Mr Embree, his Highness Surveyor on accompt of the repaires and other works about his Highness houses.

Document 7. The Council of State orders the payment of £863 18s. to Thomas Simon for providing the gift for the Swedish ambassador through the sale of a shipment of cocoa recently arrived from the West Indies, 1 October 1656 (TNA, SP 25/77/part 2, p. 418).

Col[onel] Sydenham makes Report that having spoken w[i]th Mr Noell concerning the mony payable upon his Contract for the Cocho yt lately came from the West Indyes the sayd Mr Noell is willing to advance thereupon to Mr Symon eight hundred sixty three pounds eighteene shillings, and to Mr Embree, his Highness Surveyor, Two thousand pounds according to the Councells order of ye 25th of Sept[embe]r last. And yt himselfe, and Others of ye Councell having spoken w[i]th ye Com[missione]rs of ye Adm[iral]ty, and Navy, and w[i]th ye Com[missione]rs for prize goods concerning this matter

- [5] they judge it fitt that ye Contract made w[i]th ye sayd Mr Noell by the Com[missione]rs of the Adm[iral]ty and Navy for the sayd Comodity be Confirmed, ordered by his Highness the Lord Protector, and by ye Councell, yt the sayd Contract be, and hereby is Confirmed accordingly and yt the money due thereupon be paid into ye Receipt of his Highness
- [15] Exchequer where Mr Noell is to strike a talley for ye same.

And it is further ordered, That the Com[missione]rs for ye Adm[iral]ty and Navy doe state the sayd Contract and ye Quantity of Cocho soe brought and how much ye same doth amount unto and Certify the whole matter to ye Com[missione]rs of his Highness Th[reasure]y to the intent
[20] they may know what money to demand of Mr Noell in respect thereof.

[Marginal notation at line 1]
+ appr[oved] in p[er]son

[Marginal notation at line 2]
ill Mr Noell