

U DX130

Documents relating to Martin Beckman

1685-1696

Biographical Background:

Martin Beckman, the pyrotechnist and military engineer was born in Stockholm, Sweden in 1634/5. Beckman says he left Sweden in the mid 1640s to serve the English crown and is likely to have followed his brother who served with the royalists. Beckman took an early interest in fireworks and was injured whilst preparing a display to celebrate the coronation of King Charles in 1661 and was granted £100 compensation by the king.

Beckman served the Earl of Sandwich's expedition to Tangier and drew-up charts of the city's defences and quickly developed a reputation for his intelligence gathering. He wrote to Charles II with suggestions for improving the defences for harbours against the Dutch and by 1670 had been appointed as engineer to the ordnance based in the Tower of London and physically stopped Thomas Blood's attempt to steal the crown jewels in May 1671 which earned him a further £100 from a grateful king.

In 1677 Beckman was appointed Chief Engineer of the King's forts and fortifications which took him across the country and in 1681 Hull's defences were strengthened to Beckman's plans. He prepared the fireworks display for the coronation of James II in 1685 and prepared reports on the defences of the towns in Northern England. He was knighted in March 1686 and advised on the defences at Tilbury and Berwick and returned to Hull for further work. He created a firework display to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Wales in July 1688 and was shortly made the first 'comptroller of fireworks' and organised the display for the coronation of William and Mary in 1689. He was naturalised by an Act of Parliament in Nov 1691. His attempts to use fire ships against the French ports in the mid 1690s proved ineffective – being frustrated by the weather on many occasions. He died in June 1702.

Description:

Photocopies of documents from the British Museum relating to Martin Beckman, including reports of the coastal defences in Northern England, plan and notes relating to Scarborough Castle, a panoramic view of Hull and a detailed account of the state of Hull's defences.

Extent: 7 items & 2 bundles

Related material:

Hull Citadel, 1660-1865 [U DX250]

Papers relating to Hull Garrison, 1664-1971 [U DX4]

A copy of the reports and opinions of the officers of the Board of Ordnance with reference to the repair of the banks, breastworks etc of the Garrison and the Haven, 1693 [C BRS/10/1]

Plan of the Town and Citadel of Hull, 1715 [C DBRT/2]

Other Repositories:

British Library, Department of Manuscripts [Add Mss 5795, 16370 & 33233]

The National Archives hold material relating to the Thomas Blood affair including [SP 29/289/187; SP 29/292/30; SP 44/34/110; SP 45/12/246]

Access conditions:

Access will be granted to any accredited reader

Hull History Centre: Documents relating to Martin Beckman

- U DX130/1 Plan of Scarborough Castle, by Capt. Martin Beckman. late 17th cent.
Negative copy. Plan and elevation showing the headland with key elements including magazines, bridges, battery etc all identified. It also includes a description of the bays and the approach to the castle from the sea.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 16370]
1 item
- U DX130/2 Plan and prospects of Tinmouth (Tynemouth) Castle, by Capt. Martin Beckman. late 17th cent.
Negative copy. Shows the view from both the North and South with a brief outline plan.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 16370]
1 item
- U DX130/3 Report by Major Martin Beckman on the Northern Garrisons fit to be fortified for his Majesties Service. 21 May 1685
Negative copy. Reports cover Berwick, Carlisle, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tinmouth (Tynemouth), Scarborough, Hull, Yarmouth, Langer Fort (Landguard near Harwich) and Chester.

The entry for Hull notes it is a place of importance both for 'shipping, seamen and situation' and that the Town be fortified as a Citadel.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 16370]
1 item
- U DX130/4 Panoramic views of Hull by Martin Beckman 1689
Negative copy.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 33,233]
1 bundle
- U DX130/5 Report by Martin Beckman on Hull defences late 17th cent.
Negative copy. Detailed report on the condition of the Town's defences including references to parts of the wall that were damaged, and poorly repaired, in 1646 with a breakdown of the work required and the costs. Also includes a list of Guns in the North Blockhouses and a plan of the Middle Blockhouse or Castle.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 16370]
1 item
- U DX130/6 Commission to Sir Martin Beckman as colonel of a train of brass ordnance and mortars to sail with the fleet 1 May 1692
Negative copy.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 5795]
1 item

Hull History Centre: Documents relating to Martin Beckman

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| U DX130/7 | Commission to Sir Martin Beckman as colonel of a train of brass ordnance and mortars to sail with the fleet
Negative copy.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 5795]
1 item | 8 May 1694 |
| U DX130/8 | Account by Sir Martin Beckman of the bombardment of St. Martin and Olonne (5-8 July 1696)
Negative copy.
[Original Document Ref Add Ms 33,233]
1 item | 10 Jul 1696 |
| U DX130/9 | Panoramic view, by Thomas Cockran, of the bombardment of Olanne in Poitou by Sir Martin Beckman
Negative copy.
[Original Document Ref Add f86]
1 item | 7 Jul 1696 |