

THE PROFITABLE BOKE

While exploring some of the contents of the Bodleian Library in search of spinning wheels I discovered "The profitable boke... Taken from the dutche and Englished by L.M." published in 1583, once the property of John Aubrey, the antiquarian and writer. I felt this short extract had to be of interest to all furniture historians interested in the uses for chests. It might help to explain the vast amounts of linen which appear in some household inventories of the period.

'A good waye to keepe linnen fayre 20 yeares without remouing and will not waxe moulye nor rotte. Fyrst take your linnen in march (so much as you intend to keepe unremoued) and washe them, and then drye them fayre agayne. So laye them up in your cheastes untill May next following: then shall ye take them oute and wash them agayne, when ye have so washte them, looke that ye doe then drye them thorowly and well, and then folde them fayre up, and lay them in your chestes or presse, and ye then shall not neede to remoue them in twentye yeares after, yet they shall continue drye and well.'

'Things to keep moughths from clothes, very good in sommer and other times. The flying moughths will he in the beginning of June, and continue till August, but they are chiefly from mid July to mid August. The running moughth he will continue in your cheasts all the year long, winter and sommer, whiche are greate spoylers of geare and other thinges. For the flying moughth. Take the powder made from drye Orange Pilles, and the powder of Elecompane rootes mixt together, and so cast it among your cloths, also perfume in a chafing dish of coles your clothes therewith. Thus you may use quarterly, and it will be saue then. Or ye may take the powder of Arras, with the powder of Ginoper, also the powder of sitrinum, cast among clothes saues them from moughths. Wormewood or Lauendar small preuayleth. Some useth-oyle of spyke, to annoynte their cheasts, and hang it in bladders therein. Some laies the hearbe called Flewort, in Latin pulicaris, which if ye lay it in your chamber, no flea will breede, some takes brimstone & perfumes therewith, but for the running moughth I know nothing but strong perfuming, and remoouing your geare.'

The Profitable Boke of 1583 is a translation of the Dutch book T'Bouck van Wandre, published in 1544. It is apparently well-known in the Netherlands. The translation had four English editions, 1583, 1588, 1596 and 1605. The first and last are in the British Library (something useful found on the Internet!), the 1583 in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

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