

SUMMARY: The document below is an extract from the Acts of the Privy Council stating that on 18 March 1554 [=1555] the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford was ordered by the Privy Council to be present, in company with Richard (1496/7-1567), 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Rich, at the burning of Protestant heretics at certain places in Essex, and to assist the Sheriff of Essex in that regard. There is no evidence that the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl obeyed the order and was physically present at the executions. Lord Rich, on the other hand, according to *The Dictionary of National Biography* was ‘infamous for his energetic persecution of heretics’:

*Rich and his wife entertained Mary on her progress to the capital early in August 1553, and he was named a privy councillor on 28 August. Having profited greatly from the dissolutions, Rich was forced by Mary to restore some properties, and he opposed the restoration of land to the see of Durham on the same grounds. Although not active as a privy councillor, he was busy in Essex, where he was soon infamous for his energetic persecution of heretics. He was consistent in suppressing conventicles during Edward's and Mary's reigns. Rich's earlier support for moderate religious reform under Somerset led Thomas Watts, burnt at Chelmsford in June 1555, to rebuke him: 'My Lord, beware, beware! For you do against your own conscience herein, and without you repent, the Lord will revenge it' (Acts and Monuments, 7.123). Yet it seems clear that Rich remained a conservative in religion throughout his life, and his earlier endorsement of reform was motivated more by politics and greed than by personal faith.*

The excerpt below is taken from Dasent, John Roche, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, New Series, 32 vols., (1890-1964) at vol. V, p. 104. For another letter, dated 3 June 1555, from the Privy Council to the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl, ordering him to have his officers, servants and tenants (but not the Earl himself personally) attend Lord Rich at Colchester and Manningtree at the execution of Protestant heretics, see Dasent, p. 141. For a letter from the Privy Council to the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl, Lord Rich and Sir John Wentworth (1494-1567) thanking them for assisting the Sheriff of Essex at the execution of Protestant heretics (but again not referring to the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl as having been personally present thereat), see Dasent, pp. 147-8.

LM: Heretics to be burned

Letters to th' Earl of Oxford and the Lord Rich to be present at the burning of such obstinate persons as presently are sent down to be burned in divers parts of the county of Essex, and to be aiding to the Sheriff of the said shire therein.