

SUMMARY: The document below consists of two extracts from the Acts of the Privy Council stating that on 3 June 1555 the 16th Earl of Oxford was ordered by the Privy Council to send his officers, servants and tenants to attend Richard (1496/7-1567), 1st Baron Rich, at the execution of Protestant heretics at certain places in Essex, and to assist the Sheriff of Essex in that regard. The letter from the Privy Council did not require the 16th Earl to be personally present at these 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 excerpts below are taken from Dasent, John Roche, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, New Series, 32 vols., (1890-1964) at vol. V, p. 141. For an earlier letter, dated 18 March 1555, from the Privy Council to the 16th Earl and Lord Rich, ordering them to be personally present at the burning of heretics, see Dasent, p. 104. There is no evidence that the Earl obeyed the order. For a letter from the Privy Council to the 16th 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 16th Earl as having been personally present thereat), see Dasent, pp. 147-8.

RM: The execution of heretics in Essex

A letter to the Lord Rich praying him to be present at Colchester, Manningtree and Harwich at such time as th' offenders that are already condemned for heresy shall be there executed, in consideration whereof he is unburdened from being at Rayleigh and other places mentioned in the former letters sent unto him from hence.

A letter to the Earl of Oxford to cause so many of his officers, servants and tenants as his Lordship shall think convenient to attend upon the Lord Rich at Colchester and Manningtree at th' execution of such persons as are there appointed to suffer, for the better execution of justice.

A like letter to Sir John Rainsford for the same purpose.