

SUMMARY: The document below is the private Act of Parliament of 1609/10 by which, at the petition of Oxford's widow, Elizabeth Trentham de Vere (d.1612), Countess of Oxford, licence was granted for the sale of Oxford's manor of Bretts in order to help finance the Countess' repurchase of Castle Hedingham for the benefit of Oxford's son and heir, Henry de Vere (1593-1625), 18th Earl of Oxford.

The manor of Bretts, which was centered on Plaistow in West Ham, had earlier been granted to Sir Peter Meautys (see the will of his son, Hercules Meautys, TNA PROB 11/73/110). Oxford acquired the manor of Bretts by purchase from Roger Townshend on 7 March 1584. For the licence dated 2 March 1584 authorizing Townshend (c.1544-1590) to alienate the manor of Bretts to Oxford, see TNA C 66/1248, m. 27. See also:

'West Ham: Manors and estates', in *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 6*, ed. W R Powell (London, 1973), pp. 68-74. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol6/pp68-74> [accessed 18 March 2016]

In 1540 Bretts was granted for life to (Sir) Peter Meautis or Mewtas and Joan (or Jane) his wife, who had previously acquired a large estate in West Ham at the dissolution of Stratford Abbey. Lady Mewtas, who survived her husband, was still holding Bretts in 1567. In 1576 Elizabeth I granted the manor to (Sir) Thomas Heneage, who conveyed it in 1583 to Roger Townsend. Townsend conveyed it in the following year to Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who died holding it in 1604. In 1610 the earl's widow sold Bretts to Henry Wollaston.

On 8 June 1588 the Queen regranted Colne Priory and Bretts to Oxford (see TNA C 66/1321, mm. 8-9 and ERO T/B 177/3). Oxford had transferred title to Colne Priory to the Queen by a fine in the Court of Common Pleas dated 6 May 1588 (see TNA CP 25/2/261). How the manor of Bretts had come into the Queen's hands is unclear. There is a brief mention of 'Brettes' in the fine. However Emmison states that this was the manor of Brettes in White Colne, and distinguishes it from the manor of Bretts in West Ham (see Emmison, F.G., *Feet of Fines for Essex, Vol. VI 1581-1603*, (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 1993), pp. 60, 197).

In a letter to Lord Burghley dated 18 May 1591 Oxford put forward a proposal to purchase the demesnes of Denbigh, in return promising to deliver the manor of Bretts and other properties in Essex to Lord Burghley for the support of his three daughters by his first wife, Anne Cecil (see BL Lansdowne 68/6, ff. 12-13):

The effect hereof is, I would be glad to have an equal care with your Lordship over my children, and if I may obtain this reasonable suit of her Majesty, granting me nothing but what she hath done to others, and mean persons, and nothing but that I shall pay for it, then those lands which are in Essex, as Hedingham, Bretts and the rest whatsoever, which will come to some 5 or £600 by year, upon your Lordship's friendly help towards my purchases in Denbigh shall be presently delivered in possession to you for their use. And so much I am sure to make of these demesnes for myself.

As mentioned in the Act below, the Queen extended against the manor of Bretts for a period of 80 years in connection with Oxford's debt to the Court of Wards. See also TNA C 66/1385, mm. 9-10 which records the Queen's grant by letters patent dated 8 June 1592 to John Drawater (d.1597) and John Holmes of a 100-year lease of properties of Oxford's which had been seised into the Queen's hands for Oxford's debt to the Court of Wards. Included in the grant are Colne Priory and Castle Hedingham, the manors of Barwick Hall, Inglethorpe, Grayes, Prayors, Parkes, Earls Colne, Abbot Hayes, Lamarsh, Crepping Hall, Downham, Sheriffs, Little Yeldham, Great Yeldham, Wivenhoe, Great Bentley, Battleswick, Bretts, Bumpstead Helions and Hinxton, along with rectories and other lands:

Which all & singular the premises now are or lately were parcel of the lands & possessions of our beloved cousin, Edward, now Earl of Oxford, and are now in our hands, having been seised for the debts of the said Earl.

A few days before his death, by a deed dated 18 June 1604, Oxford sold his interest in both the manor of Bretts and the farm of Plaistow in Halstead to his brother-in-law, Francis Trentham (d.1626), for a term of 60 years, with a proviso indicating that the transaction was for the benefit of the Countess (see Oxford's inquisition post mortem, TNA C 142/286/165).

The Act below states that after Oxford's death on 24 June 1604 the Countess held a life estate in Bretts, with the reversion after her death to Oxford's son and heir, Henry de Vere. At the time of the Act, Henry was still a minor, and a ward of King James. The Act states that the Countess had already sold £400 worth of her own lands and borrowed money at interest towards the repurchase of Castle Hedingham, and permission was therefore granted by the Act for the sale of the manor of Bretts, the farm of Plaistow in Halstead and certain tithes to assist with the financing of the repurchase.

As noted above, the manor of Bretts was sold to Henry Wollaston (d.1619) shortly after the passage of the Act. However, the farm of Plaistow and the tithes were still in the Countess' possession at her death, and are mentioned in her will of 25 November 1612 (see TNA PROB 11/121/171) in which she directs that they be sold and the proceeds used to pay her debts and legacies. For another copy of the Act below, see ERO D/DRg 2/39.

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Soit faict come il est desire

An Act for the sale of the manor of Bretts & farm of Plaistow in the county of Essex, parcel of the possessions of Henry, Earl of Oxenford, towards the repurchasing of the

castle, manor & parks of Hedingham in the same county, being the ancient inheritance & chief mansion-house of the Earls of Oxenford.

In all humbleness beseecheth your most excellent Majesty your dutiful and obedient subject Elizabeth, Countess Dowager of Oxenford, that whereas Edward, Earl of Oxenford, your suppliant's late husband, deceased, was in his lifetime seised in his demesne as of fee of and in the manor of Bretts with th' appurtenances in the county of Essex under such provisos, conditions and limitations as are expressed in certain indentures bearing date the 7 day of March in the 26 year [=March 7, 1584] of the late Queen Elizabeth made between Edward, late Earl of Oxenford, father of the said Henry, now Earl, on the one part, and Roger Townshend of East Rainham in the county of Norfolk, esquire, on the other part, and of some other lands thereunto adjoining, lying in the towns and parishes of West Ham and Flatwick in the said county of Essex, by purchase from Sir Roger Townshend, knight, which said manor and lands were extended in the lifetime of the said Earl and for his debt to continue for the term of fourscore years;

And was likewise seised in fee of the farm of Plaistow in the county of Essex, and of certain portions of tithes in Sible Hedingham, Stansted, Maplestead, Aldham and Bures in the county of Essex, and in Lavenham and Aldham in the county of Suffolk, part whereof are conveyed to your suppliant for term of her life, and the said Earl afterwards of such estate in the said manor and other the premises died seised, after whose decease the reversion of the same manor and other the premises descended to Henry, now Earl of Oxenford, his son and heir, who being within age, and for that the same manor is held of your Majesty by knight's service in capite, the said Henry, Earl of Oxenford, was and yet is in ward to your Majesty and his wardship and marriage is granted over to your suppliant, which said manor of Bretts and other the lands aforesaid, if they were in the now Earl's possession, are in yearly value in demesne upon the rack two hundred pounds by year three and forty shillings five pence freehold rents, and three pounds four shillings and four pence copyhold rents, and the said farm of Plaistow and portion of tithes are but of the value of nine pounds by year;

And whereas your said suppliant, being very desirous to uphold and raise the ancient and most honourable house of Oxenford what in her doth lie, to that end hath lately bought the castle and manor of Hedingham in the said county of Essex which was the ancient inheritance and chief seat of the said Earls of Oxenford and hath continued in their name and possession almost from the time of the Conquest until the same was lately sold by the said Edward, Earl of Oxenford, which manor of Hedingham is of the value of seven hundred pounds by year, besides divers liberties, royalties and privileges that are thereto belonging, which said castle and manor your suppliant hath caused to be assured to herself for life and after to the said Henry, Earl of Oxenford, and the heirs of his body, and the same hath cost your suppliant a great sum of money, towards the payment whereof your suppliant hath sold above four hundred pounds by year of her own inheritance, and besides your suppliant was enforced by herself and her friends to take up a great sum of money at interest for which your suppliant standeth yet still engaged, and hath no sufficient means of her own to satisfy the same but by sale of some part of the lands of the said Earl, and for that there is no part of his lands more fit to be sold than the

said manor of Bretts and other the premises, which both your suppliant (that hath the interest of the said extent for fourscore years and an estate for your suppliant's life in part of the rest as aforesaid), and also the said Earl himself, are willing to depart with but as yet can make no good assurance thereof for that the said Earl is still your Majesty's ward and not of the full age of one and twenty years but wanteth some few years thereof, and for that if present sale may not be made of the said manor of Bretts and farm of Plaistow and other the said premises then the said manor of Hedingham must be dismembered, which will be much to the hurt of the said Earl;

In regard whereof may it please your most excellent Majesty that it may be enacted by your Majesty, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and be it ordained and enacted by authority of the same that it shall and may be lawful to the said Henry, now Earl of Oxenford, at all times from and after th' end of this present session of Parliament by and with the consent of Robert, Earl of Salisbury, Master of your Majesty's Wards and Lord Treasurer of England, and of your suppliant, Sir Edward More of Odiham in the county of Southampton, knight, and Francis Trentham of Rocester in the county of Stafford, esquire, or of any three or two of them (whereof the said Robert, Earl of Salisbury, during the time of the minority of the said Earl to be one) expressed in writing under their hands and seals to make sale of the said manor of Bretts and the said farm of Plaistow and all other the lands and tithes above expressed (other than the said castle, manor and lands in Hedingham) to any person or persons, bodies politic or corporate that shall be willing to buy the same, and that all and every such estate, conveyance and assurance so to be made by the said Earl of the said manor of Bretts, farm of Plaistow and other the said premises so to be sold shall be and stand good & effectual in law against the said Henry, Earl of Oxenford, and his heirs notwithstanding his said minority, and that all and every person and persons, bodies politic and corporate to whom the said Earl shall make any such conveyance in form aforesaid of the said manor, lands and tithes or any part thereof shall and may have, hold and enjoy the premises so to them to be conveyed according to the state to them limited without impeachment or eviction of the said Earl or his heirs for or by reason of his said minority or being within the age of 21 years at the time of such assurance made;

Saving always, and be it ordained and enacted, that this Act nor anything therein contained shall be hurtful or prejudicial to your Majesty, your heirs or successors, or to any other person or persons, bodies politic or corporate, their heirs or successors, for or in regard of livery to be sued of the premises out of your Majesty's hands at the full age of the said Earl, or for or in regard of any estate, right, title, action, lease, interest, condition, service, rent, profit, charge, emoluments, hereditaments and other demands whatsoever which your Majesty or any other person or persons, bodies politic or corporate, or any of them lawfully have or claim or of right ought to have or claim of, in, to or out of the said manor, farm, tithes and other the said lands and premises or any part thereof, but that the same shall be, continue and remain in as ample and beneficial manner to all intents and purposes as if this Act had never been made;

And your said subject shall daily pray to God for your Majesty in all honour, prosperity and safety long to reign over us.

Soit baille aux Communs
A ceste Bill lez Comuns ont assentuz

[=Let it be delivered to the Commons. To this bill the Commons have assented.]