

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated July 1584 from Oxford's brother-in-law, Peregrine Bertie (1555-1601), Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, to Sir William More of Loseley requesting More to extend a lease in the Blackfriars which the Italian fence-master, Rocco Bonetti (d.1587), had purchased from Oxford's servant, John Lyly.

It is helpful to clarify that Lyly held four different leases in the Blackfriars, all four of which Wallace considers were given to Lyly by Oxford. See Wallace, Charles William, *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), p. 187. The first, and best-known, was the lease of the site of the first Blackfriars theatre, which had originally been granted by Sir William More to Richard Farrant (d. 30 November 1580). Farrant left it in his will to his wife, Anne, who sold it to William Hunnis and John Newman, who sold it to Henry Evans, who sold it to Oxford, who gave it to John Lyly. See Folger MS L.b.350. Sir William More eventually recovered that lease through litigation in 1584, and according to Wallace, *supra*, p. 194:

When the Farrant-Lyly theatre broke up, the lease was forfeited to More, and Lyly could not sell it.

Although he could not sell the Farrant lease, Lyly could and did sell the other three. He sold two leases to Henry Carey (1526-1596), 1st Baron Hunsdon, who used the premises as his residence. See Wallace, *supra*, pp. 186-7.

Lyly's fourth lease, the lease he sold to Bonetti, is the one referred to by Lord Willoughby in the letter below. See Wallace, *supra*, p. 187.

Lord Willoughby also asks More to extend a lease which Bonetti had purchased from Margaret Poole, for whose life estate in the Blackfriars property see Folger MS L.b.352 and the will of her father-in-law, Sir Thomas Cheyney, TNA PROB 11/42B/105.

Among others, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir John North (c.1550-1597) also wrote to More on Bonetti's behalf. For Sir John North's letters see SHC LM/COR/3/382 and SHC LM/COR/3/383. For Raleigh's letter see Folger MS L.b.37. See also the Loseley manuscripts at:

http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?_ep=Rocco&_dss=range&_ro=any&_p=1500&Refine+dates=Refine.

Shakespeare alludes to Bonetti's skill as a fencer in *Romeo and Juliet* ('the very butcher of a silk button'). Since a topical allusion of this sort would not have been made after Bonetti's death, the allusion indicates that *Romeo and Juliet* was written prior to 1587.

The letter appears to be in the hand of a scribe, and to be signed by Lord Willoughby, who added a postscript in his own hand.

Right worshipful, after my most hearty commendations, where this bearer, Mr Rocco, hath an house of yours in the Blackfriars in London in lease, which term he bought of one John Lyly, and upon the same hath bestowed already great charges in reparations and so mindeth to do, and is an honest man, and hath sustained great losses, and if he may have further interest therein he mindeth to bestow much more charges thereupon, these are therefore to desire you to stand his friend therein, and to grant him a further interest thereof, and also in one other tenement of yours there next adjoining which is in great decay in the tenure of one Mistress Poole, who hath granted her estate likewise unto him, wherein I think you shall do no hindrance to yourself, and find him a good tenant, and I shall account myself much beholding to you for the same, praying you to return me answer of your determination therein to th' intent I may proceed for him as occasion shall serve. Barbican, this (blank) of July 1584.

Your loving friend,

Peregrine Willoughby

Postscript: I pray you, sir, the rather at this my special instance to perform to this gentleman all favour you may in his aforesaid suit, and to my power I will acquit it to you thankfully.

Endorsed: (1) To the right worshipful my very good friend, Sir William More, knight; (2) The Lord Willoughby.