

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 30 November 1585 to Sir William More of Loseley (1520-1600) from three arbitrators appointed to examine witnesses in connection with a request that More extend a lease in the Blackfriars which the Italian fence-master, Rocco Bonetti (d.1587), had purchased from Oxford's servant, John Lyly, who had obtained it from Oxford.

For John Lyly's lease of the Blackfriars property, see the *ODNB* article:

Lyly's use of the Blackfriars as an apparently essential part of his playwriting enterprise had been achieved by legalistic chicanery that had deprived the landlord of his rights and transferred the property to the earl of Oxford, who passed it to Lyly.

Sir Walter Raleigh, Oxford's brother-in-law, Peregrine Bertie (1555-1601), Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, and Sir John North (c.1550-1597) also wrote to More on Bonetti's behalf. For Raleigh's letter see Folger MS L.b.37. For Lord Willoughby's letter see SHC LM/COR/3/372. For Sir John North's letters to More see SHC LM/COR/3/382, 383, 387 and 388. 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.

Right worshipful, according to the contents of your letters we have had some time of conference to examine the proofs which Rocco hath brought before us of the promise which he claimeth for a lease of your house, and of the charges which he hath laid out in repairing and enlarging thereof, and of your answer thereunto, and although there were at that time then present divers persons sent by the said Rocco to be examined for the testification thereof, and also a certain writing under the hand of Edward Clune(?) to witness the grant of a lease which you promised for 21 years, as well of the house which he now dwelleth in as in thother your house adjoining to the same, yet notwithstanding, nothing doubting of your good and godly disposed mind sufficiently known in all your actions, we thought it rather meet, in the behalf of the poor man who hath almost to his utter undoing disbursed such great sums of money in the building & bettering of your tenements and rents, by these our letters to crave your favourable consideration of his poor estate which hath grown by the same than by farther examinations and troubles to consume any time therein.

Most heartily therefore entreating and earnestly praying you either to redeem that promise which he claimeth with the recompense of the charges that he hath laid out in

building, or else that you will grant him a lease for so many years in certainty which may countervail his charge.

Thus much we are bold in his behalf to crave at your hands for that we take the same to be agreeable both to Christian charity and good conscience, whereunto we know you are fully inclined, assuring ourselves that you covet not to be enriched with the utter undoing of so poor a man, being a mere stranger who hath no other means to relieve himself.

In compassion therefore desiring you to weigh his great extremities the rather at our suit, and also praying you to return your answer by the bearer hereof, so doing we shall both think this our present travail well bestowed and show ourselves ready in any other matter to do you any service or pleasure we may.

And thus we commit you to God this last of November Anno Domini 1585.

Robert Forthe
Thomas Aldersley
William Salter

Endorsed: To the right worshipful our singular good friend, Sir William More, knight, give these, at Loseley.