

SUMMARY The document below is a letter dated 27 August 1576 from Richard Farrant (d. 30 November 1580) to Sir William More (1520-1600) of Loseley requesting that More grant him a lease of premises in the Blackfriars.

For a letter to More written the same day by Sir Henry Neville (c.1520-1593) recommending that More grant a lease to ‘my very friend’, Richard Farrant, see Folger MS. No. 71. Neville was the nephew of George Neville (c.1469-1535), 3rd Baron Bergavenny, and thus a first cousin of the latter’s daughter, Dorothy Neville (d. 22 September 1559), the first wife of William Brooke (1527-1597), 10th Baron Cobham, later Lord Chamberlain, mentioned in the letter below as the former tenant of the premises Farrant wished to lease. See the *ODNB* entries for Sir Henry Neville and Lord Cobham, and Folger MS L.b.352.

Farrant mentions in the letter below that ‘the Italian’ will need to be ‘removed’ as a precondition to the lease. Smith, *infra*, p. 153, notes Chambers’ suggestion that ‘the Italian’ could have been one of the Company of Silk Dyers who had formerly occupied the premises. Wallace, *infra*, p. 145, was of the same view (‘we may take it that ‘ye Italian’ that Farrant wished to be removed was of this company of dyers’). Smith disagrees, noting that the silk dyers had ‘departed five years before’. The Folger guide to the Loseley manuscripts identifies ‘the Italian’ as the fence-master, Rocco Bonetti (d.1587). However according to other sources, Bonetti had his fence-school in a house in Warwick Lane, not in the Blackfriars. It was not until the 1580s that Bonetti became connected with the Blackfriars through his purchase of the remainder of Farrant’s lease from Oxford’s servant, John Lyly. The identity of ‘the Italian’ who needed to be ‘removed’ from the premises before Farrant could lease them thus remains unknown.

For the indenture dated 20 December 1576 by which More subsequently leased ‘six upper chambers’ in the Blackfriars to Farrant for 21 years at an annual rent of £14, see Folger MS L.b.350, and Wallace, Charles William, *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), pp. 132-6.

Having obtained his lease, Farrant converted the premises into a playhouse for the Children of the Chapel, and also sublet part of the premises to two other persons, for which latter infraction More claimed Farrant had forfeited his lease. Before More could regain possession, however, Farrant died, leaving the lease in his will to his widow, Anne, the daughter of Richard Bower (d.1561), Master of the Choristers of the Chapel Royal. For the will of Richard Farrant, dated 30 November 1580 and proved 1 March 1581, see TNA PROB 11/63/120.

After her husband’s death, and after intervention by Leicester with Sir William More on behalf of William Hunnis (d.1597), Master of the Children of the Chapel, Anne Farrant sublet the premises to Hunnis and John Newman on 20 December 1581, who later transferred their interest to Henry Evans. Evans sold his sublease to Oxford, who granted it to his servant, John Lyly (1554–1606). More brought suit against Evans, and was granted possession of the property in Easter term 1584, and the first Blackfriars theatre

was closed. See Wallace, *supra*, pp. 130-77; and Smith, Irwin, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse* (New York University Press, 1964), pp. 135, 148-53, 467-8.

The modern-spelling transcript below was made from the original-spelling transcript in Wallace, *supra*, p. 131.

Right Worshipful, my duty done, these are to signify unto you that where your Worship doth mind to let your house in the Blackfriars, late in the Lord Cobham's hands, I am earnestly to request your Worship if I may be your tenant there. If the Italian may be removed, as it appeareth somewhat to me, it were easily done, if it be your pleasure so to accept of me. Though unacquainted unto you, I hope in God you will not mislike with me in any dealings concerning the rent or any other things to be performed. If it be my chance to have that favour at your hands, this yet farther am I to request, that I may pull down one partition, & so make of two rooms one, & will make it up again at my departure, or when my life shall end.

Thus craving your Worship's answer by this bringer, either to me or your man, the keeper of your said house, with my humble & hearty commendations I commit you to the Almighty. From London this 27 of August.

Your Worship's to command,

Richard Farrant