

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 6 March 1591 from Roger Manners (c.1536-1607) to Lord Burghley mentioning the prospective marriage of Oxford's eldest daughter, Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), to Edward Russell (1572-1627), 3rd Earl of Bedford, a match which met with the approval of Anne (nee Russell) Dudley (1549-1604), Countess of Warwick, who was Edward Russell's aunt and guardian.

Anne (nee Russell) Dudley (1548/9-1604), Countess of Warwick, was the eldest of the three daughters of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford. At the age of sixteen she married Leicester's brother, Ambrose Dudley (c.1530-1590), Earl of Warwick. The 2nd Earl of Bedford's three eldest sons predeceased him: Edward Russell died in 1573, Lord John Russell died 24 July 1584, and Francis Russell was wounded in a fray on the Scottish border on 27 July 1585 and died only hours before the 2nd Earl of Bedford's own death on 28 July 1585. Francis Russell's son, Edward Russell (1572-1627), thus succeeded his grandfather as 3rd Earl of Bedford.

Edward Russell was a minor when his father and grandfather died only hours apart, and the Earls of Leicester and Warwick claimed and were granted his wardship on behalf of his aunt, the Countess of Warwick. However, this settlement was challenged by Lady Burghley's sister, Elizabeth (nee Cooke) Russell (1528-1609), the widow of the Countess of Warwick's second brother, John, Lord Russell (d. 24 July 1584). According to the *ODNB*:

She was a notoriously combative woman, who accused the countess of Warwick of persuading the second earl of Bedford to revoke an earlier settlement for John Russell and his heirs in the will he made on 7 April 1584, thus disinheriting her two daughters. She appealed to her brother-in-law, William Cecil, Baron Burghley, and to the queen, who had second thoughts. This in turn provoked Warwick to complain on 31 August 1585 about the queen's treatment of 'my poor afflicted wyfe' (TNA: PRO, SP 12/181/238). The Dudleys were ultimately successful in obtaining the wardship, but Lady Russell was still charging the countess with 'cruelty' as late as 1601 (Salisbury MSS, 9.562).

It was in the midst of this family conflict that a marriage was proposed between Edward Russell and Lord Burghley's granddaughter, Elizabeth Vere. It seems unlikely that the suggestion originated with Roger Manners, whose letter indicates that he was acting as an intermediary between the Countess of Warwick and Lord Burghley. The proposal may have originated with Bridget (nee Hussey), Dowager Countess of Bedford, who had close connections to the Cecil family and was the widow of the 2nd Earl of Bedford and the step-grandmother of his heir. However the proposal came to nothing, and Edward Russell eventually married, on 12 December 1594, Lucy Harington (1581-1627).

When the Earl of Warwick died he left the Countess of Warwick North Hall, his house at Northaw, Hertfordshire, where she lived for the rest of her life; however he also left her debts totalling over £7000. In the 1590s the Countess was widely understood to be one of the Queen's closest intimates, and was among those who attended her at her death on 24 March 1603.

The Countess' youngest brother, William Russell (c.1553-1613), 1st Baron Russell of Thornhaugh, accompanied Oxford on his journey back to Paris in 1576 (see TNA SP 70/137, ff. 322-3).

Sir John Russell (1552-1593), the brother of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), the overseer of the will of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) of Stratford upon Avon, was brought up in the household of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford, and was a close friend of Oxford's companion, William Russell (c.1553-1613), 1st Baron Russell of Thornhaugh, whom he made one of the executors of his will. Moreover Sir John Russell (1552-1593) and the family of Oxford's second wife, Elizabeth (nee Trentham) (d.1613), were connected by marriage. For the will of Sir John Russell (1552-1593), see TNA PROB 11/92/96.

May it please your Lordship, I have been at North Hall with the Countess of Warwick, and find her Ladyship very well inclined to the match of my Lord of Bedford with my Lady Vere, and desired to know of me if your Lordship had either a desire or liking of it. Further that she did acknowledge herself so much beholding to your Lordship that she would gladly do that might be to your Lordship's best liking.

Thus with my humble duty I commit your Lordship to the Almighty. At the Savoy the 6 of March, 1590.

Your Lordship's most assured to command,

Roger Manners

Endorsed: To the right honourable my very good Lord, the Lord Burghley, Lord High Treasurer of England

Endorsed: (in Lord Burghley's hand) 6 Martij 1590, Roger Manners, Countess Warwick