

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter written to Lord Burghley from Gravesend by William Faunt on behalf of himself and John Wotton. From the letter it appears that Faunt and Wotton had recently been discharged from Oxford's service. The letter claims that three of Oxford's servants, David Wilkins, John Hannam [=Hammond?], and 'Deny the Frenchman', had beset Faunt and Wotton's lodgings in London, from whence Faunt and Wotton fled, only to be set upon on the road from Gravesend to Rochester by Wilkins, Hannam and Deny the Frenchmen, who shot at them, and then rode towards London.

David Wilkins appears to have been one of Oxford's trustworthy servants. In a deposition on 25 April 1594 in Oxford's lawsuit against Roger Harlakenden (d.1603) for fraud in the sale of Colne Priory, David Wilkins of London, gentleman, stated that he was 'of th' age of 47 years or thereabouts', and had known Oxford 'ever since he was married to his first wife'. Wilkins then testified as follows (see TNA C 24/239/46):

*That at or about the same time of the foresaid speech between Felton and this deponent, the said Felton moved this deponent jointly with him to purchase certain lands belonging to the Earl of Oxon' which the said Roger Harlakenden had then commission from his Lordship to sell, wherein he said there was a great pennyworth to be had, and whether it was any of the lands in the interrogatory mentioned or not he cannot tell, but saith that Felton spake of the lands of the said Earl's that were thereupon sold, and that he answered & told the said Felton again that if Roger Harlakenden had commission to sell the lands it were good that he sold it the best he could for his Lord's use, and that this deponent would not meddle with it unless he had it and bought it as a stranger would give for it, and then told unto Felton that if Roger Harlakenden & he did sell the land in that order as they went about, their dealings therein would come in question another day, and Felton replied again and said that there could not any question arise about it by any law because Roger Harlakenden had commission to sell the land, & further adding that since the land was to be sold, as well this deponent & he & Harlakenden to gain by it as another, but this deponent, not liking the motion, refused utterly to deal in it, with this conclusion, that whereas this deponent had served the said Earl so long a time as he had done, it should not be said that this deponent had in any way cozened him, or words to like effect.*

The dutiful regard we owe to your Honour and the due consideration we have in this case doth stay us to address our complaint to any but to your Lordship because the matter doth near touch the honour of my late good Lord and master, of whom publicly to hear complaint (of raging demeanour) would grieve your Honour, and myself to make it, if there were any other means for our security.

So it is, right Honourable, Wotton and myself, riding peaceably by the highway from Gravesend to Rochester, had three calivers charged with bullets discharged at us by three of my Lord of Oxenford's men, Davy Wilkins, John Hannam, and Deny the Frenchman,

who lay privily in a ditch awaiting our coming with full intent to murder us, yet notwithstanding they all discharging upon us so near that my saddle, having the girths broke, fell with myself from the horse, and a bullet within half a foot of me, it pleased God to deliver us from that determined mischief, whereupon they mounted on horseback and fled towards London with all possible speed.

The consideration hereof doth warn us to provide for our safety, insomuch we plainly see our lives are sought for. Otherwise the forenamed parties would not have pursued us from London who in like manner yesterday beset our lodging, for which cause, and to procure my Lord's favour in time, we left the city an[d] chose the country for our safeguard, where we find ourselves in no less peril of spoil than before.

And now seeing that neither city nor country is a sufficient protection from their malice, we humbly appeal to your Honour, whom we never knew but a maintainer of justice and punisher of abuses, or else generally to the Council, as your Honour liketh best.

The law hath given us great advantage of them, which surely we would pursue to the uttermost of it were it not in respect of our late noble Lord and master who (with pardon be it spoken) is to be thought as the procurer of that which is done.

And so to conclude, right Honourable, if we have offended the laws of this realm or our late noble Lord, as [sic?] (which we have not), we remain here in Gravesend to abide condign punishment, from whence we dare not depart before we be assured of our security and order taken for them.

Thus beseeching God to preserve your Honour to your heart's desire, we leave to trouble your Honour from Gravesend this present Thursday.

By your Honour's ever to command,

William Faunt, John Wotton.

To the right Honourable the Lord Burghley, Lord Treasurer of England

Endorsed in Lord Burghley's hand: Faunt, Wotton, Maij 1573 from Gravesend