

SUMMARY: The document below is a petition to Queen Elizabeth by an unnamed woman concerning certain alleged ‘conspiracies’ entered into by her husband, including one involving Oxford. From other sources it is apparent that the author of the petition was Isabel Frobisher, the first wife of Sir Martin Frobisher (1535?-1594):

*In March, 1573, Stukeley was endeavouring to raise a force in Spain for the invasion of Ireland, Sir Warham St. Leger and Jerome Brett being his chief agents in England. These gentlemen, with other “decayed men,” calculated upon raising an English contingent among the Catholics and such other of Elizabeth’s subjects as were discontented with her rule; and they had “allured to them Martin Furbisher, with the promes of 20l. land by the year, or with the vallew of it in ready money, to transport them over to their cousin, Stukeley.” Frobisher’s needy condition threatened to make him an easy victim of their wiles: but his wife, discovering the conspiracy, helped to thwart it. Her hostility was brought about by her personal dislike for St. Leger; and “some jarres happened between Furbisher and her.”*

See ‘The Ancestry of Martin Frobisher’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine June – November 1868*, Vol. I, New Series, (London: Bradbury, Evans, 1868), pp. 856-7.

Although the foregoing article does not cite a source, it is clearly based on the letter written from William Herle to Lord Burghley on 16 March 1573 (BL MS Lansdowne 16 f. 102r - 103v). See:

<http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/herle/letters/086.html>

*Lastly I have to advertis your L. of a new Conspiracye, that is intended by certain decayed men to go over into Spaigne, & to joyne with Stukely in his practises for the invading of Ireland, & the subversion of this State, as far as in them lyes. The matter is handled in sentligers howse & there concluded uppon. The cheeff partyes be sir warham sentliger hymself & Jerom Brett, having allured to them martin furbisher with the promis of 20li land by the yere, or with the vallew of it in redy money, to transport them over to their Cosin Stukely. They have joyned to them on Haselby a seaman & John Poole mi frind for whom I am most sorry, butt that I prefferre loyallty to ani fryndship. They allso mene to bring in som more decayed gentilmen, & som other suche as they note ether discontented or addicted this waye, & among these they wold have yong Brown with them a base brother to the L. Montacute. Their pretence wilbe to ship corne over into Ireland, & therwith to passe into Spaine; to which end if Jerom Brett have nott bin allredy with your L. to obtayne a lycens for the sayd Corne he menes to be. The occasion of this Bile (beside their own decaye & lewdnes is an offence that som [fol. 102v] of them have conseved against your L. namely sir warham sentliger, for the restoring of the Erlle of Desmond into his Contrey again: which he takes on so ylle parte, that he hopes to se the Q. majestie he sayth destroyed with all the pack of suche villaynows Cowncellors, as now governe, having opened to your L. grett secretts he saith, of the sayd Erlle of Desmond & of the state of Ireland, wherby he hath discredited hym self utterly, & is rejected with all from that he loked for & shold have had there, butt the Pope shall grow*

*on their heeles, or ether he advertys ani more or serve in suche a state, where upstarts do comande & that the nobility of the land is kept back & contempned, cursing that blablipped Cowardly foole, the Duke of Northfolk, that he had nott gon rowndly to his busynes, who might have had xv, men to on of the Q. & yett wold suffer hym self to be intrapped like a Dollte; which words & matter as they be grevous, so it may plese your L. to construe of them as yow se cawse & to hold me discharged, for imparting the same unto yow; herof your L. shall trye the whole truthe with further circumstance if ye vowchesave to speke with furbishers wife, whom I will send to you with a lyttel scedule of myne, by whom her husband may be made a mene to entertayne this matter to his full ripenes; for they canott departe before the next terme, for that their Banck will nott be redy till then. I have enjoyned grett secresy to furbishers wife, who is the discoverer of this pack, & though it procede partly of displesure borne to sir warham sentlyger as I perceve, & partly of som jarre hapned bettween furbisher & her by sir warhams menes, yett there is grett likelihood that every parte therof shold be true, & by suche displesures, women mani tymes have disclosed grett tresons, wherin it may plese your L. to examine her of every parte that I have written, which she will shew you [deleted: in effect] allso written with her own hand./ . . . from London this xvj of marche. 1572./ your L. verey hublye./ W. Herlleli.*

The first of the alleged conspiracies mentioned in Isabel Frobisher's petition concerns Oxford's attempted employment of Martin Frobisher to help Oxford's first cousin, Thomas Howard (1538-1572), 4th Duke of Norfolk, escape from England. Oxford's involvement with Frobisher in this regard can be dated between 3 August 1570 and 7 September 1571 by the reference in the petition to Norfolk's house arrest at the Charterhouse. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Norfolk was moved to the Charterhouse on 3 August 1570, and was returned to the Tower on 7 September 1571:

*On 3 August 1570 he was duly released from the Tower, where plague had occurred, but he was not allowed to return to Kenninghall, which he would never see again. Instead he was placed under virtual house arrest in his London residence, Howard House, where he passed his time in the supervision of its enlargement and embellishment.*

*On 7 September [1571] the queen's warrant for conveying him to the Tower arrived. Thereupon the duke admitted a degree of involvement in the transmission of money and correspondence to Mary's Scottish supporters, before he was taken through London to the Tower.*

For mention of Oxford's intercession with the Queen on behalf of Norfolk, see John Lee's letter to Lord Burghley from Antwerp dated 18 March 1572, TNA SP 15/21/23, ff. 42-3.

The second alleged conspiracy mentioned in Isabel Frobisher's petition involves the illegal clipping of coin. In this regard it is of interest that William Herle mentions John Poole as his friend in the letter quoted above, since on 25 July 1583 Poole was in Newgate on suspicion of coining. At that time Poole made complaints against the Queen,

Leicester and others during conversations with a government informant, John Gunstone, including an obscure reference to Oxford, saying that ‘the Queen did woo him, but he would not fall in at that time’.

The third and fourth alleged conspiracies mentioned in Isabel Frobisher’s petition involved Gerald fitz James Fitzgerald (c.1533-1583), 14th Earl of Desmond, Thomas Stucley or Stukeley (c.1520–1578), Sir Warham St Leger (1525?–1597) and Jerome Brett. The circumstances are set out in detail in William Herle’s letter dated 16 March 1573 quoted above. It has been suggested that Martin Frobisher was acting as a double agent in relation to these alleged conspiracies.

Since Desmond was released from custody in England in March 1573, and William Herle’s letter is dated 16 March 1573, Isabel Frobisher’s petition can be dated to 1574 since she states that it has been a year since she revealed these matters to the Lord Treasurer, Lord Burghley (‘And sith I opened these things to my Lord Treasurer it is a year’).

The petition gives rise to a question with respect to the date of Martin Frobisher’s first marriage. According to Brigg, William, *The Parish Registers of Snaith, Co. York, Part I*, (Leeds: Knight and Forster, 1917), p. 145, the first marriage of Martin Frobisher is recorded in the Snaith register in 1559 as follows:

*Maie Itm xxxt day of Maie Martin Frobisher & Isabell Ricard of Snathe [Sept?]*

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available online, adopts the date of 30 September 1559:

*Frobisher married twice: first, on 30 September 1559, Isobel (d.1588), widow of Thomas Rigatt [sic] of Snaith, who brought several young children from her former marriage; and second, in 1590, Dorothy, widow of Paul Withypool of Ipswich, a mature woman with a grown daughter. His marriage to Isobel was unhappy; he appears to have abandoned her and her children by the mid-1570s, and the occasion of her death in a poorhouse in 1588 brought no recorded reaction from him.*

In her petition below, however, Isabel Frobisher states that she married Martin Frobisher in the parish of Walbrook in London five years before the date of her 1574 petition to the Queen, i.e. in 1569, not 1559. She also states that she has lived in the Blackfriars as ‘maid, widow and wife’ for 20 years, which would place her in London in 1554. There appears to be no way to resolve these discrepancies.

Martin Frobisher’s second wife, whom he married about 1590, was Dorothy Wentworth, the widow of Paul Withypoll and the daughter of Thomas Wentworth (1501-1551), 1st Baron Wentworth, and his wife Margaret Fortescue. See the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*:

*Wentworth, Thomas, first Baron Wentworth (1501–1551), nobleman, was born at Nettlestead in Suffolk, the eldest son of Sir Richard Wentworth, de jure fifth Baron Despenser (d. 1528), and his wife, Anne, daughter of Sir James Tyrell of Gipping, Suffolk, the alleged murderer of the princes in the Tower who was executed in 1502. Originally from Yorkshire, Thomas's family had settled in Suffolk in the mid-fifteenth century. Through his father he was a cousin of Queen Jane Seymour and her brother Edward, later duke of Somerset. About 1520 he married Margaret, elder daughter of Sir Adrian Fortescue and his first wife, Anne Stonor (d. 1518), with whom he had a large family, which numbered at least eight sons and nine daughters.*

See also Richardson, Douglas, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, 2nd ed., 2011, Vol. III, p. 239:

*Thomas Wentworth . . . married about 1520 Margaret Fortescue, daughter of Sir Adrian Fortescue . . . They had eight sons, Thomas [2nd Lord Wentworth], Henry, Richard, Philip, Gent., John, Edward, James, and Roger, and nine daughters, Anne, Cecily (wife of Robert Wingfield, Knt.), Mary (wife of William Cavendish), Elizabeth (wife of John Cock and Leonard Matthew), Margaret, Margery (wife of John Williams [Lord Williams of Thame], William Drury, Knt., and James Croft, Knt.), Jane (wife of Henry Cheney [Lord Cheney], Katherine, and Dorothy (wife of Paul Withypoll, Martin Frobisher, Knt., John Savile, Knt.).*

It is perhaps of interest that in her petition Isabel Frobisher mentions ‘Sir James Croft, one of your Highness’ honourable Council, that hath known me many years’. According to the ODNB, in 1580 Sir James Croft’s third son, Sir James Croft (d. 1624), married Margery Wentworth (d. 1587), daughter of Thomas, first Baron Wentworth, and widow successively of John, first Baron Williams of Thame, Oxfordshire, and Sir William Drury, governor of Ireland, whom he had served in Ireland as captain (1578–9). As noted above, after Isabel Frobisher’s death, Sir Martin Frobisher married another of Lord Wentworth’s daughters. However according to Isabel Frobisher’s statement, there was already a connection between the Croft and Frobisher families in 1574, prior to the marriages, in 1580 and 1590 respectively, of Sir James Croft’s son and Sir Martin Frobisher to two of the Wentworth sisters.

The reconciliation requested by Isabel Frobisher in the petition below did not occur. For her petition to Sir Francis Walsingham claiming that Martin Frobisher had spent all that her first husband had left to her and her children, see TNA SP 12/151/17, f. 59. It is said that she died in a poorhouse in London in 1588.

The document is slightly damaged and partly illegible.

Certain conspiracies that of force I have been acquainted with touching your Majesty’s person (rest of line illegible) but that have I dearly bought and am like to do during my life without your Highness’ [ ] unto me, [ ] I so briefly here(?) indite them that your Majesty might vouchsafe to view it yourself, there were some hope of redress for me, a

truer cause never came before your Majesty, neither greater torment offered(?) to a poor woman than hath been to me sithence I have revealed the last conspiracy, in which(?), as I thought, I did but my duty, proof enough is to be had thereof as it may be called in question

#### The first

1 Inprimis, that at the time the late Duke of Norfolk was removed out of the Tower to the Charterhouse [=3 August 1570], my husband being prisoner in the Fleet, the Earl of Oxford provided a ship called the Grace of God, and ten pounds was given earnest thereupon, and five hundred pounds more was to be paid for her, my husband's liberty granted, and the ship to be given him with two thousand pounds in ready money, the one half to be paid here, the other to be delivered him at his arrival with the Duke in Spain. My husband opened these dealings to me, and offered to leave me nine hundred pounds of the first payment so that there might no words grow thereon, but I utterly renounced such gain to receive. I had a care of the duty I owe to your Majesty, as also I feared it would be the utter destruction of my husband, so that with dutiful persuasions I caused to let the earnest be lost, and so that enterprise was dashed.

#### The second

1 Item(?), shortly after another practice (half line illegible) a shilling [ ] pence. This I was made privy of by my husband, but

2 the dealers therein he would not tell (half line illegible, torn) methought would not have to do any more with such matters

3 thus always I have had care (half line illegible, torn) also I did not reveal it for fear that I should bring my husband

4 in question or danger (illegible) I have (illegible) of these dealings till now present, as hereafter shall appear by sufficient proof.

#### The third

LM: Desmond in the Tower Feb(?) 1568

1 Item, that after those doings were laid apart which are above-written, my husband spent some time abroad on the seas, where he consumed that he had

2 with such company as he had to deal for, so returned to London, where he remained in great want, at which time one of the Earl of Desmond's men brought

3 him acquainted with Sir Warham St. Leger, who upon that same(?) acquaintance proffered him a small bark to do him a pleasure in that necessity, himself

4 also determined to be brought into Ireland by my husband, which [ ] should have the ship to use as they thought good. This being concluded on, stay was

5 made for want of money to furnish their determination, all which the Earl of Desmond's men perceiving, offered my husband a thousand pounds to be paid by

6 an English merchant dwelling on the Bridge and hath trade into Ireland, so that he would make ready with speed the ship, and convey the Earl thither.

7 This determined between them, within few days after my husband acquainted me therewith, and I found him fully persuaded to accomplish this pretent,

8 whereupon I told him that some trouble might grow thereon, as I thought, towards your Majesty, besides the danger that might happen to himself upon

9 your Highness' displeasure. Further I understand that Sir Warham was bound for the Earl, so that if he carried him away he must needs bring

10 him in danger, who, pleasuring him with the ship, the world would judge & condemn him for a spoiler of his friends. To this effect talk passed between

11 us, yet I perceived that the large offer would be a mean to cause him to put all in hazard, and thereupon I said that if he would needs take [ ] money of

12 them, yet tell Sir Warham thereof, whereof he may be discharged in giving the Council to understand. My husband did agree thereto, and made Sir Warham

13 St Leger privy to it, who for his discharge presently gave my Lord Treasurer understanding, and how things were taken I know not, but shortly

14 after the Earl was delivered into his own country, the which Sir Warham took in evil part that the Council had upon his complaint delivered the Earl,

15 which was to his discredit, and thereupon vowed as hereafter shall follow.

#### The fourth

1 Item, the vow Sir Warham St Leger made was that he and Jerome Brett would go into Spain to their cousin Stukeley, by whose means they did

2 not doubt but [+to?] have aid of the King into Ireland, and then, as they said, they might place themselves there in such sort as they need not doubt either the English

3 or the Irish, but might live at liberty, no man to look unto their doings. They would have with them as many gentlemen as they could that were fallen in decay

4 or other men of service. My husband, being desirous to have me with him, brake these things to me, persuading me to go with him this journey, but I being in divers doubts

5 thereof did allege to him that we should never come again into England without displeasure, whereupon he told me that there was one determined to give your Majesty a gird(?)

6 which you should hardly escape, and upon the change which should follow, they all should come into England with greater credit than ever they had, and upon those words I

7 flatly denied to be any of the company, thinking to persuade with my husband from these dealings as heretofore I had done, and he seemed to take all I said in good part,

8 promising me that he would deal no farther with them, confessing he feared they would bring all to naught, *But*, saith he, *let me alone, they all shall not wind*

*9 me in, yet I will serve mine own turn amongst them; they shall not start, for I have all their heads under my girdle.* And thereupon he willed me to depart thence,

10 and he would come to me that night or on the morrow. And I did even as he appointed me, for I doubted not my husband's goodwill towards me, sith which time

11 he would never speak with me, come where I am, or suffer me to come to him, no way relieving me or my children with anything, but hath taken all that their

12 father left us either in money or money's worth, himself remaining with Sir Warham still, who offered him 20 pounds land or so much money as so much land

13 is worth so that he would be his guide into Spain. A ship of four hundred was prepared thereto, which I seeing myself in way to lose my husband with such company,

14 and remembering your Majesty was threat therewith, I thought it was my duty to make some of your Highness' Privy Council privy thereof, which done, Sir Warham St. Leger

15 and Jerome Brett caused my husband to go to my Lord Treasurer, to whom I had complained, & for their credit' sake denied me to be his wife, never married to him, but such a one

16 as he had kept, which is most manifest to be known that I was lawfully married to him five years past [=1569?] in the parish of Walbrook in London, and have lived in the Blackfriars maid(?),

17 wife and widow 20 years, no way in discredit, I am to be judged by any friend or kin that my husband hath for my behaviour or dealing towards him, Sir Warham

18 and his company set apart, who hath not only sought to take my good name from me, but also most shamefully with false witnesses, brought in to their shame, have sought

19 to hang me. These [ ], although most true, I am ashamed to trouble your Majesty with, but in respect that I have undone myself and children in revealing the

20 causes, and by the persuasion of the dealers above-written, (illegible) I have dearly bought with the loss of all my friends. And sith I opened these things to my

21 Lord Treasurer it is a year, even when their last enterprise was in hand, sith which time I and my children have had no relief, and such poor(?) provision as I have been driven to make [ ] to sell such apparel from my(?)

22 back as my other husband left me. Now it is gone I have no succour, neither can I seek to friends, refusing their counsel when I moved(?) him, so that there is none but God(?) &(?) your Highness

23 for me to complain to, to whom I most humbly crave pardon for my boldness, as also that your Majesty would vouchsafe your express commandments on my husband to take such

24 order with my poor fatherless(?) children although(?) I can [ ] nothing that was mine, being my husband, it is his, yet hath he no right to take that [ ]

25 which their father left them, neither is there cause that he renounce me, being his wife, that never offended him but by persuading him from such enterprises

26 as are above-written. And God so give me grace to find favour at your Majesty's hand as I did it for the best. I was never she that brought any matter in

27 question before, neither was I ever called to recital(?) for anything. There is Sir James Croft, one of your Highness' honourable Council, that hath known me

28 many years. I trust he can say I have not been accounted a meddler of matters, and for this, I did it for the duty that I owe unto your Majesty, as also for

29 the fear and danger that might happen to my husband thereby, whom if I may recover him upon your Highness' commandment (forasmuch as he knoweth

30 he doth me wrong), both I and mine shall (according to our bounden duty), pray for your Highness during our lives.