

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter written on 22 July 1611 to Robert Cecil (1563-1612), 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Salisbury, and Henry Howard (1540-1614), Earl of Northampton, by Oxford's widow, Elizabeth (nee Trentham) de Vere (d.1612), Dowager Countess of Oxford in which the Countess complains of the bad influence on her son Henry de Vere (1593-1625), 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, of his second cousin, John Hunt. The letter is accompanied by a set of articles in which the countess lists Hunt's misdemeanours and her son's misdemeanours in Hunt's company, including neglect of his service to Prince Henry and to King James himself.

Among other things, the articles mention that Hunt has borrowed and mortgaged jewels belonging to Oxford's sister Mary (d.1624), Lady Willoughby, with the result that Henry de Vere's annuity of £200 has now been assigned to Lady Willoughby's second husband, Sir Eustace Harte (d.1634), until £300 is repaid:

*Besides many other base and unworthy shifts they have made to procure money (which as yet are kept secret from me), Hunt hath been a principal instrument to borrow and mortgage jewels of my Lady Willoughby, his aunt, worth £700 or £800, which they pawned for two hundred pounds or thereabouts, for which his pension in the Exchequer is now assigned to Sir Eustace Harte till £300 be paid him, Hunt's host and hostess' son-in-law being the only witnesses to the deed of assignment.*

For the note dated 19 July 1611 of a letter to the Lord Treasurer directing that the annuity of £200 which had been granted to Henry de Vere, 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, by King James henceforth be paid directly to Henry, and not to his mother, the Countess, see TNA SP 38/10.

The articles also mention an annuity of £300 per year 'out of the Low Countries' which is not mentioned as a source of income in other documents relating to Oxford:

*He hath also of late used divers means to procure six hundred pounds due in June now last past out of the Low Countries for two years' annuity to be paid unto my son himself, and not to me, the end of all which Hunt's endeavours is to get the money into his own hands that so he may make what prey thereof he pleaseth, and then turn my son home empty to me to be maintained by me out of mine own estate, as already in part he hath begun to do.*

According to the Countess' letter and articles, at the time she had residences in Cannon Row in London and at Castle Hedingham in Essex.

John Hunt was the grandson of Aubrey de Vere (d.1580), brother of John de Vere (1516-1562), 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, and was the eldest son of Henry Hunt of Gosfield, Essex, and his wife Jane Vere, daughter of Aubrey Vere. He was born about 1585, and was thus about 24 years of age in 1609 when he first began to exercise an influence over Henry de Vere, who was then only 16.

My very good Lords, the apparent danger of my son's ruin (not to be prevented without present remedy) enforceth me, with no little grief, once again to crave your Lordships' help, being bold to commend my suit to you both jointly for that either of you are interested in him, one as Master of his Majesty's Wards (whereof he is one), the other by a near conjunction in blood, and both of you as you are principal councillors of state and he a young nobleman neither of years nor judgment to advise himself, wanting the guidance of a father and past the government of a mother.

About a year since I acquainted your Lordships with some courses dangerous and dishonourable to him whereinto he had then been misled by one Hunt, a man of no worth but extremely needy and beggarly in his estate, and no less dissolute and prodigal in his life, whereupon you then vouchsafed me your honourable assistance, which for the present took such good effect as gave me much hope that neither Hunt durst ever afterwards have presumed to seduce him, nor my son have yielded to be drawn by him into the like errors.

But shortly after, Hunt again attempted by underhand messages and letters to solicit my son to withdraw himself from my government and to return to his former courses, pretending to my son fair shows of liberty, delights and pleasures (the ordinary baits for his misjudging years), but intending merely to compass to himself the absolute command and disposal both of my son's person and estate, as may evidently appear to your Lordships by the perusal of the particulars in this enclosed paper which I humbly present unto you, for ever since, having no means or estate of his own, he hath lived at a very high proportion more suitable to the estate and degree of a nobleman than to the means or estate of his father or himself.

And lest my interest in my son should, either in respect of his duty to me or of my love to him, cross those his intended purposes, this Hunt hath plotted first to cause my son to neglect me and my directions, afterwards to distaste and contemn them, and now at length openly to oppose himself against me, which he hath effected by continual suggestions that it is dishonourable for him at these years to be guided by me, that it is fit he should have the absolute command and disposing of all his own maintenance without my oversight, that I am a miserable and unkind mother to him, affording him nothing of mine, but reserving yearly a good part of his proper maintenance to my own use.

Whereas at your Lordships' pleasure I am ready to make it appear unto you that ever since he was put to the Prince, which is now about eight years, I have yearly disbursed, besides all his, a great part of mine own little estate for his maintenance, and have always been well contented to confine myself to a private life and low course of expense that I might in some small measure repair the decayed fortunes of his house, and so shall be willing to do hereafter in whatsoever course your Lordships shall propound or approve as fitting and honourable for him so as he may by your good means be reclaimed to order, duty and honour, and this caterpillar and his confederates be by your power and authority

restrained from any resort, intercourse or private intelligence with him, for till then I shall never hope for nor expect any comfort from any course or fortune of his by travel, marriage or otherwise, well knowing that all your Lordships', mine and all other his friends' endeavours for his good will be wholly frustrate by the cross and opposite counsels and dissuasions of this lewd seducer, and am therefore absolutely resolved, unless I shall presently obtain the absolute banishment of him and his confederates from my son (whereof my assurance of your honourable love and respect unto him giveth me much hope), forthwith to renounce and disclaim any further charge or government of him, as being loath, besides my daily private objects of grief, to draw upon myself a general and public imputation that his ruin hath happened in his nonage and under my charge and by consequence through my want of care or respect unto him, for the world will never believe, except I make it known by a public renouncing of his further government, but I might with suit unto his great and powerful allies and friends have easily procured this ivy to be plucked away from this young oak whose growth is so much hindered by it.

I therefore humbly beseech your Lordships in the midst of your many serious and weighty affaires of the state to afford so much time for the redeeming of an unfortunate young noble orphan out of extreme and imminent ruin as to convent the said Hunt before you, there to answer to such articles as are contained in this enclosed paper, and thereupon to inflict upon him such exemplary punishment as to your Lordships in your wisdoms shall seem fit, so as he and others of like disposition may be hereafter discouraged from the like attempts, but especially that your Lordships will carefully provide that he may be absolutely banished from my son's company and from all private intercourse and intelligence by sending or writing to him.

Lastly I beseech your Lordships to make my son fully and plainly to know his errors, and to afford him your grave and judicious advice whereby, through God's blessing upon it, he may be withdrawn out of these dangerous ways so much tending to his dishonour and utter overthrow, hoping that when ripeness of years shall discover to him the true differences between good and evil he will thankfully acknowledge your honourable care herein vouchsafed to him.

In the meantime myself, for this and sundry other your honourable favours, shall now and ever rest exceedingly bound unto your Lordships, and thus craving pardon for this my boldness I humbly take my leave from my house in Cannon Row this 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1611.

Your Lordships' assured friend,  
Elizabeth Oxenford

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable my very good Lords, the Earl of Salisbury, Lord High Treasurer of England, and the Earl of Northampton, Lord Privy Seal; (2) 22o Iulij 1611, Countess of Oxenford to my Lord and Lord Privy Seal concerning her son.

Articles preferred by the Lady Elizabeth, Countess Dowager of Oxenford, against John Hunt for misleading and corrupting the Earl, her son, and for preying upon his estate

About this time two years Hunt, under pretense of kindred, first insinuated himself into my son's acquaintance, who till then, both in his attendance on the Prince and exercises of learning at his appointed times, had always given me good satisfaction. Hunt shortly after his first acquaintance with him would oft intrude himself into my son's chamber at his appointed times for learning, and so withdraw him from his book, whereof being advertised, I caused my dislike thereof to be made known unto him, requiring him to forbear the same, but not prevailing, and being certainly informed of his loose and dissolute disposition (which could not choose but make his company very dangerous to my son), I did cause him directly to be forbidden both my house and my son's company, yet would he not cease to resort unto him, sometimes openly, sometimes privily (taking opportunities by lurking secretly about my house to have access unto him).

In Lent, after I sending my son from Hedingham to London to attend the Prince, Hunt immediately after his departure from me met with him, accompanied him to Chelmsford, procured him greyhounds, and drew him to course in the Forest of Waltham, as he hath oft done since in his company, whereby his Majesty hath been much offended, and my son's right and interest in the said Forest much prejudiced.

By these and other like seducements my son, contrary to my direction and knowledge, was kept a good space from repairing to the Prince, and being come thither was presently withdrawn from thence by Hunt to taverns, ordinaries, plays and other places, exercises and companies, much to his dishonour and quite contrary to all his former breeding, but agreeable in all respects with Hunt his former and continual practice and course of life. My son thus misled hath in effect ever since neglected his attendance on the Prince, delighting wholly in such companies, exercises and places as aforesaid, wherein Hunt hath ever been an undividual companion with him.

He hath from the very first of his acquaintance with my son laboured by continual use of cursing, swearing, filthy and ribaldry talk, and all other lewd and licentious courses to corrupt and poison my son's tender years with the like infection.

My son waiting on the King in the morning on St. George his day was twelvemonth, according to his place and duty, was after dinner drawn away by Hunt, who kept him in his company all the day after with neglect of his service to the King in the afternoon, by whom he was missed, called and sent for, but could not be found.

About midsummer was twelvemonth, Hunt privily & altogether without my knowledge withdrew my son from my house in Cannon Row into Essex, where in his company he got much dishonour by disorderly hunting in divers parks and other like disorderly and riotous actions, Hunt in all that journey taking upon him to be my son's purse-bearer, and to command the same at his pleasure.

My son being recalled home to me by my Lord Treasurer's honourable letter wherein he expressed a great deal of care and respect unto him, and being advised by my Lord of Northampton to be guided by me, Hunt never ceased by letters, messengers and private meetings to solicit and seduce my son to the like courses, so as by his continual solicitations, a little before Michaelmas last he suddenly and without my knowledge withdrew him again from my house at Hedingham to a lodging in Milford Lane, being an ordinary, a great house of play, and whose host is the tennis-court keeper there, where he kept him from me till sithence Easter last, the place, company and exercises exceedingly tending to my son's dishonour and prejudice.

During this last absence of my son from me, Hunt hath impudently presumed to be his bedfellow, and otherwise used him most unrespectively. In particular, Hunt having drawn my son from his old shoemaker unto one of his choice, who asked my son 15 shillings for a pair of shoes which his old shoemaker offered to have made the like for 4 shillings and six pence, and thereupon my son telling Hunt that he had persuaded him to 3 cozening knaves, viz. a shoemaker, tailor and band-seller, Hunt openly replied that lords might lie by authority.

Item, Hunt, in my son's name, hath borrowed and taken up divers sums of money, wares and commodities of sundry persons, greatly to my son's dishonour, so as my son sithence his last departure from me is indebted, as themselves report, £700 or £800 besides £150 of his pension which they have procured to be received out of the Exchequer, and have pawned and sold all his apparel, horses, rapiers and other things he had, all which hath principally been consumed by Hunt himself, who liveth wholly upon my son's purse, in all show and course of expense like a nobleman, himself neither having any means or maintenance, nor his father able to afford him any.

Besides many other base and unworthy shifts they have made to procure money which as yet are kept secret from me, Hunt hath been a principal instrument to borrow and mortgage jewels of my Lady Willoughby, his aunt, worth £700 or £800, which they pawned for two hundred pounds or thereabouts, for which his pension in the Exchequer is now assigned to Sir Eustace Harte till £300 be paid him, Hunt's host and hostess' son-in-law being the only witnesses to the deed of assignment.

He hath moved and persuaded my son to misinform the King that I receive and dispose his annuity out of the Exchequer to mine own use, and upon that misinformation to procure his Majesty's letters for his own receiving it, whereas I have yearly for divers years past disbursed not only that and all other [+for] his own proper maintenance, but also a great part of my own estate in his education.

He hath also of late used divers means to procure six hundred pounds due in June now last past out of the Low Countries for two years' annuity to be paid unto my son himself, and not to me, the end of all which Hunt's endeavours is to get the money into his own hands that so he may make what prey thereof he pleaseth, and then turn my son home empty to me to be maintained by me out of mine own estate, as already in part he hath begun to do.

---

Hunt daily draweth my son from my house to his the said Hunt's lodging in Milford Lane at the ordinary aforesaid, where he causeth him to spend all his time with him in play and other like exercises, so as my son for 14 nights together now last past hath not come home until twelve, one, two or three of the clock at night, at which hours I am driven, night after night, to be disquieted for the keys to let him into my house, so as every day by this Hunt's allurements my son's courses grow more and more exorbitant.