

SUMMARY: In this letter written to Dudley Carleton on 8 August 1618, John Chamberlain mentions that Oxford's former mistress, Anne Vavasour, the mother of his illegitimate son, Sir Edward Vere, is about to be called in question, at the instigation of 'young Sir Henry Lee', 'for having two husbands now alive'. The circumstances are explained in the entry for Anne Vavasour in *The Dictionary of National Biography*:

Anne Vavasour [married names Finch, Richardson], (fl. 1580–1621), lady of the royal household, was the daughter of Henry Vavasour of Copmanthorpe, Yorkshire, and Margaret Knyvet. Sworn as a gentlewoman of the bedchamber to Queen Elizabeth in 1580, she was serving within the year as one of the six maids of honour. This title proved all too ephemeral, for shortly after her arrival at court she became the mistress of Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford (1550–1604), and on 23 March 1581 gave birth to his son in the maidens' chamber. The queen sent both parents to the Tower. Their son, Edward Vere, went on to a military career in the Netherlands and a knighthood (1607), probably under the tutelage of his paternal relatives Sir Francis and Sir Horace Vere.

By 1590 Anne had married one John Finch, but was probably already the mistress of the queen's champion at tilt, Sir Henry Lee (1533–1611), with whom she also had a son, Thomas Vavasour, alias Freeman. Anne and Sir Henry lived openly together at Ditchley in Oxfordshire and his other country houses; indeed, they entertained Queen Anne at a lodge near Woodstock in September 1608. At Lee's death in 1611 Anne inherited a jointure worth £700. By 1618 she had married a John Richardson, unmindful, apparently, that her first husband, Finch, was yet living. Lee's heir sued her for bigamy in the court of high commission, where she was fined £2000 in 1621. A tomb with a quatrain verse epitaph was prepared for Anne in St Peter's Chapel at Quarrendon, where Sir Henry was buried:

*Under this stone entombed lies a fair & worthy Dame
Daughter to Henry Vavasour, Anne Vavasour her name.
She living with Sir Henry Lee, for love long time did dwell
Death could not part them but here they rest within one cell.
(Lysons, and Lysons, 624)*

According to Chambers, the bigamy case was determined by the High Commission on 1 February 1621, and the King assigned his interest in the £2000 fine assessed against Anne to her accuser, 'young Sir Henry Lee'. By a warrant of 15 May 1622, Anne was exempted from 'public penitence or other bodily penalty' (see Chambers, p. 243). The transcript below is taken from McClure, Norman Egbert, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, Vol. II, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939) pp. 162-4.

My very good Lord, though it be now a week since you went hence, yet I doubt that you are still at sea-side, for the wind hath been here so contrary that there is no getting over unless you might hap to take the resolution of going to Calais, and so on by land, which I

wish you had done, seeing the business doth press so hard and your presence so necessarily required there as it seems by the King's often inquiring (as I hear) after your departure.

We are here as you left us, only the two Earls, Leicester and Northampton, were created with all the ceremonies and solemnity on Sunday last at Salisbury. The other two must receive their new-coined honour by patent, which hath been hitherto delayed for that Clare was thought too honourable a title, being usually bestowed upon none but the King's sons and those in rank before York or Lancaster, whereupon Sir Robert Rich hath been forced to make a posting journey to court, where he hath prevailed so far as to procure his father to be created Earl of Warwick, but these dignities cannot defend them from the pens of malicious poets and libellers, who give them new additions, and in plain terms blaze them in another sort, as the first to be vinosos, the second crazed, the third cornucopia, and the fourth a Lombard or usurer. I have not seen the rime, nor do not look after it, but by report it is bitter enough.

The Lady Compton is made Countess of Buckingham, and hath got the start of these new states, her patent bearing date the first of July, but it doth pose our heralds how her husband should have no place in this preferment, but to continue a bare knight, and withal there rises another question whether her daughters be ladies and are to take place as Earls' of Countess' daughters, which I think to be easily resolved by that maxim in law that ever *partus sequitur ventrem*.

Sir Walter Raleigh was at Salisbury but had no audience either of King or Council by reason that he is so sick and weak, and withal so broken out all over that it is verily thought to be a kind of leprosy, or else that he hath taken a dram of somewhat to do himself harm. He came to town (they say) yesternight to his old habitation in the Tower, but not to his own lodging, which was taken up a good while since by the Count and Countess of Somerset.

The Lord Hay is made Viscount Doncaster and in speech to be Master of the Wards, and Sir Lionel Cranfield to succeed him in the Wardrobe. There is a rumour likewise that the Lord Chamberlain is in election to be Lord Treasurer, the Earl of Montgomery to be Lord Chamberlain and Captain of the Pensioners by surrender of the Lord Walden.

Among the many late translations of our bishops, Chichester is fallen to Dr. Morton, Bishop of Chester, whose place is supplied by Dr. Bridgeman with keeping his great parsonage of Wigon *in commendam*, being within the same diocese.

This next week we are to have a great commission sitting at Guildhall about the tumult and riot committed upon the Spanish ambassador's people and his house, the King being much exasperated against the Lord Mayor and City for letting it pass so quietly, and therefore will have it re-examined and sifted to the full, to which end he hath appointed the Lord Coke for a principal commissioner.

Mistress Vavasour (old Sir Henry Lee's woman) is like to be called in question for having two husbands now alive. Young Sir Henry Lee (the wild oats of Ireland) hath obtained the confiscation of her if he can prove it without touching her life.

So with the remembrance of my best service to my good Lady, I commend you to the protection of the Almighty. From London this 8th of August 1618.

Your Lordship's to command,

John Chamberlain

To the right honourable Sir Dudley Carleton, knight, Lord Ambassador for his Majesty with the States of the United Provinces at The Hague.