

SUMMARY: This letter from Sir Thomas Darcy (1506-1558) dated 27 June 1548 was likely written to Sir Michael Stanhope (d.1552), who was Darcy's first cousin and the brother-in-law of the Protector Somerset. In the letter Darcy refers to a time 'when my said Lord of Oxenford was before my Lord's Grace', which would appear to be a reference to 1 February 1548, the date on which Somerset convented the 16th Earl before him and by means of 'threats and comminations' forced the Earl to sign an indenture (see HL/PO/PB/1/1551/5E6n35). As a result of this indenture and subsequent legal documents which the 16th Earl was forced to enter into because of it, by the date of the letter below all the 16th Earl's lands were legally in Somerset's hands under the pretext of a marriage contract between Somerset's son Henry Seymour and the 16th Earl's daughter and sole heir at the time, Katherine de Vere. Thus at the date of this letter the only drawback to the existing state of affairs from Somerset's point of view was that the 16th Earl might remarry and beget a male heir, a circumstance which would prevent some of the 16th Earl's lands from passing to Somerset. The letter indicates that active steps were therefore being taken to prevent the 16th Earl from marrying anyone other than one of the nine daughters of the Protector Somerset's first cousin, Thomas (1501-1551) Lord Wentworth, who was also a first cousin of Sir Thomas Darcy, the writer of the letter. The likelihood that the letter was written to Sir Michael Stanhope is reinforced by the fact that Stanhope's name is found in the documents by which Somerset extorted the 16th Earl's lands from him.

After right hearty commendations these shall be to advertise you that according to my late communication had with you in my Lord's Grace's gallery at Westminster, I have by all means that I can inquired of the matter between my Lord of Oxenford and the gentlewoman with whom he is in love named Mistress Dorothy, late woman to my Lady Katherine his daughter, and upon communication had with them both I have found and do perceive them to be in the same case that they were in when my said Lord of Oxenford was before my Lord's Grace and none other, saving that the banns of matrimony between them were twice proclaimed in one day. Other treatise or solemn communication hath not been before witness, but only be in secret between them twain.

Sir, if it shall stand with my Lord's Grace's pleasure to have this matter further stayed (as my Lord of Oxenford's honour, wealth and preservation considered, I think it very expedient and may right well be), then I beseech you I may be thereof advertised, and that ye will move his Grace to direct his letters to Mr Edward Green of Sampford in whose house the said Dorothy doth now continue, commanding him by the same neither to suffer my said Lord of Oxenford to have access to her ne she unto him, and that no privy messengers may go between them, which as I suppose will be the surest way to stay them. And upon further advertisement to be had from his Grace, if it shall so stand with his pleasure I will enter in communication with my Lord Wentworth for a marriage to be had between my said Lord of Oxenford and one of his daughters, and as they upon sight with other treatise may agree, so to proceed in the same.

Sir, upon your motion to be made unto my Lord's Grace concerning the premises, I pray you I may be advertised by this bearer of his pleasure in the same, which known, I shall right gladly endeavour myself to accomplish by th' aid of the Blessed Trinity, who have you in his continual preservation.

From Hedingham Castle the 27th day of June.

By your loving friend, Thomas Darcy

Endorsed: From(?) Sir Thomas Darcy, knight