

SUMMARY: The document below, dated 16 April 1576, is a copy of the instructions given to Robert Beale by the Privy Council for his embassy to Prince William of Orange (1533-1584). The outrage committed against Oxford only a few days earlier is specifically mentioned in the instructions.

Oxford had left Paris on or about 10 April 1576 (see TNA SP 70/138, ff. 29-31). As his ship crossed the Channel, it was attacked by pirates from Flushing, provoking reaction by the Privy Council and the sending of Robert Beale (1541-1601), Clerk of the Privy Council, to Flanders to meet with Prince William of Orange or the Governors of Flushing. The embassy met with little success. From the entry for Robert Beale in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available online:

*Beale's clerkship, his involvement with the principal secretaryship, and his prior experience overseas made him an unusually good candidate for a variety of diplomatic activities. Between 16 April and 26 July 1576 he went to the Low Countries as special ambassador on £2 per day to protest at Dutch seizures of English shipping. He had an audience with William of Orange about 1 May and carried with him a scarcely veiled warning: if Dutch piracies did not cease, Elizabeth would consider joining Philip II in suppressing the rebellion there. The queen emphasized her displeasure by sending Sir William Winter to join with Beale, the former arriving with new threats and demands that the Dutch repay outstanding English loans. The failure of the two men to gain Dutch co-operation led for a time to something not far removed from war between England and the Low Countries.*

In the copy, the word 'put' appears to be a scribal error for 'present' in the original, indicating that Beale had been present at the Council debate:

*We shall need the less to amplify this matter, as well for that you were put [sic] at the debating of the same*

Instructions given by the Lords of her Majesty's Privy Council to Mr Robert Beale,  
dispatched to the Prince of Orange the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1576

You shall immediately upon your arrival at Flushing inform yourself by such English merchants as you shall find there whether the ships pertaining unto the Merchants Adventurers lately stayed by them of Flushing be set at liberty, or what hope there is of their releasement, or whether they mean to detain them, pretending to do the same in respect of certain ships of theirs stayed in the west parts of this realm, without the releasement of which ships detained here they will not set at liberty the said ships appertaining unto the Merchants Adventurers.

And after full information had thereof, in case you shall find at your arrival the Merchants' Adventurers' ships released and departed from the port of Flushing, whereby

they shall not appear unto you to be within the danger of their arrest, then shall you deliver unto the Prince, if you shall find him in Zealand, or in his absence unto the Governors there, our message in such sort as you receive the same signed by us, and to th' end that he or they may the better consider of it and give the more credit unto you, you shall show them it, as also in case either he or they shall require, you shall deliver unto them a copy thereof.

On thother side, if you shall find the said ships not released and yet that there is hope that they shall be set at liberty, then shall you let him or them understand from us that her Majesty findeth her honour so greatly wounded through the daily misuseage of her subjects and of such public ministers as are sent hither from foreign princes, but chiefly through an outrage lately committed upon the Earl of Oxford, that in case the said Prince or Governors shall not search out th' offenders and see them most severely punished, as also such ships set at liberty as have been of late stayed by them of Flushing, she shall be forced to put in execution such remedies for the redress thereof as she would be loath to do otherwise than forced of necessity, wherein though her Majesty heretofore hath delayed to use such redress as by th' injuries received by her subjects to her great dishonour she hath been justly provoked unto, you may now assure both him and them from us that her Majesty is fully resolved no longer to endure to have her subjects so misused.

Lastly, in case you shall find the said Prince or Governors to stand upon conditional terms, as to have the said ships here arrested first released before he either punish such as committed the said outrage against the said Earl or set at liberty the ships pertaining unto her Majesty's subjects, you shall then let them understand that they do too too much forget themselves in standing upon such conditional terms with a prince of her Majesty's quality and to whom they have been so many ways so much beholding, and that if he or they could with sound judgment look into their own case, they should then see that if they had to do [+with persons?] either of meaner quality or to whom they were less beholding that such a kind of conditional dealing were most injurious, for that if he or they did well consider that the arrest of their ships here proceeded of sundry complaints made unto her Majesty and unto us of divers spoils and outrages sustained by her said subjects, the said Flushingers having carried in the space well-near of one month into Zealand thirty sail pertaining unto her said subjects, both he and they should then see that as the cause of the arrest grew from themselves, so are they in reason first to make satisfaction, but in that they have upon this colour stayed the ships pertaining unto the Merchants Venturers, to whom by contract they have granted free passage, they offer thereby double injury.

We shall need the less to amplify this matter, as well for that you were put [sic] at the debating of the same, as also for that you are chiefly to be guided by your own discretion accordingly as you shall find the state of things there at your arrival. Only this we think necessary, that until such time as the Merchants' Adventurers' ships shall be released you forbear to use threatenings, seeking only by persuasions to reduce them to yield to the releasement, which being done and the ships departed, then shall you deliver the message unto the Prince and Governors in such sort as it is by us signed.