

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 16 April 1576 written by Lord Burghley to Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590). 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, who robbed Oxford of all that he had brought back from his continental tour, and threatened his life. This outrage and similar depredations on English shipping by the Flushingers angered the Queen and Privy Council, who sent Robert Beale (1541-1601), Clerk of the Privy Council, to Flanders to meet with Prince William of Orange (1533-1584). As Lord Burghley predicted in his letter below, the embassy met with little success. From the entry for Robert Beale in the *ODNB*:

*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.*

For a letter dated 21 April 1576 written to King Henri III (1551-1589) by the French ambassador in England, Michel de Castelnau (c.152-1592), Sieur de Mauvissiere, mentioning the attack on Oxford by pirates from Flushing, see TNA PRO 31/3/27, ff. 75-8. See also TNA SP 70/138, ff. 44-5 and TNA SP 70/138, f. 46.

For a letter dated 5 June 1576 from Robert Beale to Lord Burghley describing Beale's fruitless attempt to recover the goods taken from Oxford by the pirates, see BL Cotton MS Galba C V, ff. 252-3.

I have perused all your letters and memorials for Mr Beale concerning his voyage into Zealand, and I do so well allow of the whole course therein taken by my Lords as I do both with heart and hand sign them, and as I wrote yesterday, I found it hard to make a good distinction betwixt anger and judgment for my Lord of Oxford's misusage, so surely when I look into the universal barbarism of the Prince's forces of the Flushingers which are only a rabble of common pirates, or worse, and that make no difference whom they outrage, I do mistrust of any good issue to the cause, though of itself it be to be favoured, yet as it is said, *bona{m} causam male agendo perijssse*.

I humbly thank all my Lords for the regard of my Lord of Oxford, in whose person surely her Majesty and the realm hath taken disgrace, and if the Prince shall not yield to hang some of the principal for such a robbery, I must say, howsoever her Majesty shall bend

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herself for the private(?) cause, she ought in justice otherwise to see it revenged, for if justice be denied in such a notorious case, all laws betwixt mere(?) princes do warrant a proceeding otherwise to make an example of avenge, and surely if Mr Beale shall speak with the Prince, he may do well to advise him to think that such an outrage as this is cannot take end without more offence to him and his than may be the hanging of 5 or 6 such thieves, as if he were rid of an hundred of them his cause would prosper better and his friends would increase, which if he shall by subterfuge in answer delay, he will feel shall neither prosper nor yet his friends remain obliged to him as they have. You see my anger leadeth my judgment, and yet truly I am not hereto moved more for particular than for the public.

I need add nothing to your writings. Mr Beale is wise, and I pray him if my name be of any value to use it to the Prince as feeling myself in the p{ro}vt(?) [=private?] of the Earl of Oxford interested with this outrage, and so also expecting the rather some honourable amends by justice in executing of the pirates. xvj Ap{ri}lis 1576.

Your assured friend, W. Burghley

This hot weather beginneth to lift my evil foot from my footstool. I pray you thank my Lord of Sussex and Leicester for permitting me to be partaker with their private letter.

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable my assured friend, Mr Secretary Walsingham; (2) 1576, from the Lord Treasurer dated the 16 of April touching Mr Beale's voyage into Zealand