

SUMMARY: The document below consists of two extracts from the Acts of the Privy Council stating that on 13 June 1555 the Privy Council sent a letter of thanks to Sir Henry Tyrrell and Mr Anthony Browne for assisting the Sheriff with the execution of Protestant heretics, and that on 15 June 1555 the Privy Council sent a similar letter of thanks to the 16th Earl of Oxford, Richard (1496/7-1567), 1st Baron Rich, and Sir John Wentworth (1494-1567) for assisting the sheriff of Essex in the execution of Protestant heretics. For the earlier letter of 3 June 1555 from the Privy Council ordering the 16th Earl to have his officers, servants and tenants attend on Lord Rich at Colchester and Manningtree to be present at the execution of Protestant heretics (but not requiring the Earl himself to be present), see Dasent, p. 141.

Earlier, on 18 March 1554 [=1555] the 16th Earl of Oxford had been ordered by the Privy Council to be present, in company with Lord Rich, at the burning of Protestant heretics at certain places in Essex, and to assist the Sheriff of Essex in that regard (see Dasent, p. 104). There is no evidence that the 16th Earl obeyed the order and was physically present at these executions. Lord Rich, on the other hand, according to *The Dictionary of National Biography* was ‘infamous for his energetic persecution of heretics’:

Rich and his wife entertained Mary on her progress to the capital early in August 1553, and he was named a privy councillor on 28 August. Having profited greatly from the dissolutions, Rich was forced by Mary to restore some properties, and he opposed the restoration of land to the see of Durham on the same grounds. Although not active as a privy councillor, he was busy in Essex, where he was soon infamous for his energetic persecution of heretics. He was consistent in suppressing conventicles during Edward's and Mary's reigns. Rich's earlier support for moderate religious reform under Somerset led Thomas Watts, burnt at Chelmsford in June 1555, to rebuke him: 'My Lord, beware, beware! For you do against your own conscience herein, and without you repent, the Lord will revenge it' (Acts and Monuments, 7.123). Yet it seems clear that Rich remained a conservative in religion throughout his life, and his earlier endorsement of reform was motivated more by politics and greed than by personal faith.

The excerpts below are taken from Dasent, John Roche, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, New Series, 32 vols., (1890-1964) at vol. V, pp. 147-8.

LM: The execution of heretics

A letter of thanks to Sir Henry Tyrrell and Mr Anthony Browne for assisting the Sheriff in the putting of such to execution as were condemned.

LM: The execution of heretics

A letter of thanks to the Earl of Oxenford, the Lord Rich and Sir John Wentworth for their pains taken in assisting the Sheriff of Essex in the executing of certain persons in the said county, and as touching preachers to come down hither, they are promised order shall be given therein accordingly.