

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 28 March 1602 from Anthony Atkinson, prisoner in Newgate, to Sir Robert Cecil, mentioning Oxford as 'honourable', and having 'a good heart', although too much given to trusting his servant, Michael Cawley, and referring to Oxford's lameness ('his legs troubles him').

It appears from the letter that Atkinson carried messages between Oxford and the Lord Treasurer, Thomas Sackville (c.1536-1608), 1st Baron Buckhurst, and that it was Oxford who instructed Atkinson to reveal to Buckhurst the libels which resulted in the proceedings in the Star Chamber noted below.

Anthony Atkinson was a customs searcher and sometime priest hunter based in Hull, who had been appointed to his position by Oxford's father-in-law, Lord Burghley. Other letters indicate that Atkinson had also sought 'countenance' from Henry Hastings (1536?-1595), 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, and Robert Devereux (1565-1601), 2nd Earl of Essex. For Atkinson's position at Hull, see:

<http://www.sp12.hull.ac.uk/lansdowne/lacat/lacat080.htm>

42. An information against Anthony Atkinson, Searcher, at the Port of Kingston-upon-Hull, for frauds in his office, Feb. 8, 1595.

43. A copy of Lord Burghley's letter to the Custom Officer and Comptroller of Kingston-upon-Hull; to have a watchful eye on Atkinson the Searcher, Feb. 20, 1595.

See also:

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=109-mss_1-2_1&cid=2-4#2-4

24 Petition by Anthony Atkinson, searcher in the port of Hull, to Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, for permission to train merchants' sons and sailors in the use of arms, c.1597.

Anthony Atkinson was a prisoner in Newgate on 28 March 1602, and was eventually tried in the Star Chamber, together with William Elston, Gilbert Wilkinson and Michael Cawley, for having libelled the Privy Council and the Lord Treasurer. Many of the allegations were of corruption on the part of the Lord Treasurer, Thomas Sackville (c.1536-1608), 1st Baron Buckhurst. TNA SP 12/283/7 contains a summary of the charges against Atkinson, Elston, Wilkinson and Cawley, and is endorsed:

Mr Secretary Cecil; business in the Star Chamber betwixt the Lord Buckhurst and Atkinson.

In a letter of 5 January 1602 to John Chamberlain, TNA SP 12/283/6, Dudley Carleton stated that:

There are this day brought before the Council certain bold fellows that lay high matters to the Lords' charge; as Arthur Hale [=Hall?], who accuses the Lord Keeper; one Atkinson, who accuses the Lord Treasurer, and two others, Mr Secretary; they were heard in great secrecy, and sent to the Gatehouse; their cause will thrive ill when their adverse party is juge et partie; the Lord Chief Justice and Attorney Coke will have the hearing of the matter.

The result of the trial was reported to Dudley Carleton by John Chamberlain in two letters dated 27 June 1602 and 8 July 1602, TNA SP 12/284/46, and TNA SP 12/284/72:

The last day of the term at the Star Chamber Atkinson, Wilkinson, Elson and Cawley, the accusers of the Lord Treasurer, were after a long and tedious hearing condemned in a fine to be whipped, to stand on the pillory and lose their ears, and to the galleys or perpetual imprisonment. The first and third found some little favour, and were dispensed withal for whipping and their ears, in consideration the one was very penitent and had revealed the whole plot and drift, the other for that he was a soldier, and so more subject to discontentment. . . .

On Wednesday last Atkinson and his fellows had their payment in Cheapside according to the sentence in the Star Chamber. . . .

See McClure, Norman Egbert, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, Vol. I, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939) pp. 151-5.

For an entry dated Friday, 11 June 1602, and other mentions of the Star Chamber proceedings, see also Baildon, William Paley, ed., *Les Reportes del Cases in Camera Stellata 1593 to 1609 From the Original MS. of John Hawarde*, 1894, pp. 143, 146, 147, 411 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/lesreportesdelc00bailgoog#page/n231/mode/2up>.

Three endorsements on CP 42/27, a letter dated 10 July 1596, reflect the allegations in TNA SP 12/283/7:

Corn, wine, stir sedition, promoter, caterpillar, £90,000

Earl of Oxford not to be touched

Atkinson submitteth, accuseth Elson and Cawley

It thus seems likely that these three endorsements were added in error to CP 42/27, and that they in fact pertain to the Star Chamber proceedings of 1602, rather than to the 1596 complaint against Richard Atkinson of Ripon in CP 42/27.

For Lord Burghley as Anthony Atkinson's patron, see CP 125/109, a letter from Jane Jobson to Sir Robert Cecil dated 30 April 1608 entreating favour for Anthony Atkinson,

searcher of Hull, who was placed there by ‘your father, my uncle’. It would appear from this and other letters that Atkinson did not suffer the sentence of ‘the galleys or perpetual imprisonment’ reported by John Chamberlain.

For Anthony Atkinson’s family connections, see CP 122/142, a letter dated 20 October 1607 from William Atkinson to his ‘cousin, Anthony Atkinson’, also mentioning his ‘cousin Thomas’, and the death of his ‘cousin Mr Robert Atkinson’; and CP 122/143, a letter dated 20 October 1607 from William Atkinson to Sir John Dawson mentioning his cousin, Anthony Atkinson.

For other letters from or concerning Atkinson, see CP 27/6; CP 30/82; CP 36/51; CP 44/82; CP 53/33; CP 88/70; CP 94/75; CP 117/67; CP 126/83; CP 169/36; CP 184/26; CP 203/152; CP 213/18; CP 213/65; and CP 251/157.

For Michael Cawley’s connection to Oxford, see ERO D/DRg/2/26, and CP Petitions 787.

For another of the defendants, William Elston, see CP 184/26, a letter dated 6 May 1602 from Jane Elston to Sir Robert Cecil.

The Lord Admiral mentioned in the letter was Charles Howard (1536–1624), 1st Earl of Nottingham.

‘Captain Fenner’ mentioned in the letter was the merchant and privateer George Fenner (c.1540–1618). His parentage is unknown; however as noted above, Jane Elston is said in the letter below to be his niece. He commanded the galleon *Leicester* in the Armada campaign, served again with Lord Admiral Howard in 1591, 1593 and 1599, and accompanied Essex on the Islands voyage in 1596. He died 26 October 1618 at the Charterhouse, and was buried in the chapel there.

Right Honourable, though I have been grievously wronged by bad company, yet would I not have you abused. If Wilkinson and his wife be soundly examined, I am assured they will open the truth about Elston and his wife, and if that voluntarily they do it not, let them be urged upon all the points in my book and articles. I fear both Elston, Wilkinson and the rest have been laboured to lay all upon me. Elston[’s] wife hath from the first that I opened the matter dealt cunningly by advice of her uncle Fenner and others.

I understand by the Lord Treasurer that the Lord Admiral doth give credit to Captain Fenner. Neither your Honour nor the said Lords have cause to trust him upon my knowledge, which will appear by Wilkinson and others hereafter, and where I understand by the Lord Treasurer that Captain Fenner excuseth Elston, I think he hath reason least he open his budget and make him and others known, God reveal the truth.

The Earl of Oxenford sent word by Cawley when I was last before your Honours that Elston was a dangerous man. His Lordship knows no less, and Cawley is become a saint in all matters, but the end will try all, and as I remember the Earl wrote in his letter that Cawley brought in his excuse that Wilkinson first opened Elston and his matters to his Lordship, which indeed is true, for the 4th of October he uttered that Elston had great causes touching the state, as is in my book etc.

The Earl is honourable, and I will make no debate, but I wish his Lordship had better counsel than Cawley, least he make not his honourable friends offended, and in the end it may be doubted that Cawley will betray him as he hath done me. His Lordship hath a good heart, but his legs troubles him or else Cawley would set his Honour a-work in many causes as well as he did about me, God reward him as he deserves, but if I were abroad as he is I could find(?) hounds(?) to(?) search(?) out his dealings to his shame, and so much abuseth his Lord and master, and feeds both his Honour and his Lady in their humours.

I humbly pray you for God's cause to forgive me, for I will take it upon my salvation I never meant to your Honour nor none of your house any harm, nor yet to my Lord Admiral, and if the Earl and Cawley had not been, I had come to your Honour the first night, and then had I been a frete(?) nott(?) man, yet I thought that I had been clear when I had made it known to my Lord Treasurer as the Earl commanded me, being but as a servant or messenger betwixt them from time to time, and there were never any but the Earl and Lord Treasurer that ever saw the articles until I was examined.

And if Mr Young, my Lord Admiral[s] man, had kept promise with me the 7 or 8th of November, I had acquainted his Lordship and your Honour withal, for I met Mr Young at Ram Alley End in Fleet Street, and told him his Lord and master was abused, and prayed him to tell his Lordship I would speak with his Honour, who promised me he would, but we met often and he had not done it for me, so I passed off(?) the time, and perceived it to be a plot practised in Essex' time, and if Elston had not been warned to take heed of me, I had got all out of him, for surely there was writings in some place for that purpose, and some that combined with Elston not far from London, as I think.

God send the truth to appear, and preserve you from your foes with increase of honour, which is the worst I wish, reserving myself wholly into your merciful hands, and in like manner to my Lord Admiral, humbly praying your Honours to move my Lord Treasurer to be good to me, and whatsoever you will afflict upon me that I am able to endure I will be content, but if your Honour knew my torments, oppressions and wrongs, you would lament the same.

And so craving pardon, I humbly take my leave this 28th March 1602,

Your Honour's humbly to command,

Anthony Atkinson

Postscript: Sir, I have matters for her Majesty to prosecute both in the Exchequer and Star Chamber which are greatly hindered by my imprisonment, and an utter ruin to me and mine forever without your merciful compassion towards me.

Endorsed: To the right honourable Sir Robert Cecil, knight, Principal Secretary to the Queen's most excellent Majesty at court [+or?] elsewhere

Endorsed: 1602, March 28, Anthony Atkinson, prisoner in Newgate, to my master