

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 20 May 1595 from Sir Anthony Standen (died c.1615) to an unnamed correspondent.

The letter describes efforts by friends and relations of Robert Devereux (1565-1601), 2nd Earl of Essex, to persuade the Queen to mitigate ‘this matter imposed upon the Earl for gendering’. From the *ODNB*:

The resultant long periods of separation from his wife also perhaps help to explain Essex's dalliances with other women, including Elizabeth Southwell, a maid of honour (which resulted in the birth of his illegitimate son, Walter Devereux, at the end of 1591), and Elizabeth Stanley, countess of Derby, in 1596–7. Early in 1598 he was also reported as having revived a relationship with ‘his fairest B’, who was perhaps Elizabeth Brydges, the elder daughter of Giles Brydges, third Lord Chandos.

The Queen had belatedly learned in May 1595 that Essex was the father of Elizabeth Southwell’s illegitimate son, Walter, born in 1591, for whose paternity Sir Thomas Vavasour (1560-1620), brother of Oxford’s mistress, Anne Vavasour, had earlier taken the blame. For the will of Sir Thomas Vavasour, see TNA PROB 11/136/511.

For Essex’s illegitimate son by Elizabeth Southwell, see Emerson at:

<http://www.kateemersonhistoricals.com/TudorWomenSo-Sy.htm>

Elizabeth Southwell (1569-1602+) was the daughter of Sir Thomas Southwell of Woodrising, Norfolk (c.1542-c. 1572) and his third wife, Nazaret Newton (c.1541-April 16, 1583). She was at court as a maid of honor by 1588/9 and in 1591 suffered from “lameness in her leg”—she was pregnant. Thomas Vavasour (1560-1620), brother of Ann, a former maid of honor whose pregnancy a decade earlier had cost her the queen’s favor, took the blame for her condition and was imprisoned for misconduct. What happened to Elizabeth is unclear, other than that she gave birth to a boy named Walter (1591-c.1641) who was given to Lettice, countess of Essex and Leicester, to be raised at Drayton Bassett. She may have returned to court, but more likely she was simply still referred to as a maid of honor. In May 1595, the queen learned that the father of young Walter was not Thomas Vavasour but rather Robert Devereux, earl of Essex. Queen Elizabeth was furious, not only because the child had been fathered by Essex, her on and off again favorite, but because she had been deceived. . . .

It appears from Standen’s letter that the birth of Essex and Elizabeth Southwell’s illegitimate son had also involved Doctor Gifford and Lady Scudamore, who were now also the objects of the Queen’s displeasure.

For Essex’ sister, Penelope (nee Devereux) Rich, the ‘Lady Rich’ mentioned in the letter below, see the *ODNB* entry.

The persons whose efforts on behalf of Essex are the chief subject of Standen's letter below are Mary (nee Browne) Wriothesley (d.1607), Countess of Southampton, and her second husband, Sir Thomas Heneage, for whom see the *ODNB* entry. Standen's epithet 'her ill-goodman' suggests that Heneage was already suffering from ill health in May 1595. He had married the Countess on 2 May 1594, and died 17 October 1595.

'Lady Scudamore' mentioned in the letter below was Mary Shelton (c.1550 – 15 November 1603), wife of Sir John Scudamore (1542 – 15 April 1623) of Holme Lacy, Herefordshire. See the *ODNB* entry, and Skidmore, Warren, 'Lady Mary Scudamore (c.1550-1603), Courtier', Occasional Papers No. 29, available online.

See also Emerson's entry for Mary Shelton at:

<http://www.kateemersonhistoricals.com/TudorWomenSa-Sn.htm>.

Standen suggests, however, that the Earl's 'gendering' was perhaps not the real cause of the Queen's displeasure:

Most that talk do judge this not to be the principal cause, neither yet that of the newly-coined Countess, but that some other matter hath been discovered unto the Queen

The 'matter' of the 'newe coyned countes' which Standen alludes to in passing has not been satisfactorily explained. Birch originally identified the 'newe coyned countes' in 1754 as Elizabeth Vernon, who in late August or early September 1598 secretly married Henry Wriothesley (1573-1624), 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. See Birch, Thomas, *Memoirs of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, Vol. I, (London: A. Millar, 1754), p. 238 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/memoirsreignque01bircgoog#page/n248/mode/2up>.

However Birch's identification is ruled out by the date of Standen's letter (20 May 1595), and by the fact that 'Lady Robert Cecil' and 'Doctor Gifford', both named in the letter, died prior to Southampton's marriage to Elizabeth Vernon. For Sir Robert Cecil's wife, Elizabeth Brooke (d. 24 January 1597), see McKeen, David, *A Memory of Honour*, (Salzburg: Institut Fur Anglistik Und Amerikanistik, 1986), p. 666, and the *ODNB* entry:

In August 1589 Cecil married Elizabeth Brooke (1562–1597), daughter of the tenth Lord Cobham. Six months older than Cecil, with a sister already a widow, she was a veteran of the privy chamber, serving her godmother the queen, and well beyond the usual age of first marriage for aristocratic girls. . . . In January 1597, pregnant with her third child, Lady Cecil miscarried and died.

For the Queen's physician, Roger Gifford (d. 27 January 1597), see the *ODNB* entry.

Hammer recently identified the 'newe coyned countes' as Oxford's daughter Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), who married William Stanley (1561-1642), 6th Earl of Derby, at

Greenwich Place on 26 January 1595. See Hammer, p. 321:

Although the couple [i.e. Elizabeth Vere and the Earl of Derby] soon had a daughter, also named Elizabeth, the marriage initially proved to be a disaster. A passing reference by Anthony Standen to rumours about Essex and ‘the newe coyned countes’ suggests that Lady Derby may have been involved with Essex as early as May 1595 (LPI, MS 651, fol. 122r). This may have been one of the ‘divers injuries and wrongs’ which her father, the earl of Oxford, complained he had received from Essex by October 1595. The countess was clearly more interested in the delights of Court than in her husband and, by July 1596, Burghley was upset that she was even ignoring her child (PRO, SP 12/259, fol. 140r). Derby himself was frustrated that she did not behave like a dutiful wife, but he could do little to change her behaviour.

See Hammer, Paul E. J., *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 321.

If the ‘newe coyned countes’ was Elizabeth Vere, Hammer would appear to be correct in concluding that the Queen and others at court had knowledge of an alleged affair between Elizabeth Vere and Essex as early as May 1595.

However it is also possible that the ‘newe coyned countes’ was Essex’ sister, Dorothy (nee Devereux) Perrot, whose first husband, Sir Thomas Perrot, had died in February 1594, and who had recently married Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland. From the *ODNB*:

In 1594 Northumberland married Lady Dorothy Perrott (d. 1619), widow of Sir Thomas Perrott, son of Sir John Perrott, the late lord deputy in Ireland, and sister of Elizabeth's favourite, Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex (1565–1601).

However it is not known what, if anything, the Countess of Northumberland might have done to incur the Queen’s displeasure in May 1595.

The endorsement ‘De monsr Standen le 20 de May 1595’ was partly obscured in the binding process, and a photographic image of it cannot be obtained; however it was kindly supplied to the author of this website by the Assistant Archivist at the Lambeth Public Library in an e-mail message on 8 May 2017.

Right Worshipful,

I have this morning taken pills for a hurt I find in the liver, wherefore by order of the doctor not to stir abroad.

What I learned yesternight amongst the dames was that the Lady Rich, having visited the Lady Robert Cecil at her house, understood that the Countess of Southampton and her ill-goodman had expected on Sunday two hours to have spoken with the Queen, but could not. At last the Countess sent in word that she desired her Majesty's resolution, to which the Queen answered that she was sufficiently resolved, but that the next day she would talk with her further about this matter imposed upon the Earl for gendering.

The Lady Scudamore and Doctor Gifford are also in the class.

Most that talk do judge this not to be the principal cause, neither yet that of the newly-coined Countess, but that some other matter hath been discovered unto the Queen not known to the vulgar which doth pinch nearer, and this is mightily imprinted in men's breasts through the multitude of traitors they have seen him heretofore straitly besieged with. I am heartily sorry to hear us made a football in the world, and yet if he were subject to counsel there is doubtless a remedy, which consisteth in the diligence about and observing of her, which two points put in practice would restore his greatness, and yield his foes flat at his feet.

Endorsed: De monsr Standen le 20 de May 1595