

SUMMARY: The document below dated December 1583 entitled ‘Account of Events in England’ states that Oxford’s first cousin, Lord Henry Howard (1540-1614), had been imprisoned on suspicion of being in communication with Mary, Queen of Scots. Hume identifies the ‘Lord Howard’ mentioned in the ‘Account of Events’ as Lord William Howard, but this identification is not supported by the other evidence. A letter dated 28 February 1583 from Mary, Queen of Scots, to the Spanish ambassador in London, Don Bernardino de Mendoza (d.1604) confirms that Lord Henry Howard was in communication with her, and the entry for Lord Henry Howard in *The Dictionary of National Biography* states that he was imprisoned in the Fleet in September 1583 on suspicion of involvement in the Throckmorton plot

*[I]n September 1583, suspected of involvement in the Throckmorton plot, he suffered miserable conditions of imprisonment in the Fleet prison, and in July 1585 he was confined to Sir Nicholas Bacon's house in Suffolk. In all he was arrested and imprisoned five times. By the 1580s he was in secret correspondence with the Queen of Scots (who did not trust him with anything of importance) while between 1582 and 1584 the Spanish ambassador Mendoza paid him a substantial pension for regular information from Elizabeth's court.*

Lord Henry Howard’s close friend and kinsman, Charles Arundel, fled England at this time for fear of arrest. A letter dated 22 December 1583 written by the Spanish ambassador in Paris, Juan Bautista de Tassis, to King Philip II, reports Arundel’s arrival in Paris (see Paris Archives K.1561).

The events which precipitated Howard’s arrest and Arundel’s flight from England were the arrests of John Somerville (1560-1583) and Francis Throckmorton (1554-1584). Somerville’s plight was attributed by contemporaries to Leicester’s vengeance, as indicated in the entry for Somerville in *The Dictionary of National Biography*:

*Somerville and his family were members of the Roman Catholic church, and he presumed its restoration if Mary, Queen of Scots, should supplant Elizabeth I. In early October 1583 Somerville had been examined regarding an acquaintance imprisoned in the Tower for associating with Mary. On 24 October 1583 he was ill in bed at his father-in-law's home. Yet early the next morning he began to journey alone to London, where he was said to have ‘meant to shoot her [Elizabeth] with his dagg [pistol], and hoped to see her head on a pole, for that she was a serpent and a viper’ (CSP dom., 1581–90, 126). Somerville publicized his intention to fellow guests at an inn, and he was arrested and questioned for the next few days. On 31 October he spoke to Sir John Conway, a relation of the Ardens, regarding ‘the trouble of his mind’ (ibid., 126). On 7 November Thomas Wilkes, secretary to the privy council, reported to Sir Francis Walsingham that ‘nothing could be learned except from the confessions’ of Somerville and his family (ibid., 129). Some scholars have presumed that this last statement implied the use of torture. In any event Somerville, as well as his wife's parents, and Hugh Hall, a priest resident at Park Hall, whom he was said to have implicated as the instigators of this ‘conspiracy’, were imprisoned in the Tower of London and convicted of high treason on 16 December 1583.*

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*On 19 December Somerville and Arden were moved from the Tower to Newgate prison. Within two hours of this move Somerville was found strangled in his cell. It was stated that he had committed suicide. His head was cut off and placed on Tower Bridge, and his body buried in Moorfields outside the city of London.*

*Many contemporaries of Somerville believed that he had been the means for Robert Dudley's vengeance for the public contempt with which he was held by Edward Arden. That Somerville was mentally ill seems beyond doubt. Cecil admitted as much in his *Execution of Justice in England*, and William Allen drew attention to this fact in his *True Defense of English Catholics*. Like other Roman Catholics, he questioned whether John Somerville had died in his cell 'for prevention of the discovery of certain shameful practices about the condemnation' of his father-in-law (Allen, 108–9).*

Francis Throckmorton and Lord Henry Howard were identified as 'the chief agents' for Mary, Queen of Scots, at this time, and both were in close communication with the French ambassador, as indicated in the entry for Throckmorton in *The Dictionary of National Biography*:

*In April 1583 Francis Walsingham received a report from Henry Fagot, his agent inside the French embassy, that Francis Throckmorton had dined with the ambassador, having recently sent the Scottish queen the sum of 1500 crowns, 'which is on the ambassador's account' (CSP Scot., 1581–3, 432). A month later Fagot wrote again with the information that 'the chief agents for the Queen of Scots are M. Throckmorton and Lord Henry Howard. They never come to bring things from her except at night' (Bossy, 200). This, together with further reports of 'what secret resorts he had to the French ambassador, what long and private conferences at seasons suspicious' (ibid., 203), was enough for Walsingham to set a watch on Throckmorton and in November he was arrested at his London house. He just had time to destroy a letter he was in the act of writing to the Queen of Scots and send a maidservant with a casket of incriminating documents to the Spanish ambassador, Bernardino Mendoza, but among his seized papers was a list of the names of 'certain Catholic noblemen and gentlemen' and also details of harbours 'suitable for landing forraigne forces' ('A discovery', 192). Confronted with these Throckmorton at first 'impudently' denied they were his, saying they must have been planted by the government searchers, but later admitted they had been left in his chamber by a man named Nutby who had since fled the realm. When he refused to say any more he was put on the rack and 'somewhat pinched', but 'continued in his former obstinacy and denial of the truth' (ibid., 191). He managed to smuggle a message out to Mendoza, written in cipher on the back of a playing card, saying he would die a thousand deaths before he betrayed his friends, but, racked a second time, he broke down and 'yielded to confess anything he knew' (ibid.). . . . At his trial he attempted to retract the matters he had confessed because the rack had forced him to say something to ease the torment. He was executed at Tyburn on 10 July 1584 and was reported to have died 'very stubbornly', refusing to ask for the queen's forgiveness.*

Considering that Lord Henry Howard was so closely involved with Francis Throckmorton, the French and Spanish ambassadors, and Mary, Queen of Scots, at this

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time, the fact that he was merely imprisoned, and later released, seems nothing short of miraculous.

For the roles played by Charles Arundel and Lord Henry Howard in events involving Oxford in 1580/1 see TNA SP 15/27A/46, ff. 81-2 and other documents on this website, in particular the letters of the Spanish ambassador to England, Don Bernardino de Mendoza (d.1604).

The translation below is taken from Hume, Martin, ed., *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs*, Vol. III, 1580-1586, p. 512.

A gentleman named Somerville, being out of his mind, said in the presence of many others that it was necessary the Queen of England should be killed, as she was the bane of the Catholic Church. The other gentlemen paid no attention to what he said, as they saw he was not in his right senses, but he continued in the same way of thinking and went towards London, saying openly that he was going thither to kill the Queen. He was arrested on the road by a judge, who sent him a prisoner to London. In the prison there he accused several persons, and amongst others his father-in-law and a priest, his confessor. Some of these persons are already in prison, and they are seeking the others on the charge of high treason for not having revealed to the Council the words of the madman. Four out of these persons are heretics, although adherents of the Queen of Scotland. Lord Howard is also a prisoner, accused of having spoken somewhat freely in favour of the Queen of Scotland, and he is suspected of having some communication with her. Francis Throgmorton and a son of his named George are also in the Tower of London, the former under suspicion of communicating with the Queen of Scotland. They have found a box of his containing two papers, in one of which were enumerated all the ports on the English coast where a landing could be effected, and the other bearing the names of many principal English Catholics. They have put him to the torture dreadfully.