

SUMMARY: The letter below dated 13 August 1586 (3 August 1586 Old Style) written by Bernardino de Mendoza (d.1604) to King Philip II concerns the Babington plot, and is remarkable for its list of names of those who were allegedly either involved in the plot or aware of it. As might have been expected, Oxford's name is conspicuously absent, although those allegedly involved included many of his close relatives. Oxford's first cousin, Lord Henry Howard (1540-1614), and his second cousins, Philip Howard (1557-1595), 13th Earl of Arundel, Thomas Howard (1561-1626), later 1st Earl of Suffolk, and William Howard (1563-1640) were allegedly to have played prominent roles, as were his half-nephews, Frederick (1559-1585), 4th Lord Windsor, and one of his brothers. The conspirators allegedly intended to kill Oxford's father-in-law, William Cecil (1520/1-1598), Lord Burghley; Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590); Henry Carey (1526-1596), 1st Lord Hunsdon; Sir Francis Knollys (1511/12-1596); and Robert Beale (1541-1601). A note on the letter in the hand of King Philip II reads: 'It does not matter so much about Cecil, although he is a great heretic, but he is very old, and it was he who advised the understandings with the Prince of Parma, and he has done no harm. It would be advisable to do as he says with the others'. Other notations in the King's hand indicate serious fears about the secrecy of the enterprise. Hume comments that 'The King's misgivings with regard to the secrecy of the correspondence were fully justified, as copies of all the letters concerning this conspiracy were very soon in the possession of Walsingham'. Whether all those named in the letter were in any way involved in, or even aware of, the conspiracy is open to question, but the fact that Lord Henry Howard's name is mentioned is a telling indication of where his loyalties were thought to lie. 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. II, 1568-1579, pp. 603-8.

Some months since I wrote to your Majesty that some English Catholics had sent a priest to me to learn whether your Majesty would help them if they rose. As he did not descend to further particulars than this, I replied vaguely, instancing the promptitude with which your Majesty had always offered aid whenever an opportunity had occurred of forwarding so righteous a cause as the augmentation of the Catholic church. This, I said, was the motive of your actions, and I was sure that you would again proceed in the same spirit, if they on their part provided you with a worthy opportunity. In order to be able again to submit their intentions to your Majesty, however, I said it would be well for them to come to details with me, and clear up certain points which I considered necessary to convince me that the matter was serious. I told the priest what these points were, so that he might communicate them to his principals and obtain the information desired.

The Catholics have now sent to me a gentleman of good family called Master Gifford with proper credentials, and the substance of his commission is what I have now to lay before your Majesty. My answer sent by the priest so greatly encouraged those who had

started the plot, that they decided to sound the principal Catholics and also the schismatics on the pretext that it was not possible for your Majesty to avoid revenging yourself upon the Queen of England, for having so shamelessly taken the Netherlands under her protection, and having sent such a multitude of ships to sea not only to rob your subjects, but also to sack and pillage your dominions in Spain and the Indies. These things, they said, could not possibly be overlooked, and if your Majesty did not send a fleet this year to England, you must do so next year, or the year after. For this reason they agreed that it would be well that a unanimous understanding should be arrived at by them, so that they might be ready to receive your Majesty's forces, the coming of which would be a benefit and not an injury to them. They all adopted the idea most readily, and swore not only to raise their forces respectively, but, if necessary, to call them out whenever was thought convenient, 20 days before the arrival of your Majesty's fleet, and to co-operate therewith as they might be instructed to do.

In order the further to prove to me their good faith, they sent me the names of the persons who had agreed to this, and a statement of the way in which they intended to proceed. This was to the effect that the Earl of Arundel, who is now a prisoner in the Tower of London, and with whom they are in communication, and have kept fully informed, undertakes, with the assistance of a few men, to make himself master of the Tower, whilst Lord Harry Howard, his uncle, would raise troops and would be joined by Lord Thomas Howard, the Earl's brother. Lord Thomas is not a Catholic, but desires by any means to avenge his father's death. Lord William, another brother of the Earl, a strong Catholic and very popular, would also join. The Earl of Northumberland, son of the Earl that died in the Tower. Lord Strange, son of the Earl of Derby, a young man with a great following. Lord Windsor, who has arms sufficient for 1,000 men, and who, as he lives near where the Queen of Scotland is confined, intends to release her. Lord Morley and Lord Stourton of the province of Lancashire, who have all the nobility of the county on their side, as well as the commonalty. Lord Dacre, who is a Catholic and wants to be made President of the Northern province, and revenge himself upon the President, the Earl of Huntingdon. Sir John Constable, a man of influence and large credit in the north, where all the people are Catholics. Sir William Courtenay, a Catholic, who expects to be able in the turmoil to recover the earldom of Devonshire, which is his by right. He is a person of great weight and credit in the west, and promises to ensure the possession of the port of Plymouth. Sir John Arundel and his son. The father is a prisoner in the Tower of London since the Duke of Norfolk's rising, and has all Cornwall at his bidding, as his family is much beloved. Lord Compton, who is in mid-England. Sir William Stanley, a soldier of great experience, who has come from Ireland by the Queen's orders with 1,000 troops, mostly Catholics, to pass over to Flanders. They are now quartered in the neighbourhood of London. The Queen herself administered the oath to this colonel three times in one week, that he would be loyal to her, but as he is a Catholic he has found excuses for not going over quickly with his men to Flanders, in the expectation that your Majesty's fleet will arrive, and he will continue this course until news of the fleet comes. When he is obliged to go to Zeeland he promises to pass over on the first opportunity to the Prince of Parma. Lord Montague and all his house, which is the principal family in Sussex and has a great following.

In addition to these there are Lord Vaux, Sir Thomas Tresham, Sir Thomas Fitzherbert, Sir John Southward [sic?], Sir William Catesby. Lord Vaux and those whose names follow his have not been informed of the business, as they are declared Catholics, and are consequently held prisoners by the Queen, and under very heavy money penalties, but it is confidently assumed that as others far less interested are joining the design they certainly will do so.

Lord Gifford, a person of advanced age, is the father of the gentleman they have sent me, and he with the gentlemen whose names follow have agreed in the country where the Queen of Scotland is confined. Sir Walter Aston, his brother-in-law, Wolseley Beedle, Ashley Fowler, Dracot, Carswick, Maxfield, and others of the county of Derbyshire. Babington, Langford Shirley, Fitzherbert, and others of the county of Worcestershire. Abington, the Throgmortons and Middlemores [sic for 'Middlemores'?), in Shropshire. Talbot Brooke, Corbet. The captains James Bele and others in Ireland are also agreed to rise the moment they hear that the movement has begun in England. They have command of the Queen's troops in Ireland. Communications are also established with Claude Hamilton and the other Scots Catholic lords who agree to join the insurgents of the north the moment they rise. Considering the willingness with which those above-named and many others have offered to take up arms immediately they are assured of the period when your Majesty's fleet will arrive to help them, in case of the Queen's death they would probably do so even more readily, seeing the many evils which may result from the Queen's intimacy with the French.

This and the desire that your Majesty might promptly send them aid in their oppression in order to take advantage of the present favourable opportunity, now that all France is in turmoil and so many English heretic soldiers and sailors are in Holland and absent with the pirates, with discontent ripe not only amongst Catholic schismatics but also amongst heretics themselves owing to the oppressive new taxes for the war and the stoppage of trade, and with the whole country anxious for a change of government, led Babington, who is a strong Catholic, a youth of great spirit and good family, to try to find some secret means of killing the Queen. Six gentlemen, servants of the Queen, who have access to her house, have promised to do this, as I reported to Don Juan de Idiaquez on the 11th of May for your Majesty's information. This gentleman (Gifford) tells me that no person knows of this but Babington, and two of the principal leaders, and it would already have been effected if they had not had their suspicion aroused by seeing the Earl of Leicester armed and with a force in Zeeland, which they feared he might bring over to England quickly enough to attack them before they could gather their own forces or obtain help from your Majesty. This has caused them to delay laying hands upon the Queen until they had reported matters to me and received assurance that they would be succoured with troops from the Netherlands the moment they might desire it. As, moreover, they are most of them young men, and none of them soldiers, they desired that the Earl of Westmoreland should be ready to embark with some other experienced captains, of any nationality, to help them immediately it might be necessary. The Earl, they say, is so influential a personage that his mere presence will suffice to raise all the north-country as he has the greatest following of any man in England. They will not ask for troops to be sent unless they are urgently needed, and if I will give them my word that

they shall at once have help from the Netherlands in case they want it, and that your Majesty will succour them from Spain if required, they say that they will immediately put into execution their plan to kill the Queen. They beg me not to doubt this, as those who are to carry it out are resolved to do it, and not to await for a favourable opportunity, but to kill her, even on her throne and under her canopy of State, if I tell them that the time has arrived to put an end to her.

As a security for this, they would send hither for me to send as hostages, to any place I pleased, a brother of Lord Windsor, and two other gentlemen, who should be held as prisoners until the business was effected. They would also, if I pleased, give me hostages for their rising against the Queen 15 or 20 days before any time which was signified to them as the date that your Majesty's fleet might be looked for. They said they wished to negotiate this matter with me only, in consequence of the confidence they reposed in my secrecy and safety, and because I had helped them in their troubles in times past, on your Majesty's behalf, at my own great personal risk. They would on no account discover the matter to the French, nor would they appeal to any other prince but your Majesty, and they concluded by saying that, as they were all so deeply pledged in the business, it was necessary that it should be carried through very promptly, as all of them would be lost if it were discovered, and they prayed me most earnestly for God's sake to send them an instant answer.

I received the gentleman in a way which the importance of his proposal deserved, as it was so Christian, just and advantageous to the holy Catholic faith, and your Majesty's service, and I wrote them two letters by different routes, one in Italian and the other in Latin, encouraging them in the enterprise, which I said was worthy of spirits so Catholic, and of the ancient valour of Englishmen. If they succeeded in killing the Queen, they should have the assistance they required from the Netherlands, and assurance that your Majesty would succour them. This I promised them, in accordance with their request, upon my faith and word. I urged them with arguments to hasten the execution, and said that I had already given your Majesty information as to their resolution, and ended by thanking them for the kind opinion and esteem in which they held me, which was deserved, so far as regarded my goodwill towards their prompt liberation from tyranny and oppression.

In addition to the letter, I made some other remarks which I thought they should bear in mind. First, that on the day they intended to kill the Queen, they should have a person ready at the moment to arrest Don Antonio and the Portuguese who are with him, and lodge them in the Tower of London, or some other secure place, by which they would greatly oblige your Majesty in a way you would never forget. They should try to delay Colonel Stanley and the 1,000 Irishmen near London, so that when the thing was done he could seize the Queen's ships if they were not certain that the commander, Lord Howard, would embrace the cause of the Queen of Scotland. They should either kill or seize Cecil, Walsingham, Lord Hunsdon, Knollys and Beale of the Council, who have great influence with the heretics, as they are terrible heretics themselves, and I gave them other advice of the same sort.

I can give your Majesty no further assurance with regard to this business than what I have already written, namely, that which these Englishmen promise, but of all the plots they have hatched these many years past none have been apparently so serious as this. They have never before proposed to make away with the Queen, which now is the first step they intend to take. As her punishment is so richly deserved it may be believed that God has heard the groans of the Catholics, and desires to bring it upon her swiftly, perchance by this means. Let Him dispose as He will, but if for our sins He should decree that it shall not succeed, there will be much Catholic blood spilt in England. Up to the present your Majesty had in no way been pledged in the business, except the risk of the 100,000 crowns which have been given to the priests who have been going thither, and if secrecy be kept there will be no risk in looking on and watching what comes of it. If the Queen falls, the country will submit without the effusion of blood, and the war in the Netherlands will be at an end, which will result in infinite advantage to your Majesty's interests and those of your dominions. If your Majesty sees no objection, you might have the Prince of Parma written to immediately, in accordance with what I have said about his sending troops to England.

Another dispatch might be written to M. de la Motte, governor of Gravelines, in my credence, so that arrangements may be made to facilitate the passage. These despatches I will retain in my own hands until I see whether the business is going forward in which case I will send them on, asking for the troops the Englishmen may require. It will not be advisable, up to that point, that another person should be informed of the affair, besides which it will be unnecessary as his help (i.e. the Prince of Parma's) will not be wanted to kill the Queen, and if the English do not do this and lay the first stone of the edifice the troops will not need to be sent. The Earl of Westmoreland left Flanders with leave of the Prince of Parma in order to go and salute your Majesty, and the Duke of Guise who was passing through Paris, at the time when he was being approached about the English enterprise, detained him in Paris. The poor gentleman in the meanwhile spent all the money he had for his journey, and is suffering great privations; indeed he would starve if he did not dine nearly every day in the house of the Scots ambassador or mine. I promised to send him (to England) but will not say a word to him until it be needful. He has written about his straits to your Majesty, and I have also mentioned the matter in my general letter. Although the English say he is a person of such great influence, he is of no ability, but still as your Majesty maintains other Englishmen it will not be unadvisable for you to continue the pension you have allowed him for so many years.

I have had the English gentleman who came delayed here as the French ambassador facilitated his passage across, in the belief that he came to bring money for the Catholics, and if he returned quickly it might give rise to suspicion that he is in some plot. I send herewith a statement of the English counties and their condition. I have drawn this up afresh, both from my own information, and from the intelligence given to me by a priest whom I sent round the country. No names are mentioned, as it would be dangerous to have them pass through many hands.

I have had this despatch waiting four days for a passport. This is the way they always hamper me. Paris, 13th August 1586.