

SUMMARY: The document below is an exemplification of a petition brought in 1495 by John de Vere (8 September 1442 - 10 March 1513), 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, alleging that during the Christmas season of 1472 the future Richard III had used coercion to obtain the inherited lands of the Earl's mother, Elizabeth Howard (1411-1473). The Earl's petition is followed by the depositions of Sir John Risley (d.1512), Sir James Tyrrell (c.1455–1502), alleged murderer of the two young sons of Edward IV in the Tower of London, William Tunstall, esquire, Henry Robson, esquire, William Paston, esquire, and John Power, esquire.

For the will of John de Vere, 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, see TNA PROB 11/17/379.

The modern spelling transcripts below are based on the original spelling transcripts in Hicks, M.A., 'The Last Days of Elizabeth Countess of Oxford', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 406, (January 1988), pp. 76-95.

For a summary of these events by Susan Higginbotham, see 'Gloucester, Greed, and Granny: Richard III and the Countess of Oxford' at:

<https://www.susanhigginbotham.com/posts/gloucester-greed-and-granny-richard-iii-and-the-countess-of-oxford/>

To the Most Reverend Father in God and gracious Lord, the Lord Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of England, beseecheth your good and gracious Lordship John, Earl of Oxenford, that where Elizabeth, late Countess of Oxenford, his mother, whose heir he is, for the true and faithful allegiance and service that she owed and did to the most blessed and Christian Prince, King Henry the Sixth, was in the time of the reign of King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup> by imprisonment and for dread of her destruction compelled by coercion against her will to depart with her livelihood to Richard, late calling himself King Richard the Third, then Duke of Gloucester, your said suppliant then being attainted of high treason for his true service done to the said most Christian Prince, and therefore durst not ne might be at his liberty in this land, of the which imprisonment, coercion and manner of departing of her said livelihood there were divers worshipful and credible persons privy and had perfect knowledge thereof, of whom divers be of great age, and if they should decease, their witness in that behalf not had ne entered of record, the knowledge of the said imprisonment and coercion might run out of mind and thereof might ensue wrongful vexation and trouble to the said Earl and his heirs of and for the inheritance of his said mother;

Wherefore in eschewing thereof it may please your noble Grace to direct several writs of subpoena to Sir James Tyrrell, knight, Sir John Risley, knight, William Tunstall, esquire, William Paston . . . Henry Robson and John Power, esquire, the which were privy and had perfect knowledge of the manner of departing of the said Countess from her said livelihood, commanding them to appear before the King in his Chancery at a certain day, there to depose and witness all that they know touching imprisonment and coercion the

which was put to the said Countess in that behalf, and all other things concerning the departing of her said livelihood to the said late Duke, and that their depositions and witness may be there entered and remain of record to th' intent aforesaid;

And the said Earl shall pray to God for your prosperous estate long to continue and to his pleasure.

#### Deposition of Sir John Risley

John Risley of Tottenham in the county of Middlesex, knight, of th' age of 52 years and more, sworn and examined the second day of December in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup> [=2 December 1495] saith and deposeth upon oath that upon 4 years or thereupon afore the decease of King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup> [=1479?] to his remembrance this deponent come to the said King Edward then riding in hunting in Waltham Forest between Walwoorde [=Walworth?] and Langforde's place;

And then and there this deponent showed to the same King Edward that he intended having the favour of h... purchase of the Duke of Gloucester a place beside London Wall called the Earl of Oxenford's place, beseeching his Grace to give him his good counsel whether he might so surely do, yea or nay;

And then and there the said King Edward asked of this deponent by what right and title the same place come to the hands of his brother of Gloucester;

And this deponent answered to the same King Edward that the said Duke of Gloucester come unto it by a release made by the Lady of Oxenford, mother to my Lord of Oxenford now being;

And then and there the same King Edward said to this deponent Risley, 'Meddle not ye with the buying of the said place, for though the title of the ... place be good in my brother of Gloucester's hands or in another man's hands of like might, it will be dangerous to thee to buy it, and also to keep it and defend it', saying then also to this deponent that the said Lady was compelled and constrained by the said Duke of Gloucester to release and forsake her right in the said place;

For which cause this deponent surceased and made no further labour in the said matter;

At which communication were present no moe persons and hearing the same communication but they two [=Walwoorde and Langforde?], forasmuch as they then were riding by the way;

But by what means the said Lady was so compelled to release her right as is aforesaid he cannot say, but he hath heard say of divers persons whose names he remember not that the said Lady was under the strait keeping of the said Duke in London, but in what place he cannot say;

And more he knoweth not.

#### Deposition of Sir James Tyrrell

James Tyrrell of Gipping in the county of Suffolk of th' age of 40 years, sworn and examined the second day of December in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup> [=2 December 1495] saith and deposeth upon his oath that he knew well my Lady of Oxenford, mother to my Lord of Oxenford now being, by sight;

Also he saith that in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> year [=1471, 1472] of King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup>, as he supposeth, about Christenmas, as he remembereth, this deponent, then being servant with the Duke of Gloucester then being, went with the same Duke from Stepney unto Stratford where the said Lady then lay, and then and there this deponent within the Abbey there heard the said Duke report and say to the said Lady that the King, his brother, had given unto the said Duke the keeping and rule of the said Lady and of her lands;

Whereupon this deponent then saw the said Lady weep and make great lamentation, but what answer she then gave unto the said Duke this deponent heard not;

And then and there this deponent heard Sir John Pilkington, then chamberlain to the said Duke, desire to have her keys of such coffers as she had, which this deponent then saw her deliver to him, then present divers servants of the said Duke whose names he remember not;

Also this deponent saith that within short space after, what days he remember not, this deponent saw the said Lady at Stepney beside London at lodging of the said Duke, and there he saw her continue by the space of 3 or 4 days, by the which space he saw the same Lady weep and make great lamentation divers times, but for what cause he cannot certainly say;

But he saith that a communication and a talking was then amongst the household of the said Duke that her weeping was forasmuch as she was desired and entreated by the said Duke to make estate to him of certain of her lands which were of her inheritance, but of what lands this deponent cannot say;

Also this deponent saith that he hath heard reported that the said Lady made estate of her lands to the said Duke, but of what lands, or by whom the said report was made, this deponent cannot perfectly say;

But whether the same estate were made by compulsion and coercion he cannot precisely say, but he saith that he heard the Lord Howard at that time being give great words of menace in the place of the Archbishop of York beside Westminster to one Master Baxter, then being one of the feoffees of the said Lady in her said lands, calling him false priest

and hypocrite because he would not grant to the said state and release, then present Sir John Pilkington, knight, and other;

And he saith that he deemeth only in his conscience that the said estate and release was by coercion by reason of the said words of menaces so made to the said Baxter, which Master Baxter after the said menaces moved the said Lady and caused her to make the said estate, as this deponent hath heard reported;

And more he cannot say in this matter.

#### Deposition of William Tunstall, esquire

William Tunstall of Scarborough in the county of York, squire, of th' age of 60 years and more, sworn and examined the second day of December in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of our Sovereign Lord King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup> [=2 December 1495] saith and deposeth upon his oath that he knew my Lady of Oxenford, mother to my Lord of Oxenford now being;

And he saith furthermore that in Christmas season about the 12<sup>th</sup> year of King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup> [=1472] a servant of the Duke of Gloucester whose name he remember not come then to this deponent to Stepney beside London, and said to this deponent that the mind of the said Duke was that this deponent and other servants of the said Duke should go into a town called Stratford, being about 3 mile out of London, and fet the said Lady from the said Stratford and bring her unto Stepney aforesaid where the said Duke at that time kept his household;

And this deponent thought in his mind that it was not for the profit of the said Lady to be brought to the said place, and therefore he absented himself and meddled no further therein;

Furthermore this deponent saith that within 2 or 3 days after divers servants of the said Duke whose names he remember not to the number of 16 persons or thereabouts went unto Stratford aforesaid in peaceable wise and fet the said Lady fro[m] Stratford aforesaid and brought her unto Stepney aforesaid;

And then and there this deponent saw the said Lady weep, wherefore he then comforted her, saying to her that the said Duke was a knight and a King's brother, and trusted that he woll [=will] do her no wrong;

And the said Lady thanked this deponent for his good comfort, then being present one Master Baxter, then confessor to the said Lady, and divers other persons whose names he remember not;

Also this deponent saith that the same day that the said Lady was brought from Stepney aforesaid, by the commandment of the said Duke, with divers of his servants, this deponent at her desire waiting upon her, [+the said Lady?] was sent upon her feet to a

place of the said Duke's at Walbrook in London, and then and there the said Lady gave to this deponent a purse and thanked him, and so this deponent departed, leaving the said Lady in a chamber within the said place at Walbrook with divers other persons whose names he remember not, nor whose servants the said persons were this deponent cannot say, but how the said Lady was entreated in the said place by the said Duke or by his servants this deponent cannot say;

Also this deponent saith that he knoweth not if any estate or release [+was?] made by the said Lady or by any other person for her to the said Duke of any of her lands, nor of any compulsion or coercion made by the said Duke or any of his servants to the said Lady;

But it was then commoned and reported amongst the servants of the said Duke and other persons there that the said Lady was sent for to th' intent that she should be compelled to make an estate to the said Duke of certain of her lands, but of what lands this deponent cannot say, nor whether she was so compelled or not but by the said report;

And more he knoweth not.

#### Deposition of Henry Robson, esquire

Henry Robson of Lincoln's Inn in London, gentleman, of th' age of 47 years and more, sworn and examined the second day of December in the 11 year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup> [=2 December 1495], saith and deposeth by his oath that about Christmas in the 12 year [=1472] of King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup> in the month of January, as he remembereth, what day he remembereth not, my Lady Elizabeth, then Countess of Oxenford and mother to my Lord of Oxenford that now is, then being at Stepney beside London in the keeping of the Duke of Gloucester, sent for this deponent to come to speak with her if he durst, she then being at Stepney aforesaid lodged over the porter['s] lodging in a place there then called Sir Thomas Vaughan['s] place wherein the said Duke then kept his household, at which desire this deponent went to the said Countess to the said place and chamber;

At whose coming the said Countess thanked him for his coming and said these words, 'I thank God, heartily beseeching him to have mercy on my friends' souls by whom I have these lands which now shall save my life'. And then she showed and reported to this deponent that without she would make estate to the said Duke of all such lands as she then had, and cause her feoffees to release their right and title to him thereof, that he would send her to Middleham, there to be kept;

Wherefore the said Lady, considering her great age, the great journey, and the great cold which then was of frost and snow, thought that she could not endure to be conveyed thither without great jeopardy of her life, and also sore fearing how she should be there entreated, required and desired this deponent, forasmuch as he with other were enfeoffed in parcel of her lands, that if any writing or deed under her seal come to him to be sealed, that he should enseal it in like wise as he loved her and her life, then present divers

servants to the said Lady, both Master Piers Baxter, her confessor, Thomas Barton, then her steward, and other now deceased;

Also this deponent saith that within 2 days after this deponent came again to the said Lady to Stepney aforesaid in the said chamber where she was afore, and then and there the same Lady showed to this deponent that she had fulfilled the mind and intent of the said Duke as touching her said lands, unto which time she remained still in the said chamber, wherefore he supposeth verily in his conscience that the said Lady ensealed divers deeds of her said lands unto the said Duke by coercion and compulsion and fear as is aforesaid, and as she hath showed and reported oftentimes to this deponent;

After which second being of this deponent with the said Lady, forasmuch as she had fulfilled the mind of the same Duke, she was conveyed the same night from the same Duke's place unto a place of one Chadworth in Stepney aforesaid, and so from thence into Walbrook to a place of the said Duke;

And within was 5 or 6 days after that, the said Duke sent one Watkyn Chaundeler, his servant, for this deponent to come to speak with the said Duke at Saint John's beside Smithfield;

And so he did, at whose coming the same Duke then said to this deponent that the said Lady had ensealed to him a deed [+of?] feoffment of such lands as she had, and that the said Master Baxter, her co-feoffee, then being present, had also ensealed the same deed;

And there the said Duke caused the same deed there to be read, which deed was then read, but by whom he now remember not;

And when the reader thereof came to the name of William Paston, which was one of the feoffees of the said Lady, the same Duke demanded of this deponent if he knew him or loved him, seeing that he understood that the same Paston repugned against the same feoffment;

Wherefore the same Duke commanded this deponent to say to the same Paston that without he would enseal the said deed it should cost him that he loved best, then present Sir John Pilkington, the said Master Baxter, and many other persons whose names he remember not;

After which commandment so made, the said reader of the same deed read the name of this deponent in the said deed, and then the same Duke, incontinent after the reading of the name of this deponent, demanded of this deponent if he would enseal the same deed, which deponent, fearing the same Duke would have said or done to him in like wise as he said of the same Paston, said that he would enseal it, and so then did, present the said Master Baxter, the said Pilkington and other, howbeit he durst not otherwise do;

Also this deponent saith that he heard the said Lady oftentimes sithen the said times report and say that she was sorry that she, for saving her life, had disherit[ed] her heirs;

Which deponent comforted her, saying that insomuch as most part of her lands were entailed and be matter of record, and also that she had done against her will, he trusted that her heirs should not be disherited thereby, notwithstanding the said Duke had carried away all her evidences;

And more he cannot say.

#### Deposition of William Paston, esquire

William Paston of London, squire, of th' age of 60 years and thereupon, sworn and examined the third day of December the 11 year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup> [=3 December 1495], saith and deposeth upon his oath that upon a 27 year past or thereupon by his estimation, he was then of good knowledge and in favour with Elizabeth, then Countess of Oxenford, mother to John, now Earl of Oxenford, and was of counsel and of fee then with the said Countess;

Furthermore this deponent saith that upon a 23 year past or thereupon, as he remembereth, he heard by the report of James Arblaster, then servant . . . Countess, and also one Harry Robson and other whose names he remember not, then showed to this deponent, being in London, that Richard, then Duke of Gloucester, had been at Stratford of the Bow with the said Countess, there being within the place of the nunnery, and that the same Duke had there showed and reported . . . Edward, his brother, had given to the same Duke the rule and guiding of the same Countess and of her manors, lands and goods;

And the said James said also that the said Duke had caused the said Countess by dreadful menaces against her will to be brought from Stratford aforesaid unto a place in Stepney then pertaining to Sir Thomas Vaughan, and there was kept in a chamber unto such season that by the means of the said Duke she was compelled to agree that all such feoffees as were enfeoffed in her said manors and lands to her use should make estate and release the right and title of the said manors and lands to the said Duke;

Furthermore this deponent saith that in the time of Doctor Stillington, Bishop of Bath and then Chancellor of England, the same Chancellor, a little afore he was discharged of the office of the chancellorship, but what year, which month or day he remember not, the said Chancellor, being then in the Chequer Chamber in Westminster, hearing of the myso [sic for 'miserable?'] entreating of the said Countess by the said Duke on the premises, called the said Countess then and there afore him, and then this deponent heard the said Chancellor then say unto the said Countess these words, 'Show ye me the truth of the dealing of the Duke of Gloucester with you, and fear no person to say the truth';

Which Countess there showed that she was compelled by great fear and dread to make the bargain which she made with the said Duke concerning her said manors and lands,

and nothing of free will, then and there present divers and many judges and other of the King's Council whose names this deponent perfectly remember not;

Furthermore this deponent saith that about the said season, but what year, month or day this deponent remember not, the said Duke divers and many times sent unto this deponent by the said Robson and by divers others of the council of the said Duke by great threatenings and menacings and upon pain of death that this deponent should release to the said Duke all such right and title as he had of and in the manors and lands belonging to the said Countess, which to do this deponent utterly refused;

Wherefore the said deponent, in eschewing of inconvenience that might grow to him by reason of the premises, conveyed his plate and goods into the custody of the Lord Ormond now living to th' intent to withdrew [sic for 'withdraw?'] his own person secretly, and so did;

Which notwithstanding, the said Duke having understanding where this deponent was, caused a subpoena to be delivered to him to appear afore the King in his Chancery at a certain day upon a great pain, at which day this deponent there appeared afore the Lord Lawrence Booth, then Bishop of Durham and Chancellor of England then setting [=sitting?] in the King's Chancery at Westminster, by whom there sat the said Duke, my Lord Chancellor now being and then Master of the Rolls, with divers of the Masters of the said Chancery, the said Duke then saying these words unto this deponent, 'William Paston, I have sent to you many times to seal a release according to the bargain had between me and the said Countess. Why will you not seal it as your co-feoffees have done?';

Which deponent this [sic] answered, 'I never knew that it was the free will of the said Countess that I should release';

Then the said Chancellor then being [+said?], 'William Paston, hearken what my Lord of Gloucester saith to you that ye shall release and ye shall not choose but release. William Paston, what say ye thereto?';

Which William then said, 'I must do as the court woll [=will] award';

But whether this deponent released indeed or not he perfectly remember not, and referreth him to such records as then were recorded in the same court concerning the said release, then and there present Sir Thomas Montgomery, Master Piers Baxter standing within the said court, and many other persons whose names he remember not;

And more he knoweth not.

Deposition of John Power, esquire



John Power, sergeant of the larder unto our Sovereign Lord King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup>, squire, of th' age of 66 years of thereupon, sworn and examined the 5 day of December in the 11 year of our said Sovereign Lord [=5 December 1495], saith and deposeth upon his oath that he knew well Dame Elizabeth, Countess of Oxenford, mother unto John, now Earl of Oxenford, for he was divers and many times with her and consisaunt [=conversant?], and also was her feed servant;

Furthermore this deponent saith that about the 13 year of King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup>, but what day or month this deponent remember not, he was in London when the said Countess was fet from Stratford of the Bow by divers of the servants of Richard, then Duke of Gloucester and brother to the said King Edward, and this he knoweth for as he was going to the said Countess to Stratford aforesaid he met one Thomas Barton, then steward to the said Countess, and many other of her servants, which showed these words to this deponent, 'Beware, go ye not to my Lady to Stratford, for there is many of the servants of the said Duke's that hath searched my Lady's place where she lay, and also her coffers, and woll [=will] convey my Lady away', but whether then she should be conveyed this deponent knew not;

Furthermore this deponent saith that soon after, but what day or month this deponent remember not, the said Countess was had by the servants of the said Duke unto a place of one Thomas Vaughan's;

And incontinent thereupon this deponent went to the said place to see the said Countess, as his duty was, where he found the same Countess;

The Countess then, seeing this deponent, said these words, 'I marvel greatly that ye durst come see me, remembering the trouble that I am in';

Whereupon the said deponent said to the same Countess, 'How is it with you, Madame?';

Which Countess then answered and said, 'Sore troubled. Nevertheless, I know well ye have loved me and all my blood, wherefore I trust you, and pray you to show unto my son, John, Earl of Oxenford, if ever ye speak with him, as I trust in God ye shall, that all such estates and releases as I most [=must] make of my manors and lands to the Duke of Gloucester I do for great fear and for the salvation of my life, for if I make not the said estates and releases I am threatened to be had into the north country, where I am sure I should not live long, and for the lengthening of my life this I do.';

Furthermore this deponent saith that upon Saint Thomas Eve's eve afore Christmas afore the decease of the said Countess, but what year this deponent remember not, this deponent was at Stratford aforesaid within the place in the nunnery there where the said Countess then was in her chamber by her bedside, and then and there the said Countess showed to this deponent that she was sick and grievously diseased, wherefore she thought she could not long live, and then and there the same Countess remembered the words and showing what she had showed to the deponent in the said place of Vaughan's, which words the same Countess there rehearsed to this deponent, and prayed him in any wise

that he would keep in mind the same words, whatsoever became of her, and so show it unto her son when he spake with him, and also to say that she sent him God's blessing and hers, which Countess died within eight days after;

Also this deponent saith that the said Countess within 2 days next after, as he remembereth, was buried in the Church of Friars Augustines in London afore the high altar there, at which burying this deponent was then and there present, also the said Duke, the Lord Howard, and other;

Furthermore this deponent saith that he heard divers and many times by report of Arblaster and Paston which stood feoffees in the said manors and lands to th' use of the said Countess that they were divers times threatened by the said Duke and his servants to leese their lives because they woll [=will] not release all such right and title as they had in the same manors and lands to the use of the said Duke, but whether they released or not this deponent cannot say;

And more he knoweth not.