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What was William Patten's involvement in the publication of the Langham *Letter*?

William Patten (1510?-1589) is connected to the publication of the Langham *Letter* through his letter of September 10, 1575 to Lord Burghley who, the previous day, had been with the court at Woodstock. The text of Patten's letter is as follows:

May it lyke yoor honorabl Lordship. This day receyved I aunswer fro my good freend the master of Requests hoow the book waz too be suppress for that Langham had complayned upon it, and ootherwize for that the honorabl enterteinment be not turned intoo a jest. May it pleaz yoor honor, excepting the vi untoo master Wylson, too yoor lordship and untoo my Lord Kepar, I have not let three more pass me, but have & suppress them all. I indeed prayd master Wylson too gyve Langham one, for that of woont he woold have taken more upon him. sory I am that he takez it so noow. And for the rest, I humbly submit myself too yoor honor, mooch less to stond at ony poynt of defens, but rather beseching the continuans of yoor favor, whearof my poor estate hath so mooch need of, God healp me. Thus endyng untoo yoor good Lordship, encreas of mooch honor and continuans of good health most humbly & hartely wish I. From London this xth of September 1575.

yoor honorabl Lordships allweyz humbly at commaundment W Patten (Scott 300-1).

Although Patten's letter to Lord Burghley makes no specific reference to the title of the book which is to be suppressed, Scott has argued convincingly that the date of the letter, and the mention of Langham and the "honorable enterteinment", make it clear that the "book" referred to is the Langham *Letter* describing the Queen's recent entertainment by the Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth (301). Patten's letter is thus

helpful in clarifying a number of points related to the *Letter's* publication.

In the first place, Patten's letter provides a firm date for the publication of the original version of the *Letter*: it was in print and had been partially distributed by September 10, 1575. Since the *Letter* is dated "From the Coourt. At the Citee of Worceter, the xx. of August, 1575", the initial publication and distribution of the *Letter* occurred within the surprisingly brief period of three weeks.

A second fact evident from Patten's letter is that the original version of the *Letter* was suppressed as a result of Langham's complaints and in order that "the honorabl enterteinment be not turned intoo a jest". The suppression of this original edition appears to have been complete. O'Kill suggests, on bibliographic evidence, that the two Elizabethan editions of the *Letter* which we now have are later than 1575:

[N]o copy of the suppressed first edition has survived to this day. Indeed, its ghostly existence has never been suspected by bibliographers, and can only be deduced from the fact that it must have been printed in 1575 between 20 August (the date given at the end of the text) and 10 September (the date of Patten's letter to Cecil), whereas typographical evidence strongly suggests that both extant editions of the book, neither of which bears a date or printer's name, were printed several years later (O'Kill 41).

According to O'Kill, the first of the two extant editions was published no earlier than June 1577, and the second in the 1580's (42).

Patten's letter of September 10, 1575 also suggests

that he was solely responsible for the *Letter's* distribution. He states that he has given out no more than nine copies, six of which have gone to "Master Wilson", who is presumably Thomas Wilson, appointed principal secretary to the Privy Council in 1577 (Pulman 34); to the Lord Keeper, Sir Nicholas Bacon; and to Lord Burghley himself. One of the remaining copies had apparently been given to Langham. Patten says, "I indeed prayd master Wylson too gyve Langham one, for that of woont he woold have taken more upon him. sory I am that he takez it so noow", which seems to indicate that Langham had originally been pleased to receive a copy of the *Letter* from Patten and had wanted additional copies, although now he has changed his mind and is complaining about the *Letter*. What is noteworthy here is the fact that, aside from the copy given to Langham, Patten confined the distribution of the *Letter* to highly placed individuals with important connections to the court. No mention is made of a copy having been given to Humfrey Martyn; much less is there any mention of the *Letter's* having been offered for sale to the general public.

The question which naturally arises from these considerations is why William Patten took on the task of distributing the published copies of the *Letter*.

One explanation which has been put forward independently by both Scott and O'Kill is that Patten distributed the copies because he was the *Letter's* author. However, this explanation is unconvincing.

In the first place, there is nothing in Patten's letter to Burghley of September 10, 1575 which is suggestive of authorship. Secondly, although Patten used a spelling system similar to that found in the Langham *Letter* in his letter of September 10, 1575 to Burghley and in four published works (Kuin 22), Patten's use of this spelling system can be explained by the fact that he moved in the same circles as the spelling reformers Sir John Cheke, Sir Thomas Smith and John Hart, all of whom, like Patten, had close connections to Lord Burghley. Another spelling reformer of the period was Patten's nephew, William Waad (1546-1623) (Scott 302). Patten is thus merely one of several writers (including Cor-

net, Stavely, and the author of the Langham *Letter*) who were influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by the spelling reform systems which originated with Cheke, Smith and Hart. Thirdly, the style of Patten's other extant works is very different from that of the Langham *Letter*. Fourthly, Patten was much too old in 1575 to be plausible as the lively, youthful speaker of the *Letter*. His birthdate is uncertain, but according to O'Kill, Patten was probably born around 1910, which would have made him sixty-five years of age at the time of the publication of the *Letter* (31). Finally, it is difficult to see what Patten -- had he been the *Letter's* author -- would have gained from its publication. The speed and finality with which the *Letter* was suppressed indicates how strongly averse Queen Elizabeth was to free-lance publications which depicted herself and her court, even when the book was privately printed and intended for distribution solely within the court circle. Patten had more than enough experience of Elizabeth's court to realize that publication of the *Letter* for sale to the general public would have been completely unthinkable; he clearly would not have written the *Letter* with a view to financial benefit. Private publication (indicated by the absence of the printer's name and the fact that the *Letter* was never entered in the Stationers' Register) (Kuin 12, 24), was expensive, and almost certainly well beyond the means of Patten, who complains in his letter to Burghley of his "poor estate".

It thus seems evident that Patten was not the author of the Langham *Letter*. However, by his own admission he distributed copies of it to members of the court circle. One cannot help but wonder about the motive for his involvement, and perhaps the most important clue is his connection to Lord Burghley. Patten was a long-time associate of Burghley's. Their relationship dated at least as far back as Somerset's 1547 campaign into Scotland (Read 38-9). Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was Lord Burghley's son-in-law, and if Oxford was the author of the Langham *Letter*, Patten may have distributed the *Letter* at Oxford's request.

In that regard, it is also interesting to note a comment made by Patten in his letter of September 10

to Lord Burghley. Patten says that he submits himself to Burghley without standing on "ony poynt of defens". This phrase suggests that both Patten and Burghley are aware of an excuse which Patten could have raised in defense of his distribution of the book. If Patten had attended to the *Letter's* publication and distribution as a favour to Oxford, Burghley would have been well aware of the nature of Patten's "poynt of defens" without Patten having to spell it out.

One other fact which connects Patten with the Langham *Letter*, and which appears not to have been noticed heretofore, is the likelihood that William Patten was distantly related by marriage to Humfrey Martyn, the addressee of the Langham *Letter*. William Patten's father was Richard Patten (d.1536), a member of the Clothworkers' Company of London, and a nephew of William Patten of Waynflete (1395?-1486), Bishop of Winchester. His mother was Grace Baskerville, daughter of John Baskerville (*DNB*, 495).

Humfrey Martyn, the addressee of the Langham *Letter* had an aunt, Jane Pakington (his mother's sister), who was the wife of Humphrey Baskerville (d.1564). Humphrey Baskerville was an Alderman of the City of London from 1558-1564 (Beaven, v.1, 337), one of the Merchant Adventurers named in Queen Mary's Charter of Incorporation of 1555 (*CPR 1554-5*, 55-9), and Master of the Mercers' Company in 1560 (Beaven, v.2, 36). It seems quite likely that William Patten's mother, Grace Baskerville, was related to Humfrey Martyn's uncle, Humphrey Baskerville. This family connection may have provided another motive for Patten's involvement in the distribution of the *Letter*.

It is thus entirely possible that William Patten undertook the distribution of the Langham *Letter* both because he was a close friend of Lord Burghley -- and of Oxford through Lord Burghley -- and because he had family connections to the addressee of the *Letter*, Humfrey Martyn.

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