

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 1 September 1592 from Ralph Bowes to Lord Burghley concerning a lease sought by Bowes to his own benefit and that of his mistress, Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627). Further details of the suit, and of the nature of Ralph Bowes' service to Elizabeth Vere, are not known.

It seems likely that this was the Ralph Bowes who participated in a tournament with Oxford in 1581. See Segar, William, *The Book of Honor and Armes* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975) pp. 99-100:

*An honourable challenge was likewise brought before her Majesty by the Earl of Arundel, calling himself Callophissus, who with his assistant, Sir William Drury, challenged all comers anno 1580 [=1581].*

*The defenders were the Earl of Oxford, the Lord Windsor, Philip Sidney, Edward Norris, Henry Knollys, Robert Knollys, Fulke Greville, Thomas Knyvet, Thomas Keilway, Ralph Bowes, George Goring, George Gifford, Anthony Cooke, Henry Brouncker, Edward Denny, Richard Ward, Sir Thomas Perrot.*

*The prize was given to the Earl of Oxford.*

Ralph Bowes was the brother of Sir Jerome Bowes (d.1616), for whom see the entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available online:

*Bowes, Sir Jerome (d. 1616), diplomat and glass maker, was the son of Sir John Bowes, landowner, of Elford, Staffordshire, and his wife, Anne, daughter of Richard Huddleston of Lancashire. For a man of his prominence and considerable notoriety, Bowes is rather an elusive person. He had a sister, Elizabeth, and two brothers, Sir Edward and Ralph Bowes.*

Ralph Bowes' sister, Elizabeth Bowes, was the wife of Sir George Harte (d.1587), the son of Sir Percival Harte (1496-1580). Sir George Harte and 'Elizabeth, now his wife', as well as 'Sir Jerome Bowes, knight, Ralph Bowes, esquire, and Mary Bowes, servant to my said daughter Harte' are all mentioned in the will of Sir Percival Harte, dated 16 February 1578 and proved 1 June 1580 (see TNA PROB 11/62, ff. 153-6).

In another letter to Lord Burghley in September 1592, Ralph Bowes mentions that 'since the death of my sister', Elizabeth (nee Bowes) Harte, 'my nephew Harte', now aged 18, 'has been in my charge, as also a sister of his' (see TNA SP 15/32/52, f. 102).

For the will of Ralph Bowes, dated 18 May and proved 28 June 1598, in which he refers to himself as 'one of her Majesty's Gentlemen Pensioners' and leaves most of his estate to his brother, Sir Jerome Bowes (d.1616), see TNA PROB 11/91, ff. 368-9. In his will Ralph Bowes also makes brief mention of his eldest brother, Sir John Bowes (d.1609), and refers to his wife ('my kind and loving wife, the Lady Digby').

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For the Bowes pedigree, see Howard, Joseph Jackson and George John Armytage, eds., *The Visitation of London in the Year 1568*, (London: Harleian Society, 1869), p. 29.

For the Queen's grant to Ralph Bowes by letters patent dated 2 June 1573 of the office of master of 'our game pastymes and sportes, that is to saie of all and everie our beares bulles and mastyve dogges', see Greg, Walter W., ed., *Henslowe Papers, Being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe's Diary*, (London: A.H. Bullen, 1907), p. 1, available online. For an image of an exemplification of the letters patent, see:

<http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/images/Muniments-Series-1/Group-007/01r.html>.

See also *CSPD 1598-1601*, p. 79 and TNA SP 12/268. The mastership of the bears, bulls and mastiff dogs was later purchased by Edward Alleyn (1566-1626) and Philip Henslowe (c.1555-1616). From the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available online:

*In 1598 Alleyn and Henslowe made concrete plans to gain the mastership of the bears but it passed to someone else. When the office next became vacant they tried for it again but they were passed over in favour of Sir William Stewart, a friend of the new king. Finally, in 1604, they purchased the patent from Stewart and together held a joint patent for the office until 1616, when Henslowe died and his share passed to his son-in-law (Cerasano, 'The master of the bears', 195–209).*

May it please your good Lordship, I am informed by a friend of mine of a matter wherein your Lordship, if so it please you, may do me a favour, a matter prejudicial to none nor unfit to be granted, a thing as yet unsought for by any, but will be, I know, presently undertaken by some other of as little desert as myself either to your Lordship or her Majesty's, but the thing I take to be within your Lordship's granting, or at the least I am sure so as if your Lordship grant a lease of it, no other will then seek it at her Majesty's hands.

And as in this suit, if I happily prevail by your Lordship's good favour, he that hath informed me of it is to taste somewhat, so shall I most gladly agree in respect of my good affection towards my mistress, my Lady Vere, and my most bound duty towards your Lordship for your favour therein, that she have a third part of the benefit thereof towards the supplying of some part of her extraordinary charges as occasion shall serve, to whom in the execution of the suit I will vow unto your Lordship upon my poor credit to be a true servant and just steward to bring unto her such benefit as from time to time shall grow due unto her if your Lordship shall allow it reasonable that she give me so much credit. If not, I shall then well like that she appoint some other for herself in that behalf. I forbear, under your Lordship's favour, in these to set down the nature of the suit lest my letter might by chance come to some other's sight, but will attend your Lordship withal when it hath pleased you to have read these.

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Your Lordship's most bound at commandment,

Ralph Bowes

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable my singular good Lord the Lord Treasurer; (2) (in Lord Burghley's hand?) primo September 1592, Ralph Bowes