

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 23 November 1585 from Robert Sothebie to Sir William More of Loseley (1520-1600) in connection with a request that More extend a lease in the Blackfriars which the Italian fence-master, Rocco Bonetti (d.1587), had purchased from Oxford's servant, John Lyly, who had obtained it from Oxford.

Sothebie is mentioned in a letter from Sir John North to More. See SHC LM/COR/3/38 *infra*:

Mr Sothebie is at this present out of the town, who promised also to set to his hand unto this other letter to do the poor man good, who dealeth in my conceit very wisely and discreetly in your affairs according to the trust reposed in him.

The document is damaged. Missing text is indicated by square brackets in the transcript below. A few words which have been filled in conjecturally are also enclosed in square brackets.

For John Lyly's lease of the Blackfriars property, see the *ODNB* article:

Lyly's use of the Blackfriars as an apparently essential part of his playwriting enterprise had been achieved by legalistic chicanery that had deprived the landlord of his rights and transferred the property to the earl of Oxford, who passed it to Lyly.

Sir Walter Raleigh, Oxford's brother-in-law, Peregrine Bertie (1555-1601), Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, and Sir John North (c.1550-1597) also wrote to More on Bonetti's behalf. For Raleigh's letter see Folger MS L.b.37. For Lord Willoughby's letter see SHC LM/COR/3/372. For Sir John North's letters to More see SHC LM/COR/3/382, 383, 387 and 388. See also the Loseley manuscripts at:

http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?_ep=Rocco&_dss=range&_ro=any&_p=1500&Refine+dates=Refine.

Shakespeare alludes to Bonetti's skill as a fencer in *Romeo and Juliet* ('the very butcher of a silk button'). Since a topical allusion of this sort would not have been made after Bonetti's death, the allusion indicates that *Romeo and Juliet* was written prior to 1587.

Sir, after the receipt of your letter with such other things as were brought unto me by Mr Austen, I acquainted Rocko therewith, who promised that I should know this day by Bradshaw as well of the time as the place where we should parley of

the matters betwixt you, whereof [as] yet I hear nothing,
but what shall be done therein I will make known [to]
you towards th' end of the term. The same day I received
[another?] letter dated from the court to perform the contents
[thereof]. I will neither trouble myself nor any other, but
[do] wholly trust to the honesty of the man, for I assure
[myself] there is no such meaning. [On?] Saturday last I
[was] at the Counter to have spoken with him, but could not.
[Sending] my mind briefly in paper up unto him by [the]
[] of the prison, I received this answer, [that?] []
[] [nothing?], for he would yield to any []
[] on his delivery. I understand his [m] []
[] being(?) an order in the Chancery, who being []
[put?] in trust by his old master, Sir James(?) Harvey, and
[meaning?] to execute the same with all advantage whatsoever
to his master's son, whom at this present he serveth,
as well the one as the other are committed to several prisons.
The counterpane of the lease I shall defer(?) to your
appointment. No news at all I hear of [] any-
thing whatsoever. I glad to do you or yours that
pleasure, and promise never to forget your courtesies,
howsoever time may make me slack effectually to remember
the same. I can by no means see Loseley, but crave

a gentle pardon. Only I promise ever to like that lady
whom your Honour[‘s] self once made promise always to love,
of both whose persons I crave an opinion to my
deserts. This 23rd of November.

Your worship’s most assured,

Robert Sothebie

Endorsed: (1) To the right worshipful Sir William More, knight, at Loseley give these;
(2) Mr Sothebye [illegible]