

SUMMARY: The document below is a copy of the writ of privy seal dormant dated 26 June 1586 by which the Queen granted Oxford an annuity of £1000, retroactive to 25 March 1586 and payable quarterly. It is stated that the annuity is to continue during the Queen's pleasure, or 'until such time as he shall be by us otherwise provided for to be in some manner relieved', an event which never occurred. The annuity thus continued to be paid until her death, and was renewed by King James on 2 August 1603 (see TNA E 403/2598, f. 27v). Notes in the margins of the document summarize its terms.

According to Ward, the original writ is lost, and this contemporary copy is No. 170 in Privy Seal Book E 403/2597 (as noted below). Ward states that:

Until the year 1527 a Roll of Issue of all Privy Seal writs was kept, but in that year the old Exchequer was abolished and the only check on these payments was contained in the Teller's Rolls, which are the equivalent of receipts for the various payments as they were made. The Roll of Issue was revived in 1597 by Lord Burghley, who had been trying to restore it for some years. The first of the Privy Seal Books containing the Roll of Issue as restored by Lord Burghley is numbered E 403/2655.

This book contains 78 entries, the 57th entry being a copy of the Dormant Privy Seal of June 26th, 1586, granting £1000 yearly to the Earl of Oxford.

A second Privy Seal Book containing the revived Roll of Issue is numbered E 403/2597. This book seems to have been opened simultaneously with E 403/2655, or at all events very shortly afterwards. The first book appears then to have been discontinued, as it contains no entries subsequent to 1598, whereas the second book continues to the end of the Queen's reign. There are 197 entries in the second book, the Earl of Oxford's grant being Item No. 170.

Both books were kept by "Chidioc Wardour, clerk of the pells for the restoring of the Pell of Exitus," and are in his handwriting. It seems probable, therefore that the two books between them give all the payments made from the Exchequer during the last six years of Elizabeth's reign.

See Ward, B.M., *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604*, (London: John Murray, 1928), pp. 257, 355-6.

In an unpublished manuscript entitled 'The State of England Anno Dom. 1600' (see TNA SP 12/280), Thomas Wilson claims that Oxford's annuity of £1000 was paid out of the revenues of the See of Ely, which the Queen kept vacant for nineteen years from the death of Bishop Richard Cox (c.1500-1581) on 22 July 1581 until 3 February 1600, when Martin Heton (1554-1609) was consecrated Bishop of Ely. Wilson is clearly in error. The writ of privy seal dormant expressly states that Oxford's annuity is to be paid out of the Exchequer. The revenues of the entire realm flowed into the Exchequer, and it would have been as impossible to determine in Queen Elizabeth's time what the original revenue source was for any payment made from the Exchequer as it would be today to

determine the source of money paid out to a customer by a teller in a bank. Moreover Lansdowne MS 156 ff. 125-7 contains a list of 'Pentions and Annuities graunted by hir late Maiestie and paiable att hir death', including an entry for the Earl of Oxford on f. 126r. There is no mention of Oxford's, or any of the other annuities listed, having been paid out of the revenues of the See of Ely.

According to the entry for Wilson in the *ODNB*, his loyalty was to Oxford's brother-in-law, Sir Robert Cecil:

In spite of these indications of a connection with Southampton and Essex, Wilson remained faithful to the Cecils, and during the later years of Elizabeth's reign he was constantly employed as foreign intelligencer by the lord treasurer, Buckhurst, and Sir Robert Cecil. On 1 March 1601 Wilson began writing a discourse, 'The state of England', on conditions in 1600. Although it remained unpublished until edited by F. J. Fisher for a Camden Society Miscellany volume (3rd ser., vol. 16, 1936), it could be considered in key respects Wilson's pitch for gainful employment. . . .

In December 1601 Wilson was in Florence, employed in diplomatic negotiations with the duke of Ferrara, the Venetians, and other Italian states. The main object of his residence in Italy during 1601-2 was to keep Cecil informed about plots against England and Ireland then being devised by and with their Catholic countrymen. This was dangerous work, and by his own admission Wilson feared at times for his life. He returned to England the following winter and was at Greenwich on 12 June 1603. Early in 1604 he was sent to reside as consul in Spain. He was at Bayonne in February 1604, and remained in Spain until the arrival of the earl of Nottingham and Sir Charles Cornwallis as ambassadors in 1605.

On his return to England, Wilson definitely entered the service of Sir Robert Cecil, in the capacity of private secretary.

Although cordial to outward appearances, relations between Oxford and his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Cecil, were strained at the time Thomas Wilson began writing his 'The State of England Anno Dom. 1600' on 1 March 1601, and Wilson's desire to curry favour with Cecil may have coloured his statements about Oxford.

Oxford's annuity was commented on by Bohun in 1693. See Bohun, Edmund, *The Character of Queen Elizabeth*, (London: Richard Chiswell, 1693), pp. 330-1:

Her bounty to the Earl of Oxford and some few others of the nobility, and her severity towards luxurious spendthrifts

The Earl of Oxford was one of the most ancient houses amongst the nobility, but by the excessive bounty and splendour of the former Earl was reduced to a very low and mean condition so that the family was no longer able to maintain its dignity and grandeur, and the Queen allowed that house one thousand pound the year out of her Exchequer, that one of the most illustrious houses in her kingdom might not suffer that want which was

intolerable to those of meaner extraction. She also upheld Sir Edward Dyer, an old courtier who was become very poor, and would not suffer him to want. But as for those spendthrifts and wasters that had foolishly wasted their patrimonies in luxury and base expenses to gratify their intemperance, and afterwards solicited her to bestow pensions on them, she sent some of them to her Privy Council, who rejected their petitions and gave those reasons for it which the Queen was not willing to give herself, and others who sought by way of reward what they had never deserved, she neglected, that her bounty might not encourage others to luxury and imprudent expenses whilst they relied upon the crown for the repair of what they had wastefully consumed.

For a list of privy seal warrants from the period, see Phillimore, W.P.W., ed., *An Index to Bills of Privy Signet, Commonly Called Signet Bills, 1584 to 1596 and 1603 to 1624, With a Calendar of Writs of Privy Seal 1601 to 1603*, (London: British Record Society, 1890). The warrant below is listed on p. 6 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=4DYEAAAIAAJ&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=%22privy+seal+warrant%22&source=bl&ots=pDQuUYX4Ru&sig=HOLqrfTwdrNb3LaeOo6nfkYj3sA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjSp4aTr4HUAhVL3WMKHVaUCyYQ6AEILzAD#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

The Earl of Oxford: Dorm {ant} (?)

Elizabeth etc., to the Treasurer and Chamberlains of our Exchequer, greeting.

We will and command you of our treasure being and remaining from time to time within the Receipt of our Exchequer to deliver and pay, or cause to be delivered and paid, unto our right trusty and right well-beloved cousin, the Earl of Oxford, or to his assigns sufficiently authorized by him, the sum of one thousand pounds good and lawful money of England, the same to be yearly delivered and paid unto our said cousin at four terms of the year by even portions, the first payment to begin at the feast of th' Annunciation of Our Lady last past before the date hereof, and so to be continued unto him during our pleasure or until such time as he shall be by us otherwise provided for to be in some manner relieved, at what time our pleasure is that this payment of one thousand pounds yearly to our said cousin in manner above specified shall cease;

And for the same or any part thereof our further will and commandment is that neither the said Earl nor his assigns nor his or their executors nor any of them shall by way of account, imprest, or any other way whatsoever be charged towards us, our heirs or successors;

And these our letters shall be your sufficient warrant and discharge in that behalf;

Given under our Privy Seal at our manor of Greenwich the six and twentieth day of June in the eight and twentieth year of our reign [=26 June 1586].

Tha [sic?] Clarke

RM: £1000 of her Majesty's free liberat'

To be paid quarterly

During pleasure, or until such time as he shall be by her Majesty's goods provided for to be in some manner relieved

LM: Without imprest

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RM: Ex {aminatus}