

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter from Roger Manners (c.1536-1607) to Lord Burghley, mentioning the prospective marriage of Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), with Edward Russell (1572-1627), 3rd Earl of Bedford, a match which met with the approval of Anne (nee Russell) Dudley (1548/9-1604), Countess of Warwick. Lord Bedford's guardian.

Anne (nee Russell) Dudley (1548/9-1604), Countess of Warwick, was the eldest of the three daughters of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford. At the age of sixteen she married Leicester's brother, Ambrose Dudley (c.1530-1590), Earl of Warwick. The 2nd Earl of Bedford's three eldest sons predeceased him. Edward died in 1573, and John in 1584, while Francis was killed on the Scottish border only hours before the 2nd Earl's own death on 28 July 1585. Francis was the father of Edward Russell (1572-1627), who succeeded his grandfather as 3rd Earl of Bedford.

The 3rd Earl was a minor when his father and grandfather died only hours apart, and Leicester and Warwick claimed and initially received his wardship on behalf of his aunt, the Countess of Warwick. However, this settlement was challenged by Lady Burghley's sister, Elizabeth (nee Cooke) Russell (1528-1609), the widow of the Countess' second brother, John, Lord Russell (d.1584). According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available onlineL

*She was a notoriously combative woman, who accused the countess of Warwick of persuading the second earl of Bedford to revoke an earlier settlement for John Russell and his heirs in the will he made on 7 April 1584, thus disinheriting her two daughters. She appealed to her brother-in-law, William Cecil, Baron Burghley, and to the queen, who had second thoughts. This in turn provoked Warwick to complain on 31 August 1585 about the queen's treatment of 'my poor afflicted wyfe' (TNA: PRO, SP 12/181/238). The Dudleys were ultimately successful in obtaining the wardship, but Lady Russell was still charging the countess with 'cruelty' as late as 1601 (Salisbury MSS, 9.562).*

In the midst of this family conflict, a marriage between Edward, Lord Russell, and Lord Burghley's granddaughter, Elizabeth Vere, was proposed. Whose idea this was is unknown, and it came to nothing. It seems unlikely that Roger Manners was the originator of the marriage proposal, although his letter indicates that he was acting as an intermediary between the Countess of Warwick and Lord Burghley.

When the Earl of Warwick died he left the Countess North Hall, his house at Northaw, Hertfordshire, where she lived for the rest of her life; however he also left her debts totalling over £7000. In the 1590s the Countess was widely understood to be one of the Queen's closest intimates, and was among those who attended her at her death on 24 March 1603.

The Countess' youngest brother, William Russell (c.1553-1613), 1st Baron Russell of Thornhaugh, accompanied Oxford on his journey back to Paris in 1576 (see TNA SP 70/137, ff. 322-3).

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Sir John Russell (1552-1593), the brother of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), the overseer of the will of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) of Stratford upon Avon, was brought up in the household of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford, and was a close friend of Oxford's companion, William Russell (c.1553-1613), 1st Baron Russell of Thornhaugh, whom he made one of the executors of his will. Moreover Sir John Russell (1552-1593) and the family of Oxford's second wife, Elizabeth (nee Trentham) De Vere (d.1613), were connected by marriage. For the will of Sir John Russell (1552-1593), see TNA PROB 11/92, ff. 52-5.

May it please your Lordship, I have been at North Hall with the Countess of Warwick, and find her Ladyship very well inclined to the match of my Lord of Bedford with my Lady Vere, and desired to know of me if your Lordship had either a desire or liking of it. Further that she did acknowledge herself so much beholding to your Lordship that she would gladly do that might be to your Lordship's best liking. Thus with my humble duty I commit your Lordship to the Almighty. At the Savoy the 6 of March, 1590.

Your Lordship's most assured to command,

Roger Manners

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable my very good Lord, the Lord Burghley, Lord High Treasurer of England; (2) (in Lord Burghley's hand) 6 Martij 1590, Roger Manners, Countess Warwick.