

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter written from Chenies on 21 April 1599 by the Dowager Countess of Bedford to Sir Robert Cecil (1563-1612). At the time the letter was written, Oxford's daughter, Bridget Vere (1584-1631), was living with the Dowager Countess at Chenies in Buckinghamshire, and as indicated in the letter, was to be married there to the Dowager Countess' grandson, Francis Norris (1579-1622), 2nd Baron Norris of Rycote and 1st Earl of Berkshire.

The Dowager Countess of Bedford was born Bridget Hussey (1525/6-1601), the eldest daughter of John Hussey (1465/6-1537) of Sleaford, Lincolnshire, and his second wife, Lady Anne Grey. Bridget Hussey married firstly, Sir Richard Morison (c.1510-1556); secondly, Henry Manners (1526-1563), 2nd Earl of Rutland; and thirdly, Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford.

By her first husband, Sir Richard Morison (c.1510-1556), the Dowager Countess of Bedford was the mother of Sir Charles Morison (1549-1599); Jane Sibylla Morison (1552-1615), who married Edward Russell (d.1573), eldest son and heir of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford, and secondly, Arthur Grey (1536-1593), 14th Baron Grey of Wilton; and Elizabeth Morison, who married firstly, William Norris (d.1579), and secondly, Henry Clinton (1539-1616), 2nd Earl of Lincoln. By her first husband, William Norris, Elizabeth Morison was the mother of Oxford's son-in-law, Francis Norris (1579-1622), 2nd Baron Norris of Rycote and 1st Earl of Berkshire. The will of the Dowager Countess of Bedford, in which she refers to 'Francis Norris, son of my daughter, Lady Elizabeth, Countess of Lincoln', confirms this relationship (see TNA PROB 11/97, ff. 41-3).

In the letter below the Dowager Countess mentions the recent death of her son, Sir Charles Morison (1549-1599). For his will, in which he bequeaths 'my sorrel bald mare' to 'my well-beloved nephew, Mr Francis Norris', see TNA PROB 11/94, ff. 137-140. In his will Sir Charles Morison also mentions his daughter, the Countess of Sussex, to whom Robert Greene dedicated *Lady Fitzwater's Nightingale*. From the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, available online:

In or before 1592 [Robert Radcliffe (1573-1629), 5th Earl of Sussex] married Bridget (bap. 1575, d. 1623), the eldest daughter of Sir Charles Morison of Cassiobury, Hertfordshire. The couple gained a reputation as literary patrons in the 1590s. In 1592 Robert Greene dedicated to Lord Fitzwalter Thomas Lodge's Euphues Shadow and to his wife Philomela, which he subtitled The Lady Fitzwater's Nightingale.

For further background on the Dowager Countess of Bedford, see TNA SP 12/270/82, f. 147. For the Morison tombs in the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Watford, Hertfordshire, see Brayley, Edward Wedlake, *The Beauties of England and Wales*, Vol. VII, (London: Thomas Maiden, 1808), pp. 299-303, available online.

Sir, this present morning I have received your letters, and have considered of your good advice concerning the solemnizing of your niece's marriage, and whereas you write that you think it not decent to make a public matter thereof, so was it farthest from my mind, only desiring such a course as might be both answerable to the expectation of some of their honourable friends & in some sort pleasing to your niece, which I have this morning also certified by a letter unto Francis Norris, with which I have purposely sent a messenger to return a perfect resolution thereof. Yet notwithstanding, if the country be best pleasing unto you, although the wants be great, as I have already written, and besides having lost my dear son very near me, who should have been my greatest comfort and assistant in all advices, I must crave to have Mr Bellott & some people from you which may be helpful in the managing thereof. And so leaving all to your good liking & resolution, with all hearty good wishes do end. Chenies, this 21 of April 1599.

Your very assured friend,

Bridget Bedford.

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable Sir Robert Cecil, knight, at the court, give these;
(2) 21 April 1599, Lady Bedford to my Master.