

TNA: PRO SP 63/85/34*Grey to the Privy Council, September 1581*

This letter commends the service of Captain William Russell (see biographies), who had gone to Ireland in 1579, where he had been given command of a band of soldiers who were to help to quell the Baltinglass rebellion and the uprising of Feagh McHugh O'Byrne. In April 1581, he and Sir William Stanley had achieved success against Feagh McHugh, in reward for which he was granted the lease of Baltinglass Abbey, Co. Wicklow, and was knighted. The production of such letters of commendation was a regular responsibility of Grey's secretariat: they were most frequently carried to England by their commendees, as a kind of official passport giving them access to the court, as well as support in their courting of favour, reimbursement, or reward. Such letters were as important to Grey as they were to their bearers, for his own credit was bound up in the success of his clients, and it was, conversely, a blow to Grey's fortunes that he actively wrote against one Irish captain – Walter Raleigh – whose star would shortly rise to an unusual zenith (see SP 63/88/12 and 63/92/10).

The text of this letter, including the subscription, is written in the regular secretary hand of Lodowick Bryskett. The signature is Grey's own. The address is in Spenser's characteristic secretary hand, and the endorsements – presumably added upon the filing of the letter in London – are in later, distinct hands. The first addressee note at the foot of the letter's recto ('{Lord}es of the Counsell') is probably also in Bryskett's hand; a second note (reading, 'To the Lordes for Mr Russell:-') is written along the long edge of the verso of the letter, and may also be in Bryskett's Italian hand, though it could, equally, be a later addition.

Address and Endorsements

To the right Hono
rable the Lords and
otheres of her Highnes
privie Councell

Lords
{..} September 1581
From the Lord Deputy of
Ireland.
on the behalfe of mr
William Russell

Text

May it please your honorable Lordships This gentleman the bearer hereof Mr William Russell, retourneth now with my lycense, into England for a tyme; partly for dispatche of certein his pryvate affaires and partly to procure a suplye of his band of horsemen, being greatly decayed aswell by service in the field, as by visitacion with sicknes, throughe the contagiousnes of diseases that have reigned mucche here of late: by both

which he hath lost many of his companie. And as I am to become a sueter vnto your Lordships for him in that behalf, that it might please you to geve direction for suche a convenient supplie as he shall declare vnto you to be nedefull for the filling vp of his number: So can I not but recommend vnto your honours both his painefull and chargeable travell, and his forwardnes and good endeavour allwayes in service since his arryvall here; having ben very often in action against the enemies, and chiefly these mounteine Rebels, and in every of them so well discharged his parte, not onely in respect of the sufficiencie of his band, but also for his owne person, as he hath thereby very well deserved the good, and gracious acceptacion of her Maiestie and your honours. Whereof I thinke it my parte to make reporte. And therefore humbly recommending him and his causes as a gentleman deserving very well for his service vnto your Lordships I take my leave. From Dublin the of 1581*

Your honorable Lordships assured to commaund

Arthur Grey

†Textual Notes

* **From Dublin . . . 1581]** Bryskett apparently left these gaps for the date to be completed later.

Annotations

Mr William Russell] Captain and future Lord Deputy; see biographies.

by visitacion ... his companie] English companies in the more densely populated east of Ireland were indeed decimated by sickness throughout 1581, a frequent topic of dispatches to England. See Grey's lament of 6 April over the 'generall feruent or rather pestilent ague' (HH Cecil Papers 11/91, *supra*); his passing report to Walsingham on 23 March that 'It hathe pleased God this mornyng too make mee powrar by one boye then beefore I was' (SP 63/81/42) may also have been occasioned by the same sickness. The bands of Cecil and Hoord had also been almost entirely consumed in 1581 by this plague: see SP 63/83/45 (*supra*).

chargeable travell] Costly labours.

these mounteine Rebels] The forces of Feagh McHugh O'Byrne in Wicklow, whom Russell (along with William Stanley) had been involved in fighting (see also SP 63/82/6 above). In the *View*, Spenser claims that the names of the O'Byrnes and O'Tooles reflect the mountainous country that they inhabited, and where Feagh had been based, 'for *Brin* in the Brittons language signifyethe woddye, and Toll hillye' (3639), and speaks of the 'strengthe and greate fastenes' (3664) of Glenmalour and Feagh's country.