

TNA: PRO SP 63/93/64/1*Copy of Thomas Meagh to James Meagh*

Thomas Meagh, or Myagh, was a servant to the Countess of Kildare, whose apprehension in London in the summer of 1581 led to the detection of the Earl of Kildare in the Pale rebellion of that year. Grey intercepted this letter from Meagh (still in the Tower) to his half-brother James Meagh, alias McKedagh O'More, in May 1582; it alludes conspiratorily to a change in fortune for O'More, which Grey clearly found disturbing; but, possibly more worryingly, it alludes to further incriminating information Meagh might divulge on Kildare. The text of the letter, apart from the marginal annotations but including the subscription and (copied) signature, are written in Spenser's characteristic secretary hand. Spenser has also added his signature in the certification appended to the end, and endorsed the letter in his italic hand. Grey has added marginal annotations in his usual hand on the second page of the letter and, it seems, has underlined some of the text.

Endorsement

Copy of Thomas Meagh his lettre
to Iames Meagh alias mac Kedagh Omoore.

xvij^o Maij 1582

Text

<p>IHS Marya.</p> <p>The Chiefest cause that I send this bearer into Irland {at}* this tyme was to see you and to bring me some money yf he can gett yt; I am assured to be enlarged very shortly after my Lord of Kildares Coming ouer, so that the wan{t} of money to pay, for my fees & other extraordinary Char{ges} wilbe a great lett; I haue written a lettre to Walter Ashpoll to lend me x^{li} sterling</p>	<p>vpon my stufte vpon my stufte* that he hath in his handes; he promised before my Coming away to lend me somuch, yf I had written to him. I thought he should haue had mo{re} of my come money in his handes then x^{li} besides the paymentes that I willd him to make. Yf he doe refuse to send yt me, send you for him & be earnes{t} with him to lend the same & charge him with his promis{e} and putt to your helping hand your self. Truly xl^{li} powndes* wilbe the least, that will carry me freely home: yf the money that was due vnto me with Rory Downe before my Coming away, or the frutes of the last Harvest of the Vicarege of Rathangan bee taken out of my handes, be you earnest with my Lord Deputy to cause the same money to bee restored agayne & sent me by this bearer and to tell him of the great neede & pouerty that you vnderstand I am in: truly good brother farre greater yt would haue bene, were yt not for my wives brother, who hath very eftsones supplied my wantes bee earnest also with the Gouvernour to wryte to Mr Secretary Walsingham in</p>
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Greate care & good
disposition too nourrishe
in hys broother glorie of
bastardrie & declaring
theyr moother
a harlott.

the meanyng heerof wouold
bee learned, for the present
state of the man is far from
any sutche hoape./

Hartpowle &
Mackwoorthe, better &
truar seruantes too theyr
Prince then euer were or
wyll bee of the oother
surnames./

I haue not yet spoken
with the messenger./

my favour. I meane neuer to serve the Earle of Kildare agayne, yf you had knowen how he hath dealt with me both before my Committing and since, you would marveile that I did not requite his vsage of me, having such a tyme as I haue to further any thing that I would say against him. there bee many reportes of me, but the truthe wilbee knowen to you very shortly. I hope to goe ouer with the newe gouernour, and yf you handle the matter well with my Lord Gray to wryte earnestly in my favour, there is no mistrust of my going in credit. Your case & your name of the Moores is better knowen vnto me, then to your self, such was the care I tooke of you in the tyme of your trouble. I omitt to say any more of the matter, till yt please god wee meete; keepe yt to your self. I haue no mistrust yf god lend you life before the end of three yeares; that your credit with your presence shalbe such, as you shalbe hable to pleasure all the frendes you haue. I haue written very lately before this vnto you; bee carefull to performe the contentes thereof. keepe your self well from being in the daunger of ij of your neighboures the first letre of their surname is H. & M. they are accustomed to cary poison & suger together in their mouthes; a sufficient warning to beware of them. I pray you chalenge my brother Pane for dealing so vnfrendly with me. I haue written sondry tymes to him, making choice of him of all other frendes & to this howre I hard nothing from him or any elles in Ireland since my Coming, but our letre from my mother in law. he will say he durst not wryte vnto me, but he might a written to my wife, whereby I might vnderstand how I am dealt with all in my absence. but I mistrust that the cause is fearing that I should know of the base mynded man Walter Eustace his dealing with me touching the vicaredg of Rathangan. I will say nomore till this beareres retourne, which I looke for in all hast I pray you procure it with as much spede as may bee

Provide a couple of good horses for me against my Coming; I meane to attend daylie on the gouernour when I come there, which attendaunce I hope will grow to your proffitt & myne. It is not knowen certainly who shall goe but the eleccion is betwixt Sir Henry Sidney & Sir William fitzWilliam This I take leave with my wives loving Commendation & myne &c./ May xvij^o 1582./

Your assured brother during life

Thomas Meagh.

Examinatur Edmund Spenser/

Textual Notes

* **{at}**] This word is slightly obscured by damage to the right margin of the manuscript (also affecting a few subsequent lines of the text), but given the context is undoubtedly 'at'.

† **vpon my stuffe]** Spenser's slip here – repeating a phrase in copying – is a common scribal mistake.

* *after powndes]* A single character has been deleted.

Annotations

James Meagh . . . Omoore] Meagh, or Myagh, was the bastard son of Kedagh O'More, and was recognised as the chief of the O'Mores. He had submitted to Grey in September 1581 (see NA 63/85/54) and received protection (NA 63/86/10), thereafter surrendering pledges to Captain Mackworth for his good behaviour in October (SP 63/86/19).

IHS Marya] A monogram of the name of Jesus, with that of his mother Mary. 'IHS' was part of the emblem of the Jesuits; there is no doubt that Grey would have regarded with disgust Myagh's superscription of these names at the top of his letter.

this bearer] Unidentified.

my Lord of Kildares] Meagh had had a close relationship with the Earl as well as the Countess of Kildare.

for my fees . . . Char{ges}] In order to be released from prison, prisoners were required to make satisfaction for their diet during the period of their imprisonment.

Walter Ashpoll] Unidentified.

vpon my stuffe] A ten-pound loan, using Meagh's personal possessions, currently in Ashpoll's keeping, as collateral.

my corne money] Meaghe is presumably referring to the income from the harvest made from his lands.

Rory Downe] Unidentified.

the frutes . . . Rathangan] Meagh seems to have had title to the tithes of Rathangan, a small hamlet about 10km northwest of Kildare; this title had presumably been the gift of his (former) master the Earl.

my wives brother] Unidentified.

eftsones] Immediately, readily.

Your case . . . Moores] As Grey's marginal note makes clear, this comment introduces the passage of intrigue for which this letter was, presumably, copied and forwarded to London. Meagh alludes to his half-brother's bastardy – acknowledging his natural father as Kedagh O'More – and insinuates that his brother will shortly be coming to some influence and power; this is obviously important news for the English governors of Ireland, who were as ever vigilant to glean what information they might about the power relations between 'mere' Irish septs and Old English families.

Hartpowle & Mackwoorthe] On Captain Humphrey Mackworth, a longtime antagonist of the O'Mores, see biographies. In June 1585, Robert Harpoll would be named by Wallop in a letter to Burghley as the constable of Carlow (SP 63/117/55).

my brother Pane] Unidentified.

Walter Eustace] Possibly the brother of James Eustace, Viscount Baltinglass, the rebel.