

TNA: PRO SP 63/94/46*Grey to Walsingham, 28 July 1582*

This document functions both as letter of commendation for Nicholas Fitzsimons ('FitzSimon') and as an intervention in an ongoing dispute between the Dublin Corporation and custom officials at Chester and other English ports. The merchants of Dublin had formed a very strong group during the 1570s, refusing to pay custom taxes on their goods (and lobbying for permission to do so), as well as prohibiting foreign merchants from trading in Dublin. There were accusations that they had committed tax offences at Chester, aided by corrupt accomplices among the officials there. Their complaint in July 1582 was that Elizabeth had recently granted them a charter ('a graunt', as this letter has it) allowing 'that we should be fre of Poundage for all kyndes of merchandizes that we should shipp or bringe within your maiesties Portes of Chestir and Leirpole [i.e. Liverpool]', but that the customs officers in England (relying, as it seems from this letter, upon a different interpretation of that charter) 'taketh Custome of wollen cloth Which is the chefast commoditie that we do vse to transport' (SP 63/94/51, John Gaydon, Mayor of Dublin, to Walsingham, 28 July 1582). For more on this dispute, see Woodward 1970: 25-30. This is one of a set of letters carried over to England by Fitzsimons (from Grey, Waterhous, Wallop, Loftus, and John Gaydon, Mayor of Dublin) protesting about this matter and about the customs officers in Chester and Liverpool: many of them include commendation for Fitzsimons himself, and for his 'resonable sutes' (SP 63/94/38, Wallop to Walsingham, 21 July 1582).

The address and text of the letter, including the subscription, are in Spenser's secretary hand. The signature is Grey's, and the endorsement, presumably added later during the filing process in London, is in a distinct hand. The 'addressee note' at the foot of the letter ('{M}r Secretary'), in Spenser's Italian hand, he probably added to remind himself, come time to dispatch the packet, to whom it should be addressed.

Address and Endorsement

To the right Hono-
rable my very especiall
good frend Sir Fraunces
Walsingham Knight
Chief Secretary
to her Maiesty./

28 Iuly 1582
The Lord Deputy
on the behalfe of the
Citie of Dublin

Text

Sir whereas there is some Controuersie betwene this Corporacion of the Cittie of Dublin & the Customeres of westCh{ester}* and Hilbry touching a graunt by her Maiesty made vnto them, for to bee freed from Custome & Pondage there, of all such wares and marchandize, as they are to transport hether from thence, so as now the difference onely consisteth in the exposition of the said wordes and her Highnes meaning therein, for the solliciting whereof they haue presently sent this Bearer theyr Agent, I beseeche you therein to yield them what favour & furtheraunce you may, both for the obeyning her Maiesties said resolucion, and also for their more speedy dispatch; in both which the willingnes & duetifull mynd, which in the tyme of all these late troubles they haue carried towards her Maiesties service hath well deserved to bee favored. Amongst the which I am in especiall to Commend vnto you this bearer Nicholas FitzSimon a right honest marchaunt, & an Alderman of this Cittie of very speciall accoumpt, of what earnest good will & duetifull zeale to her Maiesties service, aswell in the tyme of former gouernementes being witnessed & approved by consent of all the Councell here, (who likewise affirme his Ancestoures from tyme to tyme to haue bene good seruitoures & faithfull Subiectes;) as also partly fownd true in this tyme of myne owne experience, so farre forth as I haue had occasion to vse his service; I could no lesse doe but deliuer vnto you the true report & acknowledgmet praying you both for his owne well deserving & also the rather for my sake to affoord him your good favour & Countenance in all such reasonable suittes as he may haue occasion there to sollicit. For the which you shall bynd both him with a perpetuall bond of duety, and my self also to bee thanckfull vnto you in his behalf. And so leaving him to your favorable consideration for the present I betake you to almighty God. Kilmaynham the xxvijth of Iulie. 1582./

Youres euer most assured,

Arthur Grey

Textual Notes

* **WestCh{ester}]** damage to the manuscript's right margin here and below has partially obscured the ends of some lines.

Annotations

Customeres . . . Hilbry] The small, uninhabited **Hilbry** (or Hilbre) Island lies off the north-west point of the Wirral peninsula, i.e. on the route between Chester and Dublin. **WestChester** may just mean Chester, although it may refer to the New Haven that had been constructed in the 1560s by the city authorities, about ten miles north-westwards up the River Dee, at Neston, in an attempt to preserve the city's sea-borne trade against the consequences of the silting of the river. See Woodward (1970), 2-3. A **customer** may merely be a purchaser, but, given the context of the dispute, almost certainly refers here to a customs official.

Custome and Pondage] **Custome**, i.e. custom, is a tax levied upon goods entering a port or country. **Pondage** was a tax of one shilling in the pound, normally paid for all goods sent in trade.

solliciting] Petitioning.

Nicholas FitzSimon] I.e. Nicholas Fitzsimons, Agent of the Corporation of Dublin and alderman of the city (as Wallop also notes in his letter of July 1582). On similar commendations for Fitzsimons, see headnote. Fitzsimons wrote to Burghley again in December 1582, arguing that Dublin merchants should not have to pay custom when they ship woollen clothes, 'the chiefest merchandise we carie forth this Realme to serve hir Maiesties garrison resident in that realme', from Chester to Ireland. He begs Burghley to 'be a meane vnto hir Maiestie that wee may have free passage' rather than being 'abused' by the customs officials of Chester and Liverpool, and offers to pay the amount determined by the customs officials directly to Elizabeth for the next four years (SP 63/98/31, 'Humble petitions from Nicholas Fitzsimons', 8 December 1582).

servitoures] Servants.