

**TNA: PRO SP 63/115/41***John Norris to Burghley, 30 March 1585*

This is one of the only surviving letters from Sir John Norris during the period of his Lord Presidency in Munster. Norris hardly made a start in Munster before being called away by Lord Deputy Perrot to serve against Turlough Luineach O'Neill in Ulster, thereafter returning to the Spanish wars in the Netherlands. This letter – expressing his frustration with lack of support for the Lord Presidency, and testifying to the general quiet of the province, perhaps demonstrates why he was so keen to leave. The address and main text of the letter, including the subscription, are both in Spenser's characteristic secretary hand. Norris has added his own signature. The marginal annotations are in a spidery italic hand, possibly Burghley's. The endorsement is in a compact and regular cursive italic, probably added during the process of filing the letter in London. An addressee note (reading, 'Lord Treasurer') appears on the verso of the final page of the letter, adjacent to the address.

**Address and Endorsements**

To the right Honorable  
his very good Lord the Lord  
Burghley Lord Threasorer  
{of Engla}nd . /\*

Vltimo Martij. 1585  
Mr Iohn Norris to  
my Lord

**Text**

Right honorable my very good Lord though no great occasion of Accidentes haue here lately happened to bee aduertized vnto your Lordship yett forsomuch as I purpose from tyme to tyme to acquaint your Lordship with the continuall state of this Province vnder my Charge, I haue thought meete to signifie vnto you, how the same now presently standeth, in reasonable good condicion of peace & quietnes in generall, though otherwise in some places troubled with small stealths & filching by some, which being lately come out of the Rebellion are lefte so bare & needy, that they haue no Waye to keepe life in them, but by that bad occupacion, by meanes whereof some of them wanting good successe therein, being so streightly here prosecuted & restreyned by the scourge of Iustice due to that offence, haue vtterly abandoned the fall to tillage & manuring of the land, seeing great hope of peace likely for the recouery of their decayed estates. But in truthe the wastenes is so huge & vniuersall, Chiefly for want of

people, that yt  
wilbee very long,  
ere they can bee  
hable to gett

Moally and Tralee

Asketin

His suite for land

Victualing the Soldier.

agayne a fore hand  
or recouer  
themselves into any  
habilitie of living.  
Neuerthesse in  
peace I doubt not  
god willing but to  
keepe them vnlesse  
more vehement  
occasions of trouble  
doe fall out, then  
can as yett bee  
feared or suspected.

And whereas at  
my Coming out of  
England your  
Lordship willed me,  
of such her  
Maiesties landes as  
bee here fallen, to  
looke out what  
places I should  
thinck most  
convenient to bee  
annexed vnto this  
Presidencie, & that  
the Lord Deputie  
should therevpon  
haue order for the  
establishing of  
them, I accordingly  
named certain  
places, which I  
thought fittest, as I  
signified vnto your  
Lordship of the  
which his Lordship  
hath assigned vnto  
me by Custodiam  
these, videlicet  
Moally & Tralee  
But Asketin, which  
indeed I named in  
especiall as fitt both  
for the convenient  
situacion & other  
Commodities  
thereof, very  
answerable to the  
service of the

Countray, his Lordship would in no wise yield to lay forth the  
same, nor to dispossesse Captein Barcley thereof. One Chief  
cause why I nominated that place was for the building &  
housing which is therevpon, being almost in present readines  
to bee vsed, which in all these other named parcelles is  
wanting, being vtterly ruined & requiring great Charges of  
building & reparacion before they can bee made serviceable.  
Whereof I beseeche your Lordship to haue that consideracion  
that ether such places may bee appointed, as may bee to some  
vse & service, or that some Allowaunce may bee sett downe  
for the repaying & building of those places, without which  
they wilbee to litle purpose. for hardly can I thinck that her  
Maiesty will giue away her owne house ready built & builde  
another newe to annexe to the Presidencie. Likewise at my  
coming into this Realme, yt pleased her Maiesty to promise  
me some of her landes here for my self in private, for which I  
beseech your Lordship also to bee a meane, that direccion  
may bee giuen vnto my Lord Deputy to assigne them vnto me  
so as I may in due season cast for the inhabiting & framing of  
them to some readines, yt being a very hard matter in long  
tyme to bring so waste places to any commoditie, nether  
people nor almost ought elles being here to bee had in the  
countray.

Here haue bene some Quantities of Corne & vittell sent into  
this Province for the provision of the garrizon here but nether  
so good nor in such quantitie\* as perhaps may bee aduertized  
vnto your Lordship And now that the forces are with drawen  
hence, here being this long while lefte but onely l. footmen,  
very litle spending of them is made, so as needes great waste  
& losse must grow vnto her Maiesty for avoyding whereof &  
the great Accidentes that Comenly follow victelling besides  
the Charge of Officeres growing to great Summes &  
expences to her Maiesty I thinck (vnder correccion of your  
Lordship) that yt should not bee amisse to leave the Soldier to

Pirates.

victell him selfe, being as seemeth thereto not vnwilling, incase order might bee giuen for his payment, or he might haue the xij<sup>s</sup> a moneth which (as I heare) was wont to bee allowed him for his victelling, which in regard of the great Charge which her Maiesty is otherwise needlesse at, should very behooffully bee yielded him, to provide himself as he could best, for his owne best contentment & ease. And yf occasion should happen that the Soldier should bee drawn forth to service, yt would not bee hard for him to victell him self for few daies, as the services now lye variable & vncertein, or from the nigh townes, being now in reasonable good sort & better habilitie\* to furnish him then heretofore, of which I beseech your Lordship accordingly to consider. Here haue of late bene many Pirates haunting vpon this coast to the no small hinderance of traficque & of her Maiesties impost besides other casualties, of the which there haue bene of late ij by my procurement taken, & more would I haue enforced my self to restrayne them, but that I fynd my Lord Deputy vnwilling to grawnt any Allowaunce out of the commoditie & prizes which might happely arize vnto her Maiesty for the recompence of private Charges of shipping & men & other thinges without which yt is impossible to doe any thing to purpose or to imploy men that way without Consideracion. Therefore yf it might please your Lordship that commission might bee grawnted me & some order sett downe for the Allowaunce of private Charges vnto me for shipping & such like, out of such Pirates & prizes of theirs as I should bring in, & for the ouerplus to bee accoumptable to her Maiesty which I doubt not but would turne to her farre greater proffitt & advauntage, I would the rather vse some endeavour & meanes to ridde this coast of many the like, which annoy these her Maiesties dominions & proffittes greatly. Of all which craving your Lordships answere, & in the rest being euermore most ready, in all that I may to your Lordships services & good pleasure I committ you to the gouernement of Almighty god. Clonmell, the last of March. 1585 /

Your Lordships euer most assured to commaund,

Iohn Norreys:

## Textual Notes

\* **Address {of Engla}nd]** The removal of the sealed bands of the letter has obscured part of the address, which was written over the bands. Four pairs of incisions were made in the paper to accommodate the bands.

† **quantitie]** Original 'quait' was overwritten here as 'quan', before completion of the word.

\* **& better habilitie]** Inserted above the line.

## Annotations

**Vltimo Martij. 1585]** I.e. 31 March 1585.

**at my Coming out of England]** Norris had received his commission for the Presidency of Munster in July 1584. His first letter from Munster is dated 7 August 1584 (SP 63/111/51).

**by Custodiam]** A fixed-term interest in land (in Ireland at this time, usually of three years), the title to which remained in the crown; see glossary.

**Moally & Tralee ... Asketin]** Moally, 'comenly Called Mallo' (or Mallow; see SP 63/115/42), is situated about forty kilometers northwest of Cork; Tralee at the eastern end of the Dingle peninsula; and Askeaton, about twenty kilometers west of Limerick on the south bank of the Shannon estuary; see map.

**Captein Barcley]** Captain Edward Barkley, who had served with Bagenal and Norris in Ulster, wrote to Walsingham on 23 October 1584 requesting the grant of attainted lands in Munster (SP 63/112/31); he would eventually make one of the Munster undertakers.

**hardly can I thinck]** I can hardly believe.

**her Maiesty ... to annexe to the Presidencie]** Norris had been given instructions to identify former Desmond lands that could be joined to the office of President of Munster; these lands would then support the office out of their income, and would provide bases for the President's residence. Norris had obviously settled on his three proposals with an eye to strategy: Mallow, Tralee, and Askeaton define a triangle embracing most of Cork.

**but onely l. footmen]** The garrison at Clonmel had been substantially reduced after the death of the Earl of Desmond and the end of the Munster campaign; most of the military resources of the Dublin government were at this point concentrated in Ulster.

**waste & losse must grow]** Norris's basic point is that supplying the Munster garrisons out of England is no longer necessary; not only had the number of soldiers serving in the province been considerably reduced, but the local towns, now enjoying their first full year of peace, were better able to provide basic commodities for money.

**great Accidentes that Comenly follow victelling]** Storms and pirates were a serious problem for the English government in its attempt to feed its Irish soldiers out of Chester.

**to leave the Soldier to victell him selfe]** By paying him an allowance for purchasing food locally.

**many Pirates haunting vpon this coast]** The danger of pirates to Irish shipping was a frequent preoccupation of Lord Deputies. Regular patrolling of the seas around Ireland was left to Elizabeth's admirals; George Beston was allowed 10s *per diem* at the end of 1580 for the apprehension of pirates in her Majesty's ship the *Foresight*, and Sir John Perrot 26s 8d *per diem*, in the *Revenge* (see *CSPD* 1590, p. 95). The southwest coast of Ireland, with its remote and sheltered bays, seems to have offered an inconspicuous haven for ships coming off the main. For Spenser's implication in privateering and the appropriation of prize spoils, see Zurcher 2007: 110-15.

**her Maiesties impost]** A tax levied on custom imported from overseas; the interception of goods by pirates meant fewer goods, and thus a smaller return on the impost; but fear of pirates also contributed to a gradual atrophy in trade over the longer term.

**by my procurement]** It is not clear whether Norris himself oversaw the boarding and capture of these two pirate vessels, or simply supplied commission and/or funds to a venture undertaken by another. The grant of a Lord President's authority for such a venture would have been a significant boost for adventurers, whose potential gains would thereby have been made secure.

**any Allowaunce out of the commoditie & prizes]** Goods seized from pirates were considered 'prize', and as such by ancient custom were assigned to the royal prerogative. Lord Deputy Perrot, as the queen's viceroy in Ireland, thus had the privilege of assigning or disposing of any spoil.

**without Consideracion]** Without recompense for their toil and danger.

**commission]** A formal licence.

**for the ouerplus to bee accoumptable to her Maiesty]** Norris proposes that he should by licence be allowed at least the cost of any anti-piratical ventures; that cost subtracted, he proposes that the remainder, or profit, could pass to the Queen.

**Clonmell]** The easternmost garrison town of Munster, in Tipperary, and traditionally the first, strongest staging post for English ventures in the province; see map.