Evan T. Jones (ed.), ‘William Walton’s suit for the searchership of Bristol, July 1597’ (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2010)\(^1\)

**Letter: William Walton to Robert Cecil, 4 July 1597**\(^2\)

To the worshipful

John Leye esquire

give these\(^3\)

Worshipful After most hartyest maner I commend me unto you with thanks for all your cortesies & prayer for your felycyte &c. Sertefyinge you one William Colston\(^4\) served hear in brystoll the office of serchershipp: \(^5\) & for his mysbehaviour therein is dysmyssed & his patent taken from hem: it is the queens gyft & graunted by patente forth of her chansery & now in her hand Colston bought the office of one Mr Ley\(^6\) which before served that office heare & gave for the same 300 li. pleaseth you to deall with Sir Henry Ley\(^7\) or by your self or any other to bege the same of the queene in my name that I may have that graunt as Colston had it: I will give you good payment 300 li for your paynes: yf you please to deall therin you must do it forthwith for sondry this day is ryd hear hence to be suters to my Lord Tresorer for his good will for the office. I have don her majestye very good service sondry tymes & never had any recomppence. yf ned be (althought no sercher ever gave sherties) I will give good sherties\(^8\) for my good behaviour in the office: The wydow is yett a clear woman\(^9\) & worth the sewinge\(^10\) & another since fallen aclothiers wydo worth som 3000 poundes.\(^11\)

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\(^{1}\) I would like to thank Lord Salisbury for giving me permission to publish these letters. I also thank Robin Harcourt Williams (Hatfield House Library) and Margaret Condon (University of Bristol) for their advice and assistance on the transcription. Summaries of the two letters can be found in: Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury*, VII, (London, 1899), pp. 288-9, 293. The following conventions were employed when transcribing the documents: the line spacing, spelling, capitalization and punctuation follow the manuscript; reconstructions of suspensions are in italics, editorial comments are in squared brackets.

\(^{2}\) Hatfield House Library, CP53/21.

\(^{3}\) The address is on the verso of the document. John Lee is mentioned here because Walton’s brother had apparently been instructed to give Lee the petition. The brother was then take to Walton’s letter to Robert Cecil, along with Lee’s letter of recommendation: CP53/21.

\(^{4}\) William Colston was searcher of Bristol by 29 Sept 1591: TNA E190/1131/1.

\(^{5}\) A searcher was a senior customs officer, responsible for ensuring that vessels did not lade or unlade uncustomed goods while in the jurisdiction of his port. Like customers and controllers, searchers were appointed by letters patent.

\(^{6}\) John Lee / Ley was searcher of Bristol in the 1580s: TNA E 134/24Eliz/East11; E 134/26Eliz/Hil1.

\(^{7}\) Sir Henry Lee of Quarrendon, Buckinghamshire, Queen’s Champion, d. Feb 1611.

\(^{8}\) ‘sherties’: sureties. A surety is a form of ‘security’ in which a third party pledges himself financially for the behaviour of the principal. In this case, those offering surety would make themselves financially liable, up to a pre-agreed sum, if Walton did not behave properly while in office.

\(^{9}\) In this context ‘clear’ could be read as either ‘fair / attractive’ or ‘unencumbered / unattached’: *OED*.

\(^{10}\) ‘sewinge’: suiting – i.e. paying suit to.

\(^{11}\) This sentence appears to represent a break from the previous subject. If so it presumably eludes to some previous correspondence: Walton informing Robert Cecil of the continued availability of one marriageable widow and the more
what good I or my frendes may do for
your good: be you assured it shalbe performed
with all care: And so I take my leve
& commit you to the holy keaping of the allmyghtye
Brystoll the iiijth day of July 1597 anno
Your Lovinge ffrend to commaund
       [Signed] William Walton

Letter: John Lee to Robert Cecil, 8 July 1597

To the Right Honorable
Sir Robert Cissill knight
Principall Secreteraye
to her majestie. /

Right honorable this enclosed was written unto me from Bristowe by ane honest
man a ffrende of myne which I have presumed thoughg yt be a great deale more then
becommeth me to doe; most humblie beseechinge your honor to pardon my boldnes to
send to your honor by this bearer his Brother and in all humblenes I beseech your
honor give me leave to entreat your honorable furtherance to my good lord your
fathore towchinge the sute he maketh for the Sherchershipp of Bristowe beinge
nowe voyde; he ys a man of very honest Carriadge and such a one as hath
served her majestie in very good sorte of his owne charge as ys well knowne to
my lord Admiral as I am enformed. the honest offer he maketh in his lettre
towchinge the puttinge in of Suerties which hath not bin done heretofore maketh
me the more to presume to commende his sute to your honor. Assuringe you that
I dare gage my poore creditt and honestie which ys the greatest parte of the
little wealth I have for the performinge of the other offer he mentioneth in his
lettre to be presently payd upon the obteyninge of the place to any such of better
desert as my good lord your fathore or your honor shall thinke mete to bestowe the
same upon. And soe with my daylie prayer to allmightie god for the continuance of
your health with daylie encrease of honor I most humblie leave you to the tuiccion
of thallmyghtie

       Your honors most humblie allwayes att
       commaundement./

       [Signed] Jhon Lee

recent availability of a clothier’s widow. Cecil might have been expected to be interested in such matters because Lord
Burghley, as Master of the Court of Wards, was responsible for issuing licences for widow’s marriages: J. Hurstfield,
‘Lord Burghley as Master of the Court of Wards, 1561-98’, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Fourth Series,
Vol. 31, (1949), p. 99. In addition, Cecil might have been interested in rich widows as potential spouses for his clients.
12 William Walton was a successful privateer with interests in Bristol and Weymouth. He was also mayor of Weymouth
13 Hatfield House Library, CP53/21.

15 This is presumably a reference to William Walton’s services as a privater over the previous ten years.
16 John Lee had been searcher of Bristol during the 1480s, before selling the office to William Colston: TNA:PRO E
134/24Eliz/East11; E 134/26Eliz/Hil1, E 133/6/809; Hatfield House Library, CP53/21.