

[ENGLAND]

[Proposal of Sir Richard Gresham, Lord Mayor of London, to King Henry 8, to take over unused monastic hospitals (1537)]

[on back]

To the Kyng our most gracious
Dredd soveraigne Lorde

[1]

Most redowted puyfant and noble prynce, my most dredd, beloved, and naturall soveraigne Lorde.

I your pore humble & most obedient *servaunt* dailly confideryng and ever more and more perceyving by your *Vertuus* Begynnyngf & charitable procedyngf in all your cawses your persone and majestie Royall to be the elected and chosen Vessell of God. By whome not alonly the very and true worde of god is & shalbe sett forthe and accordyng to the trewghth & verytie of the same. But also to be he whome god hath constituted & ordeyned, Bothe to redresse & reforme all crymes offences & enormyties, Beyng repugnant to his doctryne or to the detryment of the com^mon welthe & hurt of the pore people Beyng your naturall subjects and Forder to forsee & vigilantly to provyde for the charitable reformacion of the same

whyche thyng hath & yet dothe encourage me and also my bounden dewtie obligethe me in especiall Beyng most unworthy your Levetenant & mayer of your Cytie Royall of London, to enforme and advertise your most gracious highnes of one thyng in especiall, for the ayde and comforte of the pore, fykk, blynde, aged, & Impotent persones, beyng not able to helpe them selffes nor havyng no place certen where they may be refresshed or lodged at, tyll they be holpen & cured of theyr diseases & fyknes.

So it is most gracious Lorde, that nere & *withyn* the Cytie of London, be iij hospytallf or Spytellf commonly called seynt maryes spytell, [2] seynt Barthilmewes spytell, and seynt Thomas spytell, and the New Abbey of Tower Hyll, [3] founded of good devocion by auncient Faders, & endowed with great possessions & Rentf, onely for the releffe, comforte, and helpyng of the pore, and Impotent people, not beyng able to helpe them selffes, and not to the mayntenance of Chanons, Preeftf, and monkf, to lyve in pleasure, nothyng regardyng the miserabile people liyng in every strete, offendyng every clene persone passyng by the way, with theyre fylthy & nasty favours

Wherefore, may it please your marcifull goodnes enclyned to pytie & compaffion, for the releffe of Crystf very Images, created to his owne similitude, to order by your high autoritie as supreme hed of this Chyrche of England, or otherwise by your sage discrecion, that your mayer of your Cytie of London, & his brethern the Aldermen for the tyme beyng, shall & may fromhenforthe, have the order disposicion, Rule, and governaunce, Bothe of all the landf, tenementf, and Revenewes, apperteynyng & Belongyng to the said hospittalf or any of them, and of the ministers which be or shall be *withyn* any of them.

And then your grace shall facillie perceyve, that where now a small nombre of Chanon Preeftf, & monkf be founde for theyre owne profett onely, & not for the com^mon utilitie of the Realme, a great nombre of pore, nedy, fykke and Indigent persones shall be refresshed, maynteyned, & comforted, and also healed & cured of theyr Infirmyties, frankly & freely, by Physicions, Surgeons, & Potycaries, which shall have stipende & jalarie onely for that purpose, so that all Impotent persones not hable to labour shall be releved, and all sturdy beggars not wylling to labour shall be punyshed.

For the whiche doyng your grace shall not alone-ly meritt highly towarde god, But shew your selffe to be more charitable to the pore, than your noble progenitor Kyng Edgar foundour of so many monasteryes, or Kyng Henry the thyerde Renewer of westmynster, or Kyng Edward the thyerde

[1] [British Library, Cotton MS Cleopatra E iv f 262v-f 263r (formerly f 222); apparently Sir Richard Gresham's original letter. Also printed in *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Gresham* by John William Burgon, London: Jennings, 1839, vol 1 pp 26-29.

This letter is undated. It does not mention King Henry 8's son Edward who was born 12 October 1537. But a later petition of the city of London, also undated, is based on the wording of this letter, and it does mention the prince. Although Gresham's term as lord mayor officially began 28 October 1537, he was actually elected on 29 September 1537, before the prince was born. Several historians think that he and the king knew each other, and this may be why he was elected—as the most promising person to test the sensitive subject of asking for the hospital properties which by then belonged to the king. Probably, then, this letter began the process, and the king's reaction was such that the city was encouraged to submit its official petition soon after. But, six years of very mean-minded reluctance elapsed before the king or his successors refounded a series of originally monastic hospitals as secular hospitals and gave them and their properties to the city of London. All of which makes me suggest that this letter must have been dated very soon after Sir Richard Gresham began his term—say, 1 November 1537.

[2] Now called Bethlehem Hospital.—*Stowe's Survey*, ed. 1720, b. i. p. 192.

[3] This was the Abbey of St. Clare, called the Minorities.—*Ibid.* b. ii. p. 14.

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foundor of the New Abbey, or Kyng Henry the fyfte foundor of Syon & Shene. But also shal have the name of conservatour, protectour, & defendour, of the pore people *with* theyre contynuall prayer for *your* helthe, welthe, and prosperitie Long to endure.

your homble and most obedyent
servant *Rychard Gresham*

2 *Proposition du maire en 1537 de reprendre les hôpitaux monastiques inutilisés de Londres*