

DEATH OF PRINCESS HENRIETTA

William Perwich, Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris

to Sir Joseph Williamson (1633–1701), Secretary to the Earl of Arlington

Princess Henrietta (1644–1670), youngest daughter of Charles I of England, lived in France during the English Civil Wars. In 1661, after her brother Charles II had re-gained the English Throne, Henrietta wed Louis XIV's younger brother, Philippe (1640–1701). On 26 May 1670, she arrived in England to negotiate a secret treaty between England and France. On her return a week later, she moved with her husband to the Palace of Saint Cloud, just west of Paris.

Paris, 1 July 1670^[NS]

Since what I wrote yesterday in haste and confusion by our courier, I having the occasion by one going from Monsieur¹ and having more matter to enlarge to you upon the most deplorable subject, cannot but particularise what I have seen and what I have learnt from the ladies and other persons attending Her Royal Highness.

On Thursday last Madame found herself a little indisposed and, although advised to the contrary, went into a cold bath, as she did also the two days following. But on Sunday morning she declared she was not well, without knowing what visible distemper indisposed her. She dined very well, looked still as well as ever until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when, finding herself hot within, she drank two or three glasses of juice of chicory,² immediately whereupon finding a marvelous alteration all over, she cried out she was poisoned, changed her colour in a moment, became blackish and yellow, hollow, and the very symptoms of death appeared in her face.

Before my Lord Ambassador could get to Saint Cloud, at nine o'clock, she had had six cloisters given her, but I cannot tell you particularly and the subsequent proceedings of the physicians. Alas, poor princess, all along she cried out that she was in great anguish and pain, desiring to be dissolved. The King was by her almost to the last breath. About twelve o'clock the Sacrament was administered unto her, at two the extreme unction, and near three this most excellent Princess gave up the ghost.

But now, whilst all the world was in tears and extraordinary affliction, you may well ask [*at this point, Perwich began writing in cipher*] what did Monsieur? Why, he immediately employed himself in seizing all Madame's money, to a farthing, in any of her ladies' hands, all her jewels, and immediately hastened to Paris and tumbled over her papers. All the people believe she was poisoned. You cannot imagine how Her Royal Highness is lamented. [*end cipher*]

But to come to yesterday in the afternoon, when my Lord Ambassador³ went to Saint Cloud to see her opened and what might be the cause of her so-sudden departure (taking the Chamberlain⁴ and Mr. Beaucher, the Queen of England's surgeon, with him to make observations), where the doctors and ladies deferred her opening until eight at night, notwithstanding that the Ambassador pressed to have it done sooner because of better light. No sooner was the upper skin entered but all the house was filled with the most horrible stench that anybody ever smelt. She was all over rotten within, her liver wasted, and this the general opinion of the doctors—that they wondered not why she died then, but that she lived so long. She was stuffed up with bile. Beaucher spied a little hole in her stomach, which the other surgeons excused to be the haste of the incisor, though it was blackish within. You will please to pardon this confused account, for all we do is in disorder. She is to be carried to Saint Denis⁵ this night.

National Archives, SP 78 / 129, f^o 279

¹ The French used the titles *Monsieur* and *Madame* as shorthand to refer to Philippe and Henrietta.

² Chicory, a plant related to both dandelions and endives, often used as a coffee substitute or additive

³ George Villiers (1628–1687), Duke of Buckingham, English Ambassador to France

⁴ Godefroi Maurice de la Tour d'Auvergne (1636–1721), Duc de Bouillon, Chamberlain of France

⁵ All but three Kings of France since 465 have been buried in the Basilica of Saint Denis, just north of Paris. Moreover, Henrietta's mother, wife of King Charles I of England, had been buried at Saint Denis just ninth months earlier.