

PERKIN WARBECK BEFORE EXETER

Henry VII (1457–1509), King of England (1485–1509)

to Oliver King (c. 1432–1503), Bishop of Bath and Wells (1495–1503)

Perkin Warbeck appeared before the Burgundian Court in 1490 identifying himself as Richard, son of Edward IV. He gained support from various continent powers, most notably the Holy Roman Emperor, and in 1495 landed in Kent. Henry VII's forces routed Warbeck's supporters, and the pretender fled first to Ireland and then to Scotland, where he married a distant cousin of King James IV. In September 1496, Warbeck marched four miles into northern England before retreating into Scotland.

In July 1497, James IV expelled Warbeck from Scotland. The pretender sailed to Ireland and besieged Waterford for eleven days before fleeing that island. On 7 September, he landed at Land's End in Devon with approximately 100 men. His force quickly swelled to 6000, and he marched on Exeter.

Woodstock, 20 September 1497

Right reverend father in God, right trusty and well-beloved, We greet you well and have received your writing, by the which We conceive how there is word that Perkin is landed. Truth it is that he is so landed and that Our commons of Cornwall take his part, amongst whom on Monday last, the eighteenth day of September, there was not one gentleman.

On Sunday the seventeenth of September, Perkin and his company came before Our city of Exeter about one in afternoon, and there ranged themselves in the manner of a battle in the space of two hours. Within that, Our city, were Our cousin of Devonshire, Sir William Courtney,¹ Sir John Sapcotes, Sir Piers Edgecombe, Sir John Croker, Sir Walter Courtenay, Sir Humphrey Fulford,² with many other noble men, both of Our counties of Devonshire and Cornwall.

This Perkin sent for to have deliverance of Our said city, which was denied unto him by Our said cousin. Whereupon Perkin and his company went to the east gate and to the north gate, and assaulted the same, but it was so defended (blessed be God) that Perkin lost above three or four hundred men of his company, and so failed of his intention.

On the morrow after, the eighteenth day, Perkin and Our rebels made a new assault at the said north gate and east gate, like as by the copy of the letters from Our said cousin of Devonshire enclosed you shall move to understand more at large.

The Perkin and his company, if they come forward, shall find before them Our Chamberlain,³ Our Steward of the Household,⁴ Lord Saint Maurice, Sir John Cheyne,⁵ and the noblemen of south Wales and of Our counties of Gloucester, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Somerset, and Dorset, and at their back the garrison of Our said city of Exeter. And We with Our host royal shall not be far, with the mercy of our Lord, for the final conclusion of the matter.

We have proclaimed also that whosoever brings the said Perkin alive unto Us shall have the sum of a thousand marks,⁶ and all those that give their offences first and last. We trust soon to hear good tidings of the said Perkin.

Henry Ellis, ed. *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (London: Harding, Triphook, and Lepard, 1824), 1:34–35. [modernized]

¹ Sir William Courtenay (1475–1511), son of the Earl of Devon and commander of the King's forces at Exeter

² Sir John Sapcotes (c. 1445–1501); Sir Piers Edgecombe (1469–1539); Sir John Croker (1440–1508); Sir Walter Courtenay (–1506), a distant cousin of Sir William Courtenay; Sir Humphrey Fulford (1467–1508)

³ Giles (1451–1508), Baron Daubeney, KG, Lord Chamberlain (1494–1508)

⁴ Robert (c. 1452–1502), Baron Willoughby de Broke, KG, Knight of the King's Body and Lord Steward of the Household (1488–1502)

⁵ John (c. 1442–1499), Baron Cheyne. KG, KB

⁶ 1000 marks equaled approximately £666