

PROCLAMATION OF REBELLION

Thomas Stafford (1531–1557)

Historians know almost nothing about Thomas Stafford's childhood and youth. Henry VIII in 1521 executed his grandfather, the Duke of Buckingham, for treason. Thomas Stafford's father, Henry Stafford, managed to regain royal favor, and in 1547 received the title Baron Stafford from the King.

Thomas Stafford first appears in the historical record in 1550, when he moved to Italy to live with his maternal uncle, Reginald Pole (1500–1558), a Cardinal of the Catholic Church and later Archbishop of Canterbury. After three years, Stafford move to Poland, where he became an intimate of Sigismund II (1520–1572), King of Poland. Stafford returned to England in January 1554 and joined Wyatt's rebellion against Queen Mary. Upon the rebellion's failure, Stafford fled to France, where he remained until 1557, when he returned to England, seized Scarborough Castle, and issued the following proclamation.

25 April 1557

To all and every singular person and persons, of what estate or degree soever they be, that love the commonwealth, honour, and liberty of this our native country, and most for the Realm of England, the Lord Thomas Stafford, son to the Lord Henry, rightful Duke of Buckingham, sends greeting.

Know, most dearly-beloved countrymen, that we, traveling in strange realms and foreign nations, have perfectly proved out many detestable treasons which Spaniards shamefully and wrongfully have pretended, and to this present have endeavoured themselves to work against our noble Realm of England.

We therefore more tenderly favouring, as all true Englishmen ought to do, the common commodity and weal public of this, our native country, than our wealth, treasure, safeguard, health, or pleasure, have with all possible speed arrived here in the castle of Scarborough, levying our band, wherewith we thought to have proved in other affairs, coming after us, because we had perfect knowledge by certain letters taken with Spaniards at Dieppe that this same castle of Scarborough, with twelve other of the most chiefest and principal holds in the Realm, shall be delivered to 12.000 Spaniards before the King's coronation. For the Spaniards say it were but vain for the King to be crowned unless he may have certain of our strongest castles and holds to resort to at all times, till he may be able to bring in a great army to withstand his enemies, that is to over-run and destroy the whole Realm.

For, so long as Englishmen have any power, we trust they will never submit themselves to vile Spaniards; which treason we have disappointed.

Trusting and firmly believing, by the might of the omnipotent, everlasting God, with the aide and help of all true Englishmen, to deliver our country from all present peril, danger, and bondage whereunto it is like to be brought by the most devilish device of Mary, unrightful and unworthy Queen of England, who, both by the will of her father, King Henry VIII, and by the laws of this noble realm of England has forfeited the Crown for marriage with a stranger.

And also has most justly deserved to be deprived from the Crown because she being naturally-born half-Spanish and half-English, bears not herself indifferently towards both nations, but showing herself a whole Spaniard and no Englishwoman in loving Spaniards and hating Englishmen, enriching Spaniards and robbing Englishmen, sending over to Spaniards continually the treasure, gold, and silver of our Realm to maintain them for our destruction, suffering poor people of England to live in all careful misery, many of them dying for very hunger.

And, not contented with all these mischiefs, she seeking earnestly by all possible means to place Spaniards in our castles and holds, contrary to all statutes, customs, and ordinances within this Realm, that they may burn and destroy the country three or four times yearly until Englishmen can be contented to obey all their vile customs and most detestable doings, whereby the whole commonality of England shall be brought to perpetual captivity, bondage, and most servile slavery, as evidently shall be proved before all men at our first assembly.

We therefore, dearly-beloved countrymen, preventing these miserable mischiefs, have purposed here to remain and tarry to receive all such faithful and true Englishmen as willingly will work to preserve their own lives, lands, livings, treasures, wives, children—yea, and to speak briefly, the Crown of the whole Realm—from the possession of proud, spiteful Spaniards, whose Moorish manners and spiteful conditions no nation in the world is able to suffer.

And therefore we are fully determined to withstand them in all their doings for the defence of our country, not minding to work to our own advancement touching the possession of the Crown, but only to restore our blood and house to the old pristinate estate, which all men know has been most wrongfully suppressed by the malaise of Cardinal Wolsey—and not for any offence that we committed towards the Realm or the Crown—but have always endeavoured ourselves, as we pretend at this present, to withstablish the Crown to the next rightful heirs of the Realm so that it may remain successively to the true English blood of our own natural country, banishing and expelling all strangers, merchants only excepted. And to restore again all such acts, laws, liberties, and customs as were established in the time of that most prudent prince, King Henry VIII. Whereby this whole realm of England shall not only be preserved from the tyranny of foreign princes, but also be delivered from all such powling payments as the Queen does daily give to Spaniards, and will give continually 'till she have beggared and destroyed all the whole Realm.

We therefore are fully determined most thankfully to receive all persons, of every state or degree, that willingly will withstand this miserable mischief. And as the Dukes of Buckingham, our forefathers and predecessors, have always been defenders of the poor commonalty against the tyranny of princes, so should you have us at this juncture, most dearly-beloved friends, your protector, governor, and defender against all your adversaries and enemies. Minding earnestly to die rather presently and personally before you in the field than to suffer you to be overrun so miserably with strangers and made most sorrowful slaves and careful captives to such a naughty nation as Spaniards, who affirm openly that they will rather live with Moors, Turks, and Jews than with Englishmen, whereby all men may perceive plainly that ever like as they do use Turks, Moors, and Jews, which be their captives, so much more worse will they use us if we do not manfully within short time withstand the pretended purposes.

We shall therefore most earnestly and lovingly desire all manner of persons, of what estate or degree soever they be, that will gladly withstand these miserable mischiefs and works, and to maintain the Crown from all strangers to the right heirs of the Realm, that they and every of them, with all expedition, resort to us, so well-appointed with horses, armour, or otherways as they possibly can appoint themselves, for the preservation of the Crown and safeguard of the Realm.