

***Supplicatio* (c.1584)**

Source

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Clairambault 327, fos. 122r–3v. It is endorsed ‘A supplication to the right honorable the Erle of Leicester for erecting of a printe[r] at Oxford’.

Notes

The precise date of the *Supplicatio* is unknown but it presumably pre-dates January 1585 as Joseph Barnes had begun printing by then. In this volume, it has been dated as c.1584.

The text was transcribed in Strickland Gibson and David Rogers, ‘The Earl of Leicester and Printing at Oxford’, *Bodleian Library Record*, 2 (1949), 243–5; this is reproduced below. A translation appears in Carter, 19–20. An alternative translation, below, has been provided by Simon Neal and revised by Andrew Hegarty, with advice from Robin Darwall-Smith and Leofranc Holford-Strevens.

Transcription

Supplicatio ad illustrissimum comitem Leicestriae summum Oxoniensis academiae cancellarium pro Typographia Oxoniae erigendâ, eademque vrbe privilegij aliquot librorum, qui nondum privilegij muniuntur dotanda, ad sumptus Typographiae facilius tolerandos. Cum nulla Germaniae et Galliae Academiola suam non habeat typographiam, miraculi instar videtur exteris per vniversum hoc Angliae regnum in vna tantum vrbe typographos reperiri, in eâque quod non sit academia, nulla fere praeter Anglicana imprimi. Quocirca optime de literis merebitur, qui impetraverit a Regia maiestate, vt suâ solita munificentia typographum in academia Oxoniensi (quae collegiorum magnificentia et annuorum reddituum amplitudine omnes Europae vniversitates superat, typographiae defectu singulis cedit) fovere et confirmare dignetur. Rationes huc spectantes istae vel istarum similes esse possunt.

Ratio prima.

In primis in illius academiae bibliothecis multi manuscripti libri optimi delitescunt, nunc pulvere et squallore turpiter obsiti, qui beneficio typographiae in eadem vrbe constituendae a tenebris perpetuis possent vindicari, et cum totius gentis honore in alias Europae regiones distrahi.

Secunda.

Praeterea cum viri sint ibidem omnium linguarum et artium liberalium peritissimi, quorum tenuitas interdum non fert, vt suis sumptibus Londini viuant, dum opera sua typis mandent, vnde hactenus obscuri et ignoti exteris, vix suis conterraneis innotuerint, praesente hac typographiae opportunitate, ignauiae notam, quam illis quotidie exteri obijciunt, breui facillime delerent et excuterent.

Tertia.

Cum semper exteris rationi consentaneum visum fuerit, vt vbi est sedes doctorum virorum, ibi sit typographorum locus, quò opera emendatius imprimantur et exemplaria diligentius conferantur: non sine summâ literarum iacturâ academiae typographis deprivantur.

Quarta.

Vixit Oxoniae annis abhinc plus minus quinquaginta quidam qui ibidem libros imprimebat, qui adhuc in manibus quorundam visuntur. Quodsi tum rudiori seculo academia suum haberet typographum, quanto magis erit necessarius in hac doctorum ingeniorum abundantia.

Quinta.

Est etiam nunc opulentus quidam bibliopola Oxoniensis vocatus vulgò Joseph Barnes, qui ibidem libenter libros excuderet, modo privilegium quatuor aut quinque librorum nondum privilegij comprehensorum, quos ipse nominaret, et reliquorum nondum impressorum quos illi viri docti ex bibliothecis Oxoniensibus commendarent, obtinere posset, et ij qui a nundinis Frankfortensibus exterorum libros omnis generis quantitate maxima in hoc regnum important, latinos et graecos authores quos noster imprimet mediocri quantitate exportare, vt par est, teneantur.

Sexta.

Porro typographo Oxoniae stabilito occidentales Angliae et Walliae regiones, et barbarum adhuc Hyberniae regnum decursu temporis lympidissimis rivis melioris literaturae foelicus et abundantius irrigarentur.

Vltima.

Postremo cum omne fere regnum iam scateat frivolis opusculis anglicè compositis, quae magis ad morum corruptelam spectant quàm ad vllam sanam aut solidam doctrinam, hac ratione ad saniora et magis erudita iuniores excitarentur.

Fortunet Deus.

Translation

A petition to the most illustrious Earl of Leicester, High Chancellor of the University of Oxford, for the setting up of a printing press there and for granting in the same city a number of privileges for books not yet covered by privileges, as a help towards defraying the expenses of a printing house.

Since there is no university, however small, in Germany and France that does not have a printing press, foreigners are astonished that in the whole of this realm of England printers can be found in only one city, and that, because there is no university in it, virtually nothing is printed except in English. Therefore, he will deserve well of the world of letters who obtains from the Queen's Majesty that she, in accord with her accustomed generosity, deign to favour and secure a printing house in the University of Oxford (which surpasses all the universities of Europe in the grandeur of its colleges and the extent of their yearly revenues, and yet lags behind each and every one of them by its lack of a press). The following, and others like them, are considerations that may bear on the matter.

First consideration. First of all, there lie hidden away in the libraries of that University many excellent manuscripts, now shamefully covered in dust and dirt, which, by the boon of establishing a press in the same city, could be rescued from perpetual obscurity and distributed in other parts of Europe to the great credit of the whole nation.

Second. Moreover, whereas there are men on the spot, extremely learned in all manner of languages and liberal arts, the slenderness of whose means does not at times permit them to live in London at their own expense while putting their works into print, these men have hitherto in consequence been overlooked and unknown to foreigners, and scarcely recognized by their own countrymen. But given now the opportunity of a press, they might swiftly and easily remove and shake off the imputation of idleness which foreigners daily lay

against them.

Third. Since foreigners have always thought it reasonable that where there is a settlement of learned men there should be printers, so that books may be printed more correctly and texts more diligently collated, universities may not be deprived of printers without the greatest loss to literature.

Fourth. There was living in Oxford more or less fifty years ago a certain man who used to print there books which are still to be seen in the hands of some people. If, then, the University had its own printer in that less cultivated age, how much more needful must it be in the present abundance of learned talents.

Fifth. There is also at present a certain prosperous bookseller of Oxford, commonly called Joseph Barnes, who would willingly print books there if he could obtain a privilege for four or five books of his own choice not now covered by privileges, and for others not yet in print which learned men could recommend out of the libraries of Oxford, and if those who import foreigners' books of every kind into this realm in exceedingly large numbers from the Frankfurt fairs were obliged, in like manner, to export in smaller quantity the Latin and Greek authors our man could print.

Sixth. Furthermore, if a printer were established in Oxford, the western parts of England, Wales, and the as yet barbarous realm of Ireland would in the course of time be watered more happily and abundantly with the purest streams of better literature.

Last. Finally, whereas nearly the whole kingdom now abounds with frivolous small works written in English which look more to corruption of morals than to any healthy and solid instruction, by this means youth might be incited to matters healthier and more learned. May God prosper this request!