LOT 11

[MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS.]—ELIZABETH, QUEEN, LORD BURGHLEY, FRANCIS WALSINGHAM, AND OTHERS.

A COLLECTION OF LETTERS WRITTEN TO SIR RALPH SADLER WHEN ENTRUSTED WITH THE CUSTODY OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, 1584-85

Discussing such subjects as the conditions and security of the Scottish Queen's confinement, and her negotiations with Queen Elizabeth, comprising four letters signed by Elizabeth I, one with an autograph superscription (“...Use but olde trust and new diligence | Your affectionat loving Soueraine Elizabeth R...”), seven autograph letters signed and one letter signed by Lord Burghley, 17 letters signed and two autograph letters signed by Francis Walsingham, one autograph letter signed by the Earl of Leicester (to Walsingham), three letters by others, six draft or copy letters in the hand of Sadler’s secretary John Sommer including a copy of a letter by Queen Elizabeth to Mary, Queen of Scots (3 December 1584), a set of accounts relating to the Duchy of Lancaster, and "An Inventorie of
such Lynen & platt as is to be caryed to wyngefield"
altogether 43 items, 68 pages of text, folio, plus address leaves, marginal notes and
docketing in the hand of Sommer, and blanks, with later pencil pagination and some other
pencil notes, in total 180 pages, 12 August 1584 to 7 May 1585, loose in eighteenth-century
blue boards but some pieces with sewing-thread still attached, in a blue folding box and
morocco-backed slipcase, some spotting and soiling, nicks and tears including seal tears

ESTIMATE #150,000-200,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 349,250 GBP

PROVENANCE
Sir Thomas Phillipps, MS 11016; William H. Robinson Ltd, Pall Mall, London, Catalogue 81 (1950), item 74; Frederick,
2nd Lord Hesketh, bookplate

CATALOGUE NOTE
A highly important cache of letters unknown to historians and biographers, covering an important but little-known period in the long captivity of Mary, Queen of Scots. By the late summer of 1584 the forty-one year-old Mary had been in England for 16 years, most of them spent in the charge of the Earl of Shrewsbury. The increasingly dangerous international situation – with bloody religious wars in France and the Low Countries, the recent assassination of William of Orange, hostility of Spain, and plots against Queen Elizabeth at home – and the collapse of Shrewsbury's marriage, made it necessary to find a new keeper for England's most dangerous prisoner. The man chosen was Sir Ralph Sadler, who began his career as secretary to Thomas Cromwell, and as Ambassador to Scotland in the early 1540s had held the infant Mary in his arms. It was an honour that few will have envied: it meant he was constantly under the court's intense and highly critical gaze, faced Elizabeth's resentment when he incurred inevitable expenses, and had to deal with constant complaints from Mary. Any favour to Mary would meet displeasure from Elizabeth, but it would hardly be wise to treat harshly the woman who could well be England's next queen.

The first letter in the collection is Sadler's instructions of 12 August 1584, signed by the Queen and countersigned by Walsingham, informing him of his temporary responsibility:

"...Whereas our right Trustie and welbelved Cosin and Councellor the Earle of Shrewsbury hath of long tyme been an humble sutor unto us to be licenced to make his repaire hither to our presence, whereunto we are now moved to assent. And finding it very expedient to have in his absence some person of trust... to supply his place, in looking duly to the safe keeping of the Queen of Scotes committed and now remaining in the charge of the said E: For this purpose we have made choice of you for many respoectes to use your service therein as one of whose approved wisdome and fidelity we have so great confidence..."

Sadler was given strict instruction over security and the restraint to be placed on his charge; she was, for example, "not permitted to ride farre abroad but onely suffered on foot or in a Coche to take the ayre and use some such exercise neere the howse where she shall lye". The terms of Sadler's employment changed in December, with a letter signed by Elizabeth – headed with the warning written in her own hand and distinctive compressed prose style, that he should "Use but olde trust and new diligence" – confirming his final relief of Shrewsbury and ordering Mary's removal from Shrewsbury's manor at Wingfield, Derbyshire, to Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire. Mary had first been at Tutbury in 1569 and loathed its draughty rooms and stinking drains, but it was a more secure location.

Elizabeth's letters give an extraordinary insight into the state of the complex relationship between the two queens at the time, especially in her remarkable letter of 31 October 1584 in which Elizabeth levels sharp criticisms against Mary in a letter intended to be shown or read to the Scottish queen. This indirect communication was made necessary,
Elizabeth explains, “thorough a vowe heretofore made not to writte unto her with our own hand untill we might receave better satisfaction by effect from hir to our contentment then heretofore we have don”. Mary had expressed her wish that the “jealousy and mislike” between the two women be removed, and one can hardly envy Sadler for having to transmit Elizabeth’s response:

“...You may lett hir understand that we wish she had been as carefull for the tyme past to have avoyded the cause and ground by hir given of the just jealousy by us conceaved, as she now sheweth to mislyke of the effectes that the same hath (by due desert) bread towards hir: For she hir selfe knoweth (wherein we appeale unto hir own conscience) howe great contentment and lyking we had for a tyme of hir frienshippe, which as we then estemmed as a singular and extraordinary blessing of god to have one so neerely tyed unto us in blood and neighborhood, so greatly affected towards us as we then conceaved, so are we nowe as much greeved to behold the alteration and interuptuion thereof, taking no pleasure to looke back on the causes that have bread so unpleasant affectes which we wish that ether they had never been, or at the least we could never remember, and that She were as innocent therein as she laboreth greatly to beare both us and the world in hand that she is...”

Although Elizabeth follows these icy criticism with an assurance that her goodwill is not utterly extinguished, despite Mary’s “sundry hard and daungerous coorses heald towards us”, and allows Mary’s secretary Nau to attend her at court, Mary would have had little doubt that her envoy would meet with a cool reception and be under close scrutiny. Alongside high politics, the letters from Burghley and Walsingham also provide detail about the daily life of the imprisoned Queen, especially between December 1584 and April 1585 when she was in Sadler’s sole care. In these letters we read of Mary’s requests for table silver, a “tent of Tapestery” for her bedchamber (a request that seems to have caused much confusion), and a priest to say mass (refused). “A Memoriall of sondrie things appointed by hir majestie to bee sent to Sir Raffe Sadler knight... by Brian Cave”, signed by Burghley, provides detailed instructions about how Mary was to be treated at Tutbury: her household was to be reduced including the removal of all mothers with young children, there were to be standing watches around the castle, and Sadler is recommended “once or twice a moneth to have a privie serche sondelie in all places within som Compas of the Castell, so as all strangers to be found in that serche maie be forthecomming”. Above all, it is stressed time and again, he must endeavour to provide for his charge as cheaply as possible. The money was largely to be provided from the confiscated estates of the recusant Lord Paget, but Burghley acknowledged to Sadler that the Queen’s demands were unrealistic, informing him on 18 January that “…hir Majesty ... wiled me to wryte ernestly unto yow, now at your being at Tutbury, to devise how the chardg may not excede above ... md" by you, which I sayd in my opinion was unpossible to be doone...”

One result of this cost-cutting was that Tutbury Castle was insufficiently furnished, and this elicited complaints from Mary on her arrival in mid-December that, for example, “the lodginges at Tutbury have bothe the wyndowes unglased & are besides so farr out of order & reparacions as they are not to be used” – to which Elizabeth provided a characteristically wily response. She wrote to Sadler (in a letter not included in the current collection) protesting that her honour has been touched and ordering the strict punishment of those responsible, but at the same time ordered Walsingham to write with a very different message: “Sir, her majesties letter to your self that you shall nowe receave herewith signifeyng her mislyke that there was not more care had of the well furnishing of the house at Tutbury before the remove, is rather written pro forma then otherwise to thend you may shew yt to the Queene for her satisfacion and contentment, in the doinge whereof her Majesty thinketh she should seeme to be much greevyd with the complayntes that she hath made of the wantes there/ And yet her Majestes pleasure is nevertheless that you should take no discomft at all of the matter...”

Security is an overriding concern of these letters: Sadler was asked to interrogate noblemen who strayed too near to the Scottish Queen; was firmly ordered, by Leicester, to “gyve styckt order to his servantes that they should have no conference with the Q. of Scottes folkes, spetyally prylvatly”; and himself came in for criticism for allowing his charge too much freedom. His own vulnerability to malicious gossip is evident when Burghley writes on 1 February to say that Elizabeth had been informed by a nobleman at court “that yow lodged the scottes Quene in Derby town. and ... that she was suffred to salute & to kys multitud, of the towns women, and that she regard them, to bear with hir, that
she was not of power to do them such plesur as she was willing to but this latter part ... was not yett told to her Majesty". The marginal notes added to the letter explain that poor weather necessitated the stop at Derby and give Sadler's version of Mary's interview with the women of Derby, providing a fascinating glimpse of her public behaviour: "...her enterteynment to the women of Derby was in this sort. In the hall of the wydows house, was the good wife with 3 or 4 at the most of her neighbors. whome she saluted with a beck with her head & kissed her hostesse & none other. sayeng that she was come thither to troble her. and that she was a wydow to. and so trusted they should agree well inough to gether having no husband to troble them. And so went to the parlor and no stranger with her but her hostesse and that hostesses sister a woman of good yeres...."

Six weeks later he once again had to defend himself, this time against complaints passed on by Walsingham that Mary had "more lybertye now then at any tyme when she was in the E of Shrewsbury chardge" and had been hawking several miles from the castle. Walsingham clearly sympathised with Sadler's position and wrote again apologetically on the subject a week later ("...beyng verie sorie that you are so grieved for the ill takyng here of the libertie by you given to your Chardge in hawkyng in your companye: which libertie beyng in no other sort than it was, yf my self had been in your place I should have gyven...").

The letters chart the shifting attitude of the court towards Mary. On the one hand, Mary's attempts at personal reconciliation had some effect, with Burghley informing Sadler on 11 January that "Hir Majesty is well satisfyed with the scottish Qu. wrytynges and therfor wold hope yow to make no shew of any mistrust of hir although it is good to be sure". On the other, however, there were continued plots against the Elizabethan regime that came dangerously close to Mary – notably the machinations of Dr William Parry, whose condemnation is reported by Walsingham on 25 February – and ominous international developments. The French Wars of Religion and growing power of the Catholic League, headed by Mary's Guise relatives, at the expense of Henri III, caused considerable unease at court, with Walsingham reporting no 22 March that "the Queene your chardge shall notwithstanding be verie straightly looked unto, the rather for that the Guises do of late growe verie great who having taken arms against the K: by the pronouncement of the pope and the k: of Spayne ... This doubtfull and dangerous state of thinges geveth her Majesty just cause to cary the more watchful eye over that Queene & her doinges".

Given his advanced age, Sadler's appointment was only ever intended to be for a short period, and the letters include many references to the ongoing efforts to find a replacement: the first candidate, Lord John St John, Baron of Bletso, gave an endless succession of excuses and by the beginning of February the Privy Council had settled instead on Sir Amias Paulet. It was not until 10 April 1585 that the Queen wrote to Sadler with what must have been enormously welcome news that following his suit to be "unburdened of that charge which we did of late commytt unto you, of attending the Queene of Scottes; we have bene pleased in respect of your yeeres & state of body, graciously to consider therof. And therfore have appointed our trusty and right welbelovid Counsaylor Sir Amyas Pawlett to succeede you therin..."

Given the importance and sensitivity of Sadler's role, exceptional care was taken over the speed and security of communication with the royal court. Trusted messengers are frequently mentioned in the letters themselves, and the docketing by Sadler's secretary not only records the date of receipt – revealing that the letters typically took two or three days from London – but also the identity of the messenger, or if the letter was sent by the regular royal post. Blank spaces in several of the more significant letters are carefully crossed through to prevent the illicit addition of text, and various methods of secure folding were used to prevent their being tampered with in transit. Indeed, because these letters have had minimal intervention by binders or restorers, they provide exceptional evidence for security measures used in Elizabethan correspondence.

The current group of letters are the most significant Elizabethan manuscripts to appear at auction since the sale of the Hulton Letters of the Earl of Essex in 1999. They constitute just under a third of Sadler's surviving papers relating to his custody of Mary. The remaining papers are now held by the British Library (Add. MS 33594). The current letters are unpublished, although eight of the letters by Walsingham were published (at least in part) from retained copies in the Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1584-85 (1913). However, the letters at the British Library were published in 1809 as part of The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler. Those letters
remained at Standon Lordship, Sir Ralph Sadler’s seat, until 1762, when the house was sold on the marriage of Barbara Aston (a descendent of Sir Ralph through his grand-daughter Gertrude Sadler, who had married Sir Walter Aston of Tixall in 1584) to the Hon. Thomas Clifford. They remained with the Constable-Clifford family until 1889, when they passed to the British Museum. Since the current papers were unknown to Arthur Clifford, editor of the 1809 State Papers, they almost certainly did not travel from Standon Lordship to Tixall in 1762, but beyond that their early provenance remains obscure.