



## The signatories: Warwick

Robert Rich, second Earl of Warwick, is unique among the signers of the Peirce Patent in coming from a “new” family, a family that had gained its wealth through mercantile activity and then became ennobled (and gained even greater wealth) through personal service to Henry VIII.

Robert Rich’s great-grandfather, Richard Rich, started the family on its rise to power. Richard possessed a keen legal mind, impressive administrative abilities, a shrewd business sense, strong survival instincts and absolutely no principles. A lawyer by training, he became part of Henry VIII’s crusade to separate the English church from Rome and, as solicitor general, prosecuted those who denied the validity of Henry VIII’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon and remarriage to Anne Boleyn. He moved against Bishop John Fisher, testified against Sir Thomas More and presided over the dissolution of the monasteries, building up a considerable personal estate in Essex in the process.

Richard was named Lord Chancellor by Henry VIII’s successor, the young Protestant King Edward VI. When it became clear that Edward would not live to adulthood, Richard first supported the bid of the Protestant Lady Jane Grey for the throne. Upon Edward’s death, however, he declared for Mary Tudor, Catholic daughter of Henry VIII. Under Queen Mary, Rich changed his tune and took part in the restoration of Catholicism, becoming an active persecutor of Protestants. Upon the accession of Mary’s sister, the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I, he changed his views yet again and accompanied her as she made her joyful progress to London upon gaining the throne. Elizabeth retained his services and he continued to be styled “Councillor” until his death in 1567.

Our Patent signer's grandfather, Robert Rich, the second Baron Rich, quietly supported the Reformation and quietly continued to enlarge the family's coffers. He died when his son - another Robert Rich, the third Baron Rich and father of our Patent signer - was only twenty-two.

The new young third Baron Rich successfully engaged in the lucrative Elizabethan sport of privateering, whereby sea-going buccaneers, licensed by the English crown, would prey on Spanish ships. In 1618, Baron Rich was able to pay King James £10,000 for the title of Warwick. (The title had been in abeyance since the death without heirs of Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, in 1590; it should be noted that Baron Rich purchased only the title, not Warwick Castle.) Even with this significant outlay of money, Rich’s purse was still full and, when he died shortly after purchasing the title of Warwick, he left over £5000 in liquid assets, plus property in London, Suffolk and Norfolk, and over 70 manors in Essex.

The third Baron Rich may have been lucky in money, but he was most definitely NOT lucky in love. An arranged marriage between Rich and Penelope Devereux, the beautiful inspiration for Sir Philip Sidney’s poetic “Stella,” resulted in seven children. After a dozen years of increasing unhappiness, however, Penelope became the (very) public mistress of Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy. Baron Rich made no comment. Eventually, Penelope, by now the mother of five more children fathered by Mountjoy, petitioned for a legal separation - to the great annoyance of King James I, who could abide adultery but detested publicity.

Young Robert Rich (1587-1658), first-born son of Baron Rich and his notoriously unhappy wife, first appears in the records as a 16-year-old student at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, a hotbed of Puritan theology. Robert Rich followed in his great-grandfather's footsteps by studying the law. He later followed in his father's footsteps by seizing on the commercial possibilities of privateering and expanding into colonization - and by inheriting his father's newly-purchased title of Warwick, the name by which he will be known hereafter. He set his own path, however, in remaining a lifelong supporter of Puritanism.

On at least one occasion, Warwick's two nautical and commercial interests, colonization and privateering, overlapped to the detriment of both. In 1618, one of Warwick's privateers, operating out of Virginia, attacked a ship of the Mughal emperor of India. This resulted in a multi-year lawsuit with the East India Company and exacerbated a significant rift among the members of the Virginia Company. At one point, a duel was even threatened!

The dissension and disagreement about the focus of the Virginia Company led to the Company's prestige and usefulness diminishing in the early 1620s. Eventually, the King appointed commissioners to inquire into the government of Virginia and, in 1624, the Company's charter was revoked. Warwick, a shrewd businessman who had been critical of the bad management of the Virginia Colony, had a key role in the reorganization and, when the king appointed a new council, Warwick was one of the members.

Warwick had a long and notable career as a colonizer. In addition to joining the Virginia Company in 1612 and becoming one of its largest stockholders, he was a founding member and the largest stockholder of the 1614 Somers Island (Bermuda) Company.

His role in the Somers Island Company illuminates his colonial and religious beliefs.

The first English settlers of Bermuda were shipwrecked Englishmen heading for Virginia in a fleet commanded by Admiral Sir George Somers. The crew and passengers - including future *Mayflower* passenger Stephen Hopkins - were stranded in Bermuda for 10 months while they built two new ships, which they ultimately sailed to Virginia, although three men chose to remain behind on Bermuda. Three years later, in 1612, the Virginia Company of London laid claim to the island and sent additional settlers.

Warwick led the movement to establish Bermuda as a separate colony and, in 1615, King James granted an independent charter to the Somers Island Company, which administered Bermuda until 1684. For the first 30 years of its existence, Warwick guided the Somers Island Company. He was the moving force behind a set of instructions that, issued to the Governor of Bermuda, read

*"We require you that as soon as you may after your arrival in the Islands, you do assemble your council and as many of the ablest and best understanding men in the Islands, both of the clergy and the laity, as you and your council shall think fit, wherein we wish you rather to take too many than too few, both because every man will more willingly obey laws to which he hath yielded his consent..."*

Warwick was also responsible for sending a series of Puritan and nonconforming ministers to Bermuda. This was the beginning of his strong public support for Puritanism.

In 1618, Warwick became a member of the Guiana Company (founded by Sir Francis Drake). Guiana was one of the destinations that the Pilgrims considered, and then rejected. The arguments against Guiana - hot climate, grievous disease, danger from the Spanish - proved even stronger and the Pilgrims decided to "live as a distinct body by themselves under the general Government of Virginia." After a great deal of discussion, "they had a patent granted them, and confirmed under the Company's seal." The "Company" referred to was the Virginia Company, of which Warwick was a member.

The Pilgrims sailed, landing outside of the jurisdiction of the Virginia Company. They landed instead in the territory under the jurisdiction of the newly organized Council for New England, of which Warwick was a founding member. Hence, Warwick's signature on the Peirce Patent, which promised Plymouth Colony 100 acres for every person who remained in the settlement for three out of seven years, or who died in the attempt. At the end of seven years, the Colony could apply for a new patent that would give the actual physical boundaries of the colony. The Pilgrims applied for a new charter from the Council for New England in 1628. Known as the Bradford/Warwick Patent because it was signed by Warwick as president of the Council for New England and granted in the name of "William Bradford, his heirs and associates," this patent is also on display in the Lower Hall of Pilgrim Hall Museum.

Massachusetts Bay Colony procured its patent, dated 1628, through the influence of Warwick. Warwick was also responsible for the patent of Connecticut. This Connecticut grant led to a struggle between Warwick and another member of the Council for New England (and signer of the Peirce Patent), Sir Ferdinando Gorges. As a result of the dispute, Warwick was ousted from the presidency of the council.

In addition to his illustrious career as a colonizer, Warwick also had a notable career as a sponsor of privateers. It is estimated that, of all the privateering ships set out by the aristocracy between 1626 and 1630, HALF sailed for Warwick.

In the 1630s, Warwick became intensely involved with the settlement of Providence Island, located some 100 miles off the coast of Central America. The settlement was meant to increase England's presence in the Caribbean at the cost of the Spanish. Unlike the other Caribbean colonies, Providence Island was settled largely by Puritans who engaged both in agriculture and privateering. The settlement only lasted ten years, between 1631 and 1641, and was besieged by the Spanish on several occasions. The last, and successful, Spanish invasion resulted in the loss of the island and the massacre of many of its inhabitants. Survivors from the Colony, however, continued to privateer in the Caribbean, joining with other English pirate captains operating in the area.

William Bradford notes that some very naughty pirates, with connections to Warwick and to Providence Island, visited Plymouth in 1646:

*"About the middle of May this year came in three ships into this harbor in warlike order. They were found to be men of war. The captain's name was Cromwell, who had taken sundry prizes from the Spaniards in the West Indies; he had a commission from the Earl of Warwick. He had aboard his vessels about 80 lusty men, but very unruly, who after they came ashore, did so distemper themselves with drink as they became like madmen, and though some of them were punished and imprisoned, yet could they hardly be restrained. Yet in the end they became more moderate and orderly. They continued here about a month or six weeks, and then went to the Massachusetts, in which time they spent and scattered a great deal of money among the people, and yet more sin I fear than money, notwithstanding all the care and watchfulness that was used towards them to prevent what might be."*

Thomas Cromwell was part of a privateering venture headed up by Captain William Jackson under a commission obtained through the Earl of Warwick. Jackson had captured Jamaica but stayed there only a month before abandoning the island to sail to other sites around the Caribbean gaining information on Spanish troop strength and fortification. The report that he brought back to England and Protector Oliver Cromwell (no relation to Thomas Cromwell, as far as we know) was instrumental in persuading Oliver Cromwell to implement the "Western Design," the attempted English invasion of the Spanish Caribbean during which Pilgrim Edward Winslow died.

Providence Island was only one of Warwick's ventures combining privateering and colonizing. He had purchased a patent in 1638 for the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, intending to turn them into staging areas for attacks on Spanish interests, and had offered (unsuccessfully) £12,000 for the patent for Barbados in 1639.

Warwick's maintenance of a private navy and its aggressive privateering activities against Spain were, in effect, an individual "foreign policy," one that was at odds with that of King Charles I of England. Warwick's religious and political beliefs were increasingly at odds with his monarch, as well. He became one of the most active champions of the parliamentary cause and, in the 1640s, was named Lord Admiral of the English navy and commander of the army of the eastern association.

Warwick's attention was pulled back to New England in 1643 when he was named head of the commission of 18 appointed to govern the colonies of North America and the Caribbean. He intervened in various New England affairs (hence, the town of Warwick, Rhode Island) and issued a declaration establishing freedom of worship in Bermuda.

Although a strong and public Puritan and parliamentarian, Warwick was a voice of moderation in the debate over the ultimate fate of Charles I, for which his loyalty was called into doubt. After the execution of Charles I in 1649, Warwick's influence lessened. A newly revived hostility with Spain and a revival of the interest in Warwick's colonial experiments in the Caribbean, however, raised Warwick's status. Warwick personally helped to invest Oliver Cromwell at the lord protector's second inauguration in 1657; his grandson married Cromwell's daughter Frances (but died less than a year later). Warwick himself died two months after his grandson, on April 19, 1658.

Warwick married three times. By his first marriage to Frances Hatton, he had two sons, Robert and Charles, and a number of daughters. After Frances' death in 1623, Warwick married Susan Rowe, daughter of the Lord Mayor of London. After her death in 1646, he married the already-twice-widowed Eleanor Wortley Lee Radcliffe, Countess of Sussex (who, after Warwick's death in 1658, went on to marry Edward Montague, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Manchester, as her 4<sup>th</sup> husband).

Warwick was succeeded by his eldest son, another Robert Rich (1611-1659), who held the title of third Earl of Warwick for only one year; the title of fourth Earl of Warwick was then held by Warwick's second son, Charles Rich (1616-1673).