

SUMMARY: The document below is the bill of complaint filed in Chancery by William, 2nd Lord Windsor (1498-1558), Sir John Baker, knight, & Edmund Windsor, executors of the last will, dated 16 March 1543 and proved 31 July 1543, of Andrew (1467-1543), 1st Lord Windsor, the grandfather of Edward (1532?-1575), 3rd Lord Windsor, husband of Oxford's half-sister, Katherine de Vere (1538-1600), against Robert Wingfield, esquire, executor of the will of Humphrey Wingfield (d.1545), esquire, executor of the last will of John de Vere (1442-1513), 13th Earl of Oxford. The complainants allege that 42 years earlier, i.e. circa 1514, Andrew, Lord Windsor, purchased from the executors of the 13th Earl the wardship of Roger Corbet (d.1538), whom he married to his daughter, Anne Windsor (d.1551). The complainants allege that although Andrew, Lord Windsor, paid the full purchase price of 950 marks for the wardship, Robert Wingfield has commenced an action of debt against them for the amount for which they cannot produce acquittances. The Robert Wingfield complained of in this suit would appear to have been the historian, Robert Wingfield (c.1513–c.1561), the son and heir of Sir Humphrey Wingfield (b. before 1481, d. 1545), a successful lawyer who became speaker of the House of Commons in 1533, and his wife, Anne (d. 1537), daughter of Simon Wiseman and widow of Gregory Adgore or Edgar. From the entry for Robert Wingfield (c.1513–c.1561) in the online edition of *The Dictionary of National Biography*:

*Among various legal disputes preoccupying Wingfield, there was litigation in 1547 with the group of men who ran the affairs of the weak and irresponsible fifteenth [sic] earl of Oxford. Wingfield describes with considerable relish this group's discomfiture during Princess Mary's seizure of power in 1553. For he was given his one chance to shine on the national stage when he entertained Mary at his Ipswich home, from 24 to 26 July 1553. Having seized the throne from the rival queen, Lady Jane Grey, Mary was travelling in triumph from Framlingham Castle to London, and the Wingfield mansion, impressively grouped around a courtyard entered by a gatehouse with gardens beyond, was among the most obvious places for her accommodation in Ipswich. On 1 November 1553 Wingfield received a life annuity of £20 in consideration of his service during Mary's coup. Small wonder that he chose to commemorate his moment of glory with a detailed narrative of these events, the *Vita Mariae Angliae reginae*. This survives in a single manuscript (now BL, Add. MS 48093), almost certainly the presentation copy to the dedicatee, Sir Edward Waldegrave. Wingfield tells the reader that he had been forced to withdraw a previous presentation copy given to Waldegrave on 23 March 1554, after being told of numerous slips in it, which he blamed on inadequate sub-editing and proof-reading by Roger Ascham, a former fellow scholar in Sir Humphrey's household. The account, written in self-consciously sophisticated humanist Latin, runs from the last illness of King Edward VI to an appendix of a rather random series of events in summer 1554; it provides a wealth of otherwise unrecorded material for events in East Anglia, and fresh perspectives on other national events in the first year of Queen Mary's reign. Wingfield is revealed as a fervent admirer of the queen and a firm Roman Catholic, and his narrative's deeply partisan tone may explain the reformist Ascham's reluctance to read it thoroughly. Perhaps characteristically of its author, it is least vivid when dealing with events of which Wingfield himself was an eyewitness.*

This bill of complaint would appear to be the only surviving document establishing that Roger Corbet (d.1538) was the ward of the 13th Earl. The wardship, showing as it does a relationship between the Earls of Oxford and the Corbet family, is of considerable literary interest since Roger Windsor's sister, Joanna Corbet, married Thomas Newport (d.1548), and was the mother of Sir Richard Newport (d.1570), the owner of a copy of Hall's *Chronicle* now in the British Library containing annotations thought to have been made by Shakespeare.

The bill of complaint can be dated between 1 January 1556 and 17 November 1558 during the tenure of Nicholas Heath (1501?-1578), Archbishop of York, as Lord Chancellor.

To the Right Reverend Father in God Nicholas, Archbishop of York and Chancellor of
England

In most humble wise showeth & complaineth unto your Grace your daily orators Sir William Windsor, knight, Lord Windsor, Sir John Baker, knight, & Edmund Windsor, esquire, executors of the last will & testament of Sir Andrew Windsor, knight, late Lord Windsor, deceased, that whereas the said late Lord Windsor a 42 years last past or thereabouts bought of the Lady Elizabeth, Countess of Oxford, Sir Thomas Lovell, knight, Sir John Vere, knight, Humphrey Wingfield, esquire, & of other executors of the last will & testament of the right honourable Lord John, late Earl of Oxford, the wardship & marriage as well of the body of one Roger Corbet as also the custody of all such manors, lands, tenements & hereditaments as he, the said Roger, was inheritor unto or ought to have by the death of his father, and in consideration thereof the said late Lord Windsor paid at the sealing of the indentures of covenants two hundred marks and further should pay or cause to be paid to the said executors of the said late honourable Lord of Oxford seven hundred & fifty marks more at certain days between them agreed, and for the sure payment thereof the said late Lord Windsor by his several deeds obligatory became bounden to the said Lady Countess of Oxford & other the executors of the said honourable Late Earl of Oxford in every of the said obligations in the sum of two hundred & fifty marks payable at certain days in the said obligations contained, all which sums of nine hundred & fifty marks the said late Lord Windsor well & truly contented & paid at the days in the said obligations expressed according to the true meaning of the said obligations to the said executors & other by their appointment, and for proof thereof your orators have two several acquittances of two hundred & fifty marks apiece for the latter payments of the residue of the said sum of nine hundred & fifty marks, as by the said acquittances more plainly appeareth;

And so it is, if it might please your Grace, that notwithstanding the said payment & acquittances so made by the said late Lord Windsor, one Robert Wingfield, esquire, perceiving the said money to be paid so long ago, which is 42 years past, and knowing the said acquittances so made unto the said late Lord Windsor for the first & second payments, that is to say, for the said four hundred & fifty marks, to be casually lost, the said Robert, as executor to the said Humphrey Wingfield, knight, deceased, who survived

the residue of the executors of the said right honourable Lord John, Earl of Oxford, & notwithstanding that the said executors received five hundred marks of the last payment of the said sum of 900 & 50 marks, which is a great presumption that the said money was truly paid, hath commenced an action of debt against the said Sir William Windsor, Lord Windsor, & Edmund Windsor upon an obligation of two hundred & fifty marks, being parcel of the said sum of four hundred fifty marks which was truly paid to the said executors, intending thereby, for that the same was paid so long ago, to recover the same again against your said orators, being executors unto the said late Lord Windsor, notwithstanding that the same is already paid, contrary to all right, equity & good conscience, and forasmuch as the acquittances for the said first obligation never came to the hands of our said orators, and for that they have not the acquittance of the said executors of the said right honourable Lord John, Earl of Oxford, testifying(?) the payment of the same of so high an nature as the said obligations be in discharge thereof, your said orators are therefore like to be condemned in the said action, & so constrained to pay again the same sum of two hundred & fifty marks, being already paid, contrary to all right, equity & good conscience unless your Grace's favour and aid be towards them showed in this behalf;

In consideration whereof it may therefore please your Grace, the premises considered, to grant your said orators the King and Queen's Majesties' most high writ of injunction to be directed, as well to the said Robert Wingfield as to all other his counsellors, solicitors & assigns and to every of them, commanding them & every of them not only to surcease & no further to proceed in the said action of debt, but also the said Robert Wingfield personally to appear before your Grace in the King & Queen's Majesties' most High Court of Chancery at a certain day & under a certain pain by your Grace to be limited, then & there to answer to the premises, and further to abide such order & direction therein as shall stand in right, equity & conscience, and your said orators shall daily pray to God for your Grace in honour long to continue.