

SUMMARY: The document below is a petition from Anne Farrant to Sir Francis Walsingham concerning property, site of the first Blackfriars playhouse, which Sir William More (1520-1600) of Loseley had leased to her late husband, and which More had now re-entered, claiming forfeiture of the lease after it had been sold to Henry Evans. Wallace dates the petition to the time of William Hunnis' petition to the Queen, November 1583. See Wallace, Charles William, *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), pp. 156-9.

For the indenture dated 20 December 1576 by which More had leased 'six upper chambers' in the Blackfriars to Richard Farrant (d. 30 November 1580) for 21 years at an annual rent of £14, see Folger MS L.b.350, and Wallace, *supra*, pp. 132-6.

After obtaining a lease from More, Farrant had converted the premises into a playhouse for the Children of the Chapel, a use not envisaged by More, and had also sublet part of the premises to two other persons, for which latter infraction More claimed Farrant had forfeited his lease. Before More could regain possession, however, Farrant died, leaving the lease in his will to his widow, Anne, the daughter of Richard Bower (d.1561), Master of the Choristers of the Chapel Royal. For the will of Richard Farrant, dated 30 November 1580 and proved 1 March 1581, see TNA PROB 11/63/120.

On 25 December 1580, a month after her husband's death, Anne Farrant wrote to Sir William More requesting that he allow her to sublet the leased premises in the Blackfriars. See Folger MS L.b.448. It would appear that Sir William More did not grant her request. However on 19 September 1581 Leicester intervened with More on behalf of William Hunnis (d.1597), Master of the Children of the Chapel (see SHC LM/COR/3/316), and although there is no surviving record indicating that More had actually granted permission for the sublease, on 20 December 1581 Anne Farrant entered into an indenture by which she sublet the premises to Hunnis and John Newman, who agreed to pay her £6 13s 4d a year more than she was required to pay More under the original lease.

According to Smith, *infra*, p. 150, Hunnis and Newman were more than once late in paying their rent, and on one occasion, in order to make her rent payment to More, Anne Farrant was 'forced to make humble and pitiful suit to Lord Cobham, whose mansion adjoined her property at the north, to pay her rent for her'. For William Brooke (1527-1597), 10th Baron Cobham, see the *ODNB* entry.

Unable to keep up with their obligations under the sublease, Hunnis and Newman transferred their interest to Henry Evans, who sold his sublease to Oxford, who granted it to his servant, John Lyly (1554-1606). More brought suit against Evans, and was granted possession of the property in Easter term 1584, and the first Blackfriars theatre was closed. See Wallace, *supra*, pp. 130-77; and Smith, Irwin, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse* (New York University Press, 1964), pp. 135, 148-53, 467-8.

According to Wallace, *supra*, p. 194:

When the Farrant-Lyly theatre broke up, the lease was forfeited to More, and Lyly could not sell it.

For the petition see also:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/42c64498-945b-4371-b7bf-be3c1485fc99>.

The modern-spelling transcript below was made from the original-spelling transcript in Wallace, *supra*, pp. 158-9.

To the right honourable Sir Francis Walsingham, knight, chief secretary to the Queen's
most excellent Majesty

In most humble wise showeth your Honour your oratrix, Anne Farrant, widow, that whereas Sir William More, knight, the 20th day of December in the 19th year of her Majesty's reign did demise unto Richard Farrant, your said oratrix' late husband, and to his executors and assigns, one house with other th' appurtenances situate in the Blackfriars for the term of 21 years then next ensuing, as by the indentures appeareth, so it is, right Honourable, that now of late this last Hillary term Sir William More, upon a supposal of a lease to be made by your oratrix unto one Henry Evans, hath entered upon the demised premises and made over a lease thereof unto his own man, Thomas Smallpiece, to try the said Evans his right therein, who hath recovered it against Evans, and seeketh by the supposed lease made to Evans to take forfeiture also against your said oratrix, which might be her utter undoing.

Whereas your said oratrix never made any lease to Evans, nor admitted any forfeiture, but truly paid her rent from time to time unto Sir William More, and repaired the house, which house did greatly indebt your said oratrix' late husband to make it commodious for his purpose, which debt had not her Majesty been gracious and bountiful unto your said oratrix had never [sic] able to discharge it, who hath paid all her Majesty's bounty bestowed on your said oratrix for his debts and for the relief of your said oratrix and her poor ten children since it pleased God to call your said oratrix' late husband, so that your said oratrix hath nothing left to relieve her and her poor children.

May it therefore please your Honour of your abundant compassion the rather for that your said oratrix is a poor widow, and hath a great charge of children, and is not able without great charges and hindrance to defend the truth of her cause, to grant your Honour's letter unto Sir William More that he would stay his proceeding and suffer the cause to be heard by indifferent persons, lest through mistaking your said oratrix her cause and intent both she and hers be causeless put from their only stay and relief, and your poor oratrix according to her bounden duty shall pray to th' Almighty God for your honourable estate long to continue with increase of honour.

By your poor oratrix,

Anne Farrant

Endorsed, in More's hand: Anne Farrant, supplication.