

SUMMARY The document below contains notes made by Sir William More (1520-1600) of Loseley on the lease of his house in the Blackfriars. According to the notes, More leased the house at the request of Sir Henry Neville (c.1520–1593) to Richard Farrant (d.1580), who converted the premises into a playhouse for the Children of the Chapel. Farrant also sublet part of the premises, for which infraction More claimed Farrant had forfeited his lease, but before More could regain possession, 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, f. 67.

After her husband's death, and intervention by Leicester with Sir William More on behalf of William Hunnis (d.1597), Master of the Children of the Chapel, Anne Farrant sublet the premises to Hunnis and John Newman on 20 December 1581, who later transferred their interest to Henry Evans. Evans 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 Smith, Irwin, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse* (New York University Press, 1964), pp. 148-52, 467-8. The final phase of the dispute is described by Smith at pp. 151-2:

*Under these troublous circumstances a new company of boys was formed, with Henry Evans as manager, John Lyly as dramatist and proprietor of the playhouse, and the Earl of Oxford as patron. It was composed of the Children of the Chapel and the Children of Paul's, the latter group having been brought into the venture presumably in consequence of [Sebastian] Westcott's death and Evans's prior association with him. This was the company that took Campaspe to Court on New Year's Day 1584, and Sapho and Phao on March 3rd, the payee for both performances being John Lyly. Once again the status of William Hunnis is unclear. He was still the Master of the Chapel Children, and on the title pages of the two Lyly plays his Children were listed before those of Paul's; on the other hand, he no longer had a financial interest in the lease of the playhouse, he was superseded by Lyly as payee for the performances at Court, and he was currently in such straitened circumstances that in November of 1583 he drafted a petition asking for an increased allowance for the food and keep of the Chapel Children, ending with the statement that he was not able upon so small an allowance any longer to bear so heavy a burden.*

*In the meantime the courts of law were busy with disputes arising out of the Blackfriars lease and its peregrinations. In Michaelmas Term of 1583 Anne Farrant brought two suits in the Court of Common Pleas for repayment of the £100 bond, one against Hunnis and the other against Newman, and they in turn sued her in the Court of Requests, asking for relief in equity against her suits at the common law. Sir William More pressed his suit for recovery of the premises through four terms of court. Having been put off by Evans's demurrer in Trinity Term (May-June) 1583 and again in Michaelmas Term (November), he demanded judgment in Hilary (January) 1584, but "the judges would not then give judgment, but required to have books of the whole proceedings delivered them."*

*Judgment was finally given in his favor at the end of Easter Term of 1584, and process was awarded to the sheriff to give him possession. But even this did not close the matter for Anne Farrant. She appealed to the Privy Council, and it was this appeal that led Sir William to write his memorandum on the history of the Farrant lease, presumably for the information of counsel. Nothing came of her appeal. The First Blackfriars Playhouse had come to an end after a story life of eight short years.*

Sir William More's notes were printed by Charles William Wallace in *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare, with a History of the First Blackfriars Theatre*, (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1912), pp. 175-6.

For Henry Evans' involvement with the later Blackfriars lease, see the lawsuit brought by Robert Keysar (1576-c.1640), a London goldsmith, against Richard Burbage, Henry Evans, Cuthbert Burbage, John Heminges and Henry Condell on 8 February 1610, TNA REQ 4/1/1.

Touching the matter in variance between me and Anne Farrant, widow, for an house in  
Blackfriars

1 First I let the said house to Sir Henry Neville for a term of one-and-twenty years, and took of him no fine for the same. Sir Henry Neville added a new kitchen and set up (blank) partitions in the house. Afterward Sir Henry Neville sold me his lease thereof for an hundred pounds, which I paid him at one payment, besides forbearing of two or three years' rent, so far as I remember.

2 Afterward Sir Henry Neville desired me by his letter to let the said house to Farrant, which I did upon condition that he should not let nor set the same nor any part thereof to any person without my consent had and obtained in writing under my hand and seal.

3 Farrant pretended unto me to use the house only for the teaching of the Children of the Chapel, but made it a continual house for plays, to the offense of the precinct, and pulled down partitions to make that place apt for that purpose, which Sir Henry Neville had set up, and contrary to the condition let out part of the said house, for the which I charged him with the forfeiture of his lease, whereunto he yielded and offered composition, but before I could take remedy against him he died.

4 After whose death I entered upon the said house and refused to receive any rent but conditionally, nevertheless offering Farrant's widow that if she would commit the cause to two lawyers indifferently chosen, or to any two judges, I would yield to whatsoever they should determine therein, which she utterly refused.

5 Immediately after she let the house to one Hunnis, and afterward to one Newman or Sutton, as far as I remember, and then to Evans, who sold his interest to the Earl of

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Oxford, who gave his interest to Lyly, and the title thus was posted over from one to another from me, contrary to the said condition.

6 At what time Evans was so possessed of it I brought my action against him for the same, and when it came to be tried he demurred in law upon it, which was done in Trinity term. The demurrer being drawn, the said Evans kept the same in his hands all Michaelmas term next following, using many delays. After the demurrer had, I caused my learned counsel in Hilary term to demand judgment, arguing the case at the usual place, but the recorder argued against me. The judges would not then give judgment, but required to have books of the whole proceedings delivered to them, whereof I delivered one to every of them. At the end of Easter term following I had judgment against Evans, and process awarded to the sheriff to give me possession.

7 In all which time of my suit I never heard of Farrant's widow, but only by her said means I was put to this great charges of suit very injuriously. My charges in following the said suit and lying in London for that business stand me in not less than forty pounds. The house is much impaired by the pulling down the partitions thereof. She had of the said Newman or Sutton thirty pounds in money at his entry into the said house, as he told me.