

SUMMARY: The documents below are the interrogatories in a Star Chamber suit brought against Thomas Swift, and Swift's deposition sworn on 3 June 1594. The Star Chamber suit centered around actions taken by Swift in the years 1589-92 while he was in the service of Sir William Cornwallis (c.1551-1611) at Oxford's former mansion in Bishopsgate. Swift was a brother-in-law of the poet, Thomas Watson (d.1592), who had married Swift's older sister, Anne Swift (b.1564), at St Antholin's, Budge Row, London, on 6 September 1585. Albert Chatterley, the author of the entry for the poet and translator Thomas Watson in the online edition of *The Dictionary of National Biography*, explains Watson's involvement in Swift's actions leading up to the Star Chamber suit:

*From time to time Watson may have been used by Sir Francis Walsingham as a political agent; perhaps even his position with William Cornwallis, as tutor to the son, was organized so that he could be Walsingham's ears during the official inquiries into the recusancy of the father, Sir Thomas Cornwallis of Brome in Suffolk, who was under surveillance from 1587. It was about this time that Watson took up his duties at Fisher's Folly opposite St Botolph without Bishopsgate, which the Cornwallises had just taken over from the earl of Oxford; John, aged fifteen, was soon to enter the then openly Catholic Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.*

*One of Watson's colleagues in the household was Thomas Swift, a Norwich-born musician, sheltered in the family since boyhood. Watson had married his older sister, Anne (b. 1564), at St Antholin, Budge Row, London, on 6 September 1585. About 1589 Swift conceived the notion that William Cornwallis had been 'miserable towards him', and, 'by the advice of the said Watson, whom he ... confessed the plot-layer of this matter' (Bodl. Oxf., MS Tanner 97, fol. 29), he began a blackmail worthy of presentation at a nearby playhouse. The scheme was to lend ten gold angels to Cornwallis's fourteen-year-old daughter, Frances (not an unusual event, for Swift was 'in love' with her, and it was a miser's house), in return for her signature to a document which promised repayment with interest on her wedding day. The signing was hurriedly effected before morning lessons in front of witnesses, but the document (drawn up by Swift's brother, the attorney Hugh Swift) actually concealed a contract to marry the musician. Watson doubtless thought that he would never dare use it, and attempted later to get it away from him; but use it he did on Frances's betrothal, setting a blackmail price. Cornwallis's fury at this calumny and his daughter's besmirchment knew no bounds, and as a relative of Burghley through his wife, he managed to get a hearing in the Star Chamber in 1593, at which (the late) Watson's involvement was exposed by John, Frances's honour restored, and Swift very severely punished.*

For a fuller discussion, see Chatterley, Albert, 'Two Sixteenth-Century East Anglian Families at the Court of Star Chamber', *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. 44, Part 1, (Hunstanton: Witley Press, 2002), pp. 119-128.

Thomas Swift was a musician, as were two others involved in the events which led up to the Star Chamber suit, Robert Hales and Daniel Bacheler. For the latter, see the entry in the online edition of *The Dictionary of National Biography*:

*Bacheler [Bachiler], Daniel (bap. 1572, d. 1619), lutenist and composer, was baptized on 16 March 1572 at Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire, the fifth of the ten children of Richard Bacheler (1545–1583) and his wife, Elizabeth Cardell. On 13 November 1579 he was apprenticed to his mother's brother Thomas Cardell, a lutenist and dancing-master to Queen Elizabeth, with whom he went to live in King's Street in the parish of St Margaret's, Westminster. In June 1586 his apprenticeship was signed over to Sir Francis Walsingham, principal secretary of state.*

*For the Walsingham family Bacheler composed several pieces for the broken consort, the ultra-modern music for mixed instruments of which he was one of the originators. Eight of these have survived, one dated as early as 1588, when he would have been only sixteen; three of the Walsingham consort books, thought to be in his hand, are in Hull University Library. In Thomas Lant's illustration of the funeral procession of Walsingham's son-in-law Sir Philip Sidney, Bacheler is depicted sitting on Sidney's war-horse. After Walsingham's death in 1590 he joined the household of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, on his marriage to the widowed Frances Sidney.*

For the will of Sir William Cornwallis (c.1551-1611), see TNA PROB 11/118, ff. 93-5.

The right side of the interrogatories has been partly cut away. The missing text is indicated by square brackets in the transcript below. Additions to the interrogatories after they were originally written are indicated as such in the transcript below.

Interrogatories to be ministered on the behalf of the Queen's most excellent Majesty to Thomas Swift, defendant

1 Inprimis, did you not serve William Cornwallis, esquire, from the age of ten years or thereabouts, and did he not from the age of eighteen years give you £12 yearly, besides meat, drink and livery, until the time of your departure from him? Was he during your service [ ] then a good master unto you, and wherein, when and why did you [ ] to serve him, and by whose advice?

2 Item, were Robert Hales and John Campe (expressed [ ] in a bill signed and sealed by Frances Cornwallis [ ] to the contents of the said bill? Did they or either of them [ ] hear it read before or at the ensealing thereof or [ ] them the purport, words or effect thereof, and [ ] witnesses of the same, and when?

3 Item, what said you to the said Frances Cornwallis [ ] signing and sealing of the said bill [ ], and what was said by any then present openly [ ]? [ADDED: or the said Frances unto you openly or in hearing?]

4 Item, where was the said bill made and [ ] Hugh Swift present at the ensealing thereof [ ] before did you confer with him about the said bill [ ]?

5 Item, by whom and by what means were you preferred to the service of the right honourable the Earl of Essex? How long served you him? When did the said Earl put you out of his service, and did the said Mr Cornwallis ever work anything to your prejudice before your discharge of the said Earl's service?

6 Have you not been aided, counselled or abetted by any person or persons that have lent you money or otherwise maintained you in the prosecuting of your intentions against the said William Cornwallis and the said Frances? Who are they, and in what sort have they aided you?

7 Item, have you or can you produce any letters of the same writing of the said Frances unto you? How many? By whom were they sent you? When and where delivered you? [ADDED: Show them now forth.]

8 Item, did not you and the said Robert Hales make a journey to Sir John Petre, knight, at his house by Ingatestone? Did the said Hales know of your full intent and purpose in that journey? What was the meaning and intent of your said journey, and how long was the said journey after you departed Mr Cornwallis his service?

9 Item, have you not since you were dismissed out of the service of the said Earl of Essex written divers and sundry letters to the said Mr Cornwallis and the said Frances [ADDED: And be these now showed unto you any of them]? And have you in your own keeping or in the custody of any others the copies of them or any of them? [ADDED: Show them forth.]

10 Item, have you not been examined heretofore upon the commandment of the right honourable the Lord Keeper by Mr Mill, Clerk of this honourable Court? Were your confessions and answers then taken by him upon your oath true, and do you now aver and justify the same to be true?

11 Item, did the said Frances ever read the foresaid bill in the hearing of any witness, and of whom, and when?

12 Item, have you not since the first of December in the 35<sup>th</sup> year [=1 December 1592] of her Majesty's reign and since your departing out of the service of the said Earl both by letters and otherwise claimed and justified(?) the said Frances to be your wife and contracted unto you by the foresaid bill, and this at sundry times till you were committed to prison and sithence?

Examinatio Capta Tertio die Iunij Anno Elizabethhe Regine Serenissime &c xxxvjto Super Interrogatoria ex parte Serenissime dicte Domine Regine ministrata [=Examination taken on the third day of June in the 36<sup>th</sup> year [=1594] of the most Serene Queen Elizabeth etc., upon interrogatories administered on the part of the said most Serene Lady Queen]

Thomas Swift, now prisoner in the Marshalsea, of the age of 27 years & upwards, sworn, saith:

To the first interrogatory this deponent saith that he came into the service of William Cornwallis, esquire, mentioned in the interrogatory, when he, this deponent, was of the age of 10 or 12 years or thereabouts, & saith that when he came to be of the age of about 17 or 18 years the said Mr Cornwallis did yearly give this deponent, besides his livery & his meat & drink, the sum of £12 yearly & more, and this deponent saith that the said Mr Cornwallis gave unto this deponent such allowance until the time of this deponent's departure from him, and further this deponent confesseth that the said Mr Cornwallis was a very good master unto him, this deponent, during all the time that he, this deponent served him, and this deponent saith that he departed from the said Mr Cornwallis his service about this time was two years, and further this deponent saith that the said Mr Cornwallis, upon some displeasure by him conceived towards this deponent, did fall out with him, this deponent, at Romford(?) as he came riding from thence towards London, in respect whereof this deponent did on the next day following, by the advice of his brother Watson, depart out of the service of the said Mr Cornwallis.

To the second interrogatory he saith that Robert Hales & John Campe mentioned in this interrogatory were privy to the contents of the said bill or writing in the information mentioned, & that the said Hales did read the same bill or writing before he did put his name thereunto & before the same was sealed, but whether the said John Campe did at the time of the signing & sealing of the said bill or writing or at any time before read or heard the same read or not this deponent saith he cannot now certainly depose, but by the oath he hath taken he saith that he, this deponent, himself did before the signing & sealing thereof truly impart unto the said John Campe the full & whole contents of the said bill or writing, & that in everything as now it is, and further this deponent saith that before the signing & sealing of the said bill or writing (the time certain appertaining?) he doth not remember), he, this deponent, did request the said Hales & Campe to be witnesses to the signing & sealing of the said bill or writing by Mrs Frances Cornwallis in the information mentioned.

To the third interrogatory this deponent saith that he cannot by any means call to his remembrance either what he, this deponent, said to the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis or the said Mrs Frances unto him, this deponent, openly or in hearing at the time of the signing & sealing of the aforesaid bill or writing, neither can this deponent by any means

call to his remembrance what was then openly & in hearing said by any other person that was then present.

To the 4<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent saith that the said bill or writing was made in a chamber of the said Mr Cornwallis his house without Bishopsgate, in which chamber this deponent then lay, and saith that the same was signed & sealed by the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis in the parlour of the same house, & saith that the said Hales did write his name & the said Campe did put his mark to the said writing at the said time, and this deponent saith that Hugh Swift, this deponent's brother, was the man that did write the said bill, and this deponent saith that he had conference & talk with the said Hugh about the said bill or writing before the making thereof, but how long before this deponent had the said conference with the said Hugh, his brother, concerning the same, this deponent saith he cannot clearly depose, but this deponent saith that he is clearly & well assured that the said Hugh Swift was not present at the signing & sealing thereof as aforesaid.

To the 5<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent saith that he was preferred to the service of the right honourable the Earl of Essex by the said Robert Hales & by Daniel Bacheler, page to the said Earl, and this deponent saith that he served the said Earl for the space of three quarters of a year or thereabouts, & that as he remembereth, it was in Lent was 12 months that the said honourable Earl did put him, this deponent, out of his Lordship's service, and this deponent saith that the said Mr Cornwallis did before this deponent's discharge out of the said Earl's service make complaint of him, this deponent, to the said honourable Earl, whereby he purchased the said Earl's displeasure towards him, this deponent, to the great prejudice of him, this deponent.

To the 6(?) interrogatory, this deponent saith that there hath not any money been to him lent, nor any aid or maintenance to him given by any person or persons for the prosecuting of this deponent's intentions against the said Mr Cornwallis or Mrs Frances, his daughter, as is supposed.

To the 7<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent saith that one Mary Mosste(?) that was sometimes servant unto Mrs Cornwallis, mother of the said Frances, did deliver unto him, this deponent, a letter from the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis of her own hand written, but when or where the same letter was so delivered unto him he saith he cannot depose, and any other letter this deponent saith he doth not now remember that [-did] he received or had from the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis as sent unto him, this deponent, and further saith that he did also cancel & tear in pieces the said letter delivered unto him by the said Mary Mosste from the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis as aforesaid, so as now he confesseth he hath not nor is able to produce or show forth any one letter of the said writing of the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis writ or sent unto him, this deponent.

To the 8<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent saith that he, this deponent, & the said Robert Hales did, about Christmas next after this deponent's departure from the said Mr Cornwallis his service, make a journey to the John Petre, knight, was then at his house by Ingatestone, and saith that the said Hales did know the full intent & purpose of this

deponent in that journey, which was to desire the said Sir John Petre (whom this deponent knew to be a great friend of the said Mr Cornwallis) to be a mean unto the said Mr Cornwallis to pacify the displeasure by him conceived towards this deponent concerning the matter of his daughter, & to have consideration of this deponent, as well in respect of this deponent's loving service towards him as also in respect of the band which before that time this deponent for the relief of his necessity had put in suit against the said Mr Cornwallis, and more he saith not to this interrogatory.

To the 9<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent said that sithence he was dismissed out of the service of the said honourable Earl of Essex, he, this deponent hath writ divers & sundry letters to the said Mr Cornwallis & to the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis, his daughter, and he saith that those two letters now showed unto him, this deponent, at the time of this his examination, were by him, this deponent, written & sent to the said Mr Cornwallis & to Mrs Frances Cornwallis, his daughter, sithence the time that he was dismissed out of the said Earl's service, and this deponent saith that he, this deponent, hath the copies of all letters by him writ & sent to the said Mr Cornwallis & Mrs Frances, his daughter, but hath not the same copies now about him to show them forth as by this interrogatory he is required to do, for he saith that they are now in a trunk of his, this deponent's, which is in his friends' keeping.

To the 10<sup>th</sup> interrogatory he saith that he was heretofore examined by Mr Mill, Clerk of the Council [sic?], and this deponent saith that the same his examination so taken by the said Mr Mill was as far as he then knew & he believed(?) true.

To the 11<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent saith that the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis did never read the aforesaid bill or writing in the hearing of any witness or witnesses, to this deponent's knowledge or understanding.

To the 12<sup>th</sup> interrogatory this deponent saith that sithence the first day of December in the 35<sup>th</sup> year [=1 December 1592] of her Majesty's reign, & sithence his, this deponent's, departure out of the service of the said honourable Earl of Essex, he, this deponent, did both by letters & otherwise claim the said Mrs Frances Cornwallis to be his wife, & to be contracted unto him, this deponent, by the foresaid bill or writing at divers & sundry times, and this he saith he hath done before & unto the time that he was committed to prison & at divers times after he was committed.

Thomas Swift