

SUMMARY: The document below is the last will and testament, dated 25 March 1605 and proved 28 August 1605, of Sir Richard Leveson (d. 2 August 1605), whose mistress, Mary Fitton, is thought by some scholars to have been the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets, and whose heir, Sir John Leveson (d. 7 November 1615), was the brother of William Leveson (d.1621), who acted as trustee to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, including William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, in the allocation of shares in the ground lease of the Globe Theatre in 1599. For the will of William Leveson (d.1621), see TNA PROB 11/137/600.

For the will of the testator's heir, Sir John Leveson (d. 7 November 1615), see TNA PROB 11/126/409.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Testator's father's first marriage

The testator was the son of Sir Walter Leveson (1551–1602) of Lilleshall, Shropshire, by his first wife, Anne Corbet (fl.1550–1576), the daughter of Sir Andrew Corbet (d. 16 August 1578) and Jane Needham (d. 7 January 1577). For Sir Andrew Corbet see the will of his father, Roger Corbet (d.1538/9), TNA PROB 11/27/408; the will of his mother, Anne (nee Windsor) Corbet, TNA PROB 11/34/443; and Corbet, Augusta Elizabeth, *The Family of Corbet*, (London: St Catherine Press, n.d.), Vol. II, pp. 271, 274, 289 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/familyofcorbetit02corb#page/n167/mode/2up>

See also the History of Parliament entry for Sir Andrew Corbet at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/corbet-sir-andrew-1522-78>

Sir Andrew Corbet's daughter, Margaret Corbet, married Thomas Harley of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, by whom she had a son, Sir Robert Harley (1579-1656), named as one of the testator's trustees and executors in the will below. As Sir Robert Harley's mother and the testator's mother were sisters, the testator and Sir Robert Harley were first cousins. Sir Robert Harley married firstly Anne Barrett (d.1603), the daughter of Christian (nee Mildmay) Barrett, second wife of the testator's heir, Sir John Leveson (d. 7 November 1615); secondly Mary Newport (d.1622), the daughter of Sir Francis Newport (d. 6 March 1623); and thirdly Brilliana Conway, a marriage brokered by Brilliana's aunt, Lady Mary Vere (1581-1671), wife of Oxford's first cousin, Horace Vere (1565-1635), Baron Vere of Tilbury. See the *ODNB* entry for Sir Robert Harley; the will of Sir Francis Newport, TNA PROB 11/141/527; and the will of Lady Mary Vere, TNA PROB 11/338/214.

Testator's father's second marriage

After the death of the testator's mother, the testator's father, Sir Walter Leveson (1551-1602), married Susan Vernon, the sister of both Elizabeth Vernon, the wife of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, and Sir Robert Vernon, Comptroller of the Household, and a first cousin of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex. It is indicative of the complexity of family relationships in the Elizabethan period that the testator's heir, Sir John Leveson (d. 7 November 1615), played a prominent role in the suppression of the Essex Rebellion in 1601, for which Essex and Southampton were tried for treason.

The testator had a sister, to whom he refers in the will below to 'my well-beloved sister, Penelope Leveson alias Holborne'. Why she is referred to as 'alias Holborne' is unclear. 'Holborne' cannot have been the name of her husband, as in the allegation for the licence for her marriage to John Tonstall on 15 May 1611 she is described as the daughter of Sir Walter Leveson, and a 'maiden'. See Armytage, George J., ed., *Allegations for Marriage Licences Issued by the Bishop of London 1611 to 1828, Vol. II*, (London: Harleian Society, 1887), Vol. XXVI, p. 2 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/allegationsforma26ches#page/2/mode/2up>

MARRIAGE

The testator married, by license dated 13 December 1587, Margaret Howard (c.1570–1641), daughter of Charles Howard (1536–1624), 1st Earl of Nottingham, and the Queen's cousin, Katherine Carey (d.1603), by whom he had no surviving issue. After 1602 Margaret Howard suffered from mental illness, and was made a ward of her brother, William Howard (1577-1615), 3rd Baron Howard of Effingham.

LIAISON WITH MARY FITTON

The testator then contracted a liaison with his second cousin, Mary Fitton (1578-1641). She was the daughter of Sir Edward Fitton (d. 4 March 1606) of Gawsworth, Cheshire, by Alice Holcroft (d. 5 February 1626), and was a Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth and while at court became the mistress of William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke, one of the 'two noble brethren' of the First Folio, by whom she had an illegitimate son who died young. Sir Edward Fitton is named in the will below as one of the testator's trustees. See the *ODNB* articles for Mary Fitton and Sir Edward Fitton.

By the testator, Mary Fitton had an illegitimate daughter:

* **Anne Leveson**, who, as noted in the will of Sir John Leveson (d. 7 November 1615), was contracted to marry either the latter's son, Richard Leveson, or the latter's son, Francis Leveson, provided that her education was entrusted to Sir John Leveson's wife.

According to the *ODNB*, Anne Leveson ultimately married neither of the sons of Sir John Leveson, and on 4 April 1625 wed Robert Charnocke of Astley in Chorley, Lancashire.

In the will below the testator makes provision for an annuity of £100 and a lump sum payment of £1000 which appear to have been designated for his mistress, Anne Fitton, and his illegitimate daughter, Anne Leveson.

OTHER PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE WILL

According to the *ODNB*, the testator was marshal to the 1605 embassy to Spain, and on his return to London died of smallpox at the house of a Mr Bonelle (likely the Hugh Bunnell mentioned in the will below) in the Strand on 2 August 1605, and was buried on 2 September at St Peter's, Wolverhampton.

A document in the Shropshire Record Office, 972/2/1/303, dated 20 November 1617, mentions the testator, Mary Fitton, and Hugh Bonell of St. Clement Danes:

http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_X972_2_1_7_5/

The testator's 'well-beloved cousin, Sir Walter Leveson' mentioned in the will below was Sir Walter Leveson (d. January 1620) of Ashmores near Wolverhampton, a Catholic recusant, as was his sister, Elizabeth Leveson. See Cahill, Michael, *The Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield*, 1603-1642, Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, October 2001, pp. 168, 219, available online.

It appears that Sir Walter Leveson (d. January 1620) and his sister, Elizabeth Leveson, were the children of Thomas Leveson of Wolverhampton (c.1533-1595), by Joyce Leveson (d. 14 March 1608), the daughter of James Leveson (d. 13 October 1545), and that Elizabeth was the wife of Richard Giffard (c.1553-1606) of Saredon in Wolverhampton, second son of John Giffard (d. 28 August 1613), esquire, of Chillington in Brewood. See the will of James Leveson, TNA PROB 11/31/655, and the pedigree of Giffard at:

'The parish of Church Eaton: High Onn', *Staffordshire Historical Collections*, vol. 4 (1883), pp. 52-63:

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=52409>

See also the History of Parliament entry for John Giffard at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/giffard-john-1534-1613>.

See also Grazebrook, H. Sydney, ed., *The Heraldic Visitations of Staffordshire*, (London: Mitchell and Hughes), 1885, p. 147 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/collectionsforpt205stafuoft#page/146/mode/2up>

See also:

https://archive.org/stream/gri_33125008386944#page/n105/mode/2up

For the testator see also the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/leveson-sir-richard-1570-1605>

TESTATOR'S ESTATE

As noted in the will of Sir John Leveson, his inheritance of the testator's lands involved him in 'a mass and heap of suits and charges'. For these legal and financial difficulties, see TNA C 2/JasI/S12/39; the *ODNB* entries for the testator and Sir John Leveson, and the History of Parliament entry for Sir John Leveson at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/leveson-sir-john-1556-1615>

See also the descent of the testator's manor of Lilleshall:

'Lilleshall: Manor and other estates', *A History of the County of Shropshire: Volume 11: Telford* (1985), pp. 153-155 at:

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=18110>

The manor was held in demesne by the abbey until surrendered to the Crown in 1538. In 1543 James Leveson (d. 1547) of Wolverhampton, a merchant of the staple, bought the manor from the Crown. His son and heir Richard (kt. 1553) died in 1560, leaving the manor to his executors for thirteen years and thereafter to his son and heir Walter (born 1550, kt. 1587). At Sir Walter's death in 1602 the manor passed to his son and heir Sir Richard, who became vice-admiral of England in 1604.

Dying in 1605 without lawful issue Sir Richard left the manor to trustees for the payment of legacies and debts and thereafter to his third cousin, Richard Leveson of Halling (Kent). The younger Richard's father, Sir John (d. 1615), became sole trustee by 1609 and left the trust to his widow and executrix, Christian, reserving Lilleshall manor to her as long as she should choose to live there. In 1616 Lilleshall was seized by the Crown for a debt of Sir Richard's still owing to it; in 1617, however, Christian bought a Crown lease of the manor to trustees to the uses of Sir John's will. In 1622-3 the Crown debt was paid off and in 1623 Christian discharged her last functions as Sir John's executrix. By the end of 1623 her son Richard (kt. 1626) was in possession.

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<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/>

At Sir Richard's death without lawful issue in 1661 the manor passed under his will to his widow Katherine (d. 1674) for life, and thereafter to his grand-nephew William Leveson-Gower (formerly Gower) of Stittenham (Yorks. N.R.).

RM: T{estamentum} D{omi}ni Richardi Leveson milit{is}

[f. 52r] In the name of the Almighty and eternal God, Amen. I, Sir Richard Leveson of Lilleshall in the county of Salop, knight, being of perfect health and memory, thanks be to God, and now ready addressed to a journey beyond the seas in the service of my King and country, calling to mind the uncertainty of all earthly things and that we hold and enjoy our selves together with all our temporal blessings but as tenants at will to our good God that gave them, and considering the troubles that many times do ensue by the indisposition of men's estate, I have thereupon in the time of health resolved to settle such things as I possess, and do make known my mind & purpose how and in what manner how I would have things ordered and disposed;

And therefore I do commend my soul to God that gave it, and to my Saviour Jesus Christ, his only Son, that redeemed it;

My body I commit to it['s] mother the earth, to be interred or disposed as it shall please God to appoint;

And whereas divers statutes, judgments, recognizances, extents and executions had, made liable or chargeable upon all, some or any the lands, manors, tenements or hereditaments of me, the said Richard Leveson, or that late were of Sir Walter Leveson, my late father, deceased, situate and being in the several counties of Salop and Stafford or elsewhere within the realm of England are and remain in my hands or custody or in the hands of another for my use and benefit to be at my disposition, all which were by my direction assigned in name and estate to others and yet in truth upon trust and intent to be at my dispose, I do now by this my last will and testament limit, will and appoint that the same and every of them and all the said estate and estates, interest & interests, shall from time to time and at all times [+be?] employed, applied and used for and towards the uses, purposes and intents in and by one indenture of lease had and made between me, Sir Richard Leveson, of the one party, and Sir Edward Fitton, Sir Robert Harley and John Tirricke of thother party, limited and expressed and for and towards the better enabling and performance of the true intent and purpose of the said-recited lease and deed, and after to and for the support, benefit and avail of the use and uses, limitation and limitations, estate and estates, in one other indenture in the said-recited lease mentioned between me, the said Sir Richard Leveson, on the one party, and the said Sir Edward Fitton, Sir Robert Harley and John Tirrike of the other party, according to the tenor and true meaning of the same;

And whereas by the said-recited indenture had and made between me, the said Sir Richard Leveson, on the one party, and Sir Edward Fitton, Sir Robert Harley and John Tirrike of the other party, bearing date the 23rd day of this instant month of March, provision is made for the raising and levying of ten thousand pounds of lawful money of England to be converted, paid and employed to such use and uses and to such person and persons and in such manner and form as by my last will and testament in writing under my hand and seal I should limit and appoint, as by the same-recited indenture due reference thereunto had more at large appeareth, now I do by this my last will and testament desire and appoint that all my debts be duly and truly paid, all my servants' wages discharged, and that all the old servants and friends of my late father, deceased, be freed and saved harmless from all just and due debts which they stand engaged for him, not exceeding the sum of £500;

And first my will and pleasure is that forth of my revenues, goods and chattels there shall be paid unto Edmund Mainwaring or John Tirrike one hundred pounds yearly during the continuance of the foresaid lease made between me, Sir Richard Leveson, of the one party, and Sir Edward Fitton, Sir Robert Harley and John Tirrike of the other party, which said sum of one hundred pounds yearly shall be employed by them to such uses and purposes and for such person and persons as I shall appoint unto them by some private instructions from myself;

Item, I do give, limit and appoint one thousand pounds, parcel of the foresaid sum, unto my well-beloved sister, Penelope Leveson alias Holborne;

Item, I do give and appoint one thousand pounds to be paid unto Hugh Bunnell in trust to the use and behoof of such person and persons as the said Hugh Bunnell standeth bound to pay the same unto by one obligation bearing date [f. 52v] this present month of March, which said sums of two thousand pounds to my said sister and to the said Hugh Bunnell I desire may be paid with all convenient speed;

Item, I do give unto my well-beloved friend, Edmund Mainwaring, three hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto my cousin, Margaret Corbet, one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto my cousin, William Meyre, one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto my servant, John Heall, one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto my servant, William Shereatt, one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto Jane Rowleston one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto Anne Tilston one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto my servant, Samuel Bowdler, one hundred pounds, and do release him of all debts due to me from him or his brother for iron;

Item, I give unto Philip Mainwaring one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto Rowland Rutledge fifty pounds;

Item I do give unto Hugh Bunnell one hundred pounds;

Item, I do give unto John Tirrike two hundred pounds;

Item, I do give my well-beloved cousin, Sir Walter Leveson, the one of my trunks at his choice and election now standing in his house at Ashmores with all that is therein contained, be it pearls, jewels or anything else of what nature soever;

I do also give and discharge unto the said Sir Walter Leveson one debt of three hundred pounds due unto me from him;

Item, I do give and bequeath unto my cousin, Sir Robert Harley, two of my best horses at his choice and election;

Next unto him I do give unto my cousin, Sir Walter Leveson, two other of my horses or mares to be chosen by him;

Last of all I do give, limit and appoint and it is my true meaning and intent that all my goods and chattels not bequeathed or disposed, together with all such surplusage of money when my debts and legacies be paid which shall be levied by virtue of the foresaid indenture of lease made between me, Sir Richard Leveson, of the one party, and Sir Edward Fitton, Sir Robert Harley and John Tirrike of the other party, or shall remain in the hands of my [-my] executors, lessees or assigns shall be bestowed, employed and used to the use and benefit of such person and persons to whom I have conveyed my lands next and immediately after my decease by one pair of indentures bearing date the three and twentieth of this instant March between me, the said Sir Richard Leveson, on the one party, and Sir Edward Fitton, Sir Robert Harley and John Tirrike on the other party;

And of this my last will and testament I do ordain, constitute and make Sir Robert Harley, Sir John Leveson, John Tirrike and Samuel Boudler my executors;

In witness whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name and put to my seal the 25th day of March in the third years [sic] of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James by the grace of God King of England, France and Ireland and of Scotland the 38th. Richard Leveson.

Probatum fuit huiusmodi Testamentum apud London vicesimo octauo die mens{is} Augusti anno d{omi}ni millesimo Sexcentesimo quinto coram m{agist}ro Iohanne Amye legum Doctore Surrogato venerabilis viri D{omi}ni Iohannis Bennett milit{is} legum etiam Doctoris Curie Prerogatiue Cant{uariensis} m{agist}ri Custodis siue Commissarij l{egi}time Constituti Iuramento d{omi}ni Roberti Harley milit{is} vnus Executorum in testamento predicto nominat{orum} Cui Comissa fuit Administrac{i}o bonorum Iurium et Creditorum eiusdem defuncti de bene et fidel{ite}r Administrand{o} &c Ad sancta dei Evangelia Iurat{o} Reservata p{otes}tate si{mi}lem Commiss{ionem} faciend{i} d{omi}no Iohanni Leveson militi Iohanni Tirrike et Samueli Bowdler alter{is} executorib{us} in testamento pred{i}c{t}o nominat{is} cu{m} ven{er}i[n]t &c

[=The same testament was proved at London on the twenty-eighth day of the month of August in the year of the Lord the thousand six hundred fifth before Master John Amye, Doctor of the Laws, Surrogate of the worshipful Sir John Bennet, knight, also Doctor of the Laws, lawfully constituted Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, by the oath of Sir Robert Harley, knight, one of the executors named in the testament aforesaid, to whom administration was granted of the goods, rights and credits of the same deceased, sworn on the Holy Gospels to well and faithfully administer etc., with power reserved for a similar grant to be made to Sir John Leveson, knight, John Tirrike, and Samuel Bowdler, the other executors named in the testament aforesaid, when they shall have come etc.