

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will, dated 22 September 1602 and 7 July 1604 and proved 23 January 1612, of Sir William Browne.

The testator's background is briefly described by Lodge:

This gentleman, who was born in 1558, was the only son of Nicholas Browne, of Snelston in Derbyshire, by Eleanor, daughter and heir of Ralph Shirley, of Stanton Harold in Leicestershire. He was one of the old Low Country Captains; served in Flanders almost from the beginning of the war; and had the conduct of the surprise of Gravelines in 1586, where he was made prisoner. Sir Philip Sydney was his particular friend and patron, and the valiant brethren Sir Francis and Sir Horace Vere, who had probably been trained to the military profession under his care, always styled him "Father". He was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Flushing towards the end of this reign, and seems to have gained no further promotion in the next than the honour of knighthood, which was conferred on him at the Tower, March 15, 1604-5.

See Lodge, Edmund, *Illustrations of British History, Biography and Manners, in the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, & James I*, 2nd ed., Vol. II, (London: John Chidley, 1838), p. 574, available online.

Eleanor Shirley's first husband was Thomas Vernon of Houndhill, Staffordshire, whom she married in 1545. See Richardson, Douglas, *Plantagenet Ancestry* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2004), p. 653.

Leland Carlson states that Dorothy Vernon, a daughter of the marriage of Eleanor Shirley and Thomas Vernon, married Job Throckmorton (1545-1601), who was implicated in the printing of the Marprelate tracts in 1588/9:

Job married Dorothy, daughter of Thomas Vernon and Ellenor Shirley of Howell or Houndhill, Staffordsire. She was the great-great-granddaughter of John Talbot, second earl of Shrewsbury.

See Carlson, Leland H., *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman; Master Job Throckmorton Laid Open in his Colours* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1981), p. 129.

The testator was thus the stepbrother of Dorothy Vernon, and the brother-in-law of Job Throckmorton.

Oxford's illegitimate son, Edward Vere, wrote to the testator on August 14, 1603, addressing him as 'Kind Father' (Oxford's cousins, the 'fighting Veres', also addressed the testator as 'Father'):

Kind Father, I have received both your letters, and have spent the rest of my time in seeking some man whereby I might come out of your debt. Lieutenant Poynes [=Poins] promised me he would be gone again, but because I have lighted upon this messenger I discharge myself by him first, and in the next, if I owe anything, will pay the rest.

Two days after our march from Geertruidenberg we lodged within two English miles of the enemy, who by the next morning, two hours before daybreak, began to make his retreat in much haste and some disorder. His Excellency [=the Prince of Orange?] made haste after him, and the vanguard of our horse, with the mutineers, overtook his rear before he was fully out of the village, where they charged those they found, being Monsieur de Rohan with some few gentlemen. Some fifty or sixty at the most were slain in that encounter, among the which was [+a?] French Chevalier, Lieutenant-General of the Horse under the Duke de Male [=Duc d'Aumale?] and Commander of the Lorrainers.

The mutineers were violent to go on, and all the army desired it infinitely, seeing the enemy wavering and upon a fair heath fit to determine the controversy. My humble spirit and the modesty of a soldier will not give me leave to estimate my General, but in all men's judgment if his Excellency would but have given them countenance, the mutineers had been sufficient to have routed the enemy, being in that pickle, if he would but have been contented to have looked on. He refused to hearken to all such counsel, yet made a show as though he would have fought it if they had stood the coming up of all his infantry, which they did not, but being heartened by his stay, marched away in very good order, though it was long first ere he could assure his soldier. I make no doubt it [sic] our Lord had been present, he would have made them give a better account of their business and paid dearer for their passage.

The enemy lies still at Herentals. He was determined to have begun [=been gone?], but the coming of 3000 men out of Italy hath stayed his fear, upon which news his Excellency hath increased his guards and watcheth very strong. The number out of Italy is not more, for I spoke with one who hath been employed as a spy for that purpose, and hath marched with them over the mountains. He makes relation that they were then 3500, 13 Spanish companies out of Naples, the rest Italians. His Excellency is yet unresolved how to proceed till the coming of the States, who this day arrived at our camp, but the general speech is that we shall march to the Busse [=Bois-le-duc, or 's-Hertogenbosch, or Den Bosch], some say to Wowe, in which business the mutineers are partakers, who leave behind them in the Castle of Hoghstate 500 men furnished with artillery and munition by the States.

You write nothing of our Lord, of which we would gladly hear something.

Thus recommending my best love unto you, I rest. From the camp at Heoghstraet this 14th of August 1603, yours most affectionately, Edward Vere

See Miller, Ruth Loyd, ed., "Shakespeare" Identified in Edward De Vere Seventeenth Earl of Oxford and The Poems of Edward de Vere by J. Thomas Looney, Third Edition

Annotated and Illustrated: Oxfordian Vistas, (Jennings, Louisiana: Minos Publishing, 1975), pp. 98-100.

The testator reported to Gilbert Talbot (1552-1616), 7th Earl of Shrewsbury, in a letter dated 18 September 1602, a strange incident involving the Queen and Oxford's eldest daughter, Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), then Lady Derby, involving a picture of her uncle, Sir Robert Cecil (1563-1612), which Lady Derby was wearing about her neck in a tablet:

I sent your Lordship here enclosed some verses compounded by Mr Secretary [i.e. Sir Robert Cecil], who got Hales to frame a ditty unto it. The occasion was, as I hear, that the young Lady of Derby wearing about her neck in her bosom a picture which was in a dainty tablet, the Queen, espying it, asked what fine jewel that was. The Lady Derby was curious to excuse the showing of it, but the Queen would have it, and opening it and finding it to be Mr Secretary's, snatched it away and tied it upon her shoe and walked along with it there. Then she took it thence and pinned it on her elbow and wore it some time there also, which Mr Secretary, being told of, made these verses and had Hales to sing them in his chamber. It was told her Majesty that Mr Secretary had rare music and songs. She would needs hear them, and so this ditty was sung which you see first written. More verses there be likewise, whereof some or all were likewise sung. I do boldly send these things to your Lordship which I would not do to any else, for I hear they are very secret. Some of the verses argue that he repines not though her Majesty please to grace others, and contents himself with the favour he hath. I am now in haste, but will write again when I have been at court.

See Lodge, pp. 575-7.

LM: *Testamentum Domini Willelmi Browne militis*

In the name of God, Amen. I, Sir William Browne of Snelston in the county of Derby, knight, being whole of body and perfect of memory, considering with myself the mortality and uncertainty of human life, and purposing to dispose and set down in what manner my lands and tenements hereafter mentioned shall be and remain after my death to the pleasure of Almighty God, I do thereof make this my last will and testament in writing in manner following, that is to say:

Whereas I am seised in fee simple of and in three messuages, forty acres of land, twenty acres of meadow, one hundred acres of pasture and twenty acres of wood with th' appurtenances in Snelston, Roston, Norbury, Cubley, Clifton, Edlaston and Alvaston, in every or any of them, set, lying and being in the county of Stafford, and also of and in six messuages, one hundred acres of land, forty acres of meadow, three hundred acres of pasture and forty acres of wood with th' appurtenances in Snelston, Roston, Norbury, Cubley, Clifton, Edlaston and Alvaston or in every or any of them in the county of Derby, of and in which premises I stand and am seised of an estate of inheritance in fee

simple as aforesaid, and hold the same by socage tenure by virtue of two several recoveries thereof respectively suffered by me with voucher over of the common vouchee upon two several writs of entry brought against me by the name of William Browne, gentleman, by William Gray of Shirley in the said county of Derby, esquire, and Philip Harrison of London, gentleman, as by the said several recoveries and the records thereof in the Court of Common Pleas in the term of Saint Hilary in the four and thirtieth year [=1592] of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Elizabeth, the Queen's most excellent Majesty that now is and by one deed declaring the uses thereof bearing date the eighteenth day of March in the said four and thirtieth year of the reign of our said Sovereign Lady the Queen amongst other things more at large may appear;

All which messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments above specified in every of the said several counties of Stafford and Derby I do give and bequeath unto Mary, my loving wife, to have and to hold all and singular the premises with th' appurtenances unto my said wife for and during her natural life for her better maintenance and for and towards the virtuous education of my children;

And after her decease I do devise and bequeath all and singular the remainder and remainders, reversion and reversions of all and singular the premises with th' appurtenances unto my trusty and well-beloved friends, Sir William Russell, knight, Sir Robert Sidney, knight, Peter Manwood in the country of Kent, esquire, Thomas Edmondes, esquire, Clerk of the Council, Rowland White and Philip Harrison, gentleman, and to their heirs, nevertheless upon confidence and trust reposed by me in them and every of them and in the heirs of the survivor of them, that within convenient time after my death, at the costs and charges of my said wife if she shall then be living, and if she shall be dead then with the issues and profits of my said messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments above-mentioned, that the said Sir William Russell, Sir Robert Sidney, knight, Peter Manwood, esquire, Thomas Edmondes, esquire, Rowland White and Philip Harrison, gentlemen, and the survivor of them or the heirs of the survivor of them shall cause and procure all such my children which have been born out of the realm and which shall then be living to be made free denizens and capable to purchase and enjoy lands, tenements and hereditaments within this realm by such good ways and means as shall be available and sufficient in the law;

And after such denizations so had and procured, I will and my intent and mind is that the said Sir William Russell, Sir Robert Sidney, Peter Manwood, Thomas Edmondes, Rowland White and Philip Harrison and the survivor of them and the heirs of the survivor of them, according to my trust and confidence in them and every of them by me reposed as is aforesaid, shall within convenient time sufficiently in the law convey and assure all and singular the said messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments with th' appurtenances unto such of my children as shall then be mine eldest son and then being a denizen, to have and to hold the same unto him and to the heirs males of his body;

And for default of such issue, the remainder of all and singular the premises with the appurtenances unto such as shall then be my second son and then being also a denizen and to the heirs males of his body lawfully to be begotten;

And for default of such issue, the remainder of all and singular the premises with th' appurtenances unto such as shall then be my third son and then living(?) also a denizen and to the heirs males of his body lawfully to be begotten;

And for default of such issue the remainder of all and singular the premises with th' appurtenances unto such as shall then be my fourth son being then also a denizen and to the heirs males of his body lawfully to be begotten;

And for default of such issue, or if I shall have no son living nor any issues male of their bodies, then my will and intent is that the said Sir William Russell, Sir Robert Sidney, Peter Manwood, Thomas Edmondes, Rowland White and Philip Harrison and the survivor of them and the heirs of the survivor of them shall within convenient time after my death as aforesaid sufficiently assure and convey all and singular the said messuages, lands, tenements & hereditaments and all and singular the premises with th' appurtenances to all and every of my daughters which then shall be living and denizens and to the heirs of their several bodies;

And for default of such issue unto such person and persons and his and their heirs as shall be then next heir unto me, the said Sir William Browne;

And my further mind and intent is that for the better maintenance of all and every such my sons as shall not be my eldest son and shall not be otherwise advanced by me before my decease, and for the better advancement of every of my said daughters as shall not be likewise advanced by me before my decease, that then the said Sir William Russell, Sir Robert Sidney, Peter Manwood, Thomas Edmondes, Rowland White and Philip Harrison and the survivor of them and the heirs of the survivor of them shall first of all before any such gift in tail be made unto my said sons and daughters in manner as aforesaid give and grant by the sufficient assurance in the law unto every one of my said sons not being my eldest son and to every of my said daughters not otherwise being advanced one yearly rent of ten pounds of English money yearly going out of the premises, payable quarterly by equal portions with sufficient clauses of distress in every of the said grants to be contained for the better levying of every such rentcharge as aforesaid, to have and to hold every of the said rents to every of my said sons and daughters respectively for term of his, her and their lives;

And for the disposition of all my goods and chattels, I constitute and make my said wife my sole executrix, she paying and performing all such legacies as I shall set down in any codicil unto this present testament to be annexed;

In witness whereof unto these presents I have set my hand and seal the two and twentieth day of September in the four and fortieth year of the reign of our Sovereign

Lady Elizabeth by the grace of God of England, France and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith etc. William Browne.

Instead of a schedule I have annexed this writing to my will above specified, that is, that I bequeath unto each of my children (except my eldest son) living at the day of my death one hundred and twenty pounds sterling, wherewith(?) the better to maintain themselves;

And if my beloved wife can otherwise without receiving the profit of this maintain herself and them, then my hope and desire is that it may be employed to make up a greater sum towards their advancement in marriage or otherwise;

And my desire and will is that when my eldest son shall come to be one and twenty years of age, that then my wife shall allow him thirty pounds sterling yearly, but he not to have any hundred and twenty pounds as the rest laid out for him;

This is all written underneath the first draft of my will, and signed with my hand the seventh of July one thousand six hundred and four in the second year of our sacred Majesty, King James. William Browne.

These words ‘ten pounds of English money’ were interlined with my own hand the seventh of July 1604. For witness I have subscribed my hand the day above-written. William Browne.

Probatum fuit testamentum suprascriptum apud London coram veerabili viro Domino Iohanne Benet milite legum doctore Curie Prerogatiue Cantuariensis Magistro Custode siue Commissario legitime constituto vicesimo tertio die Mensis Ianuarij Anno Domini iuxta cursum et computacionem Ecclesie Anglicane millesimo sexcentesimo vndecimo Iuramento Domine Marie Browne relictæ dicti Defuncti et executricis in eodem testamento nominate Cui commissa fuit Administracio bonorum Iurium et Creditorum dicti Defuncti De bene et fideliter administrando &c ad sancta Dei Evangelia vigore Commissioni in ea parte alias emanati Iurate

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before the worshipful John Bennet, knight, Doctor of the Laws, lawfully constituted Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the twenty-third day of the month of January in the year of the Lord according to the course and reckoning of the English Church the thousand six hundred eleventh by the oath of Lady Mary Browne, relict of the said deceased and executrix named in the same testament, to whom administration was granted of the goods, rights and credits of the said deceased, sworn on the Holy Gospels to well and faithfully administer etc. by virtue of a grant in that part elsewhere issued.]