

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 26 September 1617 and proved 10 November 1617, of Francis Collins, who witnessed the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, and to whom Shakespeare bequeathed £5 and appointed as an overseer of his will, together with Thomas Russell (1570-1634). Shakespeare's original will is said to be in Collins' hand. See TNA PROB 1/4 (original) and TNA PROB 11/127/771 (PCC copy).

For Thomas Russell, appointed as a joint overseer of the will of William Shakespeare with the testator, Francis Collins, see his will, TNA PROB 11/165/424, the will of his father, Sir Thomas Russell (d. 9 April 1574) of Strensham, TNA PROB 11/57/83, the will of his mother, Margaret (nee Lygon) Russell Berkeley, TNA PROB 11/129/781, and the will of his half brother, Sir John Russell (1552-1593), TNA PROB 11/92/96.

It appears from the will below that the testator had a brother named Thomas (or perhaps, William?) who held land at Inkford, and that the testator married a wife named Susan, by whom he had three sons, Francis, John and Thomas, and four daughters, Alice, Mary, Anne and Barbara, as well, perhaps, as a posthumous child.

In the will below, the testator mentions a promise by Thomas Combe to give £20 to the testator's children. This appears to be Thomas Combe (buried 11 January 1609), to whose son, Thomas Combe (1589-1657), William Shakespeare of Stratford left a sword in his will. For the will of Thomas Combe (buried 11 January 1609), to which the testator, Francis Collins, was a witness, see TNA PROB 11/113/130.

It appears that John Rogers mentioned in the will below was at one time the vicar of Holy Trinity church in Stratford upon Avon. See Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael, *Shakespeare's Warwickshire Contemporaries*, (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1907), pp. 236-8. Stopes makes no mention of the testator's overseers, William Walford and John Wolmer, or of other persons mentioned in the will, including John Smith, barber, Michael Yerle, Thomas Lucas, John Backster alias Smith, Edward and Margaret Rogers, and John Heminge.

RM: T{estamentum} ffrancisci Collynes

The six and twentieth day of September 1617

[f. 294r] In the name of God, Amen. I, Francis Collins in the county of Warwick, gentleman, do make my last will and testament in manner and form following:

First I give my soul to Almighty God, my Maker and Redeemer, hoping by the merits of Christ and through the mercy of God to be saved;

I commend my body to the earth from whence I came;

If I die at Stratford, my body to lie in the parish church there; if at Warwick, then in the church of St Mary there;

Item, whereas John Smith of Stratford upon Avon, barber, did give unto John Rogers and I, Francis Collins, all his lands and tenements, goods and chattels in Stratford and in the county of Warwick (except one house that he gave to the son of Michael Yerle and his heirs, for the which he was to pay to the said Rogers and to myself six shillings eight pence by the year, and we to pay twenty shillings to the poor yearly), sithence that time one Thomas Lucas and the said John Rogers and one John Backster alias Smith did combine themselves together and keep it from the poor most unconscionably, I do by this my last will and testament give and devise all my right and title in the premises to the bailiff and to the burgesses and their successors forever, to be distributed to the poor forever, all the foresaid lands that was so given to me and to the said John Rogers;

Item, I give to the poor of Stratford all the foresaid six shillings and eight pence which I have received and hath been unpaid for some years;

Item, I give to Francis, my son, twenty pounds to be paid him within two years after my decease;

Item, to my daughter, Alice, twenty pounds to be paid her at her day of marriage or at the age of twenty-one years, the which shall first happen;

Item, I give to John, my son, twenty pounds to be paid him at the age of twenty-one years or at his day of marriage, whether shall happen first;

Item, to Thomas, my son, twenty pounds, to be paid him in manner and form aforesaid;

Item, I give to Mary Collins, my daughter, Anne and Barbery [=Barbara] twenty pounds apiece to be paid them at their several age[s] of twenty-one years or at their several day[s] of marriage, the which shall first happen;

Item, I give to the child or children that my wife goeth withal twenty pounds apiece in form aforesaid;

Item I give to my aforesaid children all that stock that is now employed to their uses, and that stock to remain in my wife her hands to the bringing up of my children, and to be then paid as aforesaid;

And if any of my said children do die before they come to the age of twenty and one year[s] or their several days of marriage, then that to be equally divided amongst the rest of my said children;

Item, I give and devise to Francis, my son, all that house, barns, gardens, orchard and backside with all buildings thereto belonging after the decease of my wife or her

marriage, whether it shall please God first to happen, for term of his life, and to the first son of his body lawfully to be begotten, and to the heirs males of the said first-begotten son forever, and for want of such issue to the right heirs of me, Francis Collins, forever;

And for and concerning the annuity of five pounds by the year the which doth issue forth of my brother Thomas Collins his land at Inkford, I give to Suzan, my wife, so long as she doth keep my foresaid [f. 294v] children, and keep herself unmarried, and after such limitation of my foresaid wife I give to John, my son, three pounds yearly to him and his heirs forever;

Item, I give to Thomas, my son, the other forty shillings to him and his heirs forever, being part of the said five pound arising out of the foresaid annuity;

Item, after my debts being paid, my legacies performed, my funeral expenses discharged, I give the one moiety or half of the residue of my goods to Suzan, my wife, and Francis, my son, whom I make executors of this my last will and testament, and the other half moiety to be equally divided amongst the rest of my said children, to be paid them in like manner as the aforesaid legacies;

Item, I give to Francis, my son, and to Alice, my daughter, the twenty pounds that Mr Thomas Combe did promise to give to any of my children, to be equally divided;

And for the performance of this my will I entreat my brother, Thomas Collins [‘Thomas’ written in what appears to be a blank space, and in the left margin ‘my brother, William Collins’], William Walford and John Wolmer to be overseers of this my last will, and for their pains I give to each of them five shillings apiece;

And I do publish and declare this to be my last will and testament in the presence of those under-written;

Item, I give to Richard Walford, Francis Walford, Katherine Walford, children of William Walford, six shillings eight pence apiece;

Item, I give to Edward Rogers and Margaret Rogers, his servants, six shillings eight pence apiece. Francis Collins. Edward Rogers. William Walford. John Heminge and William Collins. John Wolmer.

Probatum fuit Testamentum suprascriptum apud London coram venerabili viro Mag^{ist}ro Iohanne Amye legum Doctore Surrogato venerabilis viri Domini Iohannis Benet militis legum etiam Doctoris Curie prerogatiue Cantuariensis^{is} Mag^{ist}ri Custodis siue Com^missarij legitime constituti Decimo Die mensis Novembris Anno Domini millesimo sexcentesimo Decimo septimo Iuramento ffrancisci Colynnes filij n^{at}uralis et l^{egi}time dicti defuncti et vnus executorum in eodem Testamento nominat^{orum} Cui Com^missa fuit Administracⁱo bonorum Iurium et Creditorum

dicti defuncti de bene et fideliter Administrando &c ad sancta Dei Evangelia Iurat{o}
Reservat{a} p{otes}tate similem Comissionem faciend{i} Susanne Relicte dicti defuncti
alter{i} executor{i} in h{uius}mo{d}i Testamento nominat{e} cum venerit eam
petitur{e}

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before the worshipful 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, on the tenth day of the month of November in the year of the Lord the thousand six hundred seventeenth by the oath of Francis Collins, natural and legitimate son of the said deceased and one of the executors named in the same testament, sworn on the Holy Gospels to well and faithfully administer etc., with power reserved for a similar grant to be made to Susan, relict of the said deceased, the other executor named in the same testament, when she shall have come to petition the same.]