

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 3 October 1633 and proved 5 May 1634, of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), to whom William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon bequeathed £5 and whom he appointed as an overseer of his will. See the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, TNA PROB 1/4 (original) and TNA PROB 11/127/771 (PCC copy).

See also the will, TNA PROB 11/130/512, of Francis Collins (d.1617), appointed jointly as overseer of the will of William Shakespeare with the testator.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

For details of the testator's family see 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 (d.1617), TNA PROB 11/129/781; and the will of his half brother, Sir John Russell (d.1593), TNA PROB 11/92/96.

FIRST MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

The testator married firstly, at Bruton on 7 September 1590, Katherine Bampffield (d. by 1596), the daughter of Hugh Bampffield (d.1589), esquire, of North Cadbury, Somersetshire, and Cecily White, by whom the testator had two daughters who died young. See Hotson, Leslie, *I, William Shakespeare*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 42, 44, 59.

Katherine Bampffield had a brother, and two sisters:

* William Bampffield, for whom see Hotson, *supra*, pp. 135-6, 203-6, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/bampffield-sir-william-1568-1631>.

* Jane Bampffield, who married Sir George Trenchard (c.1548-1630), for whom see the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/trenchard-george-i-1548-1630>.

* Eleanor Bampffield, who married William Willoughby, the elder son of Henry Willoughby, esquire, of West Knoyle, Wiltshire. According to Hotson, Eleanor Bampffield's husband was the elder brother of Henry Willoughby, the author of *Willobie His Avis* (1594). See Hotson, *supra*, pp. 59, 68.

SECOND MARRIAGE

The testator married secondly, on 26 August 1603, Anne St. Leger (1555-1636), widow of Thomas Digges (c.1546 – 24 August 1595), and daughter of Sir Warham St. Leger (1525?–1597) by Ursula Neville (d.1575), fifth daughter of George Neville, 5th Baron Bergavenny. See the *ODNB* entries for Sir Warham St. Leger and Thomas Digges; Richardson, Douglas, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, 2nd ed., 2011, Vol. II, p. 82, and Vol. III, p. 482; the will of Thomas Digges, TNA PROB 11/86/204; the will of Sir Warham St Leger, TNA PROB 11/91/61; and Palmer, Alan and Veronica, *Who's Who in Shakespeare's England*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 209-10, at:

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=6BK1Vu6pw84C&pg=PA209&dq=Thomas+Russell#v=onepage&q=Thomas%20Russell&f=false>.

Before the testator married Anne (nee St Leger) Digges (who was fifteen years older than he), she was courted by two other suitors, Edward Andrews, esquire, of Gray's Inn and Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599). In 1574 Francis Brace had witnessed the will of the testator's father, Sir Thomas Russell (see his will, *supra*), and shortly thereafter had travelled on the continent at the same time as Oxford (see TNA E 157/1, f. 1). According to Hotson, Francis Brace persuaded Anne (nee St Leger) Digges, to sell some of her late husband's leases to pay his debts, and in return assigned her his ground lease of the manor of Rushock, Worcestershire, which was held of the Company of Merchant Taylors in London. The record of Frances Brace's burial on 14 July 1599 in the parish of St Mary Aldermanbury, London, was signed by the then churchwarden of the parish and trustee of William Shakespeare and other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, William Leveson (d.1621). By 1600 Anne (nee St Leger) Digges had married the testator. They were living at the time at his manor of Alderminster, Warwickshire, on which he held a lease which would not expire until 1611 or 1612, and she had given him control of her lease of the manor of Rushock. In 1604 or 1605, the testator obtained a forty-year extension of the Rushock lease from the Merchant Taylors, assisted in his petition by a letter from Charles Blount, Earl of Devonshire. See the will of William Leveson, TNA PROB 11/137/600; Hotson, *supra*, pp. 112-13, 131-3, 138, 161, 203, 211-13, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/brace-francis-1599>.

For Francis Brace, see also Grazebrook, H. Sydney, *The Heraldry of Worcestershire*, (London: John Russell Smith, 1873), Vol. I, p. 74 at:

https://books.google.ca/books?id=8IMBAAAQAAJ&pg=PA74&lpg=PA74&dq=%22Visitations%22+%22Bracey%22&source=bl&ots=2_LLCCRJrWu&sig=tEE65zoJ4E8Wn3dT22Gq65_wkZU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMk7DrtOjJAhVBGGMKHQ1kCOQQ6AEIIZAC#v=onepage&q=%22Visitations%22%20%22Bracey%22&f=false.

According to the Bracey pedigree, Francis Brace was the eldest of the three children of William Brace and Margery Porter, the daughter and coheir of William Porter. He had a brother, Philip Brace, and a sister, Jane Brace, who married William Dethick of Sagebury, Worcestershire.

These details suggest that Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599) was the son of William Brace (died c.1549), gentleman, of Droitwich, for whose will see TNA PROB 11/33/244. This William Brace calls himself 'William Brace the younger'. He mentions his eldest son, Francis (who is under 18), his youngest son, Philip (who is also under 18), and his daughter, Jane. He appoints as executors his father, William Brace, his brother, John Brace, and his sister, Lettice Brace.

Francis Brace married Mary Purslow, the daughter of Robert Purslow of Sidbury, Shropshire, by whom he had a son, Thomas (who married Frances Freer), and three daughters, Cicely, Mary and Margery. See the pedigree of Bracey in Phillimore, W.P.W., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1569*, (London: Harleian Society, 1888), Vol. XXVII, p. 24 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationcount02mundgoog#page/n39/mode/2up>.

A generation has perhaps been omitted in the pedigree, however, because a monumental inscription in St Augustine's church, Dodderhill, states that Francis Brace's alleged parents, William Brace and Margery Porter, died in 1543 and 1550, respectively, whereas, as noted earlier, Francis Brace's father, William Brace, made his will on 10 August 1549 while his father was still living. It thus appears that William Brace and Margery Porter may have been Francis Brace's grandparents, rather than his parents. For the inscription, see Stanton, George K., *Rambles and Researches Among Worcestershire Churches*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Company, 1884), p. 139 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=3rMHAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA139&lpg=PA139&dq=%22William+Brace%22+%22John+Brace%22&source=bl&ots=tfv5RfYzpq&sig=AHE8FiYro6Itfhi-9h-bd-VJbNY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj1yYCE3ejJAhVFwmMKHdmpCQAQ6AEIJAD#v=onepage&q=%22William%20Brace%22%20%22John%20Brace%22&f=false>

Here lyeth the body of William Brace, esquyre, and Margery, hys wyfe. Hee dyed Sept. 5, 1543; shee died 1550.

The will of Francis Brace's father-in-law, Robert Purslow, TNA PROB 11/74/162, is dated 12 February 1571, but was not proved until 1589. In it he mentions his son, Francis Purslow, and his wife, Barbara, and four married daughters: Eleanor Jennetts, Joyce Nashe, Mary Brace and Anne Wheeler. Mary is specifically mentioned in the will as the wife of Francis Brace. Robert Purslowe appoints his daughter-in-law, Barbara Purslow, and his son-in-law, John Wheeler, as his executors, which suggests a connection to the Sheldons of Beoley and to Stratford upon Avon. Jane Wheeler (d.1582), the daughter of

John Wheeler of Droitwich, married, as her third husband, Thomas Lewknor (d.1571), who thus became the stepfather of William Combe (d.1610), who in 1602 sold land to William Shakespeare of Stratford (see SBTRO ER 27/1). Jane Wheeler was the widow firstly of Baldwin Sheldon (buried 5 July 1548) of Broadway, Worcestershire, and secondly John Combe (d.1550) of Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire.

The Purslow pedigree states that Robert Purslow married Margaret or Margery Sparke, the daughter and heir of William Sparke, and by her had two sons and five daughters: John Purslow (buried 13 March 1594), who married firstly Constance Newport, the daughter of Richard Newport of Hunningham, Warwickshire, by whom he had issue, and secondly Dorothy Blount, the daughter of Sir George Blount of Kinlet, by whom he also had issue; Francis Purslow, who according to the pedigree died without issue; Joyce Purslow, who married William Nash of Hanbury, Worcestershire; Anne Purslow, who married John Wheeler of Droitwich; Eleanor Purslow, who married Humphrey Jennyns; Elizabeth Purslow, who married John Erpe of London; and Mary Purslow, who married firstly a husband surnamed Newport of Rushock, Worcestershire, and secondly, Francis Brace. See Rylands, John Paul, ed., *The Visitation of Shropshire Taken in the Year 1623, Part II*, (London: Harleian Society, 1889), Vol. XXIX, pp. 415-16 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationshrop01grazgoog#page/n142/mode/2up>.

The Purslow pedigree thus differs significantly from the will of Robert Purslow in that in his will Robert Purslow makes no mention of his eldest son and heir, John Purslow (buried 13 March 1594). The reason may have been controversy surrounding John Purslow's second marriage to Dorothy Blount. See *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, Vol. IV, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1883), p. 83 at:

https://books.google.ca/books?id=dD7QAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA83&lpg=RA1-PA83&dq=%22sir+George+Blount%22+%22Dorothy%22+%22Purslowe%22&source=bl&ots=06_DLHf-tS&sig=arg7rTbsKTtUctwiP9YC_woZDeM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwis6ZvwvejJAhUI12MKHQBdAqgQ6AEIjAC#v=onepage&q=%22sir%20George%20Blount%22%20%22Dorothy%22%20%22Purslowe%22&f=false.

For the will of Richard Newport (d.1565) of Hunningham, Warwickshire, father of John Purslow's first wife, Constance Newport, see TNA PROB 11/48/318. It appears that Mary Purslow's first husband was related to this branch of the Newport family. It would seem her first husband can be identified as Thomas Newport (d.1559) of Rushock, who made his will 8 November 1559, leaving all his goods 'to Mary, my wife, and to my children' (see TNA PROB 11/42B/695). He was the grandson of William Newport (d.1559), for whose will see TNA PROB 11/42B/459, and the son of George Newport (d.1558x60), for whose will see TNA PROB 11/43/258. As noted, after Thomas Newport's death, his widow, Mary (nee Purslow) Newport, married Francis Brace.

It is perhaps worth noting that William Newport (d.1559) appears to have been the uncle of Sir Richard Newport (d. 12 September 1570), owner of a copy of Hall's *Chronicle*,

formerly Loan 61 in the British Library, containing annotations thought to have been made by Shakespeare. See Keen, Alan and Roger Lubbock, *The Annotator*, (London: Putnam, 1954). The volume is now in the hands of a trustee, Lord Hesketh. See the will of Sir Richard Newport, TNA PROB 11/53/456.

It should also be noted that members of the Brace family also lived in Stratford upon Avon. See the will of Humphrey Brace, dated 10 May 1591, TNA PROB 11/79/180.

The foregoing suggests a web of connections between the Russells, Francis Brace, Stratford upon Avon, and the London parish of St Mary Aldermanbury, where Thomas Digges, Francis Brace, John Heminges and Henry Condell all had houses.

LM: T{estamentum} Thoma [sic?] Russell Ar{migeri}

[f. 335v] In the name of God, Amen. I, Thomas Russell of Rushock in the county of Worcester, esquire, being weak in body but of perfect mind and memory, praise be God, do ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following:

First I give and bequeath my soul to Almighty God, and my assured hope and trust is that by the merits of his dear Son, my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, my sins shall be forgiven and I shall rest with him in bliss;

And for my body, I commend it to the next parish church where it shall please God to take from me my breath, and my corps to be interred to the liking of my executor;

And as for all my temporal estate which God in his mercy hath bestowed upon me, I dispose and give the same in manner and form following:

First I give and bequeath to the poor of the parish of Rushock and Chaddesley twenty pound which I desire and appoint my executor herein to be named to distribute according as it shall seem good to him in his discretion, the tenor and purpose of this my will herein being duly observed;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my beloved cousin, John Whittington of Notgrove, ten pound;

Item, I give and bequeath to my well-beloved cousin, Thomas Copley the elder of Norton, ten pound, both which ten pounds I desire should be put into several rings which I shall desire them to wear in my remembrance;

Item, I give to Cecil[y] Warmestry, the wife of William Warmestry, esquire my pointed diamond ring;

Item, I give and bequeath to my well-beloved friends, my cousin John Stepkin and Judith, his wife, ten pound to be bestowed upon two several rings which I shall entreat them to wear in remembrance of me;

Item, I give and bequeath to my servant, John Phipps, five hundred pounds;

Item, I give to my servant, Mary Palmer, one hundred pounds;

Item, I give and bequeath to Margaret Strapy one hundred pounds;

[f. 336r] Item, I give to Margaret Baker twenty shillings;

Item, I give to Mary Tolly twenty shillings;

All and every which said legacies so given and bequeathed in manner and form as aforesaid I do order and appoint my executor to pay within the space of twelve months next after my decease;

And whereas I have entered into bond to pay unto my wife, Anne Russell, one hundred pounds a year after my decease during the term of her natural life, now if my said wife will not by my letters be entreated to remit the foresaid hundred pounds a year towards the payment of my debts and legacies, then my will [+is?] that the said hundred pound a year should be paid her according to the condition of the bond before named;

And as for the residue of my estate, as namely my land and the lease of my manor and farm of Rushock in the county of Worcester and all other leases to me belonging, and all my plate, jewels, linen, household stuff, corn, stock of cattle and all other my moveable goods whatsoever (my funeral expenses and all the said former legacies above-named and given and all my debts being discharged and satisfied), I give and bequeath unto my trusty and well-beloved friend, Francis Finch of Kempley in the county of Gloucester, esquire, whom I do ordain, make and constitute my sole and only executor of this my last will and testament, desiring him to accept of the said residue as a token of my love and recompense for the care, pains and travail which he is to undertake in performance of this my last will and testament;

And I do hereby revoke and disannul all former deeds of gift and all former wills and legacies whatsoever made or given by me;

And my further desire is that my goods may be praised by my cousin, Thomas Copley the elder, and Ambrose Cooke;

In witness of all which premises I have hereunto put my hand and seal this third day of October 1633. Thomas Russell.

Sealed, delivered and published in the presence of Francis Baber, Edward Trotman, Richard Whittington, Arnold Hall, notary public, John Duing.

Probatum fuit Testamentum suprascriptum apud London Coram venerabili viro magistro Will{el}imo Mericke Legum doctore Surrogato venerabilis viri Domini Henrici Marten militis Legum etiam doctoris Curie Prerogatiue Cantuariensis magistri Custodis sive Commissarij legitime constituti Quinto die mensis Maij Anno Domini Millesimo Sexcentesimo Tricesimo Quarto Iuramento ffrancisci ffinch ar{migeri} executoris in huiusmodi testamento nominati Cui Com{m}issa fuit administratio omnium et singulorum bonorum Iurium et Creditorum dict{i} defuncti De bene et fideliter administrando eadem Ad sancta Dei Evangelia Iurat{i}

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before the worshipful Master William Merrick, Doctor of the Laws, Surrogate of the worshipful Sir Henry Marten, knight, also Doctor of the Laws, lawfully constituted Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the fifth day of May in the year of the Lord the thousand six hundred thirty-fourth by the oath of Francis Finch, esquire, executor named in the same testament, to whom administration was granted of all and singular the goods, rights and credits of the said deceased, sworn on the Holy Gospels to well and faithfully administer the same.]