

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 12 August 1556 and proved 21 October 1556, of Sir John Russell (1493/4 – 15 August 1556) of Strensham, grandfather of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. For the will of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), see TNA PROB 11/165/424.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The testator was the son of Robert Russell (d. 28 June 1502) and Elizabeth Baynham, the daughter of Thomas Baynham of Clearwell, Gloucestershire, and sister of Sir Alexander Baynham (d. 25 September 1524) of Westbury-on-Severn, Gloucestershire. For the will of Sir Alexander Baynham, see TNA PROB 11/21/469 and TNA PROB 11/22/256.

For earlier generations of the Russell family, see the will of the testator's father, Robert Russell (d. 28 June 1502), TNA PROB 11/13/373.

MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

The testator married Edith Unton, the daughter of Sir Thomas Unton of Wadley, Berkshire, by whom he was the father of one son:

* **Sir Thomas Russell** (c.1520 - 9 April 1574) of Strensham, for whom see his will, TNA PROB 11/57/83, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/russell-sir-thomas-1520-74>

Sir Thomas Russell married firstly Frances Cholmley, the daughter and coheir of Sir Roger Cholmley (c.1485-1565). In his will, Sir Roger Cholmley appointed as one of his executors Sir William Cordell (d.1581), Master of the Rolls, who was later one of the five trustees appointed by Oxford in an indenture of 30 January 1575 prior to his departure on his continental tour. See ERO D/DRg2/25. For the will of Sir Roger Cholmley, see TNA PROB 11/48/205. For the will of Sir William Cordell, see TNA PROB 11/63/590.

By Frances Cholmley, Sir Thomas Russell was the father of a son and a daughter:

-**Sir John Russell** (1552-1593), who in May 1574 married Elizabeth Sheldon, the daughter of Ralph Sheldon of Beoley. See Hotson, Leslie, *I, William Shakespeare, Do Appoint Thomas Russell, Esquire* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 29. She was the sister of Katherine Sheldon (d.1633), the wife of Oxford's brother-in-law, Francis Trentham (d.1626). For the will of Ralph Sheldon, see TNA PROB 11/121/345. For the will, dated 24 April 1587 and proved 31 July 1598, of Sir John Russell (1552-1593), see TNA PROB 11/92/96.

-Mary Russell (d. December 1576), who married Richard Lygon (d.1584), esquire, the son of William Lygon (d. 29 September 1567), esquire, of Madresfield, Worcestershire, and Eleanor Dennis, the daughter of Sir William Dennis of Dirham, Gloucestershire, by his first wife, Anne Berkeley, the daughter of Sir Maurice Berkeley. For the will of William Lygon, see TNA PROB 11/50/246. For the will of Richard Lygon of Madresfield, see TNA PROB 11/67/499. See also Richardson, Douglas, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, 2nd ed., 2011, Vol. III, p. 23.

Sir Thomas Russell married secondly Margaret Lygon (d.1617), the daughter of William Lygon (d. 29 September 1567) by Eleanor Dennis, the daughter of Sir William Dennis of Dirham, Gloucestershire, by whom he was the father of one son:

-Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. See Richardson, *supra*, Vol. III, p. 23.

For the will of Margaret (nee Lygon) Russell Berkeley (d.1617), see TNA PROB 11/129/781.

RM: Test{amentu}m Ioh{ann}is Russell Milit{is}

In the name of God, Amen. The 12th day of August in the year of Our Lord God a thousand five hundred fifty and six, I, John Russell of Strensham in the county of Worcester, being (thanks be given to Almighty God) of whole mind and perfect memory, do make this my last will and testament in manner and form as after followeth:

First, I give and bequeath my soul to Almighty God;

And my body to be buried in the church of Strensham in such place as shall be thought good by my son, Sir Thomas Russell, knight, and other of my friends, with all such funerals, obsequies and other rites of Holy Church to be done as doth appertain, willing also that my said son, within convenient time after my decease, do cause a seemly tomb of marble to be made for me and Dame Edith, my well-beloved wife, with memorial thereon to be engraved of our sepultures and of our arms;

And as concerning my lands, tenements, rents, reversions, services and other hereditaments, whatsoever they be, and all my leases, offices, fees, annuities, extents of statutes, obligations, recognizances, debts, duties, goods and chattels movables and [f. 115r] unmovables, I give them wholly to my said son, Sir Thomas Russell, and his heirs, executors and assigns forever to th' use of the said Sir Thomas Russell and his heirs forever;

And forasmuch as through the permission of Almighty God my said dearly-beloved wife hath been and yet is visited with such infirmity as she is not well able to govern herself,

neither such things necessary as appertaineth to her sustentation in this world, my will is that the said Sir Thomas Russell, natural son of me, the said Sir John Russell, and the said Dame Edith, my wife, in whom I put my special trust, shall have the governance of my said wife, his mother, and of all such jointure or dower which God and the laws of this realm hath appointed unto her for her finding, trusting that he as a faithful and natural son shall see the same so employed and bestowed as shall stand with the pleasure of God;

Nevertheless, if it shall please God to restore my said wife to such perfect health and perfectness as she shall be well able to govern herself and goods or chattels to the pleasure of God and the benefit of herself, then I will she shall have of my said goods th' use of all my plate and household stuff during her natural life, to be used within my house at Strensham only;

And after her decease the same wholly to remain to my said son, Sir Thomas Russell, forever;

And further where I have of the gift of Almighty God divers honest and true servants for whom I would be glad to do if it might please God to spare me time, I do now leave them as God hath given them me unto my said son, willing him to be good unto them and to help them as he may conveniently;

Which said Sir Thomas Russell, my son, I do ordain, make and constitute my whole and sole executor of this my said last will and testament;

In witness whereof to this my said present last will and testament I have put my seal the day & year above-written;

Witnesses to these presents: Richard Smythe, Richard Lawley, Edward Russell, Richard Butler, Thomas Brookes, Rowland Lamkester.

Probatum fuit testamentu{m} coram mag{ist}ro Will{el}mo Cooke legum doctor{e} Curie prerogative Reuerendissimi in xpo patris et d{omi}ni n{ost}ri d{omi}ni Reginaldi Cantuar{iensis} Archie{pisco}pi Custode siue Comissario xxjo die Mensis Octobris Anno d{omi}ni Mill{es}imo quingentesimo quinquagesimo sexto Iuramento ffrancisci Harward no{ta}rij pu{bli}ci procuratoris Thome Russell milit{is} Executoris in h{uius}mo{d}i testamento no{m}i{n}at{i} Ac approbatu{m} et insinuat{m} et Comissa fuit admi{ni}strac{i}o o{mn}i{u}m bonoru{m} &c d{i}c{t}i defunct{i} pefat{o} ex{ecutori} de bene et fidel{ite}r admi{ni}strand{o} eadem Ac de pleno In{uenta}rio &c exhibend{o} Ad s{an}c{t}a dei Eu{a}ngelia in debita Iur{is} forma Iurat{i}

[=The testament was proved before Master William Cooke, Doctor of the Laws, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of the Most Reverend Father in Christ and Lord, our Lord Reginald, Archbishop of Canterbury, on the 21st day of the month of October in

the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred fifty-sixth by the oath of Francis Harward, notary public, proctor of Thomas Russell, knight, executor named in the same testament, and probated and entered, and administration was granted of all the goods etc. of the said deceased to the forenamed executor, sworn on the Holy Gospels in due form of law to administer the same, and to exhibit a full inventory etc.]