

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will, dated 12 February 1571 and proved 22 July 1589, of Robert Purslow (buried 31 December 1571), whose son-in-law, Francis Brace, was involved in property transactions with Sir Thomas Russell (d.1577), father of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, and courted Anne Digges, whom Thomas Russell later married and from whom he obtained his lease of Rushock.

The testator's son-in-law, Francis Brace, also served in Parliament with William Combe of Stratford upon Avon, who in 1602 sold land to Shakespeare.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

For the testator's family background, see the Purslow pedigree in Grazebrook, George and John Paul Rylands, eds., *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>

For the Purslow family, see also Purton, R.C., 'Some Account of Sidbury', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 4th Series, Vol. III, (Shrewsbury: Adnitt and Naunton, 1913), pp. 109-120 at p. 111:

<https://archive.org/details/transactionsofsh43shro/page/n281>

See also *The Register of Sidbury, 1560-1812*, Shropshire Parish Register Society at:

<http://www.melocki.org.uk/salop/Sidbury.html>

MARRIAGE AND ISSUE

The testator married Margery Sparke, the daughter and coheir of William Sparke (d.1510) of East Greenwich, Kent, and sister of Mary Sparke (d.1564), who married firstly Roger Legh (d.1532), esquire, of Ridge, Cheshire, son of Roger Legh (d. 4 November 1506) and Elizabeth Sutton (d. 5 November 1489), and secondly Sir Edmund Savage, son of Sir John Savage (d. 22 November 1495) and Katherine Stanley. See Burke, John and John Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain & Ireland*, Vol. I, (London: Henry Colburn, 1847), p. 709 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=YdIKAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA709>

See also Beamont, William, *An Account of the Ancient town of Frodsham in Cheshire*, (Warrington: Percival Pearse, 1881), p. 174 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=YfYVAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA174>

See also:

<http://www.prathergenealogy.com/TNG/getperson.php?personID=I9600&tree=120k>

See also TNA C 1/355/48, a Chancery suit brought in the period 1504-1515 by Mary and Margery Sparke, daughters and heirs of William Sparke, gentleman; TNA C 1/896/7, a Chancery suit brought during the period 1533-1538 by Edmund Savage, esquire, and Mary, his wife, daughter and heir of William Sparke; and TNA C 1/889/5-7, a Chancery suit brought during the period 1533-1538 by Edmund Savage, esquire, and Mary, his wife, daughter and heir of William Sparke.

For the will of William Sparke, see TNA PROB 11/16/752. See also Egan, Michael, *Wricklemarsh Revisited*, Kent Archaeological Society, Vol. 110, 1992, pp. 161-76 at:

<https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/arch-cant/vol/110/wricklemarsh-revisited>

By Margery Sparke, the testator is said to have had three sons and five daughters:

* **Nicholas Purslow** (d. 8 August 1563), eldest son, who married Margaret Williams, the daughter of Thomas Williams of Willaston, Shropshire, but died without issue. After the death of Nicholas Purslow, Margaret Williams married secondly Thomas Spencer of Whitton, Shropshire. See the Williams pedigree in Grazebrook, *supra*, p. 507 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationshrop01grazgoog#page/n234/mode/2up>

See also the pedigree of Spencer of Whitton in Grazebrook, *supra*, p. 442 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationshrop01grazgoog#page/n170/mode/2up>

See also the inquisition post mortem taken after the death of Nicholas Purslow, TNA C142/142/79, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/purslow-%28purselaw%29-nicholas-1533-63>

* **John Purslow** (buried 13 March 1594). He is mentioned in the Purslow pedigree, but is not mentioned in the will below. He married firstly, on 6 May 1566, Constance Newport (buried 27 January 1576), the daughter of Richard Newport (d.1565) of Hunningham, Warwickshire. See the will of Richard Newport, TNA PROB 11/48/318, and *Register of Sidbury*, *supra*. John Purslow and Constance Newport were the grandparents of Richard Purslow, who married Anne Huband, the daughter of William Huband of Ipsley. For the Huband family, see:

<http://www.geocities.ws/athens/oracle/6060/ipsley.html>

John Purslow married secondly, on 14 February 1576, Dorothy Blount, the daughter of Sir George Blount (d. 20 July 1581) of Kinlet, brother of Henry VIII's mistress, Elizabeth Blount. For the controversy surrounding his 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>

* **Francis Purslow**, who married a wife named Barbara, who was living in 1589 when the testator's will was proved. According to the will below, they had two sons, John and William Purslow.

* **Joyce Purslow**, who on 14 April 1561 married William Nashe of Hanbury, Worcestershire. See *Register of Sidbury, supra*.

* **Anne Purslow**, who on 10 June 1567 married John Wheeler (living 1589) of Droitwich. See *Register of Sidbury, supra*.

John Wheeler was the son of Gilbert Wheeler (d.1580?) of Great Rollright, Oxfordshire, and Elizabeth Wall, the daughter of George Wall of Droitwich. See the will of Gilbert Wheeler, TNA PROB 11/63/15.

John Wheeler may have been the nephew of Jane Wheeler (d.1582), who married firstly Baldwin Sheldon (buried 5 July 1548) of Broadway, Worcestershire, by whom she was the mother of Anthony Sheldon, and the grandmother of William Sheldon (buried 3 September 1626) of Broadway, who married Cecily Brace (d.1613), daughter of Francis Brace (d.1599). Baldwin Sheldon was the second son of Ralph Sheldon (d. 21 December 1546) of Abberton, Worcestershire. For the will of Ralph Sheldon of Abberton, see TNA PROB 11/31/403. For the will of Baldwin Sheldon, proved 31 January 1549, see TNA PROB 11/32/329.

Jane Wheeler (d.1582) married secondly John Combe (d.1550) of Stratford upon Avon, by whom she was the mother of William Combe (buried 5 October 1610), who in 1602 sold land to William Shakespeare of Stratford (see SBTRO ER 27/1); and thirdly Thomas Lewknor (d.1571). See the Wheeler pedigree in Butler, A.T., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1634*, (London: J. Whitehead and Son, Limited, 1938), Vol. XC, p. 101 at:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039595650&view=1up&seq=117>

See also the Sheldon pedigree in Butler, *supra*, p. 91:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039595650&view=1up&seq=107>

See also:

<http://earlywelshleigh.blogspot.com/2017/03/sheldon-family-history.html>

The 1569 Herald's Visitation of Worcestershire shows that BALDWIN's wife JANE was the daughter of JOHN WHEELER of Droitwich, a town north of Worcester. She was probably the sister of the Gilbert WHEELER, gent, who witnessed the will of BALDWIN's father. In 1543, Gilbert WHEELER had leased the 1-acre Vine Close, part of the property in Droitwich that had belonged to the Austin Friars, and when he made his will in 1580 in Great Rollright to the south east of Weston, he bequeathed to his elder son John 'a lease for certain 'Bullarie' [boilery] of salt water in Droitwich' plus other leases. The will was proved at the PCC (2 Darcy) by his widow on 10 January 1580/1.

* **Eleanor Purslow**, who married Humphrey Jennetts (1538-1617) of Norgrove in the parish of Feckenham, Worcestershire. See his will, proved 4 February 1617, TNA PROB 11/129/112; *Register of Sidbury, supra*; and:

<https://www.jennettone-namestudy.com/>

See also:

'Parishes: Feckenham', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3* (London, 1913), pp. 111-120. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp111-120> [accessed 11 December 2019]

* **Elizabeth Purslow**, who is said to have married John Erpe of London. See Purton, *supra*, p. 112. She is not mentioned in the will below.

* **Mary Purslow**, who married firstly Thomas Newport (d.1559) of Rushock, Worcestershire, who made his will 8 November 1559, TNA PROB 11/42B/695, leaving all his goods 'to Mary, my wife, and to my children'. 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.

According to two Chancery suits, Mary Purslow had two daughters by Thomas Newport:

-Eleanor Newport, who married Philip Brace (d.1598), brother of Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599). See:

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Brace-469>

Their son, John Brace, married Cecily Sandys, the daughter of Sir Samuel Sandys of Ombersley, Worcestershire. See the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/brace-john-1578-1630>

c.1578, 1st s. of Philip Brace of Dodderhill, and Eleanor, da. and h. of one Newport. 1 educ. Exeter Coll., Oxf., 1594, aged 16.2 m. by 1614, 3 Cecily, da. of Sir Samuel Sandys of Ombersley, Worcs., 2s., 1da. 4 suc. fa. 1598; 5 uncle Francis Brace† 1599. 6 d. 12 Aug. 1630. 7*

-Alice Newport.

See a Chancery suit dating from 1558-1579, TNA C 3/131/42, brought by Mary Newport against Robert Newport on behalf of Eleanor Newport and Alice Newport.

See also a decree dated 24 November 1560 in a Chancery suit, TNA C 78/20/16, brought by Eleanor Newport and Alice Newport against Robert Newport, gentleman, concerning salt fats and lands in Droitwich, Rushock and Woodcote, Worcestershire, 'late of William Newport of Rushock, deceased'.

Mary Purslow married secondly, on 23 November 1562, Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599). See *Register of Sidbury, supra*. According to the Bracey pedigree, he was the son of William Brace of Doverdale and Margery Porter, daughter and coheir of William Porter. See 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>

For the will of Francis Brace's father, William Brace, see TNA PROB 11/33/244. For the Brace family, see also:

'Parishes: Doverdale', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3* (London, 1913), pp. 69-71. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp69-71> [accessed 12 December 2019].

By Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599), Mary Purslow had a son and three daughters:

-Thomas Brace, who in 1588 married Frances Freer, the daughter of William Freer of Oxford, but predeceased his father, leaving no male issue.

-Cecily Brace (d.1613), who married William Sheldon (buried 3 September 1626) of Broadway (see above). See also:

<http://earlywelshleigh.blogspot.com/2017/03/sheldon-family-history.html>

[William Sheldon] married Cicely the daughter of Francis Brace esquire of Doverdale near Droitwich, and they had at least 14 children. Cicely died in 1613, and Barnard informs us (p.104) that William moved to Haselor, a small village near Temple Grafton where his son Brace and his younger brother Baldwin lived, leaving his eldest son William to manage the Broadway estate. He was buried in Broadway on 3 September 1626, aged 62.

See also the Sheldon pedigree in Butler, A.T., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1634*, (London: J. Whitehead and Son, Limited, 1938), Vol. XC, p. 91:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039595650&view=1up&seq=107>

-Mary Brace.

-Margery Brace.

FRANCIS BRACE'S CONNECTIONS TO WILLIAM COMBE AND THOMAS RUSSELL

Francis Brace served in Parliament in 1588 with William Combe (buried 5 October 1610) of Stratford upon Avon, whose mother was Jane Wheeler (see above). See Williams, W.R., *The Parliamentary History of the County of Worcester*, (Hereford: Jakeman and Carver, 1897), p. 118:

<https://archive.org/stream/cu31924030495141#page/n133/mode/2up/>

See also the will of William Combe, TNA PROB 11/117/573, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.histparl.ac.uk/volume/1558-1603/member/combe-william-1551-1610>

This account mentions another recusant, Jane Sheldon (of the Catholic county family), to whom he was allied by the 'marriage of their parents'. The Sheldons owned salt-pans at Droitwich, for which borough Combe was returned to the Parliament of 1589. Her eldest son married the daughter of another Droitwich MP, Francis Brace.

Both the History of Parliament entry and Chambers erroneously identify Jane (nee Wheeler) Sheldon Combe Lewknor (d.1582), mother of William Combe, as the recusant Jane Sheldon. See Chambers, E.K., *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), Vol. II, p. 133 at:

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.182554/page/n145>

However since the account referenced by the History of Parliament and by Chambers dates from 1595, it cannot refer to Jane (nee Wheeler) Sheldon Combe Lewknor (d.1582), the mother of William Combe.

Hotson states that Francis Brace had yet another connection with Stratford upon Avon in that he owned a house there in 1592. Unfortunately, Hotson does not provide a source for the statement. It should be noted in passing that in the same passage Hotson erroneously states that Francis Brace was the son of *Philip* Brace (d.1598), whereas Francis and Philip

were brothers, and the sons of the testator, William Brace. See Hotson, Leslie, *I, William Shakespeare*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 112:

An important neighbour of Heminges's in Aldermanbury [in London] . . . was not only likewise a Worcestershire man, but the owner in 1592 of a house in Stratford-on-Avon. This was Francis Brace, esquire, lord of the manor of Rushock, near Heminges's native Droitwich, and an old friend of the Russell family of Strensham. Sir Thomas Russell had appointed Francis Brace's father [sic] Philip trustee of the manor of Broad Campden, afterward left to his son, Shakespeare's Russell.

In their youth, Francis Brace and his brother, Philip, may have been in the service of Sir Thomas Russell (d.1577) of Strensham. Both Francis Brace and his then wife, Mary Purslow, as well as his brother, Philip Brace, were involved in property transactions with Sir Thomas Russell (d.1577) in the years 1569-1572, as evidenced in the inquisition post mortem taken after the death of Thomas Russell's eldest son, Sir John Russell (1552-1593), half brother of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon. On 27 May 1573 Francis Brace was named as a trustee in an indenture setting out the lands which were to be the jointure of Elizabeth Sheldon on her marriage to Sir John Russell. On 3 April 1574 Francis Brace witnessed Sir Thomas Russell's will, TNA PROB 11/57/83. See Fry, Edward Alexander, ed., *Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem*, Part III, (London: London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1908), pp. 210-19 at:

<https://archive.org/details/abstractsinquis00changoog/page/n267>

Shortly after Sir Thomas Russell's death, Francis Brace was granted licence to travel on the continent at the same time as Oxford (see TNA E 157/1, f. 1). Sir John Russell (1552-1593) was also travelling on the continent at about the same time. As 'John Russell of Worcestershire', he was granted licence to travel on 11 February 1576. Sir John Russell was brought up in the household of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford, where he is said to have 'formed the closest ties' with his cousin, William Russell (c.1553-1613), the Earl of Bedford's youngest son, who arrived in Paris at the end of March 1576 in Oxford's company. See Hotson, *supra*, pp. 21-2. As noted above, Sir John Russell married Elizabeth Sheldon, whose sister, Katherine Sheldon (d.1633), married Oxford's brother-in-law, Francis Trentham (d.1626). For the will of Sir John Russell of Strensham, see TNA PROB 11/92/96.

For the licences to travel granted to Oxford, Francis Brace, and members of the Russell family, see TNA E 157/1, f. 1:

William Russell, esquire, 3 years, January 1574 [=1575]

The Earl of Oxford, one year, January 1574 [=1575]

Francis Brace of Russhock in comitatu Worcester for one year with one servant, 22nd maij 1575

John Russell of Worcestershire for one year, 11th February 1575 [=1576]

The Earl of Oxford for one year after th' expiration of his former licence, 2nd martij 1575 [=1576]

After the death of Lord Burghley, Oxford's two daughters were placed in the care of the 2nd Earl of Bedford's widow, Bridget (nee Hussey) Morison Manners Russell (1526-1601). See her will, TNA PROB 11/97/10.

For Francis Brace's courtship, shortly before his death, of the widowed Anne Digges, whom Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, later married, see the will of Thomas Russell, TNA PROB 11/165/424.

For Francis Brace, see also the inquisitions post mortem taken after his death, TNA C142/325/186 and TNA C 142/350/51, and Grazebrook, H. Sydney, *The Heraldry of Worcestershire*, (London: John Russell Smith, 1873), Vol. I, p. 74 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=8lMBAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA74>

OTHER PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE WILL

For the testator's overseer, Edward Corbet (d.1590) of Glazeley, see his will, proved 14 May 1590, TNA PROB 11/75/299, and the pedigree of Corbet of Leigh in Grazebrook, George and John Paul Rylands, eds., *The Visitation of Shropshire*, Part I, (London: Harleian Society, 1889), Vol. XXVIII, p. 142 at:

<https://archive.org/details/visitationshrop00britgoog/page/n196>

Edward Corbet married Eleanor Wall, one of the four daughters of George Wall, and was thus the brother-in-law of Gilbert Wheeler (d.1580?), who married Elizabeth Wall (see above). See also:

'Parishes: Dodderhill', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3* (London, 1913), pp. 58-69. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp58-69> [accessed 15 December 2019]

George Wall was succeeded by a son George, who died without issue before 1564, when the manor passed to his four sisters. (fn. 125) One of them, Eleanor wife of Edward Corbett, (fn. 126) afterwards married Thomas Wylde, who seems to have acquired the whole manor. (fn. 127) It passed from him to his son George Wylde, serjeant-at-law, (fn. 128)

For the testator's overseer, Sir George Blount (d. 20 July 1581) of Kinlet, see his will, proved 31 July 1581, TNA PROB 11/63/409, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/blount-sir-george-151213-81>

For the inquisitions post mortem taken after the testator's death, see TNA C 142/162/176 and TNA E 150/881/1.

RM: T{estamentum} Roberti Purslowe

In dei nomine amen. The twelfth day of February in the year of Our Lord God a thousand five hundred seventy and in the thirteen year of the reign of our most dread Sovereign Lady Elizabeth by the grace of God of England, France and Ireland Queen, Defendress of the Faith etc., I, Robert Purslow of Sidbury in the county of Salop [=Shropshire], esquire, calling to mind the saying that is written, *Statutum est omnibus hominibus semel mori* [=It is appointed unto men once to die], and I being whole in body and of good and perfect remembrance, thanks be to God, do ordain and make my last will and testament in writing in manner and form following:

First I give and bequeath my soul into the hands of Almighty God, my Maker, trusting to be saved by the death and bloodshedding of Christ Jesus, my Redeemer, and no otherways, and my body to be buried in the parish church of Sidbury;

Item, I give to the cathedral church of Hereford two shilling six pence;

Item, I give to the church of Sidbury three shillings four pence for the reparations thereof;

Item, I give to the church of Stotherton [=Stottesdon?] three shillings four pence to the reparations thereof;

Item, I give to Francis Brace and to his wife, my daughter, forty pounds which he oweth me;

Item, I give to Eleanor Jennetts, my daughter, and to her children ten pounds;

Item, I give to Joyce Nashe, my daughter, and to her children thirty pounds;

Item, where I have a stock of kine at the marsh, my will and mind is that the said kine be equally divided between my daughters, Eleanor Jennetts, Joyce Nashe, Mary Brace and Anne Wheeler;

I give to Anne Smithe forty shillings;

Item, I give to John Purslow, son of Francis Purslow, thirteen pounds thirteen shillings four pence;

Item, I give to William Purslow, son of Francis Purslow, my son, thirteen pounds thirteen shillings four pence;

Item, I give to Elizabeth Gerye, my maid, six pounds six shillings eight pence besides the twenty pounds that she hath received of William Myller;

Item, I give to a preacher to preach at my burial ten shillings;

The rest of my goods movables in this will not given nor bequeathed, my funeral expenses being discharged, I give to Barbara Purslow, wife to Francis Purslow, my son, in consideration that she is sure of nothing to keep her and her children, and to John Wheeler, my son-in-law, whom I ordain and make my [f. 99r] executors of this my will and testament, which will I have read, perused, sealed and set my hand unto the day and year above-written in the presence of Francis Purslow, John Wyne alias Hankin of Overton, Thomas Walker, servant to John Smith of Walton, with others;

And I appoint overseers of this my will Sir George Blount, knight, and Edward Corbet of Glaseby [=Glazeley], and either of them to have for his pains forty shillings.

Probatum fuit h{uius}mo{d}i testamentum apud London coram m{agist}ro Ioh{ann}e Hone Legum doctore Surrogato venerabilis viri m{agist}ri Will{el}mi Drury Legum etiam doctoris Curie Prerogatiue Cant{uariensis} Com{m}issarij &c vicesimo secundo die mens{is} Iulij Anno d{omi}ni mill{es}imo quingentesimo octogesimo nono iuramento Thome Iles notarij publici procuratoris Ioh{ann}is Wheler executoris in h{uius}mo{d}i testamento nominat{i} Cui com{m}issa fuit administratio bonorum iurium et creditorum eiusdem def{uncti} de bene et fidel{ite}r administrand{o} &c ad s{an}c{t}a dei evangelia iurat{i} Reservata potestate similem com{m}issionem faciend{i} Barbarie Purslowe executrici etiam in h{uius}mo{d}i testamento nominat{e} cum venerit eand{em} petitur{e} &c

[=The same testament was proved at London before Master John Hone, Doctor of the Laws, Surrogate of the worshipful Master William Drury, also Doctor of the Laws, Commissary etc. of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the twenty-second day of the month of July in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred eighty-ninth by the oath of Thomas Iles, notary public, proctor of John Wheeler, executor 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., with power reserved for a similar grant to be made to Barbara Purslow, executrix also named in the same testament, when she shall have come to petition the same etc.]