

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Count of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 3 April 1589 and proved 14 May 1590, of Denzel Holles (c.1538-1590), whose wife, Eleanor (nee Sheffield), was Oxford's first cousin, the daughter of the 16th Earl's sister, Anne de Vere (d.1572) and her husband, Edmund, 1st Baron Sheffield (1521-1549). For the will of Edmund, 1st Baron Sheffield (1521-1549), in which he mentions his son, John (c.1538-1568), 2nd Baron Sheffield, and 'my two daughters, Eleanor and Frances', see TNA PROB 11/33, ff. 48-9.

It is said that the testator's wife, Eleanor Sheffield, discovered a letter which indicated that her sister-in-law, Douglas Sheffield (1542/3-1608), was having an affair with the Earl of Leicester. In the autumn of 1560 Oxford's first cousin, John (c.1538-1568), 2nd Baron Sheffield, had married Douglas Howard (1542/3-1608), the daughter of William, 1st Lord Howard of Effingham (c.1510-1573). Shortly after her husband's death on 10 December 1568, Douglas Sheffield embarked upon a liaison with the Earl of Leicester. She later claimed that a secret marriage occurred about 1571 and, although the evidence for this union is inconclusive, she did bear Leicester a son. The anonymous author of *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584), charges Leicester with the murder of Oxford's first cousin, John (c.1538-1568), 2nd Baron Sheffield:

*Long after this, [Leicester] fell in love with the Lady Sheffield, whom I signified before, & then also had he the same fortune to have her husband die quickly with an extreme rheum in his head (as it was given out), but as other say of an artificial catarrh that stopped his breath.*

The testator's eldest son and heir, Sir John Holles (d.1637), 1st Earl of Clare, matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1579, entered Gray's Inn in 1583, and married Anne Stanhope in 1591. For the will of his mother-in-law, Lady Margaret (nee Port) Stanhope (d.1613), widow of Sir Thomas Stanhope (d.1596) of Shelford, in which he, his wife and children are the principal beneficiaries, see TNA PROB 11/121, ff. 214-15. By his marriage to Anne Stanhope, Sir John Holles (d.1637) became the brother-in-law of Katherine (nee Trentham) Stanhope (d.1621?), the wife of Sir John Stanhope (d.1611) of Shelford. Katherine (nee Trentham) Stanhope (d.1621?) was the sister of Oxford's second wife, Elizabeth Trentham (d.1613). For the will of Sir John Stanhope (d.1611), see TNA PROB 11/117, f. 356. For the will of Katherine (nee Trentham) Stanhope (d.1621?), see TNA PROB 11/137, ff. 434-6. For an extract from the will of Sir John Holles (d.1637), see DD/4P/39/2 in the Nottinghamshire Archives. See also the will of Francis Norris (1579-1622), Earl of Berkshire, DD/4P/41/42 in the Nottinghamshire Archives. Francis Norris married Oxford's daughter, Bridget de Vere (1584-1631). His will contains a bequest of £500 to his friend, Sir John Holles.

The testator's grandson, Sir John Holles (1595-1666), 2nd Earl of Clare, on 24 September 1626 married Elizabeth Vere (d.1683), the daughter of Oxford's first cousin, Sir Horace Vere (1565-1635), Baron of Tilbury.

One of the testator's overseers, Peregrine Bertie (1555-1601), Lord Willoughby d' Eresby, was Oxford's brother-in-law. The testator's other overseer, Edmund Sheffield (1565-1646), 1st Earl of Mulgrave, was the grandson of Oxford's first cousin, Anne de Vere (d.1572).

The Welbeck portrait of Oxford appears to have descended through the Holles family.

RM: T{estamentum} Densellj Hollis

In the name of God, Amen. I, Denzel Holles of Irby within the county of Lincoln, esquire, do make my last will and testament in manner and form following:

First I give and bequeath my sinful soul into the merciful hands of my Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, by whom I most faithfully believe to receive that same again at the joyful resurrection from all sin purged and cleansed through the precious blood of my Redeemer;

My body I give to the earth from whence it came, and there to be buried at the discretion of my executors;

Item, I do give to my younger sons, George Holles and Thomas Holles, for term of their lives, to every of them annuities of thirteen pound six shillings eight pence by year, to be paid to every of them at two times of the year, viz., at the feast of Philip and Jacob and Saint Martin in winter by even portions nomine poenae out of my manor of Irby, and if either of them do die or come to preferment of living worth at the least by year for term of life or otherwise fifty pounds, that then the annuity of thirteen pound six shillings eight pence to cease and to remain to the other brother for and during his natural life;

Also I do by this my will give to every of my younger sons the sum of three hundred pounds of lawful money of England, to be paid to them after that their sisters' portions be paid and that they accomplish the age of one and twenty years, the which money I do wish that they, with the advice of mine executors, do employ for their best profit either by putting of it forth or by buying of something that may be to their best commodity;

Also I do give and bequeath unto my three daughters, viz., Anne Holles, Jane Holles and Gertrude Holles, to every of them annuities of ten pounds by year apiece, to be paid at the feast of Philip and Jacob and Saint Martin in winter by even portions out of the profits rising and growing out of my manor and demesnes of Irby for and to their finding and maintenance until they be married and their portions paid, and if any of them do depart this life before marriage or be married, then the annuity of ten pounds of her so departed or married to remain unto them that be living and unmarried equally to be divided;

Item, I also give to my aforesaid daughters and to every of them for their preferment of marriage the sum of one thousand marks of lawful money of England apiece, to be paid to every of them as they be of years, beginning with the eldest, and at their marriage or within one year after the day of her marriage at the farthest, so as she or they marry well or marry by the advice of my supervisors and executors or any two of them, which if any of them do not, then she so not doing to have for her portion but four hundred pounds, to be paid to her within one year of the said marriage, and if any of them do depart this life before marriage had, then her portion of a thousand marks to be divided amongst the rest that be unmarried equally, all which said money shall be paid by my executors as shall be hereafter declared;

Item, I give to old Elizabeth Biccliffe and to old Wilkinson's wife, to every of them yearly during their lives thirteen shillings four pence apiece;

Item, I give to every one of my household servants over and besides their wages twenty shillings apiece that be my serving-men, and to Alice Saunders twenty shillings, and to every other of my household servants and retainers ten shillings apiece besides their wages due, the which I will my executors to pay to every of them duly;

Item, I give to my brother, Gervase, a case of my best pistols, to my brother Stanley the booked called *Guerdon*, to my very friend, Tristram Tyrwhit, esquire, a cast of good pistols, to George Fawnt, Francis Hill, Christopher Harrington and Thomas Fowler, to every of them a ring of gold to the value of thirteen shillings four pence with a death-head, and to Leonard Hill of Market Rason ten shillings;

Item, I give to my son-in-law, Francis Cooke, esquire, a hoop ring of gold weighing twenty shillings and both my chronicle books, and to my daughter, his wife, my bible and a hoop ring of gold weighing twenty shillings;

Item, I give to my son, John, and to his heirs forever all my purchased lands in Barnabie;

Item, I further give to him all my armour and furniture for the war, and all my books that are not given and bequeathed already;

Item, I give to all the poor people that dwell in the houses of charity the which I builded for them at Irby, to every one of them ten shillings apiece;

Item, I give to all my father his household servants not yet named ten pounds, to be distributed amongst them at my executors' discretions;

Item, for the paying and performing of all these abovesaid annuities, legacies and bequests, as also for the paying and discharging of all my debts, my will and mind is that my executors shall sell to the best all my lands in Cornwall, which money I would should be put forth, and the gain that thereof should come to go towards the discharging of this my will, the which will be at the least two hundred pounds by year, besides that there will be other two hundred pound by year out of the rents and profits of the manor of Irby

and the rest of my lands in Lincolnshire, all which sum of four hundred pounds by year my will is shall go on for the performances of this my will and the payments of my debts, after all which discharged and paid, then the same to remain to my son, John, and to purchase so much land at the least as shall be sold by my executors in Cornwall;

Item, I require and charge mine executors to occupy and keep the manor and demesnes of Irby according to a note that I have made for the same, the which is annexed to this my will, and so shall it be for the most profit;

Also I require and will that my tenants be well used and dealt with and no otherwise than I have dealt and used them;

And also that that house the which I have builded for the relief of the poor in Irby be maintained and kept according as I have left it, and to the best behoof of the poor there dwelling always;

And to make an end of this my last will, I earnestly charge and require in the bowels of Our Saviour Jesus Christ my executors to see and carefully to provide that my children be well brought up in learning and virtue, and that great care be had that my daughters be well matched in good marriages, and my sons well kept to learning;

And that this my will may be the better performed according to my good meaning, I most humbly desire the right honourable and my very good Lords, the Lord Peregrine Willoughby and the Lord Edmund Sheffield, with my good and natural father, Sir William Holles, knight, to take the pains to see it done as the supervisors of this my will;

The executors of this my will I constitute and make my well-beloved son, John Holles, and Francis Cooke, esquire, my son-in-law, whom I desire in the name of Jesus Christ to perform this my will in all manner of legacies, gifts and bequests, and all my debts duly paid;

Item, I give to every one of my supervisors a gilt bowl of the value of six pound thirteen shillings four pence apiece, every bowl to have this inscription, *Remember the bead*;

In witness of this my last will and testament I have to this my will set my hand and seal the third of April in the one and thirtieth 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., and in the year of Our Lord God a thousand five hundred eighty-nine. By me, Denzel Holles. Edward Skipwith, James Mussendyn.

Probatum fuit testamentu{m} suprascriptu{m} apud London coram ven{erabi}li viro Magistro will{el}mo Lewin legu{m} Doctore ad excercend{um} officiu{m} Magistri Custodis siue Commissarij Curie Prerogatiue Cantuarien{sis} l{egi}time deputat{o} decimo quarto die Mensis Maij Anno domini millesimo quingentesimo nonagesimo

iuramento Will{el}mi Sadler Notarij publici procuratoris Iohannis Hollis filij et Executoris in h{uius}mo{d}i testamento nominat{i} Cui commissa fuit Administrac{i}o bonoru{m} Iurium et Creditoru{m} d{i}c{t}i defuncti de b{e}ne et fideliter Administrand{o} ad sancta dei Evangelia Iurat{i} Reseruata p{otes}tate similem Comissionem faciend{i} ffrancisco Cooke Executori etiam in eodem testamento nominat{o} eam cum venerit petitur{o} in debita iuris forma admissur{o} Deinde decimo octauo die mensis Maij p{re}d{ictus} comp{ar}uit personaliter dictus ffranciscus Cooke et ex certis causis eu{m} et animu{m} suu{m} vt asseruit in ea parte mouen{tibus} oneri execu{i}o{n}is d{i}c{t}i testamenti expresse renunciauit vt ex actis eodem die expeditis plenius liquet et apparet ex{aminatur}

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before the worshipful Master William Lewin, Doctor of the Laws, lawfully deputed to exercise the office of Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the fourteenth day of the month of May in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred ninetieth by the oath of William Sadler, notary public, proctor of John Holles, son and 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, with power reserved for a similar grant to be made to Francis Cooke, executor also named in the same testament when he shall have come to petition the same in due form of law, and then on the eighteen day of the month of May aforesaid the said Francis Cooke appeared personally, and for certain causes him and his mind, as it is asserted, in that part moving, expressly renounced the burden of the execution of the said testament, as by the acts on the same day expedited(?) more at large is clear and appears. Examined.]