

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 27 July 1591 and proved 29 July 1591, of Mary (nee Fitton) Leveson (d. 27 July 1591), whose great-niece, Mary Fitton, is conjectured by some scholars to have been the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

The testatrix was the daughter of Sir Edward Fitton (d. 17 February 1548) of Gawsworth, Cheshire, by Mary Harbottle (d. 12 December 1556), the daughter of Sir Guiscard Harbottle, slain at the battle of Flodden. See the will of Mary (nee Harbottle) Fitton, TNA PROB 11/39/471; and the Fitton pedigree in *Gossip from a Muniment-Room*, (London: David Nutt, 1898), p. 1 at:

https://archive.org/stream/gri_33125008386944#page/n29/mode/2up/.

In the will below the testatrix mentions three brothers, Francis, Thomas (who married a wife named Anne and had a daughter, Frances) and George. For the will of the testatrix' brother and executor, Francis Fitton (d. 17 June 1608), see TNA PROB 11/112/118.

For the will of the testatrix' sister, Margaret (nee Fitton) Englefield, see TNA PROB 11/121/212.

The testatrix also appears to have had another sister, Anne, who married Sir Ralph Egerton (d.1596) of Wrinehill, Staffordshire, the son of John Egerton (d. 1 June 1529) and Agnes Griffith, by whom she had four children mentioned in the will below, Edward, Ralph, Margaret and Frances. See TNA C 147/11, and *Debrett's Baronetage of England*, 5th ed., (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1824), Vol. I, p. 45 at:

http://books.google.ca/books?id=v9gGAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA45&lpg=PA45&dq=%22Fitton%22+%22Egerton%22&source=bl&ots=msM9uJhsJO&sig=BOaUPjCclA71zZ3EXTVOx-_hE7s&hl=en&sa=X&ei=VOhfVPfmGoP0igLIq4DAAQ&ved=0CBwQ6AEwADgK#v=onepage&q=%22Fitton%22%20%22Egerton%22&f=false.

The testatrix married Sir Richard Leveson (d.1560), by whom she had a son and two daughters:

* Sir Walter Leveson (1551-1602), who married firstly Anne Corbet, the daughter of Sir Andrew Corbet (d.1578), by whom he was the father of Sir Richard Leveson (d. 2 August 1605), and secondly Susan Vernon, the daughter of John Vernon (d.1592) of Hodnet, Shropshire, by Elizabeth Devereux, and sister of Elizabeth Vernon, who married Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

* Mary Leveson, who married Sir George Curzon (d. 1622) of Croxall, Derbyshire.

* Elizabeth Leveson, who married William Sheldon (d.1587), uncle of Oxford's sister-in-law, Katherine (nee Sheldon) Trentham.

See the will of Sir Richard Leveson (d.1560), TNA PROB 11/43/621; the will of William Sheldon (d.1587), TNA PROB 11/71/283; the will of Katherine (nee Sheldon) Trentham, TNA PROB 11/163/485; the will of Sir George Curzon, TNA PROB 11/141/97; and Cox, J. Charles, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1877), Vol. III, p. 360 at:

http://books.google.ca/books?id=yx5NAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA360&lpg=PA360&dq=%22Sir+George+Curzon%22&source=bl&ots=DUu-_gwFt1&sig=tAwdDddKMeX91hMOAIES9fWakOw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=8UpeVNXzEMWwogT7tIDYAQ&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=%22Sir%20George%20Curzon%22&f=false

See also Keen, Alan & Roger Lubbock, *The Annotator*, (London: Putnam, 1954), pp. 115-18; Hotson, Leslie, *I, William Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 160-1; the entries for Sir Richard Leveson (d. 2 August 1605) and Sir John Leveson (1555-1615) in the *ODNB*; and the pedigrees of Gresham and Leveson in Howard, Joseph Jackson and George John Armytage, eds., *The Visitation of London in the Year 1568*, (London: Harleian Society, 1869), Vol. I, pp. 15, 18 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationoflond00cook#page/14/mode/2up>.

See also the Leveson documents on the Staffordshire County Council website at:

<http://www.search.sutherlandcollection.org.uk/engine/theme/default.asp?theme=97&originator=%2Fengine%2Ftheme%2Fdefault.asp&page=2&records=18&direction=1&pointer=914&text=0>.

See also the wills of James Leveson (c.1500-1547), TNA PROB 11/31/655; Nicholas Leveson (d.1539), TNA PROB 11/27/552; Dionyse Leveson (d.1560), TNA PROB 11/43/645; Thomas Leveson (1532-1576); TNA PROB 11/58/397; William Leveson the elder (d.1593), TNA PROB 11/82/143; and Sir John Leveson (1555-1615), TNA PROB 11/126/409.

The testatrix' husband, Sir Richard Leveson (d.1560), was related to William Leveson (d.1621), one of two trustees employed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, including William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, in the allocation of shares in the Globe Theatre in 1599. William Leveson's grandfather, Nicholas Leveson (d.1539) was the brother of James Leveson (c.1500-1547), father of the testator's husband, Sir Richard Leveson (d.1560). William Leveson's father, Thomas Leveson (1532-1576) and the testator's husband, Richard Leveson (d.1560), were thus first cousins. For the will of the trustee of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, William Leveson (d.1621), see TNA PROB 11/137/600.

LM: T{estamentum} D{omi}nae Marie Leveson

[f. 25v] In the name of God, Amen. The seven and twentieth day of July Anno Domini 1591 in the three and thirtieth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Elizabeth by the grace of God Queen of England, France and Ireland, Defendress of the Faith etc., I, Dame Marie Leveson, widow, late wife to Sir Richard Leveson, late of Lilleshall in the county of Salop, knight, deceased, being sick and weak in body but of perfect memory, thanks be to Almighty God, do make and declare my last will and testament in manner and form following, that is to say:

First I bequeath my soul to Almighty God, my heavenly Father, trusting by the merits of the bitter passion of his blessed Son, Jesus Christ, my Saviour, to have everlasting salvation, and my body to be buried in the parish church of Trentham in the county of Stafford at such time and with such funerals as to mine executors shall seem meet and convenient;

Item, I give unto my son, Sir Walter Leveson, knight, all such several and particular things as be named and mentioned in one schedule annexed and connexed to this my present testament under my hand and seal mentioning particular thing[s] given to him, the said Sir Walter;

Item, I give and bequeath to Richard Leveson, esquire, my son's son, such other several and particular things as be named and mentioned in one other schedule likewise annexed and mentioning things given to the said Richard Leveson;

Item, I give unto Margaret, the wife of the said Richard Leveson, one carpet of needlework wrought with my own hands, being the best I have, and one wrought cushion of needlework having my arms on it, and one suit of damask, that is to say one long tablecloth, to contain in length six yards and in breadth two yards, and one towel and one dozen of napkins not as yet cut out;

Item, I give and bequeath to my sister, Mistress Margaret Englefield, one fair silver ewer for wine, plain;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my brother, Thomas Fitton, one silver tankard parcel gilt with a cover parcel gilt;

And to Frances Fitton, my said brother's daughter and my god-daughter, five marks to be bestowed on a jewel in remembrance of me;

Item I give to Edward Fitton, esquire, son and heir of Sir Edward Fitton, my nephew, one standing cup of silver called a nut double gilt, having a pounce upon the same and a cover double gilt, in token of my goodwill to him and the house of Gawsworth;

Item, I give and bequeath to Francis Englefield, esquire, forty pounds, parcel of threescore pounds which is already in the hands of the said Francis owing to me, which said sum of forty pounds I will and request the said Francis to bestow in one basin and ewer of silver to be made with some memorial of me to remain in token of my goodwill to him and his house;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my nephew, William Meyre, the sum of twenty marks of good and lawful money of England already in his own hands as debt owing unto me at this present, to be bestowed upon some piece of silver plate of the same value, and therein to be engraven my name to remain in token of my goodwill to him and his house of Meyre;

Item, I give and bequeath to my nephew, Edward Egerton, esquire, one fair standing cup of silver double gilt with a cover double gilt, the same which I bought of his father, Sir Ralph Egerton, knight, to remain in token of my goodwill to him and [-and] Wrinehill house;

Item, I give and bequeath to my niece, Margaret Egerton, the sum of forty pounds of good current money towards her preferment, to be paid within one year next after my decease;

Item, my will is that my executors within one year next after my decease shall deliver unto the churchwardens of the parish of Trentham aforesaid for the time being four of my best kine to be kept and renewed from time to time by the churchwardens of Trentham parish aforesaid, and the whole profits of them and of their increase and of th' increase of such as shall be renewed in their places from time to time to be employed upon reparations of one glass window of new erected and made there by me in the east end of the said parish church of Trentham having my arms set therein, for better execution whereof I will that the said churchwardens for the time being shall [f. 26r] yearly to the curate and parishioners there from time to time make account upon the feast-day of All Saints of the said stock of kine and th' increase thereof, and thereupon the stock with the remain to be delivered over yearly like as the parish goods unto such churchwardens as shall succeed forever to be kept and employed as is aforesaid;

And it is also my will and further desire that if the said churchwardens or any of them, their executors or assigns or any of them, shall not or do not according to the true intent and meaning of this my last will keep, maintain, renew and employ the said stock and every part thereof, or shall refuse, forbear or neglect to make their true and just account yearly according as I have before limited, that then such person and persons as then shall be mine executor or executors, administrator or administrators, and every honest parishioner of the said parish of Trentham and every friend of mine have power and authority to convent and call the said churchwardens and others offending in the premises before the Bishop of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield for the time being or into any other judicial court or place to whom it may appertain by law or equity to punish, correct or reform the same, and to sue and prosecute every such party as so shall offend until restitution, recompense or reformation be had;

And to the intent the said churchwardens may not be ignorant of my intent and will, I require my executors after my decease within one quarter of the year then next following to deliver to the curate and churchwardens of the said parish then being a true copy of this clause containing the gift and delivery of the said four kine to be registered in the register book of the said parish, there to remain with the parishioners forever and to be read to the curate and churchwardens yearly at the said account upon the feast-day of All Saints;

Item, I give and bequeath unto all and every of my friends and servants whose names are contained in any schedule to this my testament annexed the same several particular gifts and legacies as be specified and severally appointed, signified, noted or declared to be given them and every of them severally;

And I will that my executors make delivery and payment of them and every of them to the said person and persons and to every of them in convenient time after my decease so truly and effectually as though the same had been contained and mentioned at large in the body and contents of this my present last will and testament;

Item, I give and bequeath unto the poor people and householders of the town of Stafford, the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the town of Stone and the parish [+of] Trentham, all which towns be in the county of Stafford aforesaid, the sum of forty pounds of good current money of England, that is to say, to the poor of the town of Stafford ten pounds, to the poor of the town of Newcastle ten pounds, to the poor of the town of Stone ten pounds, to the poor of the parish of Trentham ten pounds, to be distributed by the discretions of the curate and churchwardens of the said several parishes in the which said towns are being with the oversight of Roger Reynolds, parson of Stoke upon Trent, my chaplain, if the said Roger be then living;

Item, I will and require that blacks be given by my executors to all my friends and servants whose names are contained in a schedule mentioned and annexed to this my last will and testament wherein is any mention of their names of such to whom I will blacks to be given, and black frieze gowns to thirteen poor women of the parish of Trentham to be appointed by my executors to attend upon my corpse to the church the day of my fu[n]eral when God shall appoint the time;

Item, I will that my executors provide a monument for me according to a draught in paper left unto them, to be graven in brass and planted in Trentham church near the place where I was wont to kneel in time of divine prayers, which will be about the charges of twenty marks;

Item, when my debts be paid, my funerals defrayed, and the legacies in this my last will and testament and in the inventories and schedule annexed and connexed mentioned truly and effectually delivered and discharged according to my mind and true meaning in all respects, then I will, give and bequeath unto George Curzon, esquire, my son-in-law, and to Mary, his wife, my daughter, all the rest and residue of my goods and chattels, plate,

jewels and others of what kind or condition soever the same or any of them be or shall be to their only use forever, hoping nevertheless [+and?] requiring and charging my said son Curzon and my daughter that they will give and bestow to my goddaughter, Marie Curzon, their daughter, some reasonable and convenient portion as of my goodwill and love to her, to be paid at the time of her marriage [f. 26v], the certainty of which portion I wholly refer unto my said son and daughter;

Lastly, I ordain, constitute and make my brother, Francis Fitton, esquire, sole executor of this my last will and testament, and I give him my best horse or gelding at his choice, nevertheless desiring him that he will authorize my said son, George Curzon, by letter of attorney from him to administer my goods, chattels, debts and legacies in all points saving for and touching one statute bond of four thousand pounds acknowledged unto me by my son Curzon's father, which statute bond and defeasance thereof I have delivered into the hands of my said brother, Francis, willing, hoping and trusting that the same may stand and remain for performance of such things as are specified in the defeasance thereof, for which purpose I have committed the same to my said brother, Francis;

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal and have published the same to be my last will and testament, given the day and year first above-written.

A schedule mentioning particular things given to Sir Walter Leveson, knight, as followeth

Inprimis I give to him all such silver plate as was left to me by his father, Sir Richard Leveson, knight, my late husband, deceased, viz., two silver cups for beer with covers parcel gilt; one silver salt double gilt with a cover double gilt having the goat's head thereupon; six silver spoons, whereof one is double gilt; all the rest in my son's own possession delivered with mine own hand at the christening of his son, Richard Leveson, namely one nest of goblets parcel gilt;

Item, I give to him all the wainscot fixed upon the walls or windows of my house at Trentham and in the chambers, and all glass in glass windows throughout the whole house;

Item, I give to him all the bedsteads in my house & chambers at Trentham except one field bedstead which standeth in a chamber there called my Lord Treasurer's chamber;

Item, I give more to him, my said son, the furniture in my hall, viz., one long standing table with the frame in the upper end of my hall, one square table with the frame, four forms for them both, two cupboards, two side tables along the hall, three forms for the same, one joined chair, one throne chair, two curtains of say over the compass window, two iron rods for the same;

Item, I give more to him, my said son, the furniture in my gallery, viz., one table standing upon a frame, four forms for the same covered with Turkey work, two joined chairs with

the seats covered with Turkey work, six joined stools whereof two are covered with Turkey work, except the drawing table and carved cupboard there;

Item, I further give to my said son the moiety or one half of [-of] all such implements, utensils and furniture of household and household stuff now being and remaining in the several houses and rooms of offices at Trentham hereafter following, viz., in the buttery, kitchen, larders, brewhouse, bakehouse, milkhouse and dayhouse and every of them which I did use to employ and occupy in those said several rooms and offices except the pewter vessel and napery, the said implements, utensils and furniture to be parted, divided and delivered upon the sixth day next after the day of my burial by Roger Reynolds, clerk, parson of Stoke, my chaplain, whom I have appointed and constituted and chosen as a person indifferent to part and divide the said implements between my said son, Sir Walter Leveson, and his son, Richard Leveson, to whom I give the other moiety or one half of the said implements, utensils and furniture;

Item, I give to my said son one basin and ewer of silver of the value of twenty pounds to be made and delivered to him by my executor.

A schedule mentioning things given to Richard Leveson, esquire

Inprimis one team of six working oxen, the best I have; ten of my best milch kine towards his dairy, one iron-bound wain, the best I have, with all furniture thereto belonging, as yokes, chains, hooks and suchlike;

Item, I give more to him, the said Richard [f. 27r] Leveson, two dozen of broad dishes, two dozen of little dishes, and two dozen of saucers, two pewter plates for pies, twelve broad dishes of pewter, being unturned vessel;

Item, I give more to the said Richard Leveson seven featherbeds, the best I have; seven mattresses, the best I have; seven bolsters, the best; eight pillows; fourteen blankets of the best, and seven coverlets; three coverings of tapestry, whereof the best to be none; one white caddow; three curtains for a bed of red and yellow silk with valence to the same; three curtains of blue and yellow mockado;

Item, I give more to him, the said Richard Leveson, one cupboard of joined work, one chair covered with Turkey work, one chair of joined work, two joined stools covered with blue cloth embroidered with lace, one window-cloth of blue fringed with blue silk, one carpet for the cupboard of blue cloth;

Item, I give more to the said Richard Leveson one pair of sheets of Holland of three breadths; two pair of fine sheets of two breadths and half, new made; seven pair of flaxen sheets of two breadths, of the best; six pair of the finest pillow-beres; my fair great cypress chest;

Item, I further give to the said Richard Leveson the moiety or one half of all such implements, utensils and furniture of household and household stuff now being and remaining in the several houses and rooms of office at Trentham hereafter following, viz., in the buttery, kitchen, larders, brewhouse, bakehouse, milkhouse and dayhouse and every of them which I did use to employ and occupy in those said several rooms and offices except the pewter vessel and napery, the said implements, utensils and furniture to be parted, divided and delivered upon the sixth day next after the day of my burial by Roger Reynolds, clerk, parson of Stoke, my chaplain, whom I have appointed, constituted and chosen as a person indifferent to part and divide the said implements between the said Richard Leveson and my son, Sir Walter Leveson, knight, to whom I have given the other moiety or one half of the said implements, utensils and furniture.

A schedule of legacies given and bequeathed to certain of my friends and servants

Inprimis I give and bequeath to my son, Sir Walter Leveson, knight, one gold ring of the value of forty shillings;

Item, I give to Richard Leveson one like ring;

Item, I give to Richard Leveson's wife one like ring;

Item, I give to my sister Englefield one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my brother, Thomas Fitton, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my brother Thomas his wife one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my brother, Francis, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my brother, George, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my nephew, Sir Edward Fitton, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my Lady Fitton one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my niece, Margaret Egerton, one like ring;

Item, I give to my niece, Frances Egerton, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my niece, Anne Arblaster, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my godson, Ralph Egerton, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to Roger Reynolds, parson of Stoke, one like gold ring;

Item, to my cousin, Margaret Mainwaring, one gold ring of the like value of forty shillings;

Item, to my cousin, Elizabeth Holcroft, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my servant, Thomas Story, one gold ring of the value of twenty shillings;

Item, I give to Anne Storie one like gold ring;

Item, I give to John Lovatt one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my servant, John Maddox, one like gold ring;

Item I give to my servant, old Whithurst, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my servant, William Higgan, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my servant, Richard Dody, one like ring;

Item, I give to my servant, John Taylor, one like ring;

Item, I give to my servant, Francis Nibbes, one like gold ring;

Item, I give to my servant, Godfrey Persall, one like ring;

Item, I give to my servant, Stephen Taylor, one like ring;

Item, I give to Anne Vize, my servant-woman, twenty pounds;

Item, I give to Joyce Warrelowe five pounds;
 Item, I give to Katherine Collens forty shillings;
 Item, I give to Elizabeth Lyiley(?) one heifer;
 Item, I give to Anne Webb one cow in her possession;
 Item, I give to Isabel Plemley one cow;
 Item, I give to John Raye three pounds six shillings eight pence;
 Item, I give to Richard Gardener one cow;
 Item, I give to Thomas Maddox, my cook, six pounds thirteen shillings and four pence;
 Item, I give to John Whithurst the younger [f. 27v] ten pounds;
 Item, I give to John Martyn five pounds;
 Item, I give to Edward Albrighton five pounds;
 Item, I give to John Kenricke five pounds;
 Item, I give to Roger Peatt twenty-six shillings and eight pence;
 Item, I give to Roger Townesend [=Townshend?] twenty-six shillings eight pence;

Item, I give to Thomas Hunte twenty-six shillings eight pence;
 Item, I give to John Adderley twenty-six shillings eight pence;
 Item, I give to Buxtons for charity[‘s] sake twenty-six shillings eight pence;
 Item, I give to Henry, the kitchen boy, forty shillings;
 Item, I give to Thomas Greene the money received of him for his tenement, six pounds thirteen shillings and four pence;
 Item, I give to Margaret Asbrigge, my late servant, four pounds;
 Item, my request is that my son Curzon and my daughter do keep my fool, Thomas Clerke, during his life for my sake.

Mary Leveson.

Signed, sealed and published by the said Dame Mary Leveson the seven and twentieth day of July 1591 in the three and thirtieth year of the Queen’s Majesty’s reign abovesaid in the presence of us whose names be underwritten. Francis Englefield, George Curzon, Fraancis(?) Moore, John Lowe, John [sic?], Richard(?) Bosson, John Whithurst, Ann Fabian, Margaret Englefield, Mary Curzon, Anne Vize, Alice Cartlich, Mary Ridgley.

The names of such persons to whom I, Dame Mary Leveson, do will blacks to be given after my decease as mourners for me, that is to say, mourning cloaks to be given to:

Sir Walter Leveson, knight, my son.
 Sir Edward Fitton, knight, my nephew.
 Francis Fitton, esquire, my brother.
 Richard Leveson, esquire, my grandchild.
 George Curzon, esquire, my son-in-law.
 Francis Englefield, esquire, my nephew.
 Edward Egerton, esquire, my nephew.
 Thomas Fitton, esquire, my brother.
 Edward Fitton, esquire, son of Sir Edward Fitton, knight.

George Fitton, gentleman, my brother.
 Ralph Egerton, gentleman.
 Thomas Story, gentleman.
 Francis Moore(?), gentleman.
 Roger Reynolds, clerk, my chaplain, a mourning gown.

Mourning gowns to be given to:

Mrs Englefield, my sister.
 Mrs Curzon, my daughter.
 Mrs Anne Fitton, wife of my brother, Thomas Fitton.
 Mrs Margaret Egerton, my niece.
 Mrs Frances Egerton, my niece.
 Anne Vize, my woman.
 Anne Story.

Mourning cloaks to be given to all my menservants.

Mary Leveson.

Probatum fuit Testamentum suprascriptum apud London coram venerabili viro Magistro Will^{el}mo Lewin legum doctor^{is} ad exercend^{um} officium Magistri Custodis siue Comissarij curie Prerogatiue Cant^{uariensis} l^{egi}time deputatⁱ Vicesimo nono Die mensis Iulij Anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo nonagesimo primo vncum Codicillis annex^{is} Iuramento Thome Browne notarij publici procuratoris ffrancisci ffyton armigeri executoris in h^{uius}mo^di Testamento nominatⁱ Cui Commissa fuit administracⁱo bonorum iurium et Creditorum Dⁱc^te Def^{uncte} De bene et fideliter administrand^o ad s^{an}c^ta Dei Evangelia Iuratⁱ

[=The above-written testament was proved 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 twenty-ninth day of the month of July in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred ninety-first together with the codicils annexed by the oath of Thomas Browne, notary public, proctor of Francis Fitton, esquire, 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.]