

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will dated 31 December 1596 and proved 7 May 1597, of Sir John Wotton (1550-1597). The testator was the third son of Thomas Wotton of Boughton Malherbe in Kent by his first wife, Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir John Rudston. Sir John Wotton is described by Isaac Walton in his life of Sir John Wotton's half-brother, Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639), as:

*a gentleman excellently accomplished both by learning and travel, who was knighted by Queen Elizabeth, and looked upon with more than ordinary favour, and with intentions of preferment, but death in his younger years put a period to his growing hopes.*

See Brydges, Egerton, and Joseph Haslewood, *The British Bibliographer*, Vol. III (London: R. Triphook, 1812), p. v, available online.

Sir John Wotton, soldier, poet and traveller, was one of three sons of Thomas Wotton by his first wife:

*By his first wife [Thomas Wotton] was the father of three distinguished sons – Sir Edward Wotton, afterwards Lord Wotton of Marley, a well-known diplomatist and courtier in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I; Sir John Wotton, soldier and poet, who was knighted by Essex at Rouen in 1591, and who married a sister of the Earl of Northumberland. . . . The third of these sons was another soldier, Sir James Wotton, knighted at Cadiz in 1596.*

See Smith, Logan Pearsall, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 2, available online.

Sir John Wotton is said to have married Lucy Percy, the daughter of Henry Percy (c.1532-1585), 8th Earl of Northumberland and his wife Katherine (1545/6–1596), first daughter and coheir of John Neville (d.1577), 4<sup>th</sup> Baron Latimer, and his wife, Lucy. The mother of John Neville (d.1577), 4<sup>th</sup> Baron Latimer, was Dorothy de Vere (d.1527), sister and co-heir of John de Vere (1499-1526), 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. This relationship perhaps explains Oxford's connection with the testator, Sir John Wotton.

Of the testator's father, *The Dictionary of National Biography* records the following:

*Thomas Wotton (b. in or before 1521, d. 1587). Educated at Lincoln's Inn, Thomas was MP for the Cornish borough of West Looe in 1547, and the fact that in 1554 he was sent to the Fleet 'for obstinate standing in matters of religion' shows that he had adopted his father's evangelicalism (HoP, Commons, 1509–58, 3.659). It was a position he maintained throughout his life. In the 1560s he supported Archbishop Matthew Parker's measures against radical puritans and Catholic recusants, but clearly sympathized with the former, since he became a patron of Edward Dering, and in 1584 was one of the leaders of the Kentish gentry in their resistance to Archbishop John Whitgift's drive for ecclesiastical conformity.*

*Unlike his father, Thomas Wotton played little part in national affairs, devoting his energies to the administration of his home county. Sheriff of Kent in 1558–9 and 1578–9, he was a JP, and of the quorum, from the accession of Elizabeth until his death. Some time after 1567 he erected the tomb in Canterbury Cathedral of his uncle Dean Nicholas Wotton, who had made him his heir, and was thus responsible for the execution, and perhaps also the design, of what has been described as ‘stylistically one of the most precocious tombs of the period’ (Eustace, 513). His standing in Kentish society is underlined by his receiving the dedication in 1576 of the Perambulation of Kent by William Lambarde, whose patron he had been. In 1573 Wotton entertained Queen Elizabeth at Boughton; she offered him a knighthood, but he declined. He died on 11 January 1587, three days after drawing up his will, in which he left £400 to his wife, Eleanor, daughter of William Finch of The Moat, Kent, and widow of Robert Morton. She was his second wife, his first having been Elizabeth, daughter of the Sir John Rudston whose widow had been Wotton's own stepmother. His heir Edward Wotton, later first Baron Wotton (1548–1628), was the second but oldest surviving son of Thomas Wotton's first marriage. The diplomat and writer Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639) was Edward's half-brother. Their father was buried in Boughton church.*

The testator leaves annuities to Duke Brooke (1563-1606), the son of William Brooke, Lord Cobham's younger brother, George Brooke (1533-c.1570), for a term of five years, and thereafter to Oxford and his son and heir, Henry de Vere. The testator also makes Oxford his sole executor. Since Oxford died before administration of the estate was complete, on 14 April 1607 administration was granted to Oxford's widow, Elizabeth (nee Trentham), Dowager Countess of Oxford.

LM: Testamentum domini Iohannis Wotton militis

In the name of God, Amen. The one and thirtieth day of December in the nine and thirtieth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Elizabeth by the grace of God of England, France and Ireland Queen, Defendress of the Faith etc., and in the year of Our Lord God one thousand five hundred ninety-six, I, Sir John Wotton, knight, being sick in body but of good and perfect memory (thanks be given to God), do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following, viz.,:

First, I bequeath my soul to Almighty God, my Saviour, and my body to be interred in the chancel of the parish church of Templecombe in the county of Somerset;

Item, I will and devise to Duke Brooke of Templecombe aforesaid, esquire, all my annuity and yearly rent of threescore six pounds thirteen shillings and four pence, and also all my annuities and rents which I have out of certain lands and tenements late Thomas Wotton's, my father, deceased, to have and to hold all the said annuities and yearly rents unto [-to] the said Duke Brooke, his executors and assigns, for and by and during and unto the full end and term of five years from henceforth next ensuing and fully to be complete and ended;

Item, I will and devise all my said annuity and yearly rent of threescore six pounds thirteen shillings and four pence and all the arrearages of my annuity and yearly rent of one hundred pounds, and all my annuities and yearly rents whatsoever unto the right honourable Edward, Earl of Oxford, and Henry, Lord Bulbeck, to have and to hold all the said annuities and yearly rents immediately from and after the full end and expiration of the said term of five years aforesaid unto the said Edward, Earl of Oxford, and Henry, Lord Bulbeck, and to the heirs of the said Henry, Lord Bulbeck, forever;

And I do make and ordain the said Edward, Earl of Oxford, executor of this my last will and testament. John Wotton. Signed, sealed and delivered after the ensealing and delivery of the indenture made between the above-named Sir John Wotton of the one party and Duke Brooke, esquire, on the other part, and after the ensealing and delivery of the indenture made between the said Sir John Wotton of the one part and Edward, Earl of Oxford, and Henry, Lord Bulbeck, of the other part, in the presence of Francis James, John Cottington. Per me, Iohannem Dacombe, Marke Tabor, John Russell.

Probatum fuit Testamentum suprascriptum apud London coram venerabili viro Magistro Willelmo Lewyn legum doctore Curie Prerogatiue Cantuariensis magistro Custode siue Commissario legitime constituto Septimo die mensis maij Anno Domini millesimo Quingentesimo Nonagesimo Septimo Iuramento Iohannis Robinson notarij publici procuratoris Honorandi viri Domini Edwardi Comitis Oxonie Executoris in huiusmodi testamento nominati Cui commissa fuit administratio bonorum Iurium et creditorum dicti defuncti De bene et fideliter administrando &c Ad sancta Dei Evangelia Iurati Examinatus

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before the worshipful Master William Lewin, Doctor of the Laws, lawfully constituted Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the seventh day of the month of May in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred ninety-seventh by the oath of John Robinson, notary public, proctor of the honourable Lord Edward, Earl of Oxford, 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. Examined]

LM: Decimo quarto die mensis Aprilis 1607 emanavit Comissio honorande femine domine Elizabethe Comitisse Dowager Oxonie relicte honorandi viri Domini Edwardi Comitis Oxonie defuncti Dum vixit executoris in huiusmodi Testamento nominati Ad administrandum bona iura et Credita dicti Domini Iohannis Wotton militis defuncti per Ecuam(?) [eiusdem?] honorandum virum executorem antedictum(?) non plene administrata iuxta tenorem testamenti huiusmodi De bene &c alias(?) vigore Comissionis Iurate

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[=On the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of April 1607 a commission was issued to the honourable Lady Elizabeth, Dowager Countess of Oxford, relict of the honourable Lord Edward, Earl of Oxford, deceased, while he lived executor named in the same testament, to administer the goods, rights and credits of the said Sir John Wotton, knight, deceased, by [ ] the honourable executor aforesaid(?) not fully administered according to the tenor of the same testament, sworn to well etc. otherwise(?) by force of the commission.]