

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will, dated 6 March 1599 and proved 4 May 1599, of Dorothy Vernon. The testatrix was an aunt (by the half blood) of Elizabeth Vernon, wife of Henry Wriothesley (1573-1624), 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

The testatrix was the daughter of George Vernon (d.1554) and Mary (nee Lacon) Aston Vernon (d.27 April 1563). She was the granddaughter of Sir Thomas Lacon (d.1536) of Willey, Shropshire, and Mary Corbet, and the great-granddaughter of Sir Richard Corbet (1451 - 6 December 1493) and Elizabeth Devereux (d.1516), the daughter of Walter Devereux (c.1432 – 22 August 1485), 1st Baron Ferrers of Chartley, slain at the Battle of Bosworth. See Richardson, Douglas, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, 2nd ed., 2011, Vol. II, pp. 163-5 and Vol. III, pp. 69-70.

By her mother's first marriage to Thomas Acton (d. 2 January 1547), esquire, of Sutton, Worcestershire, the testatrix had a half-sister, Joyce Acton (1532 – 10 February 1596), who married Sir Thomas Lucy (d. 7 July 1600) of Charlecote, Warwickshire, from whose park William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon is alleged to have poached deer.

By her father's first marriage to Elizabeth Pigott, the testatrix had two half-brothers, Richard Vernon (d.1560?) and John Vernon (d.1591).

By her parents' marriage, the testatrix had two brothers and a sister of the whole blood, George Vernon (d.1604), Edward Vernon (d.1616) and Anne Vernon (d.1570).

See the will of the testatrix' father, George Vernon (d.1554), TNA PROB 11/37/222; the will of the testatrix' mother, Mary (nee Lacon) Aston Vernon (d. 27 April 1563), TNA PROB 11/46/222; the will of the testatrix' brother, George Vernon (d.1604), TNA PROB 11/104/161; the will of the testatrix' brother, Edward Vernon (d.1616), TNA PROB 11/128/313; and the will of the testatrix' sister, Anne Vernon (d.1570), TNA PROB 11/52/492.

See also the pedigree of Vernon (which, however, does not show the marriage of George Vernon (d.1554) to his second wife, Mary Lacon) 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, p. 474 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationshrop01grazgoog#page/n202/mode/2up>.

The testatrix' close connections to her mother's family are evidenced by her bequests in the will below to William Leighton (d.1607) ('my cousin William Leighton the elder'), whom she also appoints as her executor, and his son, Sir William Leighton (c.1565-1622), ('my cousin William Leighton the younger').

The testatrix' precise relationship to Sir William Leighton (d.1607) is difficult to determine. The pedigree in *Stemmata Botevilliana* shows Sir William Leighton married firstly to Margery Sprencheaux, the daughter and coheir of Sir Fulke Sprencheaux, by whom he is said to have had no issue, and secondly to the testatrix' aunt, Dorothy Lacon, by whom he is said to have been the father of William Leighton (d.1607). However according to another source, the pedigree in *Stemmata Botevilliana* lacks a generation:

'Cardington', *A History of the County of Shropshire: Volume 10: Munslow Hundred (part), The Liberty and Borough of Wenlock* (1998), pp. 22-44. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22858>

Sir Fulk's daughter and coheir Margery took Plaish to her husband Sir William Leighton (d. 1520). Their son William (d. 1533) held the manor and his widow Dorothy apparently held it during the minority of their son William. From the 1560s that William (d. 1607) was active in county and regional government. His son and successor William (fl. 1614), author of a verse eulogy of the king, Vertue Triumphant (1603), was imprisoned for debt c. 1610.

It thus seems possible that the pedigree in *Stemmata Botevilliana* is in error in stating that Sir William Leighton had two wives, Margery Sprencheaux and Dorothy Lacon, and had issue only by Dorothy Lacon, and that in fact Sir William Leighton (d.1520) had only one wife, Margery Sprencheaux, by whom he a son, William Leighton (d.1533), who married the testatrix' aunt, Dorothy Lacon, by whom he had a son, William Leighton (d.1607), who was the testatrix' first cousin.

By 11 January 1536, the date of her father's will, Dorothy (nee Lacon) had married Sir Richard Walwyn (d.1578):

Item, I give and bequeath to my daughter, Dorothy Walwyn, to the preferment of her daughter, Margery Leighton, twenty pounds sterlings.

See the will of Sir Thomas Lacon (d.1536), TNA PROB 11/25/371; the will of Sir Richard Walwyn (d.1578), TNA PROB 11/61/430; the will of William Leighton (d.1607), Chief Justice of North Wales, TNA PROB 11/111/525; and Botfield, Beriah, *Stemmata Botevilliana*, (Westminster: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1858), pp. 184, 186 at:

http://books.google.ca/books?id=mBZYAAAACAAJ&pg=PA184&lpg=PA184&dq=%22William+Leighton%22+%22Chief+Justice%22&source=bl&ots=P6Ta0o9MZ6&sig=rvJikQve6eYgqMhSkHgD6Y5VuZk&hl=en&sa=X&ei=jxnZU_-dHM_joASvr4KYCA&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=%22William%20Leighton%22%20%22Chief%20Justice%22&f=false

See also Mayo, Charles Herbert, *A Genealogical Account of the Mayo and Elton Families of the Counties of Wilts and Hereford*, (London: Charles Whittingham, 1882), pp. 12-13 at:

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=rmEBAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq=%22Dorothy+Lacon%22+%22Richard+Walwyn%22&source=bl&ots=s1ssNsZoSV&sig=HKOezmcFwjvtN-AFXGhZBW57KhM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=vofaU53cOYXioATkn4CgCA&ved=0CFwQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=%22Dorothy%20Lacon%22%20%22Richard%20Walwyn%22&f=false>

See also a feoffment of 6 May 1525, Shropshire Record Office 1781/2/6, at:

http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_XSHA_1781_2_2_2_6/

See also the *ODNB* article for Sir William Leighton (c.1565-1622):

Leighton, Sir William (c.1565–1622), poet and composer, of Plash Hall, Plaish, Shropshire, was the elder of two sons of William Leighton (d. 1607), chief justice of the Welsh marches, and Isabella, daughter of Thomas Onslowe. Besides his probable attendance at Shrewsbury School (from c.1578) little is known of Leighton's early life in Shropshire; by the time he had become established as a gentleman pensioner at court he was married to Winifred (d. 1616), daughter of Simon Harcourt, of Ellenhall, Staffordshire. This marriage produced a son and two daughters.

The testatrix was also related to the Leightons through her great-grandmother (see above), Elizabeth Devereux (d.1516), who after the death of her first husband, Sir Richard Corbet, married Sir Thomas Leighton (1443-1519) of Wattlesborough, Shropshire, who, according to the pedigree of Leighton in *Stemmata Botevilliana, supra*, was the elder brother of Sir William Leighton (d.1520).

In the will below the testatrix leaves a bequest to another member of the Leighton family, Dorothy Leighton, wife of Richard Prince:

Item, I give and bequeath unto my cousin Leighton his daughter that was married to Mr Prince my best smock, being wrought with silk, and one pair of sleeves not fully finished, and my French hood.

For Richard Prince (c.1532-1598), see his will, proved 13 February 1599, TNA PROB 11/93/147, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/prince-richard-1523-98>.

LM: T{estamentum} Dorothee Vernon

[f. 332v] In the name of God, Amen. The sixth day of March one thousand five hundred ninety-eight I, Dorothy Vernon of the parish of Llandewith Rothereth(?) [=Llanthewy

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Rytherch?] in the county of Monmouth and diocese of Llandaff, being sick in body but of perfect [-of] memory, do make this my last will and testament in manner and form following:

First I commend my soul to Almighty God, my Maker and Redeemer, and my body to be buried in the chancel of Llandewiskyned;

Item, I give and bequeath towards the reparations of the church and chancel of Llandewiskined aforesaid twenty shillings, to be bestowed at the discretion of the parson there;

Item, I give and bequeath to the cathedral church of Llandaff two shillings;

Item, I give and bequeath towards my funeral three pounds, to be bestowed at the discretion of Mr Gwillim and Mr James;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my cousin Leighton the elder fourscore pounds which doth now remain in the hands of my cousin Leighton the younger, for the which I have a bill of two hundred pounds besides my cousin Leighton the elder his letter;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my cousin Leighton the younger fourscore pounds, being parcel of the said two hundred pounds;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Anne, my servant, twenty pounds, being parcel of the said two hundred pounds;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Jane Gwillim, being in the house with me, ten pounds, being also parcel of the said [f. 333r] two hundred pounds;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Mr William James ten pounds, being all the residue of the said two hundred pounds;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my man, Thomas Cooke, ten pounds which is in the hands of Mr Marston;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Mr William Griffythes, clerk, parson of Wistanstow, forty pounds, for the which he hath the bands in his own hand;

Item, I give and bequeath unto the said Mr Griffithes all th' interest of the said forty pounds, together with all th' interest due unto me of the men of Shrewsbury and now remaining in his hands or in theirs;

Item, I give and bequeath unto John Gwillim, clerk, parson of Llandewiskenid, ten pounds, for which there is a bond of twenty pounds in my trunk;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Mr Marston's daughter five and twenty pounds which is in the hands of William Lyttlelen;

Item, I give unto my brother, Edward Vernon of Lincoln's Inn, all the money due unto me, both the principal and interest, by Sparre(?), for the which he hath the bond in his own hand;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my said brother, Edward, all the money due unto me by Mr Marston except the ten pounds given to my man, Thomas Cooke;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my said brother all the money due to me by the men of Shrewsbury and not before given and bequeathed, paying my debts and funeral charges and expenses in proving this my will, for the which the bonds remains in my trunk;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my cousin, Elizabeth Herbert, my best gown;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Anne, my servant, my second gown;

Item, I give unto Mrs James my third gown;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Jane Gwill{a}ms my fourth gown;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Thomas Cooke, my man, one gown of mine that [+is?] in the hands of a tailor in London this three years or thereabouts;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my cousin Leighton his daughter that was married to Mr Prince my best smock, being wrought with silk, and one pair of sleeves not fully finished, and my French hood;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Anne, my servant, and Jane G{wi}ll{a}m all the rest of my clothes, both woollen and linen, to be equally divided between them both;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my cousin Leighton the elder all my jewels, whom I do make my sole executor of this my last will and testament, and my overseers Mr William Griffithes, parson of Wistanstow, and Mr John Gwillim, parson of Llandewiskyned, of this my last will and testament, these person being witnesses: John Gwillim, clerk, George Jones, clerk, John Will{ia}ms, clerk.

Debts which I do owe, viz: four pounds to William James for my board this last quarter.

Probatum fuit Testamentum suprascriptu{m} apud London coram magistro Daniele Dunne legum d{o}c{t}ore Surrogato venerabilis viri magistri Iohannis Gibson Legum etia{m} d{o}c{t}oris Curie Prerogatiue Cantuariensis magistri Custodis siue Commissarij l{egi}time constituti Quarto Die mensis maij Anno Domini milesimo Quingentesimio

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[sic] Nonages{im}o Nono Iuramento M{agist}ri Thome Ward notarij publici procurator{is} (blank) Leighton Executoris in huiusmodi Testamento nominat{i} Cui comissa fuit Administratio bonoru{m} Iuriu{m} et Creditoru{m} eiusdem defuncte de bene et fideliter administrand{o} &c Iurat{i}

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before Master Daniel Dunne, Doctor of the Laws, Surrogate of the worshipful Master John Gibson, also Doctor of the Laws, lawfully constituted Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the fourth day of the month of May in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred ninety-ninth by the oath of Master Thomas Ward, notary public, proctor of (blank) Leighton, executor named in the same testament, to whom administration was granted of the goods, rights and credits of the same deceased, sworn to well and faithfully administer etc.]