

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 25 December 1580 from Anne Farrant to Sir William More (1520-1600) of Loseley requesting that More allow her to sublet premises in the Blackfriars which had been leased to her husband, Richard Farrant, who had died a month earlier on 30 November 1580.

For the indenture dated 20 December 1576 by which More had leased ‘six upper chambers’ in the Blackfriars to Richard Farrant for 21 years at an annual rent of £14, see Folger MS L.b.350, and Wallace, Charles William, *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), pp. 132-6.

After obtaining a lease from More, Farrant had converted the premises into a playhouse for the Children of the Chapel, and had also sublet part of the premises to two other persons, for which latter infraction More claimed Farrant had forfeited his lease. Before More could regain possession, however, Farrant died, leaving the lease in his will to his widow, Anne, the daughter of Richard Bower (d.1561), Master of the Choristers of the Chapel Royal. For the will of Richard Farrant, dated 30 November 1580 and proved 1 March 1581, see TNA PROB 11/63/120.

It would appear that Sir William More did not grant Anne Farrant’s request in the letter below. However on 19 September 1581 Leicester intervened with More on behalf of William Hunnis (d.1597), Master of the Children of the Chapel (see SHC LM/COR/3/316), and although there is no surviving record indicating that More had actually granted permission for the sublease, on 20 December 1581 Anne Farrant entered into an indenture by which she sublet the premises to Hunnis and John Newman, who agreed to pay her £6 13s 4d a year more than she was required to pay More under the original lease.

According to Smith, *infra*, p. 150, Hunnis and Newman were more than once late in paying their rent, and on one occasion, in order to make her rent payment to More, Anne Farrant was ‘forced to make humble and pitiful suit to Lord Cobham, whose mansion adjoined her property at the north, to pay her rent for her’. For William Brooke (1527-1597), 10th Baron Cobham, see the *ODNB* entry.

Unable to keep up with their obligations under the sublease, Hunnis and Newman transferred their interest to Henry Evans, who sold his sublease to Oxford, who granted it to his servant, John Lyly (1554–1606). More brought suit against Evans, and was granted possession of the property in Easter term 1584, and the first Blackfriars theatre was closed. See Wallace, *supra*, pp. 130-77; and Smith, Irwin, *Shakespeare’s Blackfriars Playhouse* (New York University Press, 1964), pp. 135, 148-53, 467-8.

According to Wallace, *supra*, p. 194:

When the Farrant-Lyly theatre broke up, the lease was forfeited to More, and Lyly could not sell it.

The modern-spelling transcript below was made from the original-spelling transcript in Wallace, *supra*, p. 153.

Right worshipful sir, after my humble commendations and my duty also remembered, where it hath pleased your Worship to grant unto my husband in his lifetime one lease of your house within the Blackfriars for the term of 21 years, with a proviso in the end thereof that he cannot neither let nor set the same without your Worship's consent under your hand in writing, and now for that it hath pleased God to call my said husband unto his mercy, having left behind him the charge of ten small children upon my hand, and my husband besides greatly indebted, not having the revenue of one groat any way coming in but by making the best I may of such things as he hath left behind him to relieve my little ones, may it therefore please your Worship of your abundant clemency and accustomed goodness to consider a poor widow's distressed estate, and for God's cause to comfort her with your Worship's warrant under your hand to let and set the same to my best commodity during the term of years in the said lease contained, not doing any waste. In all which doing I shall evermore most boundently [=boundenly] pray unto God for the preservation of your Worship's long continuance. From Greenwich, the 25th of December.

By a poor and sorrowful widow,

Anne Farrant

Postscript: Sir, I am to crave pardon of this presumed boldness upon so slender acquaintance, yet urged by constraint I am to impart my penury in hope of relief.

Addressed: To the right worshipful Sir William More, knight, at his house near Guildford, give these with speed.