

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 14 October 1560 and proved 28 November 1560, of Sir Richard Leveson, whose great-niece, Mary Fitton, is conjectured by some scholars to have been the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The testator was the eldest son and heir of James Leveson (d. 13 October 1545) by his first wife, Alice Wrottesley, the daughter of Richard Wrottesley of Wrottesley. See Bowes, G.C., 'A Manuscript Relating to the Family of Offley', in Harwood, H.W. Forsyth, ed., *The Genealogist*, New Series, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1903), Vol. XIX, p. 407 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/genealogist01unkngoog#page/n464/mode/2up>

For the testator's brothers and sisters, see the will of his father, James Leveson, TNA PROB 11/31/655.

MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

The testator married Mary Fitton (d. 27 July 1591), the daughter of Sir Edward Fitton (d. 17 February 1548) of Gawsworth, Cheshire, by whom he was the father of 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), second son of William Sheldon (d. 23 December 1570) of Beoley, uncle of Oxford's sister-in-law, Katherine (nee Sheldon) Trentham.

See the will of Mary (nee Fitton) Leveson, TNA PROB 11/78/48; 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>

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 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 testator 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, father of the testator. William Leveson's father, Thomas Leveson (1532-1576) and the testator 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.

OTHER PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE WILL

For the testator's executor, Sir Andrew Corbet (d.1578), see the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/corbet-sir-andrew-1522-78>

For the testator's brother-in-law and executor, Robert Eyton (d.1604), see his will, TNA PROB 11/105/469.

The testator appoints his two 'uncles', Sir Rowland Hill and Walter Wrottesley, as overseers. For Sir Rowland Hill (d.1561), see the Wikipedia article edited by the author of this summary, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/hill-sir-rowland-1498-1561>

According to Bowes, Sir Rowland Hill was the great-uncle of the testator's wife, Mary Fitton, while Walter Wrottesley was the brother of the testator's mother, Alice Wrottesley. See Bowes, *supra*, p. 225.

For litigation between the testator's executors and Elizabeth Leveson concerning the testator's estate, see TNA C 2/Eliz/C17/51.

LM: T{estamentum} Richardi Leueson

[f. 442r] In the name of God, Amen. The year of Our Lord God a thousand five hundred and threescore, the 14th day of October, I, Richard Leveson of Lilleshall in the county of Salop, knight, being sick in body and of perfect mind and memory, make this my testamēt & last will in manner and form following:

First I bequeath to Mary, my well-beloved wife, all my manors, lordships, granges, lands, tenements and other hereditaments hereafter declared & expressed, this is to say, my manor of Over Penn, Nether Penn, Rowley and Somerye in the county of Stafford, and my manors of Trentham with all lands, tenements and other hereditaments to the said manors or lordships belonging in the said county of Stafford, my grange called Lyzyarde grange, with one pasture and coalmine called the coalpits lying and being at Okengate in the county of Salop, my manor of Sheriff Hales with all lands, tenements and hereditaments to the same manor belonging, with the parsonage of Sheriff Hales in the said county of Stafford and Salop during her natural life for and in full recompense and satisfaction of her whole dowry, upon condition that the said Mary, my wife, shall not have, claim or take any dowry out of any other of my manors, lordships, tenements or hereditaments either in my possession or heretofore by me sold or alienated to any manner person or persons;

Also I give to my executors all my manor of Lilleshall wherein I now dwell, with all leasows, meadows, feedings, pastures, waters, commons & other th' appurtenances to the same manor of Lilleshall belonging or appertaining, used or occupied and taken as part, parcel or member of the same manor, and my manor or lordships of Lilleshall, Hennyngton, Donnington and Muxton with the granges called Street grange alias Mucclleton grange, Chershall grange and Wyldmore grange, with the parsonages of Lilleshall and Edgmond(?) and all and singular th' appurtenances in any manner wise to the same manors, lordships, granges and parsonages belonging and appertaining, lying and being in the county of Salop or elsewhere during the term of 13 years next after my decease to th' use and performance of this my last will and testament;

Also I constitute and make Sir Andrew Corbet, knight, Edward Leveson, my brother, Robert Eyton, my brother-in-law, and William Astyn [=Aston?], my servant, my lawful executors to execute and perform this my last will and testament;

And so I bequeath my soul to Almighty God, my Creator and Redeemer, my body to be buried in the parish church of Lilleshall;

Item, I bequeath to Mary, my well-beloved wife, half my corn and hay that is in my barns and other places at the time of my decease, with the half of my plate and household stuff as it standeth, four hundred marks in money and cattle, whereof two hundred marks to be paid her in cattle immediately after my decease, if she will, and the other 2 hundred marks to be paid her within the space of 2 years next after my decease;

Item, I bequeath to Walter Leveson, my son, at such time as he shall accomplish the full age of one and twenty years, my chain of gold with my 2 rings, that is to say, my signet ring and my ring set with diamonds, with 2 hundred marks in ready money, and if my said son die before he come to the full age of 21 years, then I will that all his said legacies shall remain and come to Mary, my wife, and to my daughter, Mary, to be equally divided between them;

Item, I bequeath to Elizabeth, my daughter, at such time as she shall be of the age of 21 years or at her marriage if her husband be then of the said age of 21 years and able to make my executors a lawful acquittance by the law, one hundred marks in money, and if she die before the said legacy be unto the said Elizabeth paid or be not married in manner and form as is aforesaid, then I will that the said hundred marks shall remain to Walter, my son, at such time as he shall accomplish the full age of 21 years;

Item, I give and bequeath to Mary, my daughter, four hundred pounds, whereof 2 hundred pounds I will to be paid to my wife, her mother, within three years next after my decease if my said wife be then living or unmarried, putting in sufficient sureties to my executors for the payment of the said £200 to my said daughter at such time as she shall accomplish the full age of 21 years or at the marriage of her if her husband shall be then of the full age of 21 years and able to make a lawful acquittance to my executor for the receipt thereof, and the other 2 hundred pounds to be paid to her by mine executors at such time as she shall accomplish the full age of 21 years or at the marriage of her if her husband shall be then of the full age of 21 years and able to make a lawful acquittance to my executors for the receipt thereof, and if the said Mary happen to die before she accomplish the full age of 21 years and be not married as is abovesaid, then I will that the said four hundred pounds shall remain to my said son, Walter Leveson, at such time as he shall accomplish the full age of 21 years, making to my said executors a sufficient acquittance for the same;

Item, I will that my brother, Edward Leveson, shall have, take and receive into his hands my lease of the deanery or lordship of Wolverhampton, with all and all manner of rents, issues, commodities, profits and advantages to the same deanery or lordship belonging until my said son, Walter, accomplish the full age of 21 years, and then my said brother

to account with my said son for the same, and the half of all such commodities, advantages and profits as shall grow or come to my brother's hands by the said lease from the day of my decease until that day he to give and deliver unto my said son, Walter Leveson, with the said lease to have and enjoy the same to him and to his assigns during the term therein contained, and the other half of the said rents, issues, commodities, profits and all advantages so received by my said brother to be kept and retained to his own use for his painstaking, and if my said son, Walter, die before he shall accomplish th' age of 21 years, then I will that my said brother, Edward, shall have all the issues, commodities, profits and advantages of the said lease of Wolverhampton to him and to his assigns during the residue of the term that then shall be in the said lease unexpired;

Also I give and bequeath to every one of my menservants being of household with me one black coat and 20s in money, except such of my servants as I have [f. 442v] heretofore recompensed or gratified by lease for term of years or lives with any farm or pasture, and to every of my household servants and retainers I give and bequeath one black coat;

Also I give and bequeath to Thomas Story, my servant, £6 13s 4d in money;

And to William Astin, my servant, one black gown, £10 in money, and one gelding;

Also I give and bequeath to every of my women servants a black gown and 13s 4d in money, except Margery Jackson, to whom I give and bequeath a black gown and 40s in money;

Also I make and ordain my well-beloved uncles, Sir Rowland Hill, knight, and Walter Wrottesley, esquire, overseers of this my last will and testament, giving either of them a ring of gold, price 40s, for their painstaking;

Item, I will that all such manors, lordships, granges, lands, tenements, parsonages and other hereditaments that I have given to my executors for term of 14 years shall remain to Walter, my son, and his heirs forever after the said years be fully ended;

Also I give and bequeath to Mary, my wife, my best horse or gelding, and to Sir Andrew Corbet my second horse or gelding, to my brother, Edward Leveson, my third horse or gelding, and to my brother-in-law, Robert Eyton, my fourth horse or gelding. Richard Leveson.

Sealed and confessed to be his last will and testament in the presence of William Lee, clerk, Maderne Wysebeke, Thomas Story, John Carleton, John Peryn, John Daucro, Thomas Asten, Galfride Bradley.

Probatum fuit h{uius}mo{d}i Testamentum coram Mag{ist}ro Waltero Haddon Legu{m} Doctore Curie Prerogatiue Cant{uariensis} Comissario apud London visesimo

octauo Die Mensis Nouembris Anno Domini mill{es}imo quingentesimo sexagesimo Iuramento Andree Corbett militis Edwardi Leueson et Roberti Eyton executorum in h{uius}mo{d}i Testamento nominat{orum} Quibus com{m}issa fuit administrac{i}o De bene etc Ac de pleno Inventario Necnon de vero et plano computo Reddend{o} Ad sancta Dei Evangelia Iurat{is} Res{er}uata potestate etc Will{el}mo Astyn executori etc

[=The same testament was proved before Master Walter Haddon, Doctor of the Laws, Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, at London on the twenty-eighth day of the month of November in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred sixtieth by the oath of Andrew Corbet, knight, Edward Leveson and Robert Eyton, executors named in the same testament, to whom administration was granted, sworn on the Holy Gospels to well etc., and to render a full inventory, and also a true and plain account, with power reserved etc. to William Astyn, executor, etc.]

Deinde xiiijto die mens{is} Maij A{nn}o 1561 com{m}issa fuit consimilis Administratio omn{i}u{m} bonor{um} etc d{i}c{t}o Will{el}mo Astyn executori De bene etc Ac de pleno Inuentario etc Necnon de plano comp{ut}o &c Iurat{o}

[=And afterwards on the 14th day of the month of May in the year 1561 a similar administration of all the goods etc. was granted to William Aston, executor, sworn to well etc., and [+to render] a full inventory etc., and also a plain account etc.