

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will, dated 7 August 1596 and proved 12 November 1596, of Margaret Stanley (1540-1596), Countess of Derby, mother-in-law of Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere. The new National Archives catalogue number is TNA PROB 11/88/298.

The testatrix was the eldest daughter of Henry Clifford (1517-1570), 2nd Earl of Cumberland, and his first wife, Eleanor (1519-1547), and widow of Henry Stanley (1531-1593), 4th Earl of Derby.

As the grand-daughter of King Henry VIII's sister, Mary Tudor (1496-1553), and her husband, Charles Brandon (d.1545), Duke of Suffolk, Margaret Stanley was closely related to Queen Elizabeth. For reasons which are not entirely clear, she incurred the Queen's displeasure, and was kept under house arrest in the custody of her kinsman, Thomas Seckford (d.1587), Master of Requests, to whom she was related through his mother, Margaret (d.1557), the daughter of Sir John Wingfield (d.1509) of Letheringham, and aunt of Charles Brandon (d.1545), Duke of Suffolk (see *The Visitation of Suffolk made by William Hery 1561*, London: Harleian Society, 1981-1984, p. 219, and Gunn, S.J., *Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk c.1484-1545*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, c1988). In May 1580, Margaret Stanley wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham, speaking of the Queen's 'heavy and long-continued displeasure', signing herself 'Her Majesty's prisoner' (see Nicholas, Harris, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton*, London: Richard Bentley, 1847, pp. 146-7). The purpose of her letter was to provide for payment of her debts by securing Walsingham's support in persuading the Queen to permit the sale of lands which she had inherited from Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, in which the Queen held a reversionary interest. In a later undated letter to Sir Christopher Hatton, Margaret credits Hatton with persuading the Queen to grant her her liberty (see Nicholas, pp. 147-8).

After her release from house arrest, Margaret Stanley appears to have leased a house which Thomas Seckford had built in Clerkenwell. In her will, she mentions such a lease, held by Francis Clifford and William Cox to her use. In his own will (see PROB 11/72, ff. 25-6), Thomas Seckford also mentions 'the houses, buildings and gardens in the said parish of Clerkenwell now occupied by the Countess of Derby'.

Margaret's marriage to Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby, was not a happy one. The couple were estranged by 1567, and circa 1570 Henry Stanley contracted a common-law marriage to Jane Halsall of Knowsley, by whom he had at least four children. Margaret and Henry had four sons, two of whom died young. Their son Ferdinando Stanley (1559?-1594), succeeded his father as 5th Earl of Derby. After Ferdinando's sudden death in 1594, his brother, William Stanley (1561-1642), succeeded as 6th Earl of Derby. However in her will Margaret Stanley's Clifford stepbrothers figure more prominently than her children or grandchildren. Only one of the three daughters of her son, Ferdinando Stanley, 5th Earl of Derby, is mentioned in the will. Another notable exception is her new daughter-in-law. On 26 January 1595, Margaret Stanley's son,

William, had married Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), but there is no mention of her in the will.

At her death, Margaret Stanley appears to have had little to leave beyond a few personal possessions. Administration of her estate was granted to her receiver-general, Richard Hickman, presumably because her estate was burdened by debt.

Her stepbrother, George Clifford (1558-1605), 3rd Earl of Cumberland, whom she had appointed executor of her will, was the son of Henry Clifford (1517-1570), 2nd Earl of Cumberland, by his second wife, Anne (c.1538-1581), the daughter of William, 3rd Baron Dacre of Gilsland. In 1577, George Clifford married Margaret Russell (1560-1616), the daughter of his guardian, Francis Russell, 2nd Earl of Bedford. In Margaret Stanley's will, she is bequeathed 'a tablet of gold with her lord's picture in it'.

There were no surviving male issue of the marriage of George Clifford and Margaret Russell, and at his death, George Clifford left his lands and titles to his brother, Francis Clifford (1559-1641), who succeeded as 4th Earl of Cumberland. In June 1589 Francis married Grissell (1559-1613), the elder daughter of Thomas Hughes of Uxbridge, Middlesex, and widow of Edward Neville, Lord Bergavenny (d.1589). Grissell Hughes was a second cousin of Oxford's father, both being descendants of Sir John Don (c.1430-1503) (see *Edward De Vere Newsletter* #47 on this website). In Margaret Stanley's will, Grissell is given 'my porcelain bowl trimmed with silver and gilt'. As noted earlier, Francis Clifford held the lease of the house in Clerkenwell in which Margaret Stanley resided until her death.

Friends mentioned in the will include Sir Drew Drury (1532-1617) and his wife, and Henry Berkeley and his wife, Katherine.

In 1584, Robert Greene dedicated *The Mirror of Modesty* to Margaret, Countess of Derby. Given Margaret Stanley's situation, the dedication cannot have been made in the hope of patronage. It may be that it was timed to coincide with Margaret Stanley's release from house arrest.

Margaret Stanley is also mentioned by Thomas Nashe in *Have With You to Saffron Walden* as 'lately deceased', and as having as resided in 1578 at the home of one 'Master Bradbury' near Saffron Walden in Essex.

RM: T{estamentum} D{omi}ne Margarete Comitisse Darbe

In the name of God, Amen. I, the Right Honourable Lady Margaret, Countess of Derby, weak in body but of perfect mind & memory, thanks be given unto Almighty God, do ordain and make this my last will and testament in manner and form following:

First, I bequeath my soul into the hands of Almighty God, my only Saviour and Redeemer, by whom I hope only to be saved and by no other ways nor means, and my body to be buried where it shall please the Queen's Majesty to appoint, or otherwise at the discretion of mine executors;

Item, I give and bequeath unto the poor people within the parish of St James within Clerkenwell in the county of Middlesex the sum of ten pounds to be given them at my own gate there presently after my decease;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Henry Fletcher, curate there, forty shillings;

Item, I give and bequeath unto my brother, the Earl of Cumberland, my suit of pearl, that is to say, a chair, a long pillow, two low stools, a carpet of black velvet bordered with pearl, and a footstool to the same;

Item, I give unto my sister, the Countess of Cumberland, a tablet of gold with her lord's picture in it;

Item, I give unto my brother, Francis Clifford, esquire, my gilt bowl with a cover that her Majesty gave me;

Item, I give unto my sister, his lady and wife, my porcelain bowl trimmed with silver and gilt;

Item, I give unto Sir Drew Drury, knight, one piece of gilt plate to be delivered at the discretion of my executor or executors;

Item, I give unto the Lady Drury, his wife, my Albatha [=alabaster?] cup;

Item, I give unto Katherine Berkeley, the wife of Henry Berkeley, all my black works, with all the things belonging to my cushion-cloth, as glass, comb, and all other things thereunto belonging, and I do also give and bequeath unto Henry Berkeley, gentleman, & to Katherine, his wife, my two coach-horses with my coach and all furniture belonging to the said coach and horses;

Item, I give and bequeath unto William, Earl of Derby, my son, my table with the twelve signs to it;

Item, I give and bequeath to the Lady Frances, my son Ferdinando's daughter, and to her heirs forever, my house and lands at Low Leyton, all wholly as I did purchase the same of Henry Clitherow, and my daughter of Derby, her mother, to have the use of the same during her minority;

Item, I give and bequeath unto Thomasine Cannon one small gilt bowl;

Item, my will and mind is that my servants shall have paid unto them by my executor or executors all such money that I shall owe unto them at the time of my decease, and for the giving of them anything more than their wages, I do refer that to the discretion of my executor or executors;

Item, I give and bequeath unto the poor people of the parish of Low Leyton in the county of Essex the sum of five pounds to be distributed at the discretion of my executor or executors;

And I do ordain and make my brother, th' Earl of Cumberland, my full and sole executor of this my last will and testament if it shall please him to take it upon him presently after my decease, and if he shall not be present to take the same upon him, or shall refuse to take the same upon him, that then I do ordain and make executors of this my last will & testament my loving friend, Henry Berkeley, gentleman, and my servant, Richard Hickman, my receiver-general, and I do appoint Augustine Worthington, gentleman, my supervisor of the same;

The residue of my goods not bequeathed, my funeral charges, legacies and servants' wages paid and discharged, my will and mind is that they shall be employed towards the payment of my debts, and those debts to be first paid & discharged the which I have undertaken and promised to pay sithence my Lord my husband's death, and then the other debts which I did owe, being under covert-baron, to be paid rateably, portion and portion like;

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my seal and subscribed my name the seventh day of August a thousand five hundred ninety-six, and in the eight and thirtieth year of the Queen Majesty's reign that now is, etc. M. Derby.

The ninth day of August in the year of our Lord God a thousand five hundred ninety-six, and in the eight and thirtieth of the reign of the Queen's Majesty that now is, the Right Honourable Lady Margaret, Countess of Derby, did affirm these things contained within this paper to be her last will and testament in the presence of us witnesses whose names are here underwritten the day and year abovesaid etc.

The eighteenth day of September a thousand five hundred ninety-six this following was added hereunto by my Lady's own commandment:

Item, I give and bequeath unto Katherine Rythe six pounds thirteen shillings four pence;

Item, I give & bequeath unto Charles Moses, my servant, five pounds. M. Derby.

John Lathum, John Renoulds [=Reynolds], vicar of Walthamstow.

Vicesimo Septembris a thousand five hundred ninety-six.

Memorandum: That the Lady Margaret, Countess of Derby, doth give and bequeath to Mr Andrews, Doctor of Divinity, one piece of gilt plate weighing thirty ounces;

Item, whereas Frances Clifford, esquire, and William Cox, gentleman, are possessed of a lease to the use of the said Countess of her mansion or dwelling-house with the gardens and all other the appurtenances in the parish of St James in Clerkenwell in the county of Middlesex now in the occupation of the said Countess, she, the said Countess, doth hereby give, devise and bequeath the said lease and premises and the said use thereof to Richard Hickman, gentleman, her receiver-general, for and during all the term & continuance of the same lease, and doth ordain & devise that the said Francis Clifford & William Cox shall make him assurance thereof;

Item, the said Countess doth give and bequeath to the said Richard Hickman all her lease and leases, term & terms of years to come of and in all [-all] those three gardens with their appurtenances in the parish of St James within Clerkenwell in the county of Middlesex now also in the occupation of the said Countess together with the deeds, writings and conveyances touching the same;

Item, the said Countess doth devise, give and bequeath to the said Richard Hickman all debts and sums of money due or to be due or payable to her or any other to her use by any person or persons, together with all bonds, writings and specialties concerning the same made either in her own name or upon trust and confidence in the name of any other person or persons, and doth ordain that such person or persons as she hath trusted in that behalf shall set over the same bonds, writings and specialties and the whole benefit thereof to the said Richard Hickman to his own use & behoof to satisfy him of all such sums of money as she oweth unto him or that he standeth liable or chargeable to pay for her to any person or persons. M. Derby.

Witnesses to this last: William Reede, Anthony Strelley.

Probatum fuit Testamentum suprascriptum apud London coram venerabili viro m{agist}ro will{el}imo Lewin legum doctore Curie prerogative Cant{uariensis} m{agist}ro custode siue com{m}issario l{egi}time deputato Duodecimo die mens{is} Novembris Anno domini Mill{es}imo quingen{tesim}o nonogesimo sexto Iuramento Richardi Hickman vnus executoru{m} etc Cui comissa fuit administrac{i}o etc De Bene et fidelit{e}r administrand{o} etc. Iurat{i} honorando viro d{omi}no Georgio Comite Cumbrie Executore in h{uius}mo{d}i testamento prius no{m}i{n}at{o} ex certis causis eu{m} et animu{m} suu{m} in hac parte iuste moventibus on{er}i execut{i}onis d{i}c{t}i tes{tamen}ti in p{er}sona m{agist}ri Thome Browne notarij publici procur{ator}is eius etc renuncian{te}(?) reservata p{otes}tate similem comissionem faciend{i} Henrico Barkley gen{eroso} Executori etiam in dicto testamento

no{m}i{n}ato cum venerit eam petitur{o} in debita iuris forma admissur{o} Deinde Decimo quinto die mens{is} Novembris d{ic}t{us} Henr{icus} Barkley oneri execucionis tes{tamen}ti h{uius}mo{d}i simil{ite}r renu{nciavit}

[=The above-written testament was proved at London before the worshipful Master William Lewin, Doctor of the Laws, lawfully deputed Master, Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, on the twelfth day of the month of November in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred ninety-sixth by the oath of Richard Hickman, one of the executors etc., to whom administration was granted etc., sworn to well and faithfully administer, etc., the honourable George, Earl of Cumberland, executor before named in the same testament, for certain causes him and his mind in that regard justly moving, renouncing the burden of the execution of the said testament in the person of Master Thomas Bowne, notary public, his proctor, etc., with power reserved for a similar commission to be made to Henry Berkeley, gentleman, also named as an executor in the said testament, when he shall have come to petition in due form of law to be admitted the same, afterwards, on the fifteenth day of the month of November, the said Henry Berkeley similarly renounced the burden of the execution of the same testament.]