

SUMMARY: The documents below, which date from 1529-32 during Sir Thomas More's tenure as Lord Chancellor, are the bill of complaint of John de Vere (1482-1540), 15th Earl of Oxford, and the answer of Henry Wentworth and his wife, Agnes, widow of John Mountney, esquire, and now wife of Henry Wentworth, whom she had married on 25 September 1528. The bill of complaint alleges that John Golding and others are seised of the manor of Mountnessing to the use of Agnes for life, and after her death to the use of the 15th Earl and his heirs, and that they refuse to release to the Earl the evidences which they have in their possession. The defendants confirm that John Golding and others are seised of the manor of Mountnessing to the use of Agnes for life, but claim that after her death the manor will revert to John Mountney's brother and heir, William Mountney, and that they know of no right which the 15th Earl has to either the manor or the evidences, unless William Mountney has sold the reversion, of which they have no knowledge.

The position of the defendants is to some extent supported by John Mountney's will, dated 3 July and proved 26 October 1528 (see TNA PROB 11/22), the relevant clauses of which read:

Item, I will that Agnes, my wife, have all my lordship of Ging Mountney for term of his [sic] natural life;

Item, I will that if Agnes, my wife, be with child with a son, then I will it shall have all my lands and tenements to him and to his heirs forever;

Item, if so be that Agnes, my wife, be with child with a daughter, then I will that all my lands and tenements shall remain to William, my brother, to him and to his heirs;

However, there is no residual clause in the will specifying to whom the lands would revert in the event that there was no child of the testator's to inherit (and it does not appear that there was such a child), and a document compiled shortly after the 15th Earl's death on 20 March 1540 confirms that he did hold a reversionary interest in the manor of Mountnessing (see TNA SC 11/919):

Divers lands in the hands of (blank) Wentworth in the right of (blank), his wife, late the wife of (blank) Mountney, the which after her decease shall revert to the said now Earl:

The manor of Mountnessing is worth by year £20.

Moreover in his inquisition post mortem of 28 September 1563, the 16th Earl is also stated to have held the reversionary interest in Mountnessing after the death of Agnes, who had married her third husband, William Wilford, on 18 January 1546 (see TNA C 142/136/12):

And the same late Earl before his death was seised in fee and law of and in the reversion after the death of Agnes Wilford, widow, wife of William Wilford, esquire, of the manor of Mountnessing in the county of Essex.

The inquisition post mortem also records a deed dated 4 October 1543 by which the 16th Earl had granted a 21-year lease of the manor of Mountnessing to Henry Wentworth, to take effect after the death of Agnes:

And the foresaid jurors say that the foresaid late Earl, by a certain deed of his sealed by his seal at arms & subscribed by his own hand dated the 4th day of October in the 35th year [=4 October 1543] of the reign of the late King Henry the Eighth, demised to Henry Wontford [=Wentworth], esquire, all that manor of Mountnessing Hall with its whole appurtenances . . . to have and to hold the said manor with all & singular the lands & appurtenances, except pre-excepted, to the said Henry & his assigns from the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel next & immediately following after the decease of Agnes, then wife of the said Henry and now wife of a certain William Wilford, until the end & term of twenty-one years from thence next following and fully to be completed, yielding thereof yearly during the foresaid term to the said Earl & his assigns £24 sterling at the two usual terms of the year . . . which certain [] by a conveyance effective in the law is granted to a certain Robert Fulkes, as by the foresaid conveyance to the foresaid jurors upon the taking of this present inquisition in manifest evidences more fully appears.

Thus, on 4 October 1543 the 16th Earl granted a 21-year lease of the manor of Mountnessing to Henry Wentworth to take effect after the death of Agnes, but before his own death Henry conveyed his interest to Robert Fulkes, leaving Fulkes as the holder of a 21-year lease in Mountnessing to commence after the termination of Agnes' life interest.

However during her lifetime, in Easter term 1573, Agnes and her then husband, William Wilford, esquire, quitclaimed whatever interest they had for the life of Agnes to John Jackson and his heirs (see Fitch, Marc and Frederick Emmison, eds., *Feet of Fines for Essex*, Vol. V, (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 1991), p.175). Agnes died shortly thereafter, and was buried in Stepney Church on 3 September 1574. It may be that Jackson also purchased Robert Fulkes' lease and Oxford's reversionary interest, thus uniting the various interests into one.

Since Agnes was still alive in 1573 after Oxford had come of age, it is clear that Oxford did not receive any revenue during his minority from the 21-year lease conveyed to Robert Fulkes which was to take effect after Agnes' death.

The documents below state that John Golding, gentleman, his son, John Golding, and others are seised of the manor of Mountnessing to the use of Agnes for term of her life as her jointure. This arrangement suggests that John Golding, gentleman, was in a position of trust vis-à-vis Agnes and was related to her in some way. This is borne out by various sources which indicate that Agnes was born Agnes Hammond, the daughter of Elizabeth (nee Towe) and Reginald Hammond (d.1513). After Reginald Hammond's death, his widow, Elizabeth (nee Towe), married John Golding (d.1548). They had four children:

Sir Thomas Golding (d.1571); William Golding (d.1588), Oxford's mother, Margery Golding (d.1568); and Elizabeth Golding. See Louis Thorn Golding, *An Elizabethan Puritan* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1937), pp. 14-16. Agnes (nee Hammond) was thus a stepsister of Oxford's mother, Margery Golding.

Agnes' second husband, Henry Wentworth (died c.1545), was a younger brother of the 16th Earl's close friend, Sir John Wentworth (1494-1567) of Gosfield Hall in Essex, named as an executor of the 16th Earl's will. By her second husband, Henry Wentworth, Agnes had a daughter, also named Agnes, who married Thomas, 2nd Lord Wentworth (1525-1584). They had two sons, Lord William Wentworth (1555/6-1582) and Lord Henry Wentworth (1558-1593), and a daughter. Lord William Wentworth (1555/6-1582) married Lord Burghley's younger daughter, Elizabeth Cecil, and was for a time Oxford's brother-in-law.

The bill of complaint and answer below thus establish connections between the Goldings and the Earls of Oxford which predate the 16th Earl's marriage to Margery Golding on 1 August 1548.

For earlier information on the manor of Mountnessing, see the will of Edward Tyrrell of Downham in Jacob, E.F., ed., *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443*, Vol. II, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1198), pp. 628-36.

To the right honourable Sir Thomas More, knight, Lord Chancellor of England

Showeth(?) unto your good Lordship, John, Earl of Oxford, that where John Golding, gentleman, Harry Evererd, Thomas Danyell, esquire, & Richard Whyte, gentleman, and John Golding, son of the said John Golding, stand and be seised in their demesne as of fee to the use of Agnes, the wife of Harry Wentworth, esquire, late the wife of John Mountney, esquire, for term of the life of the same Agnes, and after her decease to the use of the said Earl and of his heirs of and in the mansion and site of the manor of Mountnessing otherwise called Gyng Mountney with the appurtenances in the county of Essex, and of and in 100 acres of land, 60 acres of meadow, 100 acres of pasture and 100 acres of wood with th' appurtenances in Mountnessing aforesaid called the demesne lands of the said manor, so it is that certain deeds, charters, court rolls, rentals, extents and other evidences concerning the premises over and besides such writings and evidences as concern the title and interest of the said Agnes in the premises for term of her life are come to the hands and possession of the said Harry and Agnes, of whom, albeit the said Earl divers and sundry times hath required deliver[y] of the said evidences, yet that to do the same Harry and Agnes have always refused, and yet do, contrary to all right and good conscience, and forasmuch as the said Earl knoweth not the certainty nor number of the said evidences, nor whether they are contained in bag, box, chest or other thing certain, the said Earl is without remedy by the course of the common law for recovery of the same;

In consideration whereof it may please your good Lordship, the premises considered, to grant a writ of subpoena to be directed to the said Harry and Agnes, commanding them by the same to appear afore the King in his Court of Chancery at a certain day and under a certain pain by your Lordship to be limited, there to answer the premises and further therein to be ordered as shall stand with equity, right and good conscience, and the said Earl shall pray to God for the preservation of your good Lordship long to endure.

Thomas Audley

The answer of Harry Wentworth and Agnes, his wife, to the bill of complaint of John,
Earl of Oxford

The said Harry Wentworth and Agnes, his wife, sayen that the said bill of complaint is uncertain and insufficient in the law to be answered unto and th' aunauntaiges [sic] thereof to them saved, for answer they sayen that true it is that the said John Golding and other stand and be seised of the said manor of Mountnessing, otherwise called Gyng Mountney, in their demesne as of fee to the use of the said Agnes Wentworth, late the wife of the said John Mountney, for term of her life, as well by force of the last will of the said John Mountney as otherwise, and the said John Mountney made the said Agnes, now wife of the said Harry Wentworth, his executrix, and died, after whose death divers evidence, charters and muniments concerning the premises over and beside such evidence, writings and muniments as concern her said use and interest in the premises after the death of the said John Mountney be comen to the hands and possession of the said Agnes, and among other the goods of the said John Mountney the use of the reversion of the premises after the death of the said John Mountney descended to one William Mountney as brother and heir of the said John Mountney, by force whereof the said feoffees were seised of the reversion of the premises to the said William Mountney and his heirs after the death of the said Agnes, and so all the evidence, charters and muniments concerning the premises except the evidence and writings which the said Agnes hath and withholdeth for surety of her jointure of right belong to the said William Mountney unless he have sold the same reversion, which the same Harry Wentworth and Agnes knoweth not, therefore the same Harry and Agnes prayen that the same William Mountney may be called into this Court to interplead for the same evidence with the said Earl, now complainant, and the said defendants shall be ready to deliver all such evidence, charters and muniments as they have concerning the premises other than concern the right and title of the said Agnes in form afore rehearsed to such of the said Earl and William Mountney as this Court will award, without that that the said John Golding and the other his co-feoffees be seised of the reversion of the said manor with th' appurtenances to the use of the said Earl and his heirs to the knowledge of the said defendants, or that the said Earl hath any right or title to the said evidence, charters or muniments to their knowledge, or that any other thing in the said bill contained concerning the said Harry Wentworth and Agnes is true, all which matters the said defendants been ready to prove as this honourable Court will award, and prayen to be dismissed out of the same with their reasonable costs and charges for their wrongful action in this behalf sustained.