

SUMMARY: The document below is a bill of complaint dated 9 February 1602 in a lawsuit brought in the Court of Chancery by Thomas Skinner, the second son of Thomas Skinner (d.1596), Lord Mayor of London, against Anne (nee Blackwell) Bacon, Robert Bacon, and George Ruggle concerning certain leases which, according to Skinner, pertained to Oxford's former manors of Overhall and Netherhall in Lavenham.

Background to the lawsuit

In 1583, Thomas Skinner (d.1596) purchased the manors of Overhall and Netherhall from Oxford indirectly, using as intermediaries Richard Peacock and Rowland Martin, leather-sellers. For the fine by which Oxford transferred clear title to the manors of Overhall and Netherhall to Peacock and Martin on 20 January 1583 for £800, see TNA C 146/6976. For the deed of 9 December 1583 in fulfilment of indentures into which Oxford had entered on 30 November 1583 with Peacock, Martin and Skinner for the sale of his manors of Overhall and Netherhall, Lavenham park, and the advowson of the church of Lavenham, see TNA C 147/152. For Oxford's acknowledgement on 30 November 1583 of the receipt of £13,400 from Peacock, Martin and Skinner for the sale of the manors of Overhall and Netherhall and the park of Lavenham in Suffolk, as well as the manors of Castle Camps and Fowlmere in Cambridge, see TNA C 146/7040. For the indenture tripartite of 4 January 1585 providing for a recovery by which the manors of Overhall and Netherhall would be held to the use of the heirs of Thomas Skinner, see TNA C 147/231.

In his will, Thomas Skinner (d.1596) left the manors of Overhall and Netherhall to his second son, Thomas Skinner:

Item, I give and devise to my son, Thomas Skinner, my manors of Overhall and Netherhall and Lanam alias Lavenham in the county of Suffolk, with th' advowson thereof, and all other hereditaments to the same belonging, and also all other my lands, tenements, rents, reversions and hereditaments in Lavenham and elsewhere in the county of Suffolk, and all my evidences concerning the same premises in the county of Suffolk, to have and to hold the same to the said Thomas Skinner, my son, and to his heirs forever, and I do declare that the use and all the uses of all and singular the said manors, lands and premises in the said county of Suffolk shall be to my said son, Thomas Skinner, and to his heirs forever.

For the will of Thomas Skinner (d.1596), see TNA PROB 11/89/542. For his son's inheritance of the manors of Overhall and Netherhall, see also Shipley, N.R., 'The History of a Manor: Castle Campes, 1580-1629', *Bulletin of The Institute of Historical Research*, Vol. 47, (University of London: Institute of Historical Research, 1974), p. 164, citing Charterhouse Muniments L5/6.

Anne Blackwell Bacon

In the bill of complaint Anne Blackwell Bacon is described as ‘late the wife of Thomas Bacon, gentleman, late of Lavenham’, and it was under the terms of the will of her husband, Thomas Bacon (d.1577), that she inherited certain leases granted by Oxford and his father. See the will of Thomas Bacon, TNA PROB 11/59/473:

Item, I give and bequeath unto Anne, my said wife, and to her heirs forever, all my leases whatsoever and not afore disposed that I have and hold by the grant as well of the right honourable the Earl of Oxenford that now is as also by the grant of his right honourable father, the Earl of Oxenford that dead is, as well of all those grounds whatsoever as is commonly known, reputed and taken by the name of Brome park, situate within the parish of Lavenham, as of all and every parcel and parcels of grounds whatsoever as are included within every or any of all the said leases that either I hold in possession or reversion by virtue and force of any of the said leases, except before excepted. . . .

Anne (nee Blackwell) Bacon and her son, Mathy Bacon of Gray’s Inn, are mentioned in the indenture by which William Shakespeare (1564-1616) of Stratford upon Avon purchased a dwelling-house or tenement and plot of ground in the precinct of the Blackfriars on 10 March 1613 (see Folger MS Z.c.22(45) and London Metropolitan Archives CLC/522/MS03738 on this website for the purchasers’ and vendor’s copies of the indenture, respectively).

From London Metropolitan Archives CLC/522/MS03738 on the Shakespeare Documented website at:

<http://www.shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/shakespeare-purchases-blackfriars-gatehouse-copy-bargain-and-sale-signed-buyers>

. . . part of which said tenement is erected over a great gate leading to a capital messuage which sometime was in the tenure of William Blackwell, esquire, deceased, and since that in the tenure or occupation of the right honourable Henry, now Earl of Northumberland;

And also all that plot of ground on the west side of the same tenement which was lately enclosed with boards on two sides thereof by Anne Bacon, widow, so far and in such sort as the same was enclosed by the said Anne Bacon

Which said dwelling-house or tenement and other the premises above by these presents mentioned to be bargained and sold the said Henry Walker late purchased and had to him, his heirs and assigns forever of Mathie Bacon of Gray’s Inn in the county of Middlesex, gentleman, bearing date the fifteenth day of October in the year of Our Lord God one thousand six hundred and four.

For the will of Mathy Bacon (d.1639), see TNA PROB 11/180/622.

Robert Bacon

The defendant Robert Bacon, one of the sons of Thomas Bacon (d.1577) by his first marriage to Anne Tomlinson, and thus the stepson of Anne Blackwell Bacon, had also inherited under the will of his father a lease granted by Oxford. From the will of Thomas Bacon, TNA PROB 11/59/473:

Item, I give unto my said son, Robert Bacon, all my lease and whole term of years that I have in reversion of all the lands, meadows, pastures, feedings, and commonly called and known by the names of Baylie Brooke and Nether Hall, which lease and term of years I hold of the grant of the right honourable th' Earl of Oxenford, to be begun after the expiration and determination of the term of years that one Robert Symond of Lanam [=Lavenham] now hath in the same lands by virtue of a former lease in possession.

George Ruggle

The reason for the involvement of 'George Ruggle of Lavenham, clothier' as a defendant in the lawsuit is unknown. He may have been the 'George Ruggle, clothier of Sudbury', whose will was proved 10 May 1616. See TNA PROB 11/127/529. It seems likely he was related to George Ruggle, author of the play *Ignoramus*, who was born in Lavenham. See the *ODNB* entry. See also:

<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/ruggle/>

George Ruggle was born at Lavenham, Suffolk, in 1575. He was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1593, admitted to the B. A. in 1597, and proceeded M. A. in 1597. In 1598 he was elected a Fellow of Clare Hall (the modern Clare College), where he remained until he demitted the position in 1620. He died two years later. Although his university career was not especially spectacular, he was by all accounts a steady and reliable academic, and a benefactor of his College.

LM: Huberd ix die ffebruarij 1601 [=9 February 1602]

To the right honourable Sir Thomas Egerton, knight, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of
England

Humbly complaining showeth unto your good Lordship your daily orator, Thomas Skinner of Lavenham in the county of Suffolk, esquire, that whereas the right honourable Edward, Earl of Oxenford, was sometimes lawfully seised in his demesne as of fee of and in the manors of Overhall and Netherhall in Lavenham aforesaid with th' appurtenances, the title, interest and estate of which said Earl of, in and to the said manors & premises is now comen to your said orator by divers mean conveyances, by reason whereof your said orator standeth and is thereof seised of a good and sure estate in fee simple;

So it is, and if it may please your good Lordship, that one Anne Bacon, widow, late the wife of Thomas Bacon, gentleman, late of Lavenham aforesaid, deceased, Robert Bacon of Lavenham aforesaid, gentleman, and George Ruggle of Lavenham aforesaid, clothier, have entered into divers parcels of lands, meadows & pastures belonging unto the said manors of Overhall & Netherhall in Lavenham aforesaid, videlicet, the said Anne Bacon into some parts thereof, and the other two severally into other parts of the said manors, and have by the space of many years together severally taken the profits thereof to their own several uses, pretending several titles thereunto by force and virtue of certain several leases thereof made unto them or to their predecessors by the said Earl, the counterpanes of which leases (if ever any there were) never came unto the hands or custody of your said orator, so as your orator knoweth not, neither can he learn, the certain dates of the same leases (if any there be), nor the certain number of years therein contained, neither when the same leases began or shall end, neither the certain yearly rents in them reserved, nor under what covenants or conditions they and every of them do enjoy the same;

In tender consideration whereof, and for that your said orator hath not any ordinary means by distress, action of debt or otherwise by the course of the common laws of this realm for the recovery of his rents(?) for great spoil, strip & waste done in the said lands and tenements, nor breach of covenants, for that as is aforesaid your orator knoweth not the certainty thereof of the rents reserved, neither the certain dates of the said leases nor the certain number of years therein contained, neither when they did begin or shall end;

May it therefore please your good Lordship, the premises considered, to grant unto your said orator the Queen's Majesty's most gracious writ of subpoena to be directed to the said Anne Bacon, Robert Bacon and George Ruggle, thereby commanding them and every of them at a certain day and place and under a certain pain therein to be limited personally to appear before your good Lordship in her Majesty's high and honourable Court of Chancery, then & there being to make answer unto the premises and to set forth upon their and every of their corporal oaths by what title they & every of them do occupy and enjoy the same, and if by any pretended lease, that then they and every of them may by the order of this honourable court be enforced to bring into this court their several leases (if any they have) to th' end your said orator by the order of this honourable court may know the same and have true copies of them, and further to stand to and abide such other order therein as to your good Lordship shall seem to stand best with equity and good conscience, and your said orator according to his bounden duty shall daily pray to God for your good Lordship in all honour long to continue.

Goldynge(?)