

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will, dated 11 November 1537 and proved 16 May 1538, of John Onley (d. 22 November 1537), whose second wife, Elizabeth (nee Rolleston), was the maternal grandmother of the poet, Thomas Watson (d.1592), who dedicated *Hekatompathia* to Oxford.

The testator was the ancestor of Elizabeth Vernon, wife of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The testator was the grandson of the Coventry wool merchant, Sir Robert Onley, and the son of John Onley, esquire, of Withington, Shropshire, and Catesby, Northamptonshire, and Jane Pontesbury, the daughter of Thomas Pontesbury of Albrighton, Shropshire. See the History of Parliament entry for the testator at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/onley-john-1498-1537>

b. by 1498, s. of John Onley of Withington, Salop by Jane, da. of Thomas Pontesbury of Salop. educ. New Inn; I. Temple, adm. 25 Oct. 1514. m. (1) by 1519, Jane (d. Sept./Oct. 1529), da. of (?Henry) Smith of Sherborne, Warws., 4s. inc. Edward† and Thomas 2da.; (2) by 1537, Elizabeth (d. 3 Aug. 1556) wid. of William Whitlok (d. Aug. 1556), Thomas Lee (d. Aug. 1527), and Robert Wade (d. June 1529), all of London, s.p.2

John Onley was probably born at Withington in Shropshire, where his parents were buried in 1512 and 1513, but his grandfather was the Sir Robert Olney (or Woneley) who had prospered as a wool merchant at Coventry, becoming mayor about 1480 and one of the town's Members in 1485. Although his first child was also born at Withington, it was his Warwickshire rather than his Shropshire affiliation which seems to have shaped Onley's upbringing and early career; he probably owed his early patronage by William Shelley to Shelley's wife Alice Belknap, sister of Henry VII's fiscal henchman Edward Belknap, who was a Warwickshire man, and he was himself to marry Jane Smith of Sherborne (close to Warwick), the servant of hers to whom Alice Shelley was to give the manuscript known as the 'Belknap Hours'. If, as is likely, Onley had been under age when his father died, he could have been brought up in the Belknap household. He had older and younger namesakes, and perhaps kinsmen, at Pulborough, Sussex.4

See also the pedigree of Onley of Onley Catesby in Metcalfe, Walter C., ed., *The Visitations of Northamptonshire Made in 1564 and 1618-19*, (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1887), pp. 38-9 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationsnort00vincgoog#page/n52/mode/2up>

According to the History of Parliament, the testator's parents were buried at Withington, Shropshire, in 1512 and 1513. However the brass in the church of St John the Baptist at Withington records that John Onley, son and heir of Sir Robert Onley of the city of Coventry died 19 June 1512, but makes no mention of the date of death of his wife. See Stephenson, Mill, *Monumental Brasses in Shropshire*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1895), pp. 99-100 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/brassesinshropsh00step#page/n153/mode/2up>

Moreover contrary to the assertion in the History of Parliament that she was buried in 1513, the will below indicates that the testator's mother was still living in 1537, and had married a second husband surnamed Pigott:

And I give and bequeath to Jane Pigott, my mother, £3 6s 8d.

The pedigree of Pontesbury in the Visitation of Shropshire, p. 404, shows the testator's widowed mother, Jane, as having married, as her second husband, Robert Pigott of Chetwynd, Shropshire. However the pedigree of Pigott of Chetwynd in the same Visitation erroneously shows the testator's widowed mother, Jane, as the first wife of the Robert Pigott (d.1584) who married Elizabeth Gatacre (died c.1584), the daughter of William Gatacre or Gattacre (d. 27 December 1577). See the wills of William Gatacre (d. 27 December 1577), dated 16 March 1575 and proved 25 January 1578, TNA PROB 11/60/34; Robert Pigott (d.1584), esquire, of Chetwynd, dated 30 May 1584 and proved 23 November 1584, TNA PROB 11/67/46; and Elizabeth (nee Gatacre) Pigott (died c.1585), dated 6 August 1585 and proved 24 May 1586, TNA PROB 11/69/296.

It appears impossible that the testator's widowed mother, Jane (nee Pontesbury) Onley, could have married the Robert Pigott who died in 1584, and it seems she was, instead, the second wife of Robert Pigott, Sheriff of Shropshire in 1517, whose son, Thomas Pigott, married the widowed Jane's daughter, Elizabeth Onley (see below). For the pedigrees of Pontesbury and Pigott, see Grazebrook, George and John Paul Rylands, eds., *The Visitation of Shropshire Taken in the Year 1623*, Part II, (London: Harleian Society, 1889), Vol. XXIX, pp. 401 and 404:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationshrop01grazgoog#page/n128/mode/2up>

The testator had two brothers and two sisters, all of whom are left bequests in the will below:

-Robert Onley.

-Adam Onley.

-Elizabeth Onley, who married Thomas Pigott of Chetwynd (see above), by whom she had a daughter, Elizabeth Pigott, who married George Vernon (died c.1554) of Hodnet, Shropshire, by whom she was the mother of John Vernon (d.1592), who married

Elizabeth Devereux, (c.1541-c.1583), by whom he was the father of Elizabeth Vernon (b. 11 January 1573, d. after 1655), wife of Henry Wriothesley (1573–1624), 3rd Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. See the will of George Vernon, TNA PROB 11/37/222, and Grazebrook, *supra*, Part II, pp. 401, 474:

-**Mary Onley** (d. 14 March 1559?), who married Sir George Cotton (d. 25 March 1545?) of Combermere Abbey, Cheshire, Vice-Chamberlain of the Household to the future Edward VI. by whom she was the mother of a son, Richard Cotton, and a daughter, Mary Cotton (d.1580), who became the third wife of Edward Stanley (1509-1572), 3rd Earl of Derby, and after his death the wife of Henry Grey (1541–1615), 5th Earl of Kent. See Richardson, Douglas, *Plantagenet Ancestry*, 2nd ed., 2011, Vol. I, p. 92; the will of Sir George Cotton, TNA PROB 11/30/417; the *ODNB* entry for Edward Stanley, 3rd Earl of Derby; and Burke, Bernard, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage*, (London: Harrison, 1880), p. 281 at:

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=u6IaAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA281>

See also, Brydges, Egerton, *Collins's Peerage of England*, (London: P.C. and J. Rivington, 1812), Vol. III, p. 75:

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=xII5AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA75>

See also the Cotton papers at:

<http://apps.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=017-cr72&cid=-1#-1>

MARRIAGES AND ISSUE

Testator's first marriage

The testator married firstly, by 1519, Jane Smyth, the daughter of Henry Smyth (d. 25 February 1513) of Sherford, Warwickshire. For the testator's father-in-law, Henry Smyth (d. 25 February 1513), see his will, TNA PROB 11/18/7, and the inquisition post mortem taken after his death, TNA C 142/28/139.

According to the History of Parliament, the testator had four sons and two daughters by Jane Smyth, although only two sons and a daughter are mentioned in the will below:

* **Edward Onley** (1522-1582), who married Katherine Catesby, for whom see the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/onley-edward-1522-82>

See also the pedigree of Catesby of Whiston in Metcalfe, *supra*, p. 174 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationsnort00vincgoog#page/n188/mode/2up>

* **Thomas Onley** (1523-1589), who married Jane Rigges. See Metcalfe, *supra*, pp. 38-9, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/onley-thomas-1523-89>

* **Jane Onley** (d.1585). In the will below the testator expresses his intention that she marry his ward, Edward Browne, son and heir of John Browne of Warwickshire, and if not, the courtier Sir Richard Cotton (d. 2 October 1556), brother of her uncle, Sir George Cotton (d. 25 March 1545?) of Combermore (see above). Jane married Sir Richard Cotton by 1538, and by him had six sons, including the Catholic recusant, George Cotton (1538-1610), and Henry Cotton (d.1545-1615), Bishop of Salisbury, and three daughters. From the *ODNB*:

Cotton, Sir Richard (b. in or before 1497, d. 1556), courtier and administrator, was the third son of John Cotton, a Shropshire gentleman, and Cecily, daughter of Thomas Mainwaring of Ightfield, Shropshire. He began his career as an attorney in the sheriff's court in London, but then entered the king's service, no doubt helped by his elder brother George.

George Cotton was the governor of Henry VIII's illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy, duke of Richmond, in the latter's household in Yorkshire, and by 1526 Richard Cotton had become the household's comptroller.

See the will of Jane (nee Onley) Cotton, proved 26 August 1585, TNA PROB 11/68/506, and the *ODNB* entry for Sir Richard Cotton:

From 1538 he was a JP in Hampshire. By that year he had married Jane, daughter of John Onley of London and Catesby, Northamptonshire. They had six sons and three daughters.

Testator's second marriage

The testator married secondly Elizabeth (nee Rolleston), the daughter of Thomas Rolleston of Swarkestone, Derbyshire, and Katherine Fitzwilliam, daughter of John Fitzwilliam, esquire, by Helen Villiers, the daughter of William Villiers, esquire, of Brokesby, Leicestershire, and Joan Bellers. Katherine Fitzwilliam was the sister of Sir William Fitzwilliam (d.1534), maternal great-great-grandfather of Oxford's first wife, Anne Cecil. See Richardson, Douglas, *Magna Carta Ancestry*, 2nd ed., 2011, Vol. II, pp. 217-18.

Before her marriage to the testator, Elizabeth (nee Rolleston) had been the wife firstly of William Whitlock (d.1520), for whose will see TNA PROB 11/19/437; secondly of Thomas Lee (d.1527), for whose will see TNA PROB 11/22/381; and thirdly of Robert Wade (d.1529) for whose will see TNA PROB 11/23/135.

The testator intended that his eldest son, Edward Onley, should marry Anne (nee Lee), the daughter of the testator's second wife, Elizabeth (nee Rolleston), by her second husband, Thomas Lee (d.1527):

And I will and charge thee, my son, Edward Onley, that thou be ordered, guided and ruled by the said Elizabeth, my wife, thy mother-in-law [=stepmother], and that thou be contented to accept and take to thy wife Anne, the daughter of my said wife, whereby thou shalt find my said wife the more kinder unto thee, and be much to thy profit and benefit.

The marriage did not take place, however, and Anne (nee Lee) married William Watson, by whom she was the mother of the poet, Thomas Watson (d.1592). See the will, dated 8 March 1561 and proved 8 May 1561, of Anne (nee Lee)Watson, TNA PROB 11/44/183.

OTHER PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE WILL

The testator states in the will below that he had been appointed one of the executors of the will of Sir William Spencer (d. 22 June 1532), together with Sir Nicholas Strelley, Anthony Cope and Sir Walter Smyth, but that the entire burden of the execution of the will had fallen upon him:

And where that one William Spencer of Althorp in the county of Northampton, knight, constitute[d], made and ordained Sir Nicholas Strelley of Strelley in the county of Nottingham, Anthony Cope, gentleman, Sir Walter Smyth, knight, & me his executors, and died, after whose death the said Nicholas Strelley, Anthony Cope and Walter Smyth were contented that I should have the whole execution of the testament of the said Sir William Spencer

For the foregoing executors, see also the will of Sir William Spencer (d. 22 June 1532), TNA PROB 1/24/12:

Item, I ordain & make mine executors Dame Susan Spencer, my wife, Sir Nicholas Strelley, knight, Anthony Cope, esquire, Walter Smythe, esquire, John Onley, gentleman, and Thomas Banister, gentleman, and I would that they shall have for their painstaking each of them forty pounds.

The testator leaves bequests to his fellow officers at the Court of Augmentations. For Sir Richard Rich (1496/7-1567), Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, and Sir Robert Southwell (c.1506–1559), Solicitor of the Court of Augmentations, see the *ODNB* entries.

For Sir Thomas Pope (d.1559), Treasurer of the Court of Augmentations, see the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/pope-thomas-15067-59>

RM: Test{amentu}m Io{hannis} Oneley

[f. 132r] In the name of God, Amen. The 11th day of November in the year of Our Lord God a thousand five hundred thirty and seven, and in the 29th year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord Henry the 8th by the grace of God King of England and of France, Defender of the Faith, Lord of Ireland and in earth the Supreme Head of the Church of England, I, John Onley, gentleman, our said Sovereign Lord the King's Attorney of his Court of Augmentations of the Revenues of his Crown and one of the under-sheriffs of the city of London, being sick in body, nevertheless whole in mind, memory and perfect remembrance, laud be unto Almighty God, considering that every man in this transitory life is mortal, and that the end of this universal flesh is death, and that every day after we be born into this world we die, the time and day certain whereof is unknown but only unto Almighty God, for that [-that] I would it should be known to all men that I have thereof consideration and a full and perfect mind now in my life by these presents to make a plain declaration and disposition of all such goods and chattels as I am by the sufferance of Almighty God and of his gift possessed of, make, ordain, publish and declare this my present testament and last will in manner and form following:

First I bequeath my soul to Almighty God, my Saviour and Redeemer, and to Our Blessed Lady Saint Mary, his mother and ever a Virgin, and to all the holy company of heaven, and my body to be buried in the parish church of Saint John Zachary where I am a parishes in such place of the said church as by my executrice shall be thought convenient;

And I will above all things that all such debts as shall happen to be by me owing at the time of my decease to any person or persons in law or in conscience be truly contented and paid without delay;

And I bequeath to the high altar there of devotion and discharge of my conscience, if anything due to the parson or curate there have been by me negligently withholden, withdrawn or forgotten, 20s;

Also I will that the morrow after my burial there be distributed amongst the poor people inhabiting and dwelling in four several parishes next adjoining unto the said parish of Saint John Zachary, in every of the said four parishes, accounting Saint John Zachary for one of the four, 40s sterlings;

And I will that my said body be buried without any pomp or pride, and such sums of money to be bestowed at my said burial, month's mind and year's mind as I thereof have showed my mind unto my executrice;

Also I will that there be one priest of good and honest conversation ordained to sing and pray for my [f. 132v] soul in the said parish church of Saint John Zachary by the space of one year next after my decease, and I will that he have for his salary and wages by the year £6 13s 4d;

Also I give and bequeath unto the poor prisoners of Newgate 20s, unto the poor prisoners of the King's Bench in Southwark 6s 8d, unto the poor prisoners of the Marshalsea in Southwark aforesaid 6s 8d;

Also I bequeath to the poor prisoners being in the two Counters in London, that is to say, to either of them 6s 8d;

Also I give and bequeath unto the poor prisoners of Ludgate 6s 8d;

Also I bequeath unto the four orders of friars within the said city of London, that is to say, the Grey Friars, the Black Friars, the (illegible) Friars Augustines, and the White Friars, to every of them to pray for my soul 10s;

Also I give and bequeath unto Elizabeth, my good and well-beloved wife, of lawful money of England two hundred pounds, and of plate such as she will choose and take to the value of one hundred pounds, and all my stuff of household, and all my store of cattle, sheep and wool being or that at the time of my decease shall happen to be in and upon my manors, lands, tenements and pastures of Catesby in the county of Northampton or elsewhere in the realm of England, and also all her jewels whatsoever they be, to have and to hold all these my legacies and bequests to her own use and behoof;

Also I give and bequeath unto Thomas Onley, my son, three hundred pounds of good and lawful money of England to be paid and delivered unto him by mine executrice when he shall come to the age of 22 years, and in the meantime I will that the said three hundred pounds shall be employed in a stock for the most advantage of my said son, Thomas, by the discretion and policy of my said wife;

And if my said son, Thomas, happen to decease before he shall accomplish the said age of 22 years, then I will that the said three hundred pounds shall be paid and delivered by my said executrice unto Edward Onley, my son, and Anne Lee, daughter to my said wife;

And whereas I have bought of John Browne in the county of Warwick, esquire, the custody and marriage of Edward Browne, son and heir apparent of the said John Browne, intending to marry the said Edward Browne unto Jane, my daughter, I will that if the said Jane, my daughter, and Edward Browne can by mediation of my friends and of the friends of the said Edward Browne be contented and assent to marry together, then I will that the said Jane, my daughter, shall have the benefit of the said marriage, and in case

that the said marriage take none effect by death, wardship, disagreement or otherwise, living the said Jane, my daughter, so that the said Jane, my daughter, be not married unto the said Edward Browne, then I will that the said Jane, my daughter, shall have and I give and bequeath unto her two hundred pounds sterling to be paid unto her by mine executrice in the day of her marriage;

And if it happen my said daughter to decease before marriage abovesaid and be not married unto the said Edward Browne [-or fortune to be married unto the said Edward Browne], then I will and also bequeath the said two hundred pounds sterling unto Elizabeth, my wife;

And where that one William Spencer of Althorp in the county of Northampton, knight, constitute[d], made and ordained Sir Nicholas Strelley of Strelley in the county of Nottingham, Anthony Cope, gentleman, Sir Walter Smyth, knight, & me his executors, and died, after whose death the said Nicholas Strelley, Anthony Cope and Walter Smyth were contented that I should have the whole execution of the testament of the said Sir William Spencer, be it known to all men that I have made a book in the which book appeareth all such sums of money as I have received sith the death of the said Sir William Spencer and also all sums of money as I have paid sith the death of the said Sir William Spencer, so that thereby it shall appear and be manifest what sums of money remain in my hands of the goods of the said Sir William Spencer, and forasmuch as there been many debts which were owing by the said Sir William in his life yet unpaid, and also many of his daughters to either of whom he bequeathed divers sums of money to her marriage yet unmarried, and whether my co-executors shall accord between themselves concerning th' execution of the said testament or not I certainly know not, I therefore most humbly require and beseech my singular and very especial good Lord, Sir Thomas Audley, knight, Lord Chancellor of England, to make, direct and set such order amongst my said co-executors that the said testament of the said Sir William Spencer may be put in due execution according to the trust and expectation that he had in us without variety or discord to be had between them, and this order to be taken by my said Lord soon after my decease, and for his pains to be taken in that behalf I give to the said Lord Chancellor £6 8s 4d;

And I will and charge thee, my son, Edward Onley, that thou be ordered, guided and ruled by the said Elizabeth, my wife, thy mother-in-law [=stepmother], and that thou be contented to accept and take to thy wife Anne, the daughter of my said wife, whereby thou shalt find my said wife the more kinder unto thee, and be much to thy profit and benefit;

And I will give to thee God's blessing and mine, and charge thee to serve God and apply thy learning which shall be thy most advancement and comfort;

Item, I bequeath to the Chancellor of the Augmentations £6 13s 4d, and to the Solicitor of the Augmentations £3 6s 8d; to the Treasurer of the Augmentations £3 6s 8d;

Item, I bequeath to my brother, Robert Onley, 100s;

Item, to my sister Pigott a harness of a girdle silver and gilt that was her own, and in money a hundred shillings;

And I give and bequeath to Jane Pigott, my mother, £3 6s 8d;

And I give and bequeath to every of my yeomen servants that shall be in my service at the time of my decease 26s 8d over & above their wages due to them at Michaelmas last except John Ponysbery [=Pontesbury], to whom I bequeath 40s;

And to every of my women servants that shall also be in my service the said time of my decease 20s;

And to every of my servants of husbandry 6s 8d;

Item, I bequeath to my sister, Mary Cotton, a little gilt cup sometime Master Crofts' and 100s in money;

And I will that if the marriage between Edward Browne and my daughter, Jane, take none effect, then I will that the marriage commoned of between Richard Cotton and my said daughter, Jane, shall take effect and be accomplished according to such communication as hath been had between the said Richard Cotton and me, and I would they should be married the twenty day of Christmas next ensuing;

And where my brother [=brother-in-law], George Cotton, doth owe unto me £46 13s 4d, I give and forgive the said George £20, parcel of the foresaid debt;

And I will that the said George Cotton and Richard shall have the governance, order, rule and bringing up of my said sons, Edward and Thomas;

Item, I give and bequeath to every of my sister Cotton's children 20s;

And to every of my sister Pigott's children also 20s;

Item, I give to my brother, Adam Onley, in money a hundred shillings;

The residue of all my goods, chattels, debts, jewels and ready money and all other my movables of what kind, quality or condition soever they be I give and bequeath unto the said Elizabeth, my wife, whom I make and ordain my sole executrice, she to order and dispose them for my soul's health as by her discretion shall be thought most convenient;

And I make and ordain John Baker, the King's Attorney-General, [f. 133r] and John Mores, gentleman, overseers of this my said testament, to every of whom I bequeath a hundred shillings;

Witness the foresaid Master John Baker, esquire, and John Morrys, gentleman.

Probatum fuit suprascriptum testamentum xvjo die mensis Maij Anno d{omi}ni Mill{es}imo quingen{tesi}mo xxxviiio apud London coram D{omi}no auct{oritat}e D{omi}ni n{ost}ri Regis Henrici octam Anglie & ffrancie Regis &c Ioannis Onley defuncti h{ab}entis &c Iurament{o} Elizabeth{e} Relicte & executricis in h{uius}mo{d}i testamento no{m}i{n}at{e} In p{er}sona Ioannis Howe procur{atoris} &c ac p{er} eundem auct{oritat}e d{i}c{t}i d{omi}ni n{ost}ri Regis approbatum et insinuatum Com{m}issa q{ue} fuit admi{ni}stracio o{mn}i{u}m & singulorum bonorum Iuriu{m} et creditorum d{i}c{t}i defuncti pefat{e} executrici De b{e}n{e} & fidel{ite}r admi{ni}strand{o} Ac de pleno et fideli In{uenta}rio secundo die post festum s{an}c{t}e Trinitatis prox{imum} futur{um} exhibend{o} Necnon de plano & vero compoto reddend{o} Ad sancta Dei Eu{a}ngelia in debita iuris forma Iurat{e}

[=The above-written testament of John Onley, deceased, having etc., was proved on the 16th day of the month of May in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred 38th at London before the Lord by the authority of our Lord King Henry the Eighth of England & France King etc. by the oath of Elizabeth, relict & executrix named in the same testament, in the person of John Howe, proctor etc., and by the same authority of the said our Lord the King probated and entered, and administration was granted of all & singular the goods, rights and credits of the said deceased to the forenamed executrix, sworn on the Holy Gospels in due form of law to well & faithfully administer, and to exhibit a full and faithful inventory on the second day after the Feast of Holy Trinity next to come, and also to render a plain & true account.]