

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will, dated 10 August 1549 and proved 9 June 1550, of William Brace the younger of Droitwich, Worcestershire, whose son, Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599), was involved in property transactions with Sir Thomas Russell (d.1577), father of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, and courted Anne Digges, whom Thomas Russell later married.

CONFUSION CONCERNING THE TESTATOR'S DATE OF DEATH

An inscription in St Augustine's church, Dodderhill, which is said to pertain to the testator and his wife states that William Brace, esquire, and his wife, Margery, died in 1543 and 1550, respectively. See Stanton, George K., *Rambles and Researches Among Worcestershire Churches*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Company, 1884), p. 139 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=3rMHAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA139>

Here lyeth the body of William Brace, esquyre, and Margery, hys wyfe. Hee dyed Sept. 4, 1543; shee died 1550.

The inscription conflicts with the will below in three respects: the will is dated 10 August 1549, six years after the date of death given in the inscription; the will makes no mention of the testator's wife, Margery, who, according to the inscription survived him, dying in 1550; the testator describes himself in the will below as 'gentleman', rather than 'esquire'.

A History of the County of Worcester states that the William Brace who died in 1543 was the grandfather of Francis Brace (d. 2 July 1599). See:

'Parishes: Doverdale', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3* (London, 1913), pp. 69-71. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp69-71> [accessed 12 December 2019]:

William Brace, who contributed six archers to the muster of 1539, was probably grandson of the younger John. (fn. 28) He died in 1543, (fn. 29) and his grandson Francis Brace (fn. 30) settled the manor in 1588 on his son Thomas on his marriage with Frances daughter of William Freer of Oxford, with contingent remainders in default of heirs male to Philip Brace, brother of Francis. (fn. 31) Thomas Brace died in his father's lifetime, leaving no son, so that on the death of Francis Brace in 1599 this moiety of the manor passed to Philip. (fn. 32) John Brace son of Philip held the manor in 1607, (fn. 33) and died in 1632. (fn. 34)

This statement also conflicts with the will below which states that the testator's father, William Brace, was still living in 1549, and thus cannot have been the William Brace who died in 1543.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

For the testator's family background, see the Bracey pedigree in Phillimore, W.P.W., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1569*, (London: Harleian Society, 1888), Vol. XXVII, p. 24 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationcount02mundgoog#page/n39/mode/2up>

Testator's parents

In the will below the testator mentions his father, William Brace, and appoints him as one of his executors. According to the Bracy pedigree, the testator was the son of William Brace and Joan Whitton.

Testator's siblings

In the will below the testator mentions a brother and a sister, neither of whom appear in the Bracy pedigree:

-John Brace.

-Lettice Brace.

MARRIAGE AND ISSUE

According to the Bracey pedigree, the testator married Margery Porter, daughter and coheir of William Porter, by whom he had two sons and a daughter, all under the age of eighteen when the testator made his will:

* **Francis Brace** (d. 2 July 1599), eldest son, who on 23 November 1562 married Mary Purslow, the daughter of Robert Purslow (buried 31 December 1571) and Margery Sparke. For the will, dated 12 February 1571 and proved 22 July 1589, of Robert Purslow, see TNA PROB 11/74/162. For the marriage of Francis Brace and Mary Purslow, see *The Register of Sidbury, 1560-1812*, Shropshire Parish Register Society at:

<http://www.melocki.org.uk/salop/Sidbury.html>

When she married Francis Brace, Mary Purslow was the widow of Thomas Newport (d.1559) of Rushock, Worcestershire, who made his will 8 November 1559, TNA PROB 11/42B/695, leaving all his goods 'to Mary, my wife, and to my children'. He was the

grandson of William Newport (d.1559), for whose will see TNA PROB 11/42B/459, and the son of George Newport (d.1558x60), for whose will see TNA PROB 11/43/258.

According to two Chancery suits, Mary Purslow had two daughters by Thomas Newport:

(1) Eleanor Newport, who married the testator's son, Philip Brace. See:

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Brace-469>

Their son, John Brace, married Cecily Sandys, the daughter of Sir Samuel Sandys of Ombersley, Worcestershire. See the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/brace-john-1578-1630>

c.1578, 1st s. of Philip Brace of Dodderhill, and Eleanor, da. and h. of one Newport. 1 educ. Exeter Coll., Oxf., 1594, aged 16.2 m. by 1614, 3 Cecily, da. of Sir Samuel Sandys of Ombersley, Worcs., 2s., 1da. 4 suc. fa. 1598; 5 uncle Francis Brace† 1599.6 d. 12 Aug. 1630.7*

(2) Alice Newport.

See a Chancery suit dating from 1558-1579, TNA C 3/131/42, brought by Mary Newport against Robert Newport on behalf of Eleanor Newport and Alice Newport.

See also a decree dated 24 November 1560 in a Chancery suit, TNA C 78/20/16, brought by Eleanor Newport and Alice Newport against Robert Newport, gentleman, concerning salt fats and lands in Droitwich, Rushock and Woodcote, Worcestershire, 'late of William Newport of Rushock, deceased'.

By Mary Purslow, Francis Brace had a son and three daughters:

(1) Thomas Brace, who in 1588 married Frances Freer, the daughter of William Freer of Oxford, but predeceased his father, leaving no male issue.

(2) Cecily Brace (d.1613), who married William Sheldon (buried 3 September 1626). See:

<http://earlywelshleigh.blogspot.com/2017/03/sheldon-family-history.html>

[William Sheldon] married Cicely the daughter of Francis Brace esquire of Doverdale near Droitwich, and they had at least 14 children. Cicely died in 1613, and Barnard informs us (p.104) that William moved to Haselor, a small village near Temple Grafton where his son Brace and his younger brother Baldwin lived, leaving his eldest son William to manage the Broadway estate. He was buried in Broadway on 3 September 1626, aged 62.

See also the Sheldon pedigree in Butler, A.T., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1634*, (London: J. Whitehead and Son, Limited, 1938), Vol. XC, p. 91:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039595650&view=1up&seq=107>

(3) Mary Brace.

(4) Margery Brace.

In his will, Francis Brace's father-in-law, Robert Purslow, appoints his son-in-law, John Wheeler (living 1589), as one of his executors, indicating connections to both the Sheldon family and to Stratford upon Avon. John Wheeler was the son of Gilbert Wheeler (d.1580?) of Great Rollright, Oxfordshire, and Elizabeth Wall, the daughter of George Wall of Droitwich. See the will of Gilbert Wheeler, TNA PROB 11/63/15. John Wheeler may have been the nephew of Jane Wheeler (d.1582), who married firstly Baldwin Sheldon (buried 5 July 1548) of Broadway, Worcestershire; secondly John Combe (d.1550) of Stratford upon Avon, by whom she was the mother of William Combe (buried 5 October 1610), who in 1602 sold land to William Shakespeare of Stratford (see SBTRO ER 27/1); and thirdly Thomas Lewknor (d.1571). See the Wheeler pedigree in Butler, A.T., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1634*, (London: J. Whitehead and Son, Limited, 1938), Vol. XC, p. 101 at:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039595650&view=1up&seq=117>

See also the Sheldon pedigree in Butler, *supra*, p. 91:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039595650&view=1up&seq=107>

See also:

<http://earlywelshleigh.blogspot.com/2017/03/sheldon-family-history.html>

FRANCIS BRACE'S CONNECTIONS TO WILLIAM COMBE, WHO SOLD LAND TO WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OF STRATFORD UPON AVON, AND THOMAS RUSSELL, OVERSEER OF SHAKESPEARE'S WILL

Francis Brace served in Parliament in 1588 with William Combe (buried 5 October 1610) of Stratford upon Avon, son of Jane (nee Wheeler) Baldwin Combe Lewknor (d.1582). See Williams, W.R., *The Parliamentary History of the County of Worcester*, (Hereford: Jakeman and Carver, 1897), p. 118:

<https://archive.org/stream/cu31924030495141#page/n133/mode/2up/>

See also the will of William Combe, TNA PROB 11/117/573, and the History of Parliament entry at:

<http://www.histparl.ac.uk/volume/1558-1603/member/combe-william-1551-1610>

This account mentions another recusant, Jane Sheldon (of the Catholic county family), to whom he was allied by the 'marriage of their parents'. The Sheldons owned salt-pans at Droitwich, for which borough Combe was returned to the Parliament of 1589. Her eldest son married the daughter of another Droitwich MP, Francis Brace.

Both the History of Parliament entry and Chambers erroneously identify Jane (nee Wheeler) Sheldon Combe Lewknor (d.1582), mother of William Combe, as the recusant Jane Sheldon. See Chambers, E.K., *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), Vol. II, p. 133 at:

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.182554/page/n145>

However since the account referenced by the History of Parliament and by Chambers dates from 1595, it cannot refer to Jane (nee Wheeler) Sheldon Combe Lewknor (d.1582), the mother of William Combe.

Hotson states that Francis Brace had yet another connection with Stratford upon Avon in that he owned a house there in 1592. Unfortunately, Hotson does not provide a source for the statement. It should be noted in passing that in the same passage Hotson erroneously states that Francis Brace was the son of *Philip* Brace (d.1598), whereas Francis and Philip were brothers, and the sons of the testator, William Brace. See Hotson, Leslie, *I, William Shakespeare*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 112:

An important neighbour of Heminges's in Aldermanbury [in London] . . . was not only likewise a Worcestershire man, but the owner in 1592 of a house in Stratford-on-Avon. This was Francis Brace, esquire, lord of the manor of Rushock, near Heminges's native Droitwich, and an old friend of the Russell family of Strensham. Sir Thomas Russell had appointed Francis Brace's father [sic] Philip trustee of the manor of Broad Campden, afterward left to his son, Shakespeare's Russell.

In their youth, Francis Brace and his brother, Philip, may have been in the service of Sir Thomas Russell (d.1577) of Strensham. Both Francis Brace and his then wife, Mary Purslow, as well as his brother, Philip Brace, were involved in property transactions with Sir Thomas Russell (d.1577) in the years 1569-1572, as evidenced in the inquisition post mortem taken after the death of Thomas Russell's eldest son, Sir John Russell (1552-1593), half brother of Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon. On 27 May 1573 Francis Brace was named as a trustee in an indenture setting out the lands which were to be the jointure of Elizabeth Sheldon on her marriage to Sir John Russell. On 3 April 1574 Francis Brace witnessed Sir Thomas Russell's will, TNA PROB 11/57/83. See Fry, Edward Alexander, ed.,

Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem, Part III, (London: London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1908), pp. 210-19 at:

<https://archive.org/details/abstractsinquis00changoog/page/n267>

Shortly after Sir Thomas Russell's death, Francis Brace was granted licence to travel on the continent at the same time as Oxford (see TNA E 157/1, f. 1). Sir John Russell (1552-1593) was also travelling on the continent at about the same time. As 'John Russell of Worcestershire', he was granted licence to travel on 11 February 1576. Sir John Russell was brought up in the household of Francis Russell (1526/7-1585), 2nd Earl of Bedford, where he is said to have 'formed the closest ties' with his cousin, William Russell (c.1553-1613), the Earl of Bedford's youngest son, who arrived in Paris at the end of March 1576 in Oxford's company. See Hotson, *supra*, pp. 21-2. As noted above, Sir John Russell married Elizabeth Sheldon, whose sister, Katherine Sheldon (d.1633), married Oxford's brother-in-law, Francis Trentham (d.1626). For the will of Sir John Russell of Strensham, see TNA PROB 11/92/96.

For the licences to travel granted to Oxford, Francis Brace, and members of the Russell family, see TNA E 157/1, f. 1:

William Russell, esquire, 3 years, January 1574 [=1575]

The Earl of Oxford, one year, January 1574 [=1575]

Francis Brace of Russhock in comitatu Worcester for one year with one servant, 22nd maij 1575

John Russell of Worcestershire for one year, 11th February 1575 [=1576]

The Earl of Oxford for one year after th' expiration of his former licence, 2nd martij 1575 [=1576]

After the death of Lord Burghley, Oxford's two daughters were placed in the care of the 2nd Earl of Bedford's widow, Bridget (nee Hussey) Morison Manners Russell (1526-1601). See her will, TNA PROB 11/97/10.

For Francis Brace's courtship, shortly before his death, of the widowed Anne Digges, whom Thomas Russell (1570-1634), overseer of the will of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, later married, see the will of Thomas Russell, TNA PROB 11/165/424.

For Francis Brace, see also the inquisitions post mortem taken after his death, TNA C142/325/186 and TNA C 142/350/51, and Grazebrook, H. Sydney, *The Heraldry of Worcestershire*, (London: John Russell Smith, 1873), Vol. I, p. 74 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=8lMBAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA74>

* **Philip Brace** (d.1598), who married Eleanor Newport (see above).

* **Jane Brace**, who married William Dethick of Sagebury, Worcestershire, the son of Richard Dethick and Elizabeth Newport, the daughter of John Newport of Droitwich. See the pedigree of Dethick in Phillimore, W.P.W., ed., *The Visitation of Worcestershire 1569*, (London: Harleian Society, 1888), Vol. XXVII, pp. 47-8 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationcount02mundgoog#page/n63/mode/2up>

RM: T{estamentum} Will{el}mi Brace

In the name of God, Amen. The tenth day of August in the year of Our Lord God a thousand five hundred forty and nine & in anno regni regis Edwardi [f. 117v] sexti tercio, I, William Brace of Droitwich in the county of Worcester, gentleman, thanks be unto God perfect in memory and in good health, do make my last will and testament in manner and form following, that is to wit:

I do give and bequeath my soul to Almighty God, trusting by the merits of the passion of his Son, Jesus Christ, to be saved, and my body to be buried where it shall please God;

Item, I do give and bequeath to the poor people[‘s] box of my parish church of Saint Andrew’s in Wich aforesaid 12d to be distributed accordingly;

Item, I do give & bequeath to Philip Brace, my youngest son, six score pounds of lawful money of England;

Item, I give and bequeath to Jane Brace, my daughter, other six score pounds of lawful money of England, to be paid and delivered to them in manner and form following, that is to wit, the said six score pounds to the said Philip when he shall come to th’ age of 18 years and the said six score pounds to the said Jane when she shall come to the age of 17 years by my executors without any fraud or contradiction;

Also I will that my executors shall find the said Philip to school and also the said Jane to some good and honest exercise whereby hereafter she may have some honest knowledge and good manners until their said ages, and longer if they can so agree, with the profits that may be had in that time of the said legacies and so that the whole legacies may come to them at their said ages without any diminishing of any part thereof;

And if any of my said two children do happen to die before they do accomplish the said years, then I will that the survivor of them shall have th’ whole twelve score pounds;

And if both the same Philip and Jane do happen to die before the said years, then I will that Francis Brace, my eldest son, shall have the same £240;

And if it happen all the said three children to die without any issue lawfully begotten of any of their bodies, then the said £240 to remain wholly to mine executors, my brethren and sisters, equally between them to be distributed;

Item, I will that mine executors shall see the said Francis found to school and honestly kept until th' age of 18 years if he be apt thereunto, and they to receive th' issues and profits of my lands during that time for the good finding of him;

Item, I do further give and bequeath to Lettice Brace, my sister, £6 13s 4d sterling for her pains heretofore with me taken;

Item, I will that the residue of all my goods and chattels whatsoever they be, my debts and legacies paid, I do give and bequeath to the said Philip and Jane, my children, equally between them to be divided;

Also I do make, constitute and ordain William Brace, my father, John Brace, my brother, and Lettice Brace, my sister, my executors of this my testament and last will;

Item, I will that my said father and brother shall have every of them £6 13s 4d apiece for their pains in this behalf;

Item, I will that all th' implements, bedding, brass and pewter now being in my house shall be kept to th' use of the said Francis, my son, until his said age of 18 years;

Witnesses hereunto: William Harper, William Adyes, John Apowell, John Adyes and others. By me, the said William Brace the younger.

Probatum fuit h{uius}mo{d}i test{amentu}m coram d{omi}no Cant{uariensis} Archiep{iscop}o apud London Nono die Iunij Anno d{omi}ni Mill{es}imo quinge{ntesi}mo quinquagesimo Iuramento Will{el}mi Walker p{ro}cur{atoris} Executor{um} in h{uius}mo{d}i test{ament}o no{m}i{n}at{orum} Ac approbatu{m} et insinuatu{m} Com{m}issa q{ue} fuit admi{n}istrac{i}o o{mn}i{u}m bonor{um} &c D{i}c{t}i defuncti p{re}fat{is} ex{ecutoribus} De bene et fideli{te}r admi{n}istrand{o} eadem Ac de pleno Inuentario &c exhibend{o} Ad sancta dei Euangelia in debita iuris forma Iurat{is}

[=The same testament was proved before the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury at London on the ninth day of June in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred fiftieth by the oath of William Walker, proctor of the executors named in the same testament, and probated and entered, and administration was granted of all the goods etc. of the said deceased to the forenamed executors, sworn on the Holy Gospels in due form of law to well and faithfully administer the same and to exhibit a full inventory etc.]