

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the will dated 24 August 1558 and proved 11 December 1560 of Eleanor (nee Browne) Kempe, the widow of Sir William Kempe (1487-1539) of Olantigh in Kent, and the grandmother of the comedian Will Kempe and of Alice (nee Kempe) Hales (d.1592), the dedicatee of Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589), to which Thomas Nashe contributed a preface. For the will of Sir William Kempe, see PROB 11/27, f. 228.

The testatrix was the only daughter and heir of Robert Browne of the manor of West Betchworth in Surrey and his wife Mary Mallet, the daughter of Sir William Mallet. Robert Browne's brother, Sir Anthony Browne (d.1506), by his second wife, Lucy Neville (d.1534), was the great-grandfather of Mary Browne (c.1552-1607), the mother of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, the dedicatee of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593), and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), and of Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). By his first wife, Sir Anthony Browne (d.1506) had a daughter, Anne Browne, who was the first wife of Charles Brandon (c.1484-1545), Duke of Suffolk, who married as his fourth wife Katherine Willoughby (1519-1580), later the mother-in-law of Oxford's sister, Mary de Vere (d.1624). Another brother, Sir George Browne (d.1483), married Elizabeth Paston, and had a son, Sir Matthew Browne (d.1557) of West Betchworth, who married Frideswide Guildford, the daughter of Sir Richard Guildford (c.1450-1506) and his first wife, Anne Pympe. Frideswide's sister, Mary Guildford, married Christopher Kempe, the elder brother of the testatrix' husband, Sir William Kempe (1487-1539). Sir Edward Guildford (c.1479-1534), the brother of Mary and Frideswide, married his daughter Jane Guildford to his ward, John Dudley (1504-1553), Duke of Northumberland. They were the parents of Queen Elizabeth's favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. For the Browne family of Betchworth, who were descended from King John of England, see Richardson, Douglas, *Plantagenet Ancestry* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2004), pp. 62-3, 160. For Browne and Guildford pedigrees, see Burke, John and Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Ireland and Scotland*, 2nd ed. (London: Scott, 1841), pp. 87, 231.

The network of relationships between the Browne, Kempe, Guildford and Dudley families perhaps explains the comedian Will Kempe's association with Leicester. That the comedian Will Kempe was a member of the gentry, and thus in all likelihood the William Kempe who was the son of Sir Thomas Kempe (d.1591) of Olantigh, is established by the lawsuit by Thomasina (nee Heminges) Ostler discovered by Charles William Wallace (see *Coram Rege* Roll 1454, 13 James I, Hilary term, m. 692). Wallace published his discovery in an article in the *New York Times* on 3 October 1909. In the lawsuit the terms of the indenture for the ground lease of the Globe Theatre entered into by Shakespeare and others are recited, and the comedian Will Kempe is referred to as 'Willelmo Kempe nuper de Londonia generoso defuncto', i.e., William Kempe, late of London, gentleman, deceased'.

A further indication that the comedian Will Kempe was the grandson of the testatrix and her husband, Sir William Kempe (1487-1539), is the meeting between the comedian Will

Kempe and the adventurer Anthony Shirley (1565-1636?) in Rome in 1601. Anthony Shirley's mother was Anne (nee Kempe) (c.1542-1623), the sister of Alice (nee Kempe) Hales (d.1592) mentioned above. The meeting between Will Kempe and Sir Anthony Shirley in Rome is perhaps best explained by the fact that Sir Anthony Shirley was Will Kempe's nephew.

According to Richardson, the testatrix had two daughters by her first husband, Thomas Fogge (d.1512), esquire, of Ashford, Kent, and six sons and five daughters by her second husband, Sir William Kempe (1487-1539). One of her daughters by her first husband, Thomas Fogge (d.1512) was Emmeline, who married Sir Reginald Scott (d.1555) of Scot's Hall, Smeeth, Kent. The Sir Robert Oxenbridge (d.1575) named as an executor would appear to have been the husband of Alice Fogge, one of the testatrix' daughters by her first marriage to Thomas Fogge (see *Sussex Archaeological Collections Relating to the History and Antiquities of the County* (London: Smith, 1860), vol. 8, pp. 226, 231.

Statements by the testatrix in the will indicate that she lived at the court of Queen Mary. Her Catholic sympathies are evident in the will, both in her directions regarding her burial and in the fact that she names as her supervisor William Roper of Eltham (1495-1577), the husband of Margaret More (1505-1564), the daughter of Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), Lord Chancellor and martyr. The testatrix' wish to be buried in the Chapel of the Savoy may have been carried out, as Strype records a memorial to her there (see Martin, Charles Trice, *Memorials of the Savoy* (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 226)

The manor of Morris-Court in Bapchild, Kent mentioned in the will had been owned by the testatrix' grandfather, Sir Thomas Browne (c.1460), High Sheriff of Kent, and had likely descended to her through her father. The manor of Chelworth mentioned in the will is also mentioned in the will of her son, George Kempe (see TNA PROB 11/72, f. 294).

For the wills of the testatrix' sons George Kempe and Anthony Kempe, see TNA PROB 11/72, f. 294 and TNA PROB 11/94, f. 113.

LM: Domine Elianore Kempe

In the name of God, Amen. In the 24th day of August in the year of Our Lord God 1558, the fifth and sixth years of the reigns of our Sovereign Lord and Lady Philip and Mary by the grace of God King and Queen of England, Spain, France, both Sicilies & Jerusalem and Ireland, Defenders of the Faith, Archdukes of Austria, Dukes of Burgundy, Milan and Brabant, Counties of Hapsburg, Flanders and Tyrol, I, Dame Eleanor Kempe, widow, late the wife of Sir William Kempe, knight, deceased, being of perfect mind and remembrance, laud and praise be unto God, do ordain, make and declare this my present testament and last will in manner and form as hereafter ensueth:

First and before all earthly things I full and wholly give and commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God, my Creator and Maker, to Jesus Christ, his son, my Redeemer

and Saviour, by whose precious blood and mere mercy I trust to be one of the partakers of the life everlasting, and to the glorious Virgin his mother, Our Blessed Lady Saint Mary, and to all the holy celestial company of saints in heaven, my body to be buried within the Savoy according to the due order of the Catholic church of Christ;

Item, I bequeath for my funeral charges and burial with the duties of the church belonging, and so charitably given as far as it shall extend, 100s;

Item, I will that there be given and distributed by mine executors at the same day of my burial to 33 poor householders within the same parish where I shall be buried and parishes thereabout, to the most needy and poorest households and to every of them, 5s, which amounteth to the sum of £8 10s [sic];

Item, I will that my executors shall buy or cause to be bought twenty gowns of black frieze, for every gown six yards after 12d the yard, to be given to twenty poor honest men, for every of them a mourning gown, and for the making of every gown 12d, and that they be made and worn at the day of my burial and my month's mind, which amounteth to the sum of 74s [sic];

Item, I bequeath to captive persons within the City of London, that is to say, Ludgate, Newgate, the Marshalsea and the King's Bench, to the prisoners of every of these prison-houses, and to every of them afore-named, 50s, to be given and distributed immediately after my decease, which cometh to £10;

Item, to the poor prisoners of the Fleet I give and bequeath 20s;

Item, I bequeath to the poor prisoners of the Gatehouse of Westminster other 20s;

Item, I bequeath for the funeral charges at the day of my month's mind with the duties of the church, so charitably to be given as far as it shall extend, the sum of 100s;

Item, I bequeath to 33 poor householders within the same parish where I shall be buried & parishes thereabout, to the most needy and poorest householders and to every of them, 5s, which amounteth to the sum of £8 10s [sic];

Item, I bequeath for my funeral charges and to poor folks at my year's mind, 100s;

Item, to my son, Sir Thomas Kempe, my ring with a diamond, and a pair of salts gilt with a cover weighing 29 ounces;

Item, to my son, Anthony, a featherbed and bolster thereunto belonging, with a pair of fustian blankets, 2 pair of sheets, and my counterpoint of arras, and a trussing bed, a great flat standard, and a gilt bowl weighing 17 ounces;

To my son, Francis, my best featherbed and a bolster, 2 pair of sheets, a pair of fustian blankets, a counterpoint of verdure with imagery, and the best trussing bed, and a little

flat standard, 6 gilt spoons, and my ring with a rak(?) ruby, a goblet parcel gilt weighing 22 ounces;

To my son, Edward, to furnish his bed which he hath already received, a pair of fustian blankets, 2 pair of sheets, six spoons with gilt ends;

To my son, John, to furnish his bed which he hath already received, 2 pair of sheets and the little gilt salt weighing 5 ounces 3 quarters;

To my son, George, my bed which I lay in at the court, with all that belongeth unto it, & 2 pair of sheets, 4 spoons with gilt ends;

To my son Anthony Kempe his wife, a French gown of black velvet and two yards and a half of black velvet, a fair damask diaper tablecloth never worn, a petticoat of silk say, and a pot with a cover gilt weighing 13 oz. and a half;

To my daughter Oxenbridge 6 yards and a half of black velvet, my best French kirtle of plain black velvet with sleeves to the same, and a standing cup with a cover gilt weighing 22 oz. one quarter, and a cypress chest;

To my daughter Pollard a loose gown of black velvet with fringe, a French kirtle of black satin, a pair of French sleeves to the same, my best petticoat of scarlet, and a pot with a cover gilt weighing 23 oz.;

To my daughter Latham a gown of black damask, my best round kirtle of black velvet, a little black chest with three tills and all the linen that is in it, a pair of very fine sheets, and a pot with a cover gilt weighing 22 oz., my porringer of silver, and my best sables;

To my daughter Boowghton [=Boughton?] a gown of black satin, a kirtle of wrought velvet, a little coffer covered with black leather with all the linen that is in it, and a pot with a cover gilt weighing 18 oz. and a quarter;

Item, I bequeath to Mistress Cicely Barnishe a French kirtle of wrought velvet & sleeves to the same;

I will and bequeath to Mrs. Brente a pair of sables;

Item, I will and bequeath to my daughter, Anne Scott, twenty pounds in money and a new jewel-chest;

Item, I bequeath to the poor folks of Wye 100 s, to the vicar of Coleman Street, to pray for me, 40s;

Item, I will and bequeath to my servant, William Bowth [=Booth?], to be paid to him yearly out of Chelworth by the heirs of the said manor during his natural life, 40s;

Item, I will and bequeath that my servants, Francis Hitchcox and William Kyttes, and every of them, shall have and peaceably enjoy their several annuities or yearly pensions by me, the said Dame Eleanor, to them granted, according to the purport, effect and true meaning of their patents or deeds of grant of the same annuities;

Item, I will that my servant, William Kyttes, shall quietly enjoy his lease of the manor of Marie Court according to his indenture of lease thereof by me, the said Dame Eleanor, to the said William of late made and granted;

Item, I will and bequeath to my servant, Francis Hitchcox, the bed which he lieth in at the court, with all things thereunto belonging, a little flat chest bound with plates at the ends, and my roaned gelding;

Item, to my servant, William Kittes, a red chest bound with iron;

Also, I will that my servant[s] Francis Hitchcox and William Kittes and William Bowth have every of them their year's wages over and besides such legacies as is to them bequeathed;

Also, I will and bequeath to Master William Roper a Flanders cup weighing 17 ounces and a half;

To Sir Robert Oxenbridge a standing cup gilt weighing 20 oz.;

To Master Robert Alee [=Lee] a gilt pot with a cover weighing 13 oz., in money five pounds, and a pair of sables;

And as concerning the free disposition and gift of my manor of Morris-Court with the appurtenances in the county of Kent, with all the lands and woods thereunto belonging, known or taken as any part or parcel of the said manor, lying in the parish of Baptechilde [=Bapchild], Tonge, Redmerson, Muston and Lynsted, I do freely give unto John Kempe, my son, all the said manor with the appurtenances to him for the term of his life, and after his life to the heirs of his body lawfully begotten, and for default of such heirs unto my son Francis Kempe and to the heirs of his body lawfully begotten, and for default of such heirs to my son Edward Kempe and the heirs of his body lawfully begotten, and for lack of such heirs to my son Sir Thomas Kempe and his right heirs forever;

Also I bequeath to my son[s] John Kempe, Edward Kempe and George Kempe all my goods unbequeathed, to be equally divided among them all;

Also I make my overseers of this my last will Mr William Roper of Eltham aforesaid in the said county of Kent, esquire, and my executors my son Sir Thomas Kempe, knight, Sir Robert Oxenbridge, knight, Anthony Kempe, esquire, Francis Kempe and Robert Alee [=Lee], gentlemen;

In witness whereof I, the above-named Dame Eleanor, have unto this my said last will and testament subscribed my name and set to my seal the day and year above-written. Read and sealed in the presence of Alexander Gate, parson of Sandon, Roger Madhoges [=Maddux?] and John Glascock, with others.

Probatum fuit huiusmodi Testamentum coram Magistro Waltero Haddon Legum Doctore Curie Prerogatiue Cantuariensis Comissario apud London vndecimo die mensis Decembris Anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo sexagesimo Iuramento ffrancisci Kempe et Roberti Lee personaliter presentium, Thome Kempe militis Roberti Oxenbridge et Anthonij Kempe Armigeri in persona [-in persona] dicti ffrauncisci executorum in huiusmodi Testamento nominatorum Quibus comissa fuit administracio de bene etc. Ac de pleno inventario Necnon de vero et plano computo Reddendo Ad sancta Dei Evangelia Iuratis

[=The same testament was proved before Master Walter Haddon, Doctor of the Laws, Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, at London on the eleventh day of the month of December in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred sixtieth by the oath of Francis Kempe and Robert Lee, personally present, Thomas Kempe, knight, Robert Oxenbridge and Anthony Kempe, esquire, in the person of the said Francis, executors named in the same testament, to whom administration was granted, sworn on the Holy Gospels to well etc., and to render a full inventory and also a true and plain account.]