

SUMMARY: The document below is the Prerogative Court of Canterbury copy of the last will and testament, dated 5 January 1576/7 and proved 13 October 1581, of Blase Saunders, first cousin of George Saunders, murdered on 25 March 1573 by Oxford's former servant, George Browne. The murder was the subject of a pamphlet by Oxford's uncle, Arthur Golding (1535/6-1606), *Brief Discourse of the Late Murther of Master George Saunders*, and an anonymous play, *A Warning for Fair Women*, performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

For Anne Drury, who was implicated in the murder of the testator's first cousin, George Saunders, see the entry in 'A Who's Who of Tudor Women' at:

http://www.tudorwomen.com/?page_id=669

ANN DRURY or DREWRIE (x. May 13,1573) (maiden name unknown) According to John Bellamy, in Strange, Inhuman Deaths: Murder in Tudor England, Ann Drury was a "sinister widow . . . notorious for her palmistry and 'surgery.'" With her friend, Ann Saunders, Ann Drury plotted the murder of Ann's husband, George Saunders. Bellamy gives a full account of the case in Chapter 6 of his book, based on contemporary pamphlet written about the crime and later accounts in the chronicles of Stow and Holinshed. From evidence in her speech from the gallows, it would seem that Ann Drury was once in the service of Henry Stanley, Lord Strange, who had succeeded his father as earl of Derby the previous year and was present at her execution. She asked his forgiveness and insisted that she was not responsible for his separation from his wife (see MARGARET CLIFFORD). Bellamy interprets this statement as indicating one of two things. Either Ann had been sexually involved with the earl or she had practiced palmistry while a member of his household. Ann also denied from the scaffold that she had ever used witchcraft or sorcery, poisoned her own husband, or accused any merchants' wives of unchaste living. She had confessed, however, to having instructed George Browne how to kill George Saunders in March 1573, and to paying Browne when he reported that he'd done the deed. Browne, when apprehended, claimed that Ann Drury had also promised him that she would arrange his marriage to the newly made widow. Browne pled guilty to murder and was executed. Mrs. Drury, when questioned, also confessed and was imprisoned, along with her servant, Roger Clement. It was Clement who implicated Mrs. Saunders. The two women were tried in May at the Guildhall, charged with being accessories both before and after the murder. On May 6, both were convicted and sentenced to be hanged at Smithfield a week later. While in Newgate awaiting execution, a defrocked clergyman named Mell offered to provide a dowry for Ann Drury's daughter if Ann would exonerate Mrs. Saunders. Mell had fallen in love with her after seeing her at her trial. He hoped to obtain a pardon for Ann Saunders and then marry her. This plan failed and both women were hanged. The play, A Warning to Fair Women (1599), was based on this case. Exactly who Ann Drury was is not clear. Her husband's name is not recorded, nor is her daughter's.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Testator's grandparents

The testator was the grandson of Edward Saunders of Harrington and his wife, Joan Makerneys, the daughter of Richard and Felice Makerneys of Wolfhampcote. See the pedigrees of Saunders in Metcalfe, Walter C., ed., *The Visitations of Northamptonshire*, (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1887), pp. 44-5 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/visitationsofnor00harvrich#page/44/mode/2up>

See also Agutter, Doreen, 'Edward Saunders of Harrington and Rothwell, Northamptonshire', *Monumental Brass Society*, Bulletin 115, (September 2010), pp. 288-9, at:

<http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/Bulletin.html>

See also the pedigree of Saunders in Howard, Joseph Jackson, ed., *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, Vol. I, (London: Hamilton Adams, 1868), p. 159 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/miscellaneageneal12unse#page/n177/mode/2up>

For the testator's family background, see also the will of the testator's uncles, Lawrence Saunders (d.1544), TNA PROB 11/30/232; and William Saunders (d.1541?), TNA PROB 11/28/488. See also the will of the testator's aunt, Dorothy (nee Yonge) Haddon Saunders Dayrell (d. 18 January 1574), TNA PROB 11/56/39; and the will of the testator's first cousin, Francis Saunders, TNA PROB 11/68/442.

Testator's parents

The testator was the son of Thomas Saunders (d.1528) of Sibbertoft, Northamptonshire, youngest son of Edward Saunders and Joan Makerneys.

The testator's mother was Margaret Cave, the daughter of Richard Cave (d.1538) of Stanford, Northamptonshire, and his first wife, Elizabeth Mervin (d. 9 August 1493) of Church Lawford, Warwickshire. After the death of the testator's father, the testator's mother married Robert Chauntrell. See the pedigree of Cave of Stanford in Betham, William, *The Baronetage of England*, Vol. I, (Ipswich: Burrell and Bransby, 1801), p. 377 at:

<https://archive.org/details/baronetageengla00unkngoog/page/n394>

See also Waters, Robert Edmond Chester, *Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct Family of Chester of Chicheley*, (London: Robson and Sons, 1878), Vol. I, pp. 74-6 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/genealogicalmem01wategoog#page/n112>

Testator's siblings

For the testator's siblings, see the will of his father, Thomas Saunders, TNA PROB 11/22/481.

See also the wills of the testator's brothers Robert Saunders (c.1514-1559), TNA PROB 11/43/474; Sir Edward Saunders (1506-1576), Chief Baron of the Exchequer, TNA PROB 11/58/517; and Ambrose Saunders (d.1586), TNA PROB 11/69/469; and the *ODNB* entry for the testator's brother, the Protestant martyr, Lawrence Saunders (d.1555).

MARRIAGE

The testator's wife and sole legatee, Elizabeth Saunders, whose maiden name is unknown, died shortly after the testator. The register of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, states that Blase Saunders was buried 12 October 1581, and that Elizabeth, his wife, was buried 14 October 1581. See Bannerman, W. Bruce, *The Registers of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, London*, (London: Harleian Society, 1904), p. 254, available online. For the will of Elizabeth Saunders, dated 12 October 1581 and proved 1 February 1581/2, see TNA PROB 11/64/50.

For the testator see also Winchester, *supra*, pp. 63, 270, 283; Orlin, Lena Cowen, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 209; and Willan, T.S., *The Muscovy Merchants of 1555* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), pp. 121-2.

RM: T{estamentum} Blasij Saunders

[f. 271r] In the name of God Amen. 1576, the fifth day of January. I, Blase Saunders, Merchant of the Staple of England and Grocer of the City of London, being at this present fifth day of January Anno Domini 1576 in health of body and of perfect mind (thanks be to God), do ordain and make this my last will and testament in manner and form following:

First I give and commend my soul unto Almighty God, believing steadfastly that by the only merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ I shall in body and soul come to the life everlasting;

My body I will in any wise to be buried within four and twenty hours after my death at the farthest, with as little charge as may be conveniently, but in no wise to have any ringing of bells the day of my burial;

My house in the parish of Saint Ellen [=Helen] within Bishopsgate in London wherein I now dwell, and the tenement thereunto adjoining wherein my cousin Holmes now dwelleth, and my house in Flore in Northamptonshire where Marmaduke, a carpenter, now dwelleth, and all other houses, lands, goods, debts, plate, leases, ready money, household stuff, apparel and all other goods of what kind soever there are that do at this day [f. 271v] or at the time of my death shall in any manner of wise appertain unto me, I do by this present my last will and testament give and bequeath unto my loving and faithful wife, Elizabeth Saunders, with all manner of writing concerning the purchasing of my said houses, in as full and ample manner as they are mine, she to do with the same at her will and pleasure, putting no doubts but she will set order for the payment of my debts as she may conveniently in time;

In witness whereof I have written this present with mine own hand and subscribed my name and set to my seal, making my said wife, Elizabeth Saunders, my sole and full executrix the fifth day of January Anno Domini 1576, renouncing all former wills that before this day I have made. By me, Blase Saunders.

The twentieth day of March 1578 I do affirm this my last will to stand in all points, and if there be any ambiguity or doubt of my meaning therein by reason of any words not well placed, I will the same to be expounded by my said wife, Elizabeth Saunders. By me, Blase Saunders.

Probatum fuit suprascriptum testamentum apud London Coram venerabili viro m{agist}ro Will{el}imo Drury legum Doctore curie prerogatiue Cantuarien{sis} commissario etc Decimo tertio die mensis Octobris A{nn}o Domini mill{es}imo quingentesimo octogesimo primo Iuramento Lawrentij Swynborne notarij publici procuratoris Elizabete Saunders relicte et executric{is} etc Cui com{m}issa fuit administracio etc De bene &c Iurat{i}

[=The above-written will was proved at London before the worshipful Master William Drury, Doctor of the Laws, Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury etc., on the thirteenth day of the month of October in the year of the Lord the thousand five hundred eighty-first by the oath of Lawrence Swynborne, notary public, proctor of Elizabeth Saunders, relict and executrix etc., to whom administration was granted etc., sworn to well etc.]