

Introduction by Alexander Waugh: Jan Cole investigates the historical and familial connections of Bridget de Vere, the second daughter of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, her dependence on Sir Walter Cope and her overlooked second marriage to Sir Hugh Pollard, which allies the de Vere family to that of Thomas Russell, one of the overseers of the will of William of Stratford, whose step-son Leonard Digges penned commendatory verses for the First Folio of the plays of William Shakespeare (1623).

BRIDGET DE VERE'S SECOND MARRIAGE TO SIR HUGH POLLARD (C.1603-1666) AND ITS CONNECTIONS

By Jan Cole

Edward de Vere and Ann Cecil's second daughter, Bridget, was born at Theobalds on 6 April 1584. She was four years old when her mother died, and the only image known of her is her figure, alongside her two sisters, on the grand tomb built for Anne Cecil and Mildred Cecil (d. 1588 and 1589 respectively) by William Cecil, Lord Burghley, in Westminster Abbey. The effigies were in place by 1589 as Burghley had this inscription written on the panels of the tomb: 'Lady Elizabeth Vere now aged 14, Lady Bridget Vere, 5 years of age, and thirdly the little infant Lady Susannah.' No portrait of Bridget as an adult has been identified, but the surviving portrait of her daughter Elizabeth Norris Wray is the nearest to her features that we can surmise, and it bears a strong resemblance to her elder sister, Elizabeth Vere Stanley. We know little of her childhood, but we can be sure that it was carefully monitored by William Cecil, her grandfather. Of Oxford's three daughters, we know least about Bridget de Vere. Evidence is lacking for her presence at family events. Was she present at the marriage of her elder sister, Elizabeth, to William Stanley, Earl of Derby, on 26 January 1594? As a 10-year-old, this is possible. Was she present at her younger sister Susan's marriage to Philip Herbert on 27 December 1604, six months after her father's death? As a married



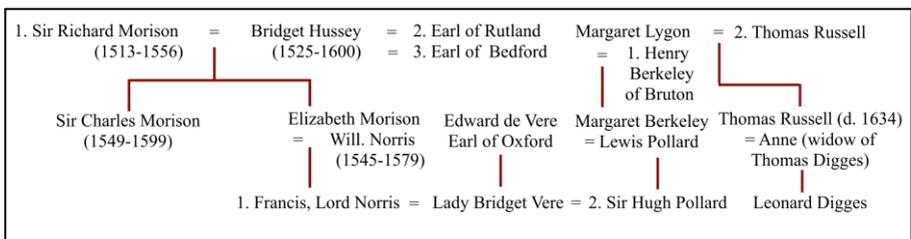
Elizabeth Norris Wray

20-year-old, this is more probable. Both were important court occasions, but we do not hear of Bridget being present.

Marriage proposals and first marriage

In August 1597 a marriage was proposed for the 13-year-old Bridget to the 14-year-old **William Herbert (1580-1630)**, who would become 3rd Earl of Pembroke, a match discussed and encouraged by his parents in correspondence with Lord Burghley. The negotiations went on for some time and Oxford was in agreement with the union, expressing his favourable view of the match in a letter to Lord Burghley dated 8 September 1597.¹ However, Herbert declined and, after the death of Lord Burghley on 4 August 1598, **Bridget (née Hussey) Morison Manners Russell, Countess of Bedford**, had the care of Oxford's two unmarried daughters, Bridget (aged 14) and Susan (aged 11); the eldest daughter, Elizabeth (b. 1575), had married William Stanley in 1594. Bridget Hussey's son by her first husband was Sir Charles Morison (1549-1599), and he was the uncle of Bridget Vere's first husband, Francis, as his sister, Elizabeth, had married firstly **William Norris (c.1545-1579)**, by whom she was the mother of **Francis Norris (1579-1622)**, 2nd Baron Norris of Rycote, to whom the Queen stood godmother, and who was married to Bridget Vere in May or June of 1599 when he was 20 and she was 15. In February 1602 Charles Morison's widow, Dorothy, wrote to **Sir Robert Cecil (1563-1612)** proposing that her son, Charles (1587-1628), should marry Oxford's youngest daughter, Susan; but Susan wrote to Robert Cecil assuring him that she would never marry without his consent. In 1604 Susan Vere married, as his first wife, **Philip Herbert (1584-1650)**, 1st Earl of Montgomery and 4th Earl of Pembroke, one of the 'two noble brethren' of Shakespeare's First Folio (1623).

From these connections, it is clear that the close relationship between



Bridget (née Hussey) Russell, Dowager Countess of Bedford (d. 1601), and Lord Burghley was the original catalyst behind *all* of Oxford's daughters' potential marriages. Her step-grandson, Edward Russell (1572-1627), 3rd Earl of Bedford, was proposed as a husband for Oxford's eldest daughter, Elizabeth; her grandson Francis Norris married Oxford's middle daughter, Bridget; and her grandson, Charles Morison (1587-1628), was proposed as a husband for Oxford's youngest daughter, Susan.²

The only letter of Bridget's to survive is an incidental letter written before her marriage. Dated 16 April 1599, it is addressed to **Sir Henry Maynard (1547-1610)**, who was a secretary to Lord Burghley. In 1590 he had been granted lands at Easton, Essex, by Queen Elizabeth, where he built Easton Lodge. The letter recommended a Mr Arnold, chaplain to the Countess of Bedford, for a new post. The letter has been damaged. For a simple letter of recommendation, however, it shows considerable warmth for its addressee:

My Maynard, whereas it ... to give leave to this bearer, Mr ... to be at liberty from her for ... he having now a present opp offered him in London, if he or two of a certain company ... to request you in his behalf ... letters as effectually as you can, where gratify me, and pleasure a friend that will in very ... thankful unto you. And thus not doubting ... friendly care and furtherance in his behalf, I commit to God. From Chenies, April 16, 1599. Your loving Bridget Vere.

Endorsed: *To my very loving friend, Mr Maynard, at his house in Westminster or elsewhere, give these.*

Endorsed: 16 April(?), the Lady Bridget Vere to Mr Maynard in favour of Mr Arnold, chaplain to the Countess of Bedford.³

First marriage and separation

In the early summer of 1599 Bridget was married to **Francis Norris (1579-1622)**, the son of William Norris and his wife Elizabeth Morison (see above) at Chenies Manor House, Buckinghamshire. Francis was an infant when his father died and did not succeed to his title of 2nd Baron Norris of Rycote until 1601 on the death of his grandfather, Henry Norris. He was brought up at Chenies, probably under the close care of Bridget Hussey. He was created Earl of Berkshire



by James I in 1621, after which Bridget held the title of Countess of Berkshire. However, the marriage was not happy and the couple seem to have lived separately after a few years. Francis was a volatile man with a proud temper; he engaged in a long-running feud with the Willoughby/Bertie family which resulted in his conviction for manslaughter, about which he appealed to King James to have annulled. He brawled with Lord Scrope in the House of Lords following his imprisonment for this. Norris was later found dead at Rycote in 1622 having apparently committed suicide by shooting himself with a crossbow.⁴

Years of separation, 1606 to 1622

In May 1606, following Norris's return from a year abroad, it was reported that his wife Bridget had separated from him and removed herself to Cope Castle.⁵ On 29 June Robert Cecil, now Earl of Salisbury and Bridget's uncle, wrote to Norris to inform him that the pregnant Bridget had miscarried.⁶ A letter of August 1608, from Sir Walter Cope to Dudley Carleton, may suggest that infidelity, or at least Norris's suspicion of it, on Bridget's part was responsible for the marriage's breakdown.⁷ Cope, at Salisbury's request, urged Carleton to visit Francis Norris in Bath, who, in the midst of a severe illness, was threatening to disinherit his and Bridget's only child Elizabeth. Carleton's dispatch appears to have been motivated by fears that Elizabeth's disinheritance would give credence to rumours which had circulated about Bridget at the time of the separation. Whatever the cause of the separation, it is clear that Norris held Bridget fully responsible.⁸

Sir Walter Cope (c. 1553-1614) was a second cousin of Mildred Cecil, Lady Burghley. He became a gentleman usher to William Cecil and by 1593 became Burghley's secretary and the trusted friend of Sir Robert Cecil. In 1603 Cope travelled to Edinburgh to welcome King James VI of Scotland at his proclamation as King James I of England and was subsequently knighted at Worksop. In 1604 Cope was elected MP. In 1605 Cope began building a grand house for himself known as Cope Castle in Kensington, subsequently inherited by his daughter, Isabel, Countess of Holland, and now known as Holland House situated in Holland Park (only part of the east wing survives after bombing in 1940). This is where Bridget was staying in 1606 in the household of Cope and his wife and their 16-year-old daughter Isobel. Somewhat ironically, in 1610

Cope purchased the manor of Earls Court in Kensington, which originally had been owned by the de Veres.⁹ Cope was a collector of manuscripts – some of which are now in the Bodleian Library – as well as a collector of curiosities, and a theatre-lover. We glimpse him in the letters of John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton where, for example, on 6 March 1606, Cope put on a play at his house at which Chamberlain ‘had to squire his daughter about until he was weary’.¹⁰

How long did Bridget stay at Cope Castle (Holland House)? Robert Cecil died in 1612 and Walter Cope died in 1614 and about this time or earlier Cope’s daughter and heiress, Isabel, married **Henry Rich (1590-1649)**, second son of **Robert Rich, 1st Earl of Warwick (1559-1619)** by his first wife **Penelope Devereux Rich (1563-1607)**, Philip Sidney’s ‘Stella’ of his sonnets and sister of **Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (executed 1601)**. Henry Rich was also the brother of **Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick (1587-1658)**. This is an interesting connection, and one wonders whether Bridget was retained in the Rich family, as Henry Rich inherited Cope Castle on his marriage, changing its name in 1624 to Holland House. He also came into his father’s land at St. Bartholomew’s, Smithfield, and built a house there, identified as 41-42 Cloth Fair.¹¹ Henry Rich began his career as a courtier and soldier in 1610, becoming a favourite of King James I and playing an important role in the marriage negotiations between Charles I and Henrietta Maria of France in 1623. He was an MP in 1610 and 1614, was created Baron Kensington in 1622, and Earl of Holland in 1624, thus making Isabel the Countess of Holland. Her portrait painted about the time of her marriage survives in Kenwood House, Hampstead. We do not know where else Bridget may have lived, so it is at least feasible that she remained at Holland House with Henry and Isobel Rich until shortly before her second marriage to Hugh Pollard. Therefore, if there is a contemporary connection between the Rich and the Pollard families, this may explain the choice of Bridget’s second husband.

Connection between Rich and Pollard

Such a connection exists between respective relatives, the merchant-adventurer **Sir Nathaniel Rich (1585-1636)** (cousin of Robert Rich who married Penelope Devereux) and **William Pollard (c.1583->1638)**, third son of the elder Hugh

Pollard and Dorothy Chichester of King's Nympton, Devon, emigrated to Bermuda in his early thirties in 1616, where he took the role of captain of the fortress, apparently sponsored by William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. In 1614 Nathaniel Rich was elected MP for Totnes, Devon, therefore serving in the same parliament as Henry Rich. He was a board member of the Somers Isles Company (founded in 1615), the Somers Isles being the name for Bermuda, in which Henry Rich's brother, Robert 2nd Earl of Warwick, was a sharer. In 1619 Nathaniel also bought shares in the Virginia Company. Letters to Sir Nathaniel from his deputies in Bermuda mention William Pollard, his recusancy and his various activities in respect of its early governance.¹² William Pollard remained in Bermuda with a 10-acre settlement and raised a family there. Thus, there is a family connection between Rich and Pollard, which may be significant in respect of Bridget's introduction and second marriage to Hugh Pollard.

Second marriage – connections between Pollard and Thomas Russell

About the year 1626 Bridget was married to **Hugh Pollard (1603-1666)** who was the eldest son and heir of **Sir Lewis Pollard, 1st Baronet (d. 1641)** of King's Nympton, Devonshire, by his wife **Margaret Berkeley**, daughter of Sir Henry Berkeley, Knight, of Bruton, Somerset. Pollard's father was therefore the son-in-law of Margaret Lygon Russell Berkeley, whose will of 1617 clearly shows the Pollard connection. Thus, Oxford's daughter, Lady Bridget Vere, was married to her grandson, later Sir Hugh Pollard, the nephew of the Thomas Russell (1570-1634) who allegedly became the overseer and a beneficiary in 1616 of the will of William Shakspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon. After her first husband's death in 1574, Margaret married **Sir Henry Berkeley (1541-1601)** and through this marriage she was related to the Pollard family. In her will she mentions Hugh Pollard's father, Lewis, whom her daughter, also named Margaret, had married. Their daughter was **Elizabeth**, Margaret's grandchild, who thus appears to be the sister of Hugh Pollard who married Bridget Vere. Elizabeth Pollard married John Chichester (d. 1669) of Bishops Tawnton, Devon, and died in 1661 (see <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/159375442/elizabeth-chichester>).

Of course, the references in Margaret's will (1617) were written almost a decade before Bridget's marriage to Hugh Pollard, who in 1617 was only 14, whereas Bridget was 33 – a relatively large age gap of nineteen years:

Item, I give and bequeath **to my daughter, Margaret Pollard, wife of Lewis Pollard of Kings Nympton** in the county of Devon, esquire, one hundred pounds' worth of my plate; Also I give and bequeath to my said daughter Pollard my great gold chain and my great pearl, both which are in her keeping already; Also I give and bequeath to my said daughter Pollard my coach and my coach-horses, and my leading gelding, with all the furniture thereunto belonging, which she shall have presently after my decease, part of which plate before given is in my said daughter Pollard's keeping ... Item, I give and bequeath to **my grandchild, Elizabeth Pollard**, daughter of the said Lewis and Margaret Pollard, the sum of two hundred pounds of current English money, which said sum of 2 hundred pounds is already in her father's hands, and my will and intent is that the before-mentioned sum of two hundred pounds shall remain and be in the keeping of her said father for her and to her only use till such time as she shall be married or accomplish the age of one and 20 years, & in the meantime to give her yearly allowance of the use of the said money towards her maintenance; Item, I give and bequeath to my said grandchild, Elizabeth Pollard, presently after my decease my green mockado chest standing at the end of my cupboard in the drawing-chamber at Wells, with all such things as shall be in the said chest at the hour of my death unsight or unseen.

To her son, Thomas Russell, then residing at Rushock, Worcestershire, Margaret left 'one basin and ewer of silver which was his father's, Sir Thomas Russell, deceased'.¹³

Thomas Russell first lived at Bruton with his mother, and after 1598 as a tenant of **Sir Arthur Throckmorton (d. 1626)** – Oxford's friend and supporter in the 1580's and beyond – at Alderminster, near Stratford-upon-Avon, and from 1617 at Rushock, Worcestershire. Russell married **Anne Digges**, widow of Thomas Digges, in 1603, from whom he gained the Rushock lands as follows. Shortly before his death in 1599 Francis Brace, then a widower, courted Anne St Leger, widow of Thomas Digges, and persuaded her to sell some of Thomas Digges' leases to pay his (Brace's) debts. In return, Brace assigned to her his 'lease of the valuable manor of Rushock, Worcestershire'. By 1600 Anne Digges and her children were already living with Thomas Russell, later the overseer of

the will of William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon, at the manor of Alderminster, Warwickshire, on which he held a lease which would not expire until 1611 or 1612, and Anne Digges had given him control of the lease of Rushock. In 1604 or 1605, Russell obtained a forty-year extension of the Rushock lease from the Merchant Taylors' Company, assisted in his petition by a letter from Charles Blount, Earl of Devonshire.¹⁴ Anne Digges' son from her first marriage was **Leonard Digges (1588-1635)** who would write a commendatory verse to the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays (1623).

Bridget's second husband was a captain in the army before 1639, when he was engaged in raising troops in Devonshire for the expedition against the Scots. In the following year he was again serving under **Edward Conway (1594-1655)** against the Scots and was probably present at the battle of Newburn on 28 August 1640. Conway was the eldest son of the 1st Viscount Conway and his wife, Dorothy Tracy, sister of Mary Tracy who had married **Horatio de Vere (1565-1635)**. Conway had been baptised on 10 August 1594 at Arrow, near Stratford-upon-Avon; he matriculated from Queen's College, Oxford in 1611 and is thought to have learnt military strategy from his uncle by marriage, Horatio de Vere. Therefore, as Hugh was serving under Conway, there is a further connection with the de Vere family and particularly with Bridget's father's cousin. Sir Hugh Pollard was a staunch royalist, fought in the Civil War, and eventually became Controller of the Household to Charles II at the Restoration. He died in 1666 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.¹⁵

Earlier connection of Pollard and Norris via Paulet or Poulett

Sir Lewis Pollard (c.1465-1526) of Grilstone in the parish of Bishop's Nympton, Devon, was Justice of the Common Pleas from 1514 to 1526 and served as MP for Totnes in 1491 and was a JP in Devon in 1492. He was knighted after 1509. He was a kinsman of the judge and Speaker of the House of Commons **Sir John Pollard (c.1508-1557)**. His daughter, **Philippa Pollard**, married as his first wife c.1528 **Sir Hugh Paulet (d. 1538)** son of **Amias Paulet (d. 1538)**, and they were parents of **Sir Amias Paulet (1532-1588)** who was ambassador to France and then keeper of Mary Queen of Scots until her execution. A son of the elder Amias Paulet was **Hugh Paulet (1510-1573)**, who married **Catherine Norris**, daughter of **Henry Norris of Rycote (1532-1601)**,

the grandfather of Francis Norris, Bridget's first husband. Moreover, **Catherine Vere**, third daughter of Horatio de Vere married into the Poulet/Paulett family of Hinton St. George, Somerset, later Marquises of Winchester. She married as her second husband **John Poulett, 2nd Baron Poulett (1615-1665)**, of Hinton St. George in Somerset, who was an English peer and MP who fought on the Royalist side during the English Civil War. His father, **John Poulett, 1st Baron** was the son **Sir Anthony Poulett (1562-1600)** (also spelled Paulet), of Hinton St. George, Governor of Jersey, and Captain of the Guard to Queen Elizabeth by his wife **Catherine Norris**, daughter of **Henry Norris, 1st Baron Norreys (1525-1601)** of Rycote.

Bridget's second marriage and death

Bridget's second marriage lasted only a short five years. We do not know where she died, but the year given is 1630. Nor do we know with absolute accuracy where she was buried. Most genealogical websites state that she was buried (as were her sisters Elizabeth and Susan) in the Burghley tomb in St Nicholas's Chapel, Westminster Abbey, originally built for Mildred Cecil and Anne Cecil in 1588. If this is so, it means the vault was re-opened three times: in 1627 (for Elizabeth), in 1629 (for Susan) and in 1630 (for Bridget). As with their father, Edward de Vere, there is a mystery and paucity of documentary evidence surrounding each of the daughters' deaths and lack of evidence (so far) that these interments took place in the Burghley vault; nor is there evidence of respective wills and testaments for them. There appears to be no other evidence of their burials elsewhere. The Westminster Abbey website says of Susan, 'Her grave is not marked and she has no memorial. Susan is depicted as a kneeling figure on the large monument in the Abbey to her mother Anne Countess of Oxford (together with Anne's other daughters Elizabeth and Bridget)', and gives similar comments for Elizabeth and Bridget. If the daughters did not die in London (e.g. it is said that Elizabeth Stanley died at Lathom, Lancashire), the long funeral journeys from the country to London surely would have been remarked upon by someone, but no evidence survives. There is considerable ambiguity in this and further research, perhaps amongst the Herald's records, could be a possibility. It is remarkable that the death and burial of three daughters of an earl, themselves all countesses, and all dying within 3-4 years, should have passed unnoticed.

Bridget's daughter by Norris, **Elizabeth Norris Wray (1603-1645)** married the courtier **Edward Wray (1589-1645)** after eloping with him but was allowed *suo jure* to keep her mother's former title of Baroness Norris of Rycote (see her entry on Wikipedia). We can only hope that her second marriage brought Bridget some happiness, as her first had not. Bridget is said to have had a daughter with Hugh Pollard, who was named either Bridget or Margaret, according to different genealogical websites, and again nothing more is known of this child, who may have died young.

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