

Elizabeth and Francis Trentham of Rocester Abbey

by Jeremy Crick

Part I of a short account of the family history of Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford's second wife and the strategic importance of the Trentham archive in the search for Oxford's literary fragments. Accompanied by the Trentham family tree incorporating the de Veres and the Sneyds.

Introduction

When I began my study of the Trentham family, about two years ago, I had one principal thought in mind: if any of Edward de Vere's literary papers - whether notebooks, original drafts or even literary correspondence - have survived undiscovered till the present, it must be possible to find them.

Being a passionate Oxfordian these past twenty-odd years, I'm as fascinated as all Oxfordians are by the remarkable scholarship that has illuminated the 'Shakespearean' canon with concordances from Oxford's life, alongside the broader question of whether the Stratford or the Oxford biography delivers the better candidate. Viewed dispassionately, the sheer weight of this scholarship tilts the scales ineluctably away from the Stratfordian pretension. But are Stratfordians convinced? Worried even? The simple truth is: not at all.

Until documentary proof of Oxford's authorship is found, Stratfordians will never relinquish their tight grip on academia, publishers will overwhelmingly support the Stratfordian position, and the general public will always remain indifferent to Oxfordian scholarship.

Of course, ever since J Thomas Looney first identified Oxford as a prime candidate, the search for manuscript evidence of Oxford's literary work has been undertaken by many researchers and one might assume that all the obvious places have been examined in detail. And yet one of the most obvious lines of enquiry has been largely ignored - searching for the family papers of the Trentham family.

Oxford's widow, Elizabeth Trentham, was in possession of all the material in Oxford's study on his death and she outlived him by nine years. Oxford's study at King's Place in Hackney must have been the original source for all the material that was gathered for the First Folio that hadn't already been published in various Quarto editions - at least nineteen plays. The study would have contained notebooks, masses of loose leaves, working drafts, polished drafts, copies in the hands of Oxford's secretaries, prompt copies with notes on stage direction, literary correspondence as well as extensive marginalia in Oxford's source books.

Whether it was Oxford's son-in-law, Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, and his brother William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke - the 'incomparable brethren' - who were given access to Oxford's papers (and which may later have been consumed by fire in the library at Wilton), or whether it was another son-in-law, William Stanley, Earl of Derby, who began the process of preserving Oxford's life's work for posterity, we may never know.

It is very unlikely, however, that Elizabeth Trentham divested herself of all of Oxford's literary papers for the preparation of the First Folio - to the last scrap of paper. Assuming that the best drafts were identified, collected and eventually handed to the printers, what did Elizabeth Trentham, and her executors, do with all the remainder?

One thing that is clear from the archive record is that Elizabeth Trentham's brother, Francis Trentham of Rocester Abbey, took over the management of the de Vere estate (alongside his own considerable estate) upon the marriage of his sister to Oxford in 1591, that he continued in this capacity after Edward's death, through the years of Henry de Vere's minority and even himself inherited and passed down the manor and castle of Hedingham and other lands and properties once owned by Edward de Vere. That Francis spent hours poring over the de Vere estate papers at King's Place on his frequent visits to London as a Knight of the Shire and also at Hedingham, that he was as familiar with the inside of Oxford's study as anyone, is, I believe, born out by the evidence.

Francis died in 1626, twenty-two years after Edward de Vere, thirteen years after his sister Elizabeth and one year after Henry de Vere - the last in the Oxford direct line. Also three years after the publication of the First Folio.

My current researches proceed on the possibility that the discovery of archive material by following the Trentham line is, perhaps, one of the richest unploughed furrows in the quest to solve the Authorship Question. As will be shown in the second part of this article, it was largely thanks to Francis Trentham that during the last thirteen years of his life, Oxford had all his money worries lifted from his shoulders. Among the treasures in the

Trentham archive, I discovered a remarkable reference to Francis Trentham settling an extremely generous £10,000 upon Edward when they became brothers-in-law. Thanks to this, Oxford had more ready cash than at any time in his life and it certainly puts his £1000 annual disbursement from the Queen's coffers into perspective.

Perhaps more crucially, with Francis Trentham as his trusted brother-in-law - a wealthy landowner, not only skilled in estate management but also a minor courtier with considerable political weight in running the affairs of Staffordshire - Oxford was also freed from the irksome burden of managing his estate. By the time of his second marriage, the de Vere estate was a complete shambles and the worst part for Oxford was that, as a result, the estate barely yielded the sort of income that Oxford had grown accustomed to. On a dynastic level too, the restructuring that Francis Trentham performed on the de Vere estate gave Oxford great confidence that his son Henry's inheritance would indeed be fit for a future Earl and Lord Great Chamberlain of England. And Oxford was ever mindful of dynastic considerations, as we all know.

I believe that when Edward de Vere is finally recognised as the true bard, Elizabeth and Francis Trentham will also become acknowledged as the greatest patrons of the arts in history.

The Shropshire years

The earliest member of the Trentham family to emerge from the mists of time was, according to the 'Visitation of Staffordshire, 1583', William Trentham of Shrewsbury who died around the year 1420. As their drapery business prospered over the coming years the family would establish themselves as leading burgesses of the town. William's son John (d. 1484) is the earliest Trentham to have left his mark in the archive record, that of the Shrewsbury Drapers' Company, whose papers contain his signature on many property conveyances in Shrewsbury as a witness. His son Thomas Trentham I (d. c. 1529), we know little about beyond the fact that he too became a pillar of town society, becoming bailiff of Shrewsbury four times.

But it was his only son and heir, Thomas Trentham II (c.1468-c.1519), whose life first provides the Trentham line with some anecdotal colour for, during his teens, he seems to have lived a somewhat dissolute lifestyle. His burgess-ship was even taken away from him, briefly, after he and his companions had raided the town gaol to free a

friend of theirs, and the many complaints made against him for riotous behaviour and for keeping seventeen of his unruly companions in food, lodging and money are recorded in the archive of the Star Chamber.

All this must have given his father cause for embarrassment, given the family's standing in the town, but he needn't have worried for too long because the young Thomas soon pulled his socks up. One of the undoubted influences on his character reformation was his good fortune in contracting an excellent marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Richard Corbet of Moreton Corbet - a man of some influence and with connections to the royal court. Doubtless it was Corbet influence that enabled Thomas to enter Henry VIII's second parliament for Shrewsbury in 1512 and to be re-elected in 1515 having had some foreign adventure in between serving under the Earl of Shrewsbury in the French campaign of 1513. Thomas Trentham II predeceased his father by a decade, and was living with his family in London at the time of his death in 1519.

Perhaps the most influential development for the Trentham family that resulted from the Corbet marriage was that the two sons of Thomas Trentham II, Richard and Robert, were able to make their early careers as esquires in the royal household itself. Richard (c.1500-1547) inherited the family estate on the death of his grandfather and evidently divided his time between Shrewsbury and the royal court for, shortly before he became Cup Bearer to the young Prince of Wales, later Edward VI, in 1536, he became the MP for Shrewsbury. One year later, a very curious coincidence occurs.

I'm often asked by friends whether the Trentham family of my researches has any relationship to the vast former estate of the Dukes of Sutherland (Leveson-Gower family) at Trentham in Staffordshire - a few miles down the road. Having always replied in the negative, imagine how surprising it was to discover recently that, in fact, Richard Trentham was granted the lease to the lands of Trentham Priory in November 1537. I doubt whether he ever actually took up residence there and yet a permanent move across the border into Staffordshire followed shortly after - and this was certainly Richard's greatest bequest to the Trentham fortunes.

Rocester Abbey

With the advent of the Reformation and the attendant religious conflict raging throughout Europe, in September 1538, Henry VIII sealed his

Abbey Field, Rocester today

irrevocable rejection of Rome by an outrageous but hugely popular act of plunder on a scale hitherto unimaginable in English history - the dissolution of the monasteries. The vast wealth that accrued from declaring all former monastic estates to be crown land served Henry VIII well in a number of ways. Not only did it replenish the royal coffers, it allowed Henry to distribute a great deal of patronage in the form of leasehold grants to vast estates throughout his Kingdom. And it was not just the noble Earls and principal courtiers who prospered in this way - such patronage was an important factor in cementing the loyalty of the Shire Knights who administered the English counties at the direction of the Privy Council.

Described in many independent sources as a 'favourite' of Henry VIII, it was not long before Richard Trentham's loyalty was rewarded with the granting of the lease of Rocester Abbey. Actually, it first came to one Edward Draycott - one of Thomas Cromwell's men, in March 1540, and is recorded thus in the published Parish Register of Rocester:

*Croxden Abbey - five miles west of Rocester.*

"The king grants a lease to Edward Draycott Gent for 21 years of the House or Site of the late Monastery and lands in Rocester at the yearly rent of £36 8s 10d with reversion to Richard Trentham, to be held *in capite* by Knight Service rendering £3 18s yearly."

The following year, the reversion to Richard Trentham was confirmed and Rocester Abbey became the principal family seat of the Trenthams until their extinction over a hundred years later.

At the time of the Dissolution itself in September 1538, the Abbey was perhaps the smallest of all the Augustinian Abbeys in England. It has often been noted that in most respects Rocester resembled more a Priory than an Abbey - yet Abbey it was, with nine canons under the Abbot, William Grafton, and a valuation taken in 1535 as £100 2s 10d comprising £46 13s 10d in spiritual income and £64 17s 9d income arising from estate lands. In March 1539, by Letters Patent, as Rocester Abbey was valued at less than £200, it was allowed to remain. Then in August 1539 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, writes to the King's principal secretary, Thomas Cromwell, urging commissioners to suppress the Staffordshire abbeys of Rocester, Tutbury and Croxden (*see photo*). The estate at this time comprised the Manor of Rocester, land and rents in Combridge, Quixhill, Ellastone, Stanton, Denstone, Swinscoe, Kingstone, Clownholme, Hognaston (Derby), Sedsall (Doveridge, Derby) and Scropton plus various churches, tithes and market rights.

The earliest known eyewitness description of Rocester Abbey was written by Staffordshire's most notable early historian, Sampson Erdeswick, in his '*A View of Staffordshire*' which he began about 1593, but which was not published until 1717. The Staffordshire Record Office contains two beautifully preserved original handwritten copies and his section on Rocester reads (*see photo*):

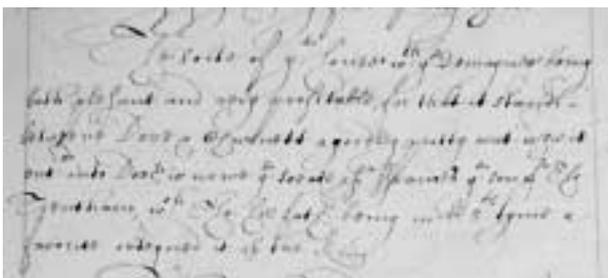
"The seat of the house [of 'Rowcester'] with demesnes, being both pleasant and very profitable, for that it stands between Dove and Churnett, a good pretty water, where it

enters the Dove, is now the seat of Francis, the son of Thomas Trentham [III] which Thomas, his father [Richard], being in King Henry the Eighth's time, a favourite, obtained it of the King. The Trenthams derive themselves from a house of the Trenthams, in Shropshire, which, in Henry the Sixth's time, were of good account, but now quite decayed or gone, for I know none of the house remaining, this of Rowcester excepted which it pleaseth God to advance in good sort."

Sadly for Richard Trentham, he only had a few years to establish himself at Rocester and when he died, in 1547, his only son and heir, Thomas Trentham III (1538-1587) was just nine years old. Interestingly, it was Sir Philip Draycott, the son of Edward Draycott who had first been granted the lease to Rocester Abbey, who was granted the young heir's wardship. Sir Philip is credited with managing the Rocester estate so well that when Thomas came of age during the first year of Queen Elizabeth's long reign the Manorship of Rocester Abbey was very profitable.

From local gentry to Shire Knight

At the age of twenty-three, as a young Lord of the Manor, Thomas Trentham III contracted what would turn out to be one of the most influential Trentham marriages so far - to Jane Sneyd. The Sneyds, under the direction of Sir William Sneyd (d. 1571) (*see photo of tomb*), were fast becoming one of the wealthiest landowners in north Staffordshire after having consolidated the family wealth practicing law in Chester for a couple of generations. Having been Mayor of Chester, twice Sheriff of Staffordshire and being a Justice of the Peace, Sir William, to the surprise of his Chester friends, then moved his family back to the old family seat of Bradwell Hall in the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire, while still relatively young, in order to invest in land. Amongst many acquisitions from this period, the most important was the purchase of the nearby manorship of Keele, a couple of miles north of the



Sampson Erdeswick delivers the first eyewitness description of Rocester Abbey handwritten in an early copy of his book.

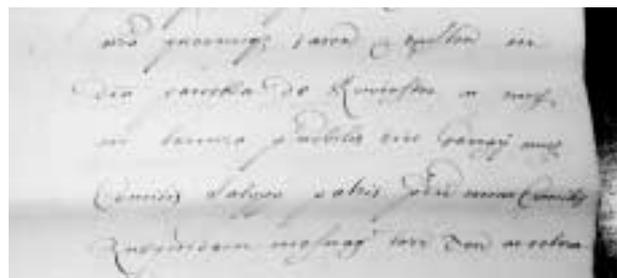


Sir William Sneyd's notable alabaster tomb in Wolstanton Parish Church, Newcastle-under-Lyme

important market town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, which is where his son Ralph would build a great hall to become the new family seat. And, like the Trenthams, the Sneyds also had connections at court for Sir William's father Richard had been councillor to Princess Mary, later Queen, as well as being Recorder of Chester for twenty-five years.

From the moment of Jane Sneyd's marriage to Thomas Trentham III, the two families formed a great bond of friendship that would last down the generations. Perhaps the most crucial early benefit of this relationship was the influence that Sir William and his son Ralph Sneyd had in educating the young Thomas Trentham III in the ways of profitable estate management. Trentham wealth, hitherto, had been founded on their drapery business and ownership of townhouses in Shrewsbury as well as civic income - they had little experience of managing hundreds of acres of farmland.

Thomas Trentham III was an ambitious and shrewd man and with the wise council of the Sneyds in his ears and the expectations of his forebears running in his veins, the Trentham family enjoyed a great flowering at Rocester in Thomas' capable hands. From evidence in the extensive Sneyd archive at Keele University it is clear that Sir William Sneyd introduced a programme of land improvement measures on his estates such as



An estate survey commissioned by the Earl of Shrewsbury in 1542 which gives a detailed description of Rocester

draining moorland and clearing 'furze and heath' to open up new pastures, the object being to increase the 'value per acre' of the land which determined the amount in leasehold rent that could be earned from a growing number of tenant farmers. It is very likely indeed that the Rocester estate under the management of Thomas Trentham III benefited from these acquired skills.

This investment in land improvement could be made to be self-financing, too. Undeveloped estates could be made profitable in Tudor times by a systematic thinning of the great mature woodlands on the estate - a ready supply of good timber was a very valuable commodity that could be exploited the year round for hard cash. It was especially profitable if you invested in a sawmill to prepare the lumber for market - and there are two extant 18C watermills at Rocester on the Dove and Churnett rivers. The 1781 Arkwright mill lies just beyond the southeast corner of Abbey Field - the site of both a Roman fort and then Rocester Abbey (*founded 1146*) and, as it's the perfect spot for a watermill, there's every chance that Thomas Trentham III used the site for cutting timber or grinding corn.

Having mentioned the Roman fort at Rocester - an interesting thought occurs regarding the Trentham Sneyd relationship. Setting off due west from the Rocester fort, a direct Roman road once set off across the moorland to link up with the

next fort - situated at Chesterton just outside the present town of Newcastle-under-Lyme. The site of this fort is overlooked by the great escarpment to the west climbing up to Keele. Roads were poorly developed in Staffordshire in Tudor times - it's an interesting thought that these two families kept in touch treading such an ancient pathway.

Over the next ten years Thomas and his wife Jane concentrated on putting down firm roots in this congenial, but isolated, corner of moorland Staffordshire situated about twenty-five miles to the south-east of the Sneyds at Keele Hall. It is likely that it was under Thomas that the existing abbey buildings underwent their first major rebuild - to fashion the place into a comfortable manor house. Their firstborn was named Elizabeth - she was the fifth member of the family to bear the name - and not the last. Sadly, no record has ever been found of her birth - the earliest extant Rocester Parish Register dates from just before the birth of Thomas and Jane's fourth child Katherine on August 16 1569, after the births of Elizabeth, Francis and Dorothy. But there are reliable clues to suggest that Thomas and Jane married around 1561-2. By this reckoning, Elizabeth Trentham was aged around twenty-nine years old when she married Edward de Vere.

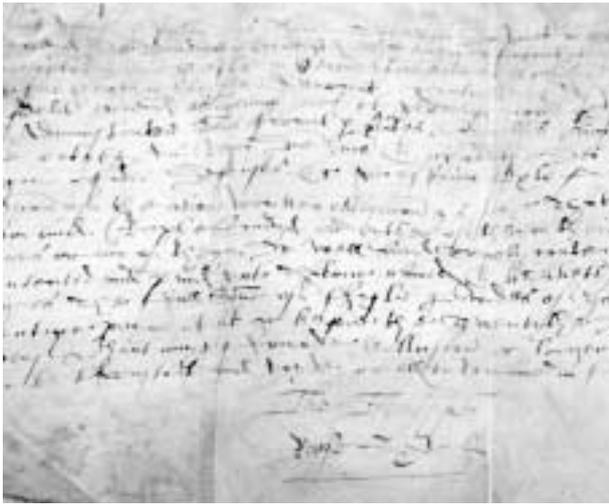
It is common knowledge amongst Oxfordians that Elizabeth Trentham was one of Queen Elizabeth's Maids of Honour - among the highest caste of all the ladies who attended the Queen. With a good education that developed an aptitude for French and Italian language and all the courtly arts like music, dancing and poetry, the Maids of Honour formed an essential part of the lustre of Elizabeth's court in its formal show when ambassadors were in town, and they also played their part in the feverish hothouse of court intrigue.



The 1781 Arkwright mill at Rocester on the Churnett



The Rocester mill on the Dove



A dowry bond for Elizabeth Trentham signed by her father Thomas Trentham III and Ralph Sneyd

A Shire Knight would consider himself in great favour indeed should his eldest daughter be chosen to become an intimate of the Queen's Majesty. It might interest Oxfordians to discover that Elizabeth Trentham may have had this destiny chosen for her at birth: Josiah C. Wedgwood, author of the three volume '*Staffordshire Parliamentary History*' (1917-1919), in his biography of Thomas Trentham III as the MP for the County of Stafford in 1571, states, "The Queen may have been god-mother to his eldest daughter, Elizabeth." Furthermore, GE Cokayne (a Victorian ancestor of the the Trenthams and author of '*The Complete Peerage*') has a manuscript note that for new year's presents one year, Queen Elizabeth gave gilt plates to two of her Maids of Honour - of all her ladies - one of whom is recorded as being Miss Trentham.

Perhaps the most vivid indication of the high esteem that Elizabeth Trentham (plus brother Francis and cousin Ralph Sneyd) was held in by the Queen is shown in the latter's personal tone in the salutation at the start of the licence document granting the purchase of King's Place, Hackney in 1596,

"...to our well beloved cousin Elizabeth, Countess of Oxenford, wife of Edward, Earl of Oxenford, and to our beloved Francis Trentham, esquire, Ralph Sneyd, esquire, & Giles Young, gentleman..."

Thomas and Jane had a further two children at Rocester - Lettice (b+d 1573) and Thomas Trentham IV (1575-1605) - at around that time in his life, in his early thirties, when Thomas Trentham III was beginning to spread his wings. On 2 April 1571, he took his seat as a Shire Knight in the House of Commons as one of two members for the County of Stafford. Interestingly, taking his seat

in the House of Lords for the first time on this day was the young 17th Earl of Oxford who had just come into his inheritance.

Parliament in Elizabethan England is barely recognisable to the Parliament of today. The summoning and dissolution of Parliament, for a start, was a Royal prerogative. Whenever Elizabeth got tired of their presumptuous questions, as she often did, she could simply tell the members to pack their bags and Parliament would not exist for months and months on end. The government of the Kingdom, by the Privy Council under Burghley's stewardship, would not be affected in any way. Parliament was useful for framing laws and for raising cash for foreign adventures - but England was governed by Burghley, Leicester and Walsingham under the cautious but wilful princely direction of the Queen.

Staffordshire elected eight members in total: two for the County of Stafford - who became the Shire Knights; and two each for the boroughs of Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Lichfield. The 'electors', such as they were, for the important Shire Knights were the Sheriff (whose job it was to administer the 'election'), between 12 and 25 'named' electors and a group of 'freeholders' that included guildmen, prominent landowners and burgesses. But in reality, the choice of the two Shire Knights was decided in smoke-filled rooms well in advance. In the section on Staffordshire in the second volume of the official history of Parliament, the description of the 'election' in 1571 seems to have been typical:

"At the next election, in 1571, we know that he [Sir Ralph Bagnall] and the Harcourt party clashed. There were three candidates: Bagnall, Harcourt's son-in-law John Grey, standing again, and Thomas Trentham I [sic III]. Harcourt himself had evidently had his fill of Parliaments.... As for Trentham, he was a pronounced Protestant, and it may well be that he and Bagnall combined forces against the Harcourt faction. According to Bagnall's statement in a subsequent Star Chamber case, he and Trentham had a majority of voices at the election; but the sheriff was Harcourt's brother-in-law, [Sir] Walter Aston, and when he came to make his return, he returned Grey and Trentham, simply substituting Grey for Bagnall as the senior Knight. Bagnall had to have recourse once more to a seat at Newcastle-under-Lyme."

It seems, in general, that the Staffordshire gentry were apathetic when it came to Parliament - having

the honour of representing the county as a Shire Knight was one thing, but taking a borough seat was deemed less worthy. A much more important and coveted post was that of the County Sheriff. This post was held for a single year at a time, and incumbents reported nominally to the Lord Lieutenant of the County when it came to surveys and musters - but, as for the day-to-day matters, much correspondence in the archive suggests that Burghley and Walsingham were the chief puppet-masters.

Barely a month after taking his seat, Thomas Trentham's parliamentary career came to an abrupt end when the Queen became tired of all the members' questions regarding her marriage and the succession and promptly wound them up. But in November that year, Thomas Trentham III was selected to replace the outgoing Sir Walter Aston as Sheriff of Staffordshire.

As he took up his post and gathered all the reins of power in his hands, he could hardly have been unaware of a very dangerous current running through the affairs of the Kingdom that would burst forth in the coming spring and come to dominate his remaining years in public life.

The Catholic threat and the Recusancy laws

On the 25th of February 1570, Pope Pius V, profoundly angered by the continued flowering of the Church of England, issued a Papal Bull excommunicating Queen Elizabeth. The Pope also made it clear that anyone willing to assassinate her could expect a Papal Pardon.

It took a while before the implications of this act began to sink in. And then on the 8th of May 1572, the Queen summoned a new Parliament to meet in order to pass the Recusancy Laws.

The question of the day boiled down to: could a good Roman Catholic also be a good Englishman? Did not the Pope's injunctions inevitably make English Catholics the enemy within? And if the answer was affirmative, then what steps were the necessary steps to safeguard the Kingdom from this potential fifth column?

Throughout the length and breadth of the Kingdom could be found families of Earls, gentry and poorfolk who had never reconciled themselves to the Church of England and who were determined - no matter what the risk - to maintain their observance of the Catholic rites. In many cases, this profound sense of grievance went beyond the personal issue of conscience - they felt it a sacred duty to call into question the very legitimacy of a Protestant sovereign of England.

And so began the persecution of English Catholics. Fines could be levied on people who refused to attend church, those deemed extremely recalcitrant could end up in gaol or even have their estates taken from them. Over the coming years, as the Catholic threat failed to diminish, the Recusancy laws were strengthened. On the 18th January 1581 Parliament introduced new anti-catholic measures which, for instance, now declared proselytising treason. At the new Parliament of November 1584, among new measures established was an increase in the fine for Recusancy. Since the first law had been passed, only 69 recusants had had to pay fines, totalling £8,938. After the act had been toughened, over the next five years recusancy receipts totalled £36,322.

Josiah C. Wedgwood, in his biography of Sir Walter Aston (*Staffordshire Parliamentary History, Vol 1917*), sums up rather well the role that some of Staffordshire's more influential figures had at this time,

"Throughout the struggle of the religions in Staffordshire, Sir Walter Aston, Mr [Richard] Bagot, Mr Gresley and Mr [Thomas] Trentham [III] formed a sort of committee of the Staffordshire bench to carry out the repression of Catholics and their conspiracies. They were in constant communication with the Privy Council from 1576 to 1590, and were the mainstay of the Protestant government."



Burghley and Walsingham's signatures on Privy Council correspondence with Thomas Gresley, the Staffordshire Sheriff of the day

In his biography of Thomas Trentham III, he goes further,

“Thomas Trentham [III], with Sir Walter Aston and Richard Bagot, watched over Staffordshire in the Protestant interest. They were in a sense Walsingham’s spies. In [this] period the Privy Council is repeatedly instructing them to hold enquiries into the doings of papists.”

Now, ever since she had returned to Edinburgh on the death of her first husband, the King of France, the Scottish Queen, Mary Stuart, had acted as a magnet to Catholic plotters throughout England - and beyond, in the Spanish and French courts.

It is an interesting fact that throughout her long exile living under house arrest in England, the Scottish Queen was placed firmly in the hands of the Staffordshire Shire Knights. Her permanent exile began in January 1569 when she and her considerable court moved to Tutbury Castle - the dilapidated Staffordshire seat of George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury who, in 1585, was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire. Walsingham had good reason, over the next few years, to become dissatisfied by the security arrangements there, and so in 1585 the troublesome Queen was moved first to Tixall - the home of the violent Protestant Sir Walter Aston - and finally, in December 1585, to the nearby house of Chartley.

The biography of Thomas Trentham III, in the official *History of Parliament - The House of Commons, (Vol II, 1559-1601)*, contains an interesting note which gives an indication of the absolute trust placed in him by the Privy Council,

“A good deal of his [Thomas Trentham III] local activity consisted of examining suspected recusants and harbourers of Jesuit priests. Sir Ralph Sadler corresponded with him about Mary Stuart and, as one of the ‘principal gentlemen in Staffordshire’, he was ordered to attend Mary on her removal in September 1586 to Fotheringay.”

Oxfordians are well aware of the role that Edward de Vere played at the trial at Fotheringay - according to the contemporary sketch (*see photo*), first in precedence was Bromley, Lord Chancellor, then Burghley followed by the Earl of Oxford and the Earl of Shrewsbury. It is likely that one of the unidentified gentlemen standing in the foreground of the sketch was Thomas Trentham III.

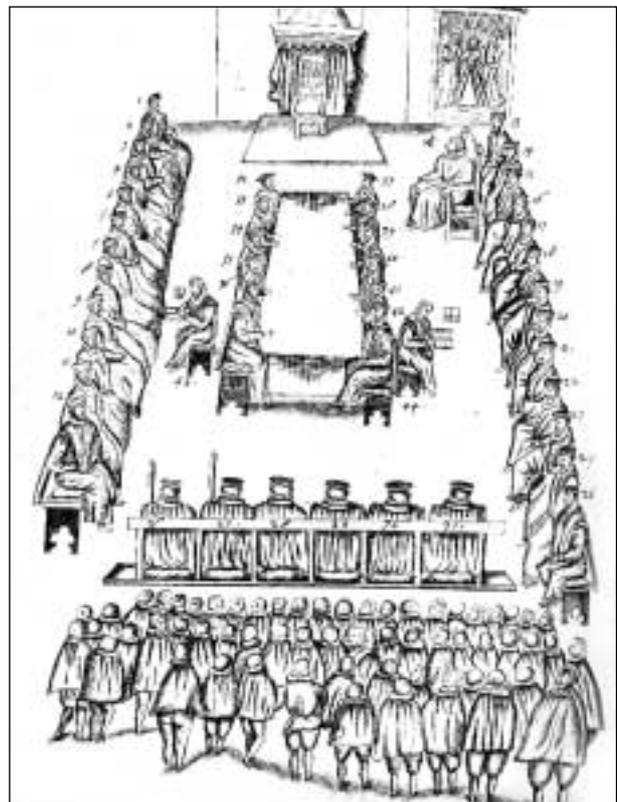
As for Thomas Trentham’s day-to-day activities following the passing of the recusancy laws, again the archive record gives us a great deal of anecdotal colour. Among the pages of the

published *Acts of the Privy Council*, are such gems as the letter written on 25 February 1578,

“To Sir Walter Aston, knight, Thomas Trentham and Richard Bagot, esquires, Justices of the Peace in the county of Stafford, that whereas their Lordships were enformed that within the said county do lurk certain Masse Priestes disguised in serving men’s apparail, or like other lay persons, and are secretly receyved and entertained in sundry men’s howses, to the perverting and seducing of many of her Majesties subjectes from ther dew obedience to her Majesties lawes and orders established in causes of Religion,...”

There follows detailed instructions about tracking the men down, arresting them and keeping their Lordships informed of all developments.

On 27 July 1579, the Privy Council wrote to Sir Walter Aston, the Dean Of Lichfield, Thomas Trentham and Richard Bagot asking them to enquire into “the Popishe stuffe” said to be within the Cathedral of Lichfield and requiring them to, “...assemble themselves together in the towne of Lichfield and to cause the said Popishe stuffe to be sought out and brought before them, and thereuppon to deface the same and to cause it to be indifferentlie [a]praised and solde ... and thereof to advertise their Lordships.”



The famous sketch of the Scottish Queen’s trial at Fotheringay

By 3 November 1580, in a letter from the Justices of Staffordshire to the Privy Council, it is clear that Thomas Trentham's stock had risen still further. During the interregnum prior to George Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury, becoming the Lord Lieutenant of the County of Stafford in 1585, Thomas Trentham III had attained the highest position in the county that a commoner could attain, that of Custos Rotulorum - in effect, the stand-in for Lord Lieutenant,

"...state their opinion that John Archpole had been very properly deprived of his office of Clerk of Peace by Thomas Trentham Esq, Custos Rotulorum, and Mr Barell appointed in his place."

The marriage of Edward de Vere and Elizabeth Trentham

Thomas Trentham III was buried at Rocester on 25 May 1587 at the age of forty-nine. In his will, dated the previous October, he entailed most of the Rocester Abbey estate upon his son and heir Francis Trentham I. The rest, he divided between his widow Jane and his other son Thomas Trentham IV, while his eldest daughter Elizabeth was bequeathed £1000. Of his three daughters, Dorothy had married Sir William Cooper, Katherine had married Sir John Stanhope while Elizabeth, living at the very heart of the Queen's court, remained unmarried.



The view from Cambridge over to Rocester

The Queen was so possessive of her Maids of Honour, she demanded such loyalty from them, that she was often loath to let them marry - holding her own chastity up as an example to follow. I'm sure her maids saw behind the facade, and the record is full of Elizabethan men coming a cropper through their entanglement with the Queen's ladies - as the Oxford-Vavasour imbroglio so vividly illustrates.

Yet somehow it was all so very different when it came to the Earl of Oxford and Miss Trentham. Elizabeth could have begun her service to the Queen, I suggest, sometime between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. It is often cited that Oxford knew her for ten years before they married in 1591. Elizabeth would have witnessed the great scandal that broke when Anne Vavasour delivered Oxford's bastard son in her rooms at Court. Elizabeth Trentham was a young woman - and perhaps she learned a cautionary lesson from it. In any case, she maintained her chastity throughout her twenties.

Now, on the one hand, we have Elizabeth Trentham - a loyal and spotless Maid of Honour, in all likelihood one of the Queen's god-daughters, approaching an age when her fertility was past its peak, together with her brother, Francis Trentham I, a wealthy Shire Knight highly skilled in estate management and a minor courtier; and on the other hand, we have Edward de Vere, the noblest of all English Earls and Lord Great Chamberlain of England, classical scholar, adventurer, poet, dramatist, patron of the arts and sciences, and impresario, recently widowed without a male heir and in shockingly poor financial straits. The Queen had done her bit to help support her greatest court poet and chief propagandist in the resurgence of English national pride when, on 26 June 1586, she authorised a Privy Seal warrant granting Oxford £1000 a year.

That the marriage of Edward de Vere and Elizabeth Trentham received Royal blessing cannot be in doubt - that the Queen herself played matchmaker to this union seems, in the circumstances, almost like stating the obvious. Bringing the two families together would bring great honour to the loyal and 'fair' Miss Trentham, and the ravaged estate of her Lord Great Chamberlain might recover its health under the stewardship of the bride's brother Francis. Perhaps the reason why no record has yet been found of the marriage itself is that people haven't been looking in the right place. It may interest Oxfordians to know that Francis Trentham I also married in 1591,

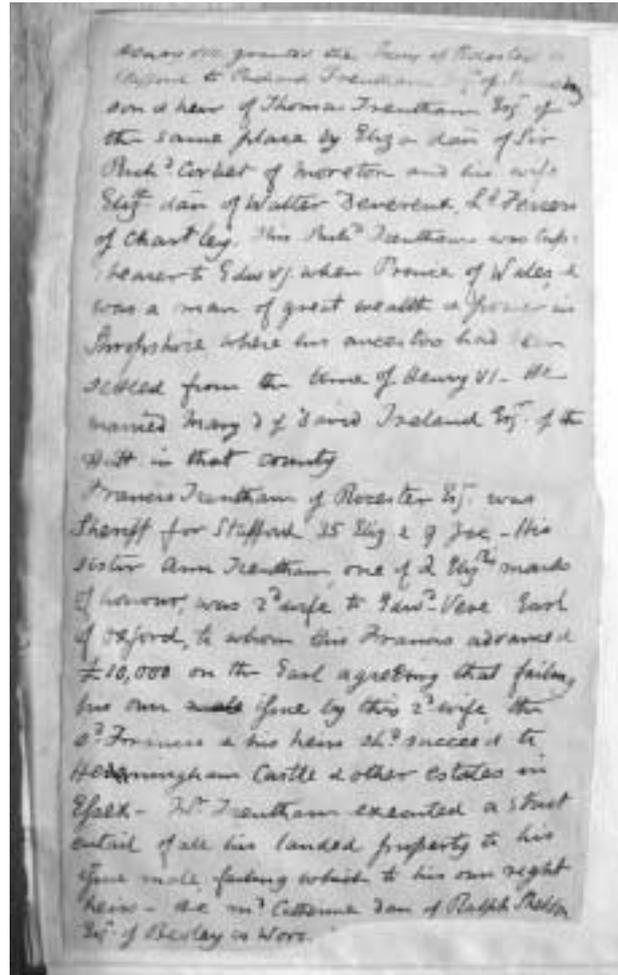
to Katherine, daughter of Sir Ralph Sheldon and yet, unlike other important Trentham marriages that had gone before, no mention of it is recorded in the Rocester Parish Register. Perhaps Elizabeth and Francis Trentham married their spouses in a double wedding in one of the Queen's chapels.

Whatever the circumstances, the marriage marked an important turning point in the fortunes of both families. While researching information about the last in the Trentham line - the heiress Elizabeth Trentham who married Bryan Cokayne, Lord Viscount Cullen - I uncovered an extraordinary hand-written note in a notebook of one of their ancestors - GE Cokayne, the Victorian author of *The Complete Peerage* and *The Complete Baronetage*. It reads, in part,

“Francis Trentham of Rocester Esq was Sheriff for Stafford 35 Eliz 2 9 Jac - His sister Ann [sic - Elizabeth] Trentham, one of 2 Elizabeth's maids of honour, was 2nd wife to Edwd-Vere Earl of Oxford, to whom this Francis advanced £10,000 on the Earl agreeing that failing his own male issue by this 2nd wife, the said Francis & his heirs should succeed to Henningham Castle & other estates in Essex.”

Soon, Edward de Vere and his new Countess would take up residence at King's Place in Hackney which is where we'll rejoin them in the second part of this short history of the Trentham family, in the next newsletter.

GE Cokayne records the settlement of £10,000 from Francis Trentham to Edward de Vere on becoming brothers-in-law



Notes

The Shropshire Years

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