

Sir Thomas More: His Nephews and Nieces

Literary connections: The Rastells, Heywoods and the Donnes

Elizabeth More : Thomas More's sister.

Born at Milk Street, London, on 22nd September 1482. Married John Rastell c.1500.

The Rastells:

John Rastell, born at Coventry in 1475, was the son of Thomas Rastell, a Justice of the Peace for Warwickshire. John became a Barrister of the Middle Temple, London, and practiced as a lawyer in Coventry where he succeeded his father as Coroner in 1505. John was a man of many talents and, after he and Elizabeth moved to London in 1508, he became better known as a printer, an author, a playwright, and as a designer of great pageants. A staunch Catholic until his fifties when he was converted to the Protestant cause and worked for Thomas Cromwell. He got caught up in the controversy about payments made to the clergy and was committed to prison where he died on 25th June 1536.

John and Elizabeth Rastell had three children:

1. **Joan**: Born at Coventry in 1504. Married John Heywood in 1523. See '[The Heywoods](#)' below.
2. **John**: Born at Coventry c.1506, he became a lawyer at one of the Inns of Court in London. Involved in a disastrous voyage of exploration to Labrador from 1536 to 1539 when he returned to England. Date of death not known.
3. **William**: Born at Coventry in 1508. Joined his father's printing business and legal practice. Established his own printing business c.1529. Printed some of his father's and his brother-in-law's works. Edited and printed the English works of his uncle, Sir Thomas More. Admitted to Lincoln's Inn, London, in 1532, and called to the Bar in 1539. Married Winifred Clement in 1544. Winifred, born 1526, was the daughter of Dr. John Clement (one-time assistant to Thomas More and tutor to his children) and his wife Margaret Giggs (Thomas More's adopted daughter). William and Margaret Rastell had no children. Faced with the persecution of Catholics in England, they fled to Louvain in Flanders in 1549. Winifred died there on 17th July 1533 and was buried in the Church of St. Peter. William returned to England on the accession of Queen Mary in 1553 and was appointed one of the Justices of the Queen's Bench. Following increasing anti-Catholic legislation under Elizabeth I, William fled again to Louvain in 1562. He died there on 22nd August 1565 and was buried next to his wife.

[In addition to the above-mentioned works, William Rastell is noted for the writing and printing of a number of Law Books and a "Table" of the Kings of England. He wrote a 'Life' of his uncle, Sir Thomas More, of which only a few fragments survive. He also translated and printed Caesar's "Commentaries" and Cicero's "De Amicitia".]

The Heywoods:

John Heywood was born in 1497 at Coventry where his father was involved in the same legal practice as John Rastell. John studied at Broadgates Hall, Oxford (now Pembroke College) and entered Court service as 'a player of virginals' in 1519. Married Joan Rastell in 1523.

John became famous as a writer of 'Interludes' and as an Epigrammatist.

Discharged from official Royal service in 1528 he continued to be a favourite entertainer at Court during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Became a Member of the Mercers Company in 1529. A firm Catholic, John became involved in the 'Plot of the Prebendaries' to overthrow Archbishop Cranmer and was convicted of treason and sentenced to death in 1544, but pardoned after making a public recantation at St. Paul's Cross. A favourite for his 'merry wit' at the Court of Queen Mary and during the early part of Elizabeth's reign, pressure to conform to the Church of England caused John to go into exile in 1564. By this time he was already a widower, but the date of Joan's death is not known. John settled in Malines, in the Spanish Netherlands. Later he moved to Antwerp and then to Louvain where he died in 1578.

[John Heywood's works have been published a number of times. They include: "Dramatic Writings of John Heywood, with the Proverbs, Epigrams and Miscellanies." Ed. John S. Farmer. Early English Drama Society. 1905. Also: "Dramatic Writings of John Heywood". Ed John Farmer. Kissingen Publishing. 2007.]

John and Joan Heywood had five children:

- 1. Ellis:** Born in London in 1530. Studied Law at Oxford. Became Secretary to Cardinal Reginald Pole in Rome. Ordained a priest. Wrote "The More, by Ellis Heywood, Englishman", published in Florence in 1556. Joined the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) at Dillingen in Bavaria, in 1566. A noted linguist, visited England on a number of occasions and travelled in Europe on behalf of the Jesuits. Died at Louvain on 2nd October 1578.
- 2. Jasper:** Born in London in 1535. As a boy was a Page of Honour to Princess Elizabeth. Studied at Oxford. Wrote a number of poems and a Compendium of Hebrew Grammar. Translated three of Seneca's Tragedies into English verse. Ordained Priest and joined the Jesuits at Rome in 1662. Sent by Pope Gregory XIII onto the English Mission. Caught returning to the continent and imprisoned in the Clink from 1582-84 and then in the Tower for seventeen months. Exiled and transported to the French coast in 1585. Went to Dole in Burgundy and then to Rome and Salerno. Died at Naples in 1598.
- 3. Joan:** Born between 1531 and 1539. Married Christopher Stubbs, a Lawyer of Lincoln's Inn.
- 4. Elizabeth:** Born between 1531 and 1539. Married ... Marvin (first name not recorded). He died before 1571. Elizabeth died after 1577.
- 5. Elizabeth:** Born c.1540. Married, firstly, to John Donne (the elder).

The Donnes:

John Donne (the elder): A descendant of the Dwn family from Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire. A Citizen of London, a prosperous Ironmonger and a Member of the Ironmonger's Company. Married Elizabeth Heywood in March or April 1563. The family home was opposite the Parish Church of St. Nicholas Olave in Bread Street, London. John died in January or early February 1576.

After John's death Elizabeth married Dr. John Syminges, twice President of the Royal College of Physicians. They had no children. John died in 1588. In 1590/1 Elizabeth married Richard Rainsford. To escape the persecution of Catholics they lived in exile in Antwerp from 1595-1606. John was committed to Newgate Prison from 1611-1613, for refusing to sign the Oath of Allegiance. The date of his death is not known. Elizabeth died in 1631 and was buried in the Parish Church at Barking.

John and Elizabeth Donne had six children:

1. **Elizabeth:** Died while still a child, in 1577.
2. **Anne:** Born 1565-6. Married (1) Avery Copley in 1585. They had one child. Avery died in 1591. Married (2) William Lyly. No issue. He died of the plague in 1603. Anne died c.1616.
3. **Katherine:** Died when still a child in November 1581.
4. **Mary:** Died when still a child in November 1581.
5. **Henry:** Born 1574. Studied at Hart Hall, Oxford, and at Thravies Inn, an Inn of Chancery in London. Sent to the Clink and then Newgate Prison after a Priest, John Harrington, was discovered hiding in his Chambers. Harrington was hung, drawn and quartered. Henry died of the plague while in prison.
6. **John Donne (the Poet):** See below.

John Donne (the Poet): Born at Bread Street between 24th January and 19th June 1572. Studied at Hart Hall, Oxford, and at Thravies Inn. Admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1592. Began to write poetry in his early twenties. Personal Secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, at his house in the Savoy, London, and later lived at the home of Sir Francis Wolley at Pyrford, Surrey. John was deeply affected by his brother's death and, after a lot of inner turmoil, joined the Church of England. Married Anne, daughter of Sir George More of Loseley in 1601. The family moved to Mitcham, Surrey in 1606. Ordained Priest in 1615. Appointed Chaplain in Ordinary to King James I, and granted Degree of Doctor of Divinity. Preached at Court. Appointed Divinity Reader at Lincoln's Inn. Appointed Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral by Royal command in 1620.

[John Donne became famous for his sermons, and as a metaphysical poet - love poems, religious poems and verse satires. All of his works have been regularly published.]

John and Anne Donne had twelve children:

1. **Constance:** Born at Pyrford in 1603. Married firstly (3rd December 1623) Edward Alleyn (1566-1626), his second wife. Edward was perhaps the most famous actor of his time. No issue. Married Secondly, Samuel Harvey of Aldborough Hatch on 24th June 1630. Three children by 1534.

2. **John Jnr:** Born at Pyrford in 1604. Went to Christ Church, Oxford in 1622. Married (1627) Mary Staples. No children recorded. Became a Church of England Priest. A Doctor of Canon Law at Padua and Oxford.
John was responsible for gathering together all his father's works and arranging for their printing. He died in January 1662.
3. **George:** Born at Peckham in 1605. Baptised at Camberwell on 9th May. Became a soldier, a Captain by 1626. Saw service in the West Indies. Married, but name of wife and daughter (b.1638) not known. George died on his way to Virginia in 1639.
4. **Francis:** Born at Mitcham, Surrey, in 1607. Baptised 8th January 1607. Buried at St. Clement Danes on 10th November 1614.
5. **Lucy:** Born at Mitcham in 1608. Baptised 8th August. Died unmarried. Buried at Camberwell on 9th January 1627.
6. **Bridget:** Born at Mitcham in 1609. Baptised 12th December. Married (1631) Thomas Gardiner Esq., of Peckham (d.1641), son of Sir Thomas Gardiner. Children: Francis, Thomas & Margaret.
7. **Mary:** Born at Mitcham in 1611. Baptised 31 January. Buried at St. Clement Danes on 18th May 1614.
8. **Unnamed child:** Stillborn. Buried at Brading, Isle of Wight in 1612.
9. **Nicholas:** Born in 1613. Baptised at St. Clement Danes 3rd August. Died before 1617.
10. **Margaret:** Born in 1615. Baptised at St. Clement Danes on 20th April. Married (1633) William Bowles of Clerkenwell - later Sir William. He died in 1681. Issue: Three sons and five daughters. Lady Margaret died in 1679.
11. **Elizabeth:** Born in 1616. Baptised on 14th June. Married (1637) Dr. Cornelius Laurence at All Hallows, Barking.
12. **Unnamed daughter:** Stillborn on 10th August 1617.

Anne Donne died five days later, on 15th August. Mother and child were buried together on 16th August 1617 at the Parish Church of St. Clement Danes.

John Donne died on 31st March 1631 and was buried inside the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral on 3rd April 1631.

[Two major lives have been written about John Donne:

1. "John Donne: A Life." R.C. Bald. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1970.
2. "Donne: The Reformed Soul." John Stubbs. Viking (Penguin Books). 2006.]

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