

**SIR THOMAS BROWNE'S DAUGHTERS,  
'COSEN BARKER', AND THE  
COTTRELLS**

EDWARD BROWNE (1643?-1708), the elder surviving son of Sir Thomas, was a young graduate in medicine from Cambridge in December 1663 when he began a journal in Norwich that was to continue until August 1664 in Paris, covering the first five months of his travels in France and Italy.<sup>1</sup> Parts of this journal were published in 1836 by Wilkin,<sup>2</sup> who was puzzled by some of the relatives mentioned in it. A week in London at the end of February 1664 caused particular difficulty, because the entries included:

- 24 Feb. [On arrival in London] laide this night at my cosin Barker's in Clarkenwell.  
 26 Feb. I dined with my sister An, at Mr. Howell's [and after attending an anatomical lecture] returned to Mr. Howell's, from whence taking my sister Nancy with mee . . .  
 28 Feb., Sunday. In the afternoon I read a sermon to Madam Fairfax, my dear sister Cottrell, and Nansy; and afterwards waited upon Madam Cottrell home to her house in St. James his parke, which is handsomely built upon a piece of ground, which the kinge gave to Sr. Charles.  
 1 March [From Arundel House] by water to Sr. Charles Cotrel's, where taking leave of my dear sister, I returned to my cousin Barkers in Clarkenwell.

The greatest problem here is Edward's 'sister Cottrell'. Wilkin's footnote said that Sir Charles Cottrell, Master of Ceremonies to Charles II, married a daughter of Sir Thomas Browne. However, in his discussion of the family in a *Supplementary Memoir*,<sup>3</sup> he confessed that this conclusion might have been too hasty: 'More probably it was a son of Sir Charles's; but I cannot give the slightest authority for the conjecture beyond the present passage.' In spite of the strength of the evidence

against it, Wilkin's conjecture has been accepted by subsequent editors and biographers. The hypothetical daughter appears in Charles Williams's revision of Wilkin's pedigree of Browne.<sup>4</sup>

The 'cosen Barker' (Sir Thomas's spelling) who occurs frequently in the correspondence of the Browne family, from as early as 1661,<sup>5</sup> was identified by Wilkin as the [William] Barker who lived in Clerkenwell, where many letters were addressed and where Edward's sister Anne (Nancy) often stayed. No doubt she met her future husband, Henry Fairfax, there. Wilkin pointed out<sup>6</sup> that Henry's mother, presumably the 'Madam Fairfax' who heard a sermon read by Edward Browne, was [William Barker's sister] Frances, only daughter of Henry Barker of Hurst in Berkshire. 'Thus is the relationship of the Fairfax and Barker families made out; but how Mr. Barker became the cousin of Edward Browne, before his sister's marriage to Mr. Fairfax, does not appear.' The answer to this conundrum, it will be shown, is that William Barker's wife, born Frances Hobart, was the direct relative, being a cousin of Dorothy Mileham, who married Dr Thomas Browne soon after his arrival in Norwich.

Dorothy Browne complicated these interwoven problems in a postscript to her husband's letter of 25 November 1664 to their younger son, Thomas, addressed to him 'att William Barkers Esq' in Clarken Well upon New Prison Wallke London': she asked him to 'bee carfull and sivell to my cosens Mrs Cottrall and the Howells'.<sup>7</sup> As the Howells were in fact indirectly related to her husband,<sup>8</sup> Dorothy

<sup>4</sup> C. Williams, 'The pedigree of Sir Thomas Browne', *Norfolk Archaeol.* xv (1902-4), 109-13. Only differences from this pedigree will be given references here.

<sup>5</sup> G. Keynes, ed., *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne* (1964), iv. 12. The year is supplied by the editor, as usual. Most of Sir Thomas's letters were printed by Wilkin, too.

<sup>6</sup> Wilkin, lxxvi.

<sup>7</sup> Keynes, 18. New Prison Walk on Rocque's map (1746) became St James' Walk on Horwood's (1799) and so remains.

<sup>8</sup> John Howell (1606?-82) was a barrister of Lincoln's Inn who became Recorder of London and was knighted in 1668. His wife Elizabeth (1607-83) was a sister of Nevill Cradock (1605-51), first husband of Sir Thomas Browne's sister Mary. See G. C. R. Morris, 'Cradock, Amherst and Howell: a link between the Selbys of Ightham and Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cii (1985), 11-17.

<sup>1</sup> British Library, Sloane MS 1906. The writing is perfectly clear in the passages cited.

<sup>2</sup> S. Wilkin, ed., *Sir Thomas Browne's Works* (1835-6), i. 44-59, 65-7.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkin, lxxvii.

Browne was very likely taking a broad view of the term 'cosen' in reference to 'Mrs Cottrell' – who was plainly not her daughter, but could well have been Edward Browne's 'Madam Cottrell', the wife of Sir Charles; she was related to William Barker.

### The Brownes' daughters

Only four daughters, all unmarried, were named (with his sons Edward and Thomas) by Dr Thomas Browne for the Visitation of Norfolk in 1664: Anne, Elizabeth, Mary, and Frances (Nancy, Betty, Moll, and Franck in the family's correspondence).<sup>9</sup> He omitted two daughters (and three sons) whose previous deaths in infancy are known from the registers of St Peter Mancroft; but it is extremely unlikely that he would have left unmentioned a daughter married to a Cottrell.

Anne's marriage to Henry Fairfax has not been found, but it was presumably in the later part of 1669. She was 'never out of London' in her father's letter of March of that year to Edward, away on his second tour of Europe, and 'still at Clarkenwell and I beleave ever will bee' in a postscript by her sister Elizabeth.<sup>10</sup> On his way back to England in November, Edward (who had not heard from home since June) was still addressing his letters to 'Ms Anne Browne' at Clerkenwell.<sup>11</sup> Yet her first child was baptized at St Peter Mancroft on 30 August 1670 (to be followed by three at St James, Clerkenwell,<sup>12</sup> one at Shiplake, and three at Hurst). Henry Fairfax was of Hurst (which he inherited through his mother, who had died in the spring of 1669) when he died in 1694.<sup>13</sup> His widow Anne was buried there with him four years later, leaving her youngest daughter Alatheia (b. 1685) her executrix, who forthwith married her first cousin Thomas Browne (1673-1710), son of Edward.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Wilkin, f.p. cx.

<sup>10</sup> Keynes, 40-3.

<sup>11</sup> Wilkin, 197-8.

<sup>12</sup> Barker, ... Nov. 1671; Frances, 27 Jan. 1674; Thomas, 29 Jan. 1677: *Register of St James, Clerkenwell: Baptisms 1551-1700*, Harl. Soc. ix (1884), 251, 262, 275.

<sup>13</sup> Buried 16 June 1694 at Hurst: register, Berkshire Record Office, D/P 73, 1/3. Administration to his widow, P.C.C., 9 July 1694: Public Record Office, PROB 6/70, f. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Will of Anne Fairfax, of St James, Clerkenwell, with administration to Thomas Browne, P.C.C., 13 May 1698: P.R.O., PROB 11/445, f. 121.

The only daughter of Sir Thomas who married in his own parish church, St Peter Mancroft, was Elizabeth (11 December 1680). Childless, she survived her husband George Lyttelton (d. 1717) and was apparently still alive in 1728, when she was mentioned in the will of her cousin Edward Tenison, Bishop of Ossory.<sup>15</sup>

Mary died unmarried in 1676 and was commemorated by a stone in St Peter Mancroft.<sup>16</sup>

The youngest daughter, Frances, was thought by Le Neve to have married a Bosville of Yorkshire, but does not appear in the pedigree of that family.<sup>17</sup> In the will of her sister Anne Fairfax, dated 19 October 1697, she was 'Sister Boswell' and could have £10 per annum for life if the executrix so decided. She seems to have been the 'Frances Brown' who married 'John Bosnel' at St Bene't, Paul's Wharf, on 19 November 1687:<sup>18</sup> the licence (12 November) was for John Boswell of St James, Westminster, gent., above 21 and Mrs Frances Browne of the same, spinster, above 21, at her own disposal, her parents dead.<sup>19</sup> He was of St Martin-in-the-Fields (but died in Ireland) when his will dated 6 October 1688, which left £100 to his widowed mother Sarah, was proved in 1692 by his widow and executrix Frances.<sup>20</sup>

### Cousins Barker

William Barker of Hurst and Clerkenwell was indeed a 'cosen Barker' to the Brownes, as Wilkin said, but only through his wife: it was she who justified the term. The clue to her identity as a first cousin of Dorothy Mileham's mother lies in a garbled passage of Blomefield's *Norfolk*.<sup>21</sup>

Manors in Erpingham acquired by John

<sup>15</sup> Will dated 31 Dec. 1728 (as Prebendary of Canterbury), proved P.C.C. 22 June 1736: P.R.O., PROB 11/677, f. 135.

<sup>16</sup> F. Blomefield, *History of Norfolk* (1805-10), iv. 94; British Library, Add. MS 23,016, f. 108.

<sup>17</sup> J. Foster, *Pedigrees of the County Families of Yorkshire. I. West Riding* (1874).

<sup>18</sup> *Register of St Bene't: Marriages 1619-1730*, Harl. Soc. xxxix (1910), 50.

<sup>19</sup> *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Vicar-General of the Archbishop of Canterbury, July 1687 to June 1694*, Harl. Soc. xxxi (1890), 28.

<sup>20</sup> Proved P.C.C. 27 Feb. 1692: P.R.O., PROB 11/408, f. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Blomefield, vi. 420. The wording is the same in the first edition (1739-75), iii. 650.



Hobart of Thweyt passed to his son William Hobart of Metton, who had two daughters, co-heiresses: Anne (who married first Nicholas Bacon and secondly Thomas Herne of Heverland, by whom she had a son Clement) and Frances, to whom these manors fell on the partition, and who

married William Hurst of Berkshire, but had no issue, but by her other husband James, son of Sir Henry Davy, pensioner to King Charles I, she had three daughters; the 1st married a Bouchier, Thomasine, the third, married Plowden of Latham in Hantsire, and Frances, the second, to whom these manors fell, married Sir George Windham of Cromere . . .

Read *William Barker of Hurst* as Frances Hobart's second husband, and this becomes an account for which there is ample corroborative evidence (except for the daughter who married a Bouchier).

The Hobart pedigree in Bulwer's edition of the Visitation of Norfolk in 1563 includes William Hobart of Metton (d. 1612) as an elder brother of John Hobart of Salle (1568-1630), whose daughter Dorothy (1599-1625) was the first wife of Edward Mileham and the mother of Dorothy Mileham, wife of Sir Thomas Browne.<sup>22</sup>

The Inquisition post mortem of Henry (1609-22), the only son of William Hobart of Metton, shows that his younger sister Frances was born 7 November 1611.<sup>23</sup> Their mother married, secondly, Francis Symonds of Suffield, where she was buried in 1640. James Davy was of Suffield in Le Neve's note of his daughter's marriage to Sir George Wyndham of Cromer.<sup>24</sup> Sir George's will gave rings to James and Frances Davy, the parents of his wife Frances; it said that the manor of Erpingham, with lands there, was leased to 'Maddam Davy my mother'.<sup>25</sup>

James Davy's daughter Frances was a minor, unmarried, when her grandfather, Sir Henry

Davy, made his will in 1648.<sup>26</sup> He described James's daughter Thomasine as a god-daughter of his wife, who was Thomasine, widow of William Quarles and then of Sir Henry Lee before her marriage to Sir Henry Davy in 1627.<sup>27</sup> Thomasine was James's 'youngest' daughter in a dispute about the terms he had negotiated for her marriage to Thomas Plowden (of Lasham, Hants) in 1653.<sup>28</sup> He had required her to seek her mother's permission for the marriage and assurance that her inheritance in Norfolk would not be prejudiced.

This suggests that Frances Hobart's marriage to James Davy was disintegrating long before illness prompted him to make a will, on 18 June 1660, in which he did not even name his wife.<sup>29</sup> Her response to his death was marriage to William Barker, on 26 July 1660 at St Margaret Pattens.<sup>30</sup>

William was the third son of Henry Barker (1574?-1651)<sup>31</sup> of Hurst, which he inherited in 1661 on the death of his brother John.<sup>32</sup> John's widow, born Elizabeth West, survived him by sixteen years; she was a sister of Lady Cottrell. As a cursitor (one of twenty-four who issued writs from Chancery to provincial courts),<sup>33</sup> William Barker needed to live in London, at least during legal terms. His house became the London base of the Browne family, who must have known his wife well. The earliest mention of 'cosen Barker' by Dr Thomas Browne, in a letter of 26 July 1661 to his son Thomas, then in

<sup>26</sup> Will dated 20 Apr. 1648, proved P.C.C. 24 Jan. 1649: P.R.O., PROB 11/207, f. 10.

<sup>27</sup> James Davy v. Sir John Lee *et al.*: P.R.O., C 5/41/39.

<sup>28</sup> James Davy v. Sir Edmund Plowden *et al.*: P.R.O., C 5/601/92; C 5/403/95 (answer by Thomas Plowden).

<sup>29</sup> Proved P.C.C. 27 Nov. 1660: P.R.O., PROB 11/300, f. 208. Nor did he mention his daughters. His son-in-law Thomas Plowden was a residuary legatee, probably in belated payment of sums promised on his marriage. James Davy's burial has not been found.

<sup>30</sup> Register: Guildhall Library, MS 5287/2. She is named as Frances Davy.

<sup>31</sup> Buried 4 July 1651 at Hurst: Berks. R.O., D/P 73, 1/3. Will dated 29 Dec. 1647, proved P.C.C. 11 Aug. 1651: P.R.O., PROB 11/218, f. 157.

<sup>32</sup> Buried 14 Sept. 1661 at Hurst: Berks. R.O., D/P 73, 1/3. Will dated 21 May 1656, proved P.C.C. 1 Oct. 1661: P.R.O., PROB 11/305, f. 149.

<sup>33</sup> C. Kitching, 'The Cursitors' Office (1573-1813) and the Corporation of the Cursitors of Chancery', *J. Soc. Archivists* vii (1982), 78-84. William Barker appears in the Muniment Book from 1658 to 6 Feb. 1682, when he was the senior Assistant to the Principal: P.R.O., C 220/15/14.

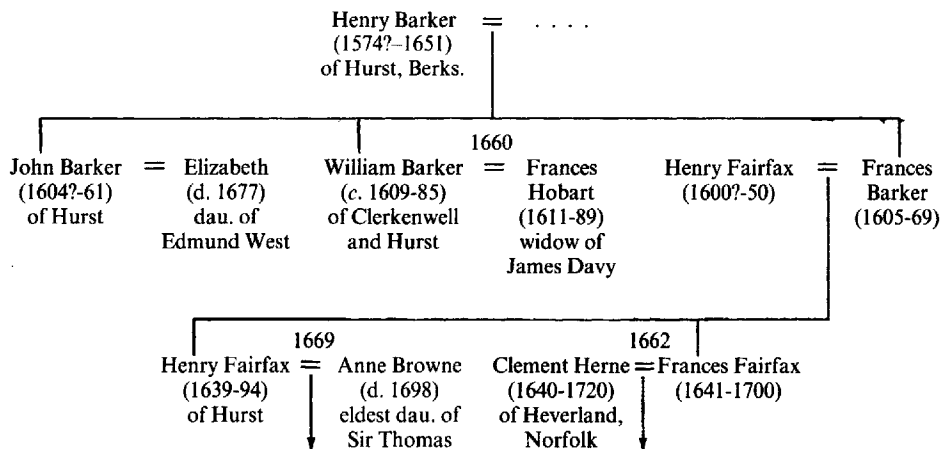
<sup>22</sup> W. E. G. L. Bulwer, ed., *Visitation of Norfolk, 1563* (1895), ii, 84-5.

<sup>23</sup> P.R.O., C 142/400/70.

<sup>24</sup> *Le Neve's Pedigrees of the Knights*, Harl. Soc. viii (1873), 237.

<sup>25</sup> Will dated 1 Feb. 1658/9, proved P.C.C. 2 Feb. 1664: P.R.O., PROB 11/313, f. 24.

## OUTLINE PEDIGREE OF BARKER AND FAIRFAX



France, says 'Nancy and my Cosen Barker are at Present with me.' This probably means Frances Barker; and it suggests that Anne Browne by then lived as much at Clerkenwell as in Norwich.

William Barker's sister Frances, widow of Henry Fairfax (d. 1650), not only had the son Henry who was to marry Anne Browne and inherit Hurst; she also had a daughter Frances who married in 1662 Clement Herne, the nephew of William Barker's wife Frances (son of her sister Anne's marriage to Thomas Herne).<sup>34</sup> It is hardly surprising that the wills of William Barker (dated 9 November 1683)<sup>35</sup> and his wife Frances (dated 17 November 1685, with a codicil in April 1687)<sup>36</sup> mention each other's relatives, some of whom were related to both testators. Besides his nephew Henry

Fairfax and niece Frances Herne, William remembered his wife's daughters Frances Lady Wyndham and Thomasine Plowden. Frances made bequests to Henry Fairfax as well as to his wife (her cousin Anne Browne) and their daughter; also to Frances Herne as well as to her own nephew Clement Herne and to her daughters and their children. She left a picture to her 'sister Willford', who was born Bridget West, the sister of Elizabeth, the wife of John Barker (William's brother),<sup>37</sup> and of Frances, wife of Sir Charles Cottrell.

### The Cottrell family

Sir Clement Cottrell, father of Sir Charles, was a courtier whose family came from Norfolk,<sup>38</sup> but there is no evidence that he was related to Dorothy Mileham, Sir Thomas Browne's wife. Sir Charles (1615-1701) married in 1642<sup>39</sup> Frances, second daughter of Edmund West (d. 1618) of Marsworth, Bucks.,<sup>40</sup> and his wife Theodosia Tyrrell, who by her subsequent

<sup>34</sup> Licence 29 July 1662, he of Gray's Inn, twenty-three, she twenty-one, daughter of Francis Fairfax: *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Vicar-General of the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1660 to 1679*, Harl. Soc. xxiii (1886), 74.

<sup>35</sup> Proved P.C.C. 14 April 1685: P.R.O., PROB 11/379, f. 41. After the death of his nephew and executor Henry Fairfax, administration was granted successively to Henry's widow Anne, to his son-in-law Thomas Browne on behalf of his daughter Alatheia and to his surviving daughter Frances, Countess of Buchan. William Barker was buried 4 Apr. 1685 at Hurst: Berks. R.O., D/P 73, 1/3.

<sup>36</sup> Proved P.C.C. by her daughter Thomasine Plowden: P.R.O., PROB 11/396, f. 92. Frances Barker was buried 4 July 1689 at Hurst: Berks. R.O., D/P 73, 1/3.

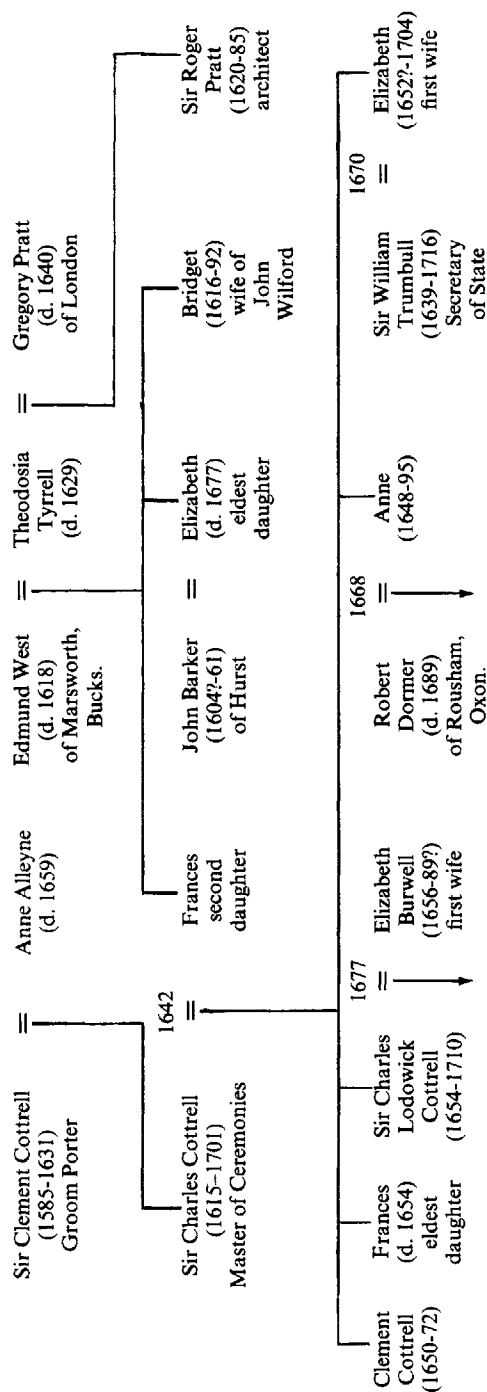
<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Barker was buried 11 June 1677 at Hurst: Berks. R.O., D/P 73, 1/3. Her will, dated 3 Dec. 1675, was proved P.C.C. 7 Nov. 1677 by her sister Bridget Wilford and two West nieces: P.R.O., PROB 11/355, f. 113. Her sister Lady Cottrell is not mentioned in her will.

<sup>38</sup> *Le Neve's Knights*, 409.

<sup>39</sup> B. D. Henning, ed., *History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1660-1690* (1983), ii. 138.

<sup>40</sup> *Visitation of Buckinghamshire, 1634*, Harl. Soc. lviii (1909), 125.

## PARTIAL PEDIGREE OF COTTRELL AND WEST



marriage to Gregory Pratt was the mother of Sir Roger Pratt (1620-85), the architect.<sup>41</sup> Assistant Master of Ceremonies in 1641, knighted in 1645, a major in the Royalist army, Sir Charles fled to the Netherlands in the spring of 1649. His children, three of whom were born during this exile, were two sons, neither of whom married a daughter of Sir Thomas Browne, and three daughters. He returned to England on the Restoration as Master of Ceremonies and lived in Spring Gardens, St James's Park, where Edward Browne met his family in February 1664. By November of that year, when Dorothy Browne told her son Thomas to 'bee carfull and sivell' to her cousin 'Mrs Cottrell', she surely knew that Lady Cottrell was closely linked to the Barkers at Clerkenwell as a sister-in-law of William's late brother John.

Sir Charles Cottrell's elder son, Clement, was twenty-two and unmarried when he was killed in the battle of Southwold Bay on 28 May 1672. The younger son, born in 1654, a godson of the Elector Palatine Charles Ludwig (nephew of Charles I), succeeded his father as Master of Ceremonies in 1686. He was Sir Charles Lodowick Cottrell, whose first marriage was to Elizabeth Burwell in 1677.<sup>42</sup>

The Cottrells' eldest daughter, Frances, was taken with her parents to The Hague in April 1649, when Sir Charles 'voluntarily banish'd' himself after the execution of Charles I; she died young, abroad.<sup>43</sup> Their second daughter was Anne, who was left behind in England, being 'then at Nurse'; she was presumably born in the later part of 1648. Anne became the favourite of the family, receiving more than the other grandchildren in the will of her grandmother, the widow of Sir Clement Cottrell,<sup>44</sup> and attracting presents from Roger Pratt, her mother's half-brother, on his frequent visits.<sup>45</sup> She was just on twenty when

she married Robert Dormer (a widower with a ten-year-old son)<sup>46</sup> at St Andrew, Holborn, on 10 December 1668.<sup>47</sup> Having borne seven sons and three daughters,<sup>48</sup> she survived her husband<sup>49</sup> and her step-son,<sup>50</sup> dying in 1695.<sup>51</sup>

The younger surviving daughter of Sir Charles Cottrell was Elizabeth, born about 1652, who became the first wife of the future Sir William Trumbull in 1670.<sup>52</sup> He was the principal companion of Edward Browne on the tour of France and Italy that started in April 1664, and they remained close friends. During their journey from Venice to Genoa a year later,<sup>53</sup> while crossing a river 'Mr Trumbull's mule fell into an hole' and he had to swim.<sup>54</sup> They went on by Arles, Toulouse, Rochelle, and Tours, where Trumbull suffered 'a very sharp paine of his teeth accompanied with a feverish distemper', to Paris.<sup>55</sup> At the end of September Browne was recovering from smallpox there and Trumbull was afflicted by colic, for which Edward Browne prescribed<sup>56</sup> and his father recommended the waters of Vic.<sup>57</sup>

### Edward Browne's 'sister Cottrell'

Trumbull was the first to return to England, in a November gale. A letter from 'Ed: Brown' at 'Hues', postmarked 30 November and addressed to London for Trumbull at East-hampstead, the Berkshire home of his family (about ten miles from Hurst), refers to his recent departure. The abstract of the letter published in 1924 says that the writer (not

<sup>46</sup> 'Visitation of Oxfordshire, 1668-9', *Misc. Gen. Her.* 5s., ii (1916-17), 201.

<sup>47</sup> By licence, which has not been found. He was of Dorset, Bucks., she was Anne Cotterill, of Covent Garden, in the register: Guildhall Library, MS 6668/1.

<sup>48</sup> F. G. Lee, *History of the Church of Thame* (1883), 509-12.

<sup>49</sup> Will of Robert Dormer the elder, dated 6 Jan. 1683, proved P.C.C. 5 June 1689: P.R.O., PROB 11/395, f.78.

<sup>50</sup> Will of Robert Dormer, dated 10 Nov. 1693, proved P.C.C. 12 March 1694: P.R.O., PROB 11/418, f. 44.

<sup>51</sup> Anne Dormer's will dated 5 July was proved P.C.C. 31 Dec. 1695: P.R.O., PROB 11/429, f. 232.

<sup>52</sup> Married 24 Nov. at Hurst: Berks. R.O., D/P 73, 1/2. Mistakenly called Katherine, she died without issue in 1704: *Le Neve's Knights*, 391.

<sup>53</sup> E. Brown, *A Brief Account of some Travels in Divers Parts of Europe* (London 1685), 194-222.

<sup>54</sup> Wilkin, 99-100.

<sup>55</sup> Wilkin, 107.

<sup>56</sup> Two prescriptions for Mr Trumbull 'in Cholico', Paris, 3 Oct. 1665: British Library, Sloane MS 1906, f. 158.

<sup>57</sup> Keynes, 27.

<sup>41</sup> *Le Neve's Knights*, 218.

<sup>42</sup> M. Toynbee, 'Some friends of Sir Thomas Browne', *Norfolk Archaeol.* xxxi (1957), 377-94.

<sup>43</sup> Sir Charles Cottrell, 'For my Dearest Son': Rousham, Oxon, Cottrell-Dormer MS.

<sup>44</sup> Will dated 17 Dec. 1658, not proved: Cottrell-Dormer MS D.9. The dowager Lady Cottrell was buried in St Martin-in-the-Fields 5 Jan. 1660: Westminster Public Library, register 4.

<sup>45</sup> R. T. Gunther, *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt* (1928), 3.

identified as Edward Browne) 'requests to be remembered to his sister Cottrell at Oxford'.<sup>58</sup> The actual letter<sup>59</sup> provides proof that Wilkin's conjecture, that Edward's sister had married a Cottrell, was mistaken.

After acknowledging money to be disbursed, asking whether a tailor's bill should be paid and expressing apprehension about Trumbull's journey, the writer refers to a fierce ship-captain 'wee met at Genoa' and gives news of other companions in their travels, including Dr (Christopher) Wren, Lord St Albans and Dr Crone. The substance of the letter leaves no doubt that it is from Edward Browne; moreover, the hand and the spelling are his. Before concluding that he will have to return to England for lack of such an agreeable companion as Trumbull on further journeys, Browne says

if you goe to Oxford, my sister Cottrell is there, and I hope you will bee so good a friend to mee as to put her in minde of one, that hath an extraordinary passion for her and no lesse for your selfe.

This certainly could not mean his own sister, married to a Cottrell. One is forced to conclude that Edward Browne was referring to a daughter of Sir Charles Cottrell, who would have been in Oxford with his family since July, when the Court left London to escape the plague.

Which daughter? The fifteen-year-old Anne, everyone's favourite, is much the more likely to have attracted Edward Browne's affectionate interest in February 1664 (when he was a long way from becoming established in practice as a physician and could not consider marriage). Whichever Cottrell girl had excited Browne's lasting fondness, his letter could well have prompted Trumbull's attention to the younger one, Elizabeth, whom he married five years later.<sup>60</sup>

G. C. R. MORRIS

Downe, Kent

<sup>58</sup> Hist. MSS Com. 75, *Downshire. I. Trumbull papers* (1924), i. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Berks, R.O., Trumbull MSS, Misc. Corresp. XXXIII, 122.

<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to Mr Thomas Cottrell-Dormer for access to his family papers and permission to quote from them, and to the Downshire trustee for permission to quote Edward Browne's letter.

## ROCHESTER AND MUCH A-DO ABOUT NOTHING

Fire, Air, Earth, and water, beasts, birds, fish and men,  
Did start out of nothing, a Chaos, a Den;  
And all things shall turn into nothing again . . .

When first by the ears we together did fall,  
Then something got nothing, and nothing got all;  
From nothing it came, and to nothing it shall.

Paul Hammond's recent edition of Rochester's poems cites the above lines from an anonymous 'Song of Nothing' in relation to Rochester's celebrated verses 'Upon Nothing'.<sup>1</sup> Hammond notes the presence of the 'Song of Nothing' in *The Canting Academy* (1673), and suggests that the poem 'appears to echo' the Rochester work, adding that 'since R[ochester] is much more sophisticated the debt is likely to be that way round'. On this basis, he puts forward 1673 as a probable *terminus ad quem* for the composition of 'Upon Nothing';<sup>2</sup> a view endorsed and repeated more positively by Rochester's latest editor, Keith Walker.<sup>3</sup> In fact, however, such a hypothesis is untenable, since 'A Song of Nothing' had already appeared in print several times before 1673. J. W. Ebsworth noted its inclusion in *Windsor Drollery* (1672).<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Thomas Vere, published two broadside editions of the poem in the previous decade, one dated 1664, the other undated but almost certainly earlier: the date '(1660)' is inscribed in a contemporary hand after the imprint in the Bodleian Library copy.<sup>5</sup> In the light of this, it would seem that, far from appearing to echo 'Upon Nothing', the anonymous 'Song of Nothing' may well have provided a source for Rochester's more sophisticated poem.

Both of Vere's broadside editions give more elaborate and virtually identical versions of the poem's title: that in the earlier text being: *Much A-do, about Nothing: A Song made of Nothing. the newest in Print: He that seriously minds it, shall find All-things in't*. However, the '(1660)' edition differs significantly from that of 1664;

<sup>1</sup> John Wilmot, *Earl of Rochester: Selected Poems* (Bristol, 1982), 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-12.

<sup>3</sup> *The Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (Oxford and New York, 1984), 260.

<sup>4</sup> And also in some later miscellanies. See *Merry Drollery Compleat Being Jovial Poems, Merry Songs Etc., ... Both Parts: 1661, 1670, 1691*, ed. J. W. Ebsworth (Boston, Lincs., 1875), 66-9, and 368 n.

<sup>5</sup> Shelf no. Wood 401, fol. 169-170.