

THE WARDSHIP AND MARRIAGE OF ROBERT BARLEY: AN ADDENDUM

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In my recently published article on the wardship and marriage of Robert Barley, first husband of Bess of Hardwick, it was suggested that Ralph Leche, Bess's step-father, may have acquired Robert's wardship and marriage from Robert's father, Arthur Barley, in lieu of debt.¹ This suggestion was based on a document in the National Archives which refers to a debt of 100 marks owed by Arthur Barley to Ralph Leche coupled with the fact that Godfrey Boswell, Bess's brother-in-law, paid the exact same sum, 100 marks, to the Court of Wards in 1544 when he purchased Robert's wardship.²

The National Archive document which tells of Arthur Barley's 100 mark debt owed to Ralph Leche is an account of a case in Star Chamber. Although the document itself is not dated, its content refers to legal process in the London Guildhall regarding the administration of a case brought before the mayoral court between July and October 1538. The case had been brought by Leche against Arthur Barley in order to recover the debt. The nature of the debt is not specified but Arthur lost the case and was imprisoned in London's Poultry Compter.³ The writ by which he was imprisoned, dated the 4th of July 1538, stated that he should remain in prison until he had paid Ralph the 100 marks and an additional £3 damages. However, on the 17th of July, William Pickering, an attorney acting on behalf of a Ralph Aleyn, alleged that Leche owed Aleyn a debt of £103. Aleyn claimed that on the 1st of April 1534, in the parish of St Christopher in Cheap ward, London, by a bill of obligation sealed with his seal and presented to the court, Leche acknowledged that he owed Aleyn £200 payable at Pentecost in the following year - 24th May 1535 - but thus far Leche had only paid £97 and had refused several requests to pay the balance of £103. Summonses were issued requiring Leche to appear before the mayoral court to answer Aleyn's plea but he failed to do so. On the 6th of October 1538, in accordance with the custom of the city of London, it was ordered that the debt owed by Arthur Barley to Leche should instead be paid to Aleyn in partial repayment of the outstanding £103 owed to him by Leche, leaving Leche still to find the remaining balance of his debt to Aleyn

No further details relating to the case are given. We know that Arthur Barley was eventually released from custody and we also know that at this time Leche was facing a number of other claims against him for debt. But, if the money owed by Arthur Barley to Leche was actually paid to Aleyn in partial settlement of the debt owed by Leche to Aleyn, then the suggestion that Ralph Leche may have acquired the wardship and marriage of Robert Barley in lieu of the 100 marks he was owed by Arthur Barley in 1538, as related in the Star Chamber account, cannot be correct.

Notes

¹ Kilburn, T., 'The Wardship and Marriage of Robert Barley, First Husband of Bess of Hardwick', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, vol. 134 (2014) p. 199

² TNA, STAC 2/19/310

³ The Poultry Compter, in the parish of St Mildred, Cheap ward, was one of a number of debtors prisons under the control of the sheriffs of the city of London.