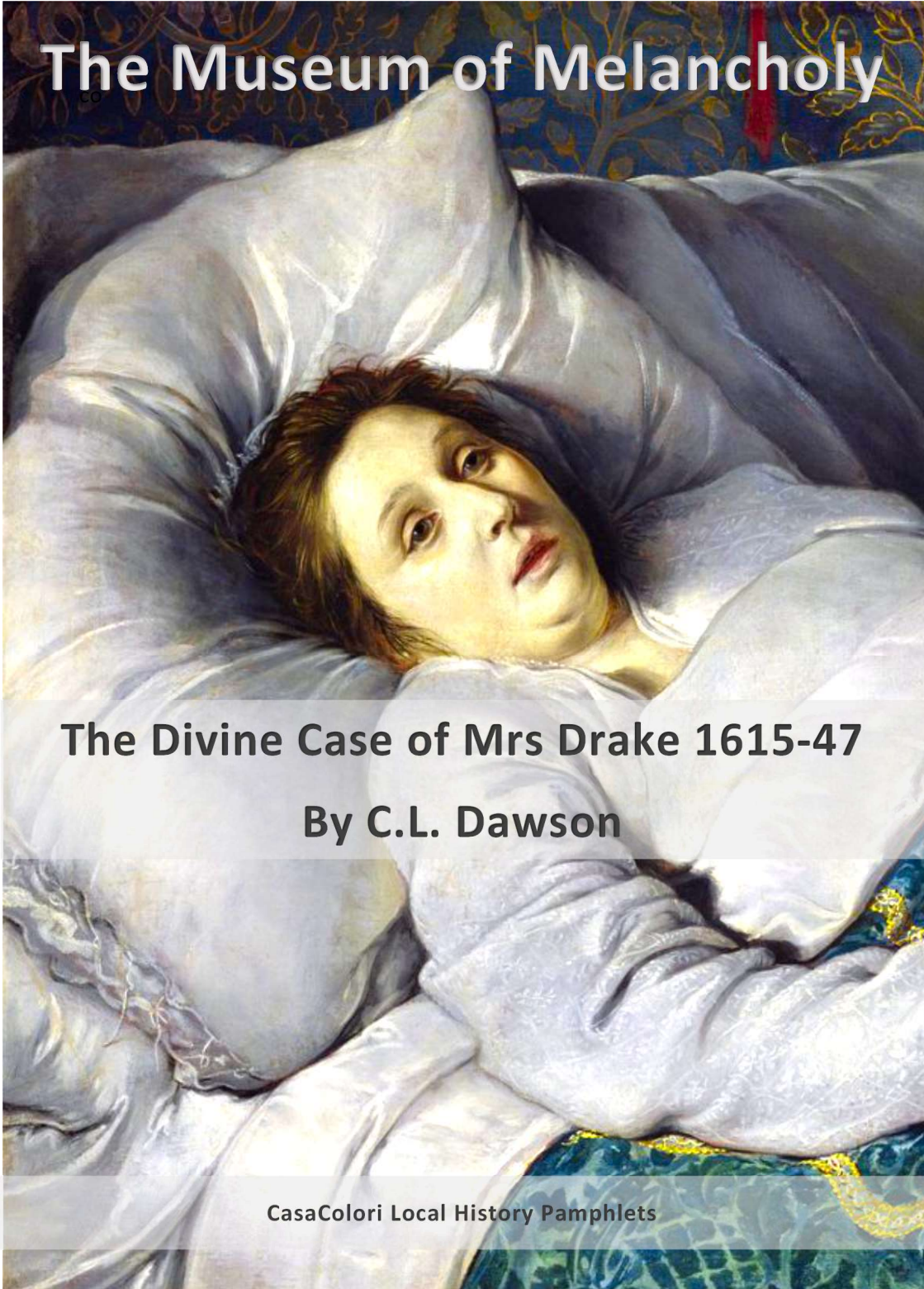
The Museum of Melancholy



The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1615-47

By C.L. Dawson

CasaColori Local History Pamphlets

In the early 1600s, Mrs Joan Drake is married to Francis Drake (godson of the great explorer) and lives in Esher Place in Surrey, previously owned by Cardinal Wolsey. They should be leading a charmed life, but she suffers from a deep melancholy that manifests itself in both physical symptoms and a spiritual anxiety. Seeking a cure, Dr John Hart, a Doctor of Divinity, arranges for a series of Puritan preachers to take on her 'case' and as the years pass finds himself inexorably drawn into Mrs Drake's confidence.

Based on the long-forgotten book Hart published in 1647, some twenty years after her death, this is a true account of Mrs Drake's final years in which, despite the occasional quarrel, she involves him in a secret plan to help her escape — whilst pregnant with her last, ill-fated child — and makes a heartbreaking confession to him on her deathbed. Written as a spiritual guide but concealing a memoir, Hart's wonderful phrasing and bygone vocabulary form a testament of his devotion, tantalisingly debatable if it was reciprocated or unrequited, but which ultimately proved deadly.

Although the events took place four hundred years ago, the issues are surprisingly contemporary: an intelligent and strong-willed woman struggling with her bodily and mental wellbeing, resolutely combatting the social norms and religious dogma with persistent subversions, and still fervently hoping for a happy ending.

The Museum of Melancholy

The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1615-47

A True Account of the Suffering and Redemption of Mrs Joan Drake (née Tothill) of Esher Place, The Parsonage of Walton-on-Thames and Shardeloes near Amersham.

C. L. Dawson

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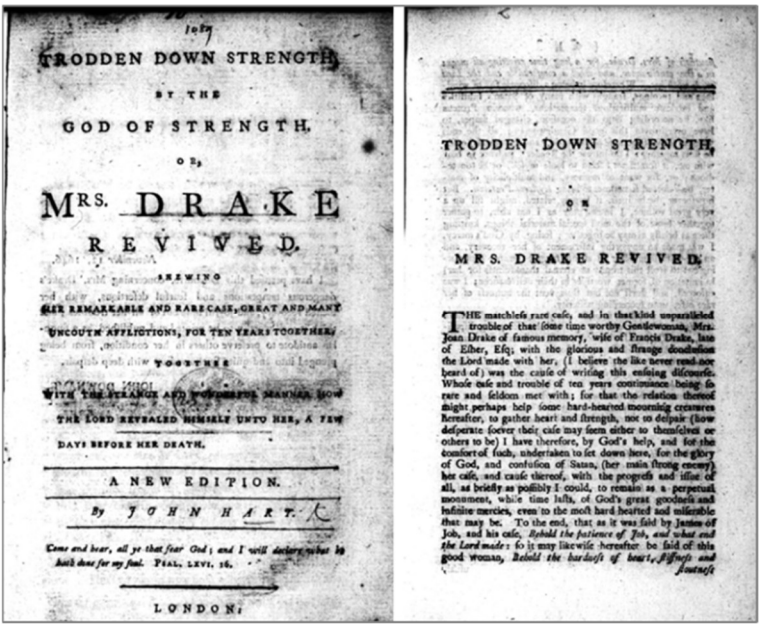
Introduction: Secular Sentences

Entering Mr Pilkington's bookshop next to the Red Lion Inn in Fleet Street in 1647, a reader in search of an uplifting spiritual story could have bought a copy of Dr John Hart's newly published work "Trodden Down Strength, or Mrs Drake Revived". The author, a Doctor of Divinity, had dithered for twenty-two years after the incidents which he related until he took the manuscript to the printers, possibly because that same year the last of those closest to Mrs Drake, who might have questioned his version of events, had died.

Editions of his book, reprinted at least into the late eighteenth century, now gather dust deep within the recesses of a few physical libraries and antiquarian bookshops, and remain devoid of 'views' and 'ratings' in digital archives. John Hart's archaic language and lengthy scriptural commentaries put up an insurmountable barrier to most casual, non-religious readers, and the focus on an unknown, wealthy woman living in Cardinal Wolsey's former home in the Surrey countryside four hundred years ago, does not sound as though it would contain those elements that tend to drive a narrative forward, such as the arc of a lifetime filled with struggles and jeopardy that is finally resolved with a joyful ending. And yet it does. Extracting Mrs Drake's true story from the musty pages, and teasing out the secular sentences to reveal Hart's wonderful phrasing and forgotten vocabulary, you are left with a quite different work, accessible to the modern world.



TRODDEN DOWN STRENGTH,

BY THE

GOD OF STRENGTH,

OR,

MRS. DRAKE

REVIVED.

SHEWING

HER REMARKABLE AND RARE CASE, GREAT AND MANY

UNCOUTH AFFLICTIONS, FOR TEN YEARS TOGETHER;

TOGETHER

WITH THE STRANGE AND WONDERFUL MANNER, HOW

THE LORD REVEALED HIMSELF UNTO HER, A FEW

DAYS BEFORE HER DEATH.

A NEW EDITION.

By JOHN HART.

Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. PSAL. LXVI. 16.

LONDON:

TRODDEN DOWN STRENGTH,

OR

MRS. DRAKE REVIVED.

THE matchless rare case, and in that kind unparalleled trouble of that some time worthy Gentlewoman, Mrs. Joan Drake of famous memory, wife of Francis Drake, late of Esher, Esq; with the glorious and strange deadnion the Lord made with her, (I believe the like never read nor heard of) was the cause of writing this ensuing discourse. Whose case and trouble of ten years continuance being so rare and seldom met with; for that the relation thereof might perhaps help some hard-hearted mourning creatures hereafter, to gather heart and strength, not so despair (how desperate soever their case may seem either to themselves or others to be) I have therefore, by God's help, and for the comfort of such, undertaken to set down here, for the glory of God, and confusion of Satan, (her main strong enemy) her case, and cause thereof, with the progress and issue of all, as briefly as possibly I could, to remain as a perpetual monument, while time lasts, of God's great goodness and infinite mercies, even to the most hard hearted and miserable that may be. To the end, that as it was said by James of Job, and his case, *Behold the patience of Job, and what end the Lord made*; so it may likewise hereafter be said of this good woman, *Behold the hardest of hearts, stiffest and stoutest*

He becomes quotable again: there is tragedy, suffering and pathos; and misunderstandings, dramatic moments and possibly a love story — tantalisingly debatable if it is reciprocated or unrequited — together with a supporting cast of notable individuals, amongst whom are the Archbishop who calculated the exact year, date and hour of the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth, and a pastor who founded a colony in the New World, and became known as 'The Father of American Democracy'.

It is from this edited, modernised version therefore, that most of the following details are taken and which, as a singular and self-serving primary source (for Hart placed himself front and centre, orchestrating proceedings), has been carefully scrutinised for what he did not mention and what emerges from reading between the lines.

Prologue: Blackfriars Theatre 1610

In the autumn of 1610, the Drakes of Esher Place went to the opening night of 'The Alchemist' by Ben Jonson at the Blackfriars Theatre in London, which was the winter home of the performers, the King's Men. Although somewhat smaller than the company's other theatre, the Globe, it had a roof which meant that plays could be performed in all weathers, and its location on the north bank of the Thames, just inside the City walls, meant that they could attract a more sophisticated audience, with the higher cost of tickets balancing out the lower capacity[1]. The best seats in the house were in the boxes that looked down directly onto the stage, providing an uninterrupted view of the play from the wings, and Mrs Joan Drake would have felt almost part of the performance as she watched the action unfold a few feet away. Unlike what she had heard said of the Globe, where there was a constant cacophony and milling of the crowds, here she could hear each word enounced and see each nuance of the players' expressions; and these were the most celebrated actors of the era, among them Richard Burbage[2] playing the lead role of the alchemist, and Henry Condell[3] as a character called Surly. Somewhere behind the scenes was William Shakespeare[4], as the same troupe was putting on Othello the next day, and Mrs

[1] The audience of Blackfriars Theatre was in the hundreds compared to the 2,500-3,000 capacity at the Globe. However, ticket prices at the Blackfriars were five to six times higher (6d. to 2s. 6d) than at the Globe (1d. to 6d).
[2] Richard Burbage was the most famous actor of the Shakespearean stage, as well as being part owner of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres.
[3]Henry Condell along with John Heminges, another actor from the King's Men, edited the First Folio of Shakespeare's works in 1623.
[4] Shakespeare part-owned the Blackfriars Theatre. He stopped writing plays around 1612 and is believed to have returned to Stratford by 1613, where he died in 1616.

Drake was so close to the backstage that she probably caught an occasional glimpse of him.

The play was particularly engaging as the action took place in a contemporary setting, in the area of wealthy Blackfriars itself during an outbreak of plague, and by unfortunate coincidence the theatre had only just re-opened after being closed for several months due to plague in London. Despite this bleak background, The Alchemist was an action-packed farce, with a constant movement of characters on and off the small candle-lit stage, that required all her attention as the plot unfolded. The storyline began with a trio of con-artists: a manservant called Face, left in charge of a grand house in the absence of his master who has fled because of the epidemic; a fraudulent alchemist named Subtle; and Doll Common, a woman of dubious repute. They have devised a scheme to deprive gullible citizens of their wealth using the age-old lure of the Philosophers Stone that can turn base metals into gold. Among those seeking riches are a pair of Anabaptists — extreme 'separatist' Puritans[5] — who are interested in purchasing some suitable items belonging to orphans (but only if their deceased parents were not Anabaptists) at a knock-down price to turn into gold, which they plan to use to convert more people to their religious views. The junior Puritan, Ananias[6], is a deacon from Amsterdam whose over-zealous views and behaviour is much mocked. He is dressed in a plain hat and

[5] Puritans were generally divided into those who sought change from within the Church of England, and those 'separatists' who formed their own independent local churches. Ministers who did not accept the Church of England's rules were called nonconformists and 'silenced' by being barred from preaching, thereby losing their livelihoods, and were barred from public life.

[6] The name Ananias references a character from the New Testament who lied to the Apostles about profits he had made from selling land, keeping a portion for himself, and was struck dead by God for his greed.

a small ruff, and derides Surly, disguised as a Spanish Don and dressed in the currently fashionable Spanish-style (and therefore suspiciously Catholic) clothing, calling his breeches *'superstitious and idolatrous'*, criticising his headwear in which *'thou looks like the anti-Christ in that lewd hat'* , and pointing to his huge ruff *'of pride'*; and he insists on interrupting and correcting Subtle's language, suggesting he use *'Christ-tide'* for *'Christmas'* since 'mass' sounds Popish. The actor playing Ananias[7] exaggerated the supposed verbal tics and holier-than-thou visage of the Puritans, and now and again burst forth with rantings in the style of an Old Testament prophet. Satire abounds, but a great deal of it was heaped on the hypocrisy of the rigid and self-righteous Anabaptists as they convince themselves that stealing from orphans and counterfeiting money (which they claim is not *'coining'* but *'casting'*) is entirely within their religious laws, as long as it is done in a spirit of *'godliness'*. This is confirmed by a supposed *'revelation of the truth'* by the Holy Spirit which is clearly no more than a spurious justification of self-interest. Subtle adds fuel to the fire by suggesting that they could use their ill-gotten gains to address some of the downsides of Puritanism, such as the endless, longwinded services, and their sense of superiority of being chosen specifically by God as the elect or *'those of us who have the seal'*[8]. Finally, in an ironic tone, Subtle hints that they might even cease their opposition to the enjoyment of life's pleasures such as their abhorrence of the theatre.

[7] Nicholas Tooley.
[8] From the 'seven seals' in Revelation that reveal divine judgment intertwined with redemption

Of course, nothing goes to plan, and towards the end of the play the alchemist's equipment over-heats and explodes off stage with a loud blast, that must have given those seated in the nearby boxes a tremendous shock. The Anabaptists are not the only caricatures pilloried by Ben Jonson, with their vices or trade indicated by their names: there is Sir Epicure Mammon, obsessed with money, gluttony and ways to improve his sexual prowess; Dapper, a lowly legal clerk looking for a sure-fire method to win at cards and gambling so that he can climb the social ladder; an angry youth, Kastril[9], keen to learn the art of rhetoric but comically ill-educated and inept; Dame Pliant (Kastril's sister who he mistreats), a rich but witless widow; and Drugger, a trader who sells the best tobacco in town and wants to guarantee the success of his new shop, and who is soon deprived of his worldly goods. However, there is no doubt that the Anabaptists (Ananias and his elder pastor, Tribulation Wholesome) are the ones to which Jonson's main message is most applicable — that fanaticism and excess of zeal, if not bounded by reason, lead to extremism, corruption, greed, hypocrisy and ultimately self-destruction. That they are themselves taken in by conmen is not meant to go unnoticed.

Mrs Drake's husband, Francis Drake, seated next to her, was a Puritan sympathiser and must have been squirming in his seat, trying to suppress his anger. He would not have been the only one if the reaction of Henry Jackson[10], who had seen the play performed in Oxford a few weeks previously in

[9] Or Kestrel, the bird of prey.

[10] Henry Jackson was a 24-year-old scholar from Corpus Christi College; he also mentions seeing Desdemona in Shakespeare's Othello the night after as 'they also had tragedies, which they acted with decorum and fitness. In these they elicited tears not only with their speaking but also with their physical action'.

September 1610, is anything to go by. Writing to a friend afterwards in Latin, he noted that the play was a success *'with the greatest applause and the theatre full',* but that the *'king's stage players'* had made the more strait-laced audience members uncomfortable as they had *'justly struck pious and learned men as impious, because not content to hit at the alchemists, they most foully besmirched Holy Writ itself. That is, they taunted the Anabaptists, as if improbity*[11] *hid behind this mask'*. He observed that of all the characters ribbed mercilessly it was the Anabaptists who received the most laughter and *'our theatre never rang with greater applause than when that hypocritical buffoon made his entrance, who, to hold up the false sanctity of the Anabaptists before the spectators as an object of derision, impiously and monstrously sullied Scripture'*. Despite this, *'our clergymen (I am ashamed to say) most eagerly were gathered together'*.

In Blackfriars, the play drew to a close. Mrs Drake was twenty-five years old and in her prime, and this is how those catching a glimpse of her during the performance from the wooden benches in the auditorium would remember her — a petite and pretty woman in her finest clothes, laughing merrily at the satirical escapades and leaning in towards her stern-looking husband to encourage him to join in the fun.

[11] Improbity: lack of honesty and moral integrity.

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Part 1: Life 1615-1625

The Unpardonable Sin

Being introduced to Mrs Joan Drake in 1615, you would encounter a small woman of around thirty, *'of a low well-compacted stature, of a lovely brown complexion, having a full nimble quick sparrow-hawk eye'*[12], who was by nature jovial, courteous and affable in conversation, with a quick wit. She was inquisitive and had a good memory, and was noted for plain speaking, but if crossed she could be stubborn, stern and resolute, yet in a modest and inoffensive way. She valued goodness in people, whether noble born or not, and detested hypocrisy, making fun of some of those she considered all show and no substance.

Getting to know her better, becoming her confidant, you would learn that she was over-indulged as a child, and that she did not agree (for reasons not stated but which become clear) with the match arranged by her father William Tothill of Shardeloes, one of the Six Clerks of the Court of Chancery, with the son of Richard Drake of Esher Place, a Groom of the Privy Chamber to Elizabeth 1, a courtly connection that might explain the marriage contract[13]. Despite this, the wedding to Francis Drake, godson of the great explorer, took place on the 3rd of March 1603 at St. Dunstan-in-the-West on Fleet Street, which was conveniently situated between Chancery Lane, where William had

[12] Note: Quotes in italics are taken from John Hart's book, updated into modern spelling but retaining the original words.

[13] William Tothill and Richard Drake may have become acquainted at court, as in his will, following his death only four months later in July 1603, Richard called William, who signed as a witness, 'a friend' and appointed him an overseer.

his offices, and Fetter Lane, where Richard maintained a London residence. That contrast — from spoilt child to marriage against her will — and the pressure of remaining outwardly the obedient and dutiful daughter, was the first occasion that she began to feel the *'storms and tempests'* in her mind, so that below the façade of mirth she maintained with friends, she developed a deep sadness. If you had to describe her demeanour, you might say she that she possessed a melancholic charisma.

It was the birth of her third child, her daughter also named Joan, sometime around 1615[14], that seemed to trigger more sinister symptoms. During the delivery she was *'much wronged by the midwife, and she was ever after troubled with fumes and scurvy[15] vapours mounting up unto her head'* which gave her a continual headache, like a migraine, and a fire burning in her stomach, that no doctor could find a remedy for. During her lying-in, as her discontent increased, her mother came to stay in Esher Place, where one night Mrs Drake woke up shrieking and screaming that she had committed the Unpardonable Sin[16] and that she was *'damned, and a cast away, and so of necessity must needs go to Hell'*, after which she shook with fear, and began to weep uncontrollably. However, having fallen back to sleep, she then

[14] The date is based on Dr Hart's statement that Mrs Drake's problems began in earnest after this birth, and that her troubles lasted ten years (she died in 1625). Joan Drake was the only daughter, so it is assumed that this birth refers to her, although her birth date is not recorded. However, this does not align with another of Hart's statements of the birth being 'not long after her marriage', and his reports of previous visits by other divines, so it may be that Joan (the daughter) was born earlier.

[15] Scurvy in its archaic and figurative meaning of unhealthy or vile.

[16] The Unpardonable Sin is the rejection of God, and is also called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

reawakened later in an ecstatic mood, saying that an angel had come to her in a dream and assured her of salvation.

During the delivery she was *'much wronged by the midwife…'*

This pattern of terror and joy continued, combined with strange utterings and occasional manic laughter, and her movements became more

violent so that it was agreed that she should not be left alone, by night or day, in case she harmed herself. The bolts were taken off the doors so that she could not lock herself in, and two gentlewomen were hired to take turns to look after her. Confinement and being constantly watched over did little to alleviate Mrs Drake's situation. No longer permitted to spend much time with her children, or to ride in the fresh air, she began to lose interest in life and its pleasures. Despite being practically bed-ridden, she slept poorly, often waking from nightmares, and had little energy when she was awake, and she lost her appetite.

Melancholy, the black bile, had been a recognised condition since Hippocrates in the fifth century BCE, but medicine had made insufficient progress since then to be of much use to Mrs Drake. The only other route available to her anguished husband and parents, to try and counteract the physical symptoms of her unbearable anxiety over the condition of her eternal state, was the spiritual one.

Francis Drake was a Puritan, his views most likely stemming from his mother's family, the Staffords[17], who had been refugees (Marian exiles) in Geneva with John Calvin[18]. As fate would have it, John Hart, a Doctor of Divinity, had been at a dinner in Isleworth at the home of Mrs Scudamore, estranged wife of an MP, when he first heard of Mrs Drake's ill health from a fellow guest, Dr Burges the Elder, a minister who had met (and been rejected)

[17] Sir William Stafford (whose first wife was Mary Boleyn) and Dorothy Stafford. They had the same surname because they were cousins.
[18] John Calvin, exiled from his native France, was godfather to the Staffords youngest son, John, born in Geneva in 1556; when Dorothy Stafford wanted to leave after the death of her husband, John Calvin would not permit her to take his godson, and only gave in after threats to involve the French authorities.

by her. In discussion, the name of John Dod[19] came up as the preacher most suitable *'with his mild, meek and merciful spirit'* to help the afflicted woman. During the next fortnight this conversation played upon Hart's mind (and maybe he saw an opportunity to boost his own reputation and career) to such an extent that discovering John Dod was in London, he put the proposition personally to him who, modestly claiming it was beyond his powers, nevertheless agreed to an introduction. Hart next wrote an unsolicited letter from his rooms in Whitefriars to Francis Drake in which he informed him that, hearing of the danger his wife was in, and out of mercy to her, he had procured *'the fittest man known to come to see her, and do his best to help her according to his ability'*. Asking his acquaintances for confirmation, the profile of Mr Dod presented to Drake was of a well-regarded Puritan divine noted for his patience, who although in his mid-sixties and having just recovered from an extreme bodily affliction that had almost put him in his grave, was currently free of responsibilities, his twelve children being mainly in adulthood.

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In 1616, John Hart and John Dod, as invited guests, left their horses in the stable yard and stood before the towering red brick gatehouse of Esher Place[20]. The cluster of buildings close to the banks of the river Mole, that had once belonged to Cardinal Wolsey, had been visible from the top of the hill as they approached, and as befitted his status gave the impression of a compact

[19] John Dod (1549-1645) was a celebrated Puritan divine, known as 'Decalogue Dod' due to his emphasis on the Ten Commandments, which led to his publication in 1635 of 'A Plain and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments'. The 'Celebrated Sayings of Old Mr Dod' was another popular publication.
[20] Known as Wayneflete's Tower, this is the only part of the old Esher Place that still remains.

Tudor palace with a four-storey 'castle-like'[21] main building complete with turrets at its core. This was surrounded by formal gardens, a large pond and orchards set in acres of parkland and woods ideal for riding and hunting. The two visitors were led across the courtyard to the entrance porch then through the Great Hall, where they marvelled at the stained-glass windows and hammerbeam ceiling where intricate angels had been carved into the wooden beams, and up into the main lodgings. As they were ushered in to the Great Chamber of the castle keep, there was a commotion where they could see Mrs Drake hurrying up the stairs '*whereupon her husband took the great iron fork [from the fireplace] in his hand, and run up after her, threatening to beat down the door, if she would not open it'*. It would turn out that, unaware of any visitors, she had spotted two sober gentlemen approaching from the windows of the dining room, run up to her bedroom and tried to shut herself in. John Dod was called for, and as was his custom, he knelt in her presence and began to pray. Hart and Drake did likewise, but Mrs Drake stayed standing. She remained silent throughout dinner, as Mr Dod spoke about his experiences of dealing with similar cases. Persuaded to stay the night, Dod was asked by Francis Drake as he was being shown to his room, what he thought so far, to which he replied that all had gone to plan *'because the Devil was afraid, run away, and durst not stand to it'*.

[21] This description comes from John Aubrey, the antiquary, who recorded visiting Esher Place in 1673 as part of his 'Perambulation of Surrey' which is in the Bodleian library. A reconstruction of old Esher Place was made by the Time Team Series 13 Episode 4 in 2006 using his descriptions and drawings.

As they were ushered in, there was a commotion and they could see Mrs Drake hurrying up the stairs…

Over the next few days, the opening positions became clear. Mrs Drake's conviction was that she had rejected God, and in doing so was *'a*

damned Reprobate[22] *who would go to hell forever'*. It was therefore needless, fruitless, and in vain for anyone to lose time or effort trying to help her. Pitifully, since there was never a chance that it was going to happen, she *'resolved to spend the remainder of her time in jollying and merriment, denying herself no worldly comforts'* since she was already damned. Instead, she was *'quite destitute of all natural affection unto Husband, Father, Mother, Children, and everybody else, having in brief no love either to God or man'* and just wanted to be left alone. She backed up her arguments with various passages from the Bible that she had come across whilst randomly *'tumbling and tossing'* over the scriptures and finding chapters and verses wherever her finger happened to alight, that must therefore support her position.

For his part, Mr Dod was convinced that he was not conversing with the woman before him, but with a far trickier opponent — the Devil himself. Had he been of a different nature, he might have suspected witchcraft and gone in search of the source in the village, but instead he listened to her confronting his arguments with counterarguments, that could only be *'the Devil's rhetoric being used nimbly and strongly against him'*. The more he spoke, the more astute her objections became. This was not the ordinary Devil he had happened upon, but a clever and *'sophisticated logician'* that would test his skills to the limit.

[22] In Calvinism, a sinner who is not of the elect and is predestined to damnation.

Mr Dod was convinced that he was not conversing with the woman before him, but with a far trickier opponent — the Devil himself.

Their relationship, observed it would appear at all times by John Hart, settled into a pattern. He would make speeches and she would laugh and jest in derision at all his fine words. She seemed to gain great enjoyment from disturbing him at private prayer, throwing open the door to his room and threatening to strike him with a staff or to fling herself down the stairs if he did

not stop. In private, she had revealed to Dr Hart that she could not take Mr Dod seriously, as he reminded her of the character of Ananias that she remembered from a play she had seen at Blackfriars a few years previously. But throughout her antics, which he took to be *'the Devil changing his posture and weapons'*, Mr Dod would look pitifully upon her but would never raise his voice.

Despite her confrontations with the in-house preacher, Mrs Drake was hedging her bets; she may have been searching for an alternative, less zealous and all-engulfing method. Behind his back she was in touch with other ministers of her own choice, anxious for second opinions on whether a creature such as herself — whose heart was *'as hard as an anvil'*[23] — had any hope of going to Heaven? Nothing was committed to paper; she sent out her waiting-woman, who she trusted to ask questions using the correct phrasing her mistress instructed her with, and commit to memory the responses. She received much favourable encouragement, which she was careful to keep to herself for succour in trying moments.

Mr Dod was understandably worn out after a month, and announced he would be leaving, to which Mrs Drake looked directly at him and gave him *'a rude farewell'* that he should go and never return, asking him what manner of religious man he was that he would leave his calling, home and family to be with her, where he was an unwelcome intruder? Mr Dod, showing the first and only small sign of impatience, replied that he was *'very sensible of her reproof and dismissal, and therefore meant hereafter to stay at home, and look unto his*

[23] Hard-hearted, in the Biblical sense, is an obstinate and calloused heart that fails to respond to God or obey Him.

own matters, not troubling her anymore'. However, *'she inwardly very sorry for what was done'*, on the day of his departure she took him aside and spoke to him in private, which meant that Dr Hart, who was still at all times poised with his pen, was unable to record the conversation, except that Mr Dod muttered that he would consult with God.

Mr Dod stayed away a month, but would not admit defeat and came back, then went again when he was fatigued, doing this several times in succession until a period of three years had passed and it was 1619 with no change in the status quo *'with the same arguments stiffly maintained over and over again, a hundred times together without her being persuaded to come to Church or Sacrament…but carried herself as a desperate forlorn creature'*.

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It was decided that a new approach should be taken: one of (unwittingly ignoring the elapsed time already spent) endless patience. This involved not showing frustration with her, or constantly urging her to go to church, but instead going along with where her spirit took her, and encouraging her with kind words, so that, in the end, a true picture of how the Devil had taken hold of her might emerge, since up until now he was constantly shape-shifting in response to their attacks. Mr Dod came up with an analogy: that this would avoid the errors like those of an unskilled physician who *'gives physick before they know the ground of the disease; who many times in place of curing, do another kill, or so much more ulcer their wounds'*. The tactic did on occasion appear to work, as her moods lightened and she would sometimes smile and

laugh, but Hart admitted that even in the midst of this laughter, her heart was sad, and in private not long after they would hear *'sore fits of weeping'*.

The analogy of the physician came back to haunt Mr Dod. His work was much hindered by Mrs Drake's medical conditions *'because the indisposition and melancholy temper of her body was such…she therewith being averse unto Physick'*.

Mr Dod's work was much hindered by Mrs Drake's medical conditions… *'she therewith being averse unto Physick'*.

Dr Hart reminded his readers how they should consider themselves fortunate if they were healthy, and could therefore pray to God without the distractions of physical ailments, which he helpfully listed, such as '*vexations of toothache, stone, strangury, convulsions, gout, palsies, burning, fevers, agues, ulcers, swellings, broken and disjointed bones, strained sinews, displaced arteries, inflammations and the like,'* as well as spiritual ones: *'terrors of conscience, with a wounded spirit; Satan's incessant buffetings, apprehensions of Hell, and the wrath of God'.*

Needing to recuperate once more, Mr Dod resolved to depart for a longer period to give her time to ruminate on what had been achieved. Paradoxically, in his absence (although Hart notes that there were *'divers worthy ministers'* who visited, but he does not name), Mrs Drake's moods darkened and led to desperation and stirrings of self-harm. It was winter and she blamed herself for any unfortunate events *'...that the great snow, and all the disastrous direful events happening abroad anywhere, she was guilty of them, and that things would never be better so long as she were alive.'* At mealtimes, she would hide a knife in a napkin, and then slip it up the inside of her sleeve, until this habit was noticed and remedial steps taken. On one occasion, she swallowed a handful of pins, which fortunately passed through her without harm; on another, she sent out her maid to buy forty oranges, with the expectation of dying from dysentery[24], but instead *'these proved excellent medicines unto her, purging away abundance of black ugly filthy matter, which*

[24] Fruit and vegetables were not advised for a healthy diet as they contained mainly water which, as it was unsanitary, was thought to make people more vulnerable to disease, particularly dysentery.

made her to look much better'. Francis Drake and the Tothills were bewildered and alarmed, and sought further help.

Hart does not say how contact was made in around 1619 with Dr James Ussher, who was then Vice-Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, having previously been Professor of Theological Controversies. Ussher was already a noted scholar and linguist, and *'a magazine of all knowledge and learning…with his infinite reading'* who had embarked on the research for his life's work which was to write an incontestable history of the classical world from its creation, as described in Genesis, to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ[25]. Frustratingly, the university library in Dublin only contained forty books, so that he was forced to travel to England regularly to visit the great libraries at Oxford and Cambridge, and the private collections of wealthy individuals in London, to purchase or copy rare books and manuscripts.

Dr Ussher visited Mrs Drake on several occasions. In contrast to Mr Dod, Hart noted with a hint of jealousy that she seemed delighted to meet with this new worthy man of a similar age, and willingly listened to his advice and anecdotes with much reverence and respect, in whatever state of health she was in, *'being contented when he came to her to drop upon her many sweet distilling showers of precious speeches; leaving them to work after he were gone'*.

[25] Later, Ussher was appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, the most senior position in the Church of Ireland. He is best remembered for his book "The Annals of the World" which he began by calculating the exact date, hour and time of the creation of the universe (6 o'clock in the evening on the 22nd of October 4004 BC) which is known as the 'Ussher Chronology'. His intellectual and literary achievements were such that Oliver Cromwell gave him a state funeral and he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

In contrast to Mr Dod, Hart noted with a hint of jealousy that she seemed delighted to meet with this new worthy man of a similar age…

The Relationship with the Relater

Around this time, Mrs Drake relocated to the Parsonage[26] in Walton-on-Thames, which her husband also owned since, she explained, not only did Esher Place hold sad memories, but it was also miserably cold and damp in the winter (even Cardinal Wolsey had complained of its 'moist and corrupt air'). She did, though, occasionally return to Esher in better weather to walk in the park and orchards, and around the old pond and by the river, and to ride her horses. This was a high point in Mrs Drake's case as she was in new surroundings and appeared less perturbed.

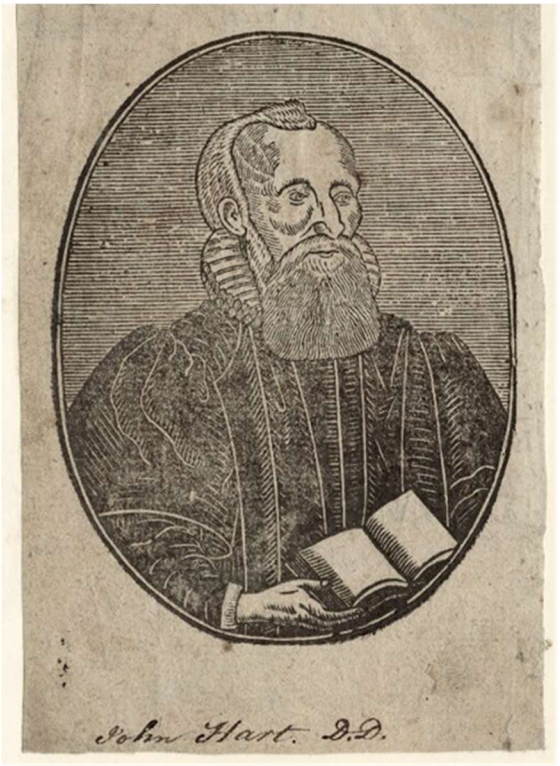
In the Jacobean society in which Mrs Drake lived, after providing children and managing the household, there were few other ways to express herself emotionally, or find outlets for her intellectual needs, apart from religious zeal. So it was natural that she was not opposed in principle to the use of divines to direct her spiritual journey. The very basis of her Puritan leanings, even if adopted or adapted to placate her husband — as Hart had suggested when he wrote that upon first meeting her '*she were not then acquainted with the power of godliness'* —was directed not outwards to the world, but inwards to the individual and the direct relationship with God in everyday life, which with its quiet prayers and meditations in the home, created a more intimate

[26] As well as Esher Place, Francis Drake was Lord of the Manor of the Rectory of Walton-on-Thames and owned the Parsonage, which appeared on all early maps of Elmbridge, so must have been a significant building and estate. This site became known as Walton Grove, but was demolished in 1973. A timber-framed manor house belonging to the other Manor of Walton Leigh still exists today.

environment than the cold church benches. The Godly, even if lost and suffering, woman and her relationship with a divine preacher, she had supposed, could be mutually beneficial. She would have companionship, access to knowledge with which she could educate herself, a ready source of responses to her religious enquiries and concerns, especially at times of loss or anxiety, and a constant gauge of her progress towards salvation — it would be almost as if God was walking beside her. For the divine's part, she assumed, there was the not insignificant matter of patronage, and if needs be, a place of residence.

She had been disappointed then, to find that Mr Dod was elderly and infirm, and that when he looked at her, he only saw the Devil in disguise. But she had subsequently discovered that with one of her spiritual advisers at least — similar in age and attitude, if not social class — she had conversations on matters that she shared with no-one else, that her notions of self-worth had increased against all odds, and that she had developed more intense feelings than she had expected.

Throughout his text, which is to a large degree a memoir, Dr Hart referred to himself in the third person as *'the Relater, that sometime unworthy friend'*, the person to whom the characters relate their story, and whose role it is to relate the salient learnings to the reader. He was by no means though, a passive actor. From the moment that he first learned of Mrs Drake's circumstances, he took the lead, identifying a divine to help her, persuading Mr Dod to meet her, writing to her husband, inviting himself into the household, and seeking out other divines: *'...another worthy Minister, whom the Relater brought to see her and judge her case'*.



Throughout his text, Dr Hart referred to himself in the third person as *'the Relater, that sometime unworthy friend'*...

John Hart is hard to pin down. Whether he was a young man in awe of an older Mrs Drake, or of a similar age, or a middle-aged man who believed he

was her mentor, makes a difference to how their relationship is viewed. The evidence is thin: he gave nothing away in his writings except that he was omnipresent in her life for almost a decade; he presented himself as a Doctor of Divinity — the most respected doctoral degree — and he was able to convince the various Puritan divines to attend Mrs Drake, but he was not one himself as he did not appear on lists of prominent puritan preachers of the time. There was a flurry of publications by him in the mid-1600s, so maybe it was then that he hit his stride, as a more mature and experienced pastor. When he met Mrs Drake for the first time, in around 1616, the most that could be said, therefore, is that he was learned, of a certain standing in Puritan circles, persuasive and in all likelihood close in age to Mrs Drake, between thirty and forty.

There are some noticeable omissions from his account. He rarely mentioned Mrs Drake's husband, Francis Drake, apart from noting her lack of emotional feelings for him, as a man *'whom at first she could not affect'*, and to register his temper. Although she had three children when they met, and a fourth during the events recalled, how Mrs Drake interacted with them was of no interest. William, the oldest, was nine at the beginning of the story and nineteen at its maternal conclusion. It is also striking that there are no passing references to Mrs Drake's daily responsibilities, even on the rare occasions of respite from her struggles, that may have contributed further to her burdens. In the frequent absences of her husband on business, who, if not her, was managing or at least directing the provision of food from the kitchen gardens and livestock, and maintaining the accounts and paying the staff wages — and intervening in their squabbles or misfortunes — and ensuring the comfortable accommodation of

the many visitors? Were her shortcomings in these most fundamental functions expected of a wife, another reason for Francis Drake's frustrations towards her?

Dr Hart's own personal circumstances do not merit a mention either. Was he a single man, or married, and was there a family at Whitefriars? Where had he studied to receive his doctorate? What arrangement for his services had been agreed with Francis Drake that allowed him to spend so many years at Mrs Drake's side, or did he have independent means? Was he living in one of the many rooms in Esher Place or renting rooms nearby? And, most pertinently, what exactly was his role, when Mr Dod (and the many other divines) would have taken on the accepted duties of a chaplain, directing Mrs Drake's spiritual journey and Biblical studies, reading to her from the increasing canon of Puritanical books, sermons and pamphlets, and discussing their implications, all within the overarching remit of achieving her cure?

The nature of their relationship is veiled, but there were two episodes from this period that are intriguing. Mrs Drake and Dr Hart had clearly been discussing whether she should leave the household, and might find solace elsewhere, perhaps under the roof of another divine, where she would be free of the attention of her relatives, and the responsibilities of her children, so that she could concentrate fully on her physical and spiritual recovery. For this purpose, they agreed that John Hart should go, secretly[27], to Essex to enquire whether Mr

[27] The phrase Dr Hart writes is: 'for this cause secretly made the Relater go into Essex…'

Rogers of Dedham — known as 'Roaring John Rogers' on account of the *'many wild notes'* of his lecturing[28] — would entertain her at his house.

For this purpose, they agreed that John Hart should go, secretly, to Essex…

With an answer in the affirmative, Mrs Drake brought up the issue with her husband and parents, who flatly denied her request. Mr Dod (who was back again) and a Mr Culverwell offered themselves as chaperones, if that might sway the decision. That the original intention might have been for Dr Hart to

[28] John Rogers's sermons were legendary. Thomas Goodwin, who later became Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, recalled one occasion when he was so overcome with emotion that on leaving he "was fain to hang a quarter of an hour upon the neck of my horse weeping before I had the power to mount".

accompany her, since it was he making the furtive arrangements, hung in the air between them. The refusal of her freedom *'much unhooked her spirit… so much did it afflict her'*.

There is then a confession, that Hart acknowledged he could have omitted, but has included because it is an example of the Devil's subtleties, and the furthest example of Satan's malice. One day, as he and Mrs Drake (and an unidentified 'friend' who he may have added for propriety since they took no part in what comes next) were walking in the garden in Walton-on-Thames, she suddenly stopped and fixed her gaze on the ground for several minutes, staring with a wild look in her eyes. When at last he managed to gently shake her out of her trance, she uttered a question: *'If God, who with a word made Heaven and Earth, can soften my heart, then why does he not do it?'* Taking this as blasphemy, *'for such speeches were not to be born with, countenanced, or disputed with, but to be cast off, with detestation and abomination'*, Dr Hart left by the garden gate immediately, without saying a word to her.

A little while later, after he had recovered his composure, she asked him whether he would join her for a horse ride at Esher, to which he replied angrily that he would certainly not be comfortable in the company of someone who had so recently blasphemed, for fear that the ground might open beneath them and swallow them up; and furthermore that the punishment for blasphemy was death by burning and that he was going to complain of her to the Archbishop, and buy bundles of sticks for her bonfire. At this *'we both parted in seeming discontent'*.

Anyone observing from a distance — the garden stroll, the pausing and his hands on her shoulders, the storming off, the arguing and gesturing — might have imagined that this was a lovers' quarrel.

No dates are provided to help the reader, and each new divine is introduced by the same phrase *'It was about this time that…'*, but it is clear from the historical record that these events — Dr Ussher's visits; Dr Hart's secret journey; the falling out — took place around 1619, when Joan Drake was pregnant and gave birth to her fourth child, John; but this fact is not mentioned anywhere in John Hart's written portrayal.

Anyone observing from a distance… might have imagined that this was a lovers' quarrel.

The Museum of Melancholy

Dr Hart returned to his lodgings in Whitefriars for a month, but did write some kind words by letter in his absence. When he came back, Mrs Drake *'prayed him to stay no more so long away'*, thanked him for his harsh treatment of her, saying that she had deserved worse, and that if he ever saw her staring at the ground in such a way again, he was to intervene more quickly.

Having forgiven Mrs Drake her profanity, Dr Hart arranged for another Minister to assess her case — John Forbes, the pastor for the Merchant Adventurers in Middelburg in the Low Countries — whose conclusion was that *'it was the strangest that ever he had seen, heard or read of... and no more he would come to visit her, nor could be drawn unto it'.* It must have seemed to Francis Drake that his wife was fast becoming an exhibit of international repute in a museum of melancholy, so he might have welcomed the familiar face of Mr Dod, who had returned with yet another new approach which he had discussed with God in absentia. This time, he had three objectives which, in stages, would lead to her recovery: firstly, that she should be persuaded to go to church; then that she should take the sacrament; and thirdly that she should sing the Psalms.

It must have seemed to Francis Drake that his wife was fast becoming an exhibit of international repute in a museum of melancholy…

On her first visit to St. Mary's Church in Walton-on-Thames, she was taken to hear the rector, who had been warned in advance of her coming so that his sermon was uplifting to doubters and prudently avoided any contradictory messages. This did not go unnoticed, and Mrs Drake complained that *'he had been prompted, and had spoken things of purpose for her case, which she murmured at'*. There was, therefore, on subsequent occasions a tension between giving notice, which was still done, but putting across the message in the sermon in less obvious terms.

She was quite averse to taking the sacrament, so Mr Dod moved on to encouraging her to join in the singing of the Psalms. This she professed she was quite willing to do, but only the ones of *'complaint, petition, mourning and deprecation'* and not of *'thanksgiving, and congratulation'*. For if she was like an Ox ready for slaughter, what cause had she to give thanks; and if she was not going to Heaven, why should she sing Heaven's praises?

With some progress finally under his belt, John Dod brought up an issue that had been bothering him for some time: whether she still wanted to kill herself? He approached the topic one day, in a somewhat graphic manner. Imagine, he said to her, that you are condemned to be burned at the stake, or hung drawn and quartered, or put on the rack then scourged and whipped and tortured. If at the last moment she was reprieved and given the chance to live for a further ten or twenty years, would she now consider it favourably? To which she replied, yes, of course. Then why, he asked, *'did you all this while seem so eager to have departed from this life, not knowing whether you would be in Hell's fires forever, or not, rather than let nature take its course, and*

trying to understand God's will?' Returning his gaze, she assured him that he should have no more jealousy or suspicion, since she was resolved to live so long as God would permit her.

Such was the notoriety of Mrs Drake's case, and the ongoing but as yet futile efforts to cure her, that Dr Hart began receiving letters offering advice, including a long missive from Robert Bruce, a Scottish minister who had fallen foul of King James, been exiled and was currently in prison *'amongst the wild Irish'*. Hart skipped over Bruce's advice *('too long here to insert'*) but was highly impressed by a speech that he had written for Mrs Drake to read out to the Devil, that was *'worthy to be written in letters of gold'*, and which he copied out in full.

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In 1620, having come to the end of his years of intermittent service, Mr Dod announced his retirement from the *'hot skirmishes with Satan'*, and for his efforts was given a large reward by the Tothills. Mrs Drake was not dismayed to see him go, and insisted that the next incumbent should live close by so that he could be in constant attendance when she needed an able preacher to answer her burning questions. Dr Hart might have thought that he had served his apprenticeship and earned this role by now, but instead it went to Thomas Hooker who was made rector of St George's Church in Esher by Francis Drake[29], agreeing to a *'poor living of forty pounds per annum'*, somewhat

[29] The Cure at Esher was a Donative (i.e. locally endowed position), and not a Presentative endowment (i.e. where the candidate had to be personally approved by the Bishop), so that Thomas Hooker, a

alleviated by being given food and lodgings at Esher Place; Mrs Drake being primarily in Walton-on-Thames. The new regime began well, and Hart noted with a touch of envy, how being a recent graduate of Cambridge, Hooker came with a *'new answering method, wherewith she was marvellously delighted, being very covetous of knowledge'*.

Hooker was patient and observant, adapting his methods to suit changes in her disposition brought upon by her physical ailments — her restless thoughts, mood swings, heartburn and constant headaches. His interest seemed to stem from having undergone some similar trauma in his own life, and he admitted that he *'long had a soul harassed with such distresses'.* He was also fond of seafaring analogies, which were a portent of his later voyage, such as that *'the promise of God was the boat which was to carry a perishing sinner over to the Lord Jesus Christ through the storms of the soul'.* He gave counsel in such a stirring fashion, that it was clear to all who met him that he was *'born to be considerable'*, which turned out to be the case as he stayed only long enough to woo and marry Mrs Drake's waiting-woman, Susannah Garbrand, at Shardeloes and he left for the position of Lecturer at a church in Chelmsford after a year. From a constant foil to her weaknesses, available day or night, Mrs Drake was reduced to visits once a week on Thursdays to the local minister, Mr Wetherell[30] of Walton-on-Thames.

Nonconformist, did not have to present himself and swear an oath, and Francis Drake could appoint whoever he liked.

[30] A board in St Mary's church in Walton-on-Thames records that Brian Wetherell was vicar between 1618 and 1623.

Rapture and Reunion

For the last section of his book, Dr Hart moved the action forward four years, like the denouement scene in a play. In doing so he skipped over, unmentioned, the death of John Drake at the age of three, in 1623, and there was no indication of how this might have affected Mrs Drake, although given her fragility and lack of spiritual support, it can be imagined. All that we are told is that *'about this time, a strong distaste was given her from a near friend…not necessary here to relate, nor to our purpose'.* Hart does not tell us whether it is he at fault, although it is clear that whilst he still keeps a watchful eye on her, it is from a distance.

Mrs Drake was bedridden, convinced she was dying. She told her husband that she wanted her final days to be spent at her parent's house, Shardeloes near Amersham, and was determined to leave as soon as possible, and when he demurred with the excuse that he had business to finish, she took two servants and left. Soon, Hart heard reports that Mrs Drake was having some sort of feverish episode in which she was *'in a surpassing extraordinary strange humor of talking of the best things perpetually night and day without intermission, not having any jot of sleep…whereby her spirits were both much spent and tired out'.* He took it upon himself to fetch Mr Dod, and together they went to Shardeloes, where she explained that she had so much she wanted to say, and so little time left in which to say it.

The final days, that took place over Easter 1625, read like diary entries, a countdown to death.

Sunday 10th April 1625 — The Second Sunday Before Her Death

She forbade her children to go to church, as she wanted to prepare them and could not be certain that she would last another week. She expounded scripture to them from memory, and gave them her blessing.

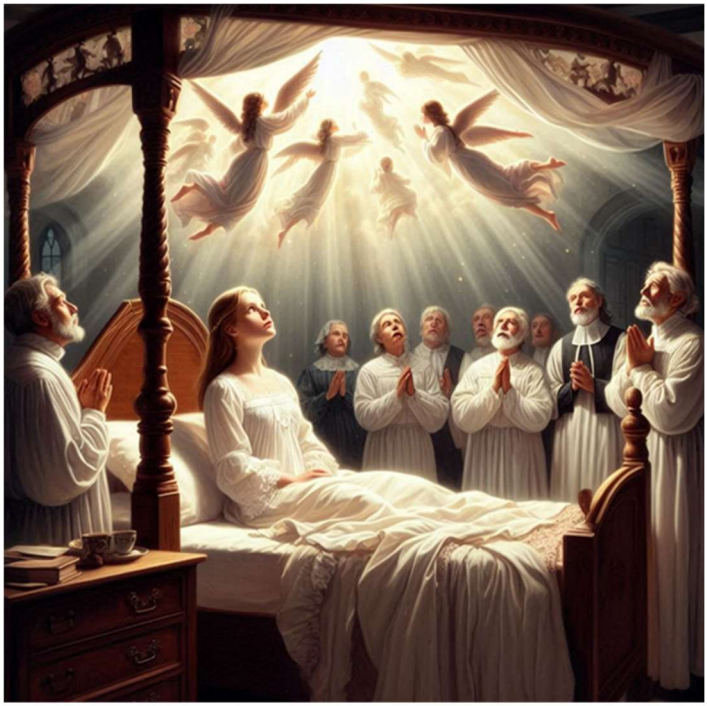
Monday 11th April 1625

She spent the day in conference with Mr Dod, but it was not like the old times because it was she in perpetual motion — speaking ill of this life and wondering aloud about heaven and eternal glory and the life to come — and he was the listener. She was not sleeping and barely eating.

Tuesday 12th April 1625

At eight o'clock in the morning, the residents of the Tothill's mansion were *'strangely interrupted'* by otherworldly shrieks from Mrs Drake's bedroom, where she sat bolt upright in bed, staring upwards at the ceiling, her chest heaving, repeating the same phrases, over and over, at a great speed:

'What's this, what's this! I am undone, I am undone! I can't endure it any longer! Look, the Angels have come for me! They are waiting! Bring me my white robes! Quickly, quickly! Let me be gone, let me be gone! It overcomes me, it overcomes me! What shall I do, what shall I do?'



… the residents of the Tothill's mansion were *'strangely interrupted'* by otherworldly shrieks from Mrs Drake's bedroom…

Whatever was the vision she was seeing, it was one of extreme ecstasy, and the onlookers remained at some distance, tied to the spot in wonder. Dr Hart thought she would fly away, leaving a hole in the roof. Only her husband had lost control, weeping and wringing his hands and pacing up and down.

The passing of time was lost for a while, but when she did eventually return to her senses, she was able to describe what had happened. She had been praying, pleading with God that he would not absent himself forever, and that just once before her death he would reveal Christ to her and give her some brief sensation of his love, when she had a sudden feeling of unsupportable joy rushing in at her that she could not help but cry out.

Next, in the retelling of a moment that gives the impression that it had been worked on, and honed, and repeated, and revised, Dr Hart indicated to the reader where he had obtained the permission to write his book, that she said:

'After I am gone, never despair of anyone, how desperately miserable so ever their Case might be, which at its worst could never exceed mine, but use and apply the same means unto them that you have used with me, and they will prevail at length.'

That afternoon, as the room filled with more relatives and friends who had come to share her happiness — this being an unusual experience — she had another vision; and later on, with a few remaining to watch over her, she spent the night singing Psalms. Dr Hart was most pleased that she even asked for Psalm 30, that he had *'always urged upon her, to belong unto her'* but *'dared never appropriate or apply the same unto myself, until now'*. It was their own

Psalm[31] and they sang it together: *'...and so that Tuesday night [we] sung the same very cheerfully'*. She had not slept for a week.

Wednesday 13th April 1625

When Mrs Tothill came to see her daughter on Wednesday morning, she found her already up and saw that she had dressed herself entirely in white (*'like a bride'*) from head to toe. Turning to her mother, she told her: *'I caused myself to be dressed thus this morning, that you might see how I would be laid in the grave.'* Hearing this, Mrs Tothill burst into tears, and had to leave the room to steady herself.

Mrs Drake spent the morning and afternoon taking her leave of members of the household, giving each a moment of her time where she passed on advice suitable to their station. In the evening, she called for her father and when he came downstairs again, Dr Hart, clearly brazen enough to accost a grieving man leaving his dying daughter's room, *'did what I could in a fair way to have fished from him, what she had said unto him',* but obtained nothing but generalities, Mr Tothill preferring to keep his own counsel.

Next, it was Dr Hart's turn to be summoned, and she asked him to sit beside her. She was solemn at first, thanking him for his care and the pains he had taken with her then, taking his hand, she asked if he would do her a favour. The favour, which he found strange and needless, was that he should forgive

[31] Psalm 30 is one of Thanksgiving, reflecting back on God's goodness in being delivered from trouble, blessed in life, showered with mercy, and the turning of mourning into dancing. It includes the line: "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (30:5).

her. He protested that instead it was she that should forgive him, as he had failed both in his duty and love for her. Her words are given, but they are also his words because it is through him that they appear on the page:

She said: *"You must forgive me that you for so many years together having shown me so much love, and been a means of my everlasting comfort and happiness, that yet I have been so unkind unto you, for I have not loved you by the hundred part, in that measure I ought to have done, according to that love you have shown to me."*

"You must forgive me that you for so many years together having shown me so much love, and been a means of my everlasting comfort and happiness, that yet I have been so unkind unto you, for I have not loved you by the hundred part, in that measure I ought to have done, according to that love you have shown to me."

The reason for her reticence, she explained, was that until she was assured of God's love, she could not love him or anyone else. But now that the Holy Spirit had been rekindled within her, her only regret was that in so short a time left, she was *'so unfit and disabled to perform my desires'*.

Was this a declaration of love, of sorts, and a statement of regret on her deathbed that she had not been in a position to act upon it? Or a long-overdue

explanation of her uncharitable treatment of him for all those years, despite being aware of his utter devotion?

Whatever it was she was trying to say, or how he understood it, the matter was resolved, and he was dismissed.

Thursday 14th and Good Friday 15th April 1625

Dr Hart's prose transformed into poetry, as he described the changes that occurred towards the end of the week.

'For, lo, the scene now changes again, the curtain waves and tosses a little with an uncouth[32] *wind… she who lately was in a glorious triumph, flying away forcibly from us all, as it were with Eagles wings mounting upwards, is now suddenly surprised with an extreme fainting and weakness of spirits…not being as formerly so lively and substantial.'*

A letter was sent to London, begging for two physicians to be sent urgently, in the hope that she might be given some potions to make her sleep, it now being ten days of wakefulness.

Easter Saturday 16th and Easter Sunday 17th April 1625

Mr Dod was seen entering Shardeloes on Saturday, where he was going to keep a private fast for Mrs Drake, accompanied by someone with a familiar profile — Thomas Hooker. It was a partial reunion of the divines who had attended her during the previous years. Soon afterwards, they were joined by a

[32] Archaic meaning: Mysterious; unfamiliar.

new face, a minister called Dr Preston, who had been present at the deathbed of King James I just three weeks before in his capacity as Chaplain to the Prince, now King Charles I.

In the afternoon, Mrs Drake asked for the three of them to pray with her, after which she told them that her time was now at hand. Her parents, husband and children were called for, and she blessed them and took leave of them, then began quietly singing hymns and verses of Psalms, until by Easter Sunday her hollow, low voice could scarcely be understood.

Easter Monday 18th April 1625

On Sunday night she finally fell asleep, and when she awoke on Easter Monday morning, she found herself surrounded by family, friends, and the divines, and rejoiced and smiled, taking their hands in turn as they were offered. Before midday, she beckoned to Mr Dod to join her, and lifted up her hands in prayer, then as he was about to begin, her arms suddenly collapsed and she departed.

Two days later she was buried all in white as she had requested, with Dr Preston, the king's chaplain, preaching her funeral sermon. Amongst the praises that Dr Hart wrote down, and possibly spoke out loud, were:

On her melancholy (a great understatement): *'She was a good creature, in her natural state, qualified with the best of mere nature's endowments, accidentally encountering with some grand difficulties, which a little overcame her natural parts.*'

On her legacy: *'The vision is for an appointed time, though it tarry, yet wait, for it will come, as it did unto this good woman after ten years expectation… and in the end did manifoldly surmount all her sufferings and troubles…leaving herself as the matchless monument of God's unspeakable mercy, unto all stout, stiff, and hard-hearted sinners for ever.'*

On her character: *'She always wore her worst side outmost, and wonderfully cloaked all the good things she ever did or said'.*

What he meant by this last observation only becomes clear on further consideration, that the divines saw her at her worst, as a difficult woman possessed, who argued with them at every turn; but this was not her true character, as in secret, behind their backs, she had a glorious temperament which her waiting woman, and of course Dr Hart, were well aware of, but she forbade them to disclose: *'it was treason for any she entrusted to betray any part or parcel of her goodness'.*

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Carved in marble on her memorial[33] her husband chose to reveal that, in another challenge to convention, she had chosen to nurse her youngest son John herself, and that they were entombed together. Her eldest son, William, later added a Latin inscription which made reference to the book written by *'a worthy author'* which he qualified with the phrase *'no more than a witness'*.

[33] Mrs Drake's memorial is in the Drake Chapel in St. Mary's Church, Amersham.

How was this to be understood — that there was a widespread belief that the Relater was, in fact, more than just an observer?

Part 2: Afterlife 1625-1647

Biography, Memoir, Eulogy and Love Letter

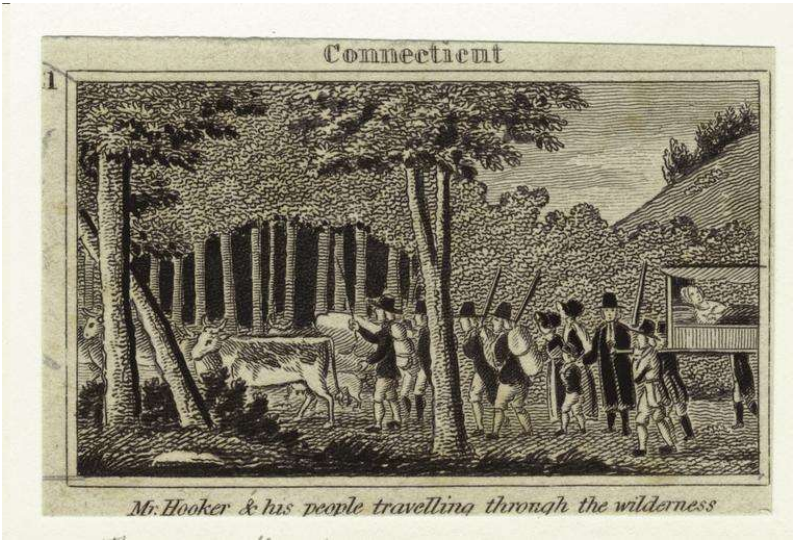
Thomas Hooker had studied Mrs Drake for a year or more in 1620-21, and then providently returned to witness her salvation in 1625, and this experience became the foundation for his theological thinking and writing. Four years later in 1629, having been forced to retire from his Lecturing role, he set up a small school in his rented house in rural Essex and in his spare time produced his celebrated work "The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ". Perhaps because he made general guidelines from the specifics of Mrs Drake's case, his book is still considered by Christians today as 'timeless and relevant' which although written in the style of centuries ago 'still manages, with the use of colourful analogies, to speak to current spiritual lives'.

A legal summons connected to his nonconformist views led to a decision to leave England for The Netherlands, where he stayed with Mr Forbes (Mrs Drake's least enduring divine) for two years before setting out for the New World in 1633. In Boston, Hooker became the first pastor at Newtown (now Cambridge, Massachusetts), and three years later, as a result of the influx of immigrants and overcrowding, he led a party of settlers from his church community, known as "Hooker's Company", one hundred miles to the southwest, where he established the Connecticut River Colony, and set up its capital at Hartford.

Inspired by a sermon Hooker gave on civil government, the fledgling colony decided to create a constitution — adopted in 1639 and called the

Fundamental Orders of Connecticut — in which the principles of modern democracy to establish a representative government, and to set up its structure and powers, were first written down. Notably, the document confirmed that the colony was a self-governing ‘law unto themselves’, and did not contain any reference to the British Crown. Hooker is still referred to as “The Father of American Democracy” and the official nickname of the state of Connecticut, which grew from Hooker’s colony, is “The Constitution State”.

Thomas Hooker died aged sixty-one in Hartford during the influenza epidemic of 1647, which spread throughout all of the New England colonies and was initially blamed on witchcraft. This led to the first execution of a witch in North America, Alice Young, who was hanged at the Meeting House Square in Hooker’s hometown.



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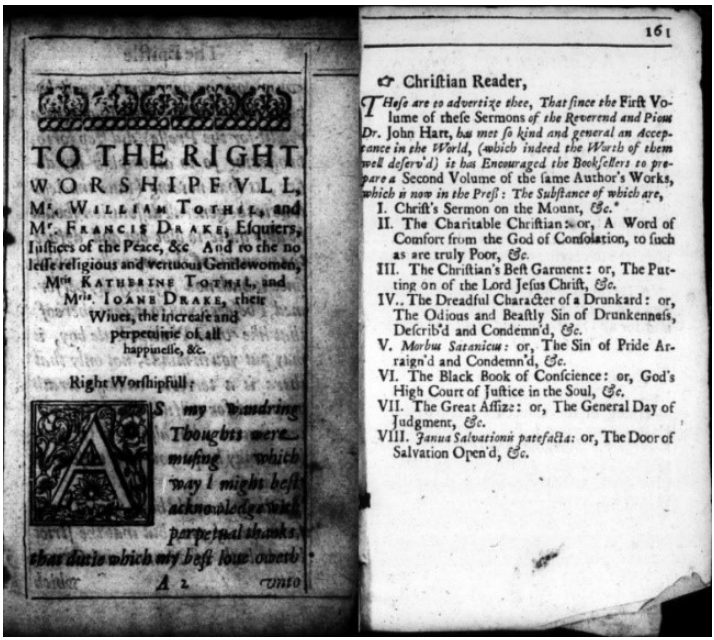
Dr John Hart's book, published the same year, differed in many ways from that of Thomas Hooker. Firstly, it was not a guidebook (although Hart would have argued otherwise) but a biography, a memoir, and a eulogy that read in places like a recollection of a lost love. Secondly, it contained the real names of those involved, and the actual places where the events took place. Thirdly, despite being reprinted until at least 1782, it is virtually unknown today.

It was first published in 1647, in a brief moment of respite during the civil war, as "Trodden Down Strength by the God of Strength, or Mrs Drake Revived" but under a slight pseudonym 'Hart On-Hi'. A later reprint used his full name — John Hart D.D. — but with a new, and much longer, title: "The Firebrand taken out of the Fire, or The Wonderful History, Case and Cure of Mistress Drake, sometime the wife of Francis Drake of Esher in the County of Surrey, Esq., who was under the power and severe discipline of Satan for the space of ten years, and was redeemed from his tyranny in a wonderful manner a little before her death, by the great mercy of God, and (instrumentally) by the extraordinary pains, prayers and fastings of four reverend divines, whose names are here subscribed, viz. Dod; Ussher; Hooker; Preston."

Dr Hart called his work a 'Tragick-Comedy'. In the meaning of the period, this was not a mixture of tragedy and comedy (for there was little light relief in Mrs Drake's story) but a play which had a serious theme throughout, yet a happy ending. The final result was indeed a relief for the divines who had laboured for so long in their battle against the Devil, since the ultimate revelation of Christ justified their methods. They maintained that Mrs Drake's brief moment of joy and rapture made up for her miserable experience of life on this earth, *'if a touch, a taste, a short glance only be so forcible and ravishing, how surmountingly excellent and glorious shall that estate be to drink at the fountainhead of the beatific vision, out of the rivers of His pleasures forever?'*

Hart's life remained a partial mystery. His first book appears to be "The Burning Bush Not Consumed" which was published in 1616 with a dedication to his new patrons: 'To the Right Worshipful Mr William Tothill and Mr Francis Drake, Esquires… and to the no less religious and virtuous Gentlewomen, Mrs Katherine Tothill and Mrs Joan Drake, their wives, the increase and perpetuity

of all happiness etc.' which he signed 'Yours in duty, much and ever bound'. There are a number of other publications of his, mainly in the mid-1600s, either as author or editor, and a woodblock portrait of him as an old man appeared on the frontispiece of some of them. One publisher even offered a second volume of his collected works, as a 'famous author'. He was, perhaps, more of a wordsmith than a celebrated evangelist.



TO THE RIGHT
WORSHIPFVLL,
Mr. WILLIAM TOTHILL, and
Mr. FRANCIS DRAKE, Esquiers,
Iustices of the Peace, &c. And to the no
lesse religious and vertuous Gentlewomen,
Mrs. KATHARINE TOTHILL, and
Mrs. IOANE DRAKE, their
Wiues, the increase and
perpetuitie of all
happinesse, &c.

Right Worshipfull:

As my wandring
Thoughts were
musing which
way I might best
acknowledge with
perpetual thanks,
that debt which my best loue oweth

A 2 vnto

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☞ Christian Reader,

These are to advertize thee, That since the First Volume of these Sermons *of the Reverend and Pious Dr.* John Hart, *has met so kind and general an Acceptance in the World, (which indeed the Worth of them well deserv'd) it has Encouraged the Booksellers to prepare a* Second Volume of the same Author's Works, *which is now in the Press: The Substance of which are,*

I. Christ's Sermon on the Mount, *&c.*
II. The Charitable Christian: or, A Word of Comfort from the God of Consolation, to such as are truly Poor, *&c.*
III. The Christian's Best Garment: or, The Putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ, *&c.*
IV. The Dreadful Character of a Drunkard: or, The Odious and Beastly Sin of Drunkenness, Describ'd and Condemn'd, *&c.*
V. *Morbus Satanicus:* or, The Sin of Pride Arraign'd and Condemn'd, *&c.*
VI. The Black Book of Conscience: or, God's High Court of Justice in the Soul, *&c.*
VII. The Great Assize: or, The General Day of Judgment, *&c.*
VIII. *Janua Salvationis patefacta:* or, The Door of Salvation Open'd, *&c.*

The date of first publishing his account of Mrs Drake is puzzling, given his insistence on its importance. His stated aim was to help others suffering from spiritual anxiety, but he chose to include so many personal details about Mrs Drake, which she had recounted to him on their walks or horse rides together or which he had observed as an eyewitness: her childhood memories; her character

and appearance; feelings about her marriage; episodes of domestic violence; her physical ailments; her suicidal thoughts; expressions of affection; the fine detail of the final days. Whether he realised it or not as he was writing, we can sense his emotions, such as his jealousy of the more charismatic and learned divines, or his excitement at the secret mission, or his passion during the argument in the garden, and his utter anguish at her death. Was he, in his pious outpourings, oblivious to the intimacy of his revelations?

When all was said and done, was he a reliable narrator? Why did he publish initially under a pseudonym? Did he hesitate so long because he waited until all of those most closely involved had died: Francis Drake in 1634; Mr Dod in 1645; and Thomas Hooker in 1647, the very same year that John Hart's book first appeared in Mr Pilkington's bookshop? Perhaps the only other living person who might have retained vivid recollections of her was her eldest son, and he was notably absent abroad during the civil war.

The Bookish Baronet

In 1943, three hundred years later and in the middle of another war, an antiquarian bookseller came across a large bundle of papers in the library at Shardeloes, containing several notebooks and diaries dating from the seventeenth century. At first, these were thought to have been written by William Tothill, Mrs Drake's father, but in the mid-1970s they were definitively attributed to her son, William Drake.

How does a mother's long-term disorder affect her children? How did the absence of Mrs Drake's love, or more precisely how did her disinterest, leave its mark? William Drake emerged from a blighted childhood as a serious and bookish young man. His education seems to have taken place partly in Amersham, presumably residing at least in term-time with his grandparents at Shardeloes, since his tutor was Charles Croke, rector of Agmondisham[34], who had gained a Doctorate of Divinity from Christ Church, Oxford. It was probably this link that enabled William to be accepted at the same college, where he became a junior student studying for a BA in 1623. Following university, he studied to be a lawyer at the Middle Temple, and read up on legal histories, among them "The Process and Proceedings of the Court of Chancery" by his own grandfather, William Tothill.

[34] Agmondisham is an old name for Amersham.

How does a mother's long-term disorder affect her children?

In his notebooks, known as ‘commonplace books’, he kept lists of every book he read (hundreds of titles from classical philosophers and historians to humanist thinkers) and made notes on everything he found of interest, or learned from conversations and debates, as well as extracts from letters he received, quotes he wanted to remember, fables and proverbs, medical remedies and details of his estate dealings. These would form the basis of his approach to life: the acquisition of useful knowledge, self-improvement, and the practical application of both via rules of behaviour that he devised for himself to enhance his fortunes.

In dealing with men, for example — who overall he considered deceitful, vain liars — he aimed to treat social situations like a game in which he arrived fully prepared with background information, but said little, giving nothing away, yet noting what views others had that could be exploited later for monetary gain. He evaluated everyone only for their potential value to him in financial terms or for their contacts. Any new acquaintance must have thought him an introverted snob.

He approached marriage, and women generally, in a similarly unemotional way, as a means to an end of acquiring more property and providing children, which he thought were ‘certain cares, but uncertain comforts’ and hugely expensive. He was particularly suspicious of intelligent women who he felt overawed or tricked their husbands, and warned himself of the dangers implicit in decisions made in the heat of passion. As for religion, he believed that it was the only way that a woman’s natural libertine impulses were tempered, and he was particularly critical of Puritan preachers who ‘attached

themselves to women like the serpent applied himself to Eve at the beginning'. The upshot was that he did not find a suitable wife and remained a bachelor.

In 1647 when Hart's book was published, Sir William Drake, 1st Baronet of Shardeloes, aged forty-one, was reputedly in Italy (as he later claimed to be able to read Machiavelli in his original language) having left the country during the early uncertainties of the civil war, and not returning until the restoration. He told those who queried his decision that it was for health reasons, and indeed he had never possessed the deportment of a soldier.

Persistent Subversions

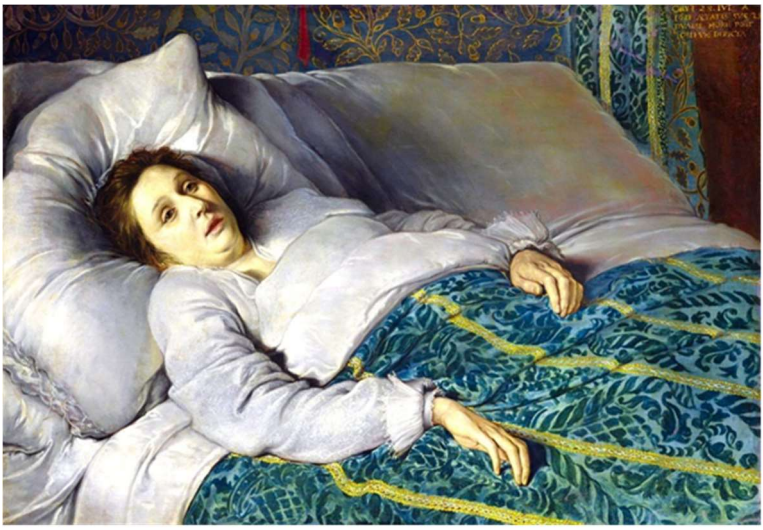
Recorded by John Hart as an eyewitness, Mrs Drake's symptoms first appeared after her marriage, and following the birth of her daughter built gradually, then alarmingly, towards a conclusion: the constant all-consuming headaches and heartburn; the loss of appetite; the irritability; the feelings of despondency, despair and emptiness; the episodes of 'frozen' staring at the ground; the feverish nightmares; the uncontrollable weeping and manic laughter; the suicidal thoughts; the excessive guilt; the rapid and confused speaking; and finally the sleep deprivation and the hallucinations.

Whether it was a cause, or a contributory factor, Mrs Drake's spiritual angst created a hopeless predicament. The Puritans took the doctrine of Predestination from Calvin which, following on logically from God's unshakeable plan for the ultimate triumph of good over evil, stated that He had already decided who were the small group of people who were saved and would have eternal life (the 'elect') and that therefore everyone else — deservedly so since humans are innately sinful — was barred from access to salvation and sentenced to eternal hellfire (the 'reprobates'). Understandably, such a situation was going to cause anxiety for many adherents, but especially those of a melancholic disposition who were most likely to be thrown into a deep, even suicidal, despair that would provoke physical symptoms which were unresponsive to medicine. Good health was a sign of God's favour, and so her chronic illness must be evidence of His irrefutable disapprobation.

The major conundrum arising from Predestination was how could anyone know for certain if they were an elect? The Puritans' answer was that at some point in your life, you would receive a profound sense of God's 'saving grace' that was your assurance of being chosen, but that whilst some might experience this in their youth, and therefore live a life of great peace and security, others might have to wait until near death, by which time they would be distraught. For the latter, the only recourse was to conform to the Puritanical beliefs and practices in the expectation of a future sign from God, all the while trying to avoid the temptations offered by the Devil. This was also the reason given to those who pointed out that since being saved or rejected was decided before you were born, what was the point in living according to strict and unpalatable rules since it made no difference to your salvation?

The challenge for the divines involved in Mrs Drake's case — Mr Dod in particular — was how to proceed in the face of such a fiercely held belief in her own damnation? The only possible option was to wait for God's signal, that they feared might never come if she was genuinely a reprobate, and in the meantime try to encourage some sensation of assurance. So they improvised, trying plan after plan in an attempt to prepare her in the best possible way for her visitation, and seeing in her counter-arguments the Devil's wiles, which if they could be overcome would go some way to providing evidence of her being chosen. This mainly took the form of a rudimentary 'talking cure', but one that involved sustained sermonising, discoursing, imploring and the unrelenting scrutiny of an unwell woman, from which Mrs Drake did try to escape on at

least one occasion. What they underestimated was her intellect, the cleverness of her reasoning, and the strength of her will.



The Puritan divines' plan … involved sustained sermonising, discoursing, imploring and the unrelenting scrutiny of an unwell woman…

That 'meantime' stretched out from months to years, to a decade, and it was always a fine line, with Mrs Drake's despair at being abandoned by God threatening on many occasions to cross over into blasphemy. It was therefore no wonder that her vision, a few days before her death, was received with such relief by those present, and presumably the wider Puritan community, and that

it became the cornerstone of Hooker's theology and the 'perpetual monument' of Hart's account.

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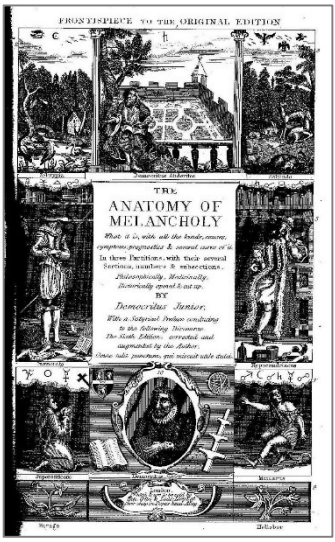
William Drake had arrived at Christ Church, Oxford to begin his studies at the beginning of the Michaelmas Term in autumn 1623, at the age of seventeen[35]. He would have been aware that he had been brought up in Esher Place, the former home of Cardinal Wolsey, and was now entering the college — created upon the dissolution of a twelfth century Augustinian priory and originally called Cardinal College — that Wolsey had founded before his fall from grace, with only three sides of the great Gothic quadrangle, known as Tom Quad, then completed.

The college library where William Drake spent many hours indulging his quest for knowledge, was housed in the former monastic refectory which lay on the south side of the cloister adjacent to the Cathedral. He would have come to know the college librarian, an Oxford don and Church of England minister by the name of Robert Burton, a scholarly, solitary and celibate figure in his late forties, absorbed almost entirely in his books and his writing, in whom William Drake might have recognised a kindred spirit, and who could indeed have encouraged his lifelong interest in reading and self-education, as a form of distraction from the challenges of everyday life.

[35] The Dean of Christ Church, Oxford recorded a Drake 'gentleman' in his registry for the 1623/4 academic year.

Robert Burton had recently finalised a revision of his major work, 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', first published a couple of years previously in 1621 in which, despite not possessing a medical background, he had elaborated with great authority, a fulsome history of melancholy: its types, causes and cures.



He had begun it as a result of his own experience, and he appears to have been concerned enough about his physical and mental state in his youth to have consulted Simon Forman, the renowned physician and astrologer in London, who noted his patient's 'great heaviness and drowsiness in the head, pain in the stomach, sluggishness of the blood…and wind in the bowels' and diagnosed melancholy, with the conclusion that 'he carries death upon him'.

In researching and writing his tome, shuttling between his own library at Christ Church and the Bodleian, and collecting evidence from both classical

and contemporary medical sources, Burton found solace to the extent that he wrote: “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business.” The ample evidence he found led him to the view that melancholy was a symptom of the human condition, and was to be taken seriously because it impaired normal functioning, and further that it had become an epidemic in his own time; so he broadened his reading to include religious, philosophical, historical and literary works.

Whilst acknowledging that everybody experienced melancholy individually, Burton identified some common themes such as melancholy arising from love, religion, poverty, stress such as bereavement, and even scholarly pursuits (over-learning). He noted how attitudes had changed across time, from being a sign of madness, possession by the Devil, to even a mark of artistic genius, and also how there appeared to be a hereditary aspect. He focused on the symbiosis between the body and the mind, in which mental anguish gave rise to physical symptoms and, vice versa, where chronic sickness could give rise to depression.

The book became an epic self-help guide, that promoted introspection in order to alter thoughts and behaviours. In addition to the accepted methods of blood-letting and purging, his list of cures, uniquely for his time, were practical and holistic, treating the person not simply the disease: he recognised how sufferers were soothed by the natural world, and recommended fresh air, slow walks in the countryside and swimming in the cold water of rivers and lakes; he proposed appealing to the senses though natural light, warm baths,

perfumes, and herbal remedies, and insisted that diet was a core part of recovery by avoiding foods that were difficult to digest, and drinking cordials instead of wine; he recommended rest and relaxation such as listening to soft music or singing in the company of friends, and the importance of undisturbed sleep. He preached moderation, even in religion, whereby the patient should avoid excessive zeal, or neglect of religious duties, but find comfort in prayer and rituals.

Burton seemed to consider his calling as a work in progress and was constantly adding to it, so that the first edition which ran to 900 pages would expand to 2,000 pages (over half a million words) in the sixth and last edition before his death. Fortunately, his writing style was highly engaging — with copious quotations, case studies, anecdotes and digressions — and he was amongst the first authors to be aware of, and speak directly to, his readers.

In his diary, William Drake mentioned Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, but it is not clear when he read it, or how much of it he ploughed through, or what he thought of it, or whether he associated the subject matter with his mother. It is only to be regretted that, having concentrated upon a clique of devout and scholarly men dedicated to learning and the writing of books to attempt a cure, the Drakes and Tothills did not call upon the similarly endowed Robert Burton to advise on Mrs Drake's case.

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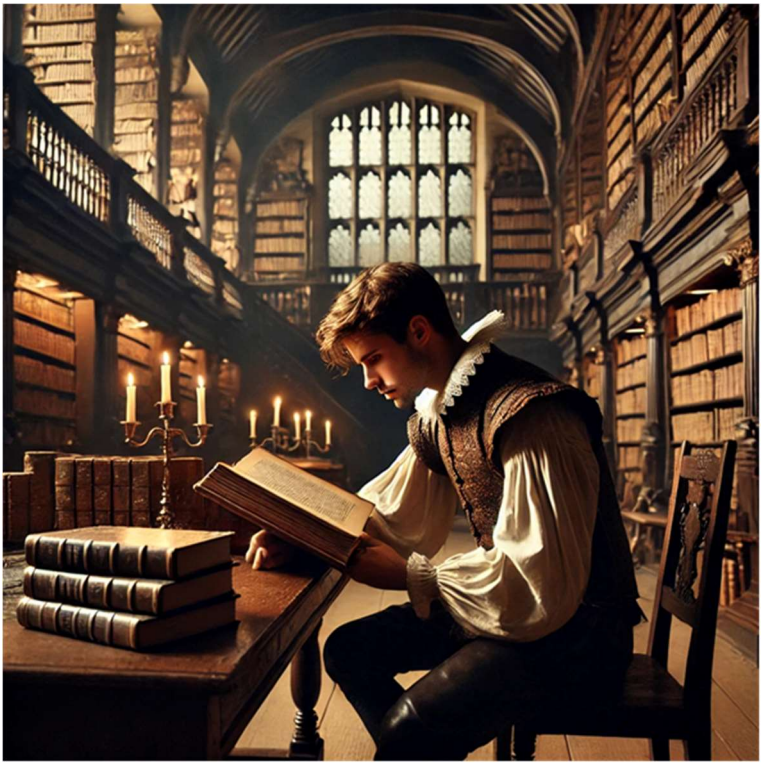

In his diary, William Drake mentioned Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, but it is not clear…whether he associated the subject matter with his mother.

With no other recourse, Mrs Joan Drake had to rely on her own ingenuity to face her challenges, which she achieved via persistent subversions that were within her control. She defied Mr Dod with dramatic distractions, found rebuttals to his pronouncements, and sent out her maid to seek alternative arguments she could use. She refused to take the sacrament or sing uplifting psalms. She formulated a determined, if impracticable, plan to escape. In desperation, she cut herself and swallowed pins. Against convention, she nursed her precious youngest son. In her final act, she symbolically left her husband, and specified how she wanted to be buried. Most poignantly for posterity, she confided in her closest spiritual adviser, Dr John Hart, who faithfully noted everything down.

A Slight Scottish Lilt

In the summer of 1616, Dr James Ussher received a letter at Trinity College, Dublin, addressing him as 'Reverend and my loving friend' and chiding him gently for not having replied to the correspondent's previous letters. This time, though, there was a specific request *"which is so great, that I think I shall never much joy in anything here until I have some hope from you to have it granted"*, which was to know exactly when Ussher was next planning to come to England; and there was a promise to meet him with a horse at the ready at Westchester[36], where they had last parted a few years ago, so that they could ride south together. The reason for this urgency, the letter continued, was that *"there is a dear friend of mine, whom now it hath pleased God to make Mr. Dod a means to bring from Satan's most horrible delusions a little… who hath so great a desire to hear you upon my report"*. As well as Mr Dod, John Rogers of Dedham was mentioned as someone whose powerful preaching could be of assistance, but *"for divers reasons, it is impossible for ought I know"*, and the godly minister Mr Culverwell was also referred to. There was news from mutual friends: Dr Burges had been given permission to preach again; and Mrs Scudamore was to be married to a gentleman called Leigh from Staffordshire. For those familiar with Mrs Drake's story, it is immediately apparent that the letter writer and the 'Relater' are one and the same person.

[36] Name for Chester used in the early modern period, and from where ships sailed to and from Dublin.

John Hart countered Ussher's possible excuses by reminding him that he must surely be due a break after his years of toil in his study, and assuring him that his friends would cover his costs. Another reason to travel would be so that he could personally amend copies of his sermons, which were in high demand for publication, before they went to print, thereby avoiding the problems that had dogged Mr Dod upon detecting errors in his book on the Ten Commandments, which had *"caused him great grief and much trouble to mend"*.

The letter was dated 22nd June 1616, and sent from London, but Ussher did not reply, so Dr Hart tried again some nine months later, on the 12th March 1617, enclosing four small religious books. He pointed out that it had now been three years since Ussher was last in England, but perhaps having become a married man had changed his habits? There was an update, and now a name, on his *"very good friend Mrs. Joan Drake…for the present, though a little better, yet she continueth in her mind troubled and tossed"* and his dedication to her cause was underlined: *"Of all my cares, it is one of the principal to procure her peace; therefore it maketh me send everywhere for help unto her, as also unto you, to know if there be any hope shortly to see you."*

Ussher finally replied, but it was a whole year later in March 1618, and worse Dr Hart did not receive the letter until the beginning of July. His response began, tongue-in-cheek, with a rebuke: *"Wherein I perceived you deal with me as for the most part God doth with his children, to send them unexpected favours, not when they desire, but when he sees a fit time, after they have often begged and entreated, waited long, but chiefly when they have in a manner past*

hope of obtaining." This was a relationship of friends and contemporaries: *"Yet must you not imagine that ever I conceived any displeasure against you; only a story of the Old Testament hath taught me now and then to set my friend's corn on fire, to have some of their acquaintance, which I put in practice to you, only so far as that you might do as you would be done unto, seeing you are so well able; wherefore I must assure you there needs no forgiveness where there was neither fault committed nor offence taken, save so far as might, like a whetstone, sharpen you to write."* His only complaint was that Ussher's letter was not longer.

Presumably, Ussher had confirmed his long-awaited visit to England that would start in 1619, as there was no specific mention of Mrs Drake's progress, although it was noted that Mr Dod had been *"sick even unto death"* but had recovered. With knowledge that Ussher was reading his correspondence, this was a much longer reply and provided more evidence of Dr Hart's character and background. There was confirmation of his Puritan and anti-Papist religious views with criticism of the poor standards of preaching in the English parishes, rumours of Catholic atrocities abroad narrowly averted, and a summary of the outcome from a General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. There was further evidence of Dr Hart's ties to Scotland[37], with his calling John Forbes, the minister originally from Edinburgh but resident in Middleburg, *"our countryman"*. Mr Culverwell was recorded as managing some fallout from Ussher's written opinion on 'Universal Grace.'

[37] Dr John Hart dedicated his book 'Fort Royal', published in 1649, to Christian Cavendish, Countess of Devonshire, with a remark that he considered her mother, Lady Kinloss of Fife, a 'sometime noble friend'.

The letter ended with a flourish: *"Therefore, still entreating your prayers, and much wishing your presence, much happiness may still attend you; that out of your belly may flow rivers of the water of life to water the Lord's garden; and long may you flourish as a palm tree and a cedar in the courts of our God, until filled with your reward he give you to drink out of the rivers of his pleasures. Yours ever much and ever bound, J. Heart."*

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All three letters, the only ones extant between the two men, were preserved among hundreds of others by Ussher's chaplain[38] after his death and eventually found their way to the Bodleian library in Oxford, courtesy of an eighteenth-century antiquarian collector called Richard Rawlinson. At various times, they were transcribed and published in collections of Ussher's works, but as the foreword to one declared: 'The Editor has felt considerable doubts as to the course he ought to pursue with regard to the orthography of the names: the variety of spelling is very extraordinary, even in the signatures. He has, however, determined to leave them as given by Dr. Parr, for it is probable that he, being in possession of the autograph letter, adopted the spelling he found in them.' Transcription error does certainly have an impact — in Hart's letters, for example, Mrs Drake was transcribed as 'Mrs John Drake', Lady Scudamore was variously 'Skidmore' and 'Shedmore', and John Rogers was from 'Dodam'. This may explain why the original letters have been classified as

[38] Dr Richard Parr was James Ussher's chaplain and biographer and published a collection of his letters in 1686.

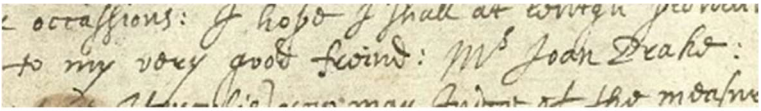
being written by a 'J Heartwell' in the library catalogue, which has caused some confusion[39].

Dr Hart's letters reveal that, far from being arbitrary ministers that *'the Relater brought to see her and judge her case'*, they were for the most part members of a well-connected network of Puritan divines ready and waiting to be called into action on just such an occasion, supported financially by sympathetic gentry families in the home counties, and in contact with those within the established church who shared some of the same values. Dr James Ussher, on his way to becoming head of the Church in Ireland, was such a 'friend', carefully managing his association with nonconformists through the infrequency and brevity of his written communications.

The content of the letters both confirms and expands the sketchy details about Dr John Hart from his book, not as the older 'famous author' of the woodblock portrait, but as the man who first met Mrs Drake at Esher Place in 1616. He was sociable and charming, playful and teasing, literary and poetic, well-read in European religious affairs and a fount of news and court gossip, and possibly spoke with a slight Scottish lilt.

[39] GH Williams, an American historian of Christianity at the Harvard School of Divinity, identified 'Jasper Hartwell', a young law student of Middle Temple aged c16/17, as the 'Relater' and letter writer, and suggested that the link to John Hart the author is a mix up. This is patently untrue for a number of reasons, not least of which is that he had not seen a copy of the original letters, written in Hart's neat handwriting, where the signature is 'J Heart' plus a few decorative strokes of his pen, but definitely not 'Heartwell' . Other reasons include: that the 'Burning Bush' book is dedicated to the Drakes and Tothills by John Hart, and dated in 1616; that the letter of 1617 refers to a previous visit by Ussher (in 1613) when the writer accompanied him to Chester to see him off, and 'Jasper' would have been barely 13/14; and that the content of the letters clearly reveals friendship between men of similar age, status and religious education.

The serendipity of history has provided two written sources of evidence of Mrs Drake's later life and her relationship with her closest spiritual advisor. The letters testify that Dr John Hart's intentions — to help her find peace — were, at least initially, virtuous and beyond reproach; but the book unwittingly exposes the reality that her untimely death was an unintended consequence of the overwhelming cure for which, with the backing of her husband and parents, he placed himself front and centre, orchestrating proceedings.



Close up of Dr John Hart writing Mrs Joan Drake's name, in his letter to James Ussher of March 1617

Epitaph: ‘Poor Thing’

In 1911, Lady Elizabeth Eliott-Drake published two volumes of her research into the family history of her husband, Sir Francis George Augustus Fuller-Eliott-Drake, who traced his lineage back to Thomas Drake, brother of Sir Francis Drake (who died childless), and had inherited the estates at Buckland Abbey and Nutwell Court. Her husband suffered periods of mental ill health, and in March 1874 he had been admitted to Ticehurst Asylum in Sussex, an institution catering for aristocratic patients, where he spent the rest of his life. In stark contrast to Mrs Drake, he was permitted to maintain his own transport — a horse and carriage, with coachman — and to travel to the seaside when he was able. His incapacity meant that Lady Elizabeth assumed the role of the head of household.

Towards the end of the first volume, outlining the court case that Francis Drake of Esher — incensed that he had not received his expected inheritance — had vindictively brought against Thomas Drake as heir and executor to Sir Francis Drake’s will (Drake vs Drake 1605), she added a footnote relating to his wife, Mrs Drake, that included a paragraph which succinctly sums up the tragic story, and provides a brief glimpse of her own compassion drawn from long experience of her husband’s mental health struggles:

“After about twenty years of a miserable [married] life, sometimes better and sometimes worse, but never really sane, she left her husband, saying

she would die in her father's house, and so she did within a few days of her arrival, believing, happily for herself, poor thing, that she was surrounded by triumphant choirs of angels. This comforting change of ideas when on her deathbed enabled those who had ruined her life to regard her as a 'firebrand plucked from the burning fire'."

Portrait of a Lady c. 1620

No portrait, or woodcut, of Mrs Joan Drake has surfaced, and although her physical presence has been described by Dr John Hart, it is still a challenge to picture what she might have looked like, and therefore there is a distance in our empathy for her. A near approximation is the next best thing, much like we

accept that an actor plays the part of a real-life character, and there exists a portrait of an unknown lady of a similar social standing, painted around 1620 by an anonymous artist of the English school.

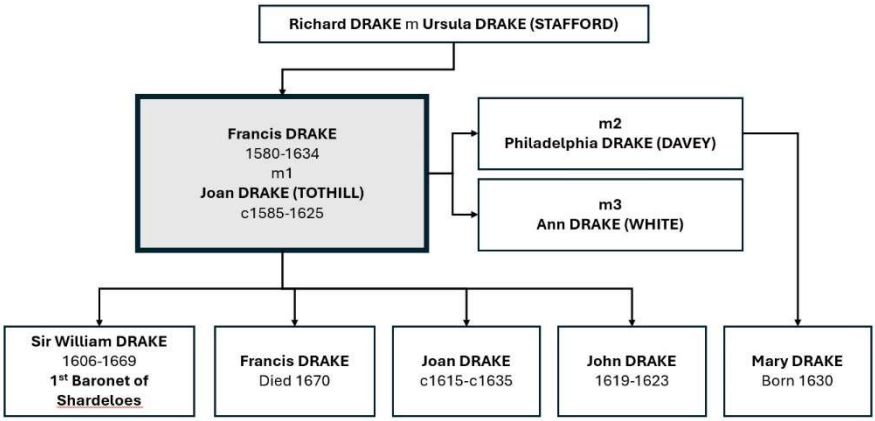
The establishment of provenance was made by an art historian[40] who provided documentation of the evidence. The portrait would have been a commission designed to express not only the sitter's likeness, but also "her sophistication, prosperity and fine taste through her costume." Her linen jacket, adorned with a multi-coloured embroidery of flowers set within scrolls of gold thread, contains sequins which would have caught the light as she walked. Over this, she wears a gauzy apron, and on her shoulders is a black gown.

The dating is confirmed by two key clues: firstly, by her hair which is held in place by a wire headdress, known as a 'tire'; and secondly by the 'falling ruff', fashionable throughout the 1620s, which is "closed and does not display any of the lady's bosom, and falls in a downward slope from a high stiff collar", hence the name.

But the reason this portrait creates a reaction, having learned of Mrs Drake's experiences, is that on examining the painting, what strikes the viewer is not only the finery of the clothes, but her demeanour — the pale features, the tired eyes, the air of having suffered and not being quite well, the melancholic charisma.

[40] Jacqui Ansell, Senior Lecturer, Christie's Education, formerly an Education Officer at the National Gallery, London.

Drake Family Tree



Drake Family Tree (selected members)

Timeline

Date	Event
1603	Francis Drake of Esher married Joan Tothill of Shardeloes (3rd March 1602/3).
1610	The Drakes attend Ben Jonson's play 'The Alchemist' at the Blackfriars Theatre in London.
c. 1615	Mrs Drake's health and spiritual anxiety spiralled downwards after the birth of her daughter Joan.
1616	John Hart, Doctor of Divinity, was introduced to Mrs Drake. He dedicated a book to his new patrons. 'J. Heart' wrote his first letter to Dr Ussher (June).
1616-19	Attempts made to 'cure' Mrs Drake over 3 years by John Dod. J. Heart wrote further letters to Dr Ussher (March 1617 and July 1618).
1619	Birth of John Drake, third son of Francis and Joan, but not mentioned at all in Hart's account. Hart made a secret trip to Essex in an attempt to find an alternative place for Mrs Drake to live.
c. 1619	Dr James Ussher made several visits. He was in England between 1619 and 1621 buying books for his library in Dublin.
1620	Thomas Hooker was made rector of St George's Church in Esher, and lived at Esher Place in order to help Mrs Drake.
1621	Hooker married Mrs Drake's woman-in-waiting (April 3rd) and left for Essex. Robert Burton published 'The Anatomy of Melancholy'.
1623	John Drake died, aged three; Willam Drake began studying at Christ Church, Oxford.
1625	On Easter Monday 18th April, Mrs Drake died after a rapturous vision at Shardeloes (aged around 40, although her actual birthdate is unknown); Dod, Hooker and Hart were reunited in attendance. Dr

	Ussher was appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh.
1629	Thomas Hooker wrote “The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ” based on his experiences with Mrs Drake.
1634	Francis Drake, having married twice more, died and was buried at Walton-on-Thames (17th March; aged 54).
1647	Dr John Hart published his version of events, “Down Trodden Strength or Mrs Drake Revived”, under the pseudonym Hart On-Hi; Thomas Hooker died in Connecticut, the colony he had founded.

The Drake Chapel Memorials

Mrs Drake's Memorial in the Drake Chapel, St. Mary's Church, Amersham (Source: Amersham Museum)

TO THE GLORIE OF GOD

TO YE BLESSED MEMORIE OF MRS JOANE DRAKE

WIFE TO FRANCIS DRAKE OF ESHERE IN YE COUNTIE OF SUR[REY]

ONE OF YE GENTLEMEN OF HIS MAJESTIE'S MOST HO: PRIVIE CHAMBER

IN ORDINARY ESQ DAUGHTER TO WILLIAM TOTHILL

OF SHARLEES ONE OF THE 6 CLARKES OF YE HIGH COURT

OF CHANNCERIE ESQUIER

WHO WHILST SHEE LIVED WAS A PATTERNE OF ALL

VIRTUES OF A GRATIOUS WOMAN & WIFE AS HIGHLY

ESTEEMED OF ALL GOOD T[HAT] KNEW HER AS LOWLY IN

HER OWNE EYES

A LIVING MONUMENT

Of Gods mercie Above Satans malice

Of his wonders in Casting downe his Children t[hat] hee may raise them up

Of the truth of his p[ro]mises in refreshing the weary soule

Of the force of faythfull prayer

Of the power of Godlines even in this life

FOR HAVING FOUGHT YE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH & WAYTED FOR

THE SALVATION OF GOD SHEE OBTEYNED A GLORIOUS VIC-

TORIE & BEGINNING YE LIFE OF HEAVEN UPON EARTH WAS

TRANSLATED FROM EARTH TRYUMPHANTLY TO HEAVEN

The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1615-47

18 APRILL ANNO DNI 1625

HAVING SENT BEFORE HER HER DEARE CHILD JOHN D WHOM

SHEE HAD NURSED HER SELFE & BY WHOM SHEE LIETH

BURIED & LEAVING BEHIND HER 2 SONNES & ONE DAUGHTER

VIZ WILLIAM, FRANCIS, AND JOANE DRAKE,

HER HUSBAND LAMENTING HIS OWNE LOSSE

YET REJOYSING IN HER GAINE, DEDICATETH

THIS MONUMENT

Child Brass of John Drake 1619-23 in the Drake Chapel (Source: Amersham Museum)

Inscription Beneath Bust of Sir William Drake (1606-1669)

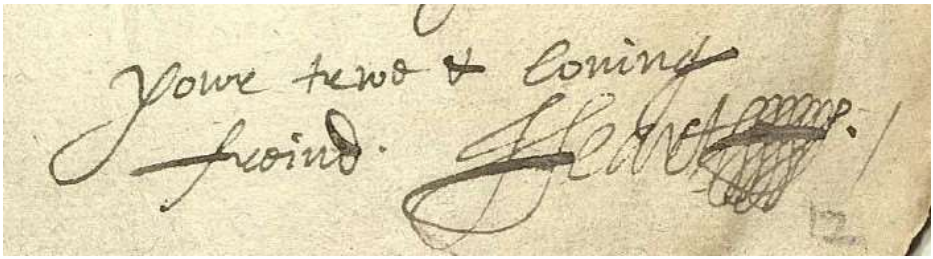
(Translated from Latin)

Joan Tothill, daughter of William and Catherine and wife of Francis Drake (from the ancient family of the Drakes of a not humble village named Ash, originating from Devonshire), was in matrimony, if any woman ever existed, of remarkable character, of uncommon humanity, both by nature and by grace, with exceptional qualities. She was so distinguished in the worship of piety that she was even written about *by a worthy author, no more than a witness*[41]. Her life was renowned, and from her life the book captured the love she had to give. I would say in a word that her life and her holy death were equal; she departed this life at the age of forty, while engaged in heavenly matters, having left behind her husband, two sons, and a single daughter, together with an example by which others might learn both to live and to die.

[41] The Latin reads: 'Idoneo Auctore, non magis quam Teste'.

John Hart's Letters

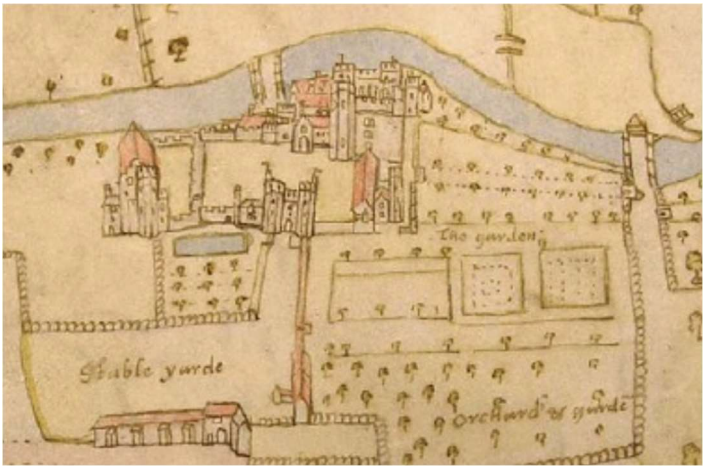
Page from letter to Dr James Ussher from London dated 12th March 1616/17, mentioning Mrs Drake's name, and signed by 'J Heart' (Source: Bodleian library MS. Rawl. Lett. 89 fols. 9r-12r).



Close up of signature, ‘J Heart’ plus a few decorative strokes of his pen.

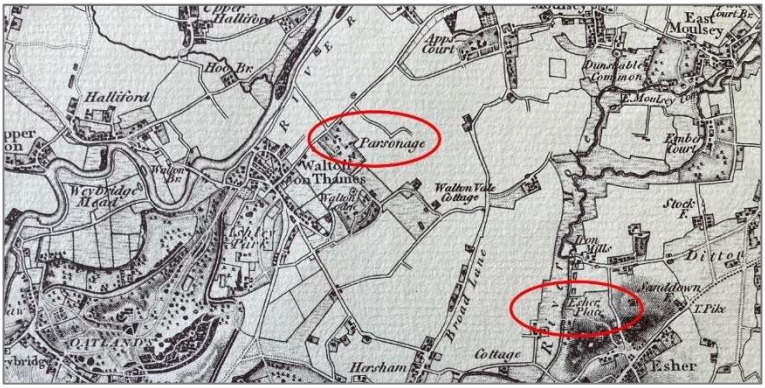
Close up of another decorative stroke of Dr Hart’s pen.

Locations and Maps

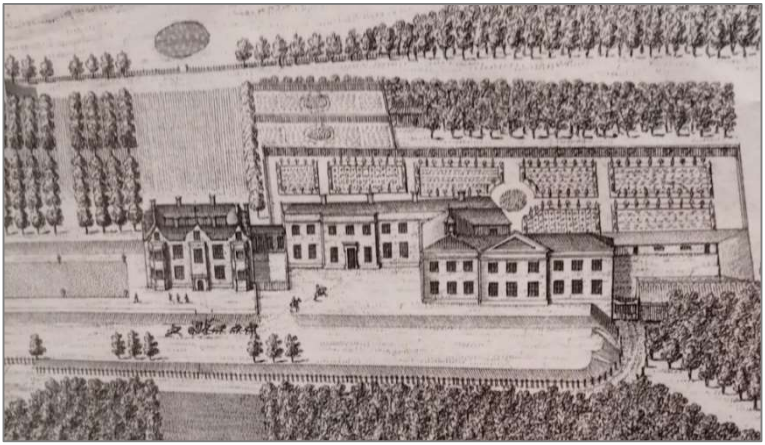


Esher Place 1606 (Treswell's map)

Esher Place reconstruction (Time Team Channel 4 S13 Ep4 2006)



Esher Place and the Parsonage at Walton-on-Thames



Shardeloes; old Tudor building on left (now demolished)

Sources

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About the Author

C.L. Dawson is a local historian from Elmbridge in Surrey. Unsurprisingly, given the proximity of Hampton Court, his preferred periods are the Tudors and Stuarts. He focuses on researching and writing engaging stories involving local people, ideally finding connections where they came into contact with famous faces or key events, and whenever possible using eyewitness accounts from antique books, letters, diaries, pamphlets, and other primary sources.

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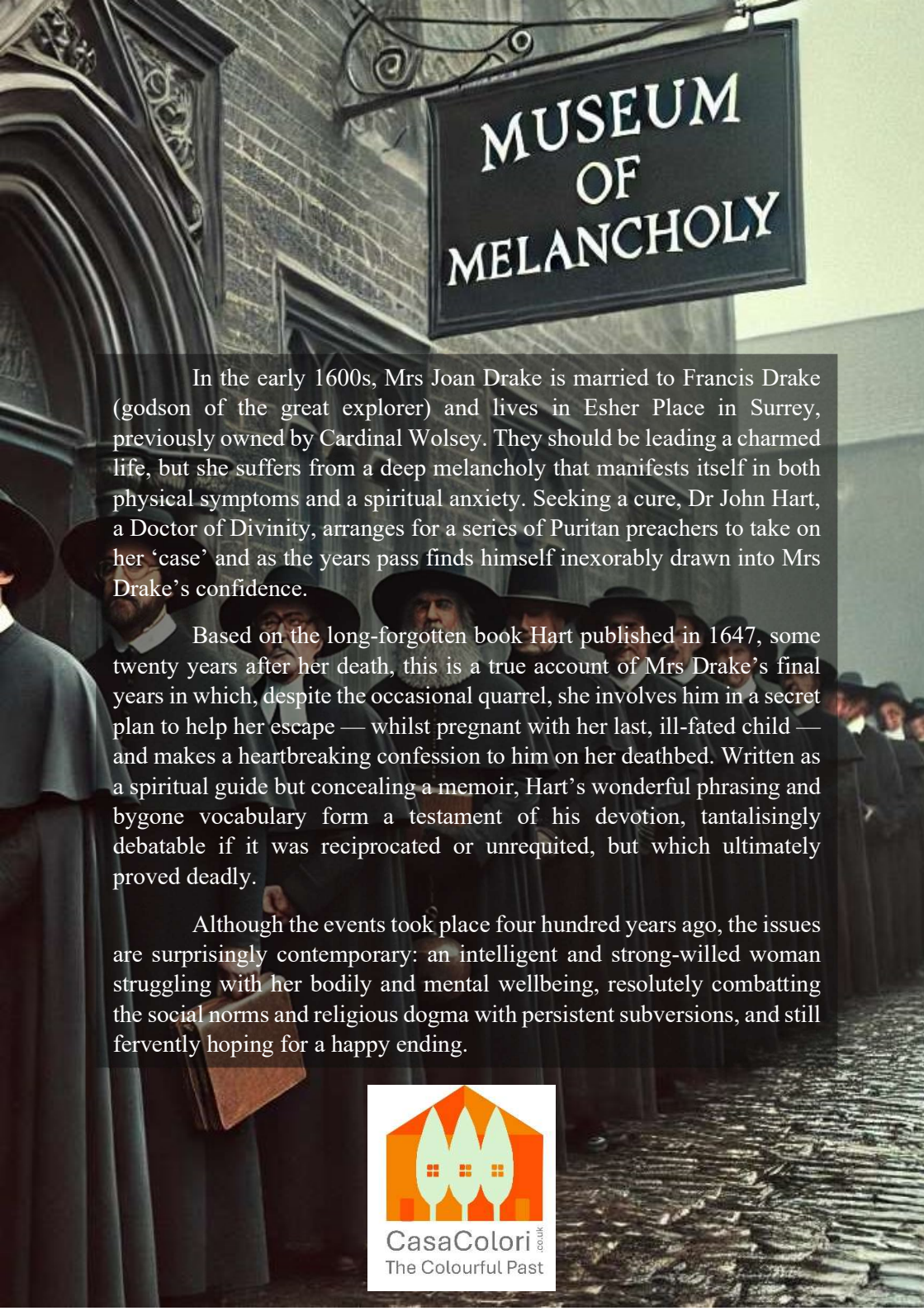

In the early 1600s, Mrs Joan Drake is married to Francis Drake (godson of the great explorer) and lives in Esher Place in Surrey, previously owned by Cardinal Wolsey. They should be leading a charmed life, but she suffers from a deep melancholy that manifests itself in both physical symptoms and a spiritual anxiety. Seeking a cure, Dr John Hart, a Doctor of Divinity, arranges for a series of Puritan preachers to take on her 'case' and as the years pass finds himself inexorably drawn into Mrs Drake's confidence.

Based on the long-forgotten book Hart published in 1647, some twenty years after her death, this is a true account of Mrs Drake's final years in which, despite the occasional quarrel, she involves him in a secret plan to help her escape — whilst pregnant with her last, ill-fated child — and makes a heartbreaking confession to him on her deathbed. Written as a spiritual guide but concealing a memoir, Hart's wonderful phrasing and bygone vocabulary form a testament of his devotion, tantalisingly debatable if it was reciprocated or unrequited, but which ultimately proved deadly.

Although the events took place four hundred years ago, the issues are surprisingly contemporary: an intelligent and strong-willed woman struggling with her bodily and mental wellbeing, resolutely combatting the social norms and religious dogma with persistent subversions, and still fervently hoping for a happy ending.

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