The Museum of Melancholy

The Divine Case of Joan Drake 1585-1625

C.L. Dawson

CasaColori Local History Publications

The Museum of Melancholy:

The Divine Case of Joan Drake 1585-1625

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

C. L. Dawson

Published by: CasaColori 2026

https://casacolori.co.uk/

Contents

Brief Lives 3

Preface: Secular Sentences 4

Part 1: Life and Death 6

Blackfriars Theatre 7

The Unpardonable Sin 12

A Slight Scottish Lilt 24

The Relationship with the Relater 30

The Museum of Melancholy 37

Rapture and Regret 42

Part 2: Afterlife 51

Predestination 52

The Survivors 55

Alternative Medicine 59

Biography, Memoir, Eulogy and Love Letter 65

Afterword: Jasper Heartwell 71

Brief Lives (concluded) 73

Timeline, Family Tree, Memorials, Hart's Letters, Maps 81

Sources 90

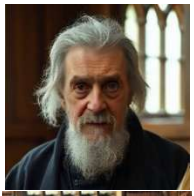
Index 93

Brief Lives[1]

Mrs Joan Drake 1585-1625
Daughter and co-heiress of William Tothill of Shardeloes near Amersham. In 1603, aged 18, she married Francis Drake of Esher with whom she had four children: William, Francis, Joan and John. From 1615, she suffered from melancholy and spiritual anxiety, and her 'case' became widely publicised in the Puritan community.

Francis Drake, Esquire of Esher 1580-1634
Lord of the Manor of Walton-on-Thames, who lived at Esher Place[2] in Surrey. He was the godson of Sir Francis Drake, and a Puritan who supported nonconformist ministers.

Dr John Hart (dates unknown)
A Doctor of Divinity and Puritan, who heard about Joan Drake's struggles in 1616 and orchestrated her cure over a decade, using a network of Puritan divines. He later wrote a spiritual guide, published in 1647, in which he included a memoir of Joan Drake's final years based on his role as her adviser and confidant. Three letters of his, mentioning Joan, also survive.



John Dod 1549-1645
A celebrated Puritan divine, preacher and writer who was noted for his patient and meek manner. He was 'silenced' by church authorities as a nonconformist, and in his late sixties spent several years attempting to cure Joan Drake and others.

William Drake 1606-1669
Eldest son of Francis and Joan Drake who attended Christ Church, Oxford, in 1623-26. In later life, he became Sir William Drake, 1st Baronet of Shardeloes. A large collection of his diaries and commonplace books was discovered at Shardeloes in the 1940s.

[1] No portraits have survived; the images above and throughout are self-created using a range of software tools, including: ChatGPT-4o, Leonardo.ai, and Affinity Photo Editing.

[2] This house was probably known simply as Esher Manor House in Francis's time (Aubrey referred to it as 'Esher House' in the 1670s). The earliest surviving record of the name Esher Place, following modification of the buildings by later owners, is on a 1709 engraving by Johannes Kip. Today's house on the hill is a later building.

Preface: 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 delayed for twenty-two years after the incidents that he related, before he took the manuscript to the printers. This may have been because that same year the last of those closest to Mrs Joan Drake, who might have questioned his version of events, had died.

Editions of Dr Hart's book, reprinted at least into the late eighteenth century, now gather dust deep in the recesses of a few 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 noblewoman, Mrs Joan Drake, living in Cardinal Wolsey's former home in the Surrey countryside four hundred years ago, is not obviously appealing. One might not expect it to 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 (although also tragic) ending. And yet it does. The musty pages reveal the fascinating story of a troubled life, relayed via Hart's wonderful phrasing and forgotten — but colourful and still comprehensible — vocabulary. As such, the work is in fact quite accessible and relatable for the modern reader: amidst the suffering and pathos, there are misunderstandings, dramatic moments and possibly even an unfulfilled love story.

Part 1: Life and Death

Blackfriars Theatre

'…in her thoughts likening him [Mr Dod] unto Ananias, one whom at a play in the Black-Friars she saw scoffed at…'

Before her illness took hold, and its attempted cure became a topic of international interest, Mrs Joan Drake enjoyed many of the pleasures of life available to a well-to-do woman. For example, in the autumn of 1610, she and her husband, Francis Drake of Esher, attended the opening night of 'The Alchemist' by Ben Jonson at the Blackfriars Theatre in London, which was the winter home of the highly reputed acting company, the King's Men. Although somewhat smaller than the company's other theatre, the Globe, the Blackfriars venue had a roof that allowed plays to be performed in all weathers, and its location on the north bank of the Thames, just inside the City walls, meant that

it could attract a more sophisticated audience, with the higher cost of tickets balancing out the lower capacity. 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 Joan 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[3] playing the lead role of the alchemist, and Henry Condell[4] as a character called Surly. Somewhere behind the scenes may have been William Shakespeare[5], as the same troupe was putting on Othello the next day.

Jonson's play was particularly engaging because the action took place in a contemporary setting: in fact, 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 constant movement of characters on and off the small candle-lit stage, which would have required all of the audience's attention as the plot unfolded. The storyline begins 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

[3] Richard Burbage was the most famous actor of the Shakespearean stage, as well as being part owner of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres.
[4]Henry Condell along with John Heminges, another actor from the King's Men, edited the First Folio of Shakespeare's works in 1623.
[5] 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.

the epidemic; a fraudulent alchemist named Subtle; and Doll Common, a woman of dubious repute. These three have devised a scheme to deprive gullible citizens of their wealth, using the age-old lure of the Philosopher's Stone that can turn base metals into gold. Among those seeking riches are a pair of Anabaptists — extreme 'separatist' Puritans[6] — who are interested in purchasing some suitable metallic items at a knock-down price (because they supposedly belong to orphans) to turn into gold, which they plan to use to convert more people to their religious views. The junior Puritan, Ananias[7], is a deacon from Amsterdam whose over-zealous views and behaviour are much mocked. He is dressed in a plain hat and a small ruff, and derides Surly, disguised as a Spanish Don and dressed in the currently fashionable Spanish (and therefore suspiciously Catholic) style, 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 also insists on interrupting and correcting Subtle's language, suggesting he use *'Christ-tide'* instead of *'Christmas'* since 'mass' sounds Popish. The actor playing Ananias[8] would probably have 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 throughout, a great deal of it heaped on the hypocrisy of the rigid and self-righteous Anabaptists as they convince themselves that stealing from orphans and counterfeiting money is entirely within their religious laws, as long as it is done

[6] 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.
[7] 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.
[8] Nicholas Tooley.

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 the Anabaptists could use their ill-gotten gains to address some of the downsides of Puritanism, such as the long-winded church services, and the sense of superiority through being chosen specifically by God as the elect or *'those of us who have the seal'*[9]. He then piles on the irony by hinting that the Puritans might even cease their opposition to the enjoyment of life's pleasures, including their abhorrence of the theatre.

There were many other caricatures on stage, with their vices or trades indicated by their names (such as Sir Epicure Mammon, obsessed with money, gluttony and ways to improve his sexual prowess). However, Jonson's main message was most clearly directed at the Anabaptists (Ananias and his elder pastor, Tribulation Wholesome) — that is that fanaticism and excess of zeal, if not bounded by reason, lead to extremism, corruption, greed, hypocrisy and ultimately self-destruction. Of course, everyone's get-rich-quick plans come to nothing, and towards the end of the play the alchemist's equipment over-heats and explodes off stage with a loud blast, probably giving those seated in the nearby boxes a tremendous shock.

Francis Drake was a convinced Puritan and must have been squirming in his seat with barely suppressed anger at this quite sulphurous satire. He would not have been the only one upset by the attack on his religious beliefs, if the

[9] From the 'seven seals' in Revelation that reveal divine judgment intertwined with redemption

reaction of Henry Jackson[10], who had seen the play performed in Oxford a few weeks previously, is anything to go by. Writing to a friend afterwards, Jackson 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. Joan Drake was twenty-five years old, and those catching a glimpse of her from the wooden benches in the auditorium would have remembered her as 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. She was in her prime, and no one could have foreseen how five years later her life would begin a decade-long downward spiral.

[10] Henry Jackson was a 24-year-old scholar from Corpus Christi College, Oxford; 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'.

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

The Unpardonable Sin

'…but not long after [she] fell out into terrible shrieks & cried out to this purpose, that she was undone, she was damned, and a cast away, and so of necessity must needs go to Hell.'

Being introduced to Mrs Joan Drake in 1615, you would encounter a 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, she would tell you that she was over-indulged as a child, and that she did not agree 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]. One of the reasons for her reluctance may have been simply a lack of attraction, as she admitted that Richard's son Francis was a man *'whom*

[12] Note: Quotes in italics are taken from John Hart's book, or other primary sources, 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 in July 1603, Richard called William, who signed as a witness, 'a friend' and appointed him an overseer.

at first she could not affect'; another may have been his religious fervour, since at that time *'she was not acquainted with the power of godliness'*. 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 his offices, and Fetter Lane, where Richard maintained a London residence.

Further, soon after the wedding, Joan's new husband entered into a lengthy legal battle with the heirs of Sir Francis Drake[14], which threatened the financial security of the household. This is unlikely to have helped to reconcile Joan with her new circumstances. The sudden transition from spoilt child to marriage against her will, along with the pressure of remaining outwardly the obedient and dutiful daughter, probably contributed much to her beginning to feel *'storms and tempests'* in her mind, so that below the façade of mirth she maintained with friends, and the leisure pursuits she sought to take her mind off her marriage woes, she developed a deep sadness. If you were close enough to Joan to perceive her true nature at the time, you might say she that she possessed a melancholic charisma.

It was the birth of her third child, a daughter also named Joan, sometime around 1615[15], that seemed to trigger more sinister symptoms. During the

[14] Legal arguments relating to Sir Francis Drake's will had been going on for some years, but the most significant case unfolded in 1605 at the Court of the Exchequer. The original documents are in the National Archive: Drake vs Drake 1605 (E133/47/3; E133/47/4; E133/47/5); these documents and their underlying stories form the basis for a companion volume to this one: 'Drake vs Drake: The Contested Legacy of a National Hero 1593-1606'. See https://casacolori.co.uk/

[15] The date is based on Dr Hart's statement that Joan's problems began in earnest after her daughter's birth, and that her troubles lasted ten years (she died in 1625). Joan Drake was the only daughter, so this birth presumably was hers, although the date is not recorded. However, this does not fully align with another of Hart's statements where he refers to the birth being 'not long after her marriage'.

delivery she was *'much wronged by the midwife, and she was ever after troubled with fumes and scurvy*[16] *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 Joan's lying-in, as her discontent increased, her mother came to stay at Esher Place, where one night Joan woke up shrieking and screaming that she had committed the Unpardonable Sin[17] 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 reawakened later in an ecstatic mood, saying that an angel had come to her in a dream and assured her of salvation.

[16] Scurvy in its archaic and figurative meaning of unhealthy or vile.
[17] The Unpardonable Sin is the rejection of God, and is also called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

This pattern of religious 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 Joan'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 or appetite when she was awake.

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

Francis Drake's Puritan views probably stemmed originally from his mother's family, the Staffords[18], who had been refugees — Marian exiles — in Geneva with John Calvin[19]. As fate would have it, John Hart, a Doctor of

[18] Sir William Stafford (whose first wife was Mary Boleyn) and Dorothy Stafford. They had the same surname because they were cousins.

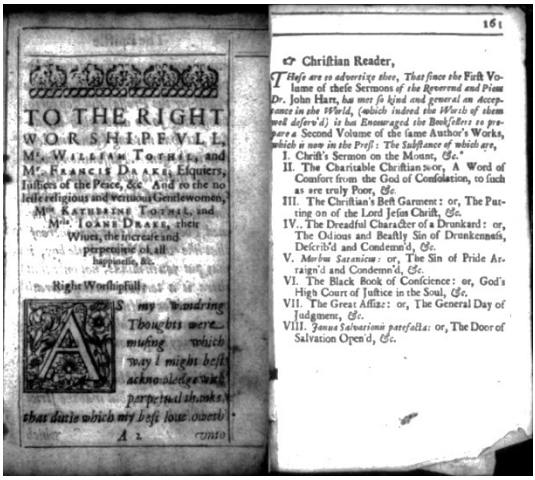
[19] Francis Drake of Esher's mother was born Ursula Stafford. The Stafford family — Sir William and Dorothy, their children Edward (aged 3), Ursula (2), William (1), their servants, and a cousin, Elizabeth Sandys — were listed in 1555 in Geneva in the 'Livre des Anglais' (the English Book). This volume recorded the names of the English community of around 140 households, most of whom had fled to Calvin's Protestant stronghold following the coronation of 'Bloody Mary'. The Staffords' son, John, was born in Geneva in January 1556, with Calvin as godfather. The British version of Calvinism known as the Reformed tradition, was referred to as Puritanism from the early 1560s.

Divinity, had been at a dinner in Isleworth at the home of a Mrs Scudamore[20] when he first heard of Mrs Drake's ill health from a fellow guest, Dr John Burges, a Puritan and physician who had met (and been rejected) by her. In discussion, the name of John Dod[21] 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 perhaps he also saw an opportunity to boost his own reputation and career. The upshot was that when he then discovered that John Dod was in London, he put the proposition to Dod that he should attempt an intervention with Mrs Drake. Dod modestly claimed that it was beyond his powers, but nevertheless agreed to an introduction. Hart next wrote an unsolicited letter from his rooms in Whitefriars to Francis Drake, in which he informed Francis 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 Francis was of a well-regarded Puritan divine noted for his patience, who although in his mid-sixties and having just recovered from serious illness that had almost killed him, was currently free of responsibilities, and also of income, as he had been 'silenced' and barred from public preaching for non-conformity to the Church of England's practices.

John Hart's first literary output dates from this period. "The Burning Bush Not Consumed" was published in 1616, with a dedication to his new patrons: 'To the Right Worshipful Mr William Tothill and Mr Francis Drake,

[20] Lady Scudamore – Mary Throckmorton (c. 1570-1632) – c. 46 in 1616
[21] John Dod (1549-1645) was a celebrated Puritan divine, known as 'Decalogue Dod'.

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, J Hart'. Whether this was published in anticipation of patronage, or in gratitude, is not known.



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,
S my wandring
Thoughts were
muſing which
way I might beſt
acknowledge with
perpetuall thanks
that dutie which my beſt loue oweth
A 2 vnto

161

☞ Chriſtian Reader,

Thoſe are to aduertize thee, That ſince the Fifth Volume of theſe Sermons *of the Reverend and Pious Dr.* John Hart, *hath met ſo kind and general an acceptance in the World, (which indeed the Worth of them well deſerv'd) it hath 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. *Fontes Salvatoris patefacti:* or, The Door of Salvation Open'd, *&c.*

Dr John Hart's first publication in 1616, dedicated to the Tothills and Drakes.

§

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[22]. The cluster of buildings close to the banks of the river Mole, which had once belonged to Cardinal Wolsey, had been visible from the top of the hill as they approached, and as befitted Wolsey's status gave the impression of a

[22] Known as Wayneflete Tower, this is the only part of the old Esher Place that still remains.

compact Tudor palace. There was a four-storey 'castle-like'[23] main building complete with turrets at its core, plus a bishop's chapel[24] surrounded by formal gardens 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, marvelling 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 Joan 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'*.

[23] 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.

[24] Treswell's Esher map of 1606 does show a 'chapel', and according to 'The Accounts for the Manor of Esher in the Winchester Pipe Rolls 1235-1376' Ed David Stones; Surrey Record Society Vol XLVI, published in 2017: '…it is intriguing that it shows a building similar to the purported appearance of the thirteenth-century chapel and set in its own enclosure to the south of the manorial centre.'

It would turn out that, unaware of any visitors, Joan had spotted two sober gentlemen approaching from the windows of the dining room, run up to her bedroom and tried to barricade herself in. John Dod was called for, and as was his custom, he knelt in her presence and began to pray. Hart and Francis Drake did likewise, but Joan 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 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'.*

Over the next few days, the opening positions became clear. Joan Drake's conviction was that she had rejected God, and in doing so was *'a damned Reprobate*[25] *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. 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. 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.

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 Joan confronting

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

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.

The relationship between Joan and Mr Dod, observed at all times by John Hart (or at least, so it would appear from the level of detail relayed in his 1647 book), settled into a pattern. Mr Dod would make speeches and Joan 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 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 Mr Dod took to be *'the Devil changing his posture and weapons'*, he would look pitifully upon her and would never raise his voice.

Alongside these confrontations with the in-house preacher, Dr Hart reveals that Joan was hedging her bets. Behind Mr Dod's 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'*[26] — had any hope of going to Heaven? Nothing was committed to paper; she sent out her waiting-woman, Susannah Garbrand, who she trusted to ask questions using the correct phrasing, and commit to memory the responses. She received much encouragement in this way, which she was careful to keep to herself for succour in trying moments.

The elderly Mr Dod was understandably worn out after a month of unrelieved disputes, and announced that he would be leaving. Joan 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 a first 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 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

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

still at all times poised with his pen, was unable to record the conversation, except that Mr Dod muttered afterwards 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. It was now 1619 and there had been 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'.*

§

Mr Dod now decided that a new approach should be taken. This involved not constantly urging Joan to go to church, but instead going along with wherever 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: up until now Satan appeared to be constantly shape-shifting in response to attacks. Dod reasoned that this would avoid 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'*. This tactic did on occasion appear to work, as Joan's 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'*.

Needing to recuperate once more, Mr Dod resolved to depart for a longer period to give his patient time to ruminate on what had been achieved.

Paradoxically, in his absence (although Hart notes that there were *'divers worthy ministers'* who visited), Joan'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 sometimes 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[27], but instead *'these proved excellent medicines unto her, purging away abundance of black ugly filthy matter, which made her to look much better'*. Naturally her husband and parents were bewildered and alarmed, and therefore sought further help.

[27] 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.

A Slight Scottish Lilt

'Of all my cares, it is one of the principal to procure her peace; therefore it maketh me send everywhere for help unto her.'

Dr Hart does not say in his book 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 a history of the classical world from its creation, as described in Genesis, to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ[28]. Frustratingly, the university library in Dublin contained only forty books, so that Dr Ussher 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, and to purchase or copy rare books and manuscripts. In the course of these journeys we learn that he visited Joan 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, regardless of what 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'*.

[28] 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".

§

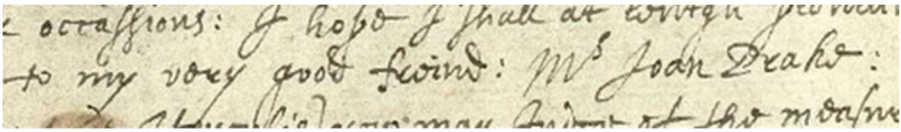
Three years previously, Dr James Ussher had received a letter at Trinity College, Dublin, addressing him as 'Reverend and my loving friend' and chiding him gently for not having replied to the correspondent's previous letters. This time, though, there was a specific request '*which is so great, that 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[29], 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, there was news from mutual friends: Dr Burges had been given permission to preach again; and Mrs Scudamore was to be married. John Rogers of Dedham (whose name will reappear later) was mentioned as someone whose powerful preaching could be of assistance, but '*for divers reasons, it is impossible for ought I know'*. It is immediately apparent to those familiar with Mrs Drake's story (but not all, as can be seen in the Afterword) that the letter writer, who signed himself 'J Heart', and Dr John Hart, are one and the same person.

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

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

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 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 a repeat of his request for help, now with a name attached, as he referred to his '*very good friend Mrs. Joan Drake…for the present, though a little better, yet she continues 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 Dr Hart did not receive the letter until the beginning of July. Hart's further 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.'* Hart's only complaint was that Ussher's letter was not longer.

Presumably, Ussher had confirmed in the March letter his long-awaited visit to England that would start in 1619, as Hart now made no specific mention of Joan Drake's progress, although he noted that Mr Dod had been '*sick even unto death',* but had recovered. As he now knew 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 also further evidence of his ties to Scotland[30], with his calling John Forbes, the minister originally from Edinburgh but resident in Middleburg, *"our countryman*'.

The letter ended with a flourish: '*Therefore, still entreating your prayers, and much wishing your presence, much happiness may still attend you;*

[30] Dr Hart also 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'.

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[sic].'

§

All three letters, the only ones extant between the two men, were preserved among hundreds of others by Ussher's chaplain[31] 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, Joan Drake's name was transcribed as 'Mrs John Drake', Lady Scudamore was variously 'Skidmore' and 'Shedmore', and John Rogers was from 'Dodam'. The 'J. Heart' transcription cited above may explain why the original letters have been classified as being written by a 'J Heartwell' in the Bodleian's catalogue.

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

Dr Hart's letters reveal that, far from being arbitrary ministers that *'the Relater brought to see her and judge her case'*, the divines were for the most part members of a well-connected Puritan network ready and waiting to be called into action on just such an occasion, 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 also begins to expand the scant details about Dr John Hart himself: 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.

The Relationship with the Relater

'...the Relater, that sometime unworthy friend.'

Around this time, Joan Drake relocated to the Parsonage[32] in Walton-on-Thames (which her husband owned) since, she explained, not only did Esher Place hold sad memories, but it was also miserably cold and damp in the winter (apparently, even Cardinal Wolsey had complained of its 'moist and corrupt air'). The Parsonage's other appeal was that as a much smaller house only a few servants were needed, and there was no space for resident divines; Esher was nearby if she felt the inclination, in better weather, to ride her horses.

In the Jacobean society in which Joan lived, after providing children and managing the household, there were few other ways for a wife to express herself emotionally, or find outlets for her intellectual abilities, apart from religious zeal. So she was probably not opposed in principle to the use of divines to direct her spiritual journey. Her recently acquired Puritan leanings, even if initially adopted or adapted to placate her husband, were directed not outward to the world, but inward to her direct relationship with God in everyday life. Quiet prayers and meditations in the home were preferable to the cold church benches, and she had supposed that a close relationship with a divine preacher could be mutually beneficial. She would have companionship, access to deep

[32] Francis Drake was Lord of the Manor of Walton-on-Thames and owned the Parsonage, which appears on all early maps of Elmbridge, so must have been a significant building and estate. The house became known later as Walton Grove, but was demolished in 1973. There was no Manor House as such, and Francis Drake followed his father Richard as tenant at Esher Place, their landlord there being Charles Howard, the absentee Lord of the Manor of Esher. This manorial property of Walton-on-Thames was distinct from the Manor of Walton Leigh, whose timber-framed manor house still stands today. The wills of Francis Drake and his father, together with evidence from a document titled 'Title of Mr Pryce to the manor of Esher Episcopi 1583-1658' (SHC G3/1/36), show that the Drakes held a long lease to the house at Esher Place, but they owned no land in Esher.

knowledge, a ready source of responses to her religious enquiries and concerns, and a constant gauge of her progress towards salvation — it would be almost as if God was walking beside her. In return for the divine's part, she assumed, there was the not insignificant matter of patronage, and if need 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 saw only the Devil in disguise. But she had subsequently discovered that with Dr John Hart she could have conversations on matters that she shared with no-one else, that her notions of self-worth had increased against all odds, and also perhaps that she had developed more intense feelings towards this alternative spiritual adviser than she had expected.

Throughout his text Dr Hart refers 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. But he was by no means a passive actor. From the moment that he first learned of Joan's circumstances, he took the lead, persuading Mr Dod to meet her, writing to her husband, inviting himself into the household, and seeking out other divines. Despite all this activity, he is hard to pin down. We do not know his date of birth, and whether he was a young man in awe of an older Mrs Drake, or of similar age, or an older man who believed he was her mentor, makes a difference to how their relationship is viewed. The evidence is thin since, although some aspects of his character can be gleaned from his letters, Hart gives nothing away in his book except that he was a major presence in Joan's life for almost a decade. He presented himself as a Doctor of Divinity — the most respected doctoral degree — and was able to convince various Puritan

divines to attend Mrs Drake, but he was probably not one himself; he does not appear on lists of prominent Puritan preachers of the time. When he met Joan for the first time, in around 1616, the most that could be said is that he was learned, of a certain standing in Puritan circles, and very persuasive. More likely than not, he was fairly close in age to Joan: between thirty and forty.

There are some noticeable omissions from Dr Hart's account. He rarely mentioned Joan's husband, Francis, apart from noting her lack of affection for him, and registering his bad temper. Although the Drakes had three children when he first met them, and a fourth was born later, how Joan interacted with her offspring was apparently of no interest (William, the eldest, was nine at the beginning of Hart's involvement and nineteen at its untimely conclusion). It is also striking that there are no passing references to Joan's daily responsibilities as wife of the head of household, which may have contributed further to her burdens. In the frequent absences of her husband on business, who was directing the provision of food from the kitchen gardens and livestock, maintaining the accounts, and paying the staff's wages — and intervening in their squabbles or misfortunes — as well as ensuring the comfortable accommodation of the many visitors? Were Joan's shortcomings in these functions expected of a wife, another reason for Francis Drake's frustrations towards her?

Dr Hart's own personal circumstances receive no 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 Joan's side, or did he have independent means? When not in London, was he living at Esher Place or renting rooms nearby? And, most pertinently, what exactly was

his role, when it was Mr Dod (and the other visiting divines) who took on the accepted duties of a chaplain, directing Joan'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 the relationship between Joan Drake and Dr Hart is veiled, but two episodes that he records in his book are particularly intriguing. On one occasion, the pair had clearly been discussing whether Joan 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 responsibilities for her children, so that she could concentrate fully on her physical and spiritual recovery. For this purpose, they agreed that Dr Hart should go, secretly[33], to Essex to enquire whether Mr Rogers of Dedham — known as 'Roaring John Rogers' on account of the *'many wild notes'* of his lecturing[34] — would entertain her at his house.

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

[34] John Rogers's sermons were legendary, and he was akin to a rock star in his time, with people travelling many miles to hear him speak. His approach to 'breaking through the stony heart' of a doubter was to terrify people by 'roaring hideously, to represent the torments of the damned'. Thomas Goodwin, who later became Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, recalled one occasion when he was so overcome with emotion that on leaving Rogers' church, he "was fain to hang a quarter of an hour upon the neck of my horse weeping before I had the power to mount".

With an answer in the affirmative, Joan 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 accompany her, given that he was 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, which Dr Hart acknowledges he could have omitted from his account, but includes because it is an example of the Devil's subtleties, and the *'furthest example of Satan's malice'*. One day, as he and Joan (and an unidentified 'friend' who he may have added for the sake of propriety, since this person took no part in what came next) were walking in the garden at 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 Dr Hart

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. Whilst this may have been a genuine reaction on his part to what he perceived as a blasphemous question, there is no doubting the intensity of their relationship.

It is also worth remarking again on the extreme selectivity of Dr Hart's account, as it is known from the historical record that these incidents — 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 significant event is not mentioned anywhere in Dr Hart's written portrayal.

The Museum of Melancholy

'And now also about this time, came to visit her another worthy minister, whom the Relater brought to see her and judge of her Case.'

Following the argument in the garden 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, Joan *'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 Joan her profanity, Dr Hart arranged for John Forbes to visit: *'...another worthy Minister, whom the Relater brought to see her and judge her case'.* Forbes, the pastor for the Merchant Adventurers in Middelburg in the Low Countries, concluded 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 appeared to Francis Drake that his wife was now becoming an exhibit of international repute in a museum of melancholy.

Francis might therefore have welcomed the familiar face of Mr Dod, who returned with yet another new approach that he had discussed with God during his absence. This time, he had three objectives which, in stages, he believed would lead to Joan's 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. On her first visit to St. Mary's Church in Walton-on-Thames, Joan was taken to hear the rector, Dr Gibson, 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 Joan 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, however, 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 Joan 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 you were reprieved and given the chance to live for a further ten or twenty years, would you 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 suspicion, since she was resolved to live so long as God would permit her.

Such was the notoriety of Joan's case, and of 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 to the Devil, that was *'worthy to be written in letters of gold'*, and that he copied out in full. The final part read: *'The Lord pour his comfort and grace in[to] her weak heart, that she may*

find and feel the sweetness of the things we write of, and from her feeling to give God the praise of his glory, and of her victory, which I am sure to be most certain in God's good time.'

§

By 1620, after four 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. Joan 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[35], agreeing to a *'poor living of forty pounds per annum'*, somewhat alleviated by being given food and lodgings at Esher Place; Joan 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 Joan's disposition brought on 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

[35] 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 nonconformist, did not have to present himself and swear an oath, and Francis Drake had influence over his selection.

admitted that he *'long had a soul harassed with such distresses'.* 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 Joan's waiting-woman, Susannah Garbrand, at Shardeloes, and left to take up the position of Lecturer at a church in Chelmsford after a couple of years[36]. From having a constant foil to her weaknesses, available day or night, Joan was then reduced to visits once a week on Thursdays to the local minister, Mr Wetherell[37] of Walton-on-Thames.

During this miserable interlude, did Dr Hart not step forward again to provide solace? Perhaps because he had been overlooked for the role of chaplain, or their relationship had cooled as she basked in the reflected glow of Mr Hooker, John Hart is for once silent.

[36] The will of Elizabeth Wheeler of Esher in December 1622 includes a bequest to the Curate, Thomas Hooker.

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

Rapture and Regret

'You must forgive me that I have been so unkind unto you, who for so many years together have shown me so much love, and been a means of my everlasting comfort and happiness…'

For the last section of his book, Dr Hart moves the action forward four years, like the denouement scene in a play. In doing so he skips over, unmentioned, the death of John Drake at the age of three, in 1623, and provides no indication of how this might have affected Joan, although given her fragility and lack of spiritual support, much 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 who is at fault, but it is clear that whilst he still kept a watchful eye on her during this period, it was from a distance.

By early 1625 Joan was bedridden, and convinced that she was dying. She told her husband that she wanted her final days to be spent at her parents' house, Shardeloes near Amersham, and was determined to leave Esher as soon as possible. When he demurred with the excuse that he had business to finish, she took two servants and left. Soon, Dr Hart heard reports that Joan 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 Joan explained that she had much she wanted to say, and little time left in which to say it.

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

Sunday 10th April 1625

Joan forbade her remaining children (William who was nineteen, Francis about fifteen and Joan aged ten) to go to church, as she could not be certain that she would last another week and wanted to prepare them for her death. She expounded scripture to them from memory, and gave them her blessing.

Monday 11th April 1625

Joan spent the day in conference with Mr Dod, but it was not like the old times because she was the one 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 Tothills' manor house were *'strangely interrupted'* by otherworldly shrieks from Joan'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?'

Whatever was the vision that Joan 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 such 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, honed, and revised, Dr Hart indicates to the reader where he had obtained the permission to write his book. He reports that Joan 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.'[38]

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, which 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

[38] Schmidt cites this as an example of the 'Puritan conversion narrative' to be copied and cultivated. See: Schmidt, Melancholy and the Care of the Soul. p. 74.

Psalm[39] 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 out of bed and dressed entirely in white *'like a bride'* from head to toe. Turning to her mother, Joan 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.

Joan 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, apparently 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 Joan 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 her. He protested that instead it was she that should forgive him, as he had failed both in his duty and love for her.

[39] 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).

She said: *: 'You must forgive me that I have been so unkind unto you, who for so many years together have shown me so much love, and been a means of my everlasting comfort and happiness; 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 simply 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 in so far as it could be, and Dr Hart was dismissed.

Thursday 14th and Good Friday 15th April 1625

Dr Hart's prose becomes quite poetic as he describes 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[40] 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 Joan might be given some potions to make her sleep, there having now been 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 Joan, 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 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.

[40] Archaic meaning: Mysterious; unfamiliar.

In the afternoon, Joan Drake asked for the three churchmen 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 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 Joan 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 Joan 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 himself spoke during the service, 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 is meant by this last observation becomes clear on further consideration; i.e. 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, if melancholic, temperament that 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'.*

§

Carved in marble on Joan's memorial[41] her husband chose to reveal that, in another challenge to convention, she had nursed her youngest son John herself, and that they were entombed together.

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

Part 2: Afterlife

Predestination

Whether it was the prime cause of her melancholy, or a contributory factor, Mrs Drake's spiritual angst had created an awkward predicament for those attempting a cure. The Puritans took the doctrine of Predestination from Calvin, which stated that God 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 was barred from access to salvation and sentenced to eternal hellfire (the 'reprobates')[42]. The major conundrum arising from Predestination was this: how could anyone know for certain if they were among 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 presumably be somewhat distraught. For this latter group, the only recourse was to conform to the Puritanical beliefs and practices in the hope 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? Understandably, such a situation caused great anxiety for many adherents, but especially those of a melancholic

[42] Predestination developed in reaction to the Catholic position that a sinner could gain salvation by penance or paying for an indulgence. The argument was that only a small percentage of people would be saved, sometimes said to be as few as one in a thousand.

disposition, who were most likely to be thrown into a deep, even suicidal, despair that could easily provoke physical symptoms unresponsive to the rudimentary medicine available. It will be seen, in fact, that Joan Drake's spiritual angst was not quite as unique as Dr Hart maintained.

The irony in Joan's case was that she did not appear to be particularly religious before her marriage, but the more divines she was presented with, or sought out, then the more she learned of Puritan theology and the relevant biblical passages, and she also learned how to exploit their weaknesses. Dr Hart observed that she became adept at backing up her arguments with various passages from the Bible that she had come across whilst apparently randomly *'tumbling and tossing'* over the scriptures — an act that like a game of chance would have been perceived as heresy by the divines — and finding chapters and verses wherever her finger happened to alight, supporting her propositions. The challenge, therefore, for the divines involved — Mr Dod in particular — had been how to proceed in the face of such a fiercely held and argued belief in her own damnation, and from an obviously intelligent and charismatic woman who might serve as an example to others? Their aim was to turn her doubt into a positive sign by attributing her anxiety and counterarguments to the Devil's wiles and insisting that to suffer was a sign of God's love, and thus to prepare her in the best possible way for her salvation. Their remedy mainly took the form of a rudimentary 'talking cure', but one that involved unrelenting scrutiny and religious pressure to conform. Once possession by the Devil was assumed, all of Joan's words and deeds had been interpreted by those closest to her on this basis, and her own being was lost. Her parents, husband, children, servants, neighbours and friends, as well as the divines who put forward this diagnosis,

all looked past her. This must have been hard for her to take in, and it is no wonder that her hold on sanity began to dissolve. The strategies she had available to fight for the survival of her selfhood were limited. With no other recourse, she had to rely on her own ingenuity to face her challenges, which she achieved via persistent subversions of authority that were still within her control. She defied Mr Dod with dramatic distractions, found rebuttals to his pronouncements, and sent out her maid to seek alternative arguments that she could use. She refused to take the sacrament or sing uplifting psalms. She formulated a determined, if impracticable, plan to escape, and 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.

In the end, when living became untenable, psychosis was a natural response to Joan's disconnection from reality. The divines had tried for a decade to pull her back to the path of salvations, while Joan's despair threatened on many occasions to cross over into blasphemy, so of course they hailed her visions of Christ as a sign from God that she was after all, one of the elect. 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?'* The news of this joy spread by word of mouth, and letters, to become a cornerstone of Hooker's theology, and also the 'perpetual monument' of Hart's account.

But it could all have all turned out quite differently.

The Survivors

Despite the rejoicing at the timely vision before her death, the 'cure' had been a disaster for Joan Drake personally, in that she did not live to enjoy God's grace for a longer period, or to witness, in better health, her remaining children grow into adulthood. Dr Hart was not to know (or perhaps became aware only much later) that there were other women who had survived similar experiences, even under the guidance of Mr Dod, and lived on quite happily.

When Mr Dod 'retired' from Joan's case around 1619, worn out by three years of intense scriptural arguments, one might have expected him to return home to Northamptonshire to recuperate. Instead, selflessly and/or reluctantly, he ministered to Lady Judith Isham of Lamport Hall who was also suffering from religious melancholy. As with Joan Drake, Lady Isham's account is known via a secondary source, in this case her daughter Elizabeth Isham who was writing her autobiography in 1638. Remembering her mother's illness some twenty years before, she began with the phrase *'my mother began to be something sad'*. There are remarkable similarities: Judith Isham was a sickly woman, often confined to her bedroom; she suffered from a spiritual anxiety and was *'tempted with blasphemous thoughts also of hardness of heart in concealing her wickedness, doubtings and great distrust of Gods mercies'*; and the experience with Mr Dod was not without its problems, as Elizabeth wrote *'I am not of their opinion who extol Mr Dod above all others'*[43]. The differences

[43] This sentiment may also have been due to Mr Dod's close involvement in Elizabeth's own undesired marriage arrangements at the age of eighteen. Despite this negative view, a list of the books in her library

were that Judith Isham was never suicidal or delusional, and also that she apparently kept a notebook of remembrances detailing the self-examination of her suffering, which is no longer extant but was used by her daughter as a reference. The most jarring contrast, though, is that with the help of her religious adviser, the comfort of friends and the written reflections on her experience, she made a full recovery and lived for a further six years. Her daughter wrote: *'I can no better express my mother's troubles than out of the notes of her own hand-writing, which she kept as remembrances and instructions to herself: how horribly low she was, the Lord leaving her, as it were, to herself [and] the vile visions and outrages, the sinful words the which the tempter did assault her weakness.'* Judith Isham also died in 1625, so John Dod may have attended two funerals of his 'cases' that year.

A few years earlier, in 1606-7, Dionys Fitzherbert — a young woman in her mid-twenties employed as a lady-in-waiting in the Puritan household of the Countess of Huntingdon at Ashby de la Zouch castle in Leicestershire — suffered a period of religious anxiety that she termed a spiritual battle for her soul. Initially a self-inflicted illness, resulting from a faux pas of which she felt ashamed, this evolved into a conviction (like Joan Drake's) that she was damned after having committed the unpardonable sin against God. This led to blasphemous ravings and hallucinations, in which she became suicidal and felt that her body was breaking apart. But she too slowly recovered. After having been confined to her room for a month, she was cared for first by a Dr Carter and his wife in London until the delusions receded, then was sent home to her

made in 1649 included John Dod's 'A plain and familiar exposition of the Ten Commandments', as well as works by Dr John Preston.

family in Oxfordshire, and finally to the peace and quiet of Wales, where normality returned. Like Judith and Elizabeth Isham, she wrote down her experiences in an autobiographical form, partly to offer support and comfort (as Joan Drake also wished) to those in similar circumstances. There were other tensions influencing Dionys Fitzherbert's behaviour that chime with Joan's story, such as the question of marriage causing family conflict, financial worries, and the constraints of social conventions for independently minded women.

We cannot know today whether Joan Drake had some physical health condition that could have contributed to her early death. Her symptoms could have been caused by any of a number of disorders, and even at the time it was recognised that chronic health conditions and psychological problems were linked and impacted each other. It is also clear that in comparison to the survivors mentioned here, other factors may have contributed to her predicament, such as the absence of 'peace and quiet' and the lack of a comforting circle of friends. Dr Hart mentions only three women who had a role in supporting Joan through her suffering: her mother, Mrs Tothill; Sarah Harris, a gentlewoman and 'cousin'[44]; and Susannah Garbrand, her waiting-woman. The impression is that Joan did not have close female companions of her own age, or that they had fallen by the wayside as a result of her troubles.

However, in late 1622, Elizabeth Wheeler of Esher made her will,[45] in which she bequeathed 'to my loving friend Mrs Joan Drake, the wife of Francis

[44] In this period 'cousin' had a broader meaning, and could refer to any familial relationship, especially when unclear, or simply friendship.
[45] The will of Elizabeth Wheeler of Esher was made on 9th December 1622, and proved on 11th November 1623. Francis Drake was a witness. (TNA 11/142/498)

Drake Esquire, my needlework cushion made with flowers called water flowers'. So Joan may not have been so alone in her suffering; it is possible to picture her sitting in bed, perhaps still using the needlework cushion — with its floral pattern imitating the water lilies on her precious pond garden beyond the orchards at Esher Place — and reminiscing about the times she had spent in the company of her recently departed friend.

But this friendship had not been enough to save Joan. There were, though, other approaches to treating melancholy, much closer to home than she could have imagined, that might have proved more beneficial.

Alternative Medicine

How does a mother's long-term disorder affect her children? How did the absence of Mrs Drake's love, or more precisely her disinterest, leave its mark?

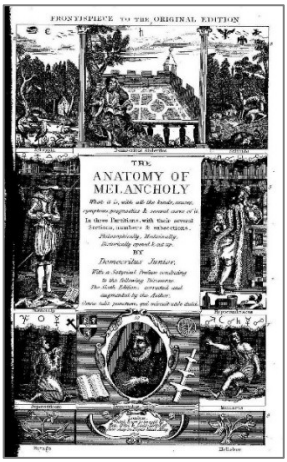
William Drake emerged from a blighted childhood as a serious and bookish young man. His education seems to have taken place partly in Amersham, presumably residing at least in term-time with his grandparents at Shardeloes, since his tutor was Charles Croke, rector of Agmondisham[46], who had gained a Doctorate of Divinity from Christ Church, Oxford. This link probably helped William to be accepted at the same college, and William arrived at Christ Church to begin his studies at the beginning of the Michaelmas Term in autumn 1623, at the age of seventeen[47]. He would have been aware, having been brought up in Esher Place, the former home of Cardinal Wolsey, that he 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.

The college library, where William Drake spent many hours indulging his quest for knowledge, was housed in the former monastic refectory on the south side of the cloister adjacent to the Cathedral. William would have come to know the college librarian, a Church of England minister by the name of

[46] Agmondisham is an old name for Amersham.
[47] The Dean of Christ Church, Oxford recorded a Drake 'gentleman' in his registry for the 1623/4 academic year.

Robert Burton. This gentleman was a scholarly, solitary and celibate figure in his late forties, absorbed almost entirely in his books and his writing, in whom William 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.

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 this volume, despite not possessing a medical background, he had elaborated with great apparent authority, a fulsome history of melancholy: its types, causes and cures.



Burton had begun this work 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. He concluded 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, bereavement, and other stresses, even scholarly pursuits (over-learning). He noted how attitudes to the condition had changed across time, from it being a sign of madness, to 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, which promoted introspection in order to alter thoughts and behaviours. In addition to the accepted methods of blood-letting and purging, Burton's list of cures, unusually

for his time, were practical and holistic, treating the person and 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 could contribute much to recovery through avoidance of 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 both excessive zeal, and neglect of religious duties, but find comfort in prayer and rituals.

Burton seemed to consider his book as a work in progress and was constantly adding to it, so that the first edition of 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 show real awareness of, and speak directly to, his readers.

§

A little more than three hundred years later, in 1943, 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, Joan's father, but in the mid-1970s they were definitively attributed to her son William.

In the notebooks, known as ‘commonplace books’, Wiliam had 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 and its practical application, 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.

William approached marriage, and women generally, in a similarly detached 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 saw 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 his newly discovered 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. One can only wonder what he thought of it, and whether he associated the subject matter with his mother, who might have benefited from Burton's alternative medicine.

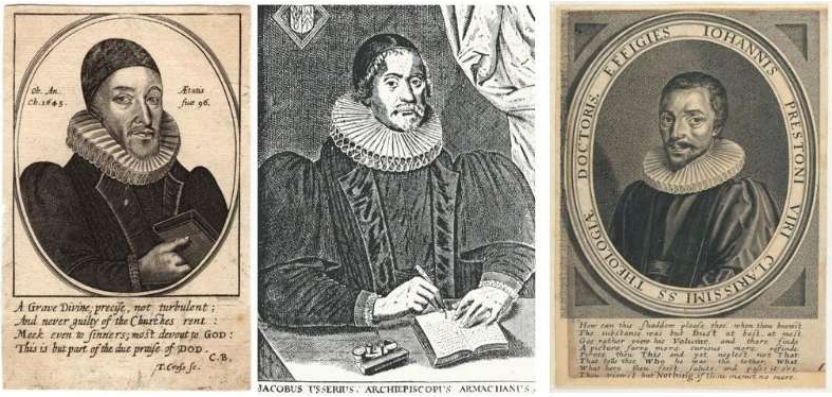
Biography, Memoir, Eulogy and Love Letter

Joan Drake's deathbed confession to Dr Hart suggests that she had developed intense feelings for him. The guilt from this may have added to her anxiety. Even if he was inwardly elated (despite the circumstances), upon reflection he may have come to the view that an emotional relationship was the natural outcome of their time spent in close proximity, discussing matters of great personal import, which broke down the otherwise strict gender (and possibly class) barriers. Through his extensive contacts, Dr Hart may have known of others in a similar situation, such as Ezekiel Rogers, chaplain to Lady Joan Barrington (c.1558–1641) who wrote to her: 'You were the first with whom I had any so serious and solemn converse about matters tending to the work of grace... I have therefore good cause to have you in my choicest remembrance… I must not, I cannot forget those times, when the Lord working powerfully on your soul, made you (in seeking my poor help) an occasion of much quickening and benefit to me.' The letter also reveals that Lady Barrington also had mental struggles: 'I hope that your old disease of melancholy is banished away by faith, as it is high time.'

Perhaps, in light of this, Dr Hart began his book as a spiritual guidebook but in reminiscing it became something else: a biography, a memoir, and a eulogy that reads in places like a recollection of a lost love. His stated aim was to help others suffering from spiritual anxiety, but he chose to include so many personal details about Joan, which she had recounted to him on their walks or horse rides together, or which he had observed as an eyewitness: her upbringing;

her character and appearance; feelings about her marriage; an episode of domestic violence; her physical ailments; her suicidal thoughts; an expression 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?

His book 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 partial 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."



John Dod; James Ussher; John Preston

Dr Hart called his work a ‘Tragic-Comedy’. In the meaning of the period, this was not a mixture of tragedy and comedy (for there was little light relief in Joan’s story) but a play that had a serious theme throughout, yet a happy ending. Given his professed urgency to spread the message of hope to doubters, the date of first publishing his account of Joan Drake is puzzling. Why did he hesitate so long after her death — fully twenty-two years — and then publish initially under a pseudonym? Was it because he waited until all of those most closely involved had died and could not question his version of events: Francis Drake in 1634; John Dod in 1645; and Thomas Hooker in 1647, the same year that Dr Hart’s book first appeared in Mr Pilkington’s bookshop?

§

The serendipity of history has provided two written sources of evidence of Joan Drake’s later life and her relationship with her loyal spiritual adviser. The letters to Dr Ussher testify that Dr John Hart’s intentions — to help her find peace — were, at least initially, virtuous and beyond reproach; but his book, a

treasure trove of literary eyewitness detail, unwittingly exposes the reality that her untimely death was at least in part an unintended consequence of the all-engulfing cure for which, with the backing of her husband and parents, he placed himself front and centre, orchestrating proceedings. He had tapped into the close-knit community of like-minded souls in the counties around the capital and in the midlands, who were dismayed at the ungodly ways of the world, and wished for a more direct conversation with God, unhindered by the man-made church hierarchy where superstitious practices still lingered. Such people set up their own congregations and marvelled at the dramatic and uplifting sermons of preachers, like John Rogers, who were learned men trained at the great universities in scripture, grammar, logic and rhetoric, and who refused to conform to the royal proclamations aimed at creating uniform standards and practices within the Protestant church. For this they were often 'silenced' by the authorities, with many of them, such as John Dod and Thomas Hooker, losing their tenures and incomes and being forced to find patronage from Puritan sympathisers amongst the gentry families, such as the Drakes and the Ishams. This network of contacts was maintained by meetings over dinner in various safe houses, attended by the likes of Dr John Burges and Ezekiel Culverwell, and by correspondence with supportive senior figures within the mainstream church, such as Bishop James Ussher or Dr John Preston, where points of doctrine were debated, news was shared and help requested, as it was by Dr John Hart for Joan Drake. Locally, there were conforming local ministers willing to offer a non-judgmental ear, such as Mr Wetherell or Dr Gibson. By these means, the details of Joan's case spread far and wide, attracting visitors, such as John Forbes (exiled from Scotland and resident in Holland), and advice by post, such as from another Scotsman, Robert Bruce. For a decade she was

the embodiment of one of the Puritans' thorniest issues, the worst case of a seeming epidemic of religious melancholy. Hers was a cure that had to succeed because otherwise the Puritan network, and its foundational tenets, would have been seen to fail. There was joy, not despair, during Joan's final days.

In Dr Hart's defence, one could argue that Joan was beset by a whole range of insuperable problems: physical illness; mental troubles and spiritual anxiety; dislike of her husband; worry over their financial woes; distress over her inability to uphold the duties of a good wife and manage the household; suspicion of Puritanism but beset by its daily burdens; the quandary, and guilt, over her feelings for John Hart; and the heartbreak of the loss of her precious last child. But the fervent presence of so many divines, over so many years, and the constant psychological pressure to conform to their demands, was surely not conducive to her wellbeing. Yet, if she could not write her own autobiographical remembrances and instructions to achieve some form of comfort, she was at least fortunate to have Dr Hart as a spiritual adviser and confidant, who faithfully noted everything down. Thus, most poignantly for posterity, in addition to the main religious message of his text, we are privileged to observe, as he did, her struggles and coping mechanisms, and to relive the complex and intriguing intimacy of their relationship.

*****

Afterword: Jasper Heartwell

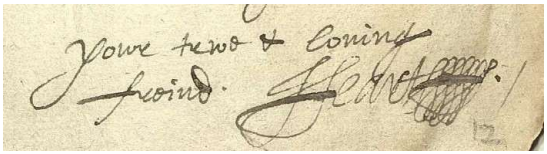
John Hart's book, and the memoir of Mrs Joan Drake that it contains, is little known today and is mainly cited briefly in academic circles as a case study of religious melancholy. The only publication that has attempted a broader analysis is a two-part article 'Called by thy name, leave us not: The case of Mrs. Joan Drake'[48] by George Huntston Williams (1914-2000) from 1968. Williams was a noted theology professor who held the Hollis Chair of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School between 1963 and 1980. He was less interested in Joan Drake's life story than in how her case influenced the pastoral career of Thomas Hooker, who became a prominent figure amongst New England Puritans. Whilst the article's first section provides a useful overview of key passages for anyone who has not read the original, the second part — in which Williams dramatically unveils the 'identity' of the Relater — that has created some confusion. Williams took the Bodleian's classification of 'J Heartwell' at face value and began to search the Jacobean archives, alighting on Jasper Heartwell, a young law student[49] at Middle Temple, whose family were from Preston Deanery in Northamptonshire, conveniently close to John Dod's ministry at Canons Ashby. He then proceeded to provide the logical basis to support his proposition, by eliminating all other options as author, namely: Francis Drake; Joan Drake's father or mother; Mr Dod, or one of the other attending ministers; a close relative; a woman, possibly a waiting-woman; or a physician.

[48] George Huntston Williams, 1968. Called by thy name, leave us not: The case of Mrs. Joan Drake, a formative episode in the pastoral career of Thomas Hooker in England. Harvard Library Bulletin XVI (2), April 1968: pp. 111-128; Harvard Library Bulletin XVI (3), July 1968: pp. 278-300.

[49] Williams notes that Jasper Heartwell was not being admitted 'generally' (where the age would typically be 16) but 'specially', in which case he was probably a year or two older.

Continuing with what looks like substantial 'confirmation bias', Williams downplayed evidence to the contrary. He called the identification of John Hart as author by George Thomason[50] — the respected contemporaneous expert on pamphlets — a 'faulty seventeenth-century ascription'; assumed that a young law student could have somehow already established the volume of contacts across the close-knit Puritan network, and the religious authority to ask for support; ignored the fact 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 Heartwell would still have been a schoolboy; and passed over without comment the jaunty tone of the letters, which clearly indicates friendship between men of similar age, status and religious education. Then there is the existence, unmentioned by Williams, of that other work by John Hart, the 'Burning Bush', published in 1616 with a dedication to the Drakes and Tothills.

However, all of these arguments are secondary since a mistake had been made by those classifying the letters at the Bodleian. The originals (which Williams understandably never saw as he was based on the other side of the Atlantic) clearly show that the signature is 'J Heart' plus a few decorative strokes of the pen, and definitely not 'J Heartwell'.



[50] George Thomason (d. 1666) was a bookseller and publisher based in St Paul's Churchyard, who began collecting copies of all books, pamphlets, and newssheets printed after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1641. By 1661, his collection consisted of over 22,000 publications. It is now held in the British Library.

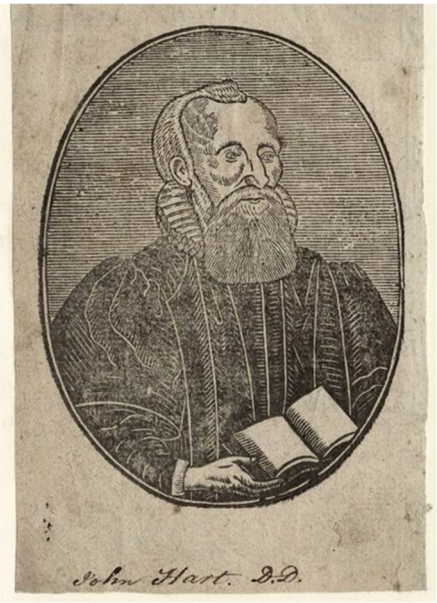
Brief Lives (concluded)

Dr John Hart (spiritual adviser and confidant)

At some unknown date, a Latin inscription dedicated to Joan Drake was added beneath the bust of her son William in the Drake Chapel in St Mary's church in Amersham. This confirmed some genealogical details: 'she departed this life at the age of forty, whilst engaged in heavenly matters, having left behind her husband, two sons, and a single daughter'. It also referred to the book written by 'a worthy author' which was qualified with the phrase 'no more than a witness'. Was this meant to imply a widespread belief that the Relater was, in fact, more than just an observer? And who commissioned the plaque?

John Hart's 1647 book was not the end of his literary career: he was responsible for a number of other later publications[51], 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'. Apart from this, no other facts are known about his life, not even the dates of his birth and death, and whether he ever married.

[51] As researched in the EEBO-TCP corpus consisting of the works represented in the Early English Books Online collections known as Short Title Catalogues I and II (based on the Pollard & Redgrave and Wing short title catalogues respectively), as well as the Thomason Tracts and the Early English Books Tract Supplement collections. Together these trace the history of English thought from the first book printed in English in 1475 through to 1700.



John Hart as an older man, from a frontispiece of a book

Francis Drake (husband)

Francis Drake remarried twice, firstly to Philadelphia Davies with whom he had a daughter, Mary, born in 1630; and then to Anne White. He pursued a parliamentary career until his death in 1634. In his will, he left the Manor of Walton-on-Thames to his younger son Francis, on the basis that William had already been well provided for by inheritance from the Tothills. William was instead offered 'the pictures in the gallery at Esher at his choice with the largest hangings in the great chamber there and other furniture.' Amongst other bequests he left £30 to 'Joan Hooker who lives in New England at her marriage' (Thomas Hooker's daughter), and £10 to John Dod.

William Drake (eldest son)

When John Hart's book was published in 1647, her eldest son, now Sir William Drake, 1st Baronet of Shardeloes, was aged forty-one and reputedly in Italy (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. He told those who queried his decision that it was for health reasons, and indeed he had never possessed the deportment of a soldier. He returned to England at the Restoration in 1660, and died unmarried in 1669.

Francis Drake (younger son)

Unlike his brother, Francis (or 'Frank' as he was known) Drake of Walton-on-Thames was an active Parliamentarian MP during the Civil War. Locally, he was best known for harassing the Diggers who had set up an encampment on common land on St George's Hill in 1649, where he organised attacks in an attempt to drive them away. He married three times, the first of which gave him connections with the Verney family, now famous for the survival of more than 30,000 family letters from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In one of these, Lady Mary Verney wrote to her husband in 1648 about Frank Drake that: 'there is no trust to be given to anything he says, for he is one day so kind and the next so churlish that there is no dealing with him and he has not kindness to anybody but for his own ends.' The proliferation of loans received against his manor, and subsequent court records over several decades, suggest that he was not careful with money, which was confirmed by a spell in a debtor's prison. In William Drake's will, he referred to his younger sibling as 'my unfortunate brother', who lived only for one more year, dying in 1670.

Joan Drake (only daughter)

Whilst Mrs Drake appeared to dote on her ill-fated youngest son, John, there is no evidence for how she felt about her only daughter, Joan, whose birth she maintained was the cause of the escalation of her illness. Aged around nineteen, the younger Joan married John Parker, a London haberdasher, in St Ann, Blackfriars on the 28th May 1634, soon after the death of her father, with the support of her two brothers, William and Frank, who signed a 'mutual agreement' with the bride and groom on the same day. It is tempting to envisage Dr Hart, still resident in nearby Whitefriars, in attendance.

John Parker died a little more than five years later, in August 1639, and it is from his will[52] (and Boyd's 'Citizens of London and Family Units') that the family background emerges. He was married previously to Bridget, who died in 1630, and seven births were recorded in the parish church of St Pancras to them. Of these only a daughter, also named Bridget (born in 1629) survived to witness his second marriage. John Parker also had four daughters with Joan: Sarah (born in 1635), Joan (1636), Mary and Elizabeth.

John Parker had connections with New England where a brother, James, was living with his family. There must have been talk in the household of joining them in the New World, as he began his will with the words: "for my burial, I cannot tell whether I shall die in England, at sea or beyond the seas." Another of John Parker's brothers, Joseph, left a will in 1642 in London, in which his five nieces (John's daughters) received a bequest of £50 each. Amongst other relatives and in-laws, there is no mention of Joan Parker (née

[52] See Genealogical Gleanings in England, by Henry F. Waters vol.2; published by Princeton University, 1901. p. 578.

Drake). It would appear that she died sometime between 1639 and 1642, only reaching her mid-twenties.

John Dod (her longest serving divine)

Already a holy man highly regarded amongst reformists for his learning and preaching, John Dod's reputation only increased as he aged. He had written his most famous work 'A Plain and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments' in 1615, which gave him a nickname that would stick: Decalogue Dod. Quotes from his books and sermons were later collected into another volume, 'The Celebrated Sayings of Old Mr Dod', and it was common practice for ordinary people to remove pages and paste them onto the walls of their cottages as inspiration.

During the Civil War Mr Dod's house in Canons Ashby was raided three times by Royalist forces, who ransacked his belongings — on one occasion including the sheets of the bed on which he was lying — and threatened to end his life, to which he professed to be unconcerned: 'if you do, you will send me to heaven, where I long to be.' When he eventually died, in 1645 at the age of ninety-six, he was feted by great men, including Archbishop James Ussher who declared 'I desire that when I die my soul may rest with his.'

Dr James Ussher (frequent visitor)

In 1625, as Mrs Drake lay dying, Dr Ussher was appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, the most senior position in the Church of Ireland. For some, this would have been a life's ambition, but Ussher had an

obsession, which was to write a Christian history of the world, from creation to the death of Christ. His initial goal was, therefore, to calculate the precise date and time when God created the heavens and the earth — by adding up all of the genealogical information in the Bible; putting a precise figure on the gap of indeterminate length between the Old and New Testaments; and cross-referencing mentions of historical events or celestial phenomena — which resulted in what became known as 'Ussher's Chronology'. In this map of time, the universe began at 6 o'clock in the evening on the 22nd October 4004 BC.

The rest of his great book, "The Annals of the World", remained to be researched and written, but luck (or God) was not always on his side. He was in London in 1641, when he learned of the Irish Catholic Rebellion that had plundered his Bishop's palace, but fortunately had not destroyed his library, which he arranged to have shipped over. Then the Civil War in England broke out, and as an appointee of the King he joined the Royalists in Oxford, where he continued his studies at the university. When the tide turned against King Charles I, Ussher was forced to flee and was heading for Cardiff with his wife and daughter, when he was ambushed by thieves, who broke open the chests containing the only copy of his manuscript: it was scattered by the wind across the hillside. Devastated, Dr Ussher implored the priests in the local area to ask their parishioners to keep a lookout for papers and, amazingly, after two or three months, he was able to regather a great number of his precious pages. He remained in London, and despite his Royalist support, his intellectual and literary achievements were such that Oliver Cromwell gave him a state funeral. He was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1656.

Thomas Hooker (curate)

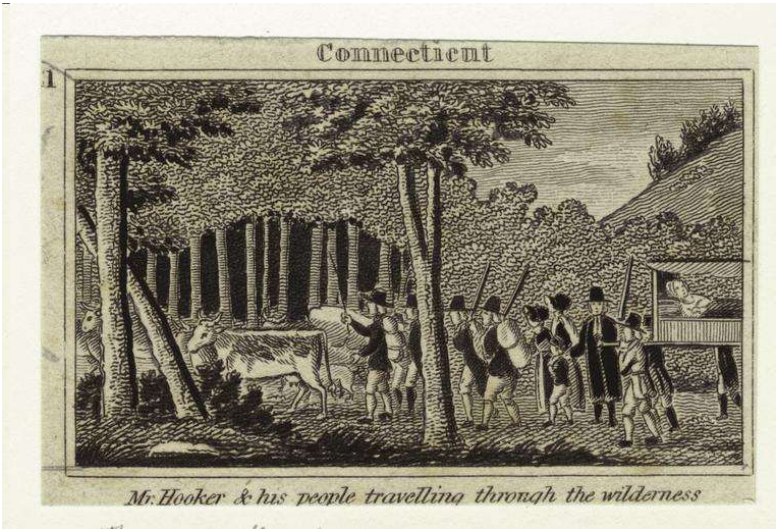
Thomas Hooker had studied Joan Drake between 1620 and 1622-23, and then providently returned to witness her salvation in 1625, and this experience became part of the foundation for his theological thinking and writing. Four years later in 1629, having been forced to retire from his Lecturer role, he 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"[53]. Perhaps because he drew general guidelines from the specifics of Joan's case (without mentioning her name), his book is still considered by Christians today as 'timeless and relevant': although written in the style of centuries ago, it 'still manages, with the use of colourful analogies, to speak to current spiritual lives'[54].

A legal summons connected to Hooker's nonconformist views led to a decision to leave England for The Netherlands, where he stayed with Mr Forbes (Joan 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 a modern

[53] Originally published in 1629.
[54] Recent reviews on Amazon and Good Reads.

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 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 on Meeting House Square in Hooker's hometown.



The reclining woman being carried through the North American wilderness is Mrs Drake's waiting-woman and Thomas Hooker's wife, Susannah Hooker née Garbrand.

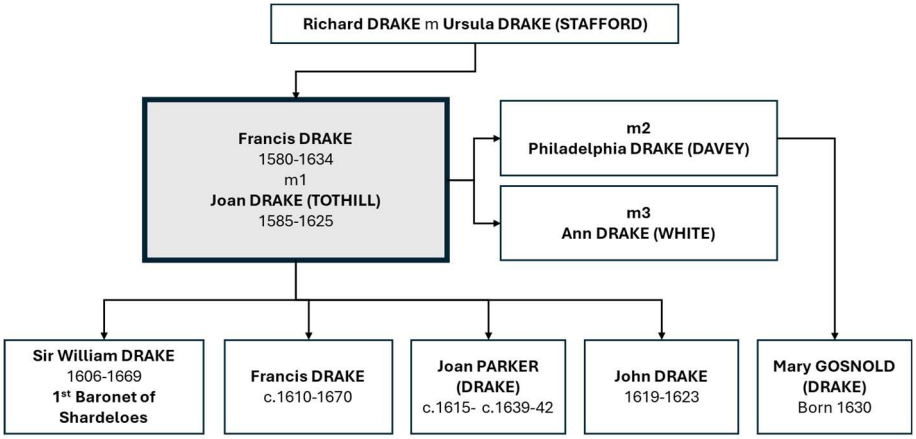
Timeline, Family Tree, Memorials, Hart's Letters, Maps

Timeline

Date	Event
1585	Joan Tothill born
1603	Francis Drake of Esher marries Joan Tothill of Shardeloes (3rd March 1603).
1610	The Drakes attend Ben Jonson's play 'The Alchemist' at the Blackfriars Theatre in London.
c. 1615	Joan Drake's health and spiritual anxiety spirals downwards after the birth of her daughter Joan.
1616	John Hart, Doctor of Divinity, is introduced to Joan Drake. He dedicates a book to his new patrons. 'J. Heart' writes his first letter to Dr Ussher (June).
1616-19	Attempts made to 'cure' Joan Drake over 3 years by John Dod. J. Heart writes 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 makes a secret trip to Essex in an attempt to find an alternative place for Joan Drake to live.
c. 1619	Dr James Ussher makes several visits. He was in England between 1619 and 1621 buying books for his library in Dublin.
1620	Thomas Hooker is made rector of St George's Church in Esher, and lives at Esher Place in order to help Joan Drake.
1621	Hooker marries Joan Drake's waiting-woman (April 3rd) and leaves for Essex (probably in 1622-3). Robert Burton publishes 'The Anatomy of Melancholy'.
1623	John Drake dies, aged three; Willam Drake begins studying at Christ Church, Oxford.

1625	On Easter Monday 18th April, Joan Drake dies after a rapturous vision at Shardeloes, aged 40; Dod, Hooker and Hart are reunited in attendance. Dr Ussher is appointed Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh.
1629	Thomas Hooker writes "The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ" based on his experiences with Joan Drake.
1634	Francis Drake, having married twice more, dies and is buried at Walton-on-Thames (17th March; aged 54).
1647	Dr John Hart publishes his version of events, "Down Trodden Strength or Mrs Drake Revived", under the pseudonym Hart On-Hi; Thomas Hooker dies in Connecticut, the colony he had founded.

Drakes of Esher Family Tree



Drakes of Esher Family Tree

The Drake Chapel Memorials

Mrs Drake's Memorial in the Drake Chapel, St. Mary's Church, Amersham

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 VICTORIE & BEGINNING YE LIFE OF HEAVEN UPON EARTH

WAS TRANSLATED FROM EARTH TRYUMPHANTLY TO HEAVEN

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)

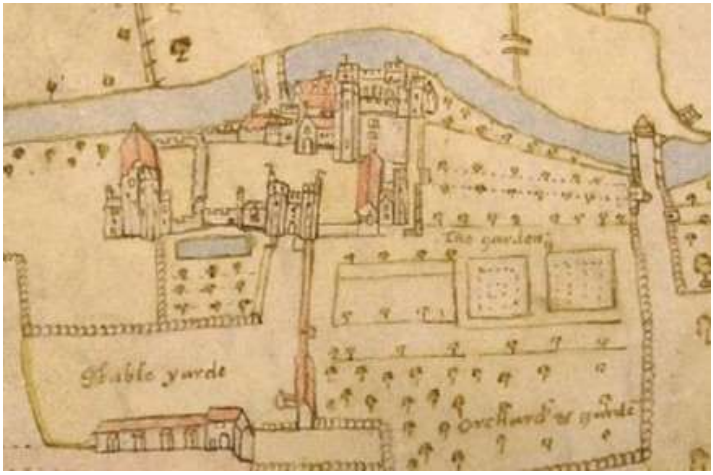
Joan Tothill, daughter of William and Katherine and wife of Francis Drake (from the ancient family of the Drakes of a not humble village named Ash, originating from Devonshire), was in matrimony, if any woman ever existed, of remarkable character, of uncommon humanity, both by nature and by grace, with 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*[55]. 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.

[55] 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).

Maps

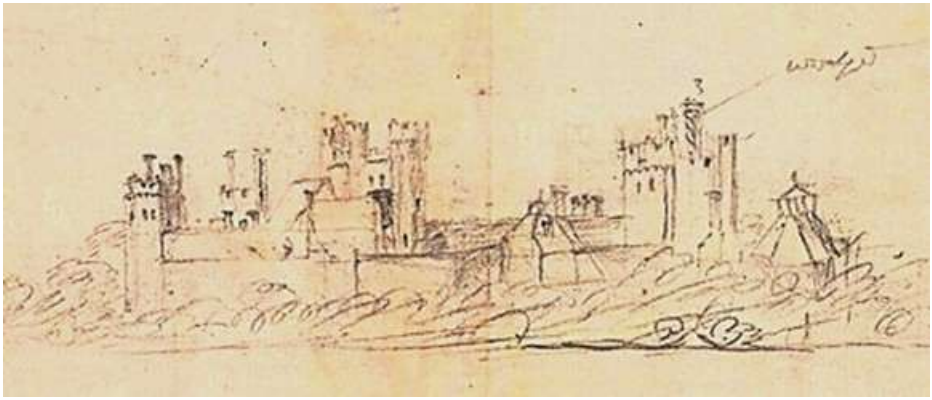


Esher Place 1606 (Treswell's map – close up)

Esher Place 1606 (Treswell's map – reimagined with AI)

After his father's death in 1603 and his inheritance of Esher Place, Francis Drake commissioned an estate plan. He chose Ralph Treswell senior (1540-1616) as surveyor due to his reputation for having completed 53 detailed plans in the City of London, Southwark, and Westminster, and for a similar job mapping the estates of Sir Christopher Hatton in Dorset.

The full map of 1606 is a bird's eye view of the manor of Esher, showing Esher Place at the centre with its main castellated building, bishop's chapel, imposing gatehouse, outbuildings, stables, gardens, orchards and ponds. In addition, Treswell has drawn the location of other dwellings, naming the occupants of the larger houses, and included field names and ownership.



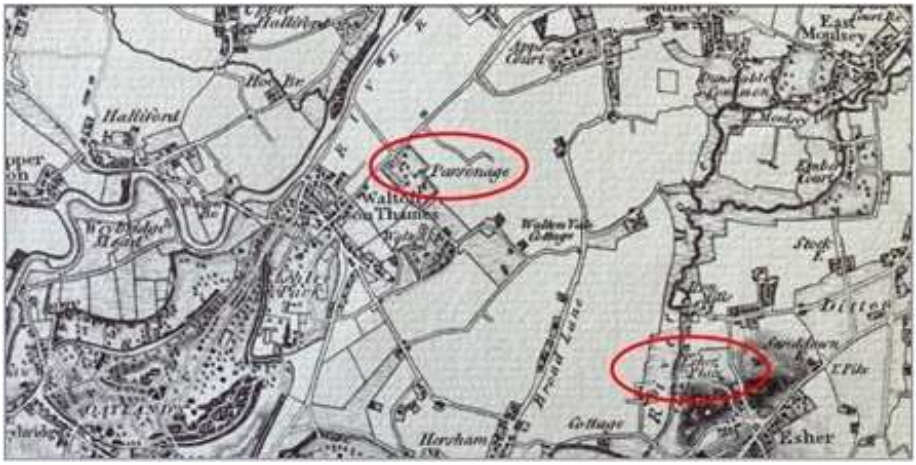
Esher Place 1673 (Bodleian Library MS Aubrey 4 Folio 45br)

In 1673, John Aubrey, an antiquary, archaeologist and biographer[56], was commissioned to undertake a survey of Surrey, which he called a 'Perambulation', as part of a project to produce an atlas of England. Although he did not fully complete his work, his detailed drawings and notes survived. Amongst these were his impressions of 'Esher House', which 'lies low at the foot of a steep hill, northward; it is stately and strongly built of brick of the Gothic architecture; a castle-like palace…'.

In 2006, the Time Team used the results of their archaeological investigations, together with Treswell's map and Aubrey's sketches, to create a 3D reconstruction of Esher Place.

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

[56] John Aubrey (1626-97) is best known for 'Brief Lives', his collection of short, informal biographies of contemporaries and famous people.



Esher Place and the Parsonage at Walton-on-Thames

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to David Morgan of the Esher District Local History Society (EDLHS) for his many editorial comments and always insightful suggestions.

Sources

Primary sources

Letters from 'J Heart' to Dr James Ussher 1616-1618; originals in the Bodleian library, Oxford under the classification: MS. Rawl. Lett. 89 fols. 9r-12r.

Down Trodden Strength or Mrs Drake Revived, by John Hart D.D. published in 1647 by Stephen Pilkington of Fleet Street, London; reprint of 1782 accessed via Internet Archive.org. Later published as 'The Firebrand Taken Out of The Fire'.

Perambulation of Surrey 1673 by John Aubrey, Bodleian Lib. MS Aubrey 4.

The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake Vol 1, by Lady Elizabeth Eliott-Drake; published by Smith, Elder & Co. of London, 1911.

The Shardeloes Muniments Parts I-IV by George Eland; published in the Records of Buckinghamshire by the Archaeological Society 1943-46.

'The Accounts for the Manor of Esher in the Winchester Pipe Rolls 1235-1376' Ed David Stones; Surrey Record Society Vol XLVI, published in 2017.

Bibliography

Genealogical Gleanings in England, by Henry F. Waters vol.2; published by Princeton University, 1901.

The Story of Esher by Ian Stevens; published by Michael Lancet, Esher, 1966.

Called by thy name, leave us not: The case of Mrs. Joan Drake, a formative episode in the pastoral career of Thomas Hooker in England by George Huntston Williams; published by Harvard Library Bulletin XVI (2), April 1968.

The Drake Family of Esher and Walton-on-Thames by Michael Blackman; published in the Surrey Archaeological Collections Vol 76 1985.

Robert Burton by Michael O'Connell; published by Twayne Publishers in Boston 1986.

Women's Attraction to Puritanism, by Amanda Porterfield; Church History, vol. 60, no. 2, 1991.

Godly Women in Early Modern England: Puritanism and Gender by Diane Willen; published in the Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. 43, No. 4, October 1992.

'An Early Friendship Network of James Ussher, archbishop of Armagh, 1626-56', by Elizabethanne Boran; in European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter Reformation (Dublin), 1998.

The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady; the Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605 by Joanna Moody; published by Sutton Publishing 1998.

The First Tudor Palace, Time Team Series 13 Episode 4, first broadcast by Channel 4 in 2006; accessed via YouTube.

Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England by Jeremy Schmidt; published by Routledge, 2007.

Women, Madness and Sin in Early Modern England: The Autobiographical Writings of Dionys Fitzherbert, The Early Modern Englishwoman, 1500–1750, by Katharine Hodgkin (ed.); Contemporary Editions (Farnham: Ashgate), 2010.

Reading Revolutions – The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England by Kevin Sharpe; published by Yale University Press, 2012.

Melancholy and the doctrine of reprobation in English puritan culture 1550-1640, by Elizabeth Hunter [PhD thesis]; Oxford University, UK 2012.

Sanity, Madness and the Family: A retrospective, Journal of Psychosocial Studies, Special Issue, Volume 11, Issue 1, April 2018; Foreword by Hilary Mantel

A History of the Old Manor House, Walton-on-Thames, by Susan Moore, 2020.

A Sixteenth-Century Clergyman and Physician: Timothy Bright's Dual Approach to Melancholia by Emily Betz, University of St Andrews; published online by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Ecclesiastical History Society, 2022.

Reviews of Thomas Hooker's 'The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ' on Amazon and Good Reads, 2025.

Useful websites accessed:

Archive.org (Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Texts, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine)

British History Online (https://www.british-history.ac.uk/)

Hathi Trust Digital Library (HathiTrust Digital Library – Millions of books online)

History of Parliament Online (https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/)

JSTOR Academic Library (JSTOR Home)

Digital Bodleian (Digital Bodleian)

Index

Alchemist, The, play by Ben Jonson 7, 8
Anabaptists..... 9, 10, 11
Aubrey, John 18, 87, 88, 90
Barrington, Lady Joan..... 65
Blackfriars Theatre..... 7, 8
Bodleian library, Oxford..... 28, 61, 85, 90
Boston, Massachusetts 79
Bruce, Robert, Scottish Minister 39, 68
Burbage, Richard, Actor 8
Burges, John..... 16, 25, 68
Burton, Robert, author of the Anatomy of Melancholy . 60, 61, 62, 64, 81, 91
Calvin, John or Jean..... 15
Cambridge University..... 40
Canons Ashby 77
Cardinal Wolsey..... 5
Chancery Lane, London..... 13
Chelmsford, Essex 41
Christ Church, Oxford University 59, 61, 81
Condell, Henry, Actor..... 8
Connecticut, State of..... 79, 80, 82
Croke, Charles, Rector of Amersham..... 59
Culverwell, Ezekiel..... 34, 68
Diggers..... 75
Dod, John 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 31, 33, 34, 38, 39, 40, 43, 48, 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 66, 67, 68, 74, 77, 81, 82
Drake, Francis, of Esher Place.. 10, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 30, 31, 32, 34, 37, 40, 43, 45, 49, 66, 67, 81, 82
Drake, Frank..... 74, 75, 76
Drake, Joan (née Tothill) 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 36, 41, 42, 43, 48, 49, 54, 59, 65, 66, 67, 69, 79, 81, 82, 90
  Argument in garden..... 36
  Birth of daughter..... 13
  Chased upstairs..... 18
  Death 49
  Declaration to Hart 48
  Rapturous vision..... 44, 45
Drake, Joan, b. 1615..... 13, 76, 81
Drake, John, d. 162336, 42, 50, 76, 81
Drake, Richard, of Esher Place. 12, 13
Drake, William . 32, 59, 60, 62, 64, 75, 76
Eliott-Drake, Lady Elizabeth..... 90
Elizabeth 1 12
English Civil War..... 66
Esher Place, Surrey. 12, 14, 30, 32, 40, 59, 81, 86, 89
Esher, Surrey 35, 66
Essex..... 33, 79
Fitzherbert, Dionys..... 56, 57, 91
Fleet Street, London 4, 13, 90
Forbes, John..... 27, 37, 68, 79

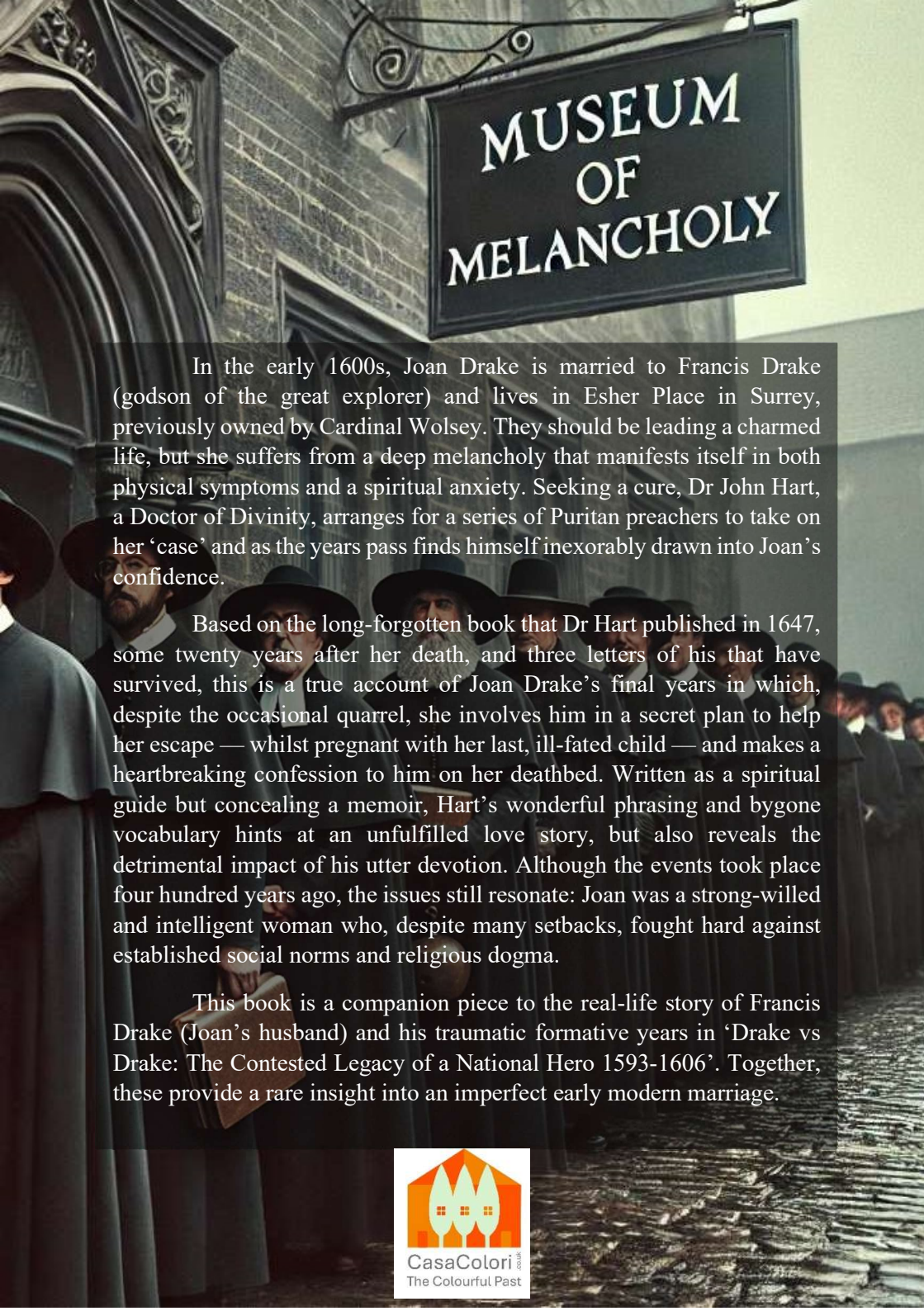
Forman, Simon, physician and astrologer.....60
Garbrand, Susannah, Mrs Drake's waiting-woman 41, 57, 80
Geneva, centre of Calvinism.....15
Gibson, Dr.....38, 68
Globe Theatre.....7, 8
Harris (or Herreis), Sarah.....57
Hart, John DD .4, 5, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 42, 43, 45, 46, 48, 49, 54, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 81, 82, 90
Hartford, Connecticut.....79
Hippocrates, Greek physician 15
Hooker, Joan 74
Hooker, Thomas 40, 48, 54, 66, 67, 68, 79, 80, 81, 82, 90, 92
Isham, Elizabeth.....55, 57
Isham, Lady Judith.....55, 56, 57
Isleworth, Middx.....16
Italy 75
Jackson, Henry, Scholar.....11
Jonson, Ben, Playwright.....7, 10
King James 1 .....39, 48
King's Men, The, Acting Company 7, 8
London 13, 16, 24, 48, 60, 90
Machiavelli 75
Marian exiles.....15
Melancholy 15, 37, 60, 64, 81
Middelburg, Low Countries.....37
Netherlands, aka Low Countries 79
Othello, play by William Shakespeare.....8
Parker, John.....76
Parr, Richard, Usser's Chaplain..28
Parsonage, Walton-on-Thames. 30, 89
Pilkington, Stephen, Bookseller . 4, 67
Preston, John, Chaplain to King Charles 1..... 48, 49, 66, 68
Puritan9, 10, 15, 16, 29, 30, 31, 32, 52, 63
Rawlinson, Richard, Collector... 28
Rogers, John, of Dedham ... 25, 28, 33, 68
Scudamore, Mrs, wife of MP Sir James Scudamore 16, 25, 28
Shakespeare, William 8, 11
Shardeloes, near Amersham 12, 41, 43, 48, 59, 62, 75, 81, 82, 90
St. George's Church, Esher 40
St. Mary's Church, Walton-on-Thames 38, 41
Stafford family..... 15
Surrey 5, 66, 91
Tothill, Katherine 17, 46
Tothill, William, of Shardeloes 12, 13, 16, 46, 62
Tothills, William and Katherine 40
Treswell, Ralph, Surveyor.. 18, 86, 87, 88
Trinity College, Dublin 24, 25
Ussher, James, Primate of All Ireland24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 36, 66, 68, 77, 81, 82
Verney, Lady Mary 75
Walton Leigh..... 30
Walton-on-Thames, Surrey 30, 34, 38, 40, 41, 82, 91
Wayneflete Tower, Esher 17
Westchester, old name for Chester 25

Wetherell, Brian, vicar of St Mary's Church 41, 68
Wheeler, Elizabeth, of Esher 41, 57
Whitefriars, London . 16, 32, 37, 76
Witchcraft 19, 80
Wolsey, Thomas, Cardinal . 18, 30, 59
Young, Alice, first witch executed in New England 80

About the Author

C.L. Dawson is a local historian from Weybridge in Surrey. Unsurprisingly, being resident in the former hunting grounds of Hampton Court Palace, his preferred period is the Early Modern, covering the seismic changes brought about by the Renaissance, Reformation, Civil War and British colonial expansion. He focuses on researching and writing engaging stories involving local people, ideally finding connections with famous faces or key events, and whenever possible using eyewitness accounts from antique books, letters, diaries, pamphlets, and other primary sources.

He can be contacted at: chris.dawson@casacolori.co.uk



In the early 1600s, 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 Joan's confidence.

Based on the long-forgotten book that Dr Hart published in 1647, some twenty years after her death, and three letters of his that have survived, this is a true account of Joan 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 hints at an unfulfilled love story, but also reveals the detrimental impact of his utter devotion. Although the events took place four hundred years ago, the issues still resonate: Joan was a strong-willed and intelligent woman who, despite many setbacks, fought hard against established social norms and religious dogma.

This book is a companion piece to the real-life story of Francis Drake (Joan's husband) and his traumatic formative years in 'Drake vs Drake: The Contested Legacy of a National Hero 1593-1606'. Together, these provide a rare insight into an imperfect early modern marriage.

CasaColori.com
The Colourful Past