Drake vs Drake

The Contested Legacy of a National Hero

1593-1606



C.L. Dawson

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Drake vs Drake: The Contested Legacy of a National Hero 1593-1606

The True Story of the Trials and Tribulations of Francis Drake of Esher and Walton-on-Thames

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Brief Lives[1]



Francis Drake 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 as a young man expected to inherit Sir Francis's estate. He was a Puritan, and a supporter of nonconformist ministers.



Richard Drake of Esher (1535-1603)
Father of Francis Drake of Esher. He was an Equerry of the Stable, and Groom of the Privy Chamber to Elizabeth I.



Sir Francis Drake (c. 1540-1596)
World explorer, privateer and naval admiral, Sir Francis Drake rose from humble beginnings to become a national hero.



Thomas Drake (c. 1554-1606)
Younger brother of Sir Francis Drake, who accompanied him on the circumnavigation of the globe and on the last voyage to Panama. He was made executor of Sir Francis Drake's will in 1596.



Jonas Bodenham (b. after 1560)
Said to be the nephew of Sir Francis Drake's first wife, he was brought up and educated in Sir Francis's household at Buckland Abbey. He acted as an 'agent and special factor' for his master from about 1588, and was on board the ship when Sir Francis Drake died off the coast of Panama in 1596.

[1] With the exception of Sir Francis Drake and Richard Drake, no portraits have survived, so the images above and throughout are illustrative (see Acknowledgments for details).
[2] This house beside the River Mole, which had been a palace of the Bishops of Winchester before the Reformation, was probably known simply as Esher Manor House in Francis's time. Wayneflete Tower, which still stands near the river, was originally its gatehouse. 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 hilltop is a later building.

Buckland Abbey 1593



In late spring of 1593 Francis Drake, at the age of thirteen, found himself in the formidable presence of his godfather[3] Sir Francis Drake as they left London, heading for the West Country. Queen Elizabeth's parliament had just been dissolved[4] and the celebrated explorer, now MP for Plymouth, was journeying back to his home at Buckland Abbey. In his early fifties, Sir Francis was beginning to show signs of his advancing years, with his curly hair receding

[3] Godfather / godson: the source for this claim is the will of Sir William Drake (Francis Drake of Esher's eldest son, who died in 1669) in which he states that in the case of the extinction of his own branch of the Drake family, he appoints the heirs of Sir Francis Drake of Buckland Abbey as heirs to his own estates 'in respect of his [Sir Francis's] affections expressed in his last will and testament to Francis Drake (father of the said William Drake and godson of Sir Francis Drake the seaman)'. Source is Lady Eliott-Drake 'The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake' Vol 1 p119, and note 1 in Vol 2 p108.

[4] The Speaker of the House was the Attorney General, Edward Coke.

and his red beard greying around his chin. In addition, his demeanour may have been somewhat subdued for a man with such a boisterous reputation, because his fortunes had fallen since the glorious days of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. His reputation had been damaged by an unsuccessful attempt the following year to destroy the remains of the fleet that had slunk, storm-battered, back to port in Northern Spain, plus a failed attack on Lisbon with the purpose of restoring Dom António to the throne of Portugal. This fiasco had cost the lives of thousands of English soldiers, for which Sir Francis was censured by the Privy Council. He had subsequently discovered that, even if he was still recognised and feted by the ordinary folk, success at court was ephemeral and a seaman was only as praiseworthy as the outcome of his last expedition. So he was, for the time being, concentrating on the more solid ground of his parliamentary career.

Accompanying the two namesakes on the journey was the youth's father, Richard Drake of Esher, who after almost five years of acting as gaoler to the Spanish Armada prisoners that Sir Francis had captured and sent to him for safekeeping, found himself free of responsibilities as they had finally been ransomed, and he was taking the opportunity to visit his relatives in Devon. He had suggested to Sir Francis that it might be a good opportunity for him to spend some time with his godson, and since it was proposed that young Francis would be a guest for several weeks, they had brought with them Samuel Pomfrett[5], a local gentleman from Esher, as his guardian. This arrangement was no casual

[5] Samuel Pomfrett's house appears on Treswell's map of 1606 to the west of Esher Place, on the road to what is now West End (see close up of the map on page 83).

proposition on Richard's part: he was aware that Sir Francis was childless and, although the birth of Sir Francis's nephews had complicated matters, there was still every possibility of a significant inheritance for his only son, so any rapprochement that might solidify its value was to be encouraged. Near Axminster, Richard Drake bade his farewells and took the road towards Ashe, near the border with Dorset, where he had grown up.

It has often been supposed, particularly since they referred to themselves as 'cousins'[6], that there was a common ancestry of the Drakes of Ashe and the Drakes of Crowndale, from whom Sir Francis descended, but nobody, not even the heraldic visitations, had actually discovered a link. The first sign of mutual acknowledgment had come in 1581 when Richard Drake's older brother and head of the Ashe family, Bernard Drake, had reportedly quarrelled with Sir Francis Drake over the family coat of arms. The glory of Sir Francis's circumnavigation of the globe, and the enormous addition to national income[7] from his cargo hold full of treasure, had led to formal recognition from Queen Elizabeth, and he was keen to consolidate his status at court. Newly in possession of a knighthood, he pursued other symbols of gentrification firstly by purchasing Buckland Abbey, a former Cistercian monastery a few miles to the north of Plymouth and located in the midst of an enormous estate with far reaching views over the river Tavy, and then by creating a claim to a pedigree.

[6] In this period 'cousin' had a broader meaning, and could refer to any suspected familial relationship, especially when unclear, or simply to close friendship.

[7] The haul was valued at £600,000, of which £265,000 went to the royal treasury, a sum said to be equivalent to the annual income the Queen received from various sources including rents from crown lands, custom duties, monopolies and licences, and legal fines.

Coming across the coat of arms of the Drakes of Ashe, who were established in the parish of Mulbury near Axminster, some seventy miles away, and who were local gentry in possession of a manor house and estate, he adopted their ready-made shield — a 'wyvern gules', or a mythical red dragon — as his own, with an unsubstantiated claim that he had an ancestral right to do so. He might have imagined that Bernard Drake, a sea captain himself, would have jumped at the chance to be associated with the man who had achieved one of the greatest feats of seamanship, but he was mistaken. Bernard took offence, publicly, that a man of low birth (with a rustic West Country accent and less than courteous manners) should claim kinship with his family. Indeed, Sir Francis had been born into a family of yeoman farmers at Crowndale, who had worked the land of the dissolved Tavistock Abbey, north of Plymouth, and dwelt in a two-roomed, sparsely furnished cottage, made of stone from the local quarry and roofed with slate or thatch; but they were by no means on the lowest rung of the social ladder, being literate and with their sons attending grammar schools and their daughters provided with dowries. Nevertheless, had it not been for Sir Francis Drake's extraordinary achievements, there would have been no connection made between the Drakes of Ashe and the Drakes of Crowndale.

Queen Elizabeth herself, keen to smooth relations, had intervened in the quarrel. She had her herald create a new coat of arms for Sir Francis in which the crest was a red dragon aboard a ship sailing on top of a globe (which Bernard Drake took as a slight), and the shield contained the two polestars in silver — the Arctic and Antarctic. The Queen was, she said, *'further desirous that the impressions of her princely affections towards him might be, as it were,*

immortally derived and conveyed to his offspring and posterity for ever'. The irony here was that Sir Francis Drake, despite two marriages, did not have children of his own.

However, the arbitration worked and any animosity with the Drakes of Ashe soon dissipated, and before long Sir Francis was helping his adopted family financially. He lent money (using the Ashe estate as collateral) to the newly knighted Sir Bernard Drake, who had been thus rewarded for an expedition to Newfoundland from which he returned with ships laden with stolen spices and gold, dried fish, and nearly forty Portuguese fishermen who, unknown to him, unfortunately carried deadly bacteria[8].

Sir Francis also bought the Manor of Yarcombe[9], comprising the manor house, a pretty village and thousands of acres of prime Devon countryside a few miles north of Ashe, for £5,000 from Richard Drake, who needed the money to cover the expenses of his new role as a Groom of the Privy Chamber. These included finding a suitably impressive home in the expensive Surrey countryside, in order to be closer to the court in London. From the outside, a courtier's life, especially one so close to the monarch, was assumed to be highly rewarding, but keeping up appearances came at a steep cost, often serviced via

[8] Upon disembarkation, Sir Bernard Drake had incarcerated the fishermen in Exeter jail to await the Lent Assizes, several weeks away. By the time of the trial, those prisoners who had survived the 'dark pit and stinking dungeon' under Exeter Castle were so weak that they had to be carried into court, whereby, according to an eyewitness, 'a noisome and pestilential smell came from the prisoners who were arraigned at the crown bar which so affected the people present that many were seized with a violent sickness which proved mortal to the greatest part of them'. Within a couple of weeks, eight judges, eleven of the twelve jurors and several constables had died of Typhus, a deadly disease caused by body lice that thrive in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions. Sir Bernard himself fell ill, and headed for home, but died on the journey.

[9] Source: Lady Elizabeth Eliott-Drake, The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake 1911

debt to relatives, friends or merchant bankers. Financial stability could be precarious, and only a fixed income, such as a royal pension, would resolve matters. Richard Drake was not in possession of one, although he does appear to have benefited from the patronage of Sir Charles Howard of Effingham, Lord High Admiral, who leased Esher Place — the former bishop's palace beside the River Mole — to him at a low rent[10]. The young Francis Drake would probably already have been aware that money, or lack of it, was a perennial subject of concern, as was his father's strong desire to have Yarcombe returned to him in the future, since its sale to Sir Francis had been forced upon him.



The three months that the thirteen-year-old Francis spent in the company of Sir Francis Drake and his wife Elizabeth at Buckland Abbey would

[10] A document from 1658 headed "The Title of the Manor of Esher in the County of Surrey with the Appurtenances", prepared for Mr George Price, lists the various transactions from 1583 (SHC Ref: G3/1/36). This shows that the Drakes of Esher had a lease of 61 years at £4 per annum, but did not own either that house or the lands of the manor of Esher, and were therefore not in receipt of the rents. This is confirmed by the wills of both Richard and Francis Drake, which do not mention the manor of Esher, but only the manor of Walton-on-Thames and its 'Rectory and Parsonage'.

have been a truly unique experience, given that the older man had spent most of his life at sea, and on those occasions when he had been on home soil he had been immersed in preparations for the next voyage. Surely, no other man alive would have had such a trove of stories with which to regale his godson. Here, speaking directly to young Francis, was someone who had risen from humble origins through his own abilities to become the first man to lead an expedition around the world[11]. Moreover, this expedition had returned with enough treasure on one single ship — the Pelican, renamed the Golden Hind — not only to clear the Queen's debts, but to make Sir Francis the richest man in the country: at least if, as he was probably quick to specify, you were speaking about ready cash and not land. He had many times interrupted the flow of gold and silver mined in Peru, which was transported on horseback across the Isthmus of Panama and heaved aboard Spanish galleons that set off across the Atlantic, to end up in the coffers of Queen Elizabeth's arch enemy Philip II. These privateering antics had provided him with the nickname 'El Draque', which was the Spanish attempt to pronounce his surname, but also appropriately meant 'The Dragon' who rained down fire upon their colonies and ships, and who had been in the thick of the ferocious battle with the Spanish Armada.

Young Francis Drake and Samuel Pomfrett would undoubtedly have been introduced during their visit to another resident of Buckland Abbey, Jonas Bodenham. Bodenham had been brought up and educated in the household since boyhood, and was regarded as a family member — he was the son of Sir

[11] Ferdinand Magellan's expedition of 1519-22 had been the first circumnavigation of the globe, but he had been killed in the Philippines and his crew returned without him.

Francis's first wife's sister[12], almost the son Sir Francis never had. Jonas would have been in his early thirties, and performed several jobs for his master: he was a *'factor[13] and special dealer in matters of great weight'* looking after Sir Francis's business interests; an accountant responsible for the great seaman's personal finances and property holdings; and in charge of putting together the 'book of accomptes[14]' from which the profits of expeditions were calculated to be paid out to investors.

A frequent visitor to the Abbey would have been Sir Francis Drake's younger brother, Thomas, who was physically a carbon copy: short and stocky with a clipped red beard and ruddy cheeks, with the same distinctive West Country accent. Sir Francis and Thomas had a close bond, as Thomas had accompanied him on the voyage of circumnavigation and they had overcome many challenges together. By contrast, Thomas Drake and Jonas Bodenham had an uneasy relationship: friendly on the surface when with Sir Francis, but wary of each other outside his company.

Francis Drake of Esher, on the cusp of manhood, could not but have felt drawn to this other world of seafaring and wide oceans, hardship and comradeship. On the other hand, as an outsider, he would have recognised that these men were of a different breed, and that when they were together the atmosphere was charged: jocular and joshing, with hearty back-slapping and

[12] Sir Francis Drake married Mary Newman in 1569, whose sister was Margaret Newman who had married John Bodenham in 1560.
[13] Factor: a person who manages business affairs on behalf of another who is absent (as in this case when Sir Francis Drake was abroad); the role typically involved purchasing, accounting, and legal representation.
[14] Accomptes: Early modern English for 'accounts'.

down-to-earth language. This was a rough masculinity most unlike the smooth courtliness of his father. There was probably a certain mutual esteem between Richard Drake and Sir Francis; a recognition that each had his own strengths. Sir Francis Drake could command respect from anyone, however lowly, as in addition to his famous achievements, he had the looks of someone who had spent his life outdoors — the wiry build, rough hands and florid complexion — and a common touch that generated fierce loyalty, particularly amongst his crews. But with the gentry, who funded his voyages as adventurers, this demeanour and approach sometimes grated, and Richard Drake's handsome visage[15] and courtly manners could help to smooth the way.

The Buckland Abbey visit came to an end, and as the young Francis and Samuel Pomfrett prepared to leave, there were some parting words between them and Sir Francis Drake. It was only later, as a result of sworn testimonies at the Court of the Exchequer in 1605, that the memories of what was said, during the visit and at their departure, were revealed.

[15] Richard Drake's portrait, by George Gower, is the only one of any of the Drakes of Esher to survive. It was painted in 1577 when Richard was 42, and shows a handsome man in black gilded armour, with the motto 'always ready to serve'.



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INTERROGATORY

Interrogatory prepared by Francis Drake, Esquire, of Esher to be answered on the 7th November 1605 by Samuel Pomfrett, aged 58 or thereabouts, a gentleman residing at Esher in the county of Surrey.

Item: Did not Sir Francis Drake since the delivery of Don Pedro desire to have this defendant [Francis Drake of Esher] come to his house in Devonshire and did not he go accordingly? How was he entertained there? Whether did Sir Francis Drake confess that he was beholden to his [the defendant's] father and what recompense did he then promise him — whether was it to make this defendant his heir and to give him all his lands, or else to leave his father and him charged onto the plaintiff [Thomas Drake] in eighteen

hundred pounds[16] *as the plaintiff requires? Declare your whole knowledge herein.*

In answer to this 'interrogatory' read out to him in the Court of the Exchequer, Samuel Pomfrett would recall the trip to Buckland Abbey and the conversations with Sir Francis Drake before their departure, and it is from his signed statement that the details of the visit are known. In this document Pomfrett confirmed that he and the young Francis Drake were *'most kindly entertained'* and that *'the defendant [Francis Drake] did remain there for some 12 weeks and when he was ready to return home again Sir Francis Drake called this deponent [Pomfrett] unto him and requested him to desire the defendant's father [Richard Drake], who he termed his very good cousin, that he would not think it amiss in that he had not at that point assured the defendant some lands as he had promised'.* The reason that Sir Francis was unable to make such a promise was that it would not be to the liking of his father-in-law, Sir George Sydenham, but he did hold out some hope *'saying further that some assurance of lands should be made hereafter to the good contentment of the defendant's father and for the great good of the defendant himself'.* Further, Pomfrett remembered that Sir Francis Drake, perhaps as some compensation for his procrastination, handed a jewel to his godson, together with some coins in a purse, as a leaving gift.

Two quite divergent recollections are evident in the 1605 court documents: Samuel Pomfrett's impression was that Sir Francis Drake's

[16] The actual amount requested in the codicil was £2,000.

promises were vague and evasive; but Francis Drake of Esher had an entirely different memory of what was said, which had cemented over time into a firm belief that was reflected in the interrogatory — i.e. that Sir Francis Drake had promised to make him *'his heir and to give him all his lands'* in his will. This belief had informed young Francis's expectations of life: great wealth and the elimination of his father's financial instability; success and recognition at court; and the adventures that would surely follow as a result, and make his godfather proud. It was this conviction that had driven his actions, and his father's before him on his behalf, in pursuit of what he believed was his just inheritance.



Codicil at Sea 1596

It was the end of January 1596, and Sir Francis Drake had not been seen on the deck of his ship, moored off a small island at the entrance of Porto Bello harbour on the northern coast of Panama, for several days. Instead, in his dimly lit cabin he lay dying of dysentery and, with his body racked by fever and nausea, his aura of invincibility was fading with each passing hour. Within this tight space, events unfolded that would reverberate in the courts for a decade, and as a consequence would be described in sworn witness statements. Around six to eight hours before Sir Francis's death, Jonas Bodenham and *'one of his familiars'*, a certain Webb, were at his bedside together with Thomas Rattenbury, a gentleman servant to Sir Francis. Bodenham told Rattenbury that he should go and fetch Thomas Drake, who was captain aboard another ship, the 'Adventure'. This might have seemed an innocuous request given the circumstances, but Rattenbury hesitated, *'distrusting their intent',* and would not depart even when Bodenham offered him £100 [£30,000[17]]. An hour or two later, Thomas Drake arrived anyway to find Bodenham attempting to have a reluctant Sir Francis, *'then languishing in manner speechless'*, set his seal upon some papers that upon investigation contained *'a release or general acquittance of all accounts and debts'* and an indenture to make Bodenham joint executor of his will. An argument broke out, sufficient to rouse Sir Francis, who told

[17] Amounts in square brackets are indicative of modern-day equivalents, calculated by multiplying given values by 300. This figure is based on the Bank of England Inflation Calculator, averaged between 1593 and 1606, and then approximated to the round figure of 300.

Bodenham to *'plight his troth and give his hand [to Thomas Drake], to deal faithfully with him and to assist him in the troubles notwithstanding'*.



Prior to leaving Plymouth in the summer of 1595 on what would turn out to be his final mission, Sir Francis Drake had reluctantly dictated his will. Since he was childless and wished to avoid his hard-won estates being broken up, his personal priority was to ensure that they passed to his brother Thomas and his sons, who represented his most direct bloodline and the future Drake dynasty. However, there were many competing claims: from his wife Elizabeth and her father Sir George Sydenham, as part of the marriage agreement; from Jonas Bodenham, on account of his years of faithful service; and from the Drakes of Esher, in particular Sir Francis's godson and namesake, to whom he had given encouraging hints of inheritance. Unable to decide how to arrange his

affairs to please all the parties, Sir Francis had departed with the will unsigned, and held amongst his papers on board[18].

Now, in the Caribbean winter and with little time remaining, Sir Francis signed his will and dictated a codicil in which, despite many deletions and insertions, enough legal terms and syntax were used to suggest it had been transcribed by someone with a legal background, which was most likely to have been Jonas Bodenham. In this codicil were two additions to the will. Firstly, the manor of Yarcombe was bequeathed to his godson, Francis Drake: *'I give, devise, and bequeath unto my well-beloved cousin Francis Drake, the son of Richard Drake of Esher in the county of Surrey esquire, one of the esquires of her majesty's stable, all that my manor of Yarcombe situate lying and being within the county of Devon…'.* But there was a catch: the legacy came at a price, which was specifically to be used to pay off creditors: *'Provided always, and my will and intent is, that if Richard Drake and Francis Drake his son, do not well and truly content and pay unto Thomas Drake of Plymouth… the sum of two thousand pounds of lawful money of England, within two years next after the death of me'* then this bequest would be *'utterly frustrate, void and of no force'*. Whilst the £2,000 [£600,000] represented less than half of what had been paid for the manor, the requirement to pay such a large cash sum represented a significant encumbrance on the gift.

[18] Source: John Sugden biography.

Secondly in the codicil, another manor, Sampford Spiney, was bequeathed to Jonas Bodenham. A separate document, an indenture, confirmed Thomas Drake as sole executor.

During the early hours of the morning of the 28th January 1596, Sir Francis Drake became delirious. In his fever dream he wanted to die a soldier's death, and asked his only remaining brother, Thomas, and his loyal adopted son Jonas for help to put on his armour.

Thomas Drake, Executor and Defendant 1596-1603

The Drakes of Esher were in shock. The news of their benefactor's death, and burial at sea, came ashore with the remnants of the expedition, whose ships had disbanded and arrived back, one by one, some weeks later in early spring. This was followed soon afterwards by revelation of the contents of the codicil, and the realisation that it was the executor — the great deceiver's brother — to whom they should complain.

They were not the only ones with cause for complaint. Thomas Drake must have come to curse the day he was appointed executor, which brought about an abrupt end to his cherished life of action at sea. Although forever in the shadow of his celebrated brother, he had shared the triumphs of the epic three-year voyage around the globe. He had captained his own ship, the aptly named 'Thomas', during the 1585/6 voyage to the West Indies, and made the last fateful voyage as captain of the 'Adventure'. His relatives and noble creditors, however, did not care one iota about his exotic travels and past achievements, and almost from the moment he set foot once again on solid Plymouth ground, there was trouble. His sister-in-law, Sir Francis's wife Elizabeth, who was the main beneficiary and had the right to remain in Buckland Abbey, questioned the legality of the codicil and Thomas's appointment as executor, and took him to court (a suit that he successfully defended). The Queen showed no patience with her demands for money said to

be owed from previous expeditions she had invested in, but Thomas was unable to locate any sign of the accounts, so he was forced to pay the Crown's claims without being able to judge their accuracy. And Sir Bernard Drake's son, John, refused to pay back the mortgage that Sir Francis had granted on the Ashe estate on the basis that the deeds had not been returned, and that anyway he had been promised that if the last voyage had been profitable, the loan payment would have been cancelled.

Court cases multiplied, but meanwhile there were two further deaths: in 1597 Sir George Sydenham died, followed a year later by his daughter Elizabeth Drake, and Sir Francis's estates passed into the hands of his brother, no longer just executor but also beneficiary. For an all too brief moment, Thomas's prospects brightened. He was in his mid-forties, with a family and heirs of his own, and found himself quite unexpectedly resident in the magnificent Buckland Abbey, with its formal gardens and deer park.

As a minor — now sixteen years old — Francis Drake's interests back at Esher were managed on his behalf by his father Richard, who kept abreast of events and considered his options. Aware that Thomas's financial circumstances had changed with his inheritance of Buckland Abbey, he made a counter-offer of half the sum demanded for the Manor of Yarcombe, one thousand pounds [£300,000], which was reluctantly agreed on the basis of being received by a specific date. But it appears that Richard still had cash flow problems, and he could provide only a promissory note on the deadline, which was refused. Thomas later relented but, instead of letting the Drakes of Esher have Yarcombe, he kept it for himself and gave them a cash sum of £1,500

[£450,000], on the understanding (or at least hope) that it would be the last he would see of them.

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At the beginning of 1603, seven years after the shock of Sir Francis's codicil, the feeling of having been cheated was still festering at Esher Place, and was not at all relieved by Richard's persistently precarious finances: he had still not received his long hoped-for pension from the Queen. Matters worsened when Elizabeth died in March and was succeeded by James I.



But family life continued nonetheless. In April 1603, Francis Drake, now aged twenty-three, married Joan Tothill of Shardeloes near Amersham. This was no match made in heaven, as Joan appeared less than enthused by her father's arrangement with the Drakes, but she was a joint heiress (with her

invalid sister Catherine) to the family estate, so Richard Drake's longer-term motive can be easily guessed at. The marriage settlement itself, however, was expensive and Richard used the £1,500 received from Thomas Drake in lieu of Yarcombe, possibly as part of the jointure[19]. Then in July, at the height of an outbreak of plague in London that killed almost one fifth of the population, Richard Drake died suddenly, and the newly married Francis, as an only son, found himself heir to his father's unsatisfactory financial situation. He must have ruminated on what he had interpreted as the promise of a large inheritance from the immensely wealthy Sir Francis Drake, which would have placed him in a very different situation. This memory, whether true or false, was unfortunately to lead him along a dangerous path.

[19] From the groom's perspective, a marriage settlement involved a jointure (putting property or income into trust to secure the wife's livelihood if widowed), and was typically in proportion to the bride's dowry. Where necessary, cash payments made up any shortfall.

Jonas Bodenham, Holder of all the Cards 1604

It is not documented who made the first approach, but by 1604 Francis Drake and Jonas Bodenham had joined forces against Thomas Drake, in bringing a case to court with the aim of depriving Thomas of some of his inherited wealth, which they deemed to be ill-gotten. It is immediately obvious, however, how the power dynamics worked: Jonas Bodenham was the schemer with inside knowledge, who held all the cards; whilst Francis Drake was the naïve outsider who was in need of money, and driven by his belief that Sir Francis had promised to make him his heir.

Jonas Bodenham had been brought up to meet precisely the needs of Sir Francis Drake for a business secretary — he was given a gentleman's education with the finishing touches of a lawyer — and benefited also from his master's unequalled knowledge of the economics of planning and undertaking a profitable maritime expedition. It appears too that Bodenham shared Sir Francis's meagre regard for convention and etiquette, but despite these rough edges the great man would not have a word said against him. Bodenham's argument against rumours of wrongdoing would always be that his master often expressed *'the good opinion and well liking he had both of him as well as his writings and careful handling of all his actions, affairs and business'*; the ultimate proof being that Sir Francis would not otherwise have left him a legacy

'of divers goods, gifts and rewards in recompense of his true honest and faithful service unto him done, and with all reposed great trust and confidence'.

One of Sir Francis's last acts as he lay dying had been to appoint Bodenham to replace him as captain of his ship, the 'Defiance' (and henceforth — another insight into Bodenham's personality — based on this one appointment he would style himself 'Captain Bodenham'). This gave him the authority to take command in the immediate aftermath of Sir Francis's death, which, according to Thomas Drake in later court documents, he used to '*displace divers officers of the ship placed there by Sir Francis & put others of his own choice in their rooms & broke open divers chests in which were writings of accounts & other things touching the voyage, and partly of other matters concerning Sir Francis Drake's affaires, and took into his hands as well … goods of great value'*. So when Thomas Drake, as executor, attempted to gather documents to gain an overview of his brother's finances and property dealings, he discovered missing deeds and a distinct lack of detailed accounts, and Jonas Bodenham was initially evasive, then downright obstructive, in avoiding passing on what was in his possession.

After a period during which Thomas prodded repeatedly at Bodenham with little useful response, his patience became exhausted: he was working under considerable pressure as Sir Francis's executor, and having to field various competing claims against the estate. It is also clear that he came to suspect foul play on Bodenham's part, because he spent some considerable time looking into the younger man's various dealings. Based on this investigation, he then made a series of accusations, of which he was *'credibly informed',* in a

court complaint of 1597, including the one cited above regarding the events in Sir Francis's cabin.

Thomas's inquiry had raised some issues that would probably have shocked him: in particular the level of autonomy that had been granted to Bodenham by Sir Francis, and the vast amounts of money that passed through the business secretary's hands. In his court complaint Thomas accused Bodenham of mishandling up to £20,000 [£6m] of Sir Francis's funds. Bodenham readily admitted that this figure was an understatement of the amounts that he dealt with, but claimed that every transaction was carried out *'according to the order, and direction continually set down given & prescribed by Sir Francis'* and that he *'accordingly did from time to time give and desire unto Sir Francis a just, true and perfect account and reckoning thereof'*. Thomas further complained that Bodenham had purchased property in Ireland, at a cost of £1,500 [£450,000], which he had kept secret, but was forced to allude to and *'did in part advertise Sir Francis'* who had heard a rumour but refused to believe it. The insinuation was that Bodenham was planning to abscond, and to set himself up overseas, where he would be hard to reach (there is no mention in any documents of a Mrs Bodenham or dependants). Bodenham did not deny the Irish purchase, but counter-claimed that he had bought the estate with his own personal money; to which Thomas Drake responded, cuttingly, that this was highly unlikely since *'being of mean parentage'* he would have had *'but small relief from any of his ancestors'* and nor would his wages, barely £50 [£15,000] a year, have enabled him to do so. There was yet more: Thomas described Bodenham as an inveterate gambler, who over several years had been

'very magnificent in his expenses' spending inordinate amounts of his master's money — at least £2,000 [£600,000] at dice and cards, and lending £1,500 [£450,000] to Dom António, the exiled King of Portugal, whose name crops up repeatedly in relation to the Drake family saga.



Bodenham may well have been able to do all that he was accused of, because he appears to have operated with a breathtaking absence of answerability, both before and after Sir Francis's death: he claimed to be unable to produce accounts, despite being asked on many occasions to do so. Amongst the litany of excuses was his insistence that there had been an unfortunate fire, or as Thomas Drake described it: *'finding himself backwards in his accounts [Bodenham] did voluntarily set fire to a great many of his own books and papers of reckonings and accounts, feigning that his chamber was casually set on fire by misadventure'*.



There is no record in the [Thomas] Drake vs Bodenham court documents of 1597 as to what action was taken, but the fact that Bodenham remained at large indicates that, despite the case casting a cloud over his character, he escaped a guilty verdict. And there was certainly not enough reputational damage to dissuade Francis Drake of Esher from colluding (maybe with some misgivings, but also financial stress) with Bodenham in bringing another case against Thomas Drake, as executor for his godfather.

But what exactly could the pair accuse Thomas or Sir Francis of having done? It appears that Bodenham was able to convince young Francis that Sir Francis Drake had fraudulently withheld money that should have been paid out to investors — notably the Crown, which was clearly a weighty matter. If this could be proved, then they would be able to negotiate a settlement for themselves. This was where Jonas Bodenham could potentially be most useful,

because as Sir Francis's business secretary he had inside knowledge of where to look for evidence, despite his earlier claims that account books had been burned. However, before proceeding further, Francis had to make sure that they would be entitled to keep part of any money awarded by the court. As a 'gentleman pensioner'[20] he had access to King James, who agreed that if Francis was able to extract the claimed £3,000 [£900,000], and potentially more, owed to the Crown, he could keep a majority share as long as he divided the remainder amongst his fellow pensioners. This was good for the King, since he could provide pensions without dipping into his own dwindling coffers. The grant made by King James was against Thomas Drake personally, as Sir Francis's executor and (eventually) his main heir. This was basically a short cut, avoiding the requirement for the parliamentary approval that would have been needed to bind the estate of Sir Francis in perpetuity, and it was to have serious consequences later.

In Hilary term[21] 1604 Francis Drake of Esher exhibited a Bill of Complaint in the Court of the Exchequer, addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, against Thomas Drake, in which young Francis declared as plaintiff that Sir Francis Drake had *'embezzled and purloined over three thousand pounds, part of the profits of the Santo Domingo voyage'* of 1585-6, and also

[20] This was a largely ceremonial role, as the band of gentleman pensioners stood guard with their axes in the presence chamber, and accompanied the King to the chapel royal on Sundays, and to the House of Lords and St. Paul's on ceremonial occasions, and on other notable events. Twenty gentlemen pensioners took it in turns to wait on the King on a quarterly basis, with the whole band attending at Christmas, Easter and other holidays.

[21] The legal year commences at the beginning of October. The terms are: Michaelmas: October to December; Hilary: January to April; Easter: April to May; Trinity: June to July.

that he had *'detained for his own use some of the pistoletts*[22] *on board Don Pedro de Valdes's ship'* (a flagship of the Spanish Armada in 1588). Thomas Drake, as executor of Sir Francis's estate and the main beneficiary, was therefore effectively being 'accused by proxy' of complicity in these offences. Thomas flatly rejected the accusations and countered in his 'replication' that young Francis was in possession of £1,500 [£450,000] of ransom money concerning the maintenance of Don Pedro de Valdes, which was intended for Sir Francis Drake but had never been paid, and that until it was recouped no trial could proceed. He further accused Francis and Jonas Bodenham of a conspiracy to falsely obtain money by putting forward fraudulent claims.

The next chapter tells the stories of the two eventful periods at sea, mentioned above, during which Sir Francis was now accused of having acted fraudulently.

[22] Spanish gold coins; also known as Pistoles.

Suspected Cases of Fraud

1. The Voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena 1585-6

Item: That Sir Francis Drake embezzled and purloined over three thousand pounds, part of the profits of the San Domingo voyage.



Adapted from map by Battista Boazio, c. 1589 (in Public Domain)

It appears that the issue of which of Sir Francis Drake's expeditions would offer most potential for plausible accusations of fraud had been carefully evaluated by Jonas Bodenham. Drake's earliest voyages to the Caribbean in the early 1570s had targeted the annual 'flota' — the fleet of galleons bringing the

silver and gold bullion from the mines in Peru and other territories across the Atlantic to the Spanish King's treasury — and were little more than piratical raids, like bank robberies at sea, that had no royal sanction. But these were followed in 1577-80 by the glorious circumnavigation, whose astronomic profits first caught the attention of Queen Elizabeth, and after that no one was going to begrudge Sir Francis Drake his well-deserved rewards. It was well known that his later voyages, after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, had been carried out under official orders of the Queen and her Privy Council, which meant that any gains had therefore been more thoroughly monitored and accounted for.

This left Sir Francis's expedition to Santo Domingo and Cartagena in 1585-86 as the anomaly, in that it took place after the resumption of an undeclared but generally agreed war footing with Spain, but before open hostilities, which gave it a veneer of patriotic acceptability; and it thus sat squarely in that hazy middle ground between outright piracy and privateering with royal assent. Furthermore, this had been a new type and scale of expedition — a complex naval / military joint venture involving a cast of thousands — combined with an inconsistent and multi-part brief that included freeing British ships detained in Spanish ports, attacking Spanish settlements in the Caribbean, and once again attempting to intercept the flota. And most pertinently for the purposes of Jonas and young Francis, the venture unusually (and therefore suspiciously) was accounted a failure, because the plunder did not cover its costs.

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Plymouth harbour had been a hive of activity once more in September 1585, but this time on the epic scale necessary to bring together and supply twenty-five ships and pinnaces[23], plus crews amounting to 2,300 sailors and soldiers. Sir Francis Drake was the overall commander — although there were whispers that he was out of his depth for an expedition of this magnitude — with ships' captains including his younger brother Thomas Drake; Edward Winter, the son of Admiral Sir William Winter (a longstanding friend of Sir Francis); and Walter Biggs, an army commander[24].

Ill fortune dogged the expedition almost from the start, when there was no sign of any captured British ships to liberate in the Spanish port of Vigo. Then in November, barely two months in, after attacking some settlements in the Cape Verde islands where they had encountered what turned out to be a quarantine hospital for patients suffering from a form of plague, a deadly disease broke out amongst the convoy's personnel: *'From hence putting over to the West Indies, we were not many day at sea, but there began amongst our people such mortality, as in few days there were dead above two or three hundred men.'* Despite this, the decision was taken to attack Santo Domingo, capital of the Spanish Island of Hispaniola[25], *'allured unto by its glorious fame'*, where the soldiers transferred to small boats and spent the night at sea before simultaneously assaulting both main entrances at dawn on New Year's Day

[23] Pinnace: A small boat with sails or that is rowed; often refers to a boat carried on a larger ship that is used to ferry passengers between ships or ashore.
[24] Biggs' diary is the source of most of the quotes used.
[25] Hispaniola: Modern-day Dominican Republic and Haiti.

1586. By midnight, the town was captured, and the central marketplace was barricaded.



Drake's soldiers held their positions whilst negotiations proceeded with the Spanish authorities who had fled into the surrounding hills, as to the ransom to be paid for returning the town to them in a habitable state[26]. The Englishmen ransacking wealthy houses looking for spoils had been dismayed to find mainly copper coins and earthenware vessels, and not the silver and gold they had been promised. Interrogating the prisoners, it was discovered that years of *'tyranny'* by the Spanish conquerors had decimated the local population, eventually leading to a lack of manual labour to work the precious metal mines, which were therefore forced to close.

[26] Burning and pillaging a town to extract a ransom was an established practice that developed out of the scorched-earth tactics of medieval warfare, known as 'chevauchée'.

A month passed and the solid construction of the stone buildings of Santo Domingo proved fire-resistant, so that negotiations were not forcibly hastened by their destruction. *'And so in the end, what wearied with firing, we were contented to accept of five and twenty thousand ducats of five shilling six pence the piece*[27]*, for the ransom of the rest of the town*.' This was another sign that the voyage would not be as profitable as expected, but worse was to come since, unbeknownst to the expeditionaries, the city council of Santo Domingo had the foresight to send out warnings to nearby settlements, including Cartagena, that 'El Draque' was in the area and that they should prepare for a possible attack.

The city council had guessed correctly, since after resupplying his ships with fresh water (a constant challenge for such a large contingent) and provisions, and setting free all the local slaves — including galley slaves, some of whom chose to join his voyage — Drake's next destination was indeed the city of Cartagena on the mainland that the Spanish called 'The New Kingdom of Granada'[28]. Here Captain Edward Winter, exchanging his role as ship's captain for an army command, took the lead, finding the weak point in the city walls where wine barrels filled with earth had been used instead of stone, thus making entry possible. Given the advance warning from Santo Domingo, the inhabitants of Cartagena had evacuated the women and children, who took with them all portable valuables, so that once again few spoils were on offer. However, despite Cartagena being half the size of Santo Domingo, it was in a

[27] 25,000 ducats at the exchange rate given was equivalent to £6,905 or £2m today.
[28] Today's Colombia, together with parts of neighbouring countries.

more strategically important position, being so close to Panama where the annual bullion fleet was assembled. The ransom agreed was therefore significantly more, at 110,000 ducats[29], mainly in silver bars, although it was reported that Drake was deeply disappointed as he had promised the Queen that he would not agree to less than a million.

Drake's council advised him, tactfully, that after the deaths from disease, and the casualties from the campaigns to capture and ransom the two cities, there were not enough men left standing to continue as planned to intercept the flota at Panama, and that they would have to return home with what money they had already in the hold.

The fledgling English colony of Virginia further north was their next port of call, before heading back across the Atlantic. There, on Roanoke Island where a makeshift fort had been built, was a group of around a hundred men sent by Sir Walter Raleigh the previous year with the aim of assessing the site and its natural resources. Drake anchored his ships off the barrier islands and sent a skiff which returned with news that all was not well. Drake met with the leader of the colony, Ralph Lane, who admitted that they had struggled to become self-sufficient and in the pursuit of the scarce food sources on shore had managed to anger the local inhabitants, and were in desperate need of the supply ship that Raleigh had promised. In conference it was agreed that the colonists would pack up their meagre belongings — which included tobacco that the natives had taught them how to smoke, and *'roots of round form, some of the*

[29] 110,000 ducats, equivalent to £30,250 or £9m today.

bigness of walnuts, some far greater… [which] being boiled… are very good meat' called potatoes — and return to England. On the Atlantic journey they crossed paths, unseen, with Raleigh's supply ship[30]. The remaining ships, the freed slaves and the remnants of Raleigh's colonists arrived at Plymouth on the 27th July 1586. Of the original sailors and soldiers who had boarded ten months earlier, fully one third — seven hundred and fifty souls who had accepted the risks in the pursuit of an irresistible lottery of a lifetime's worth of spoils that never materialised — did not return to their families, including Captain Biggs, whose diary was completed by an anonymous colleague[31].

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A total of £60,000 [£18m] had been invested in the voyage via a joint-stock company, to which the Queen contributed a third (£20,000 or £6m) and Drake himself £7,000 [£2.1m], the rest coming from established funding sources such as the Hawkins brothers, and also Sir Walter Raleigh, whose royal warrant to found a colony in the New World was evident by his naming it Virginia. These financial 'adventurers' were to make their profits from the value of their share of the cargo that returned, expected to be the bullion stolen from the annual flota, treasure chests full of the ransom money obtained from the beleaguered Spanish settlements, plus jewellery and precious objects plundered

[30] The supply ships found the fort at Roanoke deserted and left 15 men to hold it, with enough supplies for two years. However, when the next group attempting to colonise Virginia arrived a year later in 1587, consisting of 115 men and women (and soon children) led by John White, there was no sign of them. Further supplies to this second colony were held up due to the invasion of the Spanish Armada, during which all English ships were to be made available for the defence of the realm, so that it was not until 1590 that the next supply ship arrived to find no trace of what became known as the 'lost colony', except for the word 'Croatoan' carved into a tree.

[31] Biggs' diary was published with additional maps and drawings in England in 1589.

from wealthy citizens' homes, and any casks of exotic spices seized from ships encountered by chance. The crew of poor and desperate men — sailors and soldiers alike — had a very different perspective on the rewards from the voyage. They had signed up to a promise of a monthly wage[32], but each knew from experience that life at sea was hazardous and unpredictable[33], that survival was a lottery, and that such great personal risks were only acceptable if there was the prospect of significant recompense from their voyages, which might possibly even set them up for life. So it was generally acknowledged that the crew's rewards came from pocketing the occasional silver or gold coin, or piece of jewellery, that fell into their hands as they ransacked towns and took the 'spoils'. As Raleigh put it: *'We find in daily experience that all discourse of magnanimity, of national virtue, of religion, of liberty, and whatever else hath wont to move and encourage virtuous men, hath no force at all with the common sailor in comparison of spoil and riches.'*

However, in this case not only had opportunities for reward been scarce, but on a voyage partly under royal instructions, an attempt had been made to put in place more strictly enforced controls, which stated that all spoils were to be surrendered to a named individual aboard each ship. This person would then deliver them to one of a list of the most trustworthy captains in the fleet, who stored them in locked chests which required four keys to open.

[32] As a reference, sailors during the attack by the Spanish Armada in 1588 were paid 7s.6d. [£113] per month, or an annual wage of £4.50 [£1,350].

[33] For example, in order to keep his real intentions of raiding Spanish towns on the Pacific coast of North America secret, Sir Francis Drake told his circumnavigation crew that they were on a trading mission to Alexandria in the Mediterranean, a trip of a few months compared to what turned out to be a three-year voyage.

Nor had the 'adventurer' investors fared any better. When the accounts of the voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena were compiled and signed off by Lieutenant-General Carleill, the total declared value of the haul of gold and silver ransom money, plus a large amount of 'ordnance' consisting mainly of cannons, was calculated as £60,000, the same as was invested; but after *'the companies which have travelled with the voyage'* — meaning the officers not the ordinary men — were allocated £20,000 [£6m], the adventurers were left with £40,000 [£12m], or a loss of £20,000 [£6m].

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To young Francis Drake, born and bred in landlocked Surrey, this history must have sounded like a seaborne myth; yet his future wealth would depend upon being able to provide a coherent account, and a credible face, to the court. Presented in one way, the story of the Caribbean voyage could indeed sound like a long litany of excuses, carefully crafted and oft-repeated, designed to divert attention from underhand dealings that somehow circumvented the controls: that Santo Domingo's economy ran mainly on copper coins, as there were no natives left to work the silver mines; that the stone buildings were so fire-resistant that the expedition had to accept a lower ransom; that Cartagena had been warned in advance, allowing the citizens time to hide all their valuables; that the ransom agreed was one tenth of what Sir Francis Drake had led the Queen to expect; that there were not enough healthy men left to attack the flota. There was certainly enough to sow seeds of doubt, if Francis and Jonas Bodenham could find some disgruntled eyewitnesses with long memories.

Suspected Cases of Fraud

2. The Capture of the Rosario 1588

Item: That Sir Francis Drake detained for his own use some of the pistoletts on board Don Pedro de Valdes's ship.

Francis Drake was eight years old when the Spanish admiral, Don Pedro de Valdes, and his two army captains from the Armada arrived at Esher Place in the custody of the local Justice of the Peace. They would remain part of the Drake household for almost five years, and so when Francis thought back to his childhood, it is likely that Don Pedro — notable for his swarthy Spanish skin, exotic clothing, and expressive gestures — holding court in the great hall, surrounded by the many curious people who were drawn to meet him, would spring quickly to mind. Francis was told that the Spaniards were prisoners, but apart from the fact that they rarely left Esher, and then only to go to London, one would not have been able to tell, as they were treated like high-ranking and demanding guests who required constant entertainment. Esher Place was open house to visitors, with copious amounts of fine food and wine on offer. In good weather, hunting trips were organised and large crowds of locals would gather to see off the exotic 'prisoners'.



Francis probably could not remember ever asking, or being told, directly why the Spaniards were there, but over time he had been able to piece together what had happened. The story that emerged began when his father Richard, an Equerry of the Stable to Queen Elizabeth, was at court on the last day of July 1588, and received an order from the Privy Council to deliver a letter to the Lord High Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Charles Howard, moored somewhere off the coast of Plymouth. Conflicting reports had been coming into London of the sea battle in the English Channel with the ships of the Spanish Armada that had begun ten days earlier, and the Queen wanted to be informed personally of a number of facts: how many English ships were in service, how many soldiers and mariners were on board, and how well were they supplied with ammunition and provisions? What losses of ships and men had there been from the Queen's navy, and what on the Spanish side? Had many Spanish prisoners been taken?

On this last point, Richard Drake noted that the Queen made a specific request, that Don Pedro de Valdes, a high-ranking prisoner aboard one of her ships, should be brought ashore along with other captives in case they either *'may practise some mischief, or else come to understanding of the secrets'* of her navy's capabilities and intentions.

On arrival in Plymouth, Richard Drake learned that following the initial skirmish in the English Channel, and as the Armada turned away towards the Continent, one of the Spanish ships, the Nuestra Señora del Rosario, had collided with another vessel. This caused enough damage that the Rosario became detached from the rest of the fleet. By this point it was dark, and Sir Francis Drake, the vice-admiral of the English navy on his ship the 'Revenge', was ordered to track the Armada at a distance, keeping a lantern lit at the stern so that the rest of the English fleet could follow. Instead, seeing the Spanish ship in trouble, and recognising it as the flagship of one of the main commanders, Sir Francis had his guiding light extinguished and set off to capture it, leaving the rest of the English navy static and unsure whether to progress. By dawn, the Revenge was alongside the Rosario and Sir Francis invited the Admiral, Don Pedro de Valdes, aboard to discuss terms through an interpreter. Having in his mind been *'abandoned'* by the Armada, Don Pedro surrendered without having fired a shot. For Drake personally, with his piratical instincts fully aroused, this was an extraordinary coup. Not only did he have in his custody an admiral, two senior infantry commanders — Don Alonso de Çayas of Laja, and Don Vasco de Mendoça y de Silva of Xerez de los Cavalleros — and several other men '*of the better sort'* who could be held for a significant

ransom, but he soon discovered that by fortunate happenstance the Rosario contained in its hold thousands of gold coins that had been meant for the wages of the Armada's mariners. Sir Francis ordered that the treasure chest be broken open and the contents transferred to a skiff and rowed to his ship. Only then did he set sail again to catch up with the English fleet, which was once more engaged in battle off the French coast. Here the weather would intervene, resulting in the Armada being forced to head north around the British Isles, battered by the 'Protestant wind', and then in increasingly depleted numbers back to Spain.



Sir Francis Drake and 'Don Pedro', as the Spanish Admiral was most often referred to, seem to have developed a good relationship from the outset, with Drake insisting that Don Pedro should sleep in his cabin and dine at his table. However, the danger involved in keeping his precious prisoners on board

soon became apparent, because during the subsequent skirmish a cannonball breached the hull of the Revenge, and passed through the captain's cabin where two of the Spanish prisoners were sleeping, destroying one of the beds but, miraculously, not injuring either man.

Having received the Queen's request regarding Don Pedro, though reluctant to give up custody of his hostages, Sir Francis Drake now had no choice. Don Pedro and his fellow prisoners were taken by ship to Rye in Sussex, then by cart into London, where along with others (numbering about forty officers as the bulk of ordinary sailors were kept on their ships) they were paraded through the streets so that the worried Londoners — so frightened at seeing the Queen retreat to St James Palace, surrounded by a guard of five thousand men, that shopkeepers had refused to open — could see evidence with their own eyes that the Spanish Armada had been defeated. In the following days, Don Pedro was interrogated by the Privy Councillors in a manner that respected his nobility. The Councillors were particularly keen to discover the objectives of King Philip II of Spain in sending the Armada, its size and supplies, where it had intended to land, and what support it had from Catholics in Scotland or France. There were, of course, also other items of interest: what intelligence did the Armada's leaders have of the English navy and the location of its commanders; what Englishmen were in their pay and providing information; and — to enable cross-checking with their own calculations — *'what money, jewels and plate'* were on Don Pedro's ship when it was captured?

Don Pedro was diplomatic and reserved, claiming that it was not for him to judge the motives of his King, but that the ships carried three to four

months of provisions and water and were to land on the coast of the Low Countries, where they would pick up the army of the Duke of Parma and proceed to invade England. He was, however, not privy to sources of military intelligence except to mention that they had captured a fisherman in the Channel who had told them that the English fleet was near Plymouth; and he confirmed that his ship was carrying 20,000 gold coins and other valuable silver objects. The outpouring of public joy in London probably overshadowed any lingering questions in Sir Francis Drake's mind over the amount of gold that had been delivered to the treasury coffers in relation to what, according to Don Pedro, had been aboard his ship. This would become a point of contention later.

Whilst other prisoners from the Rosario were placed *'in divers men's houses in London'*, Sir Francis managed to arrange for the captivity of Don Pedro and his two senior companions, and their attendants, not in the Tower of London, as the Queen had indicated, but at Esher Place in Surrey, the home that his *'kinsman'* Richard Drake had leased five years previously from the same Sir Charles Howard, Lord High Admiral, to whom he had delivered the Queen's letter in Plymouth harbour.

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At the end of August 1588, a month into his house arrest at Esher Place, Don Pedro de Valdes wrote a letter to King Philip II in which he informed the King that at Esher *'we receive the best usage and entertainment that may be'*. There were occasional visits to London too, where Don Pedro's group stayed with Sir Francis Drake at his house in Dowgate, beside the Thames. As the

weeks turned into months, Don Pedro, who represented the embodiment of Spanish defeat, became something of a celebrity and was visited at Esher by *'noblemen, courtiers, citizens, and strangers that did sojourn within the land, and the country people dwelling thereabouts'*. Then there were military men, *'divers commanders in the wars and many others of higher and lower degree',* wanting to learn about Spanish fighting methods. One prominent visitor was the most celebrated soldier of his era, Sir John Norris, a personal friend of Queen Elizabeth despite the fact that his grandfather had been executed for adultery with her mother Anne Boleyn. Another early caller was Dom António, Prior of Crato, so-called 'King of Portugal' although he had reigned only for a month in 1580, after which Philip II of Spain had prevailed. As an exile from his native land, Dom António had fled with the Portuguese crown jewels as his only financial means, first to France and then, afraid that Spanish assassins could reach him there, to England where he gained the protection of the Queen. It seems that Don Pedro was not impressed by Dom António, or his line of questioning about prospects of regaining the throne of Portugal, since in November 1588 he was said to have spoken ill about the exiled King, and to have been threatened with being removed to London in chains. Another frequent visitor to Esher was Sir Francis Drake's wife, Lady Elizabeth — an indication that it was not all fighting talk at Esher Place, and that there were often ladies present.

These were exciting times in Richard Drake's household, but the cost of entertaining the houseguests, and multitude of visitors, quickly became a burden to him. There was also the cost of heating such a large building during

the colder months, when the Spaniards complained of a lack of suitable clothes and worried about not being able to survive another winter in England. As a result, Don Pedro was encouraged to ask for money from King Philip II to *'defray the charges'* for his upkeep at Esher. Don Pedro's letters were sent by Richard Drake to his brother-in-law, Sir Edward Stafford, the English Ambassador in Paris, who would *'peruse'* them and then pass them to Don Bernadino de Mendoza, the Spanish Ambassador to France, who would send them on to the Spanish Court.

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Time passed, but with the Anglo-Spanish war still ongoing there was little likelihood of the release of Don Pedro de Valdes, who was bracing himself for a fifth English winter at Esher Place, since he was a prized possession and useful for propaganda purposes. It was only when Don Pedro became so sick in the autumn of 1592 that Richard Drake feared for his life — and by association his own chance of recouping the costs of the four and a half years of incarceration and entertainment at Esher Place — that the Queen was spurred into action and the Privy Council agreed a prisoner exchange, which would also involve a ransom payment, plus a 'maintenance payment' to Richard Drake.

The exchange prisoner in question was Edward Winter, son of Sir Francis Drake's longtime friend and investor Admiral Sir William Winter, and the same young man who had accompanied him on the voyage to Santo Domingo where he had swapped his captaincy for an army commission, and distinguished himself in the attack on Cartagena. This combination of

wanderlust and violence in his personality continued after his involvement against the Spanish Armada (where he served on board his father's ship) when he killed the son of the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire in a duel in London and fled, sailing for the continent and resolving to join the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish. Whether he had intended to do so as a participant or an observer is unknown, but this became irrelevant when he was captured during a storm off the French coast and handed over to Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador in Paris, who then placed him in the custody of the Duke of Parma at Antwerp Castle in the Spanish Netherlands. Like Don Pedro de Valdes, he too would spend several years in imprisonment.

By early 1593, the negotiations for the exchange of Edward Winter had been in progress for some time, backed by Sir Francis Drake who had sent a messenger to Esher Place to suggest to Don Pedro that he write to the Duke of Parma. This led to several discussions between Sir Francis and Don Pedro, using an interpreter, Richard Percival, who took the opportunity to check some definitions with the prisoners regarding the English-Spanish dictionary he was writing. A deal was finally agreed, and the Privy Council wrote to Richard Drake with the details of the exchange; that Don Pedro de Valdes would be *'put to liberty'* and brought to Calais where Mr Winter would be also taken, and that they should be *'exchanged in such sort on the water or otherwise as there shall be thought most meet and indifferent for both parties'*. Drake was told to let Don Pedro write to Winter's captor informing him of the same, the letter to be handed to Mr Winter's servant who would take it from Esher Place to Antwerp.

In February 1593, eight days before his departure from England, Don Pedro (as he wrote afterwards to his King) was *'taken to Court by orders of the Queen, where I was treated very handsomely, and was visited by the councillors, nobles, and naval officers there. They unanimously requested that when I arrived at your Majesty's court I would use my best offices in favour of peace, and a return to the old amity between the two countries; and they seemed to desire this more than ever. I was then taken to London, where I was entertained at a banquet by the Lord Mayor and aldermen. The next day I went to visit the Lord Treasurer [Lord Burghley], who also pressed me to use my influence in favour of peace. I found him very ill, and yesterday I received news that the doctors had abandoned the hope of saving him. He will be the greatest loss the English could suffer, as he is the most important man in the country.'* Don Pedro, with his fellow captives, then finally bid farewell to Esher Place and his hosts — Richard and Ursula Drake, and their only son, the soon to be thirteen-year-old Francis — for whom up to that point he had only kind words, and set off for the coast, accompanied by Richard's nephew Robert, and Jonas Bodenham in his usual role as Sir Francis Drake's representative.

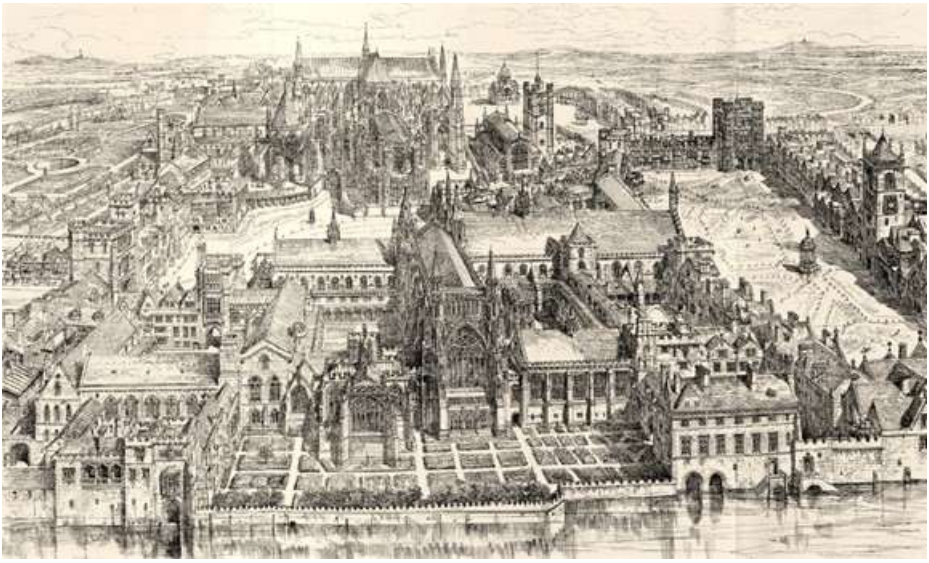
Once safely back on the continent, however, and no doubt reflecting upon the regrettable length of his imprisonment and the ransom money he was being charged for having endured it, Don Pedro's tone changed and he wrote a long letter to Lord Burghley, who had survived his health scare, in which he complained bitterly of his *'prison'* at Esher Place and the *'cruelty and harshness with which I was treated in consequence of my refusal to consent to the excessive and unreasonable things demanded of me by Richard Drake, moved*

by his greed and ambition'. He continued with specifics, keen to acquaint Burghley with *'the grievance and injury that Richard Drake does me against all justice and reason, in demanding so large a sum of money from me, in violation of the orders given by the Lords of the Council…I beg your Lordship will submit to the Queen, that she may learn the injustice being done to me.'*

In his attachment, Don Pedro listed the exact terms of his ransom: £3,550 [£1.1m], of which bonds for £2,500 [£750,000] had been given by an English banker on behalf of Edward Winter, leaving the sum of £1,050 [£315,000] to be paid by Don Pedro. However, it was the additional bill for *'maintenance charges'* that particularly infuriated him. Richard Drake was claiming a fixed rate of 23 ducats a week for each of the principal prisoners, or £333 [£100,000] a year over more than four years, a bill that came to £1,500 [£450,000].

His feet once again on English soil, Edward Winter also complained of the financial burden imposed on him, coming on top of his mistreatment by his captors — who had put him on the rack — and that he had *'spent of the sweetest time of my youth in all melancholy'*. The £2,500 that he was obliged to pay was indeed a significant sum: it appears that he was made liable for this greater part of Don Pedro's ransom due to the Spaniard's higher status. He blamed Richard Drake for what he perceived as great unfairness, for not having made it clear that in addition to paying for his own freedom, he was to pay for Don Pedro's release too, and accused Richard of having been *'the principal meddler'*. In the end, Winter had no choice but to pay up, in instalments, since he risked losing royal favour otherwise.

Drake vs Drake 1604-6



The Old Palace of Westminster, by HW Brewer; published in The Builder, 1884.

The time had come for Francis Drake of Esher and Jonas Bodenham to attempt to prove publicly their accusations of wrongdoing by Sir Francis Drake. The relevant court, which handled cases of money owed to the Crown, was the Court of the Exchequer. This was housed within the Palace of Westminster, in the building adjoining Westminster Hall, and proceeded not via brisk trials by jury but often long-winded cycles of complaints and counterclaims, supported by witness depositions, that eventually led to judgment. In preparation for the witnesses, both sides were required to prepare a list of 'interrogatories' — numbered questions that summarised the main charges and defensive arguments

— to be handed to an examiner of the court. These were then put to the witnesses, whose answers under oath (written onto parchment by a scribe using the legal 'secretary hand') were recorded using a set formula: the names of plaintiff and defendant followed by the name, age, abode and status or occupation of the witness, and the responses to each specific question. These depositions remained in the custody of the examiner until the interviews were completed, at which point they were published as copies and handed out to both parties. Although it was not obligatory for the plaintiff or defendant to be present in court, it was highly likely that they were observers: otherwise they might have to wait several weeks to find out what exactly had been said, and only then be in a position to argue that some statements may have been 'impertinent or leading' and move to have them suppressed. If the judge was not yet able to reach a decision, a new complaint was added to the list of cases to be heard at the next session.

The Court of the Exchequer thus worked slowly, through the four terms of the legal year that were mentioned earlier. In the complex case of Drake versus Drake, with the claim and counterclaim that Francis and Thomas Drake submitted in early 1604, plus the extensive list of witnesses that were to be called, it appears that the court's process ground to a near-complete halt. There is no record of any activity relevant to the case during the rest of that year, and in February 1605 King James himself felt obliged to intervene in order to speed things along by writing to the Lord Chief Baron, favouring Francis Drake (and by association his own gentlemen pensioners) with a criticism of Thomas Drake's *'delays and fraudulent course'* and with the regal command that *'now*

in like manner I have thought fit to require you, that by your means, our said servants may have the speediest course for obtaining the benefit of the said grant that in justice may be afforded to them'. Doubtless stung by the royal rebuke, but determined to stand his ground, in response Thomas Drake rented rooms in Westminster and hired an eminent lawyer.

Viewed as a whole, and given the stated objective to discover evidence of two instances of fraud by Sir Francis Drake — firstly, embezzling and purloining £3,000 [£900,000] from the campaign in Santo Domingo and Cartagena that should have been paid to the Crown; and secondly, retaining for his own use an (unspecified) amount of gold coins from Don Pedro de Valdes's Armada vessel — the selection of witnesses, and the topics covered, during the subsequent court proceedings are confusing for the modern reader. Any expectation of first-hand revelation of fraud during the Santo Domingo/Cartagena voyage was quickly dispelled, as only three of the nineteen witnesses referred to it, and then only from the perspective of the accounts: these of course confirmed the losses, but gave no indication of the reasons that lay behind them. The capture of Don Pedro's ship, the Rosario, was the subject of four witnesses, of whom three had been sailors with the English fleet: one of these men, George Hughes, provided a wonderful eyewitness account of the chaotic handling of the chest of gold coins. But the largest number of witnesses, ten in all, gave evidence solely on the aftermath of the Rosario incident and the 'imprisonment' of Don Pedro de Valdes and his compatriots, focusing on the cost of their upkeep, and the negotiation and payment of their ransoms. This provided a fascinating picture of life at Esher Place during this period, but did

little to uphold the original criminal complaint. What emerged, rather, was a court case that revolved around the later flows of money for ransoms and Don Pedro's maintenance — who received what sums, and were they entitled to them? Did any money need to be paid back, and if so to whom? Francis Drake of Esher had foreseen an opportunity to claim a share of a large reward, but the proceedings soon became a battle to avoid charges of fraud against himself, which would mean losing everything he owned.

How did this turn of events transpire? Had Jonas Bodenham, bragging about his inside knowledge of Sir Francis Drake's financial affairs, given false hope to young Francis? It certainly appears from the witness list that the pair had trouble finding people willing to speak out against Sir Francis, the national hero, twenty years after the alleged incidents. Was Bodenham propelled by the need of more money to fund his gambling habit? Land deeds from the time show that he had sold Sampford Spiney, the manor bequeathed to him in his master's will, back to Thomas Drake not long after taking possession, so it appears that he too was 'cash poor'.

An apparently serious quarrel between Francis Drake and Jonas Bodenham during the spring of 1605 came to light during the final examination of the Easter term. This was of Francis Crane, a young man of 23 who was employed as a servant to Ludovic Stewart, Duke of Lennox, a Scottish nobleman who had been involved in several scandalous incidents[34] in Scotland

[34] One incident involved Stewart being sent away from court for drawing his sword and fighting near the King's person, which was mistaken in some quarters as an assassination attempt; another involved a golf match during which there was an argument, in which two attendants were shot and killed.

and had relocated to England when King James I, Stewart's second cousin, took the throne. Thomas Drake produced Crane as a witness to give evidence of an argument during which Bodenham had declared to Francis Drake that without his testimony there was no case, and that unless Francis did *'otherwise satisfy him'* that Bodenham would *'discover against him such matters as his whole estate could hardly answer'*. In response, Francis Drake had '*conceived very unkindly of him, and used discourtesies to him, not fit to be there named'*. Crane appears to have been a go-between, since he stated further that Jonas Bodenham had recently approached him to take a message to Thomas Drake, which extended an offer that he was willing to come to a mutually advantageous arrangement. Thomas Drake's earlier court depositions had accused Francis and Bodenham of assembling their 'fraudulent' case together, but now the hapless Francis, at the age of twenty-five, was on his own, just as the majority of witnesses were about to take the stand.



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Taking the summary of the major events of 1605 set out above as context, it is worth taking a closer look at the unfolding of the court proceedings during that year. Two main interrogatories submitted in February — of around thirty questions each and putting the questions in the habitual negative construction — outlined the opposing arguments of Francis and Thomas Drake.

The original accusations were outlined in Francis Drake's interrogatory[35]:

Did not the voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena cost £60,000 which certificate Sir Francis Drake presented to the adventurers outlining their investments, but leaving blanks for what share he was going to take himself? Were not the adventurers of the voyage paid back at the rate of 15 shillings to the pound, a loss of 25%? Were there not ships that were fully provisioned for the journey that never left port (one such being the Speedwell) and others 'lost' on their return to England? Turning to Don Pedro de Valdes, was there not a treasure chest found on his ship the Rosario, and was it not broken open and money 'embezzled and pilfered', by both English and Spanish sailors? Is it not true that there were rumours that some Spanish sailors almost drowned with the weight of the gold they had pocketed? On his family's [the Drakes of Esher] finances, is it not the case that any monies received from Sir Francis Drake were gifts, and that Thomas Drake had given them £1,500 as a legacy [i.e. in lieu of Yarcombe; not a loan]?

[35] This, and the corresponding opposing view below, are summarised versions of the full interrogatories.

Thomas Drake's interrogatory advanced the counter-argument that his brother had done nothing wrong:

Did not the witness agree that the voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena had been all above board since Sir Francis Drake had a licence from Queen Elizabeth and had compiled his accounts which Thomas Drake as his executor had completed after his death? And did not the Queen's councillors agree that the accounts were 'just and reasonable'? Had Sir Francis Drake not spent a great deal of his own money which he did not have to set down in the accounts because he had not received an allowance from the Queen? With regard to Don Pedro de Valdes, would the witness not agree that the Spanish Admiral was Sir Francis Drake's prisoner, and that he had appointed Richard Drake to have custody of him, and paid him a weekly sum for their [the Spaniards'] upkeep? And did not Richard Drake receive money from the ransom of Don Pedro that was due to Sir Francis Drake, yet did not pass it on? And furthermore, did Richard Drake not borrow money from Sir Francis Drake which is still owing? As for Jonas Bodenham, what practices did he use in his 'complot' to call the voyage into question? Did he not threaten Thomas Drake that he would 'set great matters against him' and take back all the money that had come into his hands? Was it not he who was the 'great intelligence' acting for Francis Drake of Esher, and who solicited witnesses on his behalf? Can you tell the court what Francis Drake of Esher inherited from his father, that would prove he benefited from the money that belonged to Sir Francis Drake? Can you show the court the inventory of his credits and debts, his lands and chattels, and his household goods, plate and jewellery?

That the voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena had made a loss was confirmed without much argument. Sir Richard Martin had been one of the adventurers who had funded the voyage (and previously Drake's circumnavigation), and his son had taken part as a ship's captain. He confirmed that Sir Francis Drake had delivered to him a book of accounts containing the total costs of the voyage of £60,400 [£18m] and that *'therein were certain blanks left whereof no allowance was set down',* but that *'this examinant & the rest of the commissioners at that time that knows most about these affairs'* did consider that the book of accounts *'had dealt truly as they thought & made an honest account'.* By virtue of the findings of the commission, it was found that *'there was to be paid to every adventurer 15 shillings of every pound adventured*[36]*'* and that should there be further monies from the sale of what remained unclaimed, that there *'might fall out afterwards… also 12 pence in the pound more'*. In fact, there was *'£3,000 [£900,000] and upwards that was left undisposed to be distributed equitably for her majesty for her venture & the other necessary adventurers'*. Perhaps this money had never reached its intended recipients, and therefore this was where the value of the supposed 'embezzling and purloining' had originated.

Sir Richard Martin also confirmed that it was acknowledged by the adventurers that they should bear a part of any loss, which should be in

[36] Terminology is crucial here. A 'return' of 15 shillings in the pound (i.e. 20 shillings) would mean a profit of 15 shillings or +75%. But receiving back only 15 shillings for every pound ventured is a loss of -25%. The evidence that the voyage cost £60,000, and that the value of the haul brought back was almost the same, but that some of this had to be paid to the crews, confirms that the voyage was loss-making for the adventurers. Another witness, Roger Langford, was clearer in his phraseology: '…and it was agreed by the commissioners that there should be paid unto every adventurer in that voyage 15 shillings for every 20 that he had advanced'.

proportion to their investment. Furthermore, he knew all this to be true since he himself had dealt with *'the paying of the bullion [and] did pay out many monies to that effect to divers that brought bills and bonds'*. Finally, he denied any knowledge of fraud — if there had been any underhand dealings that had since come to light *'this deponent & the other commissioners knew not of them'*. In fact, he had presented the findings of the commission *'before the late Lord Treasurer & Chancellor of Exchequer & [it was] passed & allowed in the lifetime of Sir Francis Drake'*.

Philip Nichols, a clerk from Wentworth in Devon who had been on the voyage, said that he heard Sir Francis Drake *'profess & swear… that he lost £10,000 [£3m] by that voyage by reason of the charge of preparations in setting forth the voyage & by the death of Cuttle [a servant] who kept the receipts & lost them'*.

That was all. There was no eyewitness evidence that anyone, not least Sir Francis Drake, had '*embezzled and purloined over three thousand pounds, part of the profits of the Santo Domingo voyage'.* So the first suspected case of fraud appears to have ended with no substantive case for Thomas Drake to answer.

By contrast — at least as regards details revealed of a large-scale theft — the case for fraud following the capture of the Rosario (a lesser charge that had not even been quantified) began in early February 1605, with a scintillating description of events by the star witness for Francis Drake of Esher. George Hughes, a gentleman aged about 40 from Tottenham Court in Middlesex, had

at the age of twenty three been on board Sir Francis Drake's ship in 1588 when the damaged ship from the Armada, the Rosario, was captured and its commander Don Pedro de Valdes surrendered. Hughes described, in almost minute-by-minute detail, how a chest of treasure had been found on the Spanish ship and that *'before it was brought out of Don Pedro's ship it was broken open'* and *'some part of the treasure that was in the chest was embezzled away as well by Spaniards as English men'*. The looting was so rife that '*he heard likewise that one of the Spaniards that was taken at that time had as much of the gold about him as did afterwards pay for his ransom'*. What remained in the chest was transferred into thin canvas bags and onto the boat sent by Drake, but *'there came so many in the boat with it that by reason of the swelling of the sea & overloading the boat [with people] … that there is great likelihood in such a confusion that some [more] of the treasure was purloined away'*. It was utter confusion. The coins that made it into the possession of the English authorities and to the Lord Treasurer were counted, and on the orders of the Queen (who seems not to have been made aware of the pilfering) some of it was bestowed on the commanders and gentlemen who were on Drake's ship, including George Hughes himself: *'…whereof the deponent had a part'*.

The striking eyewitness detail of this testimony may have impressed those present in court, but even if Hughes's words echoed the language of Francis Drake's interrogatory, designed to reveal criminal behaviour — *'embezzle', 'pilfer', 'purloin'* — they suggested clearly that if fraud was committed, it was not by Sir Francis Drake. His only actions, as reported, were to send the boat to bring back the treasure, and to 'bestow' some of it to his

commanders once it had been counted. No further witness was proffered to prove his guilt. Instead, the focus shifted to how the Spanish prisoners were treated, the mounting costs thereof, who paid for their upkeep, and the ransom negotiations and payments.

At this remove, the apparent lack of substance in both complaints of fraud against Sir Francis is striking. It seems extraordinary that young Francis Drake even thought it worthwhile to bring them to court – unless more lay behind them that for some reason the court proceedings never reached, or the testimony of Francis's witnesses somehow failed to meet expectations.

And so the court's focus of attention moved on to the period of Don Pedro de Valdes' imprisonment, and its financial implications. The fullest account[37] of life at Esher Place during the Spanish prisoners' stay came from Evan Owen, a local yeoman aged around 40. He had been present — indeed had also dwelt in the house — when Don Pedro received his visitors, and could vouch for what was involved. Dom António, for example, *'who was named the King of Portugal, arrived with his son and divers others in his company [and] did lie at his [Richard Drake's] house'*. Other guests including *'Sir Horatio Palovicino and divers other strangers and General Norrys, Sir Francis Drake with divers other commanders in the wars and many others of higher level… had great entertainment in that house by the occasion of Don Pedro his being there, and the country people desiring to see the same…and Richard Drake he willing to give them content and no offence to the Spaniards, did often cause*

[37] Evan Owen's testimony runs to seven pages, more than any other witness.

one to play upon a tabor and pipe in his hall and to set them to dancing and so brought in the Spaniards, to see them dance'. He added, which perhaps caused a ripple of laughter in the court, that *'there was much beer drunk and much victuals spent in the house'*.



It appears that Evan Owen had administrative responsibilities, because he had access to Richard Drake's 'books of account' of income and expenditure at Esher Place. He was also curious: *'being willing to find out the truth of that charge has looked upon books of account of Richard Drake at those times that the Spaniards were at his house',* and he was able to calculate that Richard was spending double the amount each year (£800, equivalent to £240,000) compared to earlier years (£400, or £120,000).

Evan Owen also provided an account of Don Pedro's final days at Esher Place: *'After that Don Pedro had been at Richard Drake's house 4 years or*

thereabouts he fell to be very sick, and Richard Drake grew fearful that Don Pedro would die and that he should lose all the charges [that he had spent] and he was earnest with the late Queen and her Council to get an order for his deliverance'. According to Owen, the £2,500 ransom money paid by Edward Winter was at the direction of the Queen and her Council, and together with the £1,500 maintenance charge was intended to be to the benefit of Richard Drake *'being an ancient servant to the then Queen's Majesty…[and] he did often hear Richard Drake in his lifetime say that that money for the keeping of many persons was all the gratification that he had of the Queen for his pains'*. Furthermore, *'Sir Francis Drake did live long after the receipt of that [ransom] money and had not demanded the same [from Richard Drake]'*. Owen's whole testimony very much supported young Francis Drake's assertion that any money received by his father from ransom payments was recompense for additional expenses over nearly five years, and that therefore none of it needed to be paid back.

It must therefore have been an unpleasant shock for Francis when, at the start of the Michaelmas term in 1605, Thomas Drake produced two witnesses who directly contradicted this version of events. These were a married couple, Margaret and Simon Wood, from Bush Lane in the City of London, who had been servants of Sir Francis Drake at his residence called 'The Herbar' in Dowgate, just west of London Bridge, during the period under investigation[38]. In the early hours of the 5th of November 1605, the day before the Woods were

[38] Sir Francis Drake had purchased the lease in the autumn of 1588, a few months after his run in with Don Pedro's ship, the Rosario. This may, or may not, have been a coincidence, but the issue was not raised in court.

due to be examined, an infamous arrest took place in the cellars of the House of Lords, only yards away, where 36 barrels of gunpowder had been found. As a consequence, the opening of Parliament was postponed, but the Drake vs Drake case continued on its leisurely course.



Margaret Wood, aged 50, gave evidence first and told how Richard Drake was given an allowance from Sir Francis Drake for the *'diet'* of Don Pedro de Valdes and the others of £4 [£1,200] per week, and that Richard Drake's servants would come to the house at Dowgate to collect it, a habit which continued for a long time. Simon Wood, aged 60, who had been in service on another ship, the Leicester, during the battle with the Spanish Armada, confirmed the same payments, and added that Sir Francis Drake made other payments, *'he thinks between £40 [£12,000] and £50 [£15,000], and has likewise seen Richard Drake's man fetch of this'* and *'at divers times [did] deliver money at Esher in the County of Surrey where Don Pedro and others*

were kept for their diet & necessaries'. In addition, Sir Francis *'has oftentimes sent wine and capers & all other such provisions'*. Simon Wood had met Don Pedro several times, including a memorable occasion when Sir Francis Drake had taken Don Pedro to London, and afterwards walking in St. James's Park, they had encountered Queen Elizabeth who said to Sir Francis *'in this deponent's hearing since he had attended him*', that *'Drake should give then joy of his prisoner, in words to that effect, & he verily thinks that her late majesty did appoint Sir Francis to have the custody & guarding of Don Pedro, and says that Sir Francis did commit the custody of Don Pedro to Richard Drake [and] all he had need [for] the keeping of him'*. So, far from Richard Drake being out of pocket for the maintenance of Don Pedro de Valdes, it would appear from this testimony that he had been well paid for looking after Don Pedro on behalf of Sir Francis.



The presiding Barons of the Court did not intervene as the original complaints subsequently became near-buried in discussion of the ransom negotiations and payments. Insights were provided from various perspectives. Richard Percival, aged 55 from Kensington in Middlesex, was one of the closest to the action as *'he was often an interpreter between Mr [Richard] Drake & Don Pedro & did often deal between Mr Drake, & Mr Winter's men, & was the principal mediator (as he verily thinks) of the conclusion between them'*. But of all the witnesses, Edward Winter's name stands out as being the most intriguing. He represented the only link between the two fraud allegations — he had been a ship's captain on the Santo Domingo voyage, and had also been the prisoner exchanged for Don Pedro de Valdes — and he therefore possessed a unique perspective on events. His highly anticipated testimony, however, was hugely disappointing: he was barely monosyllabic in his responses to questions. Asked about the warrant that Sir Francis Drake had from the Queen to undertake the voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena, and the accounts that he submitted afterwards, Sir Edward (he had been knighted in 1595) said he had no knowledge of them. Asked about his ransoming, he simply confirmed the facts: *'having been taken prisoner by the Spaniards [he] was delivered in exchange for Don Pedro de Valdes & did pay of his part in respect these £2500 [£750,000] to Richard Drake or to some other whom he appointed to receive the same'*. He did not know what ransom Don Pedro himself had paid. Thomas Drake's examiner indicated that he did not have any questions, so Sir Edward was then dismissed.

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The legal year of 1605 came to an end, and it had been an extremely unpromising one for Francis Drake of Esher. The King's intercession on his behalf had encouraged the Barons of the Court of the Exchequer to push the warring parties to produce witnesses in court, but the accusations of fraud against Francis's godfather do not appear to have been proven in the slightest. Worse, Francis had put himself, and the finances of his household, in an extremely precarious position. It had been admitted in court that the £1,500 [£450,000] given to his father by Thomas Drake had effectively been spent as part of his wedding settlement, and it must have occurred to him that if this was judged through lack of paperwork not to be a legacy but (on Thomas's insistence) a loan, and had to be returned, it would cause him grief. He had also, perhaps naively in retrospect, argued that he was entitled to the money paid to his father for Don Pedro's maintenance, a further £1,500 [£450,000], but evidence had been produced that his father had received money for the upkeep of his 'prisoners' in addition, so he might have to repay that too. As for the remainder of the ransom money, £2,500 [£750,000], if there was no official document that would prove his assertion that the Queen had given this larger amount to Richard Drake for his long service, in lieu of a pension, then that might also need to be repaid.

The involvement of the King earlier in the year was probably the reason why the Attorney General, Sir Edward Coke, was now brought up to date with proceedings, and felt it necessary to step in and direct the court henceforth to concentrate solely, with specific evidence not hearsay, on the recovery of the balance supposedly due to the Crown relating to the Santo Domingo and

Carthagena accounts. As regards the other matters remaining open, the evidence of the confusion surrounding the plunder of the Rosario's gold coins was just too embarrassing to be allowed to sully the legend of the defeat of the Armada, and there was no likelihood of finding Sir Francis Drake, the great victor, guilty of anything more than dimming his stern lantern.

Thomas Drake, still residing at Westminster, stated that in order to comply fully with the new demands for evidence, he needed time to consult a large quantity of bills, books and notes that were stored at Buckland Abbey. The sudden revelation of the existence of these documents, coming soon after the relationship between Jonas Bodenham and Francis Drake had broken down, may have raised some eyebrows: it hinted that Bodenham was now on Thomas's side, reinforcing Francis Crane's testimony to that effect. It was agreed that a commission should be set up to sit in Plymouth to review the new evidence on the first Monday of Lent, 1606; but following pleadings by Francis that his deponents had other responsibilities, this was moved back to just prior to Easter.

Hounded first by the King and now by the Attorney General, Thomas Drake hastened back to Devon, facing the elements in the coldest month of the year on the tortuous two-hundred-mile journey. The first indication to the outside world that something was amiss was at the beginning of March, when a lawyer was called to assist in making Thomas's will since he was seriously ill. The Commissioners, along with Francis Drake and his witnesses, had already arrived in Plymouth when the news broke on the 4th April 1606 that Thomas Drake, at the age of fifty-two, was dead, his ill health compounded by a decade

of stress resulting from sustained legal conflicts over his acclaimed brother's legacy.



There would have been stunned silence as the implications sank in. Everyone was aware that the royal grant of a share of any money reclaimed, and therefore the ensuing court complaint, had been brought against Thomas Drake personally, not against Sir Francis's estate, and therefore that with his death there was no longer a case. Jonas Bodenham, wherever he was when he heard the news, may have sighed with relief: he had now probably escaped any further investigation into his questionable handling of Sir Francis Drake's affairs. Or, if he had switched sides, he may have regretted the loss of a potential court victory alongside Thomas.

As for Bodenham's former partner, one can only speculate about what must have been a complex mix of emotions. Unless significant information is

missing from the court record (which seems unlikely), Francis would have had cause to reflect on why his case had turned out to appear so weak. Had it been too tall an order to dredge up these 'cold cases' of two decades ago, searching for evidence of crimes about which no one had raised suspicions at the time? Was failure due not so much to the death of Thomas Drake, but rather to the lack of coherent witnesses and evidence? Had that untrustworthy gambler, Jonas Bodenham, simply conned him into believing a fairy story? And ultimately, had it been a mistake to think that Sir Francis Drake's stellar reputation could be called into question?

What is certain is that Francis had obtained no benefit from almost three years of legal efforts and accompanying worries, and his mood on departing from Devon for a second time must have been very different from that of the hopeful young man who had travelled back to Esher in 1593. He may have been secretly relieved that the case had collapsed, just when the momentum had apparently swung in Thomas's favour. He was probably concerned about the considerable bill now to be paid for court costs, but conscious that the outcome could have been much worse. Perhaps there was even a realisation that he could learn from the traumatic experience, and that it was time to put the past aside and forge his own identity.

To Please the Prince

What Francis did between 1606, when the court case ended abruptly, and 1615, when he was recorded by Dr John Hart chasing his wife up the stairs while brandishing a great iron fork[39], did not make headlines. He had two sons — William and Francis — and so became a family man with heirs of his own. He had responsibilities as Lord of the Manor of Walton-on-Thames and the Rectories of Walton and West Molesey: his name appears in surviving records of the manor courts written, in Latin, between 1606 and 1619. He became a Justice of the Peace for Surrey in 1608, which would have kept him occupied with regular local law enforcement and Quarter Sessions undertakings — his experience in the Court of the Exchequer does not seem to have put him off courtrooms. These were all well before his parliamentary career, which began around the time of his first wife's death in 1625 (he married again subsequently, twice). He was therefore a busy man, but none of these activities would have made him rich, and he would have relied primarily on the income from his tenants. After the costs of the court case there would probably still have been financial pressure on him, and he would have had to accept that he was never going to acquire the wealth he once coveted.

Francis would have been mortified, then, by the spendthrift and licentious behaviour of the Royal Court of which he was, at least nominally, a part. At the end of July 1606, just weeks after the failure of the Exchequer case,

[39] See 'The Museum of Melancholy: The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1615-47'.

James I entertained Christian IV of Denmark (his brother-in-law) at Theobalds, the great country house of the Cecil family. As part of their ceremonial duties accompanying the King, the gentleman pensioners would have been present and it is entirely possible that Francis Drake was among them, or at least heard first hand of the goings-on that were described by an eyewitness, Sir John Harington,[40] who wrote: '*…there hath been no lack of good living, shows, sights, and banquetings from morn to eve. We had women, and indeed wine too, of such plenty, as would have astonished each sober beholder. Our feasts were magnificent, and the two royal guests did most lovingly embrace each other at table. I think the Dane hath strangely wrought on our good English nobles; for those whom I never could get to taste good liquor, now follow the fashion, and wallow in beastly delights. The ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen to roll about in intoxication.'*

The favouritism of King James towards his Scottish courtiers, and in particular one handsome youth, would also have been visible to Francis. In March 1607, a few months after the bacchanalia at Theobalds, King James (who was then around 40 years old) was celebrating the anniversary of his Accession Day by watching a tournament. During the jousting competition Robert Carr[41], barely 20, was thrown from his horse and broke his leg. This potentially distressing event turned out to be extremely fortunate for him, as King James insisted that his personal physician should attend the injured man. Not being averse to a fine male leg, even a broken one, the King took a personal interest

[40] Harington, another courtier, wrote a letter to a 'Master Secretary Barlow' describing these events, collected in 'Nugae antiquae' Vol 1.
[41] Sometimes written as Kerr.

in young Carr's recovery: he was soon seen with his arm around Carr and, in a sign of the royal doctor's skills, leaning casually on his shoulders for support. As King James's first favourite at the English court, Robert Carr's subsequent meteoric rise took everybody, including Queen Anne, by surprise. Within four years, he was knighted, granted the manor and estates at Sherborne that had belonged to Sir Walter Raleigh, made Viscount Rochester, and had become a member of the Privy Council and the King's private secretary.

Sir Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, wrote an insightful letter[42] to the same Sir John Harington who had recorded the bad behaviour at Theobalds, with advice on how to win the King's affections, as he *'covets wondrous discourse, which you can furnish with ample means'*, but such *'endowments of the inward sort: wit, valour and virtue'* are no longer preeminent, because His Majesty now admires *'outward things, such as good fashion in clothes, deportment and a good countenance'*. Of Robert Carr, Howard observed that '*...he was with him as a boy in Scotland, and knows his taste and what pleases. This young man does much study art and device; he has changed his tailors and tiremen[43] many times, and all to please the Prince'*.

The rapid ascent of Robert Carr led to a redefinition of masculinity at court, as political factions attempted to dangle young men with similar attributes in front of the King to try and gain favour. Somehow lost was the Elizabethan ideal of honour, self-control and patriarchal authority in defence of a man's

[42] The letter is undated, but from the content must have been written during the early period of Robert Carr's rise, probably in 1607.
[43] Tireman: Occupation of someone responsible for the outfitting of the nobility.

family name and social standing, which had previously been evident through martial prowess or land stewardship. In its place was an 'effeminacy'[44] — the excessive outward show of passions and fashions — which now seemed to be more valued than any underlying substance.

No longer an impressionable youth or a naïve onlooker, Francis Drake appears to have taken stock of the realities of his world — with the piratical machismo of the West Country sailors at one extreme, and the licentious posturing of the Jacobean court at the other —and decided to take his own path.

[44] Effeminate: A term used at the time to refer to men who lacked emotional restraint, and had an 'unmanly' interest in fashion and poetry. A later heir of Sir Francis Drake sub-titled an account of his voyages as: 'Calling upon this Dull or Effeminate Age to Follow his Noble Steps for Gold and Silver.'

A Puritan Identity

Following the creation of the Church of England, and several further Acts of Uniformity designed to define its practices, various gradations of dissent emerged. These ran all the way from silently wishing for a more direct conversation with God — unhindered by the man-made church hierarchy with its 'popish' vestments and superstitious practices — to complete rejection of the state religion. This latter separatist ideology provoked its adherents to cross oceans to find (so they imagined) an empty land where they could begin anew. Arriving at such a worldview was a journey in itself: from dismay at the ungodly ways of the world; to peacefully but resolutely protesting by not attending mass on Sundays; to cautiously sharing views with like-minded souls; to forming congregations of their own and marvelling at the dramatic and uplifting rhetoric of their preachers (who had been 'silenced' by the authorities, losing their tenures and incomes). It was only then, with no other choice, that they fled abroad as exiles.

Francis Drake would have been aware that his mother's family, the Staffords, had been on such a journey of their own, joining other austere Protestants at the very beginnings of what would become the Puritan movement. In 1555, when the burning of the heretics who refused to convert to Catholicism began under Queen Mary's rule, the family of the future Ursula Drake, then a two-year-old Ursula Stafford, made the decision to flee into exile in Europe. They headed for Geneva, where there was already a thriving community of like-

minded reformists[45], led by Jean Calvin. The following year Dorothy Stafford found herself pregnant again and in January 1556 a son, John, was baptised in the chapel adjacent to the cathedral in Geneva. This chapel was used by Calvin as an auditorium for his Bible studies and theology lectures[46], and he allowed it to be used as a place of worship for the various exiles of different nationalities and languages. It was perhaps in recognition of this that Calvin was made godfather to John Stafford, who was the first newborn of the English congregation to be baptised there. This might have remained a notable honour to the Staffords, forever a source of pride as Calvinism spread, had Sir William Stafford not died barely four months later. His widow was then keen to leave Geneva, but Calvin would not permit her to take John out of the city, and it was only after threats to involve the French authorities that Dorothy secured permission to move to Basel, where the family remained until it was safe to return to England after the death of 'Bloody Mary'[47].

§

[45] The Stafford family — Sir William and Dorothy, and 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) which recorded the names of the English community of around 140 households.

[46] Now known as the Calvin Auditory.

[47] After Dorothy and her family returned to England in early 1559, Celio Secondo Curione, Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Basel university, wrote to enquire after her health. The letter sent in reply, dated 30th April 1559 and signed by Dorothy Stafford and Elizabeth Sandys, expressed their optimism for Queen Elizabeth's reign: 'There was hope that, when we first returned to the homeland, having cast away superstition, we would find restored piety and true worship of God.'



The historical record shows that Francis Drake became a staunch Puritan in the years following the court battle with Thomas. This is not surprising, given his experiences at the Court of the Exchequer and at the Court of King James, combined with his family history. However, he was not yet fully integrated into London's Puritan 'network', as is evident in his willingness to let Dr John Hart, his wife's confidant, orchestrate events for the attempted cure of her spiritual anxieties[48]; if he had already been a seasoned Puritan, he would probably have been meeting over dinner at various safe houses, and corresponding with Dr Ussher in Dublin, and would surely have known of the reputation of Mr Dod, whose long career of sermonising had resulted in published and well-regarded works, and a nickname: 'Decalogue Dod'. He

[48] See 'The Museum of Melancholy: The Divine Case of Mrs Drake 1585-1625'.

would himself have known which Puritan divines to solicit. But in fact it was not until 1620 that he felt confident enough to appoint his own minister at Esher — Thomas Hooker, a noted nonconformist[49].

This Puritanical streak may also have been reinforced by Francis's financial circumstances. With no reward, but only expenses, from the court case, belts would have had to be tightened, and there would be no unnecessary spending, or frivolous entertaining, at Esher Place. Sober manners were to be practised, and plain clothes were to be worn. It would only be a short step from here for the household to turn inwards, and to seek God from within its own confines. Francis would have been aware — not least from the well-publicised satirical pamphlets and plays — that to be a Puritan was to be open to some ridicule, but he seems to have found a place in society which provided him with a firm moral purpose and where, although probably still aggrieved at his misfortune, he felt able to confront his past.

By the time of Francis's own death in 1634, the contents of his will show that he had recovered well financially, having made good progress at Court and as an MP. But he never became the rich man of his youthful dreams, and he must surely have regretted the damaging missteps that he had made thirty years earlier, in attempting to drag the reputation of his godfather through the mud.

[49] Despite apparently not holding the advowson (the right to appoint a parish priest) for St. George's church, clearly Francis Drake was able to influence the decision to appoint Thomas Hooker. According to the Victoria County History, the advowson was given by King James 1 in 1620 to Sir Henry Spiller. This 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 Hooker did not have appear before the church authorities.

Timeline

Date	Event
1555-59	The Protestant Stafford family go into exile in Geneva to escape from 'Bloody Mary'.
c. 1583	Richard Drake takes up residence at Esher Place with his wife Ursula (née Stafford) and son Francis.
1585-86	Sir Francis Drake's Voyage to Santo Domingo and Cartagena.
1588	Capture of Don Pedro de Valdes from his damaged ship, the Rosario, during the battle with the Spanish Armada.
1588-1593	Don Pedro de Valdes held captive at Esher Place, in the custody of Richard Drake.
1593	Ransom agreed for Don Pedro de Valdes, who is freed in exchange for Edward Winter.
1593	Francis Drake of Esher, aged 13, spends 12 weeks at Buckland Abbey in the company of his godfather Sir Francis Drake.
1596	Sir Francis Drake dies of dysentery off the coast of Panama. As he lies dying, he makes a codicil to his will.
1596-1603	Series of court cases involving Thomas Drake, executor of his brother's will, with the Sydenhams and Jonas Bodenham.
1603	Francis Drake of Esher marries Joan Tothill of Shardeloes near Amersham. Richard Drake dies, and Francis Drake considers court action against Thomas Drake.
1604	Francis Drake and Jonas Bodenham join forces to bring two charges that Sir Francis Drake withheld money due to the Crown.
1605	Drake vs Drake case takes depositions from witnesses at the Court of the Exchequer.
1606	Thomas Drake dies and the Drake vs Drake case is closed.

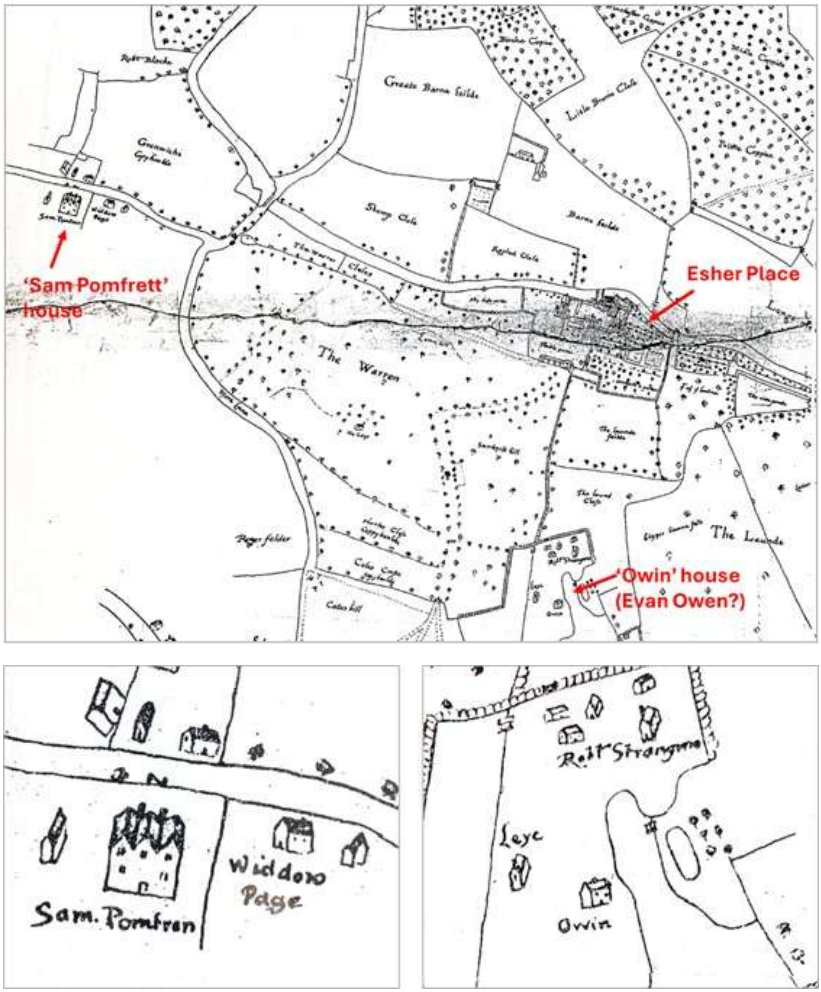
Sir Francis Drake's Codicil 1596

In the name of God, amen. The seven and twentieth day of January, in the eight and thirtieth yere of the reign of our sovereign Lady Elizabeth, by the grace of god of England, France, and Ireland Queene, Defender of the Faith, &c. I Francis Drake, of Buckland Monachorum in the county of Devon, knight, general of her majesty's fleet now in service for the West Indies, being perfect of mind and memory (thanks be therefore unto God) although sick in body, do make and ordain my last will and testament in manner and form following, viz.: First, I commend my soul to Jesus Christ, my savour and redeemer, in whose righteousness I am made assured of everlasting felicity; and my body to the earth to be entombed at the discretion of my executors. Item, I give, devise, and bequeath unto my well-beloved cousin **Francis Drake**, the son of **Richard Drake** of Esher in the county of Surrey esquire, one of the esquires of her majesty's stable, all that my manor of Yarcombe situate lying and being within the county of Devon, with all the members rights, members, and appurtenances to the same belonging or in any wise appertaining. To have and to hold all and singular the said manor of Yarcombe, with all the rights, members, and appurtenances unto the same belonging, unto the said **Francis Drake**, son of the said **Richard Drake**, his heirs and assigns for ever: Provided always, and my will and intent is, that, if the said **Richard Drake** and **Francis Drake** his son, their heirs, executors, or administrators, or any of them, do not well and truly content and pay, or cause to be contented and paid, unto **Thomas Drake** of Plymouth in the said county of Devon gentleman, his executors or assigns,

the sum of two thousand pounds of lawful money of England, within two years next after the death of me the said Francis Drake, that then this my present legacy and devise of the said manor of Yarcombe, with its appurtenances, unto the said **Francis Drake**, son of the said **Richard Drake**, and to his heirs, to be utterly frustrate, void, and of no force. But my will, intent, and meaning is that, upon default of payment thereof within two years next after my decease, all and singular the said manor called Yarcombe, with all his rights, members, and appurtenances, shall wholly descend, remain, come, and be to my said brother **Thomas Drake**, and to his heirs and assigns for ever, to the only use and behove of the said Thomas Drake, his heirs and assigns for ever more; having this will, intent, and meaning, that the said two thousand pounds before expressed shall be only and wholly employed towards the payment and discharge of my debts and performance of this my present will and testament, and not otherwise. Item, I give, devise, and bequeath unto **Jonas Bodenham**, gentleman, all that my manor of Sampford Spiney situate lying and being within the said county of Devon, with all the rights, members, and appurtenances to the said manor of Sampford Spiney belonging, to have and to hold all and singular the said manor of Sampford Spiney, with all the rights and members and appurtenances to the same belonging, unto the said **Jonas Bodenham**, his heirs and assigns, for evermore. Furthermore, I do make constitute and ordain my said brother **Thomas Drake** to be my full and sole executor having an assured trust and confidence in him that he will have a brotherly care to see my will performed in all things according to the trust in him reposed. As touching all the residue of lands, goods, and chattels whatsoever not herein willed devised legacied bequeathed nor disposed of, my will and intent is that a former will made by me

the said Francis Drake, under my hand and seal, bearing date the (sic) day of August, in the seven and thirtieth year of the reign of our said sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth, shall stand remain and be observed in all pointes, in such manner and form as in and by the same I have devised willed limited and bequeathed, In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal of this day and Yeoven the day and year first above written, FRA. DRAKE. Sealed, signed, and delivered, in the presence of those whose names are subscribed: Charles Mannors, **Jonas Bodenham**, **Thomas Webb**, **Roger Langford**, George Watkins, William Maynard.

Treswell's Map of Esher 1606



Ralph Treswell's Map of Esher 1606 (black & white copy) at Surrey History Centre

Ref: Z/503/26/1

Esher Place Map and Reconstruction



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



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

Sources

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Acknowledgments

Lady Elizabeth Eliott-Drake's two-volume book of 1911 documents the lives of the heirs of Sir Francis Drake. Her focus was not on the great man himself, as she considered that other historians had, and would, do a far better job. Fortunately, this meant that she included a chapter on Thomas Drake and his court cases, which provided the original impetus and identification of primary sources for this book. These include the Court of Exchequer documents now in the National Archives.

I am also grateful to David Morgan of the Esher District Local History Society (EDLHS) for his editorial comments and suggestions, as well as discussions on the finer points of early modern property and probate law, royal grants and ransoming.

Unless otherwise specified, the illustrative images used throughout were self-created using a range of software tools, including: ChatGPT-4o (https://chatgpt.com/images/), Leonardo.ai (https://app.leonardo.ai/), and Affinity Photo Editing (https://www.affinity.studio/photo-editing-software).

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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.

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In 1593, thirteen-year-old Francis Drake of Esher in Surrey is invited to visit his godfather, the celebrated explorer Sir Francis Drake, at Buckland Abbey in Devon. Young Francis leaves three months later convinced that he will be named Sir Francis's heir and will inherit the estates of the ageing and childless national hero. However, Sir Francis dies off the coast of Panama on his next voyage and makes a hasty codicil to his will, in which he leaves his godson only one small manor for which he has to pay a substantial fee.

This deathbed act leads to years of legal wrangling in which Francis Drake, now in his early twenties, fights for what he believes are his rightful dues against Thomas Drake, Sir Francis's younger brother and executor, alongside Jonas Bodenham, a shady character brought up as the son Sir Francis never had to handle his business affairs. There are no holds barred; the only way to win is to drag his godfather's name through the mud by accusing him of defrauding Queen Elizabeth I twenty years previously.

This is the true story of events, based on transcripts of the original documents from the Court of the Exchequer in 1605, that revolve around eyewitness accounts of the burning and looting of Spanish colonial settlements in the Caribbean, and the 'embezzling and pilfering' of gold coins from a damaged ship of the Spanish Armada, whose captain is held to ransom. It is also the story of young Francis Drake's search for identity — amidst the piratical machismo of the West Country sailors, and the licentious posturing of the Jacobean court — and his gradual acceptance of his Puritan heritage.

This book is a companion piece to the real-life story of Joan Drake (Francis's wife) in 'The Museum of Melancholy: The Divine Case of Joan Drake 1585-1625'. Together, these two books provide a rare insight into an imperfect early modern marriage.

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