



Thomas Watson's Lodging from May 1561 to September 1562

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Received: 19 Aug 2022; Received in revised form: 09 Sep 2022; Accepted: 15 Sep 2022; Available online: 20 Sep 2022

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Abstract— *At barely six in mid-1561, Watson had the misfortune of having his parents die successively and was hence moved from the London house he grew up in at Mark Lane, Saint Olave, to another dwelling temporarily before he joined Winchester College. He lived from mid-1561 to September 1562, for nearly sixteen months, at this temporary dwelling either in London or in his Uncle Lee's estate in Oxford, till he joined Winchester College and stayed there until his graduation for the next seven years in mid-1569. He is recorded in the Winchester College as having been enrolled there wherein his dwelling is noted as Saint Helen's parish, London.*

Keywords— *Thomas, Watson, Winchester, biographical, Lee, Renaissance.*

INTRODUCTION

In the immediate aftermath of his mother's death, doubly orphaned Thomas Watson (1555-1592) at barely six years old was not yet of age to enter Winchester College, who only admitted students at seven. Upon Anne Watson's death in May 1561, her trusted brother and principal executor, Thomas Lee, oversaw his sister's wish to relocate her two eldest daughters, Elizabeth and Mawdelyn, to the home of Dame Laxton, a real-estate heiress and prolific land purchaser, and her daughter, Lady Lodge, the mother of the acclaimed playwright, Thomas Lodge.¹ Placing two of her daughters at the households of noble, well-educated women indicated Anne Watson's recognized social status within her community and her robust financial status to sponsor their extended stays at opulent dwellings. At six, young Thomas

likely divided his time between his female siblings in London and bonded with his well-educated and childless uncle in his estate at Oxfordshire where he possibly read children's stories from his uncle's personal library. To be orphaned at such a young age must have left its memorable imprint on Watson's psyche. Although one would expect that some measure of pessimism and gloom to find their way to his literary oeuvre, surprisingly his is a legacy predominated with uplifting, amatory themes.

As Lee placed the eldest two of his four nieces, Elizabeth and Mawdelyn, in the care of his late sister's elite friends, Dame Laxton and her daughter Mistress/Lady Lodge, he possibly pushed for the inclusion of his young nephew who was barely six. Whether Lee managed to convince the two women to house the nephew of his only

¹ All wills mentioned in this article can be found through searching the National Archives website at this link:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse>. In her will, Anne Watson exclaims her wish regarding where to place her two eldest daughters: 'Item, I do will and desire that my daughter, [f. 132v] Elizabeth, may be with my Lady Laxton, and she to have her portion, putting in sureties for the same till she come to lawful age or day of marriage'. She continues, 'Item, I will and desire that my daughter, Maudelyn, may be with Mistress Lodge, and he to have her portion in like manner'. You can find her will under the following National

Archives link:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D980181>.

Anne does not allude to where she wishes to accommodate her four other children, William, the eldest, and the three youngest: Thomas, Marye, and Elizabeth-the-younger. It is likely that William who was about to turn, or just turned, eight at her death in May 1561 was already enrolled in a boarding, grammar school.

For the will of Lady/Dame Joan (Johan) Laxton, see this link:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D962038>.

For the will of Lady/Dame Anne Lodge, see:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D964119>.

sister and his two nieces in their homes as his sister wished, whether on occasion he took the three into his Oxford mansion to enliven his childless existence with Marye Wolfe, or whether he placed them elsewhere is uncertain. What is indisputable, however, is that wherever young Thomas stayed, it was for a relatively brief time, an approximate sixteen-month interim from Anne's death in early May 1561 to mid-September 1562, the beginning of the school year at Winchester College. According to the Winchester College records, a young Thomas Watson, age eleven, was among its student roll of 1567: 'Watson, Thomas (11), St. Helen, London' (Kirby 141).² This date, which establishes that he joined the school in 1562, also confirms that he was the acclaimed poet because the age of the Winchester Watson corresponds exactly to the poet's birthdate in mid-1555;³ this is further corroborated by his recorded address in Saint Helen, a parish that is near his family dwelling in Saint Olave, Hart Street.

It is not a coincidence that the Winchester College, London registered address for Thomas is in Saint Helen, a parish that is only half-a-mile away. Hence, although it is most probable that this address belonged to the Laxton/Lodge ladies since two of his sisters already lived there, it is also logical to imagine that it belonged to any of the many Watson relatives, in-laws, or close friends. These relatives would have been too glad to accommodate Thomas among their midst, the orphaned boy of much-loved the Watson couple whose genuine sense of generosity and philanthropy are clearly manifest in their will. Besides, whoever accommodated Thomas for only a small number of days per year would have been too eager to do so, especially with adequate financial support from his wealthy uncle and faithful executor.

Since Winchester College was a year-round boarding school, it functioned as a de facto permanent address for the young boy, an address that was used only in the instance of a medical emergency or a serious tragedy--for the purpose of informing the next of kin, rather than an abode of preference. Watson's favorite residence on his infrequent, religious leaves from Winchester school every

year (such as the extended holidays for Christmas and Easter) would have been impacted by his passion for play as a child and for satisfying his nascent proclivity to read poetry and drama as a young poet in the making. As a consequence, his preferred London lodging would be to stay intermittently with his female siblings for merrymaking and bonding in the comfort of his wealthy hostesses' opulent residences where he as a young child would have been inclined to do. Alternately, Thomas would be felicitous basking at his uncle's Croperdie lush mansion in Oxfordshire, nurturing and reinforcing his early playwrighting predisposition while poring over volumes of poetry and drama from Lee's private library.⁴

From another perspective, to have had many of William's kinsfolk living in close proximity at Saint Helen would have served his need for labor at his garment workshop. Some individuals from his extensive circle of friends and family members were obviously either reliant on his charity or forged a co-dependent relationship with him, assisting him as workmen and apprentices in his highly successful dress-making business.⁵ In his will, William expresses a deep sense of generosity to a long list of friends, family members, comrades in the drapery profession, hospital patients, prisoners, servants, maids, the needy at large, etc. Aside from the money he liberally bestowed upon his immediate family members including his three children from two previous marriages (Barbara from an anonymous first wife, and Blanche, Anne, and John from Jane Stanney),⁶ he also made donations to various collective entities such as the Livery of the Drapers, prisoners, hospital patients, the poor in London and Shropshire, etc.⁷ But William's largesse seems to have been misplaced in the case of two of his children--John and Anne Watson--who were apparently overly dependent on his charity and expected his wife to continue his tradition after his death. In her will, irked Anne offers to silence her step-children with ten pounds each, but makes it conditional upon their refraining from pursuing her executors after her death: 'to John Watson, £10; and to Anne Watson, £10, so that after this time they nor none for them do trouble me nor my executors

² See F. Kirby, *Winchester Scholars: List of Wardens, Fellows, and Scholars of Saint Mary, College of Winchester, Commonly Called Winchester College* (London, 1888), 141.

³ For a concise, focused discussion of Watson's birth date, see Ibrahim Alhiyari, 'Thomas Watson: New Birth Date and Privileged Ancestry' *Notes and Queries* 53, 1 (2006), 35-40. DOI: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Thomas-Watson%3A-New-Birth-Year-and-Privileged-Alhiyari/9424623f4604ff8e13a87fd716917ed4874118bd# citing-papers>. For an elaborate discussion of his pedigree, see Ibrahim Alhiyari, 'Thomas Watson: New Biographical Evidence and his Translation of Antigone'. PhD. diss., Texas Tech University, 2006. DOI: <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/8391>.

⁴ Lee makes reference to his 'books' in his will, which he gifts to his friend, George Danvers. See Lee's National Archives' will at this link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D959647>.

⁵ William Watson's clientele included the mayor of Newcastle, Cuthbert Ellyson ... against whom William files a lawsuit of non-payment for the making of a fancy fleece coat costing up to 150 pounds. See <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?q=C+1%2F1394%2F14>.

⁶ In her will, Dame Blanche Forman (nee Stanney) gives to William's children, Anne and John, ten pounds each and refers to William as her "brother". Such reference confirms William's marriage from her sister, Joan Stanney. See Dame Blanche's 1564 will here: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D956040>.

⁷ See William Watson's will: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D979370>.

any more, and if they do, this my bequest to them to be void and no gift'.

The importance of the address is that it is located near the Watson family house in Saint Olave, Hart Street. Most likely, it belonged to either Dame Laxton or Lady Lodge, where two of Thomas female siblings lived, or to an unknown Watson family relative. It would be inconceivable for Lee to lodge the young boy as a tenant at a random house in London among a group of strangers with no common interests. The unresolved issue of who owned or leased the Saint Helen, Winchester address that hosted Thomas Watson may not be of considerable importance because the residence was entered in the register as an emergency-based, next-of-kin technicality and because it was a lodging that Thomas utilized exceedingly rarely, at best for a mere fortnight per year.

It is certain that in the interim period between his mother's death in early May 1561 and the commencement of Winchester College's school year in the autumn of 1562, the barely six-year-old Thomas stayed either with his uncle at Oxford or joined his siblings in the Laxton/Lodge London household.

REFERENCES

- [1] All wills mentioned in this article can be found through searching the National Archives website at this link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse>. In her will, Anne Watson exclaims her wish regarding where to place her two eldest daughters: 'Item, I do will and desire that my daughter, [f. 132v] Elizabeth, may be with my Lady Laxton, and she to have her portion, putting in sureties for the same till she come to lawful age or day of marriage'. She continues, 'Item, I will and desire that my daughter, Maudelyn, may be with Mistress Lodge, and he to have her portion in like manner'. You can find her will under the following National Archives link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D980181>.
- [2] Anne does not allude to where she wishes to accommodate her four other children, William, the eldest, and the three youngest: Thomas, Marye, and Elizabeth-the-younger. It is likely that William who was about to turn, or just turned, eight at her death in May 1561 was already enrolled in a boarding, grammar school.
- [3] For the will of Lady/Dame Joan (Johan) Laxton, see this link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D962038>.
- [4] For the will of Lady/Dame Anne Lodge, see: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D964119>.
- [5] See F. Kirby, *Winchester Scholars: List of Wardens, Fellows, and Scholars of Saint Mary, College of Winchester, Commonly Called Winchester College* (London, 1888), 141.
- [6] For a concise, focused discussion of Watson's birth date, see Ibrahim Alhiyari, 'Thomas Watson: New Birth Date and Privileged Ancestry' *Notes and Queries* 53, 1 (2006), 35-40. DOI: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Thomas-Watson%3A-New-Birth-Year-and-Privileged-Alhiyari/9424623f4604ff8e13a87fd716917ed4874118bd#cing-papers>.
- [7] For an elaborate discussion of his pedigree, see Ibrahim Alhiyari, 'Thomas Watson: New Biographical Evidence and his Translation of *Antigone*'. Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 2006. DOI: <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/8391>.
- [8] Lee makes reference to his 'books' in his will, which he gifts to his friend, George Danvers. See Lee's National Archives' will at this link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D959647>.
- [9] William Watson's clientele included the mayor of Newcastle, Cuthbert Ellyson ... against whom William files a lawsuit of non-payment for the making of a fancy fleece coat costing up to 150 pounds. See <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?q=C+1%2F1394%2F14>.
- [10] In her will, Dame Blanche Forman (nee Stanney) gives to William's children, Anne and John, ten pounds each and refers to William as her "brother". Such reference confirms William's marriage from her sister, Joan Stanney. See Dame Blanche's 1564 will here: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D956040>.
- [11] See William Watson's will: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D979370>.