

# THE WILL OF AGNES SHACKLETON A TUDOR LADY OF SUTTON-IN-CRAVEN

Until relatively recent times it was unusual for a woman to make a will and therefore it is extremely unusual that Agnes Shackleton, who died in Sutton towards the close of December 1608, should have left one. Other than from the content of her will, and the brief entry for her burial in the Kildwick Parish Records, we have no further information about her.

We do not know when or where Agnes was born. But, the will tells us, she had several grandchildren, a number of whom had already reached adulthood, and so it is fair to assume that she was at least sixty years of age, and possibly much older, when she died. She was probably born during the latter half of the reign of Henry VIII, who died in 1547. The Kildwick Parish Church record for her burial tells us that she was ... *Agnes Shacleden vidua* ..., a widow, so we also know that her husband had predeceased her. Her will implies that her son, Richard Shackleton, was also dead, as she makes no provision for him and leaves a legacy to his son ... *Richard Shacleton Younger* ... , as well as to his daughter, Mary, and to ... *Agnes Shacleton their mother* (Richard Shackleton married Agnes Ingham at Kildwick in 1583). It appears that she had three daughters, of whom only one, Alice the wife of Thomas Driver, is actually named. Her two other daughters also seem to have predeceased her, one of whom was married to a man called Judson and the other to a man called James Ackornley (a Mary the wife of James Ackornley was buried at Colne in 1601).

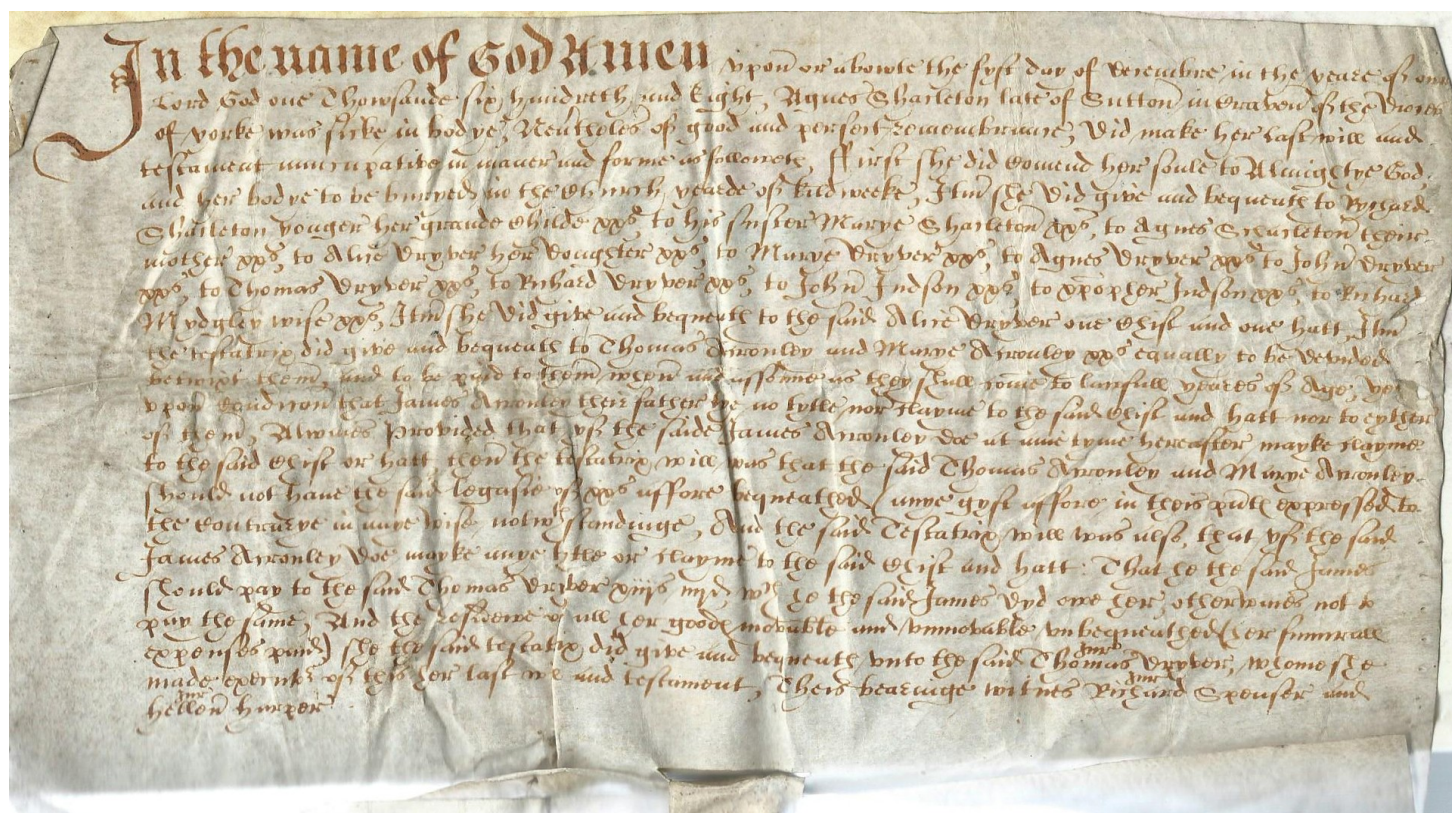
The will was made ... *upon or aboute the First Day of December in the year of our Lord God one Thousand Six hundredth and Eight* ... *nuncupative* ... , that is orally. Such wills are unusual and were only permitted if the testator was near death or incapacitated. We can therefore assume that Agnes must have been in serious decline when she expressed her wishes to one Richard Spencer and to a lady called Helen Harper. Spencer and Harper and perhaps her grandson, Thomas Driver (who was made the sole executor), then had the will drawn up later by a cleric.

As well as leaving legacies to her grandson, Richard Shackleton, and to his sister and their mother, Agnes also left one to each of ten further grandchildren; Mary, Agnes, John, Thomas and Richard, the children of her daughter Alice Driver; John and Christopher Judson and ... *Richard Midgley wife* ... (who was probably their married sister); and Thomas and Mary Ackornley, the children of James Ackornley. Each legacy was of 20 shillings, with the exception of that left to Thomas and Mary Ackornley, who were to receive ... *XXs equally to be Divided betwixt them* ... . In total the legacies amounted to £13, approximately £35,000 in today's money. This was a huge amount at a time when most of the villagers would have been landless and largely penniless labourers and confirms that she was a lady of some substance.

In addition to the monetary legacies Agnes also left ... *one chist and one hatt* ... to her daughter Alice Driver and another chest and hat to her unmarried grand daughter, Mary Ackornley. The chests would have been bequeathed to provide 'bottom drawers' for the storage of goods in preparation for the marriage of Alice's daughters and for that of her granddaughter Mary Ackornley. The hats suggest that Agnes, despite her age, was up to date with the fashion of the day and they are likely to have been made of felt with a high crown and a brim and trimmed with ribbon and, perhaps, an ostrich feather. This style of hat would have been very expensive and desirable and they are well illustrated in portraits of the period. The gifts to her granddaughter Mary Ackornley were made subject to her father having ... *no tittle or claim to the said chist or hatt, not to eyther of them* ... . Agnes was clearly not on good terms with her son-in-law and does not trust him, as she goes on to declare that if he claims the two items then his children would not receive their legacies and, furthermore, that he should repay to her executor thirteen shillings that he owed her. The remainder of her possessions were to be sold by her executor, Thomas Driver, to discharge her funeral expences and her legacies.

The will is a remarkable survival and gives us a small window into the mind of a long forgotten Sutton lady of strong character and family commitment, and one who, even

after death, was determined to see fair play, as James Ackornley would have discovered.



### The will of Agnes Shackleton

**In the name of God Amen** upon or aboute the First Day of December in the year of our Lord God one Thousand Six hundredth and Eight, Agnes Shackleton late of Sutton in Craven of the Diocese of Yorke was Sicke in bodye Nevtheles of good and perfect remembrance, Did make her last will and testament nuncupative in maner and forme as followeth, ffirst she did commend her soule to Almightye God, and her bodye to be buried in the Church yarde of Kildwicke, Itm she did give and bequeathe to Rychard Shackleton Younger her grande childe XXs, to his Sister Marye Shackleton XXs, to Agnes Shackleton their mother XXs, to Alice Dryver her Daughter XXs, to Mary Dryver XXs, to Agnes Dryver XXs, to John Dryver Xxs, to Thomas Dryver XXs, to Richard Dryver XXs, to John Judson XXs, to Christopher Judson XXs, to Richard Midgley wife XXs, Item she Did give and bequeath to the said Alice Dryver one chist and one hatt, Itm she testatrix did give and bequeath to Thomas Acronley and Marye Acronley XXs equally to be Divided betwixt them, and to be paid to them when and asonne as when they shall come to lawful yeares of age, yet upon and now that James Acronley their father (has) no tytle or claim to the said chist and hatt nor to eyther of them, Alwaies provided that if the said James Acornley doe at anie tyme hereafter mayke clayme to the said chist and hatt then the testatrix will was that the said Thomas Acornley and Marye Acornley should not have the said legacye of XXs afore bequeathed anye gyft affore in their ? expressed to the contrueye in anye wise not withstandinge, And the said Testatrix will nevtheless, that yf the said James Acronley Doe

mayke anye title or clayme to the said chist and hatt: that so the said James should paye to the said Thomas Dryver XIIIs, wch he the said James Dyd did owe her otherwise not to pay the same, And she testatrix did will for goods mobile and immobile be bequeathed for funerall expences paid, she the testatrix did give and bequeath unto the said Thomas Dryver jnr, nowsome made executor of this her last will and testament their bearinge witnes Richard Spenser jnr and helen harpur junr.

Note. Many thanks to Deirdre Gossington for loan of the will and to Helen Mayoh for help with transcribing it.