

A Lady Obsessed with Poison

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It turns out that the great-great-great grandmother of the immigrant Peter Worden I, **Ellen (Kenyon) Anderton**, was accused of instigating the murder of her husband, **Oliver**, who was allegedly killed by her two sons, one of whom was Peter's great-great grandfather, **Hugh Anderton**. She then committed another murder (allegedly) before killing herself.

The line of descent to Peter is as follows:

Thurston de Anderton, fought at Avignon 1415, alive 1430

Oliver de Anderton d.before March 1467-68 m. abt.1432 = Ellen de Kenyon d.abt 1468, dau. of Matthew de Kenyon

Hugh de Anderton d.1516/17 =

James de Anderton d.1552 =

Isobel de Anderton d.1573 = Peter Worthington b.1514, d.19 Sep. 1577

Isobel Worthington d.11 Dec 1580 = Robert Worden d. 11 Sep 1580

Peter Worden I d.Feb. 1638, Yarmouth, Massachusetts

Details of the allegations are found in a court case recorded in Pleadings and Depositions in the Duchy Court of Lancaster. The proceedings took place in 1538-39, many years after Oliver's death in 1468. The suit was addressed to "the right honorable William, Earl of Southampton, Lord Admirall, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Apparently the Chancellor had some worthies of the area hear the evidence.

Ellen and Oliver had five sons, William, Christopher, Hugh, James, and Thurston and possibly a sixth, Matthew. William died before his father, leaving a son Thurston. Ellen left her estate to Christopher, rather than her eldest son's son. Christopher died without heirs, and in accordance with Ellen's wishes, Hugh took over the estate. Hugh's son, James, eventually inherited the estate. In the court case, James complained against William's grandson Oliver and his son Piers, alleging that Piers "has lately entered the said premises and cut down many trees and underwoods thereupon growing, to the loss of plaintiff of £100 and more, and has done many other injuries to plaintiff at sundry times." It is clear from the record that this dispute had been going on for some time. The judges had previously ordered Oliver and Piers to stay away from James's property, and were getting frustrated. This time James was asking for a "privy seal" (a seal of the king) against Oliver and Piers.

The court record consists primarily of testimony and depositions of various people. I have edited out the legal stuff and testimony about the land, focusing on Ellen's alleged crime, beginning with a statement from Oliver, the great-grandson of the murdered Oliver (the editor's notes and quotation marks are those of the editor of the Pleadings, I have preserved the original spelling and punctuation):

The Answer of Oliver Anderton.

The said Ellen never gave the said lands as is surmised by the said James, for she "laboured" the said Oliver, her husband, to give them to the said Christopher, which he always refused.

Afterwards as Nicholas Fox should have served the said Oliver his master with potage his mistress met him in the "Tresaunse" [Editor's note: Tresaunte is a passage in a

house] and put powder therein, saying it was spice: then he went up to the table and bade his master beware, whereupon the said Oliver gave the potage to a dog and by and bye he "swelled, and thereupon died." After that defendant drove the said Ellen, his wife, to Heyley. Then she caused Roger Wylkynson and William Plesyngton, on the Tuesday in Whitsun-week, to entice defendant to a place in Horwyge [Horwich], called the Grawleburst, and there Christopher Anderton and Hugh, his brother, were ready to murder defendant, their father, "and so they did," at which shameful murder all the country wondered. The said Wylkynson was afterwards taken and put in prison, and for fear he should make open confession the said Ellen sent him a "pasteth" [Editor's note: A pastethe is a perfuming ball, but probably what is here meant is a pasty] which was poisoned whereof he died the day before he was to be examined. When the Justices and Lord Stanley heard of the murder and poisoning they made a vow before God that the said Ellen should be burnt within 7 days, but she, hearing these words, caused Agnes Hawkeshead, on the Tuesday in the Sessions week, to make her a poset and to put in a powder that her son Hugh had sent her. After she had drunk the poset ale she told her servant to burn the dish, and "or mornyng" she was dead. After her death the said Christopher and Hugh caused the said surmised deed to be made in Evexton in a place called Bukshagh.

A little later Oliver described how he had borrowed money from James, that James had him thrown in jail and that he (Oliver) had lost his sight and nearly died and to get out of prison Oliver had renounced his rights to the land and had paid James vast sums of money. Piers also testified to the property rights.

James responded simply:

Says that all the statements made by the said Oliver in his answer are false, and contradicts everything said by the said Piers.

He gets someone else to defend his father:

On behalf of James Anderton.

Richard Urmeston, of Lostok, gentleman, servant to Andrew Barton, Esq., aged 70 years and more, says that Christopher and Hugh Anderton were men of good fame and not guilty of the death of the said Oliver Anderton.

But then there is further testimony:

John Gelybrunde, of Chorley, gentleman, aged 55, tenant to Anne, Countess of Derby, and Laurence Anderton, tenant to the same, aged 40, says that Richard Breris, of Chorley, declared 3 days before his death that he was with Ellen, wife of Oliver Anderton, in Heylay, when James Anderton, her son, came from Lancaster the Tuesday in the Sessions week, and told her that Lord Stanley said she should be burnt within certain days for causing her own "chylder" and one Wilkinson to murder their father, and also for poisoning the said Wilkinson, whereupon she caused her servant woman Katherine Banke to make her a posset into which she put poison which caused her death. Deponent never new of any estate of any lands given by her to her son Christopher, but has heard that the said estate was made after her death. Witness gave the box containing the poison to Piers Anderton. This confession was made 28th April, 30 Henry VIII. [1538].

Richard Bulhagh, of Anlezargh [Anglezark], tenant to the said Countess, aged 70 and more, has heard that the said Ellen caused her sons, the said Roger Wylkynson and William Plesyngton to murder the said Oliver Anderton in Horwiche, in a place called Gralleyhurst, on the Tuesday in Whitsun week. James Urmeston examined the said Wylkynson in prison, and he confessed the murder, saying that when the said Oliver saw his son Hugh coming he exclaimed that he was a dead man. "It was a Grett punysshment yt Godde did take for this wylfull murder, Jamys Anderton breke his legge and dyed Incontynent, Thurstan Anderton as he come from Heylay at a stele he fell and brake his nekk, Cristopher Anderton as he came from Whityll [Whittle] and shuld leape oppon his hors he died sodanly, Hugh Anderton went starke madd yt he didd not knowe a man from a woman and died madd." Christopher Anderton had the lands in Heylay for his life according to an award made by Lord Stanley, and not by right; after his decease Thurstan Anderton, his nephew, held the land peaceably all his life, without suit of Hugh Anderton, his uncle, or James, his son, and died thereof seised.

So the first Oliver was murdered, allegedly by his younger sons and their accomplices, at the instigation of his wife. Ellen is alleged to have poisoned one of the accomplices, Roger Wilkinson, fearing that he would confess while in custody. She then took her own life. There is no indication here that Christopher and Hugh were brought to justice, although one witness suggests that God exacted vengeance. But pain was suffered not only by the murderers but by their brothers James and Thurston as well.

In the case at hand, the Chancellor found in favor of James, apparently ignoring the gory goings on many years before.

Sources:

For Robert Worden back to James de Anderton, see Philip M. Worthington, *The Worthington Families of Medieval England*, Chichester, England: Phillimore, 1985, pp. 119, 136-137 (I have this book).

A major source of genealogical information is the **Victoria County Histories**, large, multi-volume works. See **William Farrar's *Victoria County History of Lancashire* (1906), *Anderton* vol. 6, pp. 220-222** (shows a number of generations before Oliver), ***Worthington* vol. 6, pp. 222-223**. The quotations from the court case are found in Pleadings and Depositions in the ***Duchy Court of Lancaster*, volume 35** in the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire series (1897), pp. 87-100. This is a summary of the manuscript record of the testimony. **Mrs. Arthur Cecil Tempest, "An Episode in the Anderton Family History," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, new series vol. 6 (vol. 42 of the overall series) (1892), pp. 180-194 tells the story with many colorful embellishments. Mrs. Tempest (Eleanor Blanche) also describes the conflict over property that carried down through the generations of Andertons** (she apparently had access to original manuscript records of the court cases). **Eleanor Blanche Tempest was also the author of considerable material about the Tempests, also ancestors of Peter Worden.**

In the past few months I have been collaborating with **Douglas Hickling** of Piedmont, California in efforts to clarify certain relationships in the **Tempest family** and their possible connection to the **Holand family**, relationships that are confused in 19th century histories and in many pedigrees of the Tempest family found on the Internet. **In this connection I recently had the opportunity to examine Mrs. Tempest's magnificent pedigree of the Tempests (1922)**

which appears to exist only in manuscript form in the British Library. We hope to share the results of our studies of the Tempests and Holands with Wordens Past readers at the appropriate time.