

The Jeffreys Inheritance

Nicholas and Frances

The years from the marriage of Jeffrey and Mary, in 1740, to the death of Nicholas Jeffreys, in 1747, were evidently difficult on several fronts.

Nicholas and Frances Jeffreys had four children – Jeffrey, Frances (Fanny), Elizabeth (Betty) and Mary. Nicholas made his first recorded will in 1727. He gave all his real estate (lands and property) to his son Jeffrey Jeffreys, then age 7, with the proviso – written in his own hand – for the Cantlowes estates to provide maintenance and portions to his wife and daughters. His second will was made in 1740, in the year his son Jeffrey married Mary Morice. He made more substantial provision: of £3000 (partly in trust from his wife's Eyles family) and his goods and chattels to his wife Frances, and similar sums for the three daughters 'from the estate', with the remainder to his son Jeffrey Jeffreys. Nicholas and Jeffrey are also named together in an inventory of leases written in 1744. But Nicholas' will at probate in 1747 describes an agreement before his son's marriage that all the lands of Brecon and Suffolk should pass to his wife Frances 'being the lands of her jointure, until her death'; that £12000 should be distributed between 'the three daughters, Elizabeth, Frances and Mary'; and that their mother Frances retains full control of the residual estate: Jeffrey Jeffreys is not named directly in the will at all – although this may also reflect a marriage settlement for Jeffrey in 1740.

Nicholas' older brother Edward died in 1740, at the age of sixty. Edward made Nicholas' son, Jeffrey, his sole legatee. Edward had been an MP for a period in the Parliamentary seats of both his uncle John (Marlborough, 1703-1706) and his father (Brecon 1709-1714). He was described as being 'of the Priory, Brecknock', but there is little record remaining: one donation to the poor of Llywel in 1734 was recorded being given by Nicholas. Edward's will is very simple – all property (unlisted) to (his nephew) Jeffrey Jeffreys, who is also made the executor. The will gives Edward's address as Inner Temple – where Jeffrey, though only 20, was near ending his studies – although this could be an address of convenience local to the court, if Edward was otherwise in Llywel, or even in Virginia, America.

There's a further nuance. Sir Jeffery Jeffreys' will in 1709 had directed that Nicholas should receive a proportion of the lands of Cantlowes to provide an annuity for his and Edward's mother, Dame Sarah Jeffreys. In October 1740, Nicholas signed an indenture to the executors of Edward Jeffreys' will (ie, to his son, Jeffrey Jeffreys)

requesting that “the unspent portion of the inheritance passed to Nicholas” for that annuity should go to his son before a call of debt on the estate by Henry Furnese (a business contemporary, perhaps a trustee?). There is a very valuable schedule of the deeds and transactions of the estates held jointly between Nicholas Jeffreys and Jeffrey Jeffreys, drawn up March 1744. This shows estates in Brecon, Oxford and some other places, including leases for Kentish Town which have a rental of £43 10s.

There were financial strains for Nicholas Jeffreys and Frances his wife. Both had inheritances. They had married, in 1717, a decade after Nicholas’ father Sir Jeffrey, and a year after Frances’ father, Francis Eyles, had died. A lease / release had been agreed from Nicholas’ mother (widow Dame Sarah, nee Dawes) assigning them rents from lands in Suffolk and Middlesex (Greenford); in 1724, a ‘marriage portion’ of £7000 and lands in Brecon was given by Nicholas’ older brother Edward (‘of the Priory’) in trust to Frances, Nicholas’ wife; and in 1740, when their son Jeffrey Jeffreys married Mary Morice, there was a further indenture confirming that Frances’ jointure would remain in trust after her death (ie, not with their son and daughter-in-law Jeffrey and Mary). Yet in the earlier part of the 1740s, Frances Jeffreys was in battle in the courts for her inheritance.

In his 1716 will, Sir Francis Eyles had left his estate mainly to his “dear and loving wife Elizabeth”, and gave £7000 each for his (then) unmarried daughters Frances and Mary. Elizabeth his wife died almost two decades later, in 1735: she divided her will in four parts, for her four children, with the last quarter as a trust of public shares for executors to use for Frances’ children. This simple formulation however, became problematic. Frances’ two brothers, Joseph and John Eyles, were their mother’s executors; but Joseph – one holder of the trust fund - died in 1740, and his brother John claimed both that the funds were now inadequate to pay and that he was “not liable for £2232 10s 2d”. Moreover, the brother John Eyles, the second executor, then also died; and it appeared in his estate that he had already passed the funds in trust (“estate amounted to several thousand pounds”) to his son, Sir Francis Haskins Eyles Styles [sic!], who had himself then used it to pay a large lease on a manor ... Frances wrote in a complaint to court: “All of which actings and doings of the said Sir John Eyles and Nicholas Jeffreys are contrary to Equity and lead to the great wrong and injury of your Oratrix”. While this is only available in a draft, and undated, it is clearly heartfelt: and the intention seems to be to provide for her daughters in the face of primogeniture.

Nicholas Jeffreys died in 1747. In a Codicil to his 1740 will, signed shortly before his death states, Nicholas makes quite stringent revisions: he would no longer give his

study and books to his son Jeffrey Jeffreys but to his wife Frances; he would lessen (from £20 to £10) his gift to Christ's Hospital (a tenth of what his father-in-law gave), and nothing to his servants; and that if Jeffrey Jeffreys dies without son, then the estate to be divided between the three daughters and [his daughter-in-law] Mary 'as tenants in common and not as joint tenants' and their heirs. He says, "as it is my wish that no part of the lands in Wales should go to the uses declared by my great-uncle Sir John Jeffreys, if my daughters do not have issue their share goes to the other(s)" and "the whole shall be paid to the surviving sister", with the residue of his personal estate for full control of his wife. This left the estate very muddled – lying both with his wife and also five ways with his children and daughter in law.

The next generation – and of madness

Jeffrey Jeffreys, the oldest of Nicholas and Francis Jeffreys' four children, had a local, if traditional, education at the Inner Temple, where he was admitted in 1732 and called to the bar in 1741. He appears initially to have been directed towards business: at 17, he was sent to Cadiz to learn the trade. But, apparently a wayward youth, his father's associates had to litigate to regain over £1000 spent on "servants and lodgings there commensurate with being a first son".

He married his cousin Mary Jeffreys – 'a very agreeable young lady of great merit, of about 30,000l fortune' – on 2 December 1740. They had a child, christened Jeffrey Morice Jeffreys; but he was buried, also at St Andrews, with address of Bedford Row, on 18 December 1741, (see Parish Register) and no further offspring are reported.

Jeffrey Jeffreys had made a will in March 1740, at the time of his wedding, with his address as Bedford Row and all his estate given to his wife Mary. He put the residue of his real estates to Nicholas Jeffreys (his father) and the personal estates to Mary (Morice) Jeffreys. Yet four days later, 17 March 1740 – the exact date is confirmed and signed again by witnesses – he made a substantial revision: "If I have no natural issue my real estate to be held by my dearly beloved wife Mary and then according to my marriage settlement and as to my personal estate I hereby give to my wife Mary."

Four years later there is a formal 'Inquisition into the state of mind' of Jeffrey Jeffreys in 1744 set before Parliament, for which he is stated as 'formerly of Inner Temple, now Chelsea'. In the year before, 1743, Mary's mother, Anne Morice, wrote

a will specifically excluding Jeffrey Jeffreys from any inheritance of the Morice fortune (it could go in trust only to Mary or her legatees).

The nature of his illness is not explained. It appears he continued as 'lunatick', since in 1757 Mary Morice had a further Act of Parliament passed allowing the use (sale) of his lands in Devon for leases. It was also Mary, as his Committee, rather than Jeffrey himself, who is recorded (following previously his father Nicholas) in making a donation to the new incumbency of Mythyr Cynog, near Brecon(xi). When Jeffrey Jeffreys died in 1761, at 41, his will was unchanged from 1740, giving all his worth to Mary his wife. The probate in May 1760 reports his address as 'late Lampton, in the county of Middlesex' – perhaps his long-term care home.

(Lampton is now a part of suburban Hounslow, in west London, which developed at the end of the nineteenth century with the building of the Piccadilly underground line. Lampton was a property of the Bulstrodes, lords of the manor of Hounslow during the 18th century. Sir George Jeffreys, the so-called 'hanging judge' and Lord Chief Justice to King James III, to whom – while not closely related in family – Alderman John Jeffreys had given a moderate legacy in his will – had built Bulstrode Manor in Berkshire in 1676-85. But this is the only tenuous connection otherwise between the Llywel family and Sir George Jeffreys of Bulstrode.)

So the marriage of Jeffrey and Mary Jeffreys was difficult throughout: Mary was the beneficiary of a change in Jeffrey's will; their only child died in infancy; Mary had to fight in court to gain the benefit of her marriage and also her family inheritance; then, from 1744 Mary became responsible for her husband as Executive for his Commission of Lunacy; and after his death in 1761, Mary she continued as a widow until 1779.

Last Jeffreys

Charles Pratt and Elizabeth Jeffreys were married in 1749 in the private chapel of Ely House, nearby to St Andrew's Holborn and the Inns of Court.

Of the six inheritors after Charles' marriage in 1749, only Elizabeth had children for the next generation; but the others drew on the inheritance for their own living, probably all in London. It was the slow tick of time that re-collected the different properties into Lord Camden's estate.

Jeffrey Jeffreys had died a Lunatick under the Committee of his wife Mary. His will passed all his estates to his heirs or, if without, to his wife Mary. Mary had also received £654 from the will of Mrs Bridget Sherlock, perhaps her executor: there is a receipt that Mary gave Sarah Buckland (T142-H) (who placed her mark) six pounds and ten shillings for a year and a month's wages; and Elinor Forster (who could copy her name) £16 1s for five months and one week's wages and £13 pounds for a year's wages and a year's mourning.

The five women lived longer. Mary Jeffreys, the youngest of the four Jeffreys/Eyles children, died in October 1776. No will is found and little is recorded for her, beyond her remaining a spinster. But shortly after, just four months over 1779-1780, there were three further deaths: Mary Jeffreys, widow of Jeffrey Jeffreys, in October 1779; Elizabeth Jeffreys, wife to Lord Camden, in December 1779; and then Frances Jeffreys, mother to the four children, who died in January 1780. Frances, the last of Frances Jeffreys' children, died in January 1785. Another relative, Mary Richardson, Mrs Frances Jeffrey's sister (???check), died in 1793. These exact dates (apart from Mary Richardson) are recorded at the beginning of the accounts managed from 1780 by Augustine Greenland on behalf of Lord Camden.

Mary Jeffreys, widow, in her will of 4th June 1779, is of Upper Brook Street, Saint George Hanover Square, Marylebone. The initial part of the will simply gave her 'half part of lands at Pyworthy', near the River Tamar in north west Devon, to Arthur Whetham, eldest son of her sister Anne by her second marriage. ('All pictures to be kept in the family and not to be sold.') But she added a codicil three months later in September, written in a more personal way. She gave to 'Mrs Frances Jeffreys Snr of Welbeck Street' (presumably her sister-in-law rather than mother-in-law) ten guineas for a 'ring or keepsake'; and to 'Lady Camden' (Elizabeth), her sister-in-law, the picture of her 'grandfather Sir Jeffrey Jeffreys'; and various other legacies to family, friends and servants. But then, significantly from a financial viewpoint, she stated she 'would not call in, with interest', the maintenance made during her husband's lifetime in 1751-60 to his three sisters Frances, Elizabeth and Mary as it had been paid to her from her husband's personal estate; and similarly, she would define the payments of £120 made to Frances Eyles 'for some years' since Jeffrey's death as a gift, 'not to be demanded again'. This suggests that her inheritance from Jeffrey Jeffreys and had been used, at least in part, to support her in-law relations.

Mrs Frances Jeffreys in her will of September 1780 makes to her sister Mary Richardson a gift of £200 and the silver and china "which she had when she came to the house in Wigmore Street". Similar gifts of plate are made to Lord Camden; £200 to William Bumpsted (her great-nephew); and "any left over for purchasing a life

and paying off the debts on the estate of my late daughter in law Mrs Mary Jeffreys now in joint possession of Lord Camden and my daughter Frances Jeffreys”.

Lady Elizabeth Camden has disappeared from testamentary records: she presumably left everything to her husband under natural law. Nor, indeed is there a will for Frances Jeffreys, the last sister alive. But she had a more difficult situation. In May 1780, only a few months after her mother’s death, a hearing is held at the Braund’s Head, New Bond Street, which affirms that this Frances (ie daughter, not mother) had been a lunatic ‘with lucid periods’ since 6th January 1766 (the exact date given). The hearing focused on her testamentary capacity. It described her as a co-heir to the inheritance of Nicholas Jeffreys, and listed all the lands and estates with rents and incomes. The hearing, with eighteen seals, confirmed her as lunatic – so that she was thereafter unable to make a will – and at the same time defined John Jeffreys Pratt, Lord Camden’s son, as her ‘nearer’ heir.

Yet there is a quite unexpected contemporary confirmation of Frances Jeffreys madness¹. In 2003, the scholars Jonathan Andrews and Andrew Scull published with commentary the case-book of Dr John Monro for the single year 1666 which had survived in family private papers. Monro (1715-1791) was the leading physician for mental illness of his time, both for the Bethlem Hospital at Bishopsgate and as a private doctor. The case-book has 100 short case-notes, written sequentially. Number five, dated 6 January, is:

Miss Jefferies Welbeck Street a maiden Lady aged 46. has been afflicted once before in this way[?]; when she was attended by Dr Battie to little purpose, she was afterwards cured as her mother thought by the use of Dr James’s powder. This has been tried in vane since the return of her complaint; she is now very low, imagines herself to have been very wicked, & her distemper to have been brought on by her own imprudence & has attempted, & talks very deliberately of putting an end to her life. her brother was either an idiot or a lunatic & died under confinement. (Pp C4-6)

This connects directly with the committal report of May 1780: the name is the same; the date of 6 January 1766 is exactly the same; the note of her brother having also been ‘under confinement’ would have been Jeffrey Jeffreys from 1743 to 1761; and calling an expert physician to the home indicates a high social position. Her symptoms would now be called paranoid depression, so the suicide risk noted by Dr Monro is pertinent. A footnote made by Andrew and Scull gives some details of ‘Dr

James's powder', which was an apothecary's mix of emetics including mercury – now known itself to cause madness (as in the mad hatter).

The catalogue records of Kent Local Studies Centre suggest criticism at the time that Lord Camden made the committal of madness for personal financial reasons. But the suggestion of long-standing mental illness of his father-in-law as well as his mother-in-law, and the desire to re-establish control over the estate – into which had he married thirty years before – suggest also a practical resolution.

Further light on the estate comes in a 'release' to John Jeffreys Pratt by Robert Stewart, Frances Stewart and Elizabeth Pratt (his brother-in-law and sisters) of 'two fifths of one third late of Frances Jeffreys spinster deceased several freehold estates in Middlesex, Oxford, Gloucester, Suffolk, Brecon and City of London and for a leasehold estate for lives held under one of the Prebendaries of St Pancras [sic]'. (E104)

When Mary Richardson died in 1793, she made legacies of £600 to each of five close relatives in her husband's family; but affectionately she also gave to 'Lady Elizabeth Pratt second' (her grand-niece) the silver plate left to her by her own sister Frances – with an attached precise inventory:

One pair of Candelsticks with nozzles to them, one pair of Salts with Salt Spoons, six Table Spoons and one Marrow Spoon, six Desert Spoons, six Tea Spoons, one pair Tongues and one Strainer Spoon, one Tea Waiter and one Snuffer pan. *Mary Richardson*

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A Inventory of the plate left in my sister's house
one pair of Candelsticks with nozzles to them
one pair of Salts with Salt Spoons
six Table Spoons and one Marrow Spoon
six Desert Spoons
six Tea Spoons
one pair Tongues
and one Strainer Spoon
Mary Richardson

ⁱ Jonathan Andrews, Anthony Scull. Customers and patrons of the mad-trade. The management of lunacy in the eighteenth century. University of California Press, 2003.