

John Donne (1572-1631) and Lincoln's Inn

John Donne's career as a law student was short-lived. He was admitted as a member of Lincoln's Inn on 6th May 1592 and is described as a London gentleman and a member of Thavie's Inn, one of the Inns of Chancery associated with Lincoln's Inn. Donne's manucaptors - members of the Inn who vouched for the new member and proposed him for membership - were Christopher Brooke and Edward Loftus.

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Christopher Brooke states that he and Donne were chamber-fellows on Donne's admission in 1592 although no evidence for this has been found in the Inn's Black Book – the Inn's main record. The only learning vacations Donne kept were Lent, Easter and Michaelmas 1593 when the Inn's butlers described him as being under the bar - that is, not called to the bar. In fact, there is no record in the Inn's Archives of Donne ever having been called.

On 26th November 1594 the Black Book records that, "Mr Donne shalbe Stewarde for Christmas". In November 1598 there is an apparent mention of Donne's name as a joint Master of the Revels but this is something of a red herring since, apart from the fact that the name is very difficult to read and so is open to interpretation, it is followed by the description "senior". A more likely candidate could be John Done admitted in 1572, the first of three generations of a Cheshire family of that name to be members of the Inn.

In any case, by early 1596 Donne's ambitions lay further afield than the law, first joining in naval expeditions against Spain and in 1597 securing employment as secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton – a Lincoln's Inn man, Treasurer in 1587. Both of Egerton's sons were members of the Inn and either might have recommended Donne to their father. Also, at this time it is unlikely that Donne was resident in the Inn since he would have joined Egerton's household at York House in the Strand.

By 1615 Donne had taken up a career in the Church and was ordained deacon and priest. The following year he was elected Preacher of Lincoln's Inn and in 1617 was given a half chamber previously that of Sir Roger Owen. Donne's garret chamber was then yielded up to the Society and given to two other members, James Donellan and Adam Usher, for an entry fine of £35. A search of Pensioners' and Treasurers' accounts throughout Black Book 6 (the most comprehensive and concise account for admissions to chambers) has failed to establish exactly when Donne took up occupation of the garret.

After his election as Dean of St. Paul's in 1621 Donne resigned as the Inn's Preacher but was expressly permitted to keep his bencher's chamber as a mark of respect. In 1622 Donne gave a parting gift to the Inn which is still held in the Library: a six volume folio edition of the Latin Vulgate Bible printed in Douai with Nicholas de Lyre's commentary - *Biblia Sacra cum glossaria ordinaria*. Donne added a lengthy Latin inscription in the first volume in which he makes particular mention of his involvement with the building of the new Chapel: "Who...with his own hands laid the first stones ..."

Donne's close interest in the new Chapel project is shown by his inclusion in at least one meeting concerning practical matters. A dispute arose between John Browne the joiner and the Inn over his employment to carry out work in the Chapel. The details of the dispute are preserved in the Inn's Archives in the Saunderson Papers and show that in 1621 Thomas

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Saunderson, a bencher involved closely with management of the new Chapel project, discharged Browne at a, "conference with me and D. Dunn." Given the date, this seems quite likely to be Dr. Donne. Donne returned to the Inn to preach the sermon at the consecration of the new Chapel by the Bishop of London on Ascension Day (22nd May) 1623.

In 1624 Donne gave up his bencher's chamber and it was granted to Eusebius Andrewes. Despite a search of the first Red Book (records of chambers tenancies dating from 1614-15) up to 1660 it has not been possible to discover the location of this chamber. Descriptions in the records were not topographical until 1627 and even afterwards this is not always the case and identification can be problematic.

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