

Bacon's Maiden Speech to Parliament & His Royal Birth

by Christina G. Waldman

June 2020

In his 1958 article, "Francis Bacon and His Father," Paul H. Kocher describes an incident that took place during Francis Bacon's maiden speech to Parliament. This was in November, 1584, when Bacon was twenty-three years old. He had just been elected a member of the House of Commons for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis.

During the discussion of a bill dealing with frauds in wardships and liveries, Bacon rose to speak. He started out by saying the bill was "hard in some points." Recorder William Fleetwood's incomplete notes (in quotation marks) report that Bacon, in "speaking of the queen," had praised her, saying she was "worthy to be respected, for his father had received by her ability to leave a fifth son to live upon: but that is nothing to the matter"—to which Fleetwood added his personal response, "Then you should have let it alone." Kocher commented that the remark was in poor taste and, as Bacon himself had acknowledged, had nothing to do with the topic at hand.¹

In a 1580 letter to his uncle, Lord Burghley, Francis spoke of "an example so private and domestical of her Majesty's gracious goodness and benignity, being made good and verified in my father, so far forth as it extendeth to his posterity ...yet in the loyal and earnest affection which he bare to her Majesty's service, I trust my portion shall not be with the least, nor in proportion with my youngest birth"²

Sir Nicholas Bacon (1509–1579) had three sons (Nicholas, Nathaniel, and Edward) and three daughters by his first wife, Jane Ferneley (d. 1552). Nicholas and his second wife, Anne Cooke, added two sons, Anthony (1558–1601) and Francis (1561–

¹ *The Works of Francis Bacon ...*, 14 vols., vol. 8, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longmans, 1857–74), p. 43, fn. 1 (hereafter, Spedding), citing Lansdowne MSS 43, fo. 175, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175012007830>; Paul H. Kocher, "Francis Bacon and His Father," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Feb., 1958), pp. 133–158, 140, fn. 22.

² Francis Bacon to Lord Burghley, Oct. 18, 1580, Spedding, VIII, pp. 13–15, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175012007830>.

1626).³ In his “Life of Bacon,” his literary executor William Rawley wrote that Francis Bacon was born “in York House or York Place.”⁴ York House was where Anne and Nicholas Bacon lived at the time of Francis’s birth. Nearby was York Place, a royal palace. Before moving to York House in 1558 (when the new Queen Elizabeth made him her Lord Keeper of the Great Seal), Sir Nicholas and his family had resided at Bacon House on Foster Lane/Noble Street, in Aldersgate. William Fleetwood, the Recorder, had helped Sir Nicholas rebuilt the large, old medieval house and had lived on the property for several years. He was a good friend of Sir Nicholas’s and Lord Burghley’s.⁵

Bacon’s baptismal record, dated January 25, 1561, in the registry at St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields parish, is unusual in several respects. Next to the name, “Franciscus Bacon,” the word “filius” has been added in a different handwriting. The other baptismal entries on that page do not have a second line for the father, but the entry for Francis Bacon has a second line that reads: “Dm: Nicho: Bacon.” Then, in

³ “Sir Nicholas Bacon, 1509–1579,” England Under the Tudors, Luminarium Encyclopedia Project, excerpted from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 153.

⁴ William Rawley, “The Life of the Honorable Author,” *Resuscitatio, or, Bringing Back into Public Light Several Pieces of the Works, Civil, Historical, Philosophical, and Theological, Hitherto Sleeping, of the Right Honorable Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Albans. According to the best corrected Copies. Together, with his Lordship’s Life* (London, 1657), p. 1 (following the introductory “Epistle to the Reader”), not paginated,

<http://sirbacon.org/archives/resuscitatioorbr016570baco.pdf>;

<http://www.sirbacon.org/rawleywm.htm>; Alfred Dodd, “The Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret,” *The Marriage of Elizabeth Tudor*, pp. 38–42,

<http://www.sirbacon.org/doddsublimeprince.htm>.

⁵ Geo. R. Corner to Sylvanus Urban, “Bacon-House, Noble-Street, Aldersgate,” Correspondence, *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Review*, vol. 9, new series (November, 1860), pp. 535–536.

the same handwriting as the word “filius,” someone has written, “Magni Anglic Sigillit custodis.”⁶ In his will, Bacon mentions “St. Martin’s where I was born.”⁷

Many are reluctant to accept that Queen Elizabeth I secretly bore an illegitimate son (or, perhaps, by a secret marriage, to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester). Queen Elizabeth never publicly acknowledged Francis Bacon as her son. Her own personal experiences, including having been declared illegitimate by her father, King Henry VIII, who had had her mother, Anne Boleyn, beheaded, affected her policy toward the succession. Those making such heart-wrenching decisions did what they thought was best for England, putting the country over their personal happiness. This situation helps to explain why attention has been deflected from Francis Bacon’s role in the authorship of the Shakespeare plays. However, it also helps us begin to understand the plays themselves at a deeper level.

Christina G. Waldman
June 15, 2020

⁶ “Baptismal Registration,” accessed June 12, 2020, <http://www.sirbacon.org/baptismalregistration.htm>. See also Alfred Dodd, “The Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret,” *The Marriage of Elizabeth Tudor* (London: Rider & Co., 1940), pp. 38-42, excerpted at <http://www.sirbacon.org/doddsblimeprince.htm>; Alfred Dodd, ch. 3, “Francis Bacon’s Birth and Early Childhood,” *Francis Bacon’s Personal Life Story*, vol. 1, *The Age of Elizabeth* (London: Rider & Co., 1949), Amelie Deventer von Kunow, *Francis Bacon, Last of the Tudors*, transl. by Willard Parker (New York: Francis Bacon Society of America, 1924), p. 87. Reprinted at www.sirbacon.org/vonkunow.html, <http://www.sirbacon.org/parentage>.

⁷ “The Last Will of Francis Bacon,” Spedding, XIV, pp. 539–540, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175012007947>.