

Richard Cressy c. Alice Scrace

Cressy c. Scrace is an example of an uncontested lawsuit, where the point was not for the plaintiff to confirm or annul a marriage with the defendant but rather for both parties to have the court declare the validity of their union in the face of family hostility. It was not Alice Scrace, but her brother and employer who opposed their marriage. Alice Scrace's examination tells a detailed story of the road to marriage, from meeting as adolescents in Sussex to a later reacquaintance in London. The pair exchanged many and varied gifts with one another through several intermediaries, the meaning of which changed between the first token sent after the initial visit to Sussex in the early 1480s to the more substantial items exchanged as the question of marriage arose in 1489.

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Testimony of Alice Scrace, Defendant, 28 Mar. 1489

Responses personally made by Alice Scrace, 28 March, in the year of the Lord 1489, before Master John Millet, commissary, in my, Richard Spencer's, presence

Alice Scrace, sworn etc. on the positions etc. To the first position, she says that in summer about six years ago, that is about the time the hay is mown, Richard Cressy and Richard Scrace, this witness's brother, who at that time were companions in the inn of *Bernard's Inn* or *Lincoln's Inn*, came together to the house of her father situated in the hamlet of Hangleton¹ in Chichester diocese, and there after their arrival they stayed for about three weeks for a holiday, at which time this witness first saw and knew Richard Cressy. And after about three weeks he left the hamlet and the home of her father. And within a short time Richard, by a servant of this witness's father, sent her a pair of *tires*² and to her father's other servants *pin cases*. He also sent her brother a *hanger*.³ And she said that from the time Richard left her father's house, this witness did not see him any more until the feast of the Purification of the Virgin⁴ last past. She says also that on a certain day around the feast of the Purification and as she recalls on the vigil of that feast, this witness spoke with Elizabeth, the servant of John Scot the elder, living by the Austin Friars' gate in London, with whom this witness was also living. She asked Elizabeth to get Richard Cressy to come to that house to have a conversation with this witness. And within a

¹ Hangleton, Sussex, now a suburb of Brighton.

² A covering, dress, or ornament for a woman's head; a head-dress (*OED*, s.v. *tire*, n¹).

³ A short sword that hung from a belt (*OED*, s.v. *hanger*, n3).

⁴ 2 Feb.

short time afterwards Elizabeth told this witness that on this witness's behalf she had spoken with Richard for the abovesaid cause, and that Richard had indicated the day on which he would come and speak with this witness. And at length, that is within a week as she recalls immediately following, this witness communicated with Richard Cressy in a certain entranceway called *an Aley* near the window of the kitchen of John Scot's father, and there she asked Richard to make efforts towards and intercede with her brother so that he would render to this witness her right and legacy bequeathed to her by her father's testament.⁵ Richard said to her, "*I will know more of your mind first.*" This witness replied, "if it pleases you to return in two or three days, you will know my mind." And she says that about two or three [days] later, Richard came to John Scot's house, where Margaret, John's wife, in this witness's presence, asked Richard to make efforts towards this witness's brother that he be a good brother and give to her her due and what was bequeathed to her by her father. And he said to her and to this witness that he would do this with a willing spirit and he drank beer and kissed them and left. After he left, Elizabeth often told this witness that Richard often told her that he loved this witness to have her for his wife, and that he swore that he had never seen a woman that he loved better to contract marriage, and that he said that when he first saw her in the City of London he did not think of contracting marriage with her. And this witness said to Elizabeth that she loved Richard because he had been obliging and had acted kindly towards all the household when he had stayed at her father's house. And afterwards Elizabeth a number of times conveyed to this witness from Richard a smock, two *kerchiefs*, a pomander, a mirror [encased in] ivory, and this witness through Elizabeth sent Richard a small piece of wood carved with the figure of a crucifix. This witness received these gifts, transmitted to her by Elizabeth from Richard, in the spirit of contracting with Richard if Richard wanted in a similar way to contract marriage with her. She said also that afterwards when Elizabeth decided to leave that house, she made another woman named Elizabeth, a widow used to carry water to the house, matron and accomplice in this business between Richard and her. This Elizabeth afterwards brought to this witness on a number of occasions a number of tokens, that is two gold rings and a silver *earpick*⁶, a *St. James' shell* and a small staff of silver,⁷ and a heart of silver, which this witness for the above reason accepted from Elizabeth. To the second article, she says that on a certain day around a fortnight before last Lent, which day she cannot further specify, Richard again came to the dwelling-house of John Scot, her employer, bringing with him a *pottle*⁸ of claret wine and asked John Scot's wife that she permit him to have a conversation with this witness in secret, and having obtained permission from her, this witness withdrew with Richard from the parlour of the house to the hall and there, standing at the window facing the garden, Richard asked this

⁵ A copy of this will survives: Will of Richard Scrase [Sr.] of Hangleton, Sussex, dated 21 Feb. 1486[1487], probated 27 Nov. 1487, [TNA, Prob. 11/8/111](#). Alice is bequeathed four properties in the city of Chichester and 1000 sheep. Richard Scrase Jr., his son, is named as executor, to be supervised and advised by Lord Thomas Atwelle, prior of the Monastery of St. Pancrace de Luya, supervisor of the will. There is also a will for Richard Scrase Jr. (Will of Richard Scrase [Jr.] of Hangleton, Sussex, dated 21 Feb. 1499 [1500], probated 19 May, 1500, TNA, [PROB 11/12/84](#); it does not mention his sister Alice nor does it refer to any properties in Chichester, suggesting she was able to gain possession of them.

⁶ An instrument for clearing the ear of wax (*OED*, s.v.).

⁷ These would both have been pilgrimage souvenirs; the shrine of St. James (or Santiago) of Compostela in Spain, whose symbol was a scallop shell, was one of the major pilgrimage destinations in the Middle Ages.

⁸ A pot, tankard, or similar container (*OED*, s.v. *pottle*, n¹).

witness whether she could find it in her heart to have him as her husband, and she said yes. And further he asked this witness whether she was free and clear from any contract of marriage, and she also responded yes. And then Richard said to this witness, holding her by the right hand, "*I Richard take thee Alice to my wife, and thereto I plight thee my troth.*" And then this witness said to him, "*I Alice take thee Richard to my husband, and thereto I plight thee my troth.*" And she says that she spoke these words at that time with the intention of having Richard as her husband, and afterwards he gave her a pair of gloves. To the third position, she responds as above. To the fourth position, she says that on the day after Ash Wednesday last past⁹, this witness, in her master's and mistress's absence and against their will, left their house with Richard Cressy and went to the house of Master John Reed, serjeant-at-law, and immediately afterwards John Scot, her master, followed her into the home of Master John Reed and asked this witness whether she had contracted with Richard, admitted that she had contracted with him in her father's store-room; she says however that she did not contract with him there, but she said that she had so that John Scott would not be angry with her because she had contracted marriage with Richard in John's house without John knowing about it. To the fifth position, she admits its contents, and says that she admitted and recognized that she had contracted marriage with Richard before Master Thomas Ian and John Warham in the cathedral church of St. Paul in London. To the sixth position, she does not believe it. To the seventh position, she believes what is believed and does not believe what is not believed, and she does not believe the fame.

⁹ In 1489, Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) fell on 4 Mar.