=hy U'Girl!: A Winchester Poetic Manuscript of c. 1719

In 1821 the Rev. Peter Hall gave a small red octavo notebook containing miscellaneous hand-written poems to Winchester College Fel The date of the manuscript seems to be around 1719. He must at least have flicked through it, as the short preface he wrote on

signs some of the poems with an elaborate FC pears to refer to himself on p. 6 as . A man in holy orders, he concludes, called F. Cross, and possibly part of the household of Lady Anne Coventry, whose name also appears on one of the pages.

I now know, however, that it is the property of a woman, called Mrs. Frances Cross. She

So why, unlikely as it seems, do I think this provocative poem is the work of Frances Cross, rural spinster, far from the thrusting world of London print and politics? Chiefly, I suppose, because of where I found the only other MScopy. I took heart, too, from this phrase in the Grundy biography, which suggests that there was no particular restriction on the topics that a woman might write about in private, and circulate in MS form only

were ballads: topical, often personal. They gave short-term pleasure, and sometimes made long— The MS copy in Yale is apparently part of a collection of anti-Hanoverian poems, all written in the same neat hand. The possible connection with Warwickshire, and thus perhaps Frances Cross, comes just inside the front cover, where there is the bookplate of someone called W. Pigott L.L.B., and the signatures of Edward Pigott, a few scribbles, and Mrs. Frances Pigott.

she married a Pigott and lived a slightly seditious and amused poetic life ever after. But unfortunately there is no evidence of the marriage, Frances is a very common name at the time, and as with Mrs. Frances Cross, the form of the name suggests a spinster.

There is however a fascinating possibility, and one that reinforces my growing perception of the political and religious connections in this part of Warwickshire. It seems likely that the Pigotts implicated here are not the family of Robert Pigott, MP for Huntingdonshire, though his dates fit—1665-1746—and he owned property in Warwickshire, because he was a supporter of the new regime. It think the solution is much more local: that the Xtning Ballad was seen, in MS, at Coughton Court, home of the Roman Catholic Throckmortons, by Nathaniel Pigott (1661-1737), the Roman Catholic lawyer of the Throckmortons and of Alexander Pope, who, though chiefly resident in Twickenham, also had property in Beoley, Warwickshire, as we see in the 1715 list of non-jurors, about eighteen miles from Snitterfield, and nine from Wootton Wawen. He might well, I think, have been sufficiently amused to copy it out for his private pleasure; his friend, Pope, wrote a scurrilous ballad about tensions in the new Royal Family in 1717. He also, of course, had a great-grandson called Edward (1753-1825), the astronomer.

The idea of MS circulation being common in this circle is reinforced by the evidence of poetic interaction between Frances Cross and William Somervile. She not only transcribes his of David over Saul and (in a slightly different form from the published version) , with a poem suggesting her own

Poor Gratia, in her twentieth year, Foreseeing future woe, Chose to attend a monkey here, Before an ape below.

Friendship is a more certain pleasure than marriage in this collection, not only in the evident connection between Frances Cross and Somervile, and the crucial implicit friendship of Lady Anne Coventry

entertainments at his house; and who is continually recommending Abstinence—and what he calls tag of Horace,

side, in Norfolk Street—

with whom she seems on such excellent teasing terms, but there are more dues—though none incontrovertible—in the second, whose style and range of reference bear a marked resemblance to Oenigma poem so admired by Beighton. Two poets are referred to, John Denham, whose lines on the Thames²⁰ in (1642) had probably already passed into poetic cliché, though

, and Addison, who was friends with Somervile, and had recently himself bought a country estate at Bilton in Warwickshire. The Addison connection makes it tempting to guess that the absent poet is Thomas Tickell, who worshipped Addison, abandoning his I rish estate at Glasnevin to join Addison in London as under-secretary. This would make Cross even more with the London world than the Xtning Ballad suggests, but is unfortunately undermined by the fact that Tickell seems not to have bought the Glasnevin estate from his brother Richard until 1721. The only other plausible candidate I can hazard is the dueless Richard Verney, thirteenth Baron

isinherited

by his father and banished from Compton Verney.²² Perhaps the Denham quotation suggests that she is being satirical at his expense.

That acrid opposite of friendship is a familiar part of our perception of the period which harboured Pope and Swift, but it was still a surprise to find a direct personal attack in the Cross MS, on a clergyman called Robert Pearce

have made her very cross indeed. Vice- Edmund Hall , he was a particular object of contempt for Thomas Hearne the Oxford antiquary, on account of his Whiggish sympathies and rambling, inconsequential sermons, and his political views may have made the Coventry circle particularly unenthusiastic: certainly the poem refers specifically to both Bangor (Benjamin Hoadly, arch-enemy of the non-jurors) and Edmund Curll of Fleet Street, the Whig printer. I have not found a definite text for the sermon itself, which Cross could have heard live

been in London) or read as a pamphlet. There is even a faint possibility that the charity in question cou : there is a reference in a letter to A stell to a sermon preached by George Certainly Cross

and expresses it in a number of withering couplets:

21 no. 532.
22 , s.n.
23 Thomas Hearne, , 11 vols. (Oxford, 1885-1921), vol. 6 (1717-1719).
24 le Judgment,

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