



the national archives

palaeography

tutorial

Document 2: The registered probate copy of the will of Thomas Pike, a shipwright, dated 15 February 1722/3

(Catalogue reference: PROB 11/593 quire 196)

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About this document

This document is the registered probate copy of the will of Thomas Pike, a shipwright, dated 15 February 1722/3. (Catalogue reference: PROB 11/593 quire 196)

Wills were recognised as ecclesiastical documents because of commending the soul to God, and had to be presented in church courts to prove that they really were the last wishes of the deceased in relation to the disposal of their lands and possessions. After the will had been proved in court, a process known as granting probate (taken from the Latin "probare" – to prove), a copy of the will was made in a probate register.

This example of a will is quite short but they can be many pages in length and the information contained can vary. The handwriting is a cursive style (from the Latin "currere" - to run), so called because it was written at speed and "runs" across the page. Unlike the italic hand we saw in document 1, the pen does not leave the page between letters when using the cursive style. This is the handwriting style used for administrative purposes.

The probate clause, which was written in Latin and not shown here, states that Thomas Pike's will was proved on 18 September 1723 although his actual date of death may have been a few months earlier. There were quite complex rules regarding which church court would prove a will.

The National Archives holds those wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC). This was the court of the archbishop of Canterbury, its jurisdiction covering the southern half of the country. It also proved wills for persons who had died abroad but left personal property at home - this may have been the case with Thomas Pike, who states that he is writing his will "in consideration of the perils and dangers of the seas".

Introduction to transcribing document 2

Transcription tips - READ THESE FIRST!

In this document you should watch out for:

- Minims, as in document 1. The word in line 26 of the will looks very much like 'Knig', but there is no such word. A further clue is given by the name George which follows this word. Therefore, it must be King.
- Letter forms. Some of the letter forms are unfamiliar to the modern eye and capital letters in this style of handwriting are particularly tricky. Nevertheless, you will quickly become used to the shapes. Also note the use of double 'f' which is a capital 'F': line 25, the fffteenth day of ffebruary ... The alphabet will help you.
- Abbreviations. This document does not contain many abbreviations, until you reach the last line. Names had standard abbreviations, so at that time everyone would have known that 'Jno' meant John. 'N. Pub.' is the standard abbreviation for Notaries Public. When words are expanded, any letters which do not appear in the original are put into square brackets, like the 'Jno' in this document which is - Jo[h]n.

Wills follow a standard format at this time, normally beginning with:
In the name of God Amen.

This is followed by the personal details of the testator:
I Thomas Pike of Rotherhithe in the County of Surrey Shipwright.

The testator then states that, in order to make the will valid, he is of sound mind and memory:
being in bodily health and of sound and disposing mind and memory.

Originally a will dealt with freehold land, and a testament with personal goods:
My last Will and Testament.

The testator commends his soul to God. This may be followed by some other religious phrase, a practice continued until the mid 18th century:
I recommend my Soul to God that gave it.

The testator often states where he wishes to be buried:
my body I commit to the Earth or Sea it shall please God to order.

This is followed by the bequests to family and friends, often in no particular order:
I do devise and bequeath unto James Whittaker of the Tower of London Gentleman.

The bequests are followed by the appointment of an executor, who is responsible for having the will proved and carrying out the instructions it contains:
I do hereby nominate and appoint the said James Whittaker executor of this my last Will and Testament...

A will ends with the signature of the testator, and those of the witnesses. For a will to be valid it had to be witnessed by at least two people. The will would then be sealed in the presence of the testator.

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The example we are using here is a registered copy and, therefore, does not contain the actual signature. It does, however, record the fact that the original will had been signed: **lines 27-28**.

glossary

Bequeath	To leave personal (moveable) property by will.
Chattels	Moveable possessions, for example, furniture, livestock, clothes and jewellery.
Cursive hands	A generic term for varieties of handwriting in which the letters are joined up.
Devise	To leave land by will.
Estate	The collective assets, for example, property, and liabilities, such as debts of a person.
Examination	A statement or testimony that is taken down in writing as evidence.
Executor	A man appointed by a testator, the person who made the will, to dispose of his estate in accordance with the wishes expressed in the will.
George I	King of England 1714-1727. George I was born on 28 May 1660 in Hanover, Germany. In 1714, after the death of Queen Anne, he came to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland. Although George was only 52nd in line to the throne, he was the nearest Protestant heir under the terms of the 1701 Act of Settlement. He came to England with little knowledge of the English language and a lack of understanding of British affairs, a circumstance that assisted in the gradual transference of executive power from the monarch to the ministers and cabinet. George was divorced from his wife Sophia Dorothea of Celle with whom he had one son, the future George II, and one daughter. He returned regularly to Hanover, dying there on 11 June 1727. George was originally buried at Leinesclosskirche but was reinterred in 1957 at Herrenhausen in Hanover.
Inventory	A list of items submitted by the executor to the ecclesiastical court which details the deceased's moveable property (including

debts owed to the deceased).

Last Will and Testament

The written document by which a person disposes of his property after his death. Originally a will was concerned with freehold land while a testament was concerned with personal goods, but for convenience the two came to be included in one document. Anyone with possessions to leave could make a will, with certain exceptions including the following:

- 1) Married women, unless they had the consent of their husbands. Control of the property of a woman passed to her husband upon marriage. A married woman could bequeath both the personal goods which she had brought into the marriage and any clothes the husband had given her, but only with the consent of her husband, who also had to be the executor of the will. This situation did not change until the Married Women's Property Act of 1882.
 - 2) Children (boys under the age of 14, girls under the age of 12). There was no obligation to make a will. The poor with nothing to leave did not make them while sometimes even the rich failed to make one. In fact, only a small number of people made a will before the 19th century.
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Probate

Proving the will. Wills had to be proved in court - that is, the court had to be satisfied that the will truly reflected the last wishes of the deceased. Until the Court of Probate was established in 1858, ecclesiastical courts did the proving as wills were also seen as religious documents, in which the testator commended his soul to God. (See also Last Will and Testament).

Rotherhithe

Rotherhithe is now part of the London Borough of Southwark, near the heart of Docklands. It was within the borders of the county of Surrey until 1889. For centuries the traditional industry of Rotherhithe was shipbuilding. The name is believed to have Saxon origins, from *rotha*, meaning mariner, and *hythe*, meaning landing place. Sir Francis Drake's Golden Hind set off from here.

Shipwright

A person employed in the construction of ships.

Tenements

Property often held from another person, for example, through a lease.

how to use the interactive transcribing exercise

Help - using the interactive transcribing exercise

Step 1: Study the line of text from the document image

Step 2: On the document image, use the interactive magnifying glass to zoom in/out of image by clicking on a particular word

Step 3: Using the textbox below the document image, type in your transcription

Step 4: When you have finished the current line of text, click on the Submit button

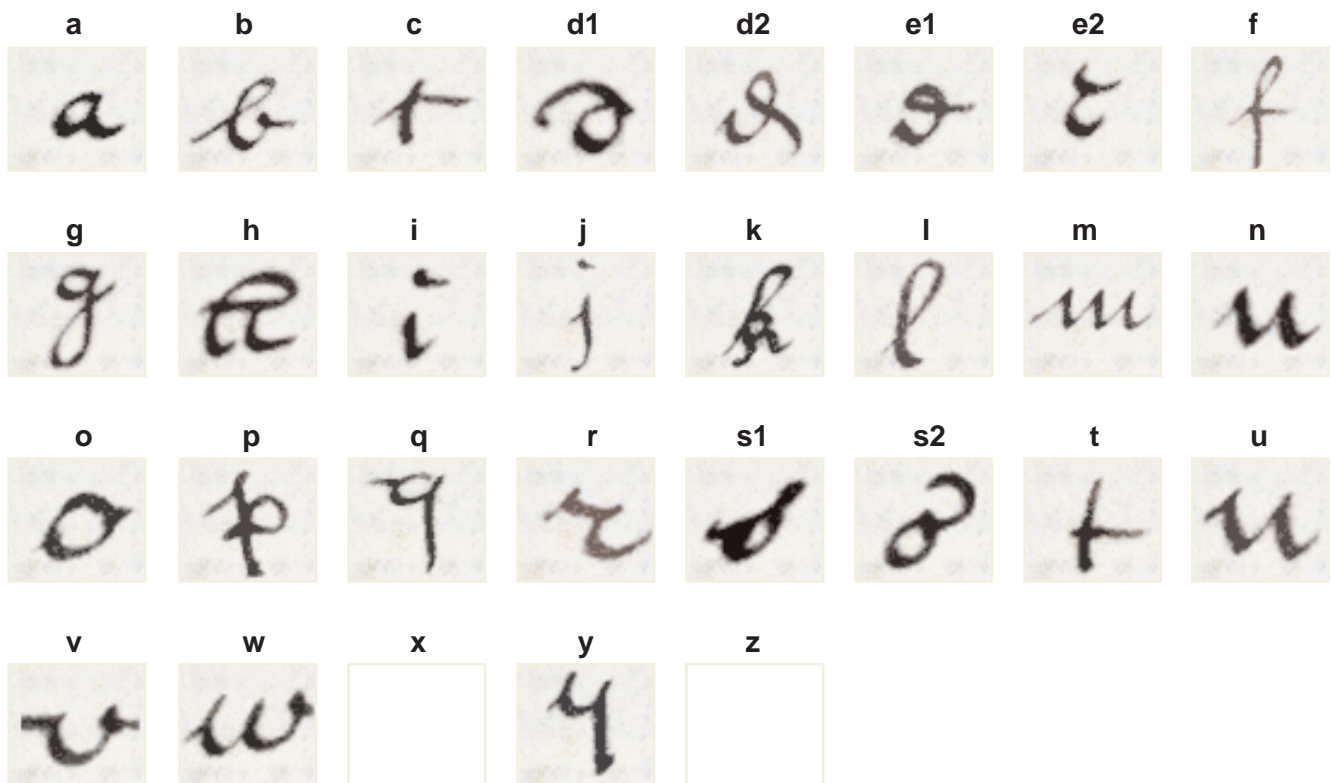
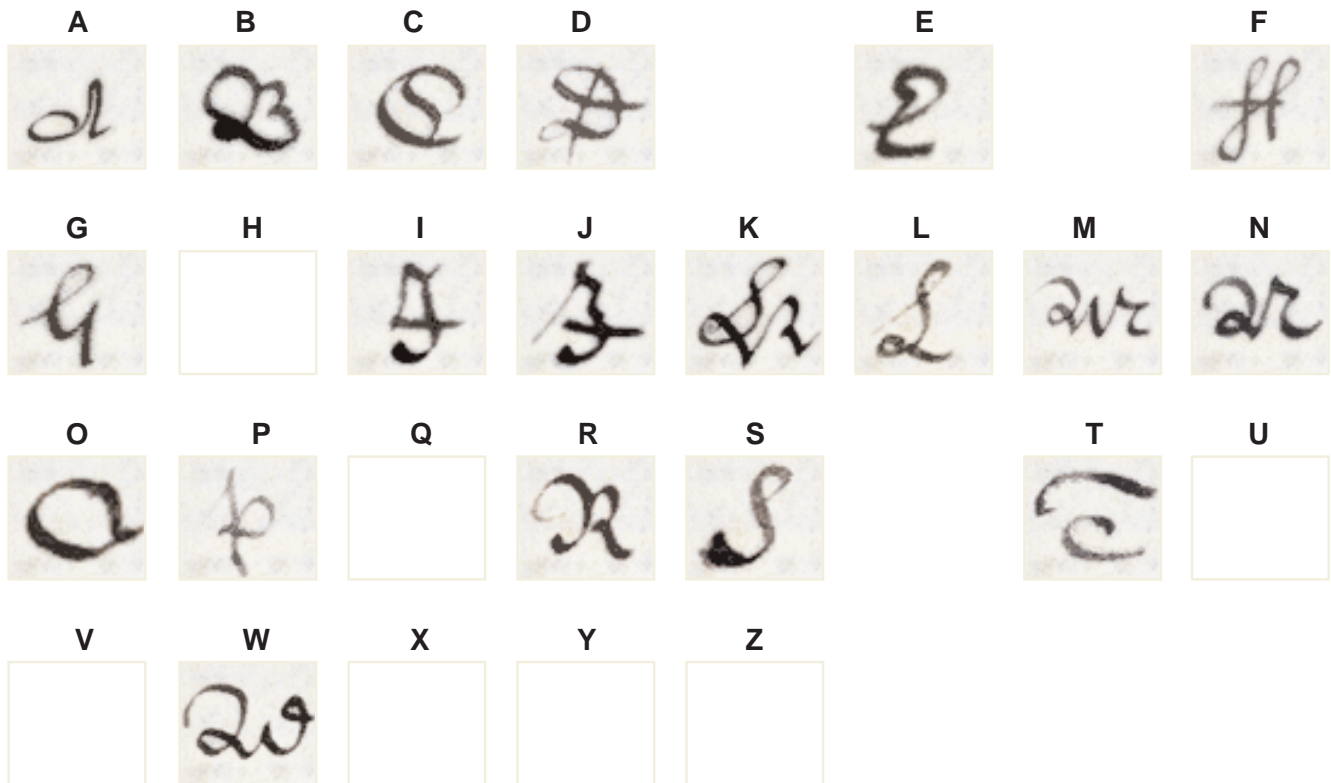
Step 5: The results will be shown and will give you the option to either retry or move onto the next line of the current document.

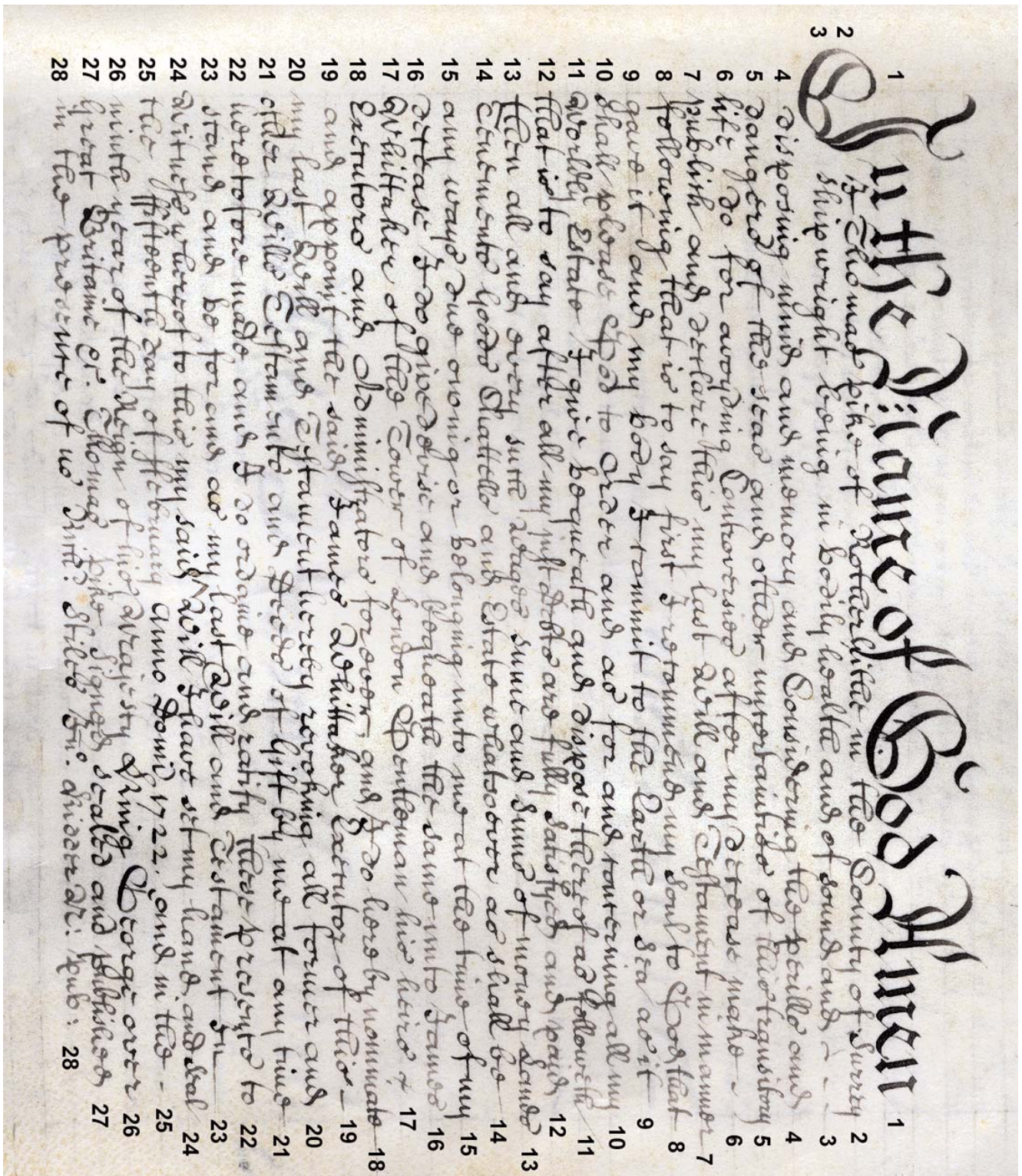
Help - instructions on typing your transcription

- 1) For every word you cannot transcribe, put in a dash character ' - '
- 2) Every word you transcribe should be separated with a single space
- 3) The transcribing text must match, whether it is in capital or lower case
- 4) Expand abbreviations in square brackets where necessary.

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Alphabet





Transcript

1. In the Name of God Amen
2. I Thomas Pike of Rotherhithe in the County of Surrey
3. Shipwright being in bodily health and of sound and
4. disposing mind and memory and Considering the perills and
5. dangers of the seas and other uncertainties of this transitory
6. life do for avoyding Controversies after my decease make
7. publish and declare this my last Will and Testament in manner
8. following that is to say first I recommend my Soul to God that
9. gave it and my body I commit to the Earth or Sea as it
10. shall please God to Order and as for and concerning all my
11. Worldly Estate I give bequeath and dispose thereof as followeth
12. that is to say after all my just Debts are fully Satisfyed and paid
13. then all and every such wages sume and Sums of money Lands
14. Tenements Goods Chattells and Estate whatsoever as shall be
15. any ways due owing or belonging unto me at the time of my
16. decease I do give devise and bequeath the same unto James
17. Whittaker of the Tower of London Gentleman his heirs
18. Executors and Administrators forever, and I do hereby nominate
19. and appoint the said James Whittaker Executor of this
20. mylast Will and Testament hereby revoking all former and
21. other Wills Testaments and Deeds of Gift by me at any time
22. heretofore made and I do ordaine and ratify these presents to
23. stand and be for and as my only last Will and Testament In
24. Witness whereof to this my said Will I have set my hand and Seal
25. the Fifteenth day of February Anno Domi[ni] 1722 and in the
26. ninth year of the Reign of his Majesty King George over
27. Great Britaine etc. Thomas Pike Signed sealed and published
28. in the presence of us Rich[ar]d Stiles Jo[h]n Kidder N[otaries] P[ublic]