



# SIR THOMAS BROMLEY

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ADM IT 1550  
READER 1566;  
TREASURER 1573-75;  
RECORDER OF LONDON  
1566-69; SG 1569-79;  
MP; LC 1579-87; PC; KNT 1579

PRESIDED OVER TRIAL OF  
MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, 1586



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## PROFILE

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Sir Thomas Bromley was born around 1530 in Shropshire, the son of George Bromley and Jane Lacon. His father's cousin, also Sir Thomas Bromley, was Chief Justice of the King's Bench during the reign of Mary I. The family had a close connection with the Inner Temple; his father was a Reader at the Inn in 1508 and 1509, and his brother (Sir George Bromley) was elected Treasurer in 1567. Sir Thomas himself was elected Treasurer of the Inn in 1573.

Bromley was admitted to Clifford's Inn in 1547, and became a member of the Inner Temple in the early 1550s. In 1555 he was appointed as one of the auditors of the Inn's steward, and in 1557 he was an auditor for the Treasurer. When his cousin the Chief Justice died in 1555, he left the younger Sir Thomas an allowance of 40 shillings a year for ten years if he continued his legal studies: Bromley did so, receiving a Bachelor of Civil Law degree from the University of Oxford in 1560. In the same year he married Elizabeth Fortescue, with whom he had eight children.

Throughout the 1550s and 1560s Bromley was active politically, sitting as an MP for Bridgnorth, Wigan, and Guildford. He also progressed in his legal career; he was active in the Inner Temple's affairs, first attending the Inn's Parliament in 1563, and serving again as an auditor for the Treasurer in 1564, as an attendant on the Reader in 1565, and becoming Reader himself in 1566, lecturing on the Statutes of Attaints.

In 1566 Bromley was made Recorder of London. As a result, he was also appointed as an MP for the City of London; however, he was still representing Guildford at that time, Parliament decided he should continue to do so, and a by-election was held. Alongside these responsibilities, in 1566 he served on both a legal committee and a succession committee.

In 1569, Bromley was made Solicitor-General. In this role, he sat on the commission that tried the rebels of the Revolt of the Northern Earls in 1569 (one of whom, Richard Dacres, was a distant relative; there were accusations that Bromley had assisted him) and took part in the treason trial of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, as counsel for the Crown. He was noted to be particularly zealous in securing the conviction.

In 1579 the Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Nicholas Bacon, died. After two months' consideration Queen Elizabeth appointed Bromley the new Lord Keeper, giving him also the title of Lord Chancellor; while Bacon had had the powers of a Lord Chancellor he had never actually been given the office itself. Sir Gilbert Gerrard, the Attorney General, was passed over in favour of Bromley; Gerrard had held his office for much longer, but was seen as awkward and ungainly, and not as fit as Bromley for a position of such dignity. He was instead given the office of Master of the Rolls in 1581.

As Lord Chancellor, Bromley rendered the judgment in the case of *Wolfe v Shelley*; the "rule in Shelley's Case" remained a leading doctrine in real-property law in England (and other common-law jurisdictions) for centuries. It was abolished in England by the 1925 Law of Property Act, but it is still in operation in Canada. However, his most prominent appearance was as the head of the commission which tried Mary Queen of Scots for treason in 1586. He was noted to act with great decency and respect towards Mary, but believed her existence was incompatible with public safety. She was found guilty; Bromley applied the Great Seal to her death warrant. Shortly afterwards, he took to his bed, dying two month later on 12 April 1587. Some have speculated that he died partly as a result of the strain of the trial, and his alarm over Elizabeth's displeasure.

At the Inner Temple Bromley was "remarkable for his proficiency and the regularity of his conduct". He allegedly only took on cases when he felt convinced of their justice, first carefully screening all those presented to him; perhaps as a result, he did not lose a case in five years. He was noted for his independence of judgment, as in the Thomas Knyvett case, in which Bromley refused to issue a pardon despite the Queen's displeasure. He was also said to be very free from religious bigotry; although a Protestant himself, he attempted to soften the execution of the law against heretics. His father-in-law, Sir Adrian Fortescue, was beatified as a Roman Catholic martyr. Bromley's descendants continued to be prominent in English politics: his daughter Elizabeth was the aunt of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector.

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