

Shakespearean Authorship Trust



Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford

Dates:

1550 - 1604

Background:

Aristocratic, educated first privately, then at Cambridge and Gray's Inn. A prominent courtier, he toured the Continent in 1575-6, principally France and Italy, and had a house in Venice. In 1586 until his death in 1604 Oxford received a grant of £1000 a year from the Crown. His final years were spent in seclusion.

Famous for:

De Vere was known as a poet and playwright of excellence, as well as a patron of authors and acting companies. He was a champion jousting and sometime favourite of the Queen, but fell from grace. He married Lord Burghley's daughter Anne Cecil, and had a celebrated quarrel with Sir Philip Sidney over a game of tennis. From 1569 until the death of Elizabeth in 1603 Oxford used what has come to be known as the crown signature, which seems to signify that he thought of himself as Edward VII.

The Case:

De Vere possessed the classical learning and knowledge of the law, music, Italian culture and aristocratic sports that feature so prominently in the Shakespeare canon. The poetry that has survived under his own name, as well as his letters, both collaborate the case for his authorship. The Shakespeare plays are replete with references to his career at Court and subsequent fall from grace, in particular his relationship with Queen Elizabeth and her chief minister Lord Burghley, who is believed to have been satirised as Polonius in *Hamlet*. Under his authorship the plays become political satires of Court life and powerful critiques of the government, hence his anonymity. His family financed the First Folio of Shakespeare's works in 1623.

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