

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. Two of his uncles, Lords Sheffield and Surrey, were influential poets; a third, Arthur Golding, was responsible for the translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that was "Shakespeare's favourite book." A prominent courtier, he toured the Continent in 1575-6, principally France and Italy, and is said to have 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 relative seclusion at King's Place in Hackney.

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 was much condemned for his cruel treatment of her. Two of his daughters by her, Elizabeth and Susan, were said to have been born by means of a "bed trick", whereby Oxford was brought to sleep with his wife thinking she was his mistress. In 1579 his celebrated quarrel with Sir Philip Sidney over a game of tennis was very nearly the subject of a duel, while in 1581 his affair with Anne Vavasour, one of the Queen's maids of honour by whom he had a son, created a scandal at court. 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. King James referred to him as "Great Oxford."

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. Shortly before his death (or disappearance) in 1604, the flow of new Shakespearean publications ceased. In 1623 his family financed the First Folio of Shakespeare's works, one of the dedicatees being Oxford's son-in-law Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery. Oxford was lost to public consciousness for over three hundred years until the publication of *Shakespeare Identified* in 1920.

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