

SUMMARY: The excerpt below is a description of Stratford upon Avon by the historian and herald, William Camden (1551-1623), in his *Britannia*. *Britannia* was widely acclaimed and went through six editions from 1586 to 1610 in Camden's lifetime, yet in none of them does Camden make any mention of William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon.

From the *ODNB*:

*Much anticipated, the Britannia made its début on 2 May 1586, Camden's thirty-fifth birthday; the squat octavo volume was dedicated to Lord Burghley. Of Camden's published work the Britannia has had the greatest and most lasting impact. It received immediate recognition when it appeared, and its successive, enlarged editions of 1587, 1590, 1594, 1600 (dedicated to Queen Elizabeth) and 1607 (dedicated to King James) and its English translation of 1610 by Philemon Holland attest to its popularity. A contemporary translation by Richard Knolles, once in Camden's possession, survives in manuscript in the Bodleian Library as MS Ashmole 849. It was also published in Frankfurt in 1590 and 1610. Throughout the decades after its first appearance Camden continued to revise the text and experiment with the work's format and apparatus, and he worked closely with Holland on the 1610 translation. In spite of the author's collaboration, however, the translation is often inaccurate and takes liberties with the material, and for this reason is regarded as inferior to Edmund Gibson's translation of 1695. By 1607, the year of its last Latin edition in Camden's lifetime, published in folio and containing an index, maps by Saxton and Norden, and engravings of coins, monuments, and topographical sites, it had evolved into an impressive and editorially sophisticated work of scholarship.*

Although Camden praised the poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, in another of his works, his *Remaines Concerning Britaine* (1605), it appears he did not connect the poet and playwright he praised in *Remaines* with William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon, whom he failed to mention in *Britannia*. For Camden's praise of the poet and playwright in *Remaines*, see the online copy of the 1636 edition, p. 319 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/remainesconcerni1636camd#page/318/mode/2up>.

Camden's failure to mention William Shakespeare in *Britiannia* in his description of Stratford upon Avon and his failure to connect the latter with the poet and playwright he had praised in *Remaines* is remarkable in view of the fact that Camden, having been installed as Clarenceux King of Arms on 23 October 1597, was personally involved, together with William Dethick, Garter King of Arms, with the 1599 draft grant to William's father, John Shakespeare. For Dethick and Camden's 1599 draft grant, which describes the original grant of arms to John Shakespeare, authorizes him to impale the arms of a younger son of a branch of the Arden family with his own, and authorizes his children to quarter those Arden arms, see:

<http://www.shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/john-shakespeares-draft-exemplification-arms>.

For Dethick and Camden's defence of the original grant to John Shakespeare, see:

<http://www.shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/shakespeares-arms-defended-bodleian-librarys-copy-garter-and-clarenceuxs-reply>

and

<http://www.shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/shakespeares-arms-defended-bodleian-librarys-copy-garter-and-clarenceuxs-reply>.

For Camden's remarkable failure to make any reference to William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon in *Britannia* despite his involvement in the 1599 draft grant to John Shakespeare, see also Jimenez, Ramon, '10 Eyewitnesses Who Saw Nothing' at:

<http://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/ten-eyewitnesses/>

Camden's failure to mention William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon in *Britannia* was noticed by the annotator of a copy of the 1590 edition of *Britannia*, who referred to him in a handwritten marginal note as 'our Roscius'. See Nelson, Alan H. and Paul H. Altrocchi, 'William Shakespeare, "Our Roscius"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Volume 60, Number 4, Winter 2009, pp. 460-9. For an abstract of the article, see:

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/365969/pdf>.

*The Huntington Library copy of the third edition of William Camden's Britannia (1590) contains a manuscript notation in Latin referring to William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon as "our Roscius." The authors conclude that the annotation was written by Richard Hunt, vicar of Bishops Itchington, Warwickshire, probably during his tenure as vicar (1621–61). Hunt was an Oxford graduate whose family, properties, and social acquaintances link him to towns and villages in the vicinity of Stratford. By employing the term "our Roscius," Hunt apparently meant to characterize Shakespeare as a great actor; since "Roscian" was sometimes used in a broader sense, Hunt may also have meant to characterize Shakespeare as a playwright or, more generally, as a man of the theater.*

Since Roscius was a noted Roman actor but was never referred to as a playwright, the annotator of the 1590 edition of *Britannia* clearly knew William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon as an actor only, and did not connect him with the poet and playwright, William Shakespeare. The final sentence of the foregoing abstract thus appears to be wishful thinking.

The excerpt below is taken from the edition of Camden's *Britannia* on The Philological Museum website:

<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/>

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<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/>

For the transcript by Dana Sutton of the Latin passage in Camden's *Britannia* see:

<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/warkslat.html>.

For the transcript by Dana Sutton of the English translation by Philemon Holland see:

<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/warkseng.html#warks8>.

For the excerpt, see also the online copy of the 1607 edition of *Britannia*, p. 426.

8. Plenior hinc Avona defertur per Charlcott nobilis et equestris familiae Luciorum habitationem, quae a Charlcottis iam olim ad illos haereditario quasi transmigravit, qui ad pauperes et peregrinos suscipiendos domum religiosam pio instituto ad Thellisford posuerunt, Thelley enim fluviolus dictus erat per Comptom Murdac olim Mordacorum, nunc equestris familiae Vernaïorum, et hanc Tellisford Avonam petit, qui Stratford mox allabitur emporiolum non elegans, quod duobus suis alumnis omnem dignitatem debet, Ioanni de Stratford archiepiscopo Cantuariensi, qui templum posuit, et Hugoni Clopton praetori Londinensi, qui Avona pontem saxeum quatuordecim fornicibus subnixum non sine maximis impensis induxit. Hic frater natu minor erat ex antiqua familia quae a Clopton manerio adiacenti hoc cognomen mutuata, ex quo Walterus de Coksfeld, dictus marescallus miles, ad Clopton sibi et suis certam sedem defixerat. Horum haereditas nostro tempore ad duas sorores cohaeredes descendit, quarum altera enupta Georgio Carew equiti clarissimo serenissimae reginae Annae procamerario, quem titulo baronis Carew de Clopton rex Iacobus ornavit, et ergo vel hoc nomine memoro, quod venerandae antiquitatis sit summus admirator. Nec aliud ad suas ripas praeter Bitford, mercatum, et rusticanos viculos videt Avonia iamiam Wigorniensis aditurus.

8. Avon now runneth downe from Warwicke with a fuller streame by Charle-cot, the habitation of the renowned ancient familie of the Lucies Knights, which place long agoe descended hereditarily to them from the Charlcots, who upon a pious and devout minde founded a religious house at Thellisford for entertainment of poore folke and pilgrims. For that little river was called Thelley, which by Compton Murdack, the possession sometime of the Murdackes, and now of the Vernaies, Knights, and by this Thellisford goeth into Avon, which within a while runneth hard by Stratford, a proper little mercate towne, beholden for all the beauty that it hath to two men there bred and brought up, namely, John of Stratford Archbishop of Canterburie, who built the church, and Sir Hugh Clopton Maïor of London, who over Avon made a stone bridge supported with foureteene arches, not without exceeding great expenses. This Hugh was a yonger brother out of that ancient family which from Clopton, a Manour adjoining, borrowed this surname, since the time that Walter de Cocksfield called Knight Mareschall setled and

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planted both himselfe and his successours at Clopton. The inheritance of these Cloptons is in our time descended to two sisters coheires: the one of which is married to Sir George Carew Knight, Vicechamberlaine to our most gracious Lady Queene Anne, whom King James hath entituled Baron Carew of Clopton, and whom I am the more willing to name with honour in this respect, if there were none other, for that he is a most affectionat lover of venerable antiquity. Neither seeth Avon any other memorable thing upon his bankes but Bitford, a mercate towne, and some country villages, being now ready to enter into Worcestershire.