



EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 8

Published by De Vere Press
1340 Flemish Street
Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 3R7 Canada

Did Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, know Arthur Brooke, the author of *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*?

The answer to this question depends very much on who Arthur Brooke really was.

J.J. Munro has provided a partial solution to the problem of Arthur Brooke's identity by demonstrating that the author of the *Tragical History* was drowned on March 19, 1563 in the wreck of Queen Elizabeth's ship, the *Greyhound*, which was carrying reinforcements to the English garrison at Le Havre on the French coast.

There are, however, additional conclusions which can be drawn about Arthur Brooke's identity from the evidence adduced by Munro, and these will be considered below in conjunction with the discussion of Munro's findings.

1. Stow's *Annals*

The starting point for an inquiry into the question of Arthur Brooke's identity is the account of the wreck of the *Greyhound* found in Stow's *Annals*:

For you must understand that Sir Adrian Poinings being knight Marshall, upon his return into England went not back again: and then was Sir Thomas Finch of Kent appointed to go over to supply the roomth of knight Marshall, who making his provision readie, sent over his brother Erasmus Finch to have charge of his band, and his kinsman Thomas Finch to be provost marshall, whilst he staying till he had every thing in a readinesse to passe over himselfe, at length imbarqued in one of the Queens ships, called the Greyhound, having there

aboorde with him besides three score and sixe of his own retinue, foure and fortie other Gentlemen. . . . and as they were on the further coast towards Newhaven [i.e. Havre], they were by contrarie wind and foule weather driven backe againe towards Ric, they forced the captaine of the ship, a very good seaman, named William Maline, and also the master and mariners, to thrust into haven before the tyde, and so they all perished, seven of the meaner sort onely excepted, whereof three dyed shortly after they came on land. After this mischance, Edmond Randoll was appointed knight Marshall (Munro 165).

Munro compares this account of Stow's with four other contemporary documents: verses by Thomas Brooke, an epitaph by George Turberville, a letter from Henry Cobham to Thomas Chaloner, and an entry in Henry Machyn's diary. Taken together, these documents establish that Arthur Brooke, the author of the *Tragical History*, perished in the wreck of the *Greyhound*. The documents also provide clues which connect Arthur Brooke with one of Elizabethan England's most important families, the Brookes of Cobham Hall.

2. Verses by "Thomas Broke, the younger"

The second item of contemporary evidence adduced by Munro is a few lines of verse by "Thomas Broke, the younger, to the Reader". These verses establish that Arthur Brooke died in the shipwreck of an unnamed vessel.

According to Munro, the verses are found in folio 308 of the only other known work by Arthur Brooke, a book published in 1563 under the title *The Agreement of Sondry places of Scripture, seeming in shew to Jarre*. They read as follows:

Example, lo, in Broke before thine eye,
Whose praised gifts in him did late abound,
By shipwrack forced, alas, too soon to die,
Helpless of all intomb'd lies underground
(Munro xxii).

It will be noticed that the author of this brief elegy has the same surname as the unfortunate Arthur Brooke, suggesting the possibility of identifying Arthur Brooke through his relationship to "Thomas Broke, the younger".

Fortunately, the identity of "Thomas Broke, the younger" can be established from contemporary references. He was the younger of two sons, both named Thomas, born to George Brooke, 7th Lord Cobham, (1497-1558) and his wife Anne Bray. The elder Thomas was born in 1533, the younger in 1539 (McKeen 700-01). George Brooke and his wife Anne both died in 1558, referring to the younger Thomas in their respective wills as "Thomas Broke the yonger of that name who is my sixte sonne" and "my sonne Thomas Cobham thonger [the younger]" (McKeen 9-10). "Thomas Brooke, the younger" was, therefore, a younger brother of two of the highest ranking and most influential personages of the Elizabethan era: William Brooke, 8th Lord Cobham and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, (eldest son and heir of George Brooke and Anne Bray), and Elizabeth Parr (nee Brooke), Marchioness of Northampton and close personal friend and confidante of Queen Elizabeth.

The fact that verses commemorating Arthur Brooke's death were written by a brother of Lord Cobham's thus casts an entirely new perspective on the identity of Arthur Brooke.

3. Turberville's *Epitaph on the Death of Master Arthur Brooke*

A third piece of evidence which Munro considers with respect to the circumstances of Arthur Brooke's death is a poem entitled *An Epitaph on the death of Master Arthur Brooke, drowned in passing to Newhaven* (see Appendix A for full text). The epitaph is found in George Turberville's *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs and Sonnets*, published in 1567 as "newly cor-

rected with additions", indicating the existence of an original, but now unknown, first edition (Rollins 291).

Turberville's epitaph provides an important fact about the circumstances of Arthur Brooke's death, namely that the shipwreck occurred in the course of a voyage to Newhaven (i.e., Le Havre). The epitaph also adds other details, speaking of Brooke's relative youth ("his years in number few") and of his authorship of the *Tragicall Historye* ("Juliet and her mate"), and indicating the political purpose of the voyage to Newhaven ("as he to foreign realm was bound/ With others moe his sovereign queen to serve") (Munro xxiii).

4. Letter from Henry Brooke, alias Cobham, to Sir Thomas Chaloner

Munro's fourth piece of evidence is a letter of May 14, 1563 from Henry Cobham to Sir Thomas Chaloner.

Henry Brooke who, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography* always used Cobham as a surname (v.4, 610), and who is referred to in the Patent Rolls as "Henry Brooke alias Cobham" (*CPR 1569-72*, 518) was another son of George Brooke, 7th Lord Cobham. He was thus the brother of William Brooke (8th Lord Cobham) and "Thomas Broke, the younger".

Sir Thomas Chaloner (1521-65) was a personal friend of the Brooke family (McKeen 165), and Henry Cobham and Chaloner had an additional connection in that Cobham had accompanied Chaloner when the latter was first sent as ambassador to Madrid in 1561 (*DNB*, v.4, 610). In his letter of May 14, 1563, Cobham is thus writing to the ambassador as a close family friend and associate.

As quoted by Munro, the relevant portion of Cobham's letter to Chaloner reads:

Sir Thomas Finch was drowned going over to Newhaven as knightmarshall in Sir Adrian Poinings' place, who is come over. James Wentworth and his brother John were cast away in the same vessel, on the sands

near Rye, and little Brook and some other petty gentlemen (Munro 165).

This letter so clearly links the details of the shipwreck in which Arthur Brooke perished with the account in Stow that Munro was able to conclude without reservation that Arthur Brooke died in the wreck of the *Greyhound*:

[I]n view of the parallel circumstances and the dates, we are justified in believing that "little Brook" is our own Arthur Brooke, the poet (Munro 165).

However, an even more significant point about the letter is the fact that Arthur Brooke's death is here remarked upon by yet another of Lord Cobham's brothers. This cannot be mere coincidence (particularly in view of the intimate tone of the reference to "little Brook"), and points to some sort of family connection.

5. Machyn's diary

An important clue to this family connection is found in an entry from Machyn's diary. Munro quotes Machyn to pinpoint the date of the wreck of the *Greyhound*, which is not given in Stow. As printed in Nichols' edition of Machyn's diary, the complete entry reads as follows:

The xxj day of Marche tydynges cam to the cowrt that on off the quen's shypes callyd the Grahond was lost gohyng to Nuwhavyn; the captayn was Ser Thomas Fynche knyghtt of Kent, and ys broder and on of my lord Cobham('s) brodur and ij of my lord Whentforth('s) bredurne and mony gentyll men and mynstrels; [one] of my lord of Warwyke('s) newys [nephews], and a good mastur; and mony marenars and sawgears [soldiers] to the nombur of (blank) (Nichols 302).

Machyn thus states unequivocally that one of the gentlemen who "was lost going to Newhaven" in the *Greyhound* was "one of my Lord Cobham's brothers", an assertion also made in the *Dictionary of National Biography* article on Sir Thomas Finch (v.7, 19).

There is no reason to question the reliability of Machyn's statement. As Nichols says, Machyn was:

a citizen of London, of no great scholarship or attainments. . . but the matters of fact which he records would be such as he either witnessed himself, or had learned immediately after their occurrence: and the opinions and sentiments which he expresses would be shared by a large proportion of his fellow-citizens (v).

It only remains, then, to reconcile Machyn's statement with what is known about Lord Cobham's brothers.

In his life of William Brooke (who bore the title of Lord Cobham from 1558 until his death in 1597), McKeen amassed a great deal of information about the Cobham family and its connections. According to McKeen, William Brooke had four sisters (Elizabeth, Anne, Mary and Catherine) and nine brothers (Henry the elder, George, Thomas the elder, John, Edward the elder, Henry the younger, Thomas the younger, Edmund, and Edward the younger). The Elizabethan antiquary Robert Glover, a contemporary of Lord Cobham's, recorded the births of thirteen of the Brooke children, ending with the birth of Catherine in 1544. The birthdate of Edward the younger, who was probably born after 1544, is unknown (5, 11, 700-2).

It is fairly clear that none of the nine brothers identified by McKeen could have been the individual who perished in the wreck of the *Greyhound*. Henry the elder and Edward the elder were both deceased by 1551. George died circa 1570, Thomas the elder circa 1578, Henry the younger in 1592, and John in 1594. The dates of the deaths of Thomas the younger, Edmund, and Edward the younger are not known; however, Thomas was still alive in 1571 and McKeen finds evidence that Edmund and Edward were alive until circa 1587 (11, 700-2).

Nonetheless Machyn, a contemporary witness, tells us that "one of Lord Cobham's brothers" died in the wreck of the *Greyhound*. There must thus have been another youth in Lord Cobham's household known to outsiders as Lord Cobham's "brother". This individual was undoubtedly the young Arthur Brooke.

Was Arthur Brooke a full brother of Lord Cobham's, born, like Edward, sometime after 1544? This seems unlikely. Only fourteen children are repre-

sented on the tomb of George and Anne Brooke erected, three years after their deaths, in 1561. What is more likely is that Arthur Brooke was a near relative living with the Cobham family.

Three "nephews" are mentioned in the 1558 will of George Brooke, 7th Lord Cobham (McKeen 68). It seems likely that Arthur Brooke was one of these "nephews". Two of George, Lord Cobham's three "nephews" would have been the sons of his late brother, Thomas Brooke, who had died in 1547, and who had been a member of the household staff of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. Thomas Brooke had married Archbishop Cranmer's niece, Susan, and the couple had a son named Cranmer Brooke (MacCullough 203) and another son, Edward Brooke. According to a pedigree in *The Visitation of Kent*, "Tho. Brooke fil' 2dus Tho. fil. Joh'is Baronis de Cobham" married "Susanna filia . . . Cramner [sic] vidua Glearke". They had two sons "Cramner [sic] Brooke de Ashford" and "Edwardus Brooke miles occisus in praelio" ("Edward Brooke, knight, killed in battle"). No further details regarding Edward Brooke are given in the pedigree; presumably he was killed in battle before he had an opportunity to marry and beget heirs (16).

Cranmer Brooke did marry, however. His wife is named in the pedigree as "Abell filia Joh'is Fogg Militis". And immediately beneath the name Cranmer Brooke in the pedigree appears the note "Ar fil. et haeres" ("Arthur, son and heir"). The relationships shown in this Brooke pedigree are consistent with the other historical records which have a bearing on the identity of Arthur Brooke. Thus, the "Ar. fil. et haeres" named in this pedigree is almost certainly the Arthur Brooke who wrote *The Tragicall History of Romeus and Juliet*, who perished in the wreck of the *Greyhound* on March 19, 1563, and who was a great-nephew of George Brooke, Lord Cobham.

This view is supported by the fact that the coat of arms given in this Brooke pedigree is that of the Lords Cobham: "Gules, on a chevron argent a lion rampant sable, ducally crowned or". In addition, the pedigree itself indicates that the person who pro-

vided the information was a reliable source: the informant was William Brooke, son and heir of Cranmer Brooke by his wife Abell Fogg. McKeen's exhaustive researches into the life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, also confirm the relationships given in this pedigree. A genealogical chart at the end of McKeen's life of Lord Cobham shows the marriage of Thomas Brooke (d. 1547) and Susan (Cranmer) Clarke (whose third husband was Anthony Vaughan). Finally, as stated earlier, George Brooke's will of 1558 mentions three "nephews" related to his late brother Thomas. The word "nephew" covered a broader range of relationships in Elizabethan times than it does today; it could certainly have included a great-nephew, which was what Arthur Brooke was to George Brooke, 7th Lord Cobham.

The Brooke pedigree also accords with the documents which Munro examined in his quest to establish the identity of Arthur Brooke, particularly the entry in Machyn's diary in which Arthur Brooke is called a "brother" of William Brooke, 8th Lord Cobham. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "brother" was also used more loosely in Elizabethan times than it is today, and could refer to a variety of male kinsmen, including uncles, nephews, and cousins.

It may be that Machyn in his diary used the word "brother" in this loose sense. Alternatively, it may simply be that Machyn was uninformed about Arthur Brooke's true relationship to Lord Cobham. If Arthur Brooke was living in Lord Cobham's household, it would have been easy for Machyn and others to have mistaken him for one of Lord Cobham's many brothers. However, the truth seems to be that Arthur Brooke was not a brother of William Brooke, 8th Lord Cobham, but rather the son of Lord Cobham's first cousin, Cranmer Brooke.

Further clues to Arthur Brooke's identity and literary pursuits are found in the Middle Temple archives. On February 4, 1562, the Inner Temple Parliament ordered that:

arthur broke shall have a speciall admittance without

anything paying in consideration of certen plays & shows in christmas last, set forth by hym (Cunliffe 517).

Although this notice of admittance is dated February 4, 1562, it would appear that Arthur Brooke had been admitted to the Middle Temple as a law student nearly two months earlier, on December 18, 1561. A transcript of the December 18th admission obtained from the Middle Temple archives by the late Tal Wilson records that Arthur Brooke of London was specially admitted on that date with Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton as his pledges. Sackville and Norton are known to students of English literature as the authors of *Gorboduc*, one of the earliest of English tragedies. *Gorboduc* was acted in the Inner Temple Hall on Twelfth Night 1561 (Drabble 231), and it is interesting to find Arthur Brooke himself, according to the Middle Temple records, involved with dramatic activities in the Christmas season of the following year, the year of his admission.

One might wonder how Arthur Brooke came to have Sackville and Norton as pledges for his admission to the Middle Temple. A possible answer lies in the fact that Thomas Norton and Arthur Brooke were distantly related by marriage. Thomas Norton was Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's son-in-law (Graves 20) and, as has been mentioned earlier, Arthur Brooke was the grandson of Archbishop Cranmer's niece, Susan (Cranmer) Brooke.

This relationship can also be placed in a larger context of political links between Archbishop Cranmer, and the Brookes, Lords Cobham. George Brooke, 7th Lord Cobham, was a close friend of Archbishop Cranmer and one of his chief allies in Kent, and George Brooke's brother, Thomas (d.1547), as mentioned earlier, was in Archbishop Cranmer's service. Moreover, Archbishop Cranmer was one of those who helped clear the way for the marriage of George Brooke, Lord Cobham's daughter, Elizabeth Brooke, to the divorced William Parr, Marquess of Northampton (MacCulloch 367). When viewed against this background of political relationships, Thomas Norton's sponsorship of Arthur Brooke seems a natural outgrowth of the familial and politi-

cal links between the Cranmer and Brooke families.

To return, then, to the question with which this article commenced: Would Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, have known Arthur Brooke, the author of *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*?

Undoubtedly, he would have. Edward de Vere and Arthur Brooke were both connected to the old nobility, were only a few years apart in age, and shared an interest in literary pursuits. Furthermore, Lord Cobham and William Cecil, Lord Burghley, were very close personal friends (McKeen 77). Lord Cobham would often have been at Cecil House in the Strand (where Oxford lived as a ward of the Queen from 1562 on) and Oxford would no doubt have visited Cobham's town house in the Blackfriars. In addition, Oxford and Cobham were both related to the Nevilles, Earls of Westmoreland (Goff 51; McKeen 66). Given these circumstances and family connections, it is almost certain that Oxford would have been acquainted with Arthur Brooke, and familiar with his *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*.

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Appendix A: An Epitaph on the death of Master Arthur Brooke,
drowned in passing to Newhaven.

At point to end and finish this my Book,
Came good report to me, and willed me write
A doleful verse, in praise of Arthur Brooke,
That age to come lament his fortune might.
Agreed, quoth I, for sure his virtues were
As many as his years in number few:
The Muses him in learned laps did bear,
And Pallas' dug this dainty Bab did chew.
Apollo lent him lute for solace' sake
To sound his verse by touch of stately string,
And of the never fading bay did make
A laurel crown, about his brows to cling,
In proof that he for metre did excel,
As may be judged by Juliet and her mate:
For there he showed his cunning passing well
When he the tale to English did translate.
But, what? as he to foreign realm was bound,
With others moe his sovereign queen to serve,
Amid the seas unlucky youth was drowned,
More speedy death than such one did deserve.
Ay me, that time, thou crooked Dolphin, where
Was thou, Arion's help and only stay,
That safely him from sea to shore didst bear?
When Brooke was drowned why wast thou then away?
If sound of harp thine ear delighted so
And causer was that he bestrid thy back,
Then doubtless thou moughtst well on Brooke bestow
As good a turn to save him from the wrack.
For sure his hand Arion's harp excelled,
His pleasant pen did pass the other's skill,
Whoso his book with judging eye beheld
Gave thanks to him and praised his learned quill.
Thou cruel Gulf, what meanst thou to devour
With supping seas a jewel of such fame?
Why didst thou so with water mar the flower,
That Pallas thought so curiously to frame?
Unhappy was the haven which he sought,
Cruel the seas whereon his ship did glide,
The winds so rough that Brooke to ruin brought,
Unskilful he that undertook to guide.
But sithens tears can not revoke the dead,
Nor cries recall a drowned man to land:
Let this suffice t'extol the life he led
And print his praise in house of Fame to stande,
That they that after us shall be and live
Deserved praise to Arthur Brooke may give.

