



EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 38

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

Was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, related by marriage to Thomas Russell, overseer of the will of William Shakespeare?

William Shakespeare mentions Thomas Russell (1570-1634) twice in his will. He bequeaths Russell the sum of £5, and appoints him, along with Francis Collins, as an overseer of the will:

And I do intreat and appoint the said Thomas Russell esquire and Francis Collins, gent. to be overseers hereof, and do revoke all former wills, and publish this to be my last will and testament (Lambert 85, 87).

A pedigree given in the *Visitation of Worcestershire, 1569* identifies this branch of the Russell family as the Russells of Strensham in Worcestershire, and shows a descent on the female side from the Earls of Norfolk, Arundel and Chester. Thomas Russell's father Thomas (d.1574) was twice married, first to Margaret, daughter of William Lygon, and secondly to Frances, daughter and heir of Sir Roger Cholmeley. Thomas Russell (1570-1634), was the son of Sir Thomas Russell (d.1574) and Margaret Lygon. By his father's second marriage to Frances Cholmeley, Thomas Russell had a half-brother, Sir John Russell, married to Elizabeth, daughter of Ralph Sheldon of Beoley (*Visitation*, 90-1, 116-20, 127-8; Keen 118).

Alan Keen has traced a number of connections between the Sheldons of Beoley and William Shakespeare. Keen has shown, for example, that Ralph Sheldon's wife, Anne Throckmorton, was a sister-in-law of Edward Arden of Park Hall, and that Ralph Sheldon's sister, Anne Sheldon Daston (d.1619), was

the mother-in-law of Ralph Huband, from whom William Shakespeare purchased a lease of tithes in 1605. Keen has also pointed out that Ralph Sheldon's grandson, William Sheldon, was the owner of the Burdett-Coutts copy of the First Folio, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library (118-9).

It is thus of considerable interest to notice that the Sheldon pedigree also shows that Ralph Sheldon of Beoley was connected by marriage to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Ralph Sheldon's daughter, Katherine, was the wife of Francis Trentham, the brother of Oxford's second wife, Elizabeth Trentham, whom he married in 1591 (*Visitation*, 127-8). To put it another way, Ralph Sheldon's sons-in-law were Sir John Russell (half-brother of Thomas Russell, the overseer of William Shakespeare's will) and Francis Trentham (brother-in-law of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford).

Thus, the extensive network of family connections discovered by Alan Keen -- which links William Shakespeare to such noted Elizabethan families as the Sheldons, Throckmortons, Bromleys, Corbets, Newports, Lacons, Levesons, Winters, Fittons, Grevilles, Willoughbys, Berkeleys and Treshams -- must now be re-examined in light of the fact that the same circle of interrelated families is linked to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

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RELATIONSHIP OF EDWARD DE VERE, 17TH EARL OF OXFORD, TO THOMAS RUSSELL, OVERSEER OF THE WILL OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

