



# The Shakespeare OXFORD Newsletter



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"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." Marcel Proust

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## Veres and de Vere The Privilege of the Prefix

By Bob Prechter

Why are most members of Edward de Vere's family and ancestry called "Vere" but others "de Vere"? Records demonstrate a consistency in the distinction that all family members during Edward's time understood. Thomas Babington Macaulay called the family "the longest and most illustrious line of nobles England has seen." Lord Justice Randolph Crewe, ruling in 1625 on claims to the honorary position and title of Lord Great Chamberlain, commented, "I suppose there is no man that hath any apprehension of gentry or nobleness but his affection stands to the continuance of so noble a name and house." What exactly is the proper designation of that name, line and house?

The ancient family began in England when Aubrey/Aubrie/Alberici (de) Ver(e) crossed the channel in 1066 in the service of William the Conqueror. The post of Lord Great Chamberlain of England extends back to his son, Aubrey II, whose son, Aubrey III, became the first Earl of Oxford. The family's line of titled nobility ended in 1703 upon the death of yet another Aubrey, the 20<sup>th</sup> Earl, who had been named after his earliest English ancestor.

The last name of the family's oldest English ancestors was "spelt variously Ver, Vere, Veer, de Vere, de la Vere, Verres [and] de Ver." It is clear from the earliest date, then, that the "de" portion of the Vere name was used only occasionally. It was not an integral part of the family name as it would be for, say, Dempsey or Deyton. Arguably the most official record is the Domesday Book census of English property

(cont'd on p. 10)

## Oxford Makes NYTimes Authorship Question is News Fit to Print, Finally

By Gerit Quealy

In an unprecedented move, *The New York Times* printed a large and comprehensive article on the Shakespeare authorship controversy in their Arts & Leisure section on Sunday, February 10, 2002. The article, entitled "A Historic Whodunit: If Shakespeare Didn't, Who Did?" covering nearly two full pages, primarily by *Times* writer William S. Nieder Korn, was an in-depth exploration of the claim for Oxford as author, and refreshingly free from the usual derision that accompanies this topic in the press. The lead line alone - "It was not the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon. It was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford" - was a startling breakthrough for those who

have weathered the slings and arrows of outraged Stratfordians. The article also featured a large, full-color reproduction of the Welbeck Portrait of Oxford.

A separate piece explored the history of the Ashbourne Portrait of Shakespeare, including the x-ray examinations by Charles Wisner Barrell (who concluded the portrait was of Oxford), and new research by Oxfordian Barbara Burris detailing its "restoration" at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Related articles encompassed other authorship news: Amy Freed's new play *The Beard of Avon*, where Oxford figures (cont'd on p. 19)

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2002

T H E A T E R

### A Historic Whodunit: If Shakespeare Didn't, Who Did?

By WILLIAM S. NIEDERKORN

IT was not the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon. It was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford.

For Oxfordians, this is the answer to "who wrote Shakespeare?"

It is a position long argued, and one that has gathered momentum in recent years. The question, which was the subject of a 1997 seminar in Washington last month, has divided families, friends and English departments. Do we care about Shakespeare? You bet. Shakespeare has done theater companies and festivals de-voiced to him every year. But more than being at the top of the theatrical heap, he helped create the English language.

"Most of the academic world has ignored the authorship question for generations, or belittled it as the obsession of idiosyncratic amateur scholars, while building altars in students' minds to the image of the tragically David Garrick promoted during the 1789 Shakespeare jubilee that created the Stratford tourism business the man of humbug who rose to the literary pantheon. The vast majority of academic scholars involve the spinmeister of the Shakespearean Francis Bacon, the playwright Christopher Marlowe and the Baconian writers. The Baconianists begged down in a search for cryptograms in Shakespeare texts that would point to Bacon, while the Marlowe theory and the group-authorship theory share one big problem - their authors' works are quite different from Shakespeare's; by contrast, has never been stronger. In 2000, a Massachusetts scholar successfully defended a dissertation based on the premise that de Vere wrote the history of Oxford's life as reflected in the plays, and correspondences between the works of Shakespeare and verses de Vere imitated, and the other Shakespeareans are more interested in Shakespeare's works than his biography. They say the thing that today in the academic world as a whole, proponents of the historical and biographical approach have reassessed themselves after decades of being overshadowed by the textual analysis."

"Oxford as a likely candidate is taught in more universities and colleges than we can begin to imagine," said Dr. Daniel L. Wright of Concordia University in Portland, Oregon. "I have taught in both

**OXFORD**  
From the Welbeck portrait, which shows Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, at age 25. The painting is a copy of a lost original that may have been painted in Paris in 1555. Charlton Ogburn writes in "The Mysterious William Shakespeare."

**SHAKESPEARE**  
The First Folio portrait (1623), shown in mirror image, as it would have looked to Martin Droeshout when he engraved it. Because the work was created seven years after the Stratford Shakespeare died and 19 years after Edward de Vere died, Droeshout, who was born in 1601, worked from either another

**A NEW SHAKESPEARE PLAY**  
A tale in which de Vere starts writing the canon but Shakespeare takes over. Page 19.

Bermuda; Ogburn says that account was not published until 1925. Among possible sources for the play, he cites a Bermuda showpiece in 1595 and a 1602 expedition to a Massachusetts island that was sponsored by Henry Wotton. Wotton calls it a new play, the Third Earl of Southampton, traditionally regarded as the "fair youth" to whom most of the Sonnets are rhetorically addressed and to whom Shakespeare dedicated the long poems "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece." In 1995, Ogburn's play "The Mysterious William Shakespeare" was produced at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Related articles encompassed other authorship news: Amy Freed's new play *The Beard of Avon*, where Oxford figures

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*Veres and de Vere (cont'd from front page)*

holders commissioned by William the Conqueror in 1086, which uses the briefer form in its citation of "Auberic Ver."

Originally, then, the "de" prefix appears to have been an identifying word, probably indicating place origin. According to scholars, the family's ancestors were either from Holland, Denmark or France. The "de" prefix occasionally recorded in early records seems to have meant (as *de*, *du*, *de la*, *da* and *di* mean in various European languages) "of" or "from," while "Ve(e)r(e)" originally referred to a village of residence or area of settlement. Verily Anderson cites as likely locations Veer in Holland, Ver in Denmark and an area of Normandy where Ver appears in several place names. If the extended family was mobile, its members may have at one time or another inhabited all three areas.

#### *The Vere Family*

In the 1500s, the clan was consistent in citing its ancestral, extended and collective family name as *Vere* rather than *de Vere*. Family acquaintances followed the same convention. For example, the family's Latin motto, *Vero Nihil Verius*, renders as "None truer than Vere." Edward entailed his estates in 1574 in order, says the legal document, to preserve the "name of the Veers." The residence he occupied at Oxford Court in central London was called Vere House. Oxford's cousins Francis and Horatio were nicknamed "the fighting Veres." Poet Gervase Markham in 1624 referred to "Our Veres, from the first hour of Caesar to this present day of King James...." Many modern scholars follow the same convention; for example, *The Dictionary of National Biography* cites the family name as Vere.

With respect to those individuals alive during and beyond Edward's own time, his sister was called Mary Vere, his daughters Elizabeth Vere, Susan Vere, Frances Vere and Bridget Vere, and his aunt Frances Vere. Oxford's illegitimate son by Anne Vavasor was named Edward Vere. Oxford's cousin Horatio (or Horace) became "Lord Vere of Tilbury." It was far more common for an individual from that family to be called "Vere" than "de Vere." Now let's find out why.

#### *The de Veres*

Some reference sources citing various members of the Vere family use the two forms of its last name interchangeably. However, it is clear that by the 1500s, and perhaps much earlier, the prefix "de" in English came to have a special meaning for this family. It was consistently reserved only for *certain* family members, specifically *the Veres who became earls*. It is they and only they, from Aubrey III, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl, through Henry, the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl, whose names sported the prefix. In contrast, official documents from the 1500s and 1600s report every non-earl simply as "Vere." John de Vere's will, from 1562, cites himself, the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, as *de Vere*. Yet he makes bequests to his brother "Awbry Veer," his niece "Anne Verre" and his other niece, "Robert Veeres daughter," all without the prefix.<sup>1</sup>

Oxford's indenture and schedule of debts, made up in January 1575 prior to his

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traveling, follows throughout all three distinctions, involving the family name, individuals who were earls and those who were not. He cites Edward *De* (and *de*) Veer and John *De* Veer – the only two individuals who had been earls – and then Marye Veer, Hughe Veer, Awbrey Veer, "Iohn Veer esquier sonne and heire apparaunt of Rob[er]t Veer esquire," "Iohn Veer esquier sonne & heire of Gefferye Veer esquier deceased," [F]raunc[es] Veer, Rob[er]t Veer, Horatius Veer and lady Mary Veer. He caps his citations with a reference to "his saide house & famylie, in the name of the Veers...." Notice that among the three Johns mentioned, only one, Oxford's father, has a name distinguished by the "de," indicating that he had been an earl.

A lawsuit from May 6, 1594, involving Oxford's uncle, aunt and two cousins (one deceased) pointedly makes the same distinction. While referring repeatedly and

in every instance to Robert Veer(e), Joan Veer(e), Mary Veer(e) and John Veer(e) *without the prefix*, it invokes the name of "the right honorable Edward *de* Veer nowe Earle of Oxenford." The reference to Oxford appears twice, and both instances use the prefix. In the same vein, when such documents refer to Edward's father, they call him "Iohn *de* Veer [or *Devere*] late Earle of Oxenford," and when they refer to his son, they call him "the righte hono[ra]ble Henry[ie] *de* Vere [or *Devere*] nowe Earle of Oxenford."

On November 12, 1612, Oxford's widow, Elizabeth Trentham, drew up her will and made the same distinction in her opening sentence: "I the lady Elizabeth *Vere* Countesse Dowager of Oxenford late wife of Edward *de Vere* late Earle of Oxenford doe make and ordayne this my last will and Testament...." She then carefully makes the same distinction when citing her son, saying, "I give unto my deare and lovinge sonne Henrie *de Vere* Earle of Oxenforde," while soon thereafter mentioning "my lovinge Cosen Iohn Vere esquire."

Lord Burghley referred to his own granddaughter, Oxford's first child, as "Lady Elizabeth Vere" in the inscription on his elaborate monument to Anne Cecil and her mother that he had erected in St. Nicholas' Chapel at Westminster Abbey shortly after their deaths in 1588 and 1589, respectively. Its stone and metal construction indicates its intended status as

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a historic record, intended to last for millennia. Thus, though Elizabeth was the daughter of a *de Vere*, she herself was a Vere. Surely given Burghley's social

ambitions, had he thought his family could have adopted the nobler “de Vere” form, he would have done so. Likewise, the legal document of 1591 turning over Castle Hedingham to Burghley in trust for Oxford’s daughters, who were also Burghley’s granddaughters, names them as “the ladies Eliz[abeth], Bridget, & Susan Veare.” Similar documents from 1592 and 1598 use the same spelling. So citations that Lord Burghley controlled indicate that he, too, respected the distinction.

Shakespeare also understood the difference, with exceptional precision. In

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*The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth* (Act III, sc. iii), an eighteen-year-old John de Vere, then the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl, refers to “my elder brother, the Lord Aubrey Vere.” He does not call him *de Vere*. Why? In 1462, King Edward IV beheaded Aubrey along with his father, John de Vere, the 12<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, thereby leaving Aubrey out of the line of succession. By taking care to name him Aubrey *Vere* rather than *de Vere*, Shakespeare was taking Aubrey’s lack of an earldom into account. As already demonstrated by his own legal documents, Oxford knew the difference in meaning. We may observe that as Shakespeare, Oxford cared deeply about the history of noble families. He even went so far as to whitewash part of the history of the Earls of Oxford. He would certainly have known Aubrey’s status. Indeed, reflecting Shakespeare’s precise choice of words, the son of an earl was properly called “Lord” even though he himself was not an earl.<sup>2</sup>

We may conclude, therefore, that the appellation Shakespeare chose for Aubrey was meticulous and deliberate. Lord Justice Crewe, when deciding a legal case concerning the line of succession for the title of Lord Great Chamberlain, wrote, “...let the name and dignity of *De Vere* stand so long as it pleaseth God.” He was specifically addressing the peerage and thus cited the last name as it pertained to the long line of earls upon whose continuance he was ruling.

#### *The de Fades from the Family Name*

The “de” prefix faded from use even by the earls. A legal document from 1609 regarding a dispute between officials of Cambridge University and the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl, respecting Oxford’s Covent Garden property in London omits the “de,” saying, “Earl Edward, being also seized of lands held of His Majesty, died, leaving Henry Vere, now Earl of Oxford, his son and heir, His Majesty’s ward.” It is unclear whether this particular omission was deliberate or inadvertent, but it did occur on the cusp of a definite change. According to Anderson, Robert, the 19<sup>th</sup> Earl, despite his nobility, “dropped the ‘de’” entirely. The *Dictionary of National Biography* noted that the 20<sup>th</sup> Earl’s daughter “married the first Duke of St. Albans, whose descendants preserve his memory in the barony of Vere of Hanworth (1750)...”, again omitting the prefix. The abandonment of the prefix provides yet another indication of its minority status as part of the family name.

#### *Edward’s Given Name*

Edward’s family name, then, was Vere, and it pertained to all members who were not or had never been earls. Edward was not the Earl of Oxford upon his birth, because his father was the earl. The only way that a member of the Vere family could have been born *de Vere* would be if the preceding earl were deceased. We must conclude, then, that Oxford’s *given name*, in the only form that he would have been allowed to use until he became an earl, was *Edward Vere*, more formally, *Lord Edward Vere*. It would be helpful to have proof of this conclusion from Edward’s first twelve years of life, but I am unaware of any extant document from the time that provides his

last name. His father avoided citing it. As the eldest son of an earl, Edward was entitled to take the senior among the rest of the family’s titles, which in his case was Viscount Bulbeck. John de Vere’s two wills call him “my sonne Edward Lorde Bulbeck,” “Edward my sonne” and “Edward Lorde Bulbeck my sonne,” without adding any form of the family’s last name despite its being cited elsewhere throughout the document. This very avoidance is likely evidence of respect for the distinction. A will is important twice, at its composition and at its reading. John’s son would have been “Edward Vere” at the drawing of the will yet (if he were still alive) “Edward de Vere” at its reading. John could not use the former form, as it would not properly apply after his death. He could not use the latter form, as it was inaccurate at the time and would never properly apply if Edward were to predecease his father. Thus, John de Vere likely avoided citing his son’s last name for practical reasons. At age twelve, upon the death of his father in 1562, Edward became an earl and thus entitled to adopt the “de” prefix for official matters. After that time, and in contrast to the names used in his father’s will, legal documents faithfully address him, when they include his last name, as “Edward(e) de Ve(e)(a)r(e), Earl(e) of Ox(en)ford(e).”

Despite the honor that earldom afforded, there is evidence that in personal, familiar contexts, Edward still considered himself a Vere, like the rest of his family. While evidence for this contention is thin, we can at least demonstrate that he may have presented himself this way to his tutor, his lover, his audience and his intimate friends. George Baker, Thomas Bedingfield, Thomas Underdowne and Thomas Watson used the formal version of Oxford’s name in dedicating works to Edward de Vere. However, Oxford’s own Latin preface “to the Reader” of Bartholomew Clerke’s English translation of Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*) introduces himself as “Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford.” Clerke “seems to have been tutor” to Edward, so the two men would have been on familiar terms with

*(cont’d on p. 15)*

*Veres and de Vere (cont'd from pg. 11)*

each other, Clerke taking a superior's role in the educational context. To Clerke, it seems, the earl was simply a friend, Edward Vere.

One of the few poems we know that Oxford wrote or inspired is *Ann Vavasor's Echo*. It is found in a volume of verse hand-copied by one Anne Cornwaleys, daughter of the man who purchased Oxford's Fisher's Folly property in 1588, under a section called *Verses Made by the Earle of Oxford*. The poem begins thus, with the narrator's lover's name, Vere, called out as an echo:

O heavens, who was ye first that  
bredd in me this feavere? Vere.  
Whoe was the firste that gave ye  
wounde whose fearre I ware for  
evere? Vere.  
What tyrant, Cupid, to mye harme  
usurpes thy golden quivere? Vere.  
What wighte first caughte this harte,  
and can from bondage it deliver?  
Vere.

Either Anne Vavasor or (far more likely) Edward de Vere composed this poem after he had become the Earl of Oxford and therefore after he had adopted the "de" prefix to his last name. Nevertheless, the reference is to Vere, suggesting that he was comfortable with, and perhaps even preferred, that appellation in such contexts. There are also hints that in certain writings he used the code word *ever* (and allied words such as *never* and *every*) as a self-reference, standing for *E. Ver*. For example, Oxfordians find double meaning in the line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 76 that reads, "That *every* word doth almost tell my name." The Sonnets, according to Francis Meres, were circulated only among Shakespeare's "private friends." From the context of *Ann Vavasor's Echo* and the Sonnets, we may infer that Oxford held himself out as Edward Vere to those with whom he was intimate.

There is evidence that Oxford personified spring using the old English word *Ver* (the root of the word *verdant*) in circumstances where his character is suggested. For example, *Love's Labour's Lost* ends with the "Song of *Hiems*, Winter,

and *Ver*, Spring," which is introduced, "This side is *Hiems*, Winter, this *Ver*, the Spring; the one maintained by the owl, the other by the cuckoo. *Ver*, begin." Ruth Loyd Miller interprets the lyrics as pertaining directly to a situation in Oxford's life at the time, thus indicating that *Ver* represents Oxford. If so, we may infer that Oxford was content to present himself by the name *Ver* even in public.

Had Edward considered the "de" prefix an integral and necessary part of his own name, then it would not have occurred to him to use *Vere*, *ever* and *Ver* as self-references. He thus seems fairly commonly in informal situations to have conceived of and expressed his name as *Ver(e)*, not *de Vere*. Because the "Vere," "Ver" and "E. Ver" abbreviations reflect what we have surmised to be his boyhood name, we may deduce that Oxford adopted these self-references at a young age. Since he continued to use them, we may conclude that he remained comfortable throughout his life referring to himself as Edward *Vere* in informal contexts. He reserved Edward *de Vere* for circumstances that called for a formal or official expression of his name.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I can find only one exception to the apparent rule. John de Vere's earlier will, dated 1552, refers to his brothers Aubrey, Robert and Geoffrey initially as "Vere." Once later in this document, these same names occur with the "de" prefix. Given what is otherwise consistent throughout the Vere family documents so far observed, we might postulate that the first mention was as John had dictated it, while the second mention was an error on the part of the lawyer who drafted the remainder of the document.

<sup>2</sup> For an example, see the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 9, p. 640 under "Henry Herbert."

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