



Fig. 1. A near contemporary map of the Forest of Waltham shows the boundaries of the ten Forester's Walks as they were in Oxford's time. The building at the very bottom of the map is Greenwich Palace, on the south bank of the meandering Thames, directly across the river from the Isle of Dogs. Stratford-at-Bowe is just to the north-west, then Hackney a short walk further. The Liberty of Havering is the largest "Walk," on the right. Havering Park is in its northwest corner, almost the center of the map, with Pirgo Park to its right. The palace of Havering-atte-Bowre is at the eastern edge of the Park. Just west of Havering Park is "Chappell Hennold" (Chapel Hainault), at the center of an area more thickly covered with trees than most of the map. The largest area still thickly forested, running south to north near the western edge of the Forest, remains today as the Forest of Epping. Theydon Mount (aka Hill Hall), home of Oxford's tutor, Sir Thomas Smith, lies to the north in the center of Loughton Walk. Gidea Hall ("Giddy Hall"), childhood home of the Cooke sisters, is just under the V of "Havering." "Playstowe" is towards the bottom of "Layton Walke." (Used with permission of the ERO.)

A MONUMENT WITHOUT A TOMB

The Mystery of Oxford's Death

Christopher Paul



. . . I (once gone) to all the world must die,
The earth can yield me but a common grave . . .

Sonnet 81



As the renowned nineteenth century editor Alexander Grosart wrote of Edward de Vere (1550-1604), and as his biographers know all too well, “An unlifted shadow somehow lies across his memory” (3.11/359). Nothing illustrates this better than a close examination of the confusing and contradictory records pertaining to his death. After months of intensive investigation of the records, what we now know is actually less than what we knew—or thought we knew—before. We still don’t know *how* he died, or for certain *where* he died. And now it appears we can’t even be certain *when* he died.

The first sign of the mystery that envelops Oxford’s passing comes almost a decade earlier (November 9, 1595) in a letter from Roland White in London to Sir Robert Sidney, Governor of Flushing, in which White states, as if in passing, “Some say my Lord of Oxford is dead” (Kingsford 2.184). So far no one has offered a satisfactory explanation for this statement, and we may never know what lay behind it. Oxford may have had health problems in 1595, but there’s no doubt that he was still very much alive.

June 24th, 1604

If Edward de Vere did not die on the 24th of June, 1604, then a considerable effort was made to make it look as though he did, because there are extant numerous legal documents attesting to his decease and to the fact that his eleven-year-old son Henry de Vere began to be referred to at that time as “the Earl of Oxford.” That the documents exist and that they all tell the same tale is indisputable fact. But what is also indisputable is that there are a number of important considerations that would seem to call this date, and almost everything else that relates to his death, into question. Here are the main points we’ll be examining:

1. *No one mentions his death*; there was an utter silence, most noticeably from specific individuals whom we would expect to have commented on it in letters written in the days and weeks following.

2. *He died intestate* [without leaving a will], which seems unusual, especially considering his actions in the days prior to his death, which indicate he knew some sort of end was impending.
3. *The cause of his death is unknown.*¹
4. *There is no record of a funeral*, even a modest one—most unusual for a peer of his stature, and one who was enjoying renewed favor under the new monarch.
5. *There were no elegies or epitaphs* in the weeks or months following his death, highly atypical for either a peer or a poet, and he was both.
6. *His grave has never been found* and accounts of where he was buried are conflicting.
7. Last but perhaps not least, there was *the Earl of Southampton's mysterious arrest* on the same day.

If we would hope to understand the depth and nature of these mysteries, we must take as close a look as possible at the evidence and, most important, at areas where there should be evidence but there is none. This involves examining a number of documents, unpublished letters, legal briefs, journal entries, parish registers, forest surveys, and published reports.² The puzzles unearthed in these reveal a number of significant abnormalities surrounding Oxford's death and the manner in which his assets—particularly those pertaining to the Forest of Waltham—were passed on to his son and heir.

We are often admonished to “let the documents speak for themselves.” But documents, particularly such old documents, can rarely speak for themselves without some interpretation. To the extent that we can, we will let them tell their own tale by quoting from them—many of them for the first time—as liberally as possible, so that interested readers can decide for themselves what these four-hundred-year-old words are telling us.

The Peyton report

We pick up the paper trail in 1603, the year preceding Oxford's date of death. The great Queen's sun was setting while that of James was looming on the horizon. Elizabeth's godson, Sir John Harington, was circulating his *Tract on the Succession to the Crown*, in which he stated:

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... the people as I hear, specially Northward, talk broadly of it already, but for us in the West we have tutors, look better to our tongues, but our hearts are thinking and our pens are scribbling as warily as we can; and all, or at least the chief, of the competitors do shrink, as one may judge by their shows and open professions, and two of the chief masculine competitors (for as for the feminine I am not of their counsel), two that severally have had formerly great favorers, I know for a certain by their nearest friends do now give place, and remove their lamps out of the light of this orient sun. (51-2)

These “chief masculine competitors” to whom Harington refers are the royally-descended Earls of Huntingdon and Derby. Neither was considered strong enough to oppose James; as Anthony Rivers wrote to Giacomo Creleto in Venice on March 9, 1603: “The succession is much talked of; the far greater part of the realm are for the King of Scots; but many would oppose him, had they any potent competitor” (CSPD 1601-1603 6.298). Yet a report by Sir John Peyton, Lieutenant of the Tower of London, charges that not quite a fortnight after Rivers’s letter and three days before Queen Elizabeth’s death, the Earl of Oxford was urging one of these. As Peyton tells it, Oxford attempted to conspire with the Earl of Lincoln about a possible power play for the throne (SP 14.4.14 ff28-29) in favor of Henry Hastings, Lincoln’s grand-nephew, soon to be the next Earl of Huntingdon. Following the meeting, Lincoln informed Peyton of what had transpired. Peyton thought Lincoln should have coaxed more details from Oxford, yet he claimed to feel no alarm, Oxford being “so weak in body, in friends, in ability, and all other means to raise any combustion in the state, as I never feared any danger to proceed from so feeble a foundation” (Nelson 415).

If Oxford were actually plotting to place the crown with someone other than James, then why did he not promote his own son-in-law, the Earl of Derby, the other “masculine competitor?” Despite many attempts to come up with a solid explanation, whether for Peyton’s letter or Oxford’s purported ploy, the incident remains in the mystery column, along with so much else.

When the Queen died on March 24, 1603, the last day of the Elizabethan calendar year,³ whatever Oxford may have had in mind earlier, it’s evident he yielded to the press of events and joined those who were welcoming James’s accession. On April 27th, the day before her funeral, he wrote to his former brother-in-law, Sir Robert Cecil:

I cannot but find a great grief in myself to remember the mistress which we have lost, under whom both you and myself from our greenest years have been in a manner brought up. In this common shipwreck, mine is above all the rest, who least regarded—though often comforted—of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the alterations of time and chance, either without sail whereby to take the advantage of any prosperous gale, or with anchor to ride till the storm be overpast. (CP 99/150)

Oxford refers to James as “our new master, and Sovereign Lord, who doth not come

amongst us as a stranger, but as a natural prince, succeeding by right of blood, and inheritance.” Though he had made haste to rendezvous with Cecil at Ludgate, Oxford also complains that “by reason of mine infirmity, I cannot come among you so often as I wish.” While possibly the sign of a genuine declining physical condition, we must keep in mind that feigning ill-health was a frequent excuse used by the nobility when dodging Court duties. John Rollett has revealed that Oxford was scheduled by the heralds to process immediately in front of the Queen’s coffin at her funeral—in effect serving as the chief noble mourner—but that for some reason he dropped out before the event (CA RR20/E R20).

However puzzling Oxford’s behavior before and during the accession of King James, one thing becomes very clear shortly afterwards: his determination to get back what he considered his inherited rights to the stewardship of the Forest of Waltham and the manor of Havering-atte-Bower.

The Forest of Waltham

Among the possessions and offices of the earldom of Oxford itemized in an Indenture dated June 2, 1562, Oxford’s father, the sixteenth Earl, claimed that “the Lieutenanship of the Forest of Waltham and the keeping of the house and park of Havering have of long time continued, remained and been in the name of the Veres from heir male to heir male by title of an ancient entail thereof made long time past” (PRO C54/626/46). “Long time past” meant the fourteenth century, the reign of Edward III (Fisher 117). It’s true that—apart from a brief interruption due to the attainders of the twelfth and thirteenth earls during the Lancastrian wars—the Forest had remained in the custody of the Veres until February 22, 1521, when the fourteenth Earl consigned it to Henry VIII. This came with the understanding that “when, after the king’s death, vacancies occur, the earl and his heirs [are] to have the appointment” back again (CAD 5.514-15), yet when the King died, the “appointment” never came. No doubt Earl John included it in his Indenture because he felt that, legally, the Forest should have been in his custody. Yet despite efforts on the part of Oxford and his father, neither Edward VI, Mary, nor Elizabeth ever saw fit to return it. Oxford had petitioned to regain his hereditary rights to the Forest since at least 1579 (SAL 13.173).

A week-and-a-half after the Queen’s funeral, on the 7th of May, Oxford writes to Robert Cecil regarding his 20-year-plus suit to regain his rights to the keepership of Waltham Forest:

My very good Lord, I understand by Master Attorney that he hath reported the state of my title to the keepership of Waltham Forest, and of the house and park of Havering, whereby it appears to his Majesty what right and equity is therein. Till the 12th of Henry the 8th mine ancestors have possessed the same, almost sithence the time of William Conqueror, and at that time which was the 12th year of Henry the 8th the king took it for term of his life from my grandfather, sithence which time, what by the alterations of princes, and wardships, I have been kept from my rightful possession. Yet from time to time, both my father and myself, we have as opportunities fell out not neglected our claim; twice in my time it had passage by law, and judgment was to have

passed on my side, whereof her Majesty the late Queen, being advertised with assured promises and words of a Prince to restore it herself unto me, caused me to let fall the suit. But so it was, she was not so ready to perform her word as I was too ready to believe it Now therefore his Majesty, having heard the report, I hope he will in his justice and favor do me that right which is to be expected from so gracious and virtuous a Sovereign. But for that I know, among so many matters of importance, unless his Majesty be put in remembrance, he may forget a private cause. Therefore I shall most earnestly desire your friendship in this, that you will join with my Lord Admiral my very good Lord and friend, to help me to his Majesty's resolution. My Lord Admiral is Lord Chief Justice in Oyer and Determiner, and to whose office indeed, as I understand it, appertains to have heard my cause, but I know not why or with what advice it was referred to Master Attorney and his Majesty's Council-in-Law. But now howsoever, his Majesty hath the report made unto him, which if it be forgotten shall little prevail me. But I hope in his justice, and in your two Lordships' friendships which the cause being so just and honorable, I do fully rely upon. His Majesty departeth with nothing but a keepership, and a keeper he must have. Wherefore it is much more princely for him to restore it to me, his lawful keeper, than contrary to bestow it upon an intruder. (CP 99/161)

The Lord Admiral here named is Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, Oxford's "very good friend" who is hearing his cause, while "Master Attorney" is Attorney General Sir Edward Coke (often spelled Cooke, as it was pronounced). Oxford wants to know by whose judgement his claim has been referred to Coke, who represents the Crown in the matter. We shall see in another letter, written years later, that Coke was in fact instrumental in securing the approval of his grant.

Trouble in the Forest

At first it might seem that James was not minded to grant Oxford's request, for two weeks later, on May 22nd, he grants Sir Robert Wroth (the elder) a "walkership" in Waltham Forest "for life" (CSPD 1603-10 8.10), Wroth having been a Justice of the Peace in the Forest for some time before this. Then, during the month following Wroth's grant, James grants to Sir John Gray (sometimes spelled Grey), also "for life," the office of keeper of the Mansion house and park, etc. of Havering-atte-Bower (the following translation excerpted from the original Latin):

The King sends greetings to all who will read this document. You are to know that, as a result of our particular grace and in accordance with our assured knowledge and simply by our wish that it be so, in consideration of the good, true and faithful service rendered to us hitherto by our beloved servant John Gray, noble knight of our private Chamber, we have given and granted and by this present document on behalf of our successors do give and grant to the same John Gray, knight, the office of Custodian and the Custody of our manor house of Havering-atte-Bower in our county of Essex, and

the office of Custodian of our gardens, orchards and ponds, and the office of Custodian of our park in that same place named Havering park, and the office of Custodian of the southern Gate of the Palace in the same park and the office of Custodian of the Palace of the aforesaid park of Havering and the office of Master of the game in the warrens in the same park of ours of Havering . . . this applying to the aforesaid John Gray and his assignees or a capable deputy or deputies, up to and in respect of the end of the life of this same John Gray, along with all such deer, called in English “fee deer,” both male and female, of this kind or a similar kind to be taken annually south of the aforesaid park and each and every one of the other dues and fees arising from the profitable allowances, preferments, easements and advantages of any kind whatever which pertain to or are connected with these same duties or to any one of them in any way . . . (SP 14.2.29)

The warrant for Gray’s grant was issued in June 1603 and became official on July 2nd (CSPD 1603-10 8.18). However, just over two weeks later, on July 18th, what appears to be virtually the same grant awarded to Gray is awarded by the King to the Earl of Oxford, not simply “for life,” but, more important, as a hereditary right, one he could pass on to his heirs. In addition to the keepership of Havering house and park, Oxford is also granted the Stewardship and bailiwick of the entire Forest of Essex:⁴

The King sends greetings to all who may read this document. You are to know that in the fourth year of the reign of Henry VIII, the late King of England and our predecessor, John de Vere, the late [thirteenth] Earl of Oxford, had and held for himself and his heirs in perpetuity the Stewardship of our entire Forest of Essex. Custody of the park and our houses at Havering were properly and duly attached to this Stewardship, and this arrangement has existed since before records began. We the aforesaid also restored and granted to him in addition the office of Guardian and Steward of the entire Forest in and of Essex in the aforesaid county of Essex, and by these present documents we restore and grant on behalf of ourselves, our heirs, and our successors, to our beloved kinsman Edward who is now the Earl of Oxford and is the male heir of John, late [thirteenth] Earl of Oxford, the whole aforesaid Stewardship of the whole Forest of the aforesaid Essex and custody of the aforesaid park and our houses at the aforesaid Havering . . . to his heirs and assignees in perpetuity with all fees and pledges appertaining or belonging from ancient times to the same Wardenship, Stewardship and Custody, and to any one of these, fully, freely and undiminished, just as the aforesaid John the late [thirteenth] Earl of Oxford or some predecessor of the aforesaid earl previously had, or should have had, the Wardenship, Stewardship and Custody of these. (ERO D/DCw T1/564)

In addition to this sweeping restitution, Oxford was to have the appointment of the Lieutenant of the Forest, of the Ranger or riding forester, of the three foot

foresters . . . and several keepers in every walk, the placing of which keepers now pertaineth to the earl . . . to have the amerciaments in all the Swainmoat Courts, and wood courts kept within the Forest, for all offenses done within the Forest. (SP 14.2.63)

Thus, within a period of just over two weeks, the King had granted sweeping and overlapping rights to three different men. Trouble was bound to occur. Every forest, park and walk required a keeper, and we may be certain that Wroth and Gray were far from Oxford's personal choices for these appointments. Despite the all-encompassing phraseology of the first part of his restitution, it would seem that Oxford in fact had little choice in the matter, since it continues with the following provisos:

Yet we wish and through the present document do firmly instruct and order the aforesaid Edward Earl of Oxford, his heirs and assignees, that any person or persons, who at the time of the composition of these Letters Patent of ours held, occupied or exercised, singly or jointly, some office of Stewardship in this area or locality . . . or Stewardship of the park and our aforesaid houses by virtue or alleged reason of some Letters Patent or some grant made previously by Ourselves or by our Lady Elizabeth late Queen of England . . . is to be enabled and given the power to hold, exercise and occupy fully and peaceably the same offices of Stewardship . . . without any disturbance, annoyance, trouble or imposition from the aforesaid Edward Earl of Oxford, his heirs and assignees

We can only imagine what the "aforesaid" Earl of Oxford thought of this rider. Perhaps he thought half a loaf better than none. Perhaps there was some division of authority between Gray and Oxford that is not apparent in the extant documents. In any case, whether willfully or inadvertently, the King had planted the seeds of a feud between Gray and Oxford that would grow into a very twisted vine. Thus it is important to know something about John Gray.

Sir John Gray

Gray (1576-1611) was directly descended from the first husband of Elizabeth Woodville, she who was later the wife of Edward IV. His great uncle was Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, father of Lady Jane Grey, the "nine days queen." In April of 1559, Queen Elizabeth awarded Gray's grandfather, yet another Sir John Grey, the park and mansion house of Pirgo in Waltham Forest, adjacent to Havering-atte-Bower (see map page 6). It was to Pirgo that this Sir John Grey took in charge his niece, Lady Catherine Grey (sister of Lady Jane), after she provoked Elizabeth by secretly marrying Edward Seymour, the young Earl of Hertford (1537-1621), son of former Protector Somerset. The Lansdowne manuscript collection in the British Library contains a number of letters from Pirgo exchanged among Sir John Grey, Lady Catherine Grey, and Sir William Cecil during the period in question (Smith 37).

After this Grey's death, Pirgo passed to his son Henry Grey, a man of importance at Elizabeth's Court and the father of the Sir John with whom we are primarily concerned (here spelled Gray

throughout). Through his mother, Anne Windsor, and his wife, Elizabeth Neville, Gray was actually related to Oxford—a kinship we will see referred to in a subsequent letter.⁵ Gray served with Leicester in the Netherlands and with Essex at the taking of Cadiz. By 1601, he was a gentleman pensioner and courtier, and was among those who rode north on Elizabeth's death to welcome James, whom he accompanied to London. Soon after he was appointed to the King's privy chamber, the select group surrounding King James. At the same time he was also a member of Queen Anne's circle, which included Sirs John Harington, Robert Sidney, Henry Carey, and the Earls of Rutland, Bedford and Pembroke (Hasler 2.223-24).

Not too surprisingly, contention arises in the Forest the very day following Oxford's restitution. Seven members of the Privy Council, including Robert Cecil, send a letter addressed to Sir Robert Wroth, High Sheriff of Essex, Sir William Smith, and Sir George Harvey, "or any other Justices of the Peace adjoining Havering," requesting that they obtain peaceable possession of the post of keeper of Havering park for Sir John Gray, whose appointment by the King is being resisted by Alexander Cranford and Henry Humberstone:

His Majesty, having been pleased in his favor to Sir John Gray to bestow upon him the keeping of Havering park, and thereupon the possession of the said park being to be delivered unto him by his Majesty's commandment, we are given to understand that notwithstanding the same, the former keepers there, Alexander Cranford and Henry Humberstone, do go about to resist his Majesty's said grant, and do withhold the possession of the said park from Sir John Gray to the disobeying of his Majesty's good pleasure in that behalf. We do therefore hereby pray and require you to make your repair unto the said park and there to take order (as well for the avoiding of the disorder which is like to follow if the obstinacy of the said keepers continue, as for the observation of his Majesty's will and pleasure) that a quiet and peaceable possession be delivered unto Sir John Gray of the said park, charging the said Cranford and Humberstone to yield due obedience there unto, as they will answer to the contrary at their peril. Whereof not doubting but you will take care, we bid you farewell: from Hampton Court, the 19th of July 1603. (Somerset DD/MI 18/58)

Alexander Cranford and Henry Humberstone had been granted the keeping of Havering park as early as 1599 (CSPD 1598-1601 5.214). Now, on the authority of Sir John Gray's grant to the keepership of Havering, they are being ousted. What then of Oxford's grant? One can well imagine his annoyance, not only with Gray, but very possibly with the King himself, who had seen fit to bestow this grant on Gray only weeks before Oxford received his own. Did it slip James's mind that he had just given the same thing to Gray? As a newcomer to England, the King would have been unfamiliar with the Forest, its manors and their long histories, matters in which his English courtiers were steeped. Individuals and groups vying with each other for precedence might take advantage of the King's good will, his ignorance, or possibly even his malice. But what of Robert Cecil, Oxford's erstwhile brother-in-law, who signed the order to oust Cranford and Humberstone? In this matter

of Forest rights, whose side was he on?

On July 25, 1603, six days after the Council sent the above letter, James VI of Scotland is crowned King James I of England. Oxford serves as Great Chamberlain at his coronation, having entered his claim for the service two-and-a-half weeks earlier on the 7th of July. Shortly after the coronation, on August 2nd, the King reconfirms Oxford's £1000 annuity (Nelson 422-23).

A Man of the Woods

On December 1st, Oxford (by letters patent enrolled in the Chancery) grants John Manwood the office of Stewardship of the Forest of Waltham "with all fees and profit to the same," for life (LAN 90/10). A long-time resident of the Forest, Manwood had been involved with the Stewardship for several years before James restored it to Oxford. We'll see in Manwood's own words that Queen Elizabeth herself bestowed the keepership on him, and that Robert Cecil had also been instrumental in the appointment.

An interesting figure whose surname aptly suits his occupation, Manwood would serve Oxford's forest interests in several capacities, from barrister to gamekeeper under the all-encompassing term of *Steward*, though *Deputy-Steward* would be more technically correct. An intricate hierarchy of officers had ruled the Forest since ancient times. These included various justices, woodwards, keepers, verderers, rangers, regards, and agisters. As to the Steward himself, confusion easily occurs when the title is broadly applied to more than one office—as in the case of Oxford and Manwood. William Richard Fisher, in his authoritative work on the Forest of Essex, admits the difficulty in distinguishing these offices in the various extant records:

The titles of warden and keeper of the Forest were borne both by [the Forest justices] and by the steward; and that the duties of the justices were not very clearly defined appears from the fact that a question arose in the 13th century whether the Chief Justice or the King's bailiffs were to be answerable for vert and venison in the Forests. The decision of the King in Council was that the Chief Justices had the full custody of all the Forests, as well those which were the King's demesnes as others; and that the bailiffs of the King's demesnes had those things in the King's woods which belonged to their manors. . . . It is not quite clear whether Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was Justiciary and Master Forester, or Forester of Essex (which appears to have been the same office as that of steward) in the early years of John. (106-07)

I have mentioned that the Justices of the Forest were anciently also called Wardens; but this title was afterwards specially appropriated to an important Forest officer, who was sometimes called the Steward, sometimes the Custodian or Keeper, and in more modern times the Lord Warden. He held his office in fee, and had a deputy or sub-warden, who, later, had the title of Lieutenant of the Forest. (113-14)

We do know that one of Oxford's rights as Custodian of the Forest was to have the appoint-

ing of a specific number of under-stewards and keepers, as well as specific rights within the Swainmote Court (the forest court),⁶ including the appointing of its stewards (SP 14/2/63), and this seems to have been one of the capacities in which he employed John Manwood.

In 1598, Manwood published his *Treatise and Discourse of the Laws of the Forest*, a book which remains the definitive authority on Forest Law to the present day. He dedicated it to Oxford's friend Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, number three man on the King's Privy Council (Cecil being number one; Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, number two). Nottingham was a natural dedicatee for such a work; only the year before, Queen Elizabeth had appointed him for life to the office of "Justice in Eyre south of the Trent," a title formerly styled "Warden of the Forest."

Manwood begins his dedication:

Right Honorable, and my good Lord, considering the great and provident care, not only of her Majesty, but also that your good Lordship hath, for the preservation of the game in those Forests, Chases, Parks, and Warrens, whereof you have the charge; and seeing that so many do daily so contemptuously commit such heinous spoils and trespasses therein, that the greatest part of them are spoiled and decayed: And also that very little, or nothing, as yet is extant concerning the Laws of the Forest, I thought it very necessary to collect this small Treatise, declaring therein the ways and means how to preserve and maintain Forests, together with the due punishment of such as shall be found offenders therein, to the intent that thereby, men may the better know those Laws, wherein they so often offend, and the danger thereof, which being known, they may the better avoid. (STC 17291)

Compared with the dullness of most of the verbiage of the time, Manwood is surprisingly adept in his use of language. There are some striking parallels to phrases used by Oxford in his May 7th letter to Cecil, partially cited above, such as: "So long as [the Forest] was in the custody of mine ancestors the woods were preserved, the game cherished, and the Forest maintained in her full state. But sithence it was otherwise disposed, all these things have impaired as experience doth manifest." Further textual correlations in language are found in Oxford's last extant letter, which he wrote to King James on January 30, 1604. Since this letter provides a vital piece in the puzzle we're examining, it should be cited in full:

Seeing that it hath pleased your Majesty of your most gracious inclination to justice and right to restore me to be keeper of your game, as well in your Forest of Waltham, as also in Havering park, I can do no less in duty and love to your Majesty but employ myself in the execution thereof. And to the end you might the better know in what sort both the Forest and the park have been abused and yet continued, as well in destroying of the deer as in spoiling of your demesne wood by such as have patents and had licenses heretofore for felling of timber in the Queen's time lately deceased, presuming thereby that they may do what they list. *I was bold to send unto your Majesty a man skilful, learned and experienced in forest causes, who being a dweller and eye-witness thereof might inform you of the truth.* And because your Majesty upon a bare

information could not be so well satisfied of every particular as by lawful testimony and examination of credible witness upon oath—according to your Majesty's appointment by commission, a course hath been taken in which your Majesty shall be fully satisfied of the truth. This commission, together with the depositions of the witness, I do send to your Majesty by this bearer, who briefly can inform you of the whole contents. *So that now, having lawfully proved unto your Majesty that Sir John Gray hath killed and destroyed your deer in Havering park, without any warrant for the same, his patent is void in law, and therefore I most humbly beseech your Majesty to make him an example for all others that shall in like sort abuse their places, and to restore me to the possession thereof,* in both which your Majesty shall do but justice and right to the one and other. This 30 of January 1603 [=1604]. Your Majesty's most humble subject and servant, E. Oxenford. (ERO D/DMh/C1, emphasis added)

Since this letter's discovery in April 2000 by Oxfordian researcher Sue Campbell, no one has identified the man referred to in the sentence, "I was bold to send unto your Majesty a man skilful, learned and experienced in forest causes, who being a dweller and eye-witness thereof might inform you of the truth." There seems little doubt that this "experienced" man of the woods was anyone other than John Manwood, whom Oxford had appointed by letters patent only two months previous as his Steward of Waltham Forest for life, and that he is also the "witness" whose subsequent depositions Oxford sent with the bearer of the letter to the King. Manwood had been dwelling in the Forest, by his own account, for thirty years.

And again we encounter Sir John Gray, possessor of the grant that Oxford is trying to have revoked. Manwood deposes that, first, Gray "hath killed and destroyed your deer in Havering park," something that would certainly have angered the King, who had already complained that there had been more offenses involving preservation of the game in the forests since his last coming forth on progress than even in the late Queen's time. Scolding his subjects for their ill-manners in interfering with his royal sport, James threatened, not only to enforce the forest laws against all stealers and hunters of deer, but to exempt them from his general pardon, to bar any person of quality so offending from his presence, and to proceed against those who provoked his displeasure by martial law! As a further disincentive, he indicated that any informers against such offenders would be rewarded (Fisher 197). But surely the reward that Oxford sought was simply the just implementation of his own grant. A commission was appointed to hear the matter, with testimony taken under oath. It's clear the clash had just begun.

The Liberty of Havering

It is also in this month of January 1604 that one Francis Raine writes to Robert Cecil regarding the grave illness of Sir Anthony Cooke (nephew of Mildred Cooke, Robert Cecil's mother), who "holdeth for term of his life the Stewardship of Her Highness's [Queen Anne's] manor of Havering-atte-Bower" but is now "said to be sick and not like to escape the danger of death." Raine "hath occupied the place of under-stewardship of the said manor . . . during the space of forty years," since

the days of Sir Anthony's grandfather, and now requests that, should Sir Anthony die, "he may still enjoy the said office of the under-stewardship of the said manor, under your Honor [Cecil], or such other as your Lordship shall assign" (CP P/1318).

Here again we seem to have a case of too many Stewards. While Cooke would die within the year (Smith 284), Raine appears unaware that his place had already been filled, either by Sir John Gray or the Earl of Oxford. Or perhaps Raine was aware of the flux and so was writing to Cecil in hopes that he would intervene in his behalf. Sir Anthony Cooke was Cecil's first cousin; the Cookes had occupied Gidea Hall, a stone's throw from Haver-ing-atte-Bower, since 1460 (117). Cecil's mother and her four sisters were raised and educated at Gidea Hall (see map, page 6). Whether or not Raine retained his position as under-steward is uncertain, but our quest will reveal an irate Countess of Oxford one year hence complaining to Cecil about Sir Edward Cooke (Sir Anthony's son) obtaining the Stewardship.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to bear in mind that the Liberty of Havering was unique from other parishes in Essex County. It was soon after the "perambulation" of Edward I, known to history as "Edward the Confessor" (c.1301), that Havering was made part of the Forest. Edward's son and successor assigned the "Forest of Havering"—as it was then styled—to his consort, Queen Isabella, for her dower, which included the privilege to nominate justices itinerant for Pleas in this part of the Forest, along with the fines for trespasses committed therein (Fisher 16).

On July 15, 1465, the area was declared a "Royal Liberty" by a Charter of Edward IV, making it "entirely independent of the ecclesiastical or civil jurisdiction of the county [of Essex], having written itself a tribunal for life and death" (Ogborne 101). Additionally, this Charter extended the range of the Manorial Courts in the Liberty and declared exemption from others:

The Lordship or Manor of Havering-atte-Bower is Ancient Demesne of the Crown of England. All actions arising within the Manor are and have been pleadable in its Court before the Steward and Suitors of the Manor. The tenants and inhabitants now complain that they are forced to attend other courts. It is therefore granted by this Charter that they shall not be compelled or forced or bound to answer before any other justices, judges, or commissioners, but only in the Court of the said Manor. The Steward and Suitors of the Manor are to have full power and authority to hear and determine pleas, debts, accounts, covenants, trespasses; and *the Sheriff of Essex is not to come into this court*. The Steward of the Manor and one of the discreetest and honestest tenants or inhabitants are to be Justices of the Peace, to try all felons, trespasses and other unlawful acts. . . . But they must not try any treason or felony without the King's special mandate. *Justices for the county must not interfere within the Manor or Lordship*. (Smith 265-66, emphasis added)

It is interesting that this separation of authority would reach its apex under James. According to William Addison, historian of the Forest, "these privileges were achieved by degrees until the main points were finally confirmed by James I" (27). Addison suggests that the Liberty probably originated in the desire of these sovereigns, who "frequently resided there, to have special authori-

ty within its boundaries.” It was with this purpose in mind that “it was separated from the rest of the kingdom.” As if such “special authority” needed reinforcement, interference by the Sheriff and Justices of the Peace was specifically forbidden. Could it have been, at least in part, because of these unique protections that the Earl of Oxford was determined to acquire the stewardship of Havering-atte-Bower?

A Midsummer Night's festivity

On April 4, 1604, King James confirms the Charter of Havering-atte-Bower, including the provision that the tenants “shall have one fair every year at the village of Havering, the same to last three days, that is to say in the eve of the nativity of St. John the Baptist and two days then next and immediately following . . .” (ERO Q/AX 1/1/2) St John's Day was one of the four major points of the English calendar year. June 24th was not only the birthday of St. John the Baptist, it was also the annual summer solstice festival, celebrated from time immemorial, beginning at sunset the previous evening (St. John's Eve) with music, dancing, feasting, drinking, games, mumming and some other practices that were no longer acceptable in the Reformation period. In view of the effort made to secure special rights to the citizens of the Liberty of Havering at this time, it is also interesting to note that, three months in advance, someone has also made an effort to get the King to put his stamp of approval on their traditional midsummer's eve celebration. Since June 24th would be the date of Oxford's death (or his purported death), these matters assume an even greater interest.

It should also be noted that on March 15th, three months earlier, Oxford's health was apparently good enough to allow his participation in James's triumphal progress from the Tower to Whitehall, which had been postponed due to the plague. In his office of Lord Great Chamberlain, Oxford took his place immediately in front of the King, with the Countess of Oxford following behind the Queen. Four days later, Oxford was summoned to the King's first Parliament (Nichols 1.326-27, 424). So far there is no sign of his impending demise.

May 5, 1604, seven weeks before his date of death, Oxford grants to Henry Humberstone the office of custodian of the perambulations in the walk of Chapel Hainault⁷ (see map page 20) in Waltham Forest. Recall that Humberstone was the subject of the Council's letter of the previous July to Robert Wroth (as High Sheriff of Essex) requesting him and the other local JPs to obtain possession of the post of Keeper of Havering Park for John Gray, a letter written the very day after Oxford was granted the same post. Humberstone's original grant has not yet been located; at this point we know of it only because it was included in the *Inquisitio post mortem* (hereafter Inquisition post mortem or IPM) of Oxford's estate, which would take place almost five months later at Brentwood (to follow, page 34). The relevant portion from the IPM (translated from Latin) states:

[O]n the 5th of May last past before the taking of this Inquisition [the Earl of Oxford] gave and conceded to Henry Humberstone yeoman the office of the custodian of the perambulation called Chapel Hainault walk within the Forest with its rights, members and appurtenances, and thus the said Earl of Oxford ordained, made and constituted

Henry Humberstone to the custody and perambulation of the said perambulation, having, holding, enjoying and exercising the said office by him or by his sufficient deputy or his deputies which the said Henry Humberstone accepted truly from him with all and singular lands, wages, fees, regards, profits and emoluments appertaining or enjoying to the said office from old. By virtue of which the said Henry Humberstone exercises and has the said office. . . . And the said jurors further said upon their oath that the said Henry Humberstone now survives and lives in full health at Brentwood in the said county of Essex. (PRO C142/286/165)



Hainault walk and the court of Swainmote

On June 11, 1604, the Swainmote court for the Forest of Waltham is held at Collier Row in the Liberty of Havering. As mentioned, this court held jurisdiction in the Forest and convened three times a year. The record of the Swainmote of June 11th proclaims at the top of the very first page that, as Great Chamberlain of England, Edward de Vere is Chief Warden of the Forest and that he holds these offices in fee—i.e., as his absolute and rightful possession (ERO D/DQ 52/1). His name appears twice more in conjunction with Hainault Walk and Chapel Hainault Walk, while Henry Humberstone's name is next to these same walks as a subforester in the office of perambulations, in accordance with Oxford's grant to him of the month before.

Fig. 2. The center portion of the map in Fig. 1, showing the proximity of Chapel Hainault ("Chappell Hennold") in "East Hennold Walke" to the west of the Liberty of Havering, Havering Park and Havering-atte-Bowre.

We must weigh the possibility that Oxford was personally in attendance:

The steward of the Forest was present at these Swainmotes, and the Courts are stated on the Rolls to have been held before him and the other ministers; but he did not sign the Rolls. This is in accordance with the remark of Manwood, that “although the chief warden of the Forest doth sometimes use to sit at this Court, or his lieutenant . . . yet it should seem that the chief Warden of the Forest is no judicial officer appointed to sit there; for if he were, he could not appoint his deputy to sit there for him; for a judicial place cannot be executed by a deputy. (Fisher 82)

Just as the court of Havering-atte-Bower was presided over by the steward of that Manor, so the steward of Waltham Forest oversaw the Swainmote; in Oxford's case, he had—or should have had—the stewardship of both, which would have given him an imposing leverage in the Forest of Waltham.

Although this Swainmote is on the prescribed schedule, its timing—one week before Oxford would grant his hard-won custody of the Forest to Francis Norris and Francis Vere, and two weeks before his apparent decease—is curious in view of the language of the foregoing document, which nowhere betrays any sign of his impending death or transference of his Forest stewardship to his potential executors. On the contrary, the record appears to be entirely progressive, listing the forest officials arranged, if appropriate, by their walks, as well as presentments (four of which relate to unlawful hunting of deer with hounds, erection of tenements, cutting down of trees, and keeping unringed pigs). Neither Gray nor Wroth are named in the document. But for this single record, the Rolls of presentments in Swainmote courts during James I's reign are all accountable, that is, except for those held in Waltham Forest, which are listed as missing (PRO C 99/137).

Oxford divests himself of property

On June 18, 1604, six days before his official recorded death (according to the later Inquisition post mortem), Oxford

bargained and sold to Francis Trentham the said manor [of Bretts], farm [of Plaistowe], land, tenements and hereditaments with their appurtenances, having and holding them to the said Francis Trentham his executors and assigns for and during the term of 60 years then next following, if the said Countess so long shall live (PRO C142/286/165, English translation).

On the same day he also makes the decision to grant his Custodianship of the Forest of Essex [=the Forest of Waltham] along with the keepership of the house and park of Havering, to his son-in-law Francis Norris and his cousin Sir Francis Vere, for eleven years—surpassing Henry de Vere's majority age of twenty-one by one year.

The grant begins in the usual fashion: “To all Christian people to whom this my present writing shall come, I Edward de Vere Earl of Oxenford Lord Great Chamberlain of England do send

greeting in our Lord God everlasting.” At that point, the first half of the grant closely adheres to Oxford’s claim to the Forest of the previous July, declaring the right for himself and his heirs to choose various forest officers and to reap the fines collected in the Swainmote courts, along with what other fees should be forthcoming.

The second half of the grant bears reciting in full:

Now know you that I the said Earl for the better preservation, keeping, and increasing of the game of the said Forest and park and the woods and other the pleasures and profits of the said Forest for the delight, pleasure and profits of the King’s Majesty my gracious sovereign lord his heirs and Successors, and for and in consideration of the preserving of the said offices and the profits, commodities, privileges and Immunities thereof to my heirs without disherison [=disinheritance], and also for divers other good and reasonable considerations me hereunto moving, have demised and granted and by these presents do demise and grant to the right honorable my very good and especial friends my son-in-law Francis Lord Norris and my good cousin Sir Francis Vere, all and every my said offices, and all and singular other profits, commodities and other the premises with their and every of their appurtenances and every part and parcel thereof. To have and to hold the same offices and all and singular other the premises with their and every of their appurtenances to the said Francis Norris and Francis Vere, their executors and assignees from the feast of the Annunciation of our Lady last past unto the full end and term of eleven years from thence forth next ensuing to be fully complete and ended [=March 25, 1604 to March 25, 1615]. Yielding and paying therefore yearly during the said term in regard of the charges to be spent and supplied in the exercising and using the said offices one pepper corn yearly at the feast of St. Michael the Archangel if it shall be lawfully demanded.

In Witness Whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal the Eighteenth day of June in the second year of the Reign of our most gracious sovereign Lord James by the grace of God of England France and Ireland King defender of the faith &c. And of Scotland the seven and thirtieth / 1604. (ERO D/DCw T1/565)

Just below the year “1604” is the signature: “E Oxenforde.” Oxford had stopped using his trademark “crown” signature shortly after Queen Elizabeth’s death, switching to an interwoven knot extending below his name, a flourish common to many signatures of the period. This signature, however, has no flourish, and in fact, the “E Oxenforde”—unmistakably his own signature—is written in such a shaky hand that it argues for a palsy, such as might be brought about by a stroke or the onset of Parkinson’s Disease. Compared to his other signatures, the deterioration is obvious. This could be viewed as compelling evidence of his imminent death one week later. The only other possibility we can see is that such a stroke or illness was not fatal, but only debilitating, or that the shaky signature was part of a plan to pretend that he was dead. The likelihood of this must be for the reader to judge after hearing all the facts.

Signature aside, the language in the document itself gives no hint that Oxford was knocking on death’s door (not that it necessarily would). The motive given for his decision to delegate the

Forest to Francis Norris and Francis Vere, other than “for the better preservation [etc.],” is only “for divers other good and reasonable considerations me hereunto moving,” fairly standard language in this type of grant.

Following Oxford's death, whether actual or feigned, we continue to see Sir Francis Vere's name listed along with the dowager Countess of Oxford in various legal documents as “committees of the body of lands of Henry de Vere Earl of Oxford his majesties ward.” But this grant of the Forest rights, and its confirmation in Oxford's Inquisition post mortem the following September, is the first and last mention of Francis Norris as a caretaker of any part of Oxford's estate and the first and last mention of Francis Vere in conjunction with the Forest.⁸ Although Oxford's grant stipulates that Norris and Vere might convey the said offices to their “executors and assignees,” there is no indication that this was ever undertaken, and the names that we'll continue to see affiliated with the Forest of Essex were never their representatives.

Not only do Norris and Vere disappear from the records in this context, other documents that we'll review will call into question the bona fide authority of this June 18, 1604 grant. It appears to have been entirely ignored but for a single reference in a letter written by the dowager Countess seven years later, still struggling at that time to secure for her son his rights in Waltham Forest.

The missing will

The fact that Oxford left no will is documented in a lawsuit c. 1610, in which one Edward Johnson sought recovery of a debt from the dowager Countess of Oxford for work he claims to have performed on a mansion called Plaistow house, one of the few remaining properties owned by Oxford at the time of his death:⁹

But now so it is, may it please your most Excellent Majesty, that the said Earl of Oxford is dead intestate, and all his goods and chattels whatsoever are come to the Lady Elizabeth his late wife, who hath and enjoyeth the same, never taking any Letters of Administration thereof, but converting and altering the same to her own use so as if Letters of Administration should be procured to your said subject [Johnson], yet is the estate in such manner disposed by the said Lady of Oxford as your said subject cannot by any means of law recover his said rightful and due debt. (ANW PRO REQ 2/388/28)

Alan Nelson holds that Oxford left no will because he wished to protect his estate, such as it was, from the importunities of his creditors (*Adversary* 194, 431). This seems unlikely. According to Henry Swinburne, author of *A Brief Treatise of Testaments and Last Wills* (1590) and a contemporary of Oxford's:

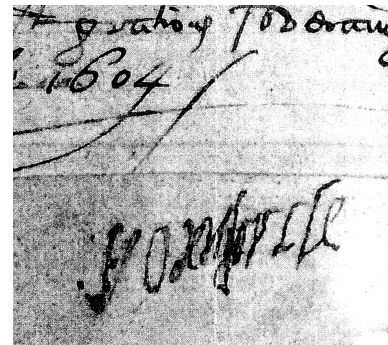


Fig. 3. The shaky signature on Oxford's grant to Vere and Norris. Note the date "1604."
(By permission of the ERO.)

When the testament is to be proved in form of law, it is requisite that such persons as have interest (that is to say) the widow and next of kin to the deceased, to whom the administration of his goods ought to be committed, if he had died intestate . . . if any die intestate, the administration of his goods is to be committed to the widow, or next of kin (STC 23547)

Thus, since Oxford died intestate, it was the Countess of Oxford who, in essence, would have been in charge of the administration of his estate, regardless of whether or not she had formally taken out “Letters” to that effect. Only the administrator or executor could sue or be sued for debts. Certainly Oxford’s creditors did importune the Countess for his debts. And just as certainly he would have been aware that they would probably do just that.

What then would have been his motive for conveying some of his properties in the June 18th grant the week before his death, rather than simply writing a will? Perhaps, knowing he was about to die, he attempted to arrange his assets in such a way that a will was unnecessary in order to protect his son and widow from the notorious wardship system, of which he himself had been a lifetime victim. Many Inquisitions post mortem in fact contain extracts from a will or an enfeoffment to “use” (putting lands into the hands of trustees for a term of years in order to avoid the King’s claims to livery and wardship, and also to allow lands to be left to people other than the heir at law). But, if the June 18th conveyances were an attempt to avoid the wardship system, the effort was not entirely successful, as shown by a Court of Wards and Liveries document dated a mere six months (January 28, 1605) after Oxford’s recorded death. This states, in part:

Sir Thomas Hesketh, knight, his Majesty’s Attorney General of the said Court of Wards and Liveries, for and on behalf of the Right Honorable Henry de Vere, Earl of Oxenford, his Majesty’s ward, that whereas the late Right Honorable Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford Lord Great Chamberlain of England deceased, was in his lifetime lawfully seised [=in possession] in his demesne as of fee of and in divers and sundry portions of tithes and other hereditaments (ECW WARD13/79)

The “tithes and other hereditaments” are then specified, including lands parcel to the manor of Bretts (which, according to the 1604 IPM, Oxford had conveyed to the “use” of his wife via her brother Francis Trentham on June 18th). The other properties named in the Wards document, most of which are also listed in the Inquisition post mortem of 1604, are indicated to have fallen, fraudulently, into the possession of various individuals, but “which of right do belong and appertain to the King’s Majesty in the right of the said ward . . . and all the premises are within the survey and jurisdiction of the said Court of Wards and Liveries”

The farm of Plaistow is not mentioned in the Wards document, and thus perhaps escaped the “survey and jurisdiction” of the Court of Wards, though this record is not necessarily inclusive. In view of Oxford’s own lifelong struggle with the wardship system—which it seems the sixteenth Earl of Oxford also attempted in vain to avoid for his son in his June 2, 1562 Indenture (PRO C54/626)—there may have been an entirely different motive for his actions on June 18, 1604, and the subsequent lack of a will, as suggested by another comment in Swinburne’s *Brief Treatise*:

Of him that killeth himself: If any man do wittingly and willingly kill himself, his testament, if he made any, is void, both concerning the appointment of the executor, and also concerning the legacy or bequest of any goods, for they are confiscate. (STC 23547)

If, as has been suggested, Oxford was intending to take his own life (Nieder Korn AR10), his goods and chattels as set forth in a will would have been subject to forfeiture. There was, however, a loophole in the feudal legal system that made it possible for a suicide's real estate to remain exempt from forfeiture if he had converted it to another through the device of a "use" (explained above in relation to wardship). Had this been Oxford's objective in not making a will, if suicide were his intention, he may have been taking measures to protect his family's interests by means of these grants to Trentham, Vere, and Norris (see Detobel, pages 69-88).

There may of course be other reasons why Oxford chose to leave no will, but with this consideration in mind, the following excerpt from Sir Edward Coke's Fifth Report in 1605, referring to "Laughton's case" c.1595, may be informative:

[I]t was resolved by Popham, Chief Justice, and the whole Court of King's Bench, that if a man be *felo de se* [=a suicide], his goods are not forfeited till it is presented or found of record, and that is the reason that such goods cannot be claimed by prescription. Then it was moved if one be *felo de se*, and cast into the sea, or conveyed or buried in so secret a manner that the coroner cannot have the view of the body, and by consequence he cannot enquire of it: it was resolved, that the justices of peace [et al. who have power and authority] may take a presentment of it, for it is felony, and that shall serve to entitle the King to his goods and chattels. (Coke 77.227)

Thus family members did sometimes secretly bury relatives who had committed suicide—a possible explanation for the void surrounding Oxford's death, though by no means the only one.

The deafening silence

However many the questions about Oxford's actions before his purported death on June 24th, none come close to equaling the questions raised by the silence that followed it. The lack of personal response to the death of "great Oxford" (as the King termed him) from his contemporaries, a silence reflected in letter after letter, calls for a satisfactory explanation. For several years, all references to him as deceased are to be found only in bureaucratic documents issued by courts or various officials, or in letters to officials from his widow.

This silence is particularly noteworthy in the case of that most prolific and detailed chronicle of current events, the letters exchanged between John Chamberlain and Dudley Carleton. Their correspondence was prolific and long term, offering vivid snapshots of life in London. Along with every other sort of gossip they invariably reported on the deaths of anyone notable. One example, from Chamberlain to Carleton on August 30, 1598, discusses Burghley and the Vere sisters:

The Lord Treasurer's funeral was performed yesterday with all the rites that belong to

so great a personage. The number of mourners one and other were above 500, whereof there were many noblemen. . . . Of his private wealth there is but £11,000 come to light, and that all in silver: whereof £6,000 (with eight or nine hundred pound land) he bequeathed to his two nieces of Oxford [Bridget and Susan Vere], the rest in other legacies. (McClure 1.41)

Throughout their long association, Chamberlain and Carleton would discuss—in numerous letters to each other as well as to others—the affairs of various Veres, including the deaths of the Countess of Oxford in 1613 and the eighteenth Earl in 1625. Of the latter, Chamberlain would write to Carleton:

We hear the ill news of the Earl of Oxford's decease, which is the more lamented for that he was the only hope and support of so ancient and noble a house, which is like to go to ruin, his successor (they say) being a man of mean worth or regard. But this is the common fate of all worldly honor to fade and fall. (McClure 2.622)

The earliest surviving exchange between the two pen pals prior to June 24, 1604, is the lengthy letter from Carleton to Chamberlain of January 15, 1604, in which he writes:

On New Year's night we had a play of Robin Goodfellow and a masque brought in by a magician of China. . . . for the ordinary measures they took out the Queen, the Ladies of Derby [Elizabeth Stanley née Vere], Harford, Suffolk, Bedford, Susan Vere, Southwell the elder, and Rich. . . . The Lady Bedford and Lady Susan took out the two ambassadors and they bestirred themselves very lively. . . . Sir Francis Vere doth stand upon high points with the States and will either have absolute command of his English without subjection to his excellency or any other or return no more. (Lee 53-59)

Carleton to Chamberlain, letter dated August 10, 1604, contains the usual deal of gossip, including the observation that the French Ambassador Beaumont “pries and spies out all advantages to make himself merry” (Lee 61). Chamberlain responded to Carleton four days later in his own newsy letter, wherein he mentions the “sickness” at Oxford University that has “taken away one [John] Eveleigh, Principal of Hart Hall on Wednesday last” (McClure 1.197). These two August letters are the pair's closest in date to Oxford's date of death.

The six-month break in their correspondence between January and August of that year is a notable anomaly in their otherwise regular exchange. (Did they not write each other during this period for some reason? Were their letters of this period later destroyed for some reason?) It is no more anomalous, however, than the fact that not a single letter from anyone survives mentioning Oxford's death. Deaths of nobility were always news, consistently mentioned in letters of the time.

Sir Edward Hoby, son of Lady Russell, Mildred Burghley's sister, and married to the daughter of Lord Hunsdon, former Lord Chamberlain of the Queen's household, was a member of the Court community. His letter to Sir Thomas Edmondes of November 19, 1605 is a typical example:

[O]n Wednesday, the 30th of October, the Earl of Cumberland died; and it is said the

body of the council is no whit weakened thereby. His wife and he were reconciled before his death, who is left a lady able to pleasure the communion of saints, having a jointure of £1,200 a year, confirmed in 39 Elizabeth by Parliament." (Birch 1.34)

Almost three weeks after the fact, Cumberland's death was still a newsworthy item. This is but one of literally hundreds of examples that could be offered.

Sir William Browne was a Vere family insider, referred to as "Kind Father" by Francis and Horatio Vere, as also by Sir Edward Vere (Oxford's son by Anne Vavasour). Sir Edward signed his letters to Browne, "your most affectionate kind loving son" (Collins 2.278-9). In June 1604, Sir William Browne had been in Flushing for some time and was writing weekly, often daily, to Sir Robert Sidney in London. In fact, on June 24th Browne actually wrote a letter to Sidney, while Sidney, it seems, wrote one to Browne three days later, for on July 4th Browne writes again to Sidney: "I received yours of the 27th June this present 3rd [of July] . . ." (Collins 2.298-9). More chit-chat follows, including the fact that Browne was "bold to take" one of Sidney's hogsheads of beer and send it to Horace Vere, for which he begs his friend's pardon.¹⁰

Although we don't have Sidney's letter of June 27th, it's evident that he did not mention the fact that Oxford had died three days earlier, for had he done so, surely Browne would have discussed it in his response. Writing to Sidney again on July 11th, and then again on July 12th, Browne begins: "Since mine of yesterday I received a letter from Sir Horace Vere with news of Sluice and of their extremities . . ." (Kingsford 3.126). In fact, in all the correspondence between Browne and Sidney, commencing three days after June 24, 1604, there is never a word on the subject of Oxford's death, strange considering Browne's close relationship to all the Veres.

This regular correspondence between the two men seems to have begun around November 1600, and continued on an almost daily basis for the next eleven years. That Browne was finally aware of Oxford's demise almost two years after the fact seems evident from his letter to Sidney of June 15, 1606, in which he writes, "At Sir Francis Vere's departure, the States General did present him with a pension of 3000 florens per annum during his life, and after his decease (in acknowledgment of his service) to the young Earl of Oxenford; reserving all his pretensions for his accounts to the end of the war" (Kingsford 3.283-84).

Henry Lok, a poet and Oxford's former servant of twenty plus years, described his service under Oxford in a letter to Burghley dated November 6, 1590 as "impossible that the beauty thereof should be eclipsed" (Nelson 326), dedicated a sonnet to Oxford in his 1597 *Ecclesiastes*, writing "I would conjure you by your wonted praise" (383), and acted as a messenger between Oxford and Robert Cecil in 1601 (397). On June 28th, four days after Oxford's date of death, a destitute Lok writes to Cecil to "borrow or beg countenance or relief" since Cecil's "past and late proofs give [me] hope" (SAL 16.154). Though it may well have behooved him to do so, nowhere in the letter does Lok mention his former lord and master's death.

Sir Julius Caesar, Master Extraordinary of the Court of Requests, who had a number of dealings with Oxford and his Countess over the years, writes to Cecil on the same day as Lok (June 28),

enclosing a petition from certain Dutch merchants to the King, and complaining of one Arthur Hall's slanders against him. He also fails to mention Oxford's death (SAL 16.154-55).

Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester, who had married Elizabeth Hastings in a double ceremony alongside Oxford and Anne Cecil in 1571 (Nelson 75), whose acting troupe had combined with Oxford's by 1602 (391-2), and who had marched on Oxford's left-hand side as the Earl Marshal in James's coronation only three months before (Nichols 1.326), writes to Sir Julius Caesar on June 29th. Again, no mention is made of Oxford's death (Add. 12506 f.185).

Thomas Sackville Lord Buckhurst writes to Sir Michael Hicke on that same day (June 29), and, despite the fact that both Buckhurst and Hicke had had numerous connections with Oxford throughout the years, Buckhurst too fails to mention Oxford's death (LAN 89/12).

William Camden's Latin diary, which covers the years 1603 to 1623, was published in 1691. According to its first editor, Dr. Thomas Smith, "Camden recorded in his diary whatever was of any importance, or of virtually none whatsoever." Professor Dana Sutton has translated the diary and posted it in the Philological Museum on the Internet. Sutton calls the document "a weird mixture of nuggets of genuine historical value, chronicles of Court scandal and gossip, and the most banal of trivia."¹¹ While Camden does note the closing of Parliament on July 7th and Robert Cecil's creation as Viscount Cranborne on August 20th, not a drop of ink is spilled on Oxford's death. Yet, on January 4th, 1605, he does note : "*Philippus Herbert frater comitis Penbrochia ducit Susannam filiam Edwardi comitis Oxonii*," which Sutton translates: "Philip Herbert, brother of the Earl of Pembroke, marries Susanna, daughter of Edward, Earl of Oxford."

The Gawdy family papers are equally silent. A week after Oxford's purported death (July 1, 1604) one Francis Morice writes to Sir Bassingbourne Gawdy giving details of Lionel Sharpe's involvement in the June 24th arrest of Southampton (Gawdy 92-3).¹² Two days later, Gawdy receives another letter on the same subject, this time from his brother Philip, who writes, "[T]he news . . . is that upon Sunday last Dr. Sharp was sent to the Tower close prisoner, the cause not directly known, but for treason, and supposed that he hath done very ill offices betwixt the king, and his Lords" (Jeayes 146-47). Philip Gawdy continues with other affairs, including news of two impending marriages, one being the Earl of Pembroke's, and the proroguing of Parliament on the upcoming session of Saturday, July 7, also mentioned by Camden.

Had the Gawdys known about Oxford's death they would certainly have mentioned it. Their family papers reveal that Lady Mary Vere Willoughby, Oxford's sister, was Philip Gawdy's patroness throughout this period (Jeayes ix, 39, 40, 41, 118, 127). Interest in the Veres is shown by the postscript that Philip Gawdy appended in a letter to Bassingbourne many years earlier (June 13, 1588):

Brother, I forgot to write to you of the death of a great lady upon Thursday last in the forenoon. My Lady of Oxford died at the court, and is interred at Westminster. There is a great funeral a preparing and I need not to write to you of the heaviness and mourning of many of her best friends (Jeayes 37-38).

Thirdly, on October 24, 1604, Philip wrote his brother: "Sir Philip Herbert shall marry my Lady Susan Vere," a full two months before the actual event, revealing Philip Gawdy as one of the first to know of this important Court marriage (150). It is notable then, that in his letter of July 3rd, when Gawdy informs his brother of the news that has happened since "Sunday last"—Sunday last being the 24th of June—he shows no knowledge of Oxford's death.

William Cavendish, later **Earl of Devonshire**, writes from London on July 4th (the day after Gawdy's letter), to Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury. He too reports on current affairs, among them that "it is thought Parliament will end this Saturday" and "the earl of Pembroke's marriage is deferred by three months" (FOL X.d.428 [23]). Again, not a word on Oxford's death. Many other letters were written in the days and weeks following June 24th by members of Court circles, letters filled with gossip, but that fail to mention his death. On the face of it, it would seem that, most strangely, among members of his own community the death of "great Oxford" caused nary a ripple.

There was, however, another event that occurred on June 24, 1604, that did send a great wave of excitement through the same community, one that left a substantial if puzzling paper trail.

A midsummer night's drama

Late on the evening of June 24th, King James ordered the arrest of the third Earl of Southampton, along with a number of other suspected conspirators. They were questioned and all released the next day, apparently with no further ramifications. A wholly satisfying explanation has never been forthcoming. The Oxfordian thesis, that Oxford was the author of the Shakespeare canon, would seem to offer somewhat more solid ground for theorizing. With Southampton as dedicatee of *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and the probable "fair youth" of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, plus Oxford's roles as potential father-in-law to Southampton in the early '90s and as one of his judges in the 1601 Essex rebellion trial, some sort of vital connection between the two is suggested. A thorough examination of the considerable paper trail¹³ this incident left in its wake is outside the scope of this article. For now we'll simply note that two such mysterious events occurring on the same day seems well worth a closer look.

A monument without a tomb

Oxford is recorded in two surviving parish registers as having been buried at the Church of St. Augustine-at-Hackney on July 6, 1604, in Register A, the original (LMA P79/JN1/21 f.197v), and in Register B, the copy (LMA P79/JN1/22, unfoliated). The entries in both registers appear genuine and contemporary to the seventeenth century, though Register B could be later. These entries raise questions similar to those we have already seen.

The entry for Oxford in Register A reads (in original spelling): "Edward de Vere Erle of Oxenford was buried the 6th daye of Iulye A^o 1604." In the facsimile, the several entries above Oxford's name begin with individuals buried, in descending order, on April 21, April 30, May 5,

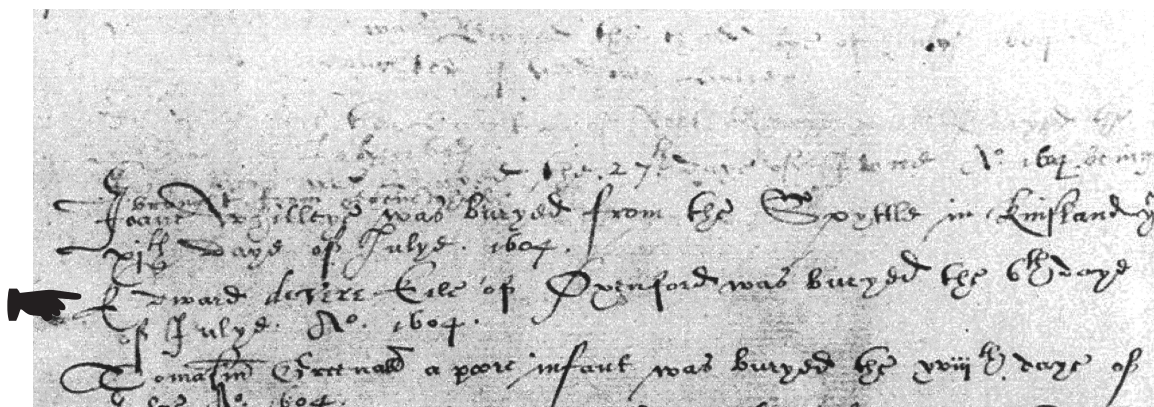


Fig. 4. Excerpt from Hackney parish Register A, showing a strip of the faded (erased?) section, followed by the interlineated name, one more name, and then Oxford's name.

May 7, May 8, May 19, May 30, June 5, June 11, and June 30. After this point at least two entries, for no apparent reason, are faded beyond legibility,¹⁴ although "Iulye 1604" can just be made out for each of them (see Fig. 4 above). The entries then suddenly become quite legible again, with an interlineated (and hence added) account recording a burial on June 27, the writing necessarily cramped to fit into the limited available space between the two July entries above and below it. The entry immediately below this interlineation records one "Ioane Whitley" on July 11, followed by Oxford on July 6, followed by "a poore infant" on July 18, and finally one "dorathie Spenser the

Fig. 5. Register B. A portion of the two columns, with "Edward Veare, earl of oxford" beside "July." (By permission of the Revd. Dr. John Pridmore, Rector of Hackney.)

John Wainwright	10	George Dickins	10
John Wainwright	13	Max Henry Wilson	1
John Wainwright	14		
John Wainwright	17	1604	
George Sande	19	May Ann. Rudson: gal	30
John Wainwright	19	June Edward Rudson: gal	3
John Wainwright	19	Arthur Hime	26
John Wainwright	19	Joan's Rye: gal	27
John Wainwright	22	July Edward Veare	6
John Wainwright	23	Carl of Oxford	
John Wainwright	25	Aug Elizabeth: Noble	20
John Wainwright	25	Dr: Waterton	26
John Wainwright	28	Sept Anthony A. Rye	30
John Wainwright	30	Oct Ann: Rudson: gal	2
John Wainwright	31	Nov William Yorks	5
John Wainwright	3		
John Wainwright	5	1605	
John Wainwright	7	April 10: Rudson	22
John Wainwright	7	John Wainwright	27
John Wainwright	9	John Wainwright	29
John Wainwright	11	Will: Rudson	30
John Wainwright	16	May Wainwright: Rudson	24

daughter of doctor Spencer" on August 4.

More individuals no doubt precede and follow where my facsimile has been cropped above and below. Nevertheless, with the exception of the interlineated account, all but one of those shown are listed in chronological order. The one other exception is Oxford. While his July 6th entry appears to be one of the originals on that page, it should have been listed before Joan Whitley's of July 11th, rather than between hers and the poor infant's of July 18th.

There are also curiosities with regards to Register B, which I must assume used Register A as its model. After noting the onset of the plague, a marginal proviso in Register B informs the reader that "I have set down none but men or women of note. I have left out all children and vagrants." So we should not expect the copy to conform precisely to the original. Indeed, Oxford is the only entry for July.

However, there are also discrepancies between the people “of note” who are recorded in B when compared to A. B’s single entry for May, which appears to be that of “Ann Hudson” on the 30th, would seem to match A’s entry for that date, despite some fading over the surname. For June, while B lists “Edward Perce,” “Arther Finch,” and “Ioane Key” on the 3rd, 26th, and 27th respectively, there is no connection between any of these names and dates in A, so that rather than leaving out the unimportant names in his copy it would seem that the scribe has added a few. Similar discrepancies follow.¹⁵ While further research is indicated, we will have occasion to consider the Hackney parish register twice more before all is said and done.

“Never greater gift”

Before August 20, 1604, the Countess of Oxford writes to Robert Cecil the first personal letter we find alluding, however ambiguously, to Oxford’s passing:

My very good Lord, presuming his Majesty had referred the apportionment of an allowance for my own, and my child’s maintenance, unto yours, and my Lord Northampton’s [Henry Howard’s] consideration; I was very glad that the relief of this ruined estate, best known to your Lordships, rested in the favor of such persons, as both in honor, nature, and affection, would regard the desolate estate of my poor child and myself. But hearing from your Lordships that the rate was set down by his Majesty’s own determination, and not left to your discretion, I earnestly entreat your Lordship that you would present my humble petition to his gracious Majesty to enlarge his gift to five hundred pounds rent yearly. Your Lordship may truly inform his highness, that *the pension of a thousand pounds was not given by the late Queen to my Lord for his life, and then to determine, but to continue until she might raise his decay by some better provision.* And as I hear, his Majesty is most respective in performing of the late Queen’s intentions, which makes me the more hopeful in my great distress of his Majesty’s favor. It hath been enjoyed but one year by his Majesty’s gift, and it is all the relief I ever look for to sustain my miserable estate. And so commending my humble suit to your Lordship’s courtesy, and yourself to the Almighty, [I] take my leave.

Your Lordship’s assured loving friend
Elizabeth Oxenford (CP 189/147, emphasis added)

Note that we hear “the late Queen” but not “my late Lord.” Normally a letter like this would be taken as solid proof of a husband’s demise, and so we would take it, were it not for the utter silence that surrounds it. As Oxford’s closest associate, the Countess’s testimony cannot be as exempt from suspicion as the inadvertent testimony of the many individuals, friends, enemies, or simply members of the larger Court community, who, it is clear from the evidence of their letters, had no inkling of Oxford’s death. If the “fantastical duke of dark corners” felt it necessary to fake his own death, for whatever reason, certainly his wife would have had to know about it and, will she

nill she, go along with it, whatever the repercussions for herself and their son. Her request was either denied or ignored. The following October, Henry would be allotted only £200 per annum.

Not long after the Countess's letter, King James writes to Robert Cecil, mentioning Oxford in a quote familiar to many Oxfordians. In context, the King is refusing Lord Cromwell's request for an annuity of between two and three thousand pounds per annum, since "I had already told him, never greater gift of that nature was given in England. Great Oxford when his state was whole ruined got no more of the late Queen; I myself bestow no more upon Arbella my near cousin" (SAL 16.395). Since the use of the past tense refers to a past event, Oxford's loss of estate, and not to Oxford himself, it offers no evidence as to whether he was alive or dead at that point. Again we hear "the late Queen," while Oxford is simply "great Oxford."

Chapel Hainault

Sixteen months after the King granted him a walkership in Waltham Forest for life, Sir Robert Wroth is found busy in forest matters. On September 15, 1604, he writes to Robert Cecil to procure a warrant for the building of bridges, the money for which he says can come from felled trees out of the walks of Hainault and Chapel Hainault (SAL 16.307), walks that by then were supposed to be in the possession of the eighteenth Earl of Oxford, under the keepership of Vere and Norris.

Two days later, a letter is written in Henry's name to the Earl of Nottingham. Other than the italic signature, possibly Henry's own, the letter is in an unknown adult's secretary script:

My good Lord, the messenger, being one of the Grooms of the chamber by whom your Lordship was pleased to send your warrant for Witherings, having faithfully delivered your Lordship's letters unto the party himself, is yesterday returned, reporting the utter refusal of Witherings to appear before your Lordship—Sir John Gray undertaking in his behalf to answer the matter unto the King his Majesty, avowing that whatsoever hath been done, was done by his only directions and commandment. Thus much I thought good to signify unto your Lordship, both that you might take knowledge of their disobedience unto, and neglect of your Lordship's authority, as also to pray you that out of your honorable disposition to relieve the oppressed, you would take some speedy course in justice, both to chastise this their contempt and also to restore my servant to his wife, children, house and goods. So shall they be justly occasioned to pray to God for the preservation of your Honor. And I shall take it as a great kindness done unto myself, which in my riper years I shall not forget to acknowledge. Thus ceasing your Lordship further trouble, I take my leave this 17th of September.

Your very loving friend,
Henry Oxenford (CP 107/16)

Like his mother's letter to Cecil of the preceding month, this would seem to confirm Oxford's death; otherwise Henry would not have signed himself "Henry Oxenford." Nonetheless, if Edward

de Vere were still alive—but meant to appear dead—his son, of necessity, would have to assume the title of the eighteenth earl. The purpose of the letter is suspect as well. The subject of Gray's behavior in the Forest of Waltham, so dear to Oxford just before his untimely demise, would not seem to be nearly as important to an eleven-year-old boy, suggesting some adult acting in his behalf. The final flourish about "my riper years" lends authenticity. Seven years later, his mother would write to Robert Cecil and Henry Howard regarding her son with the phrase: "when ripeness of years shall discover to him the true differences between good and evil . . ." (SP 14/65, ff.76-7), which might lead one to believe it took Henry some time to "ripen."

Though not in her handwriting either, might the Countess have dictated the letter? The recipient, Nottingham, Oxford's personal friend and Chief Justice of the Forest, was the individual to whom Oxford himself would most likely have turned to resolve a problem of this nature.

Evidently Nottingham summoned the man Witherings to appear before him. When Witherings refused, Gray took it upon himself to answer the matter—not before Nottingham, but before James—avowing that what Witherings had done was by Gray's own commandment. What had Sir John Gray commanded? The question is at least partially answered in a petition, undated, but evidently written within a matter of days or weeks of Henry's letter. The petition, addressed to King James, is signed by Henry Humberstone and George Harper. The reader will recall that Humberstone was the recipient of the Council's letter of July 19, 1603, demanding that he surrender Havering Park to Sir John Gray. He was also the recipient of Oxford's 1604 grant of the office of perambulations in Hainault Walk, his name appearing in that office in the June 11, 1604, record of the Swainmote Court.¹⁶ His (and Harper's) September 1604 petition to the King reads:

Whereas it pleased your Majesty to restore the Earl of Oxford to his right of Inheritance to the Custody of your Highness's Forest of Waltham, who finding divers and sundry abuses and spoils of your Majesty's game committed by one Anthony Witherings, then keeper of Chapel Hainault walk, did displace the said Witherings and placed as keeper thereof the petitioner Humberstone, an ancient servant to the late Queen's Majesty in Havering park, and a man well approved and known to the Nobility of this your Highness's Kingdom to be honest, skilful, sufficient, and never convicted of the least offence towards the game committed to his charge.

Yet so it is, if it may please your Majesty, that the said Anthony Witherings, by the encouragement of Sir John Gray, hath entered into the possession of the said walk and by force and violence put forth the said Humberstone and holdeth the same, contrary to the advice and commandment of your Majesty's faithful Counselor the Earl of Nottingham, your Highness's Chief Justice in Eyre, and the Lord Viscount Cranborne [Robert Cecil], Master of your Highness's Court of Wards and Liveries, and contrary to the laws of this your Realm.

May it therefore please your Majesty of your accustomed goodness and for the preservation of Justice and right, to grant your Highness's warrant to Sir Anthony Cooke and Sir Robert Wroth knight to remove the force of the said Witherings from the possession of the said walk, and to place the petitioner Humberstone therein, *until*

the right of the said Earl of Oxford to the placing, and displacing of all officers in the said Forest may by tried in your Highness's Court of Wards and Liveries. And that the Petitioners may receive the yearly wages of £12 apiece and the arrearages thereof from the Treasurer of your Highness's Chamber, and the fee wood, as in the time of your Highness's Ancestors hath been accustomed to be allowed therein regard of their charge in the preservation of your Majesty's game. And they shall ever pray for your Majesty's long and most happy Reign. We most humbly beseech your Majesty's gracious answer to this petition. (CP P/1377, emphasis added)

The foregoing raises as many questions as it answers. As Humberstone had been forcibly ejected from Hainault walk, we can at least guess that it is he who is the "oppressed" servant Earl Henry was requesting Nottingham "to restore to his wife, children, etc." (Though this must be reconciled with the statement in the IPM that Humberstone "now survives and lives in full health at Brentwood.") Here again we are confronted with the absence of both Francis Vere and Francis Norris, who, under normal circumstances, should have been the ones to intervene as overseers of Oxford's rights within the Forest. Instead, the indication is that any final decision on this matter will depend upon the outcome of a trial in the Court of Wards to determine Earl Henry's right to nominate the Forest officers. However, no record of any such trial in the Court of Wards has surfaced. And again, there is no mention of Oxford's decease in the petition, while Elizabeth is referred to again as "the late Queen."

The first mention of "the Earl of Oxford" without doubt refers to Earl Edward, who granted Humberstone the Hainault keepership on May 5, 1604 (thus replacing Witherings). The next reference, referring to Henry, is written "the said Earl of Oxford." If it is young Earl Henry who is meant here, the phrase "the said Earl" does not follow, since it is only Earl Edward who has previously been spoken of. Either the wording is unusually clumsy, or father and son are being deliberately conflated, or it is still Earl Edward whose jurisdiction is in question, despite his official demise.

The Inquisition post mortem of 1604

Within days of the above two letters, an Inquisition post mortem is carried out in Brentwood (located just west of the Liberty of Havering) on Edward de Vere's holdings in Essex.¹⁷ We've already noted a few of the details in the IPM, including the confirmation of Humberstone's grant, but there's also this (bearing in mind the original is in Latin):

Inquisition by indenture taken at Brentwood in the said county on the 27th day of September in the second year in the reign of Lord James I by the grace of God King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith in the presence of [names of deputy escheators and feodary] to inquire after the death of Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England, Lord of Badlesmere and Scales directed and by this inquisition by the oaths of [names of jurors] honest and law-abiding men of the said county. Who said upon their oaths that the said Earl of Oxford on the day that he died was seised [=in possession] in his lordship as of fee from the office of Bailiff of

the whole Forest in and of Essex in the said county of Essex, and of the Custody and Stewardship of the said Forest. And also of and in the bailiwick and Custody of the park and houses of the Lord King of Havering in the said county of Essex. And further of diverse fees, profits, commodities, advantages, liberties and privileges of the said office enjoying and appertaining accordingly by diverse evidences in writing produced in evidence and shown to the said jurors as is made clear and apparent And the said jurors further said upon their oaths that the said Earl from the said offices in said form seised before he died by his writing sealed at arms with his seal bearing date the 18th day of June in the second year of the said reign of the King of England . . demised and conceded to Francis Lord Norris and Francis Vere knight of the offices of the Custodian and Stewardship of the said Forest and all and singular the profits and commodities appertaining of the said office with their and whichever of their appurtenances, having and holding to the said Francis Lord Norris and Francis Vere knight, their executors and assigns at the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary then last past to the close and term of 11 years then next following and full completion [=March 25, 1604 to March 25, 1615] by virtue of which demise the said Francis Lord Norris and Francis Vere knight were and thus now are then in possession. And the said jurors further said upon their oaths that the said Earl when he lived was seised in his lordship as of fee of the office of the Lord Great Chamberlain of England And that the said Earl of Oxford died on the 24th day of June last past before the taking of this inquisition. And that Henry de Vere now Earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England, viscount of Bulbeck and Lord of Badlesmere and Scales is his son and heir and at the time of the death of the said Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford was aged 11 years 4 months. (PRO C142/286/165)

Following as it did so quickly upon the heels of the legal tussle between Gray and Humberstone, it would seem that someone in Oxford's corner had decided to take a firm step towards solidifying the rights of the Earls of Oxford in the Forest of Waltham.

Whatever the case, in the most straightforward sense we have here a legal and binding document, attested by twenty-four "honest and law-abiding men of the said county," certifying that Oxford died on June 24, 1604.

Some quibbles over the meaning of the word *dead*

Shakespeare amplified the ordinary meaning of the word *dead* when he has the court jester Touchstone, exiled to the Forest, mourn his situation: "When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room."¹⁸ In other words, a man who has lived for Art is as good as dead if his audience fails to understand or appreciate him.

The Law in Shakespeare's time had its own variations on interpretations of the word. A nobleman who had been attainted was, to all extents and purposes, legally dead and so was referred

to as “the late Earl of _____.” This meant that his title was dead, but not, of course, the Earl himself. The Earl of Southampton after the Essex rebellion and Henry Brook Lord Cobham after the Main plot were both referred to in these terms in public testaments and private correspondence.

In Medieval times there was a different kind of situation in which a man, while still alive, could be considered legally dead. According to Littleton’s *Tenures*, the late fifteenth century manual on law that went through numerous reprints throughout the sixteenth century and beyond:

[W]hen a man entereth into religion, and is professed, he is dead in the law, and his son, or next cousin incontinent shall inherit him, as well as though he were dead indeed. And when he entereth into religion, he may make his testament, and his executors; and they may have an action of debt due to him before his entry into religion, or any other action that executors may have, as if he were dead indeed. And if that he make no executors when he entereth into religion, then the ordinary may commit the administration of his goods to others, as if he were dead indeed. (94)

Of course, this custom pertained to one who was relinquishing all worldly concerns by entering a monastery, a choice made by Oxford’s twelfth-century ancestor, the first Aubrey de Vere, founder of Colne Priory in Earl’s Colne, where generations of Oxford ancestors had once been buried. This de Vere, grandfather to the first Earl of Oxford, retired from worldly life, taking the habit of a monk (Wright 423), a choice that Oxford was denied, since he was born after the dissolution of the monasteries. Still, could Oxford have decided to imitate Shakespeare’s Timon, Prospero, Belarius, Jaques, Duke Senior, Duke Vincentio, among others—and retire, monklike, to a forest setting? Since the Law could no longer provide him with this option, might he have sought to turn it to his purpose in some other way?

Sir Michael Hickes

Hickes was a secretary for many years to Lord Burghley and, following his death, a friend to Burghley’s son Robert Cecil. Although not officially in his service, Hickes continued to be inundated with letters from clients anxious to obtain his help in getting a word in the ear of Cecil (by now Viscount Cranborne and soon to be Earl of Salisbury), the most influential man at Court.

Having known Oxford from at least 1580 when he began his employment with Burghley,¹⁹ Hickes was frequently involved with the Earl over the years, whom he referred to in his correspondence with Cecil as “my Lord Chamberlain.” For example, on July 1, 1603, Hickes wrote Cecil regarding monies Oxford owed for the upkeep of his daughter:

May it please your Lordship: I would have been glad to have heard from my Lord Chamberlain for the main sum, because I have occasion to use it for a payment I am to make very shortly; your Lordship told me at my last being with you at the Court you would speak with him. . . . Mr. Bellott desired me to speak with my Lord Chamberlain touching the money due to my Lady Susan (Nelson 422)

On January 22, 1604, a week before Oxford's last letter to King James, Cecil writes to Hickes:

Although I have not answered your letters yet, I have reserved my thanks, which when I see you you shall receive, for the box by my Footman and all your letters concerning the reckonings of my Lord Chamberlain—let me know them before you demand [payment], and you shall see that we will put all to a good point.” (LAN 89/1)

We can't know what “good point” Cecil had in mind, but some sort of dealing with Oxford's finances is indicated—whether for his benefit or otherwise we can't tell. Which brings us to a letter to Hickes from Oxford's adversary, Sir John Gray, written October 12, 1604:

Sir Michael Hicks, I am unfortunately fallen into a business which doth not a little to grieve me for many respects: the one because it is a touch to my reputation or to lose my right in the country, where into I am newly come to live. Another because I am like to be drawn into many other troubles which I am altogether vanquished with, and many other such like. But above all others, I am most grieved for that I hear I have drawn my Lord of Cranborne's [Robert Cecil's] displeasure upon me, when I have ever strived to show for the love and duty I ever bore his Lordship. And now, not thinking of a better, nor a directer means than yourself, whose love and kind friendship hath ever been ready to show itself unto me, do earnestly entreat you to take some convenient time to acquaint my Lord with my humble suit, that it would please him to pardon me for breaking his commandment, which since I have performed, and that he would believe that *those informations which were brought against me were merely false as I can well prove, and that my possession was not forcible, but according to law. And that it would please his Lordship to consider of my poor estate no way to be able to go to law with so great a man as my Lord of Oxford is, and being so nearly allied to his Lordship. I being his [Oxford's] poor kinsman too, do humbly beseech his Lordship not to suffer me to spend my small portion at law, but to commit the hearing and the relating to some gentlemen in the Country. Which being done, his Lordship shall rule me as please him, and I will stand to what order his Lordship shall set down for all things that are between my Lord of Oxford and me.* This doing, so you shall bind me to you, and I shall receive you:

Ever faithful and assured friend, John Gray
[from] Havering this 12 of October 1604 (LAN 89/25, emphasis added)

The letter is endorsed the next day upon receipt: “13 Oct. 1604 Sir John Gray of Havering in Law with the Earl of Oxford.”

Here we have a document that definitely belongs in the mystery column. The “Earl of Oxford” with whom Gray is dealing—who, says Gray, “is a great man” (present tense) and “so nearly allied” to Robert Cecil—simply cannot be young Henry, who at age eleven could hardly be termed either “great” or “a man”; nor was Henry in any way “nearly allied” to Cecil. There can be no doubt that Gray is referring to Oxford senior. Could it be that Gray, a member of the King's privy chamber,

was unaware that Edward de Vere had died almost four months earlier?

What Gray describes here as the “things that are between my Lord of Oxford and me” find their beginnings in Edward de Vere’s own letter to King James eight months earlier. The business Gray has “unfortunately fallen into” refers to some current threat—wheels are in motion. Cecil’s displeasure, which stems from the breaking of some “commandment,” may involve Gray’s “encouragement” of Witherings in the forcible removal of Humberstone some three-odd weeks earlier, “contrary to the advice and commandment of . . . the Lord Viscount Cranborne.” We also see that someone has relayed information to Cecil maligning Gray in the matter, information that involved Gray’s “possession” of something, which Gray maintains was legal, contrary to his opponent’s claim. While this may refer to the walks of Hainault, it’s probable that it’s the keepership of Havering that’s in question. Recall Oxford’s own words in his last letter to the King requesting that His Majesty “restore me to the possession thereof” since Gray’s patent “is void in law.”

Apart from our astonishment at hearing that Oxford’s influence, considered not long since by Peyton to be utterly valueless, has become so highly regarded, Gray himself no more than his “poor kinsman,”²⁰ we wonder what he means when he hopes the case might be committed to “some gentlemen in the country.” Would this be the manor court of the Liberty of Havering—or was Gray looking to avoid that? Perhaps a local arbitrating commission or justice session of some sort would have been preferable. There are various records of similar commissions, such as a March 26, 1608, warrant to pay 30 pounds, ten shillings “to John Manwood for holding two justice sessions within the forests of Hampshire” (CSPD 1603-1610 8.418). There had already been at least one arbitration in the matter (as attested by Oxford’s January 30th letter to the King, in which testimony was taken under oath—the “depositions” undoubtedly Manwood’s). If Cecil will agree to this hearing, Gray will accept Cecil’s determination and “his Lordship shall rule me as please him, and I will stand to what order his Lordship shall set down for all things that are between my Lord of Oxford and me.”

Consider the phrasing of this last sentence, reminiscent of many others dealing with living individuals, such as Philip Sidney’s 1579 letter to Christopher Hatton after his tennis court quarrel with Oxford: “As for the matter depending between the Earl of Oxford and me . . .” (Wilson 100). Surely if anyone knew whether or not Oxford was dead it would have been John Gray.

If Oxford was faking his death it seems unlikely that he would willingly become involved in a public lawsuit. Surely if he was going to disappear he would have to disappear completely. This, however, may be trying to force a logical perspective on a situation that was something less than rational. There may have been nothing public about it; the matter could easily have been tried in a “privy session,” whatever that meant. In any case, there is no trace of this “hearing” in the records, despite the fact, as we shall see, that something of the sort must have taken place.

The week before Gray’s letter, on October 6th, a warrant was issued to pay Henry de Vere a pension of £200 per annum “from Midsummer last past during his life” (SP 38/7/258), a considerable reduction from the £1000 of his father’s annuity. The actual grant came on October 26th. There are two copies extant, containing slight variations in phrasing. Edward de Vere is never referred to in either copy, yet it is granted out of the King’s

special grace, certain knowledge and mere motion, and for divers other good causes and considerations . . . to have, hold, enjoy, and yearly to receive the said annuity or pension of two hundred pounds by the year to the said Henry Earl of Oxon or his assignees from the feast of the nativity of Saint John Baptist last past before the date hereof, for and during the natural life of the said Henry. (PRO C66/1637)

Henry's grant goes on to indicate that the payments are to be paid in quarterly installments "at four usual terms of the year" (March 24, June 24, September 29, December 25). The second copy is even more specific as to the retroactive payment, ordering that "so much as to him is due behind and unpaid of the said annuity or pension of two hundred pounds by the year from the said feast of the nativity of St. John Baptist now last past hitherto" (PRO C66/1657). By this it seems clear that, as of October, no pension had been paid since Oxford's date of death.

On December 8, 1604, not quite two months after Sir John Gray wrote to Hickes about Oxford, we find a letter in neat italic penmanship addressed: "To my very loving friend Sir Michael Hicks knight at his house, These be d{elivere}d." Lord Henry, still aged eleven, is the purported author. It should not go unnoted that Lord Henry's italic signature on this letter does not match the one appended to the letter of September 27th sent to the Earl of Nottingham (which Henry did not write in any case). For the sake of convenience, here we'll credit Henry as the writer, but must note the fact that that the handwriting is a near perfect match with the Countess of Oxford's.²¹

Sir, I understand that the bearer hereof, for an honest service done to his Majesty, and my father, in Forest matters, hath been violently, and unworthily beaten, by Sir Robert Wroth, and his followers, who besides many other former displeasures, at this time maliciously pursues him, with the uncharitable revenge, of withdrawing your favor, (being his Landlord) from him, and so consequently, to loose his tenancy under you. Though your tenant presume he shall find you, as in his report you have ever been, a good Landlord, and myself imagine your discretion and Justice to be such as another's unworthy malice shall bear no rule in your actions, yet at this bearer's instance, I have afforded him my letters, whereby if he find good, I shall acknowledge the same in all thankfulness to yourself. And so bid you heartily farewell [from] Hackney this 8 of December 1604.

Your Loving friend
Henry Oxenford (LAN 89/27)

We might wonder who was "the bearer of this letter" who was so badly beaten by Wroth and his men. But his identity is not the most important question raised by the letter. Henry de Vere writes here of a service being done in the interests of the King and his father entirely in the present tense—almost six months after his father's death!

But the first piece of this puzzle is the fact that the eleven-year-old Henry (or his mother) would write this letter, rather than Sir Francis Vere or Francis Lord Norris, the supposed official

guardians of the eighteenth earl's interests in the Forest, who, again, are conspicuously absent. Second, the seventeenth earl being deceased, it seems odd that the "honest service" in "Forest matters"—for which the bearer of this letter was beaten by Wroth's men—was performed for the King and the seventeenth Earl, rather than for the eighteenth Earl. And finally, Lord Henry appears to write as though his father is alive.

"The old fantastical duke of dark corners"

27 December 1604: Sir Philip Herbert, Knight, was married to Susanna Vere, daughter of the Earl of Oxford, in the Chapel at Whitehall, 1604, &c. (CS NS 3.160)

This citation is from the official entry in the old chequebook of the Chapel Royal, recording the marriage of Philip Herbert to Susan Vere. As we've seen, Henry de Vere was by then the Earl of Oxford. If Edward de Vere were deceased, we might have expected it to say "Susanna Vere, daughter of the late Earl of Oxford." Recall the wording in Camden's diary written the week after the event: "Philip Herbert, brother of the Earl of Pembroke, marries Susanna, daughter of Edward, Earl of Oxford."

Several contemporary accounts detail the elaborate wedding of Susan Vere and Philip Herbert that was the high point of the 1604 holiday season.²² Aware that nothing would please James more than an outpouring of affection for the youthful Herbert, his current favorite, poets and courtiers outdid themselves providing entertainment and gifts, spending lavishly. The King honored Philip with an earldom shortly after, which, although it didn't match his brother Pembroke's in wealth, came close to matching it in prestige.

Among the entertainments were seven Shakespeare plays performed at various times beginning November 1st and ending in February on Shrove Tuesday. These included *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labours Lost*, and *Henry the Fifth* (Schoenbaum 200-01). *Measure for Measure* was performed for the Court community the night before the wedding. The leading character in this play is a duke, described at one point as the "old fantastical duke of dark corners," who goes undercover at the beginning of the play, retiring to a monastery in the habit of a friar, not to reveal himself again to his troubled constituency until the final act.

The dialogue of this dark comedy is pregnant with suggestion, as when the noble friar asks of the comical Lucio what news he has of the missing duke and Lucio replies, "Some say he is with the Emperor of Russia; other some, he is in Rome. . . . It was a mad fantastical trick of him to steal from the state and usurp the beggary he was never born to" (3.2). When the duke, still in disguise, informs Lucio that the duke is not responsible for his misreports, "but the best is, he lives not in them," Lucio responds, "Friar, thou knowest not the duke so well as I do: he's a better woodman than thou takest him for" (4.3). Then there are the duke's own words as he unveils his machinations to the provost: "[Angelo] this very day receives letters of strange tenor; perchance of the duke's death; perchance entering into some monastery" (4.2).

All in all, *Measure for Measure* would seem an odd choice for an entertainment on the night before a wedding, dwelling as it does on the sexual malfeasance of almost every character in the play. Perhaps the choice was based on other considerations. This and the other six Shakespearean plays performed at Court during the 1604-05 holiday season were ascribed to one "Shaxberd" in the Revels Book. The entertainment on the day of the wedding included an elaborate masquerade in which, not only the performers, but all the guests appeared incognito. The reason given for this return to the ancient holiday practice of "disguising" was supposedly to avoid quarrels of precedence among the foreign ambassadors present. King James and the Duke of Holstein chose to remain "uncovered," but many would have remained masked throughout the festivities.

A fortnight after the wedding (January 10, 1605) the Earl of Nottingham wrote a letter to Sir Thomas Lake in which we once again encounter Henry Humberstone. Lake had been Sir Francis Walsingham's personal secretary. He rose rapidly in the Court towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, continuing to rise under James. Now he is a clerk of the Signet and closely associated with Cecil, whom he will eventually succeed as Secretary of State:

I am given to understand by one George Harper and Henry Humberstone, keepers of Hainault and Chapel Hainault walks in his Majesty's Forest of Waltham, that in regard of the question which hath been, and yet is, between the Earl of Oxenford and some others touching those walks, there is a stay made of the keepers fees of 8 pence per diem which hath been formerly allowed and paid to each of them by the treasurer of his Majesty's chamber, and that for the continuance thereof unto them, they are forced to become petitioners to his Majesty for the signing of a new bill—which suit of theirs being reasonable, I have thought good hereby to desire you to draw a bill for them, ready for his Majesty's signature, containing a grant of the same fee of 8 pence per diem to each of them, to be paid as it hath been accustomed, for which your so doing, this shall be your warrant.

From Arundel house, the 10th of January 1604 [=1605]
Your very loving friend, Nottingham (SP 14/12/15).

After holding the letter for two days, Nottingham adds a postscript:

I am given to understand that the said keepers have been unpaid their accustomed fee of 8 pence per diem since our Lady Day [=March 25] 1603, as by the pay books may appear. Therefore, I pray, let their bill be drawn as well to include those arrearages as to continue the said fee unto them.

From Arundel house, the 12th of January 1604 [=1605]
Your very loving friend, Nottingham

By now we've encountered Henry Humberstone in a series of documents, the last one being his and Harper's petition to King James complaining of their illegal ejectment from the two walks

in Hainault through the actions of Sir John Gray and Anthony Witherings. At some point a “stay” has been placed upon their salary, although it is not clear who has placed it, or when—the arrearages mentioned in their petition of the previous September offers little help in this regard. Nottingham first specifies that Harper and Humberstone’s fees “hath been formerly allowed and paid to each of them by the treasurer of his Majesty’s chamber.” Two days later he reverses himself in a postscript, indicating that they have *not* been paid their accustomed fee, “as by the pay books may appear,” since March 25, 1603, the first day of the New Year (and the day after Queen Elizabeth’s death). Yet Anthony Witherings held the keepership of Hainault and Chapel Hainault walks prior to May 5, 1604, when he was dismissed by Oxford for “the many abuses there committed” and replaced with Humberstone. How is this to be explained?

More important to this inquiry, to which Earl of Oxford does Nottingham refer when he states, in the present tense, “. . . in regard of the question which hath been, and yet [still] is, between the Earl of Oxenford and some others touching those walks”? According to Earl Henry’s own letter to Michael Hickes only four weeks earlier, a servant had been beaten for an honest service done to the King and his father in forest matters, suggesting that Nottingham’s instructions to draw up a new bill “for his Majesty’s signature” also concerns Oxford senior.

A “mad fantastical trick”?

If Oxford was alive, where was he? Still in England? In the Forest, perhaps living in the hunting lodge at Chapel Hainault? Did he travel about London incognito? Was he on the Isle of Man—a known refuge for debtors? Was he on the continent? If so, how much control could he possibly have had over his own affairs? And why in the world would he do such a thing?

On April 30, 1605, William Harbert of Glamorgan registered with the Stationers’ Company *England’s Sorrow: Or, A Farewell to Essex: With A Commemoration of the famous Lives, and untimely Deaths of many worthy Personages which have lived in England*. Harbert’s book pays tribute to sixteen persons, including Queen Mary; Queen Elizabeth; Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk; Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Robert Devereux and his father Walter, Earls of Essex; Sir Philip Sidney; Lord Burghley; and the deceased Earls of Pembroke, Worcester, and Rutland. Oxford’s name seems notably absent from this roster.

Compare the case of Charles Blount, Earl of Devonshire. Two days after his death on April 3, 1606, John Chamberlain wrote to Ralph Winwood:

The Earl of Devonshire left this life on Thursday night last, soon and early for his years but late enough for himself, and happy had he been if he had gone two or three years since, before the world was weary of him, or that he had left that scandal behind him. (McClure 1.226)

Chamberlain continues at some length in the same vein. The scandal that Charles Blount Earl of Devonshire left behind him was his long extramarital affair with Penelope Rich née Devereux which had resulted in several illegitimate children. (Strangely, it was the couple’s marriage that

so outraged the King, although he had willingly endorsed Penelope's divorce from her husband not long before.) It may have been due in part to sympathy for the unfortunate family that the Court community responded so quickly with an outpouring of eulogies, among them John Ford's *Fame's Memorial*, John Cooper's *Funeral Tears*, and Samuel Daniel's *A Funeral Poem Upon the Death of the late noble Earl of Devonshire*.

Poetic tributes to a passing aristocrat or poet were a commonplace. That there was not so much as a single tribute for Oxford—who was both—in the months following his death is very unusual. It would be two years before he received a public elegy of any kind.

Following the legal document quoted earlier, dated January 28, 1605 (above, page 24), in which Oxford is referred to as “late” and “deceased,” more of the same would proceed in a steady stream from the Court of Wards, Chancery, and other departments of the government, far too many to cite them all.²³ Although these documents, together with Oxford's Inquisition post mortem and burial register, would seem to offer unshakable proof that he was dead, it is interesting that among this rash of official legal documents, there are none extant that deal in any way with Forest matters, that is, not until around 1610/1611. This lack is noteworthy since we find considerable evidence in personal letters and petitions that would lead us to expect some official documentation dealing with the allocation of Oxford's rights in Waltham Forest to his son or others, now that he is deceased. Recall, for instance, Humberstone and Harper's petition the previous September that the eighteenth Earl's right to the nomination of all officers within the Forest be tried in the Court of Wards, a trial that seems to have never come about. It is due to this lacuna among the official documents that our attention is directed here more to personal correspondence and petitions, as these are more likely to reveal any irregularities in the official party line that Oxford was dead. A letter from Queen Anne's secretary, William Fowler, to Robert Cecil, though undated, is endorsed “1604.” External evidence places it near February 9, 1605.

My most honorable Lord,

There hath been a gentleman of the Earl of Oxford's very earnest with me to know the certainty of a patent past lately of Havering le Bower. I would not without your Honor's knowledge resolve him thereof, that conform to my steadfast desire to serve yourself. I may be the more answerable to your Lordship's directions, and thus expecting your Lordship's pleasure.

I rest your Lordship's truly affected to serve you.

W. Fowler (CP 108/94)

It's worth noting that Fowler, a minor published poet, is also known to have been a spy years before for Francis Walsingham (Read 2.377). In addition to now being the Queen's secretary, it hardly seems far-fetched to consider that, after Walsingham's death, Fowler might have joined Cecil's network of secret agents. Still, there may be nothing sinister at all in Fowler's letter, and one would naturally assume the Earl of Oxford referred to is the eleven-year-old Henry de Vere. This “gentleman of the Earl of Oxford's” who was so concerned about the “patent passed lately of

Havering le Bower” may have been enquiring from Queen Anne’s secretary for the simple reason that the manor of Havering had since earliest times formed part of the dower of the queens of England (Smith 17, 73).

On February 9th, the Countess of Oxford writes to Cecil, apparently on the same matter:

My very good Lord, whereas Sir Edward Cooke hath lately obtained a grant of the Stewardship of the manor of Havering, which I know of right to be my son’s inheritance, and hath never been given [away] by the Kings nor Queens of this Realm when the Earls of Oxford—my son’s Ancestors—have been in possession of their office of the Forest and Havering, as by many evidences and records plainly appeareth. And I am informed that to permit this grant now made to Sir Edward Cooke, to be by him quietly enjoyed, would be an evil precedent for future times, and turn to the disherison [=disinheritance] of my son and his heirs in that part of their right. Wherefore I desire your Lordship’s honorable favor in my son’s behalf, that in his young years his rights may be preserved according to equity and justice. Thus with my hearty commendations to your Lordship, I take my leave from Cannon Row this 9th of February 1604 [=1605]

Your Lordship’s assured friend

E[lizabeth] Oxenford (CP 104/10)

The Countess’s letter raises several questions as she addresses the issue of her son’s rights being preserved according to equity and justice. What was the outcome of the controversy involving Sir John Gray and Edward de Vere? Had Gray perhaps lost his patent to the Stewardship of Havering during the law proceeding that he had written about to Michael Hickes four months earlier, after it was heard by “some gentlemen in the country”? Although there is no record of it, it would seem that he had, since we hear no more of it and none of his future letters are addressed from Havering.

Yet, rather than the rights returning to the Earl of Oxford, it seems the Stewardship of the manor of Havering has been granted to Sir Edward Cooke, grandson of Richard Cooke, younger brother of Lady Burghley. Prior to Sir Edward, three generations of the Cooke family of Gidea Hall had held the Stewardship of Havering (Smith 284), having acquired their foothold soon after the fourteenth Earl of Oxford consigned it to Henry VIII. Sir Edward Cooke was the son of Sir Anthony Cooke, whose illness was referred to in Francis Raine’s 1604 letter to Robert Cecil (above, page 17).

On July 16th and 17th, King James pays a visit “to the ancient Palace of Havering-atte-Bower,” and progresses on to Robert Wroth’s house at Loughton Hall four miles to the northwest (see map page 6) the following evening (Nichols 1.518).

On January 27th, 1606, Sir Robert Wroth the elder dies. His death is reported two weeks later in a letter from Sir Edward Hoby to Sir Thomas Edmondes (Birch 1.47). Wroth’s son—another Sir Robert—will inherit the office of Chief Forester of Waltham Forest (CSPD 1603-1610 8.285), curtailing Henry de Vere’s own rights until after the younger Wroth’s death in 1614.

On February 5, 1606, *The Nine English Worthies* is registered with the Stationers’ Company by Robert Fletcher. As one of the dedicatees, Henry de Vere is inscribed “Earl of Oxenford,” demonstrating a public perception of Henry as the current earl.

Albion's Pearl

Two years after his death, Edward de Vere finally receives an elegy, sandwiched within two separate encomia intended to extol Susan Vere. *Ourania; That is, Endimion's Song and Tragedy* is entered on the Stationers' Register on June 21, 1606, and published before the year is out. Its author, the Puritan minister Nathaniel Baxter, seems to have been a member of Oxford's company on his 1575 tour of the continent. In an acrostic poem on Oxford's motto (feminized in the dedication), Baxter alludes—apparently as an eye-witness—to the harrowing pirate attack on Oxford's ship on his return to England in 1576.²⁴ Despite the fact that the poem is ostensibly for and about Susan Vere, four of the six stanzas that comprise the acrostic are concerned solely with her father.

Baxter refers to Oxford in the past tense, and in language that unmistakably suggests his decease. The first line on de Vere begins, "Valiant whilom the Prince that bare this Mot" (STC 1598). The word "whilom" generally means "that which existed in a former time" and, when specifically referring to a person, means "late" or "deceased" (OED). Baxter uses the same word in a later section supposedly lauding Susan, but which again is devoted almost entirely to Oxford, whom he says was "worthily then termed Albion's Pearl." This most unusual tribute—only four stanzas—seems as much a defense of Oxford as deference to him, with claims that he "never yet received disgrace or foil," that he was "No traitor, but ever gracious, and true," and against "Prince's peace a plot he never drew." Baxter then adds, "But as they be deceived that too much trust: / So trusted he some men, that proved unjust." After commending Oxford for his bounty and learning, Baxter seems to rebuke those who may have held him in disgrace: "Weak are the wits that measure Noblemen / By accidental things that ebb and flow," calling to mind John Clapham's description of Oxford after Queen Elizabeth's death as "a man more noble than fortunate" (85). It is not until the fourth and final stanza that Baxter returns to the ostensible subject of his panegyric, Susan, described as a branch that Oxford left behind, "To spread the glory of th'Oxonian line. . . ."

Thus Baxter publicly buries the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. Why there were no elegies until this one of 1606 is hard to explain. Were Baxter's intentions here nothing more than to pay homage to Susan's rising star at the Court, albeit reflected from her father? Or had it become necessary to settle in some public fashion questions surrounding the strange disappearance of the Earl of Oxford?

"It more concerneth him than me"

In an extraordinary letter of September 28, 1607, one that until now seems to have gone entirely unnoticed, we encounter John Manwood once again. He writes to Sir Michael Hicke because Robert Cecil is about to deprive him of the fee deer in Waltham Forest (an allocated number of deer over and above his salary), without which he says "I cannot serve the place and discharge my duty as I should do." He will have no choice but to resign his stewardship altogether, and "be forced to leave the place presently. . . ." He hopes Hicke will persuade Cecil to reconsider as soon as possible, ". . . for now the King hath commanded that the Swainmote court of the Forest must be duly kept three times every year according to the laws of the Forests, and all courts of Attachment

beside: and there is now presently to be kept a court of Swainmote and court of Attachment.” Since Manwood was writing on September 28 and one of the three Swainmotes was ordinarily scheduled to be held two weeks before Michaelmas (September 29), this session must have been behind schedule. It’s impossible to say when the last Swainmote was held, since all records of the Swainmote for Waltham Forest, other than the June 11, 1604 session (cited above, page 20) are missing for the reign of James I (PRO C 99/137). Whatever the case may have been, Manwood was doubtless anxious to know the outcome of Cecil’s decision, since it would also effect his office in the Swainmote (appointed to him, as we’ve seen, by Oxford).

Manwood’s lengthy letter, with its enclosures, is fascinating, not only for the window it opens into his own life, but for the biographical details it offers on Oxford. He begins:

Good Michael Hicks, let me entreat your good favor to the right honorable my Lord of Salisbury, concerning the Stewardship of the Forest of Waltham; which is this: to let his honor understand that after the death of Master Powell²⁵ in the time of our late gracious Queen Elizabeth, her Majesty did bestow upon me by her gift the Stewardship of the Forest of Waltham as my honorable good Lord the Earl of Nottingham can justify. . . . (LAN 90/10)

Nottingham, recall, was Manwood’s dedicatee for his book, *A Treatise of the Laws of the Forest*. Manwood claims that Nottingham will vouch for him in this matter, explaining that Queen Elizabeth instructed the Master Attorney (Sir Edward Coke) to draw up a patent for him, and further that Robert Cecil took charge of the matter, writing a letter to Sir Robert Wroth to inform him of Manwood’s stewardship. Manwood implies that this new arrangement was not well received by Wroth and the verderers (judicial officers of the forest) who, he writes, “did not wish me well.” Cecil nevertheless set his hand and seal to a patent allowing Manwood the fee deer, which allowance, he says, “continued until the coming in of our gracious King James.” From there, Manwood delves into the arrangement with Oxford:

And at [James’s] Coronation, the Earl of Oxford made his claim by petition to be Chief Warden and Steward of the Forest of Waltham by Inheritance; which petition and claim his Majesty referred to the Lord Chief Justice Popham, and the Attorney General [Coke], to examine his right and the truth thereof, and to certify his Majesty accordingly with diligently examining [the] lease and all objections of his claim and right by the suit and search of sundry ancient records, grants, [and] claims allowed in Act of Parliament for the confirmation of the same to his Ancestors. After many hearings, meetings and conferences about the same, in the end, they did certify his Majesty that it was the Earl of Oxford’s right and inheritance to be the Chief Warden and Steward of the Forest of Waltham, and that his Majesty had no more but only a possession of the same. And they did also show unto his Majesty how the possession of the same did come first unto the Crown. Whereupon his Majesty, finding his [Oxford’s] claim and right to be so just and true, did under the great seal of England restore him to all his right and places and to be Warden and Steward of the Forest in as large and

ample manner as any of his Ancestors ever had or enjoyed the same.

And after this restitution by his Majesty unto the said Lord of Oxford, the said Earl by his letters patent enrolled in the Chancery, did give and grant unto me the Stewardship of the Forest of Waltham, with all fees and profit to the same: As well fee deer as the fee of forty shillings by the year. By reason of which grant, I have held and served the place now full three years and more. . . .

Manwood goes on to state that his grant and patent from Oxford is as good as law can devise. He beseeches Hickes to apprise Cecil of the contents of his letter. Then, on the last page, he writes:

I have sent you herein enclosed the copy of my Lord of Oxford's restitution and also my patent. And I will be ready to attend you to know my Lord's [Cecil's] pleasure herein. My Lord of Oxford himself will also attend his Lord's pleasure as he hath promised me, for it more concerneth him than me.

We shall return to this passage in a moment, but first, let us consider the enclosed restitution and patent, both in Latin with brief preambles and postscripts in English. The restitution matches verbatim the original July 18, 1603 grant. Henry de Vere's name never appears in the grant; he is only understood to be included under the terms "*Edwardo Comiti Oxon Heredibus et Assignatibus suis Imperpetuum*" (or "Edward Earl of Oxford to his heirs and assignees in perpetuity)." Manwood's English postscript reads:

By virtue of which Restitution and grant of the premises the foresaid Edward Earl of Oxenford was seised of all and singular the premises, that is to say of the Wardenship of the whole Forest and of the Stewardship of the whole Forest in his demesne as of Fees and being so seised afterwards, that is to say the First day of December in the First year of his Majesty's Reign over England, the said Edward Earl of Oxenford did grant a Patent of the Stewardship of the said Forest unto John Manwood for life which grant is as followeth. (LAN 90/11)

Manwood's enclosed patent, in Latin, is here translated:

Edward de Vere sends greetings to all who will read this document. You are to know that I, the aforesaid Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford gave and granted and by this present document give and grant to my beloved and well-born John Manwood the office of Steward of the Forest of Waltham of our Lord the King and the office of Clerk of the said Forest of Waltham of our said Lord the King in the said county of Essex and the office of Clerk of the courts of Swainmote and Appurtenances of the said Forest of Waltham of our said Lord the King in the said county of Essex and by this present document I have made, appointed and established this same John Manwood as Steward of the said Forest of Waltham of our said Lord the King in the said county of Essex and Clerk of the courts of Swainmote and Appurtenances of the same Forest to be had, held and enjoyed by the aforesaid John Manwood and his assignees to the end and in respect of the end of the life of the same John Manwood, along with all deer of the following

kind and similar, male and female alike, called in English “fee deer,” within the afore-said Forest, to be paid annually just like all other fees, pledges, considerations and beneficial emoluments and profits whatever so allocated which pertain and belong to the same office in any way whatever. And all similar payments which John Gates, soldier, and Richard Higham Esquire pay fully, freely and undiminished to a value of forty shillings a year issued with my seal on the first day of December in the first year of his Majesty’s reign [in England] and the 27th of his reign in Scotland. (LAN 90/12)

Manwood concludes this one too with an English postscript:

This patent is word for word as all the Earls of Oxford’s patents that they granted of the Stewardship were formerly made as Records do testify.

At no point in Manwood’s lengthy letter, in the copy of Oxford’s restitution, or in the copy of Manwood’s own patent is Henry de Vere named. In Manwood’s letter, the first mention of Oxford obviously refers to Edward de Vere:

. . . the Earl of Oxenford made his claim by petition to be Chief Warden and Steward of the Forest of Waltham by Inheritance . . .

The next refers to Earl Edward as well:

. . . that it was the Earl of Oxford’s right and Inheritance to be the Chief Warden and Steward of the Forest of Waltham . . .

The identification remains clear in Manwood’s next allusion:

And after the restitution by his Majesty unto the said Lord of Oxford, the said Earl by his letters patents enrolled in the Chancery did give and grant unto me . . .

And again, on the last page of his letter:

I have sent you herein enclosed the copy of my Lord of Oxford’s restitution and also my patent.

Here’s where it gets truly problematic. Manwood’s words, “My Lord of Oxford’s restitution,” appear to be a continuing reference to Edward de Vere, based not only upon the preceding text, but because, specifically, it is Edward de Vere who is signified in the restitution that he has enclosed and to which he refers. This is followed by:

And I will be ready to attend you to know my Lord’s pleasure herein. *My Lord of Oxford himself will also attend his Lord’s pleasure as he hath promised me, for it more concerneth him than me.*

In order that this passage makes sense with Earl Edward’s death three years earlier, we are forced to apply to “my Lord of Oxford” a silent shift from the hitherto consistently acknowledged Edward de Vere to his entirely unacknowledged son. We must also presume that Manwood, who

had previously done business on a personal and firsthand basis with Edward de Vere, is now doing business on a personal and firsthand basis with fourteen-year-old Henry, who has “promised” him that he will meet Robert Cecil in person to conduct the business at hand. We would expect to find acknowledgement somewhere of Oxford as “deceased” or “late” or “in his lifetime”—just as he refers to “the death of Master Powell, in the time of our late gracious Queen Elizabeth.” We would also expect a shift in the last passage to something along the lines of: “The *young* Lord of Oxford himself will also attend his Lord’s pleasure,” a distinction we find in various letters for several more years. Again we find no such thing.

By way of comparison, let’s consider a letter, written by John Searle almost two-and-a-half years later (February 15, 1610) to William Trumbull, in which he states:

Our Master remains as uncertain still as at his first coming over what shall betide him. The Steward of the Forest is lately dead, and he hath made some suit for it, but I fear is like to go without it, seeing it is in the Countess of Oxford’s grant, who hath promised it to one Mr. Trevers. It is a place not very gainful, but of good credit. (Downshire 2.241)

Searle’s “Master” was Sir Thomas Edmondes, Ambassador to the Archduke at Brussels since April, 1605, but recalled in the autumn of 1609. Edmondes did not receive the Stewardship at the time of Searle’s letter, although Henry de Vere would send instructions from Paris in 1614 to offer him one of the Forest Walks (Add. 29,549/17 f.33) and, in 1621, Edmondes, who by then held the office of Lieutenant of Waltham Forest, would be granted by Earl Henry the power to execute the office of Warden during his absence while he was overseas (Fisher 119). The “Steward of the Forest lately dead” is certainly John Manwood, whose date of death is given in the DNB only as 1610, but who must have died prior to the 15th of February, the date of Searle’s letter.

We draw attention to Searle’s letter because it appears that, in 1610, he thought the granting of Manwood’s former office was in the power of the Countess of Oxford, not her son. Yet according to Manwood in 1607, matters relating to Waltham Forest directly concerned the Earl of Oxford, who promised to meet with Robert Cecil on the issue. To further complicate the matter, we shall see that Lord Henry did not submit an official claim for his rights in Waltham Forest until late 1611.

Finally!

On January 29, 1608, we begin to hear the kind of definite language in a personal letter that we might have expected to hear almost four years earlier. Sir John Tindall, Master in Chancery, writes to Robert Cecil detailing a complication over the wardship of a boy whose father died in possession of certain small parcels of land about Castle Hedingham, the rights to whose wardship should have passed to Oxford’s three daughters as “the immediate tenants unto the King of the same lands.” Tindall’s first sentence begins:

Being put in trust by you for the preservation of the rights of the three ladies, the daughters of *the late Earl of Oxford, deceased*, concerning the lordship of Castle Hedingham and other their lands in Essex . . .” (SAL 20.33, emphasis added)

In a letter dated 1610 (by the ERO) to (probably) the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Egerton, the Countess complains about the treatment of the schoolmaster at Earl's Colne by "one Harlaken-den," using the phrase "*my late deceased Lord*," a first for the Countess in her considerable correspondence up to that point (ERO D/Q 6/1/5, Acc. A6029/19). By October 9, 1616, when Thomas Carew mentions Oxford's son by Ann Vavasor in a letter to Sir Thomas Roe, "Captain Vere, *the late Earl of Oxford's* base son, and other English captains and officers, are embarked in the service" (CS OS 76.49), such terms are frequently in evidence when referring to Oxford.

But why did it take so long?

The Inquisition post mortem of 1608

On August 13, 1608, an Inquisition post mortem (PRO C142/305/103) is held on a property still in Oxford's possession, consisting of a Gatehouse with a great garden, known as the Covent Garden of Christ Church, along with other houses, messuages, tenements, and newly constructed buildings within the parish of St. Botolph-without-Aldgate, London. Oxford had purchased this property (formerly belonging to Magdalene College) from the Genoese merchant Benedict Spinola on June 15, 1580. The land adjoined Oxford's former mansion of Fisher's Folly and comprised seven acres stretching to the Blue Boar Inn and Boar's Head Inn. The IPM on his holdings in Essex had been held September 27, 1604, three months after his death. Why did it take four years to hold this Inquisition on his Bishopsgate property? It's still not known precisely what triggered it, but whatever it was, it led to a protracted and convoluted case that propelled like a slow motion juggernaut through the courts of Common Law and Chancery to 1615 and beyond, making legal and political history as it went, though not for any of the reasons that engage us here.

On November 26, 1609, Dr. Barnaby Gooche, then Master of Magdalene College, exhibited a petition (CSPD 1580-1625 12.520) to reclaim the property on behalf of the Fellows of the College, in which it was claimed Oxford had sold the property to John Wolley and Francis Trentham on July 4, 1591—information at variance with all other records concerning the case, including the 1608 IPM. Gooche's petition additionally stated that "the said Earl Edward . . . about four years past now died," which is also inaccurate, since November 26, 1609 was over five years past June 24, 1604.

When the suit was eventually tried in 1615 in the common law court of King's Bench, judgment was given in favor of Magdalene College. Edward Coke, by then Lord Chief Justice, immediately rushed to publish the case, reporting that

Edward Hamond [Oxford's sub-tenant], *in the name and stead of the said earl then tenant of the said house*, paid to the said Barnaby Gooche, then master of the said college, £15 of the rent aforesaid, to the said master and fellows of the said college due *at the Feast of St. Michael* [=September 29], *anno Domini 1606*; which £15 the said Barnaby Gooche, then master, received, and by writing under his hand, without a seal, acknowledged that he had received it. (Coke 1237, emphasis added)

Since Coke's report identifies the Earl of Oxford in question as "Edward" up to that point

(Henry is never named), one is left with the unmistakable impression that Earl Edward was alive on September 29, 1606.

The case was retried immediately in the Chancery court of equity, where Lord Chancellor Ellesmere reversed Coke's decision, giving judgment in favor of Henry de Vere (by this time age twenty-two and still residing in France and Italy). It is from the Chancery case that we learn that Earl Edward, along with Spinola and his under-tenants, had invested £10,000 in the construction of 130 houses upon the great garden property—specifically when is never made clear. That Oxford never mentioned any of this in his extant letters—so full of other matters of estate—is certainly curious. Despite the verdict in Chancery, Gooche was persistent, and the case was retried into the 1620s, eventually involving Parliament. A petition presented to the King by the eighteenth Earl in 1619 contains further points of interest about how the “conveyances came to the late Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford,” a portion of which is here extracted:

And the said Earl [Edward] and his tenants and under-tenants have expended £10,000 at the least in buildings and fences in and about the said garden. The said Earl of Oxon and his tenants have quietly enjoyed the same 30 years and more and every succeeding Master and Fellows have always accepted the said rent of £15 and delivered them acquittances. And by the death of the said Earl of Oxon, the reversion of the premises descended to Henry now Earl of Oxenford. (HAR 6806/78)

What stands out is the claim that Earl Edward had enjoyed the property “30 years and more.” As Oxford acquired the property on June 15, 1580, he would, by this account, have been enjoying it until at least 1610. One can only presume this was something of an overstatement; how much of an overstatement remains an open question.

Chapel Hainault revisited

On January 4, 1610, an Inquisition on a survey of Crown lands in Essex, viz. Chapel Hainault Lodge in Waltham Forest, is completed. The record consists of twelve large folio pages indicating the state of the lodge to be in utter decay, with a detailed list of the repairs needed. It seems a good possibility that since the dispute over the keepers' wages five years earlier involving Henry Humberstone and an Earl of Oxford, the walks of Hainault had had no officially recognized keeper.

And for that the foresaid rooms within the said Lodge are but very small and four in number, and this Lodge is now to serve for the habitation of one that is keeper both of the said walk of Chapel Hainault and also of the walk adjoining, called West Hainault, which hath no Lodge at all, we think the same Lodge cannot with any conveniency serve for the necessary use and habitation of the said keeper and of such number of servants as he must of necessity retain for oversight and keeping of both the said walks His Majesty since the delivery of the said commission unto us hath signified his pleasure that he would have made a convenient place at the said Lodge for His Highness's own repose if need be, at his coming to hunt in those two walks, wherein we

have thought it our duties to certify your honors (although the words of our commission extend not so far), that none of the foresaid rooms within the said Lodge will be in any sort fit for that purpose. . . . (LAN 172/48 f251-264)

The Inquisition makes no mention of either the seventeenth or eighteenth Earls of Oxford. However, one of the two surveyors is John Wright, who appears in the records the following year as the Countess of Oxford's steward (ERO T/A 225/33). He would also serve as one of the executors of the Countess's will, in which she grants him one hundred pounds, "presuming he will perform his best endeavor to preserve the rights of my son's estate, and to assist him with his best advice in all courses to advance his good fortunes and to increase his virtue and honor" (ANW PROB11/121). Wright appears to have lived up to the Countess's wishes; he turns up in the records again within a few months of her death involved in several transactions dealing with Havering-atte-Bower, including a lawsuit in the manor court against Sir Edward Cooke of Gidea Hall (ERO D/DMY/15M50/450-1-2-3), who was, you'll recall, the subject of the Countess of Oxford's complaint to Robert Cecil in February 1605 (above, page 44). Henry de Vere would also grant John Wright the office of Warden of Waltham Forest for life at some point after 1621 (Fisher 119).

What is further puzzling about the 1610 survey of Chapel Hainault Lodge is the fact that two years earlier, on February 23, 1608, there had been an "Order to the Woodward of Waltham, Essex to fell 24 loads of timber in Hainault walk, for building Chapel Hainault Lodge." At the same time there was issued a "Warrant to pay to John Wright £71 18s 4d for repairs, &c., at Chapel Hainault Lodge, in Waltham Forest" (CSPD 1603-1610 8.408). For whatever reason, these repairs appear to have been put on hold for two years. There is evidence that the repairs did take place following the January 1610 survey, as provided in two subsequent Warrants to deliver to Robert Treswell,²⁶ Surveyor General of the woods south of the Trent: one on March 19 authorizing £243 6s 8d for repairs at Chapel Hainault Lodge and one for £60 on December 8 for finishing Hainault Lodge and stables (CSPD 1603-1610 8.593, 651).

Whatever happened at Hainault and Chapel Hainault walks between the Earl of Nottingham's January 1605 letter to Thomas Lake ("the question which hath been, and yet is, between the Earl of Oxenford and some others touching those walks") and the January 1610 Inquisition, is another item for the mystery column.

ALSO in 1610, Thomas Milles publishes *The catalogue of honor, or treasury of true nobility, peculiar to Great Britain*, dedicated jointly to Salisbury (Cecil) and Northampton (Henry Howard). Milles's books (around a dozen) were all printed by either James Roberts or William Jaggard (printer/publishers of a number of Shakespeare's works). This 1610 offering contains a "Catalogue of the Earls of Oxford," in which Edward de Vere is said to have "died the 24 of June, 1604, and was buried at Hackney" (STC 17926). A similar book would appear in 1619 offering identical information, possibly copied from the earlier book.²⁷

Milles's *Catalogue* of 1610 exhibits the first publication recording the date of death and place of burial of the seventeenth earl, which has been generally accepted for centuries. The question remains: Is this the truth, pure and simple? Or is it "the truth" purely by virtue of print?

“An unfortunate young noble orphan”

On July 18, 1611, Henry de Vere, now eighteen, though still legally a minor, writes the following emotional missive to Robert Cecil:

Whatsoever I can say to you my Lord is short of the sense I have of the kindness you have done me. Acknowledgment is so due to you that you are sure of it at the rate of a whole life; and I wish if it could be without your disadvantage, that it were once in my power to let you see how I would return your favors. In the meantime my Lord, make account of me as one that is passionately—Your faithful humble servant, Oxford. (CP 197/149)

Here for the first time we can be certain that we're hearing from Lord Henry himself rather than from someone else through him. At eighteen he's determined to take his life into his own hands. His motive is clear from the fact that on the following day, July 19th, the Privy Council directs a letter to Cecil/Salisbury (as Lord Treasurer) to pay the young earl's £200 annuity directly to him, and not to his mother, regardless of his minority (CSPD 1611-1618 9.61). Not altogether surprisingly, three days later, on the 22nd of July, the Countess petitions Salisbury and Howard/Northampton to disallow this transference, expounding at length on the evil influence of her son's cousin, one John Hunt, and how he has set out “to corrupt and poison my son's tender years.” Of the annuity, the Countess writes: “[Hunt] hath moved and persuaded my son to misinform the King that I receive and dispose his Annuity out of the Exchequer to mine own use and upon that misinformation to procure his Majesty's Letters for his own receiving it.”

Since the Countess's lengthy letter and enclosed articles can be read in full in Alan Nelson's book (433-37), we'll offer just a few of her more pointed phrases:

[This] young nobleman, neither of years, nor judgment to advise himself, wanting the guidance of a father, and past the government of a mother . . . since (having no means, or estate of his own) he hath lived at a very high proportion, more suitable to the estate and degree of a nobleman than to the means or estate of his father, or himself . . . I have yearly disbursed (besides all his) a great part of mine own little estate for his maintenance, and have always been well contented to confine myself to a private life and low course of expense, that I might in some small measure repair the decayed fortunes of his house . . . I therefore humbly beseech your Lordships (in the midst of your many serious, and weighty affairs of the State) to afford so much time for the redeeming of an unfortunate young noble orphan out of extreme and imminent ruin. . . .

Consider next the following citation from the Calendar of the manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury, itself undated, but labeled by a later archivist “1603?”:

Waltham Forest: Brief of the evidences of Henry de Vere, Earl of Oxford, manifesting his right to the custody and stewardship of the King's forest of Waltham, Essex, and to the custody of the King's house and park of Havering at Bower, Essex. (SAL 15.392)

By an Inquisition taken after the death of Edward, Earl of Oxon, the earl is found to die seised of the said Custody and Stewardship of the said Forest, and of the said Custody of the said house and park of Havering, and all the several fees, profits, jurisdictions, and authorities, before in the said *quo warranto* [=by what authority] found to belong to the said offices, and likewise in the said Inquisition found to have belonged to the said Earl at his death, by reason of the office aforesaid. And herein and likewise found several patents granted by the said Earl to Sir John Rainsforth and others of the Lieutenancy of the said Forest, and of the keeping of Havering house and park, which patents were found to be therein being. (CP 146/17)

I have no doubt that the compilers erred in dating this document to 1603.²⁸ Such a transaction in the interests of the eighteenth earl could obviously not be earlier than the date of his father's death: June 24, 1604. Since the record also refers to Edward de Vere's Inquisition post mortem, its earliest possible date would be on or after September 27, 1604, although the following letters set its most probable date to between October 13 and November 15, 1611. We find a prelude in the Countess's letter of complaint of July 1611 to Cecil and Howard cited just above, in which she writes, additionally, "my son's right and interest in the said Forest [of Waltham, is] much prejudiced." Then on October 13, 1611, Sir Thomas Lake writes to Salisbury:

His Majesty hath commanded me to signify to your lordship that my lord of Oxford hath been here this day a suitor for his right to Havering park . . . his Majesty is loath to deny right to the meanest subject he hath, much less to a person of his rank. His Highness therefore desireth your lordship that for the furtherances of his own resolution, my lord of Oxford may be called and his right looked into and his majesty advertised how it standeth . . . (Nelson 439)

Evidently the King granted Lord Henry the Stewardship of Havering shortly after since a letter addressed to Henry de Vere the following month (November 15th) commands him "to forbear killing deer in Havering park, whereof he has the charge" (CSPD 1611-1618 9.88). Three weeks later, on December 6th, the Countess writes to Sir Christopher Hatton (Remembrancer of the Exchequer c.1616, and cousin of the Lord Chancellor of the same name under Queen Elizabeth):

You know his Majesty hath been pleased (though not without much difficulty) to give allowance to my son's hereditary interest in the custody of Havering house and park, whereby there is made unto him a fair entrance for recovery of his other right within the forest . . . (Add. 29,549 f31)

Thus, the custody of the manor of Havering-atte-Bower was finally recovered, but only the manor, not the stewardship of the Forest. It is not clear what immediate effect this had on Sir Edward Cooke, who had gained the stewardship of Havering by February 9, 1605, according to the Countess's letter to Cecil of that date (above, page 44). That Cooke was eventually taken to task seems apparent from a lawsuit in the manor court of Havering-atte-Bower on June 24, 1613, brought against him by John Wright, the Countess's steward (ERO D/DMY/15M50/453). In any event, Lord

Henry's "other right within the forest"—that is, the Stewardship of Waltham itself—was delayed for a few more years, as is evident from the following three documents.

AFTER his mother's death in January, Henry de Vere was making arrangements on March 22, 1613, to go abroad, where he would reside in France and Italy for the next five years:

To all Christian people to whom this shall come, I Henry de Vere Earl of Oxenford, Viscount Bulbeck, Lord of Badlesmere and Scales, Lord Great Chamberlain of England and keeper in fee of the King's Majesty's house and park of Havering-atte-Bower within the county of Essex send greeting. Whereas I the said Henry Earl of Oxenford (by God's permission) intend forthwith to travel beyond the Seas and desire in the time of my absence there to have the said house and park so governed and kept as may give contentment and satisfaction to his Majesty. (NRO FH3002)

Lord Henry indicates that he has knighted Sir Christopher Hatton his "Lieutenant of the Forest of Waltham," but this is clearly an overstatement, no doubt pursuant to his ongoing claim, since the record then specifies that Hatton is granted only "the oversight, government, and direction of the said house and park during all the time of my absence beyond the Seas."

Lord Henry's Stewardship of the entire Forest would remain on hold for one more year. Once it was conferred, Hatton's grant would be amended to reflect the change:

This Indenture made the nine and twentieth day of March in the twelfth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James [=1614] . . . Between the Right Honorable Henry de Vere Earl of Oxenford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England and Chief Warden in fee of the Forest of Waltham within the county of Essex . . . doth give and grant to the said Sir Christopher Hatton his Lieutenant of the same Forest to have, hold, enjoy and exercise the same office of Lieutenant of the said Forest by himself or by his sufficient deputy for whom he will answer for and during the will and pleasure of the said Earl, together with all fees, profits, advantages, preeminences and authorities to the said office of Lieutenant belonging or appertaining in as large and ample manner as any Lieutenant of the Forest aforesaid hath heretofore held and enjoyed or of right ought to have held and enjoyed the same. And the said Earl further, by this present, will and require all and every the Foresters and other Officers and Ministers of the said Forest whatsoever, that they be obedient, aiding, and assistant to the said Sir Christopher Hatton or to his deputy in the execution of the said office of Lieutenancy of the same Forest. (NRO: FH3085)

The final admonishment may have been directed at foresters used to taking direction from Sir Robert Wroth the younger, as we learn from Chamberlain's letter to Carleton on March 31, 1614, two days after the above Indenture.²⁹

Upon the death of Sir Robert Wroth (who was a great commander or rather by the King's favor an intruder in Waltham Forest), Sir Christopher Hatton set the Earl of

Oxford's claim on foot (being during his absence abroad put in trust with all his business), and hath so wrought with the King that though he had in a manner bestowed and given away all the walks, and notwithstanding the great opposition and contestation of the Earl of Pembroke, the Lord Lisle and others, yet he hath not only preserved the earl's right, but gotten the disposing of the walks, reserving one to the Lady Wroth, one to Sir Thomas Lake, and Sir Thomas Edmonds challengeth a promise from my Lord of another. The rest by the King's own appointment are bestowed on Sir Christopher and his brother Thomas. (McClure 1.520)

Let's return then for a moment to Earl Henry's "Brief of evidences" for his custody and Stewardship of Waltham Forest and manor of Havering (which should be dated October-November 1611). The inherent contradiction in its very existence should not go unnoted. Why did Henry de Vere have to submit this Brief in the first place? Custody of the Forest should have been his already, granted by the King as a hereditary right to his father and his father's heirs. Why did it come "not without much difficulty," as his mother indicates? Was it common at the time for all such perquisites to be maintained only at the price of continual petitions?

Only a single oblique acknowledgement of Edward de Vere's grant of the Forest rights to Francis Norris and Francis Vere appears, in the same letter of December 6, 1611, from the Countess to Hatton as partially cited above, in which she writes, "my Lord his father for avoiding of this hazard did in his life so settle the estate both of the custody of the said house and park and also of his right in the Forest as my son hath not to do in either, till he come of full age" (Add. 29,549 f31).

Yet hazard was not avoided, and that very settlement of the estate seems not to have been recognized elsewhere, as we have seen. While there were often overlapping jurisdictions, Earl Henry's "Brief of evidences" nevertheless contains the further conundrum in that it should be the very place we would expect to find a reference to his father's grant of the same to Francis Norris and Francis Vere until the year following his majority, a reference that's conspicuously absent. The Brief contains only two references to Edward de Vere, the first regarding the Inquisition post mortem cited above, which, in lieu of Norris and Vere, refers instead to "patents granted by the said Earl to Sir John Rainsforth and others of the Lieutenancy of the said Forest, and of the keeping of Havering house and park"—individuals not mentioned in Oxford's Inquisition post mortem, nor in his June 18, 1604 Forest grant. So far I have been unable to find any trace of the said grants to "Rainsforth [or Rainsford] and others," and have no idea when, or even if, Oxford truly granted these patents.

The second and final reference to Edward de Vere in Lord Henry's Brief is on the last folio, which contains the marginal notation "*Julij j Jacobi*" ("July in the first year of James"). This matches what we know of the grant to which it refers—it did in fact take place on July 18, 1603.

A patent from the King reciting that whereas John Earl of Oxon 4 Henry 8 [=1512/13] was seised in fee of the Bailiwick, Custody, and Stewardship of the Forest of Essex, and of the Custody of the house and park of Havering with all fees &c. Now the King upon consideration thereof had, doth restore to Edward Earl of Oxon and his heirs the said Custody and Stewardship of the said Forest, and the Custody of the said house and park

with the fees &c. Only there is added a Commandment to the earl his heirs and assigns not to impeach any person for any walk, Custody &c. of any park of the said Forest, house, or park which holds the same, by virtue or color of any grant made by the King's Majesty, the late Queen Elizabeth, or any other his Majesty's progeny under the great seal of England or any other seal, without the consent of the King's Majesty, his heirs or successors, in that behalf first had and obtained. (CP 146/17)

The foregoing paragraph is an accurate précis of the grant itself. As we've seen, the added commandment to forebear impeaching any person "who holds the same" may have been the legal loophole by which Sir Robert Wroth and Sir John Gray managed their own footholds in Waltham Forest. But that the Stewardship was clearly restored to Earl Edward "and his heirs" is maintained by the language of Earl Henry's Brief, despite the various contradictions we've noted.

In a letter dated June 17, 1612, Chamberlain describes the King's Progress, explaining that, after his Majesty left Wansted, "he goes to Havering, which is in the custody of the Countess of Oxford, who entertains him likewise at her own charge" (McClure 1.357). Here is more to indicate that Havering did pass to Henry de Vere in 1611, though at the time it remained in the custody of his mother, since Henry was still a minor. This again raises the question of John Manwood's 1607 statement to Hickes concerning the Stewardship of the Forest, that "My Lord of Oxford himself will also attend [Cecil's] pleasure, as he hath promised me, for *it more concerneth him than me.*"

The Countess's will

Sadly it seems the Countess did not live to enjoy the pleasures of Havering. On November 25, 1612, she made out her will, in which she asked to be buried as near to her husband's body as possible, a commonplace stipulation in a widow's will. Her additional request, that it "be done as privately and with as little pomp and ceremony as possibly may be," appears less common, as the funeral specifications of widows at that time, if included at all, more often requested that they be "decently and honestly brought towards my burial with such divine service as the laws of this realm will permit and suffer," sometimes willing a "mass and dirge song for my soul the day of my burial," or at the very least, to be "comely buried and brought forth" with "respect to my dignity and state."³⁰

On January 9, 1613, John Chamberlain wrote:

The Countess of Oxford is dead of this new disease, and left her son towards £1500 land, all her jewels and stuff, on condition he pay her legacies which rise to £2000, and bestow £500 on a tomb for his father and her. (McClure 1.405)

Thus it would seem that for some eight years, Oxford's body rested either in a location unknown to anyone but his family, or in one the Countess considered too modest for his station, stipulating in her will "that there be in the said Church erected for us a tomb fitting our degree." However private her request for a funeral, the tomb she envisioned was not nearly so modest; £500

was a very handsome sum, even for an earl. But as we shall see, after a careful consideration of the tombs that once occupied the Church of St. Augustine at Hackney, it seems questionable that this tomb was ever built.

“My name be buried where my body is”

There has been a great deal of confusion about the final resting place of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. It begins with the account by Percival Golding (the son of Oxford’s uncle, Arthur Golding) in his unpublished manuscript, *The Armes, Honours, Matches, and Issues of the auncient and illustrious family of Veer* written c. 1619/20:

Edward de Vere, only son of John, born the twelfth day of April Anno 1550, Earl of Oxenford, High Chamberlain, Lord Bolebec, Sandford and Badelsmere, Steward of the Forest in Essex, and of the Privy Council to the King’s Majesty that now is. Of whom I will only speak what all men’s voices confirm: he was a man in mind and body absolutely accomplished with honorable endowments. He died at his house at Hackney in the month of June Anno 1604 and *lieth buried at Westminster*. (HAR 4189, emphasis added)

How much of this is true? We know that Oxford was a member of the so-called “Great Council” engaged in organizing James’s smooth entry into England at the beginning of his reign, but there is no evidence for him as a member of the Privy Council. Then there is the pregnant phrase, “Of whom I will only speak what all men’s voices confirm . . .” Why did Percival speak of his kinsman in this cryptic manner when he expounds at much greater length upon many of the earlier earls of Oxford? Most perplexing, after giving the standard date of death for Oxford, Percival then informs his readers that Oxford lies buried at Westminster, a statement that has given rise to a great deal of speculation among Oxfordians, based on possible hints in the dedicatory poems of Basse, Jonson, Milton et al, that “Shakespeare” was buried in Westminster Abbey. If this is true, it would have to have taken place at some point after the Countess drew up her will in 1612 (see below). Golding, Oxford’s near contemporary, should have been in a position to know the truth about his cousin’s final resting place.

Adding to the confusion over Oxford’s burial site is B.M. Ward’s biography of the earl, in which he writes:

The Earl of Oxford was buried on July 6th, 1604, on the north side of the chancel in the Church of St. Augustine, Hackney; and his widow was buried beside him in 1612.

A monument was at some subsequent date erected to mark the spot. We know that this monument was not erected until after the death of the Countess, for in her will dated November 25th, 1612, she writes: “I joyfully commit my body to the earth . . . desiring to be buried in the Church of Hackney . . . as near unto the body of my said late dear and noble Lord and husband as may be . . . Only that I will that there be in the said Church erected for us a tomb fitting our degree, and of such charge as shall seem good to mine executors.” (370)

It should be noted that at the time of her death, the Countess was no longer living at Hackney, having sold King's Place to Fulke Greville in 1609. At the time of Oxford's 1604 IPM, she was listed as living at Hornchurch, in the Forest. By February 9, 1605, she was living at Cannon Row in London (above, page 44). Ward goes on to quote John Strype, lecturer in the Church of St. Augustine from 1689 to 1723, who

thus describes what must have been the Oxford tomb in his *Continuation of Stow's Survey* (1721): "On the north side of the chancel, first an ancient Table Monument with a fair grey marble. There were coats-of-arms on the sides, but torn off. This monument is concealed by the schoolmaster's pew."

Ward explains that, by 1721, the church was falling into disrepair as the growth of Hackney in the course of the eighteenth century as a suburb of London necessitated something larger. "In 1790 an Act of Parliament was passed authorizing the demolition of the old Church and the construction of a new one—the present Church of St. John-at-Hackney."

Ward claims that, based on Strype and on *The Diary and Correspondence of Ralph Thoresby* (published by the Rev. Joseph Hunter, 1830), an entry dated June 8, 1712 makes it possible to locate the position occupied by the Oxford monument. Although the monument itself is gone, Ward mentions an eighteenth-century drawing of it then in the Hackney Public Library, which showed where there had been two coats-of-arms, "probably those of Vere and Trentham." Ward feels it unlikely that it ever contained any identification beyond the two coats-of-arms, but thinks it can be located on a bit of lawn where the old church used to be, based on the position of

two upright stones, set up to mark the north-east and south-east corners of the Church. Starting from the north-east stone, mark off six yards towards the south-east corner, and from this point mark off seven-and-a-half yards westward. (371)

More than one writer has promulgated the myth created by Ward.³¹ To set the record straight, the following citations are taken directly from Hunter's 1830 edition of Thoresby's *Diary*, the first entry dated January 16, 1709:

Walked with Mr. Wyat, the bookseller, to Hackney, where Mr. Newcome, their pious and learned vicar prayed and preached excellently. I afterwards viewed the monuments in the church, and was particularly pleased to find that of Henry Thoresby, Esquire, so well preserved, his and his wife's and daughter's statues (the Lady Hardress) all entire, with the arms. I dined with the worthy Mr. Newcome, who received me kindly; showed me his father's picture. Afternoon, Mr. Strype, the pious lecturer, preached excellently . . . (2.23-4)

Thoresby's entry for June 8, 1712, to which Ward specifically refers, reads:

Morning, read, &c.; then, walked to Hackney, where heard two excellent sermons Mr. Newcome, the worthy Vicar, invited me to his house, and showed me a register of the parish, that he lately recovered, wherein are very many observables; . . . he showed

me also a letter of Bishop David Dalbin, a benefactor, who lieth buried next my said kinsman, that the Earl of Oxford, who died 1604, was buried there. Having taken leave of him and Mr. Strype, I returned by Shoreditch (2.113-15)

That is Thoresby's entire and only diary reference to Edward de Vere. Recall that Ward wrote, "The evidence of Ralph Thoresby in 1712 confirms the evidence of Strype as to the position of the monument and also shows that it contained no inscription at the time of his visit." All Thoresby indicates is that his Jacobean relative Henry Thoresby's monument was at Hackney, and that the vicar Mr. Newcome showed him a letter written by a third party—Bishop David Dalbin (who was himself buried next to Henry Thoresby)—indicating that the Earl of Oxford, who died in 1604, was also buried there. Dalbin (spelled variously Doulbín, Doulben, Dolben), a one-time Bishop of Bangor who died in 1633, could have obtained his information that Oxford was buried at Hackney from any number of sources. But that's not something we can learn from Thoresby. He gives no description whatsoever of Oxford's tomb. What is interesting is that Thoresby didn't learn that Oxford was buried at Hackney from the "recovered" parish register—which contained "very many observables"—but only from Bishop Dalbin's letter, lending further consideration to the discrepancies in the Hackney parish registers noted earlier.

Ward also writes that while the monument itself has disappeared, "it is possible accurately to locate the position occupied by the Oxford monument" from the evidence he quotes from Strype and Hunter's June 8, 1712 journal entry. In fairness, the table monument described by Strype may indeed have been Oxford's, but there is nothing in Thoresby's account to corroborate its position. Thoresby broaches the subject only once more, on July 29, 1712:

After my return, enquired for Mr. Strype of Low Leyton, and Mr. Henry of Hackney; but neither of them were in town. Was with both the printers, and at the rolling press, and lastly to consult Mr. Lens, an ingenious artist, about drawing the monument at Hackney, and some medals. Saw some curious drawings of his with the pen, and others he has engraved also in mezzotinto: though more than half wearied, yet walked to Bishopsgate about business. Evening, within, read, &c. (2.148-9)

It stands to reason that the rendering of the "monument at Hackney," for which Ralph Thoresby hoped to engage Mr. Lens's services, was for his late relative, Henry Thoresby, and not the eighteenth-century drawing of the table monument that Ward saw in the Hackney Public Library.

Considering Thoresby's actual words together with some further investigation, it seems at this point that ascribing the monument to Oxford is based on the flimsiest of evidence. According to the clerks at the London Borough of Hackney Archives, a plan of the church memorials was made shortly before demolition in 1795 on which all the monuments in the church (53 total) are marked along with the names of the deceased, if known. The tomb of Bishop David Dalbin is shown due east of Henry Thoresby's, verifying the entry in Ralph Thoresby's diary. The tomb due northwest of the Thoresby monument is marked "old gothic tomb." All the others on the plan are identified by name with the exception of five, which are listed as "Brassless" and a few others as "Brass Plate of a Knight & Lady," "The Happy Pair," and "Niche."

As to the drawing of the tomb mentioned by Ward, there are actually three, by two artists, part of a collection compiled by J.R.D. Tyssen, a nineteenth-century antiquarian. The first artist, T.H. Fisher, was active in the 1790s and recorded many of the memorials in the church prior to demolition. Fisher drew two similar renditions of the tomb; one apparently marked by Tyssen as "believed to be the tomb of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford," the other labeled simply "tomb 42," which corresponds to the "old gothic tomb" on the memorial plan.

The second artist, B. Saunders, was also active in the late eighteenth-century. His rendition of the tomb is identical to Fisher's, but Tyssen's catalogue identifies it as the tomb of Henry Percy, sixth Earl of Northumberland, who died June 30, 1537 at Hackney. There is no indication of Tyssen's source, but he indicates of both the "Oxford" and the "Northumberland" tombs that they lie in the northeast corner of the church and are of "dark blue marble"—at odds with Strype's "fair grey marble." The two artists' renditions are so similar, it is almost certain they are of the same tomb—but whether Oxford's or Northumberland's or someone else's entirely, no one can say.

One final observation: Oxford's name does not appear in an index of the Hackney parish register compiled by Tyssen. Regarding this omission, the present senior archivist at the London Borough of Hackney Archives has commented, "I can only assume that he thought the fact was so well known he did not record it."³²

A world of shadows

Our hope was that by close examination of contemporary documents we could clear up the mysteries surrounding Oxford's death and find answers to the questions: Why no funeral? Why no elegies, no literature of mourning? Why no tomb or monument? That hope has been dashed. If anything, the mysteries have only multiplied.

It is clear that Oxford prepared for death, or for some kind of "metamorphosis," shortly before June 24, 1604—but that he actually died on that date is far less certain now than it was before we began our research. The evidence, or lack of evidence, of his death that one would expect to find in letters passed between members of his Court community, evidence that is so obviously missing, defies any explanation other than that, for some reason, his death was either kept secret, or else he was pretending to be dead. The most suggestive evidence in this latter regard includes the letter from Sir John Gray to Sir Michael Hicckes of October 12, 1604 (page 37), the letter from Henry de Vere (or his mother?) to Hicckes of December 8, 1604 (page 39), the letter from the Earl of Nottingham to Sir Thomas Lake of January 10, 1605 (page 41), and John Manwood's letter to Hicckes of September 28, 1607 (page 46). Even Sir Edward Coke's 1615 report seems to indicate that Oxford was alive as of September 29, 1606 (page 50). The many letters from the period following June 24, 1604 that do not mention him at all might, perhaps, be explained in some other way, were it not for the evidence of those that do.

Yet this evidence is confronted by another set of documents, those issued by officials in the course of their duties, which treat matters related to Oxford as though he were in fact dead. Somewhere between these two extremes fall several ambiguous letters from his wife and son during

the period 1604-08, letters to officials that deal with matters that would normally follow the death of a husband and father, yet never specifically referring to him as “late” or “deceased.” These contradictions beg for an explanation, something that more research may provide, but that is not yet clear at this time.

In seeking for an explanation that ignores no evidence, that accounts for everything, we must ask ourselves how thoroughly “the past” is ever disclosed by primary documents and what degree of truth can we, in all honesty, expect from them. Even under the most ideal circumstances, 400-year-old accounts, whether personal letters or official records, can never be taken as one hundred percent trustworthy. Human nature being what it is, our own times should warn us that the documents that would hold the most interest for us are the very ones most likely to have been destroyed. Some we possess may have been altered, some even created to achieve a desired effect. Of the difficulties he faced when dealing with this period, historian and biographer Joel Hurstfield has observed: “We are in a world of shadows,” adding:

There is evidence that Burghley, who was the queen’s closest adviser for forty years, engaged in some deliberate destruction of his papers—and that was not in order to save space! (184, 186)

Where records are straightforward and unambiguous, it may be possible to report the past directly without second-guessing, but this will never be true of the period we study, surely one of the most secretive and hidden in the long history of the English-speaking peoples. Truly it is “a world of shadows,” but no shadow is as deep as that which “lies across the memory of the Earl of Oxford,” as noted not only by A.B. Grosart, but also by E.K. Chambers (vii), a shadow that, by the end of Oxford’s life, had become close to impenetrable. —————



Notes

1 It's been established with almost total certainty that Oxford did not die of the plague, as has often been proposed (Altrocchi 1+).

2 For greater ease of understanding, all documents (including formerly printed material) have been rendered in modernized spelling and punctuation. Documents in Latin have been translated. Transcripts of documents reproduced here in modernized, translated, cut or condensed versions, will be made available in their original, full length versions on the Internet. For information on these, contact the author at ChristophPaul@hotmail.com.

3 The Elizabethan and Jacobean New Year began on March 25. Consequently, any date written between January 1 and March 24 reflects what we moderns would consider the previous year. For this article, all dates on primary documents falling in the first quarter of the year have been transcribed as originally written, followed by the modern date in square brackets. Citations from printed materials dating to the first quarter of the year have been silently amended, if necessary, to reflect modern dating.

4 According to Fisher, "The Forest of Essex, known from the beginning of the 14th century as the Forest of Waltham, and in modern times as Epping Forest, was one of those large districts called Royal Forests, which were once common in England; and were so ancient, says Sir Edward Coke (4th Inst. 319), as no record or history doth make any mention of their erections or beginnings. Being for the most part uninhabited and abounding in woods, they were set apart for the support of the King's wild animals; and, though unfenced, were protected by fixed boundaries, and by established laws, with magistrates, judges, officers, and ministers" (1-2).

5 Sir John Gray's mother, Anne Windsor, was daughter to Sir Thomas Windsor, who was brother to Edward, third Baron of Windsor, husband to Catherine Vere, Oxford's half-sister (making Catherine Vere Sir John Gray's great aunt). Gray was also related to Catherine Vere through his wife, Elizabeth Neville, who was the great granddaughter of Eleanor Windsor, sister to William, second Baron of Windsor (Gray's maternal great grandfather). There was, additionally, a relationship between Oxford and Gray through the Neville side of his wife's family via their affiliation in marriage to the thirteenth Earl of Oxford as well as through Catherine Vere's mother, Dorothy Neville, both branches sharing common descent from Ralph Neville, first Earl of Westmoreland.

6 There are differing opinions as to the etymology of the name *Swainmote*, or *Swanimote*. The OED indicates the word means "meeting of swineheards" (3185). However, Fisher maintains that it always retained the Anglo-Saxon word *Swein*—a Minister—signifying the *Court of Ministers*, as the various officers of the forest were anciently styled (73).

7 According to Fisher, the name *Hainault* is a comparatively modern corruption of a word variously written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as *Hineholt* or *Hyneholt*; in the sixteenth as *Inholt* or *Henholt*; and later as *Henault* or *Heynault*. *Hainault* occurs in the records for the first time in 1719-20 (15). Contemporary spelling suggests it was pronounced "Hennold."

8 Sir Francis Vere is listed in the State Papers as a Keeper in the Forest of East Beare, with Sir Thomas Cornwallis as his Deputy-keeper, on March 18, 1608. But this was entirely unrelated to Oxford's grant, as the Forest of East Beare was in the county of Hants (CSPD 1603-1610 8.414).

9 It is not entirely clear to which "Plaistow house" Johnson refers in his Complaint of 1610. The village of Plaistow is located in West Ham in Waltham Forest (see map page 6), just south of Hainault. According to the 1604 IPM, Oxford was not only still seised "of diverse other lands, tenements and hereditaments in West Ham," but also of "a certain farm and diverse lands, tenements and hereditaments called or known by the name of Plaistow ... in the parish of Halstead" (PRO C142/286/165). Halstead is in northeast Essex, not far from Earls Colne and Castle Hedingham.

10 See Kingsford 3.49 and 3.124 for slightly different versions of the two citations from Collins.

11 To fully grasp the sheer quantity of deaths, births and marriages so faithfully recorded in Camden's diary, I urge the reader to check out Sutton's website (see Works Cited). Note that Camden did record the death of the sixteenth Earl of Oxford in his *Annales of the reign of Elizabeth*, c. 1615.

12 The letter is misdated to June 7, 1604; I am grateful to John Rollett for reviewing the original letter in the British Library and informing me of the correct date.

13 CP 105/139, 105/153, 109/38, 114/61, 127/87; SP 15/38/64; Bibliothèque Nationale 01 FR 15983 f.312v-317; CSPV 1603-07 10.168; Gawdy 92-3; Jeayes 146-47; Laffleur 239.

14 As I've been able to see only facsimiles of these records so far, my observations are limited.

15 In addition to the puzzle of Oxford's entry being out of chronological order in Register A (which needs to be checked for other such occurrences), to the left of his name is what Paul Altrocchi describes as "an antique asterisk in pencil consisting of a large 'X' with a period in each of the four spaces created," and that this mark "can neither be dated nor interpreted but was clearly made many decades later than the time of burial since pencils with such a sharp point did not appear until the late 1600s" (15-16). Further research is necessary to confirm Altrocchi's conclusion regarding the "pencil." This X with a period in each of the four spaces is also the alchemical symbol for vinegar or acid.

16 Harper was not named in either of these records; he may have been one of Humberstone's "sufficient deputies," as stipulated in the terms of his grant.

17 An Inquisition post mortem is not the same as a coroner's inquest, or a medical post mortem carried out after a suspicious death. It is rather a local enquiry into the lands held by persons of status, to discern whatever income and rights in their property may have been due to the Crown.

18 Shakespeare may here be alluding to the death of Christopher Marlowe, another controversial figure whose date of decease has also been called into question.

19 Michael Hickeys's mother was Juliana Penn, landlady in the c. 1591 Thomas Churchyard/Earl of Oxford rent argument (Moore Smith 447-50).

20 See note 5 above.

21 Nor does the December 8, 1604, letter (LAN 89/27) match Henry de Vere's later italic script, extant in numerous letters.

22 CSPV 1603-1607 10.206-07; McClure 1.198-99; Lee 66-69; Winwood 2.43.

23 Representative examples include: PRO WARD3/24 (February 6, 1605); PRO WARD3/21 (November 21, 1605); PRO STAC8/289/30 (November 25, 1606); PRO C33/115 (November 21, 1607); PRO C2/01/58 (May 30, 1608); PRO C2/01/58 (June 12, 1608). Transcripts of these records may be viewed online at <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/intro/index.htm>.

24 See my summation of the previous Oxfordian rebuttals to Nelson's flawed interpretation of this acrostic, along with my own additional arguments, in Endnote 4 of my article "Oxford, Hamlet and the Pirates: The Naked Truth."

25 Thomas Powle was under-steward of Waltham Forest in 1568 (CPR 1566-1569 68.200), and Steward of the Forest at least as early as 1589 (VIC 2.618).

26 The same Treswell had also compiled a survey of the manors of Castle Hedingham and surrounding estates in 1606 (ERO D/DMh M3).

27 *A Catalogue and Succession of the Kings, Princes, Dukes, Marquesses, Earls, and Viscounts of this Realm of England, since the Norman Conquest, to this present year, 1619* (STC 3832).

28 Nelson also misdates this record to the week after Oxford's death on June 24, 1604 (427).

29 This Sir Robert Wroth was the son of the Sir Robert Wroth to whom King James granted a walkership in Waltham Forest for life less than two months (May 22, 1603) before the return of Oxford's own hereditary grant of his rights in the Forest on July 18, 1603. While it is Wroth the elder who concerns us in Henry de Vere's letter of December 8, 1604, and John Manwood's letter of September 28, 1607, Wroth the younger was appointed for life to his father's office of Chief Forester of Linton walk, Waltham Forest, and keeper of Woodford walk, Essex upon his father's death on January 27, 1606 (CSPD 1603-10, 8.285).

30 Representative examples gleaned from Emmison and The Surtees Society (see Works Cited).

31 Carrington 41-44. Ruth Loyd Miller 1.528-30.

32 E-mail from Edward Rogers, June 2, 2004.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Add.	British Library Additional Manuscript.
ANW	Alan Nelson website: http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/oxdocs.html
CAD	A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the PRO. 6 vols. London: 1890-1915.
CP	Cecil Papers.
CA	College of Arms
CS	Camden Society
CSPD	Calendar of State Papers: domestic series of the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, James 1547-[1625] preserved in the State paper department of PRO, London : Longman, 1856-72 (Nota Bene: Volume numbers for the CSPD cited throughout this article refer to the published book volumes, not the separate SP volumes listed at the top of each page within those books).
CSPV	Calendar of state papers and manuscripts relating to English affairs, existing in the archives and collections of Venice, and in other libraries of northern Italy. London: Longman, 1864-1947.
CPR	Calendar of the patent rolls, preserved in the PRO. 73 vols. London: HMSO, 1891.
DNB	The Dictionary of National Biography
ECW	Earls Colne website: http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/intro/index.htm .
ERO	Essex Record Office
GAW	HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Family of Gawdy. London: Eyre, 1885.
HAR	Harleian Manuscripts in the British Library
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
IPM	Inquisitio[n] post mortem
LAN	Lansdowne Manuscripts in the British Library.
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
OED	Oxford English Dictionary. Compact ed. 1986.
PRO	Public Records Office
SAL	HMC. Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury at Hatfield house. 24 vols. London: 1883-1976.
SOM	Somerset Archive and Record Service
SP	State Papers
STC	Short Title Catalogue, English books, 1475-1640; Early English books, 1641-1700.
VIC	<i>The Victoria History of the County of Essex.</i>

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