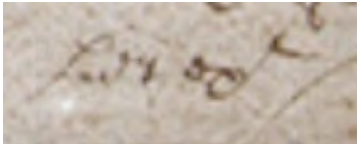


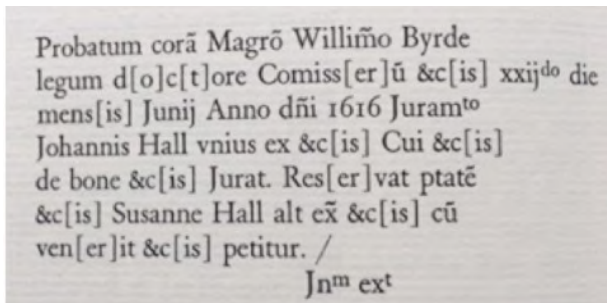
## Brevity and the Soul of Witlessness

by Julie Sandys Bianchi

Recently, De Vere Society President Alexander Waugh raised the question to online readers of an Oxfordian Facebook Page concerning the relative prevalence in other Jacobean will records of what appears to be a “squiggle” at the very end of Stratford-Shakspere’s will transcribed as ‘Jn<sup>m</sup> ext’ in B Roland Lewis’s *The Shakespeare Documents* (vol. 2 p. 480).<sup>1</sup>



[Figure 1. Snipped Google Image of Shakspere’s original will probate “squiggle.”]



[Figure 2. Digital image of B. Roland Lewis’s transcription of Shakspere’s will probate statement, courtesy of Alexander Waugh]

Having studied lots of old English documents in over forty years of genealogy research, I was puzzled. I had *never* seen such an abbreviation on the pages of any antique will affiliated with my Sandys family and its vast collateral lines. I googled the purported abbreviation “Jn<sup>m</sup> ext” as well as “In<sup>m</sup> ext” (since the letters *J* and *I* often appeared written identically), but of the multitude of English will records accessible online, I found references only to Shakspere’s will. My search result was akin to the phenomenon of looking up the meaning of an unknown word in the dictionary and finding the same word being used to define itself.

Waugh questioned if “E.K. Chambers and others”<sup>2</sup> had correctly interpreted the meaning of their (apparently unique) transcription when they pronounced it as having been an abbreviation for “inventorium exhibitum”—a phrase which Stratfordian apologist Scott McCrea over a century later translated from the Latin to mean “inventory attached.”<sup>3</sup> But those suggested interpretations of the scribbled initials made no sense to me either, because inventories, as a function of Roman law rather than canon law,<sup>4</sup> were not typically attached to wills, but were

completed after the wills had been entered for administration under probate. Rather than being recorded in the Administrative Acts or Probate Books customarily reserved for wills, inventories were recorded in Ex Officio Act Books.<sup>5</sup>

From 1529 to 1782 it was a legal obligation of the executor to compile a probate inventory of the deceased’s personal or moveable goods, assets and chattels, not including real estate or land. The assessors compiled a detailed listing of the entire contents of the deceased’s dwelling with the estimated value of each item. The objective of the exercise was to ensure that any unpaid debts owing at death could be paid. The inventories form part of the probate records and have survived in great numbers.<sup>6</sup>

McCrea’s 2005 interpretation of the Latin phrase “Inventorium exhibitum” as meaning “inventory attached” should also have been baffling to other contemporary translators of Latin, since the spelling “inventorium” is not in current use, nor was in during the 1600s. In further online discussion about the mysterious “squiggle,” Dr. Roger Stritmatter determined—with the aid of his medieval Latin dictionary—that the correct spelling of the entire phrase after the Middle Ages would have been “inventarium exhibitum.”<sup>7</sup> Apparently, Chambers and others had somehow revived, and McCrea had copied, the extinct spelling of a Latin word by substituting an *o* for an *a*. And by Googling, one can see that this pair of Latin words together indeed was used to reference a will inventory.

For the generous-hearted, E.K. Chambers and his minions might be forgiven for first publishing and repeating their anachronistic spelling, if that is all they had done in broadcasting their versions of “fake news.” The florid handwriting style known as the secretary hand, used to record Elizabethan and early Jacobean wills on crumbling parchment, is often difficult to read. Having been employed for over a century by the time it was applied to the making and administering of the will of William Shakspere of Stratford-on-Avon in 1616, individual variations had infiltrated the handwriting style to the degree that several constructions for each letter of the secretary hand can be found in early 17<sup>th</sup> century documents.

When deciphering the handwriting of English wills of the time, the chief strategy used by modern readers is first to search the copy for common articles and prepositions as well as for lexiconic words or any of the predictable jargon of will: *will*, personal pronouns, the county of residence, relationship titles (*loving wife, oldest son, said servant, executor, executrix*), religious and burial terms (*Almighty, Christ, soul, bury*), along with standard testamentary expressions like *I give and bequeath, ordain this, or set my hand*. Then, the shape of the letters used to form the recognizable words can be employed to establish an alphabet of the writer’s unique penmanship in order to

decode names and unusual or unfamiliar words in the rest of the document.

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century probate notices one also finds routinely worded notations in Latin scrawled onto the bottom of wills by a Registrar of Probate or his official scribe (both offices were appointed by the Ecclesiastical Court). The word choices are typically so repetitive that it does not require extensive schooling in Latin to interpret them: the title *Probatum*, the name of the city in which the will is being probated, the month and year of the probate, the occupations of the Registrars such as *Magro*, *Magisterio* and *Militis*, as well as the common religious/calendar expression *Anno Domini*—all can be used to establish a written alphabet unique to the person wielding the pen.

After Chambers and Lewis and their ilk first drafted their mistaken spelling and erroneous decoding of the squiggled notation—without the convenience of online searching that McCrea had access to but apparently failed to use—any of these august historians could have followed tried and true scholarly tradition by taking time before publishing to cross-check their pronouncements by culling physically through old documents, probate records, and will books. Had they done so, they would not have had to look far to see that it was rare to find the phrase “inventarium exhibitum” written directly on a will itself. Citing as evidence my own cache of three dozen wills from 1570 to 1732 in the Prerogative of Canterbury—none of them have those words written on them.

Also, Chambers and Lewis and McCrea et al would have learned that the phrase “inventarium exhibitum” (regardless of spelling) had nothing at all to do with an inventory being attached to a will. Instead, it was applied as part of a reference to the total assessed monetary value of the inventory of the testator’s worldly items and cash, minus what was owed by the estate at the time of death. It was part of a financial receipt rather than an indication of a list of items.

But most importantly, these hapless Stratfordian researchers would have found no evidence that the phrase “inventarium exhibitum” was ever abbreviated. Even if the phrase would somehow have been reduced to a smudge, one would expect to see, based on other wills from the era, that there would have been alongside the illegible smudge a *numerical value* regarding the financial assessment of the estate, or some marginal notation on the will as to why no such assessment was being made.

Here are the online mentions I netted while surfing the internet on October 22, 2017—these scant four entries nearly drowning in a sea of digitized references clogged with Chambers-through-McCrea-inspired Stratfordiana mentioning William Shakespeare’s will:

A 1634 will administration of one “Richard Adams of Cleobury Mortimer in the County of Salop” that included “*Salvo Jure cuiuscumque etc. et exhibit Inventarium extendens ad summam £24 12d*”<sup>8</sup>

wardus Hart de fletching p’d Glover et Sam<sup>l</sup> Astie de Lew  
*Inventarium exhibitum* extendit ad sumam £8 17s. 7d.

[Figure 3. Snip from 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1718 administration of will of Mary Awcock of Fletching County Sussex<sup>9</sup>]

DE THE ACT BOOK, HOWEVER, IS THE CUSTOMARY  
1: ‘Eium *Inventarium Exhibitum* 22 li’, whi

[Figure 4. Snip of a marginal note from the 1677 will of Wenceslaus Hollar “which would seem to mean the widow’s assessment of her husband’s estate.”<sup>10</sup>]

Administratio cum testimonio de bonis non emanavit mense Augusti 1680.	} Londonii <i>Inventarium exhibitum</i> Blasii Sheldon xiii
Administration, with evidence of the goods not administered, issued in the month of August 1680.	} London, Inventory Exhibited Blasius, Sheldon xiii.

[Figure 5. Snipped image with English translation of probate administration of the September 12, 1676 will of Richard Wyseman of Middlesex.<sup>11</sup>]

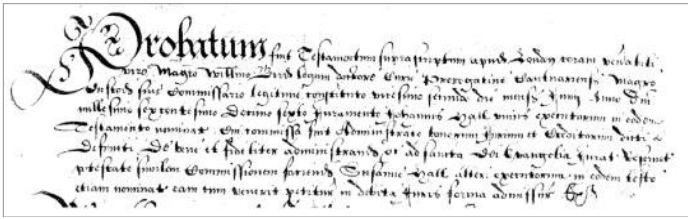
If the squiggle at the bottom of Shakspeare’s original will does not represent an abbreviation for “Inventarium Exhibitum,” what does the mark really mean?

The first part of the answer is that the probate inscription is only half squiggle. The first part of it actually forms a routine ecclesiastical probate *word*; it is followed by three carelessly scrawled letters. I will tackle the two parts separately.

A will was deemed lawfully *probated* (meaning “proved”) once the executor named in the will (or a lawfully appointed substitute executor) appeared before the official Registrar of Wills, placed his or her hand on a Bible, and swore to the veracity of the document. “Without probate of the will or letters of administration, neither executor nor administrator could take any steps in any other court of law, for the executor’s proof of his title and the administrator’s title itself could only be given by the Ecclesiastical Court.”<sup>12</sup>

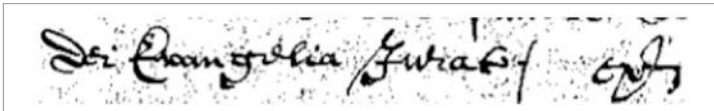
After witnessing the sworn testimony of the executor, the Registrar recorded his validation of the will on the document. This was usually done by writing “*Dei Evangelia jurat.*” Sometimes other language was used, such as the longer “*Strand eadem ad Sancta Dei Evangelia jurat*” or the single word “*Jurat.*” *Jurat* is not always written as the last complete word of the probate document; if it is not, it usually can be found in the text somewhere else, such as in the neatly transcribed and elaborate version of Shakspeare’s will that was entered at some unspecified

later date in the records of the Prerogative of Canterbury. See line 6 in Figure 6.

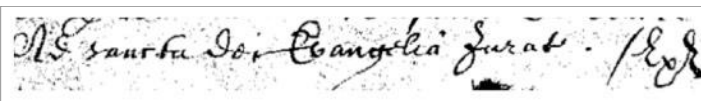


[Figure 6.]

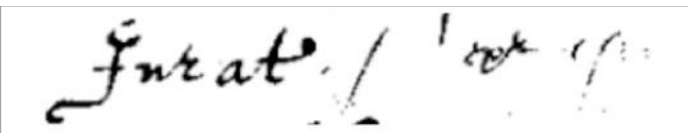
Thus, the initials “Jn<sup>m</sup>,” which the Stratfordians have claimed is an abbreviation for “inventarium,” is actually an abbreviation for “Jurat.”



[Figure 7. Snipped from a will entered in the Prerogative of Canterbury 1621]



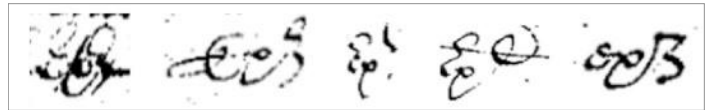
[Figure 8. Snipped from a will entered in the Prerogative of Canterbury 1642]



[Figure 9. Snipped from a will entered in the Prerogative of Canterbury 1608]

“A **jurat** (through legal French from Latin *juratum*, ‘sworn’, from *jurare*, ‘to swear’) is a clause at the foot of an affidavit showing when, where, and before whom the actual oath was sworn or affirmation was made.”<sup>13</sup> The examples above also show that a slash is usually drawn between the word “Jurat” and the final flourish. (It is curious, and unusual, that the slash is missing from Shakspeare’s reformed POC will copy.) On the right side of the slash lies the second half of the messy writing that triggered Waugh’s question. In most wills it appears added as almost an afterthought and; sometimes there is a blank space following the slash. Notably, the last marks on the page are not necessarily penned in the same hand, or with the same weight of ink, as the rest of the Probate statement. In the case of Shakspeare’s original will, the writer ignored the slash and made his routine scribble on the left side of it. This jumble of lettering, deciphered as “ex<sup>t</sup>” by the Strats,

is not an abbreviation of “exhibitum.” What it does signify is entirely mundane.



[Figure 10. Samples from 17th century Prerogative of Canterbury wills]

Once the ceremonial probate formalities were nearing their end, the Registrar performed the secretarial function of jotting the letters *EXR*—the common abbreviation for Executor<sup>14</sup>—serving as his indication that the document had been presented to him by the person lawfully designated to do so, and that the requisite swearing had been completed. Depending on whether the Registrar had penned the entire probate entry himself or left it to his assigned scribe, the dashed off initials *EXR* (or sometimes the idiosyncratic variants *EXE* or *EXT*), are found written in the vicinity of the slash mark as the last entry on nearly every will in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Prerogative of Canterbury—the same ecclesiastical clearinghouse that was the employer of the same Registrar who proved Shakspeare’s scruffy will—the “Magrō” William Byrd. The notation is so common that it is inexplicable that the Stratfordians’ misinterpretation has persisted for so long.

As a final note of interest, according to Professor Alan Nelson,<sup>15</sup> in August 1578 both Oxford and Sidney accompanied the Queen to Saffron Walden, which was not only the hometown of Gabriel Harvey but of the young man who became the Registrar of Shakspeare’s will. William Byrd would have been seventeen at the time.

- Alexander Waugh, in a thread initiated by him on Orthodoxfordians Facebook Page (October 21, 2017).
- Waugh quoting E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of the Facts and Problems* (Clarendon Press, 1930), 174.
- Waugh quoting Scott McCrea, *The Case for Shakespeare: The End of the Authorship Question* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005) 148.
- <https://www.genguide.co.uk/source/wills-and-inheritance-amp-letters-of-administration-admons-pre-1858-land-amp-property/32/>.
- Eugene A. Haertle, “Probate Courts,” *Marquette Law Review*, Vol. 45 (1962), 548.
- See note 4, *supra*.
- Dr. Roger Stritmatter, in a thread initiated by Alexander Waugh on Orthodoxfordians Facebook Page (October 21, 2017).
- [http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~uktranscriptions/Cleobury\\_Salop.htm](http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~uktranscriptions/Cleobury_Salop.htm).
- [https://archive.org/stream/visitationofengl03inhowa/visitationofengl03inhowa\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/visitationofengl03inhowa/visitationofengl03inhowa_djvu.txt).
- Richard Pennington, *A descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Work of Wenceslaus Hollar 1607-1677* (Cambridge U. Press, 1982), appendix.

- <sup>11</sup> Sir Thomas Longmore, *Richard Wiseman, Surgeon and Sergeant-surgeon to Charles II: A Biographical Study* (Ballentine Press, 1891), 189.
- <sup>12</sup> Haertle, 547.
- <sup>13</sup> Alexander Mansfield Burrill, *A Law Dictionary and Glossary (2nd ed.)* (Baker, Voorhis, 1867), 110.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *The Barnhart Abbreviations Dictionary* (John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 93-94.

- <sup>15</sup> Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward De Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool University Press, 2003), 195.



## Shakspeare's Will and (Missing) Inventory

by Harry Campbell

Orthodox Shakespeare biographers have mostly tended to ignore the awkward fact that the will of Stratford's William Shakspeare mentions no books; in reaction to the bewilderment of the anti-Stratfordians, a few have suggested that books would have been listed only in the inventory (which is now conveniently missing), not in the will. Authorship doubters have been at a bit of a loss when it comes to a response about the missing books. Relying only on supposition, it is difficult to argue that they would have, or should have, been explicitly bequeathed in the will, if Shakspeare indeed owned any. It seems logical that books would have been considered among the most valued possessions for someone who made his living and reputation as a prominent writer, and therefore important enough, both monetarily and sentimentally, to mention them and bestow them on some deserving person. But, essentially, it has come down to a difference of opinions. Orthodoxy explains it by relying on the missing inventory, and anti-Strats see their absence from the will as further proof that Shakspeare was not the author Shakespeare.

It is, of course, possible that after making an otherwise detailed list of specific bequests, the Stratford man—if he was Shakespeare—simply lumped all of his most precious and valuable literary possessions in with the final bequest to his daughter and son-in-law: “All the Rest of my goodes chattels leases plate jewels & household stuffe whatsoever...” This was standard language in wills of the period, used to sum up the remaining miscellaneous belongings of low sentimental value and therefore not explicitly bequeathed elsewhere in the will. However, it is absurdly unlikely that the author Shakespeare would have considered his literary properties no more significant than his “household stuffe.”

This might help. In her book *Stratford-Upon-Avon Inventories 1538-1699* (Dugdale Society Publications, in association with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2002) editor Jeanne Jones demonstrates that those rare individuals in the Stratford vicinity who possessed substantial collections of books and other possessions characteristic of intellectual or artistic sensibilities, were, in fact, very likely

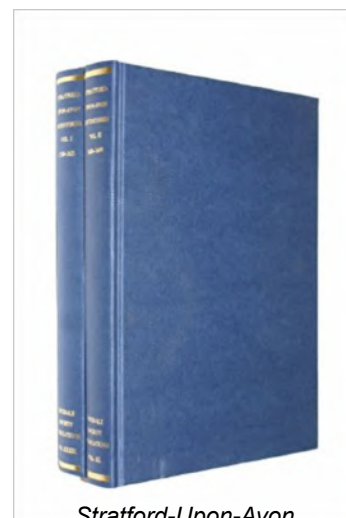
to bestow them specifically in their wills, *in addition to* listing their values in the inventories. (And, not surprisingly, valuations on the inventories also demonstrate that books were by far the most valuable movable assets of the estates.) Of the 346 inventories that still exist in several repositories and transcribed here, with the editor's notes regarding associated wills, only ten list books. Here are summaries of the five most substantial collections:

Entry 17: John Bretchgirdle, vicar, 1565: Books valued at £10. Editor notes that this is almost half his total wealth, and in his will, the books were specifically left to friends and godsons.

Entry 126: John Marshall, clerk/curate, 1608: Inventory lists 271 books *by title*, all of which were given in his will to his sons, to be divided according to their various interests. One book was bequeathed by title, along with two other titles not included in the inventory, to other individuals.

Entry 170: Leanard Kempson, gentleman, 1625: Several musical instruments and music books, plus a Bible and books. Editor Jones notes that the inventory is not accompanied by a will, so it is not known “to whom these personal treasures were left,” her implication being that *normally* they would have been given specifically to someone in the will.

Entry 269: John Ward, vicar: “Bookes in the studye” (valued at £25) were listed as part of his large estate, and went to beneficiaries in



*Stratford-Upon-Avon Inventories 1538-1699*

Northamptonshire. No more specific info is given. (This is the same John Ward who mentioned in his diary several anecdotes about the late W.S.) The actual will is entirely a list of generous monetary bequests, ending with “all the rest and residue” of his estate (this would include his books) bequeathed to his brother Thomas Ward.

Entry 272: Josiah Simcox, clerk/vicar, 1682: His desk and books, valued at £20, went to his wife along with his entire estate, except £5 left to his father. (Editor Jones believes that Simcox made a nuncupative, or oral, will, as no written will is referred to.)

None of this proves that Shakspeare did or did not possess a collection of books. Nevertheless, it appears unlikely that if books—rare personal treasures in Stratford—had been listed in the inventory (perhaps by title!) that they would not also have been mentioned in the will.

It also proves that James Shapiro is incorrect in his assertion that it is anti-Stratfordians who are unfamiliar with the “conventions” of Elizabethan wills and inventories, i.e., that books would have been listed only in the inventory. Rather, it would seem Shapiro and other orthodox writers who make such claims are the ones who

are unfamiliar with the conventions. In fact, it proves that they are dead wrong! The more conventional practice would have been to meticulously confer items such as books directly and specifically in the will.

I strongly recommend this two-volume set as an invaluable source in arguments regarding the absence of books. This issue has been a low hurdle anti-Strats have had to bypass. Perhaps now this obstacle can be leapt over, or entirely removed.

[Harry Campbell is the Book and Paper Conservator at The Ohio State University Libraries, a lifelong admirer of the works of Shakespeare, and a signatory to the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition’s Declaration of Reasonable Doubt.]



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