

SEARCHING FOR THE OXFORDIAN “SMOKING GUN” IN ELIZABETHAN LETTERS

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*I will find where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
within the center.*

Hamlet: Act II Scene 2



XFORDIAN scholars should be commended for excellent research in the past twenty-five years—a very productive quarter century. Other Oxfordians have either been content to wait in the wings for the inevitable paradigm shift or to expend their cerebral creativity fantasizing about long-lost play manuscripts—the supreme smoking gun, ignoring the advice of Matthew 7 verse 7: “Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.” Most have neglected the potential harvest available in Elizabethan personal letters (Bethell 43-82). Literary history abounds with dramatic finds of extraordinary letters in private homes or unusual places. Even a trivial remark made in passing could be an important clue. Scholars dream of finding a letter from one courtier to another linking de Vere to Shakespeare. As a mere aside, the letter writer might say, “By the way, have you seen Oxford’s *Othello*? I saw it at Whitehall last week when it played before the Queen and it is stunning, full of great lines and social commentary. It’s now at The Theatre—do see it!” Or one University Wit might add in a postscript to another, “Has Oxford finished revising *Hamlet* yet? He’s been at it long enough!”

The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts

The general belief is that research on old letters requires exploration of attics and muniment rooms of English manor houses, disturbing centuries of dust and cobwebs. Unknown to most Oxfordians is England’s remarkable Historical Manuscripts Commission, established by Royal Warrant in 1869, whose mission has been to sleuth out these muniments and translate, edit, and print them, while the original documents remain undisturbed in the manor houses. Nor are all aware of how close the internet has brought us to documents so that much can be done now without ever leaving home. The *Historical Manuscripts Commission* (HMC) maintains the following informational centers: 1. *National Register of Archives* (NRA), gives information on records relating to British history, including 43,000 unpublished but indexed catalogs; 2. *Manorial Document Register*, an index to surviving manor house records in England and Wales; 3. ARCHON, an electronic directory of archival repositories; and 4. *Archives in Focus*, a source for online archival resources.¹

The Historical Manuscripts Commission indexes are a comprehensive summary of all letters written by individuals as well as all references to them, all so far catalogued. These indexes exist in two sets of volumes: *Guide to the Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts 1870-1911*, and *Guide to the Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts 1911-1957*. These are available in the British Library and in university libraries in the UK and the US.

A recent search by the author of HMC indexes for letters by Edward de Vere to any noble recipient (excluding the Cecils—already heavily researched), yielded nothing. There were, however, several references to de Vere in correspondence between members of noble families (other than the Rutlands and the Pembrokes, reviewed below). Most of these have long since been transcribed and recorded in books, and are now available online. For this last, special thanks are due to Prof. Alan Nelson of UC Berkeley, both for his recent book, containing his transcriptions of numerous documents relating to Oxford, and for the documents on his website; also to Oxfordian researcher Nina Green for her website (see Works Cited).

Documents listed by the HMC indexes that relate to Oxford (and can be found in full on Nelson's website) are, briefly, as follows:

1. July 1, 1562: the Indenture of Covenants, i.e., the marriage contract between John, sixteenth Earl of Oxford, and Henry, Earl of Huntingdon, for the marriage of Edward de Vere, Lord Bulbeck, and either Elizabeth or Mary Hastings. The Huntingdon copy of this contract disappeared for 400 years only to show up at the Huntington Library in Pasadena among the Huntingdon family papers, which the Library had purchased.

2. 1575: a legal document regarding Edward de Vere's estate, listing his debts and expressing his wishes for disposition of his holdings should he die during his tour to Europe in 1575-76. Annexed to this is a long schedule of the Earl's debts, headed by £3457 owed to the Queen's Majesty. Among Oxford's creditors at this time were goldsmiths, jewelers, mercers, upholsterers, embroiderers, haberdashers, armorers, drapers, tailors and shoemakers. Burghley, Oxford's father-in-law, is authorized to pay any debts omitted from the list.

3. 1580: Peregrine Bertie's [pronounced *Bartie*] letter to Lady Mary Vere, sister of Edward de Vere, bemoans her brother's uncourteous attitude towards their proposed marriage.

4. March 23, 1581: Francis Walsingham writes to Henry, third Earl of Huntingdon: "On Tuesday at night Anne Vavasor was brought to bed of a son in the maidens chamber. The E. of Oxford is avowed to be the father, who hath withdrawn himself with intent, as it is thought, to pass the seas."

5. 1894: A narrative summary of the trial of Mary Queen of Scots, October, 1586, lists Edward de Vere as one of the judges.

6. Nov. 9, 1595: Rowland White writes to Sir Robert Sidney, the younger brother of Philip

Sidney and nephew of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, whose property he inherited. White was Robert Sidney's trusted estate manager and friend. The HMC letter excerpt reads:

I have written at large by John Massy, who is sent to Mr. Bodeley with letters, as I hear, commanding him to forbear the demanding of the money. Your leave will be decided within ten days. Lady Rich thanks you for the hangings. Some say my Lord of Oxford is dead.

This last remark is curious indeed. Certainly "some say" is an odd way to phrase a rumor of actual death; the physical death of a person is a fact, not an opinion.

7. March 3, 1599: Robert Bertie, the seventeen-year-old son of Peregrine Bertie and Mary Vere, writes a letter in French to his uncle Edward de Vere, freely translated as follows:

Monseigneur,
I desire greatly to reaffirm the great esteem I have for you, having always been well treated by you. But I have yet to find a subject of sufficient merit to distract you from your more important interests. Thus I have not dared to be bold enough to write you for fear of poor judgment on my part writing letters which don't even deserve to be opened. I do want to assure you of the eternal service I vow to you and your entire family, humbly imploring you, Sir, kindly to understand that I am ready to do your bidding with such devotion that I will all of my life be your humble servant and nephew.²

These documents represent the total excerpts from letters listed in the 1870-1911 HMC volumes which mention Edward de Vere. None provide any suggestion of a smoking gun.

The HMC has done a fine job of cataloging and describing the vast family documents, including letters, of England's noble families covering hundreds of years, including the Elizabethan era. Unfortunately, except for a few short letters, they have not been transcribed in full, but only excerpted or summarized, so who can say what Oxfordian insights remain undisclosed?

Where does letter research start?

The letters most likely to reveal personal information would be from the subject's closest associates, friends and relatives. Who were de Vere's best friends? Introductory letters in books dedicated to him and letters to his in-laws suggest friendships with Thomas Bedingfield, Bartholomew Clerke, and Lord Lumley, but no private letters have surfaced to connect them. As for childhood friends, because of his relative isolation either at Hedingham Castle or later, at the home of his childless tutor, Sir Thomas Smith, it seems unlikely that Oxford acquired enduring friendships in childhood. Close contacts with others of his own age and rank would have begun in 1562 at age twelve when he was removed to Cecil House upon the death of his father.

The young men that Cecil gathered for companions to his son Thomas would probably have been known to Oxford as well. These included his first ward, Arthur Hall, Alexander Neville (translator of Seneca), Barnabe Googe (translator of Palengenius), and the Cobham brothers

(Hughes *Tutors* 83). These men were six to ten years older than Oxford, while Philip Sidney was four years younger. Although it is unlikely that he did not form friendships with some of these young men and boys, direct evidence has so far escaped us.

Cecil's younger son, Robert Cecil, was born in 1563, the year Oxford spent at Cecil House without Rutland. As most Oxfordians are aware, we have a number of letters from Oxford to Robert Cecil written in the mid-to-late nineties (Fowler), though none (as yet) from Cecil to Oxford.

While head of the Court of Wards, William Cecil (Lord Burghley) had charge of a total of twelve wards, of whom nine were noblemen. The first four included: Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1562-1571); Edward Manners, third Earl of Rutland (1563-70); Edmund, third Lord Sheffield (1568-85); and Edward, Lord Zouch, acquired for Thomas Cecil (1569-77) (Hurstfield 249).

Edward Manners, Earl of Rutland (1549-1587), was a year older than de Vere but came to Cecil a year after Oxford, in 1563-4. Thus the two Edwards, de Vere and Manners, shared Cecil's guardianship for seven years, from 1563 to 1570. We have little hard evidence of their friendship, but that two boys of equal rank, so close in age and with close family ties, must have formed a close and lasting bond under such circumstances seems highly likely. Burghley's later wards, the earls of Essex, Southampton, and Rutland, shared a bond formed in similar circumstances, one that was an important factor in the passions that led to the Essex Rebellion. Although de Vere also shared some time at Cecil House with Lord Sheffield for three years and with Lord Zouch for two, nothing is known at this time about their relationships.

The other five noble wards were acquired by Burghley between 1572 and 1588, after de Vere was gone. These included Philip Howard, later Earl of Arundel (1572-78); Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex (1576-1587); Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton (1581-94); Roger Manners, later fifth Earl of Rutland (1588-97); and Lord Wharton, later second Baron Wharton (years unknown), all considerably younger than de Vere. Philip Howard, son of the executed Duke of Norfolk, was Oxford's cousin, so it's possible that they knew each other early on from family holiday gatherings, but of this we have no evidence. As for Essex, all we know (from Oxford's October 20, 1595 letter to Cecil), is that by 1595, de Vere disliked him intensely (Nelson 483).

Of these early contacts, the relationship with Edward Manners would seem to be the most important, so the Manners family archives were searched first.

Manners documents at Belvoir Castle

Muniments belonging to the Earls of Rutland have been kept at Belvoir (pronounced *Beaver*) Castle in Leicestershire in central England for almost 500 years. Sir Thomas Manners, first Earl of Rutland, began rebuilding Belvoir Castle in 1523 at the site of a ruined castle first constructed by William the Conqueror's standard bearer in the eleventh Century. It was completed by his son, the second Earl of Rutland, father of de Vere's companion.

According to historians, Edward Manners had many outstanding virtues. Unfortunately he died in 1587 at the age of thirty-eight, six days before his installation as Lord Chancellor (EB). Since he had no sons, his brother John became the fourth Earl. John died the following year, and

was followed by his son, Roger Manners (1576-1612), the fifth Earl, who became a ward of the Crown and was educated by Burghley. In 1703, John, the ninth Earl, was created first Duke of Rutland. Today it is the eleventh Duke of Rutland who lives at Belvoir Castle with his family.

The castle was severely damaged by Cromwell's troops during the English Civil War in the 1640s. It was devastated by fire in 1816, although remarkably the family documents survived. The first cataloging of castle documents was carried out in 1869 by Alfred Horwood for the HMC. Frustrated by his limited access, he urged further research. Horwood was followed by H.C. Maxwell Lyte. Lyte was able to locate documents at thirteen locations in Belvoir Castle between 1885 and 1888. He describes a classic scene of document discovery:

In looking for the key of the lumber room . . . I came across a key bearing a label with the words "Key of old writings over stable." I accordingly repaired to the stables, which are at the bottom of the hill on which the castle stands, and there, in a loft under the roof, discovered a vast mass of old papers. No one had entered the room for some years, a curtain of cobwebs hung from the rafters, and the floor was so covered with documents, piled to a height of three or four feet, that at first there was scarcely standing room. Over everything there was a thick layer of broken plaster and dirt, which made white paper indistinguishable from brown. In the course of the first half-hour I found a holograph letter of Lord Burghley

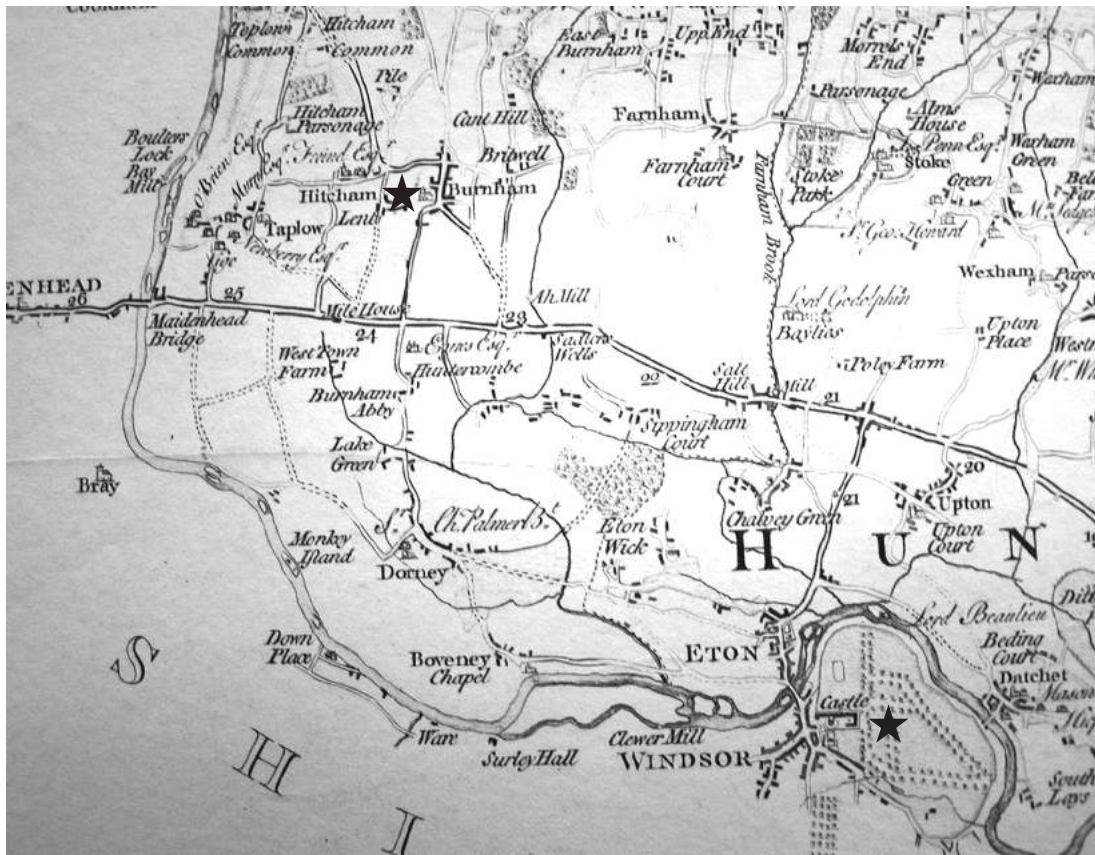
This disturbance of the surface caused a horrible stench, and it soon became evident that the loft had been tenanted by rats who had done lasting damage to valuable manuscripts by gnawing and staining them. Some documents had been reduced to powder, others had lost their dates or their signatures. The entire center of a long letter in the hand of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, had entirely disappeared. Those that remained were of a very varied character.

A deed of the time of Henry II was found among some granary accounts of the eighteenth century, and gossiping letters from the Court of Elizabeth among modern vouchers. (Lyte ii-viii)

Despite these obstacles, Lyte did a superb job of analysis, chronological arranging, tabulation and transcription, after which all letters were cleaned, repaired, mounted on guards and bound.

Lyte explains what he did and did not include in the published calendar or index of the HMC (RCHM vii-viii). The Calendar prepared for the use of the public mentions every letter which bears

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Detail of map of Buckinghamshire from the period: The meandering boundary is the Thames River. Note Windsor (starred) on the southern side of the river, near the lower edge, with Eton across the river, just above it. The other star shows "Hitcham near Burnham," not far from Maidenhead Bridge. (Map courtesy of the Guild Hall.)

a date, original or supplied, down to the year 1600, and every letter down to the year 1787 which appears to contain any information of general interest. It does not include the contents of some of the old volumes, which, he claims, consist only of letters from ladies about purely domestic affairs.

Of course it is precisely in such domestic letters—excluded from the index—that nuggets of information are found in the most trivial comments, made in passing. Whether or not there is anything relevant to Oxfordian studies in these uncatalogued and untranscribed portions of these documents is a question that Oxfordian scholars are eager to resolve. Unfortunately it may be some time before this is possible.

Although many trivial letters from the period were kept, not a single letter from de Vere to Edward Manners has yet been found at Belvoir Castle, and only twelve letters have been found which mention him, most of them in passages already familiar to Oxfordians. However paltry the results, we must be grateful, for without these we would be lacking much of our picture of the youthful Oxford.

Rutland's journey to the Cecil Household

One interesting letter is probably the earliest, dated January 9, 1564. In it William Cecil writes from Windsor to the Countess of Rutland, advising her of housing arrangements for her stepson, Edward Manners, as he makes his way to join Cecil's household following a holiday spent with his family at Belvoir Castle. After several stopovers, he will arrive at "Hitcham near Burnham," where Oxford is staying. Since this location is not far from Windsor Castle, one presumes that the two boys will reside there until lessons begin wherever they began, either at Cecil House in London, or some other place. Both were still too young to be permanently housed at Court, although de Vere's proximity to Windsor at this time suggests that he may have spent the winter holiday of 1563-4 at Court. Since Manners's father had died the previous September, it is interesting to consider that it may have been four months, or the following January, before Edward joined the Cecil household and connected with his younger cousin for the first time.

Cecil writes to Lady Rutland:

I wrote lately to you that Lord Rutland, your stepson, might be brought up hither by my cousin Disney, your officer, and I wrote the like to him. I understand by the steward of my house near Stamford that my letters have miscarried. I therefore pray that either Mr. Disney, or any other whom you shall think meet, may forthwith conduct my said Lord hither or to a place within three miles, near Maidenhead Bridge, where Lord Oxford is. It is called Hitcham next to Burnham. / In my letter to my cousin Disney, I offered this manner of journey for my Lord—first to my house near Stamford, next to Sir Robert Tyrwhitt's house or Mr. Cromwell's near Huntingdon, on the third day to Sir Robert Chester's near Royston, on the fourth either to Mr. Sadler's or to my house by Waltham. I would meet him at Mr. Sadler's, or at my own house. Because the charge is mine, beside mine own good will to that house, I cannot forbear to be somewhat curious herein. If it shall be thought meet for my Lord to come by Northampton, let him be led to lodge in gentlemen's houses and not in any inns for danger of sickness. / If the things necessary for his chamber and for his own person cannot be brought with him or before him, I shall make some shift to content his Lordship, although I lodge in another man's house and am somewhat distant from mine own. I will give order for the payment of the charge sustained by you since the death of my Lord's father, as also for his conduction hither. I thank you for your token of the New Year. (HMC 1.89)

A month later, on May 14, 1571, George Delves, writing from the Court to the Earl of Rutland in France, gives us one of our brief glimpses of Oxford:

Lord Oxford has performed his challenge at tilt, turn, and barriers far above the expectation of the world, and not much inferior to the other three challengers. Their furniture was very fair and costly. The Earl's livery was crimson velvet, very costly. / He himself and the furniture was in some more colors, yet he was the Red Knight. Charles Howard was the White Knight; Sir Henry Lee the Green Knight. Mr. Hatton was the

Black Knight, whose horses were all trimmed with caparisons of black feathers, which did passing well. There were twenty-seven defendants, whereof your servant was one. Twenty-six of them were fair and gallantly furnished, Lord Stafford and Lord Harry Seymour the chief. Henry Grey had the prize for the tilt, Lord Harry for the turn, Thomas Cecil for the barriers. Some there be that think they had not therein right judgment (HMC 1.92)

A month later Delves gives us another snapshot in writing again to Rutland: “There is no man of life and agility in every respect in Court, but the Earl of Oxford” (HMC 1.94).

A month after that (July 28, 1571), comes another snapshot from Lord St. John, writing to Rutland:

The Earl of Oxenford hath gotten him a wife—or, at the least, a wife hath caught him—that is Mrs. [Mistress] Anne Cecil, whereunto the Queen hath given her consent, the which hath caused great weeping, wailing, and sorrowful cheer of those that hoped to have had that golden day. (HMC 1.94)

And the month after that, August 15, 1571, Lord Burghley writes to the Earl of Rutland, still at Paris:

I think it doth seem strange to your Lordship to hear of a purposed determination in my Lord of Oxford to marry with my daughter, and so before his Lordship moved it to me might I have thought it, if any other had moved it to me than himself. For at his own motion I could not well imagine what to think, considering I never meant to seek it, nor hoped of it. . . . Now that the matter is determined betwixt my Lord of Oxford and me, I confess to your Lordship I do honor him as much as I can any subject, and I love him so dearly from my heart as I do mine own son. . . . And surely, my Lord, by dealing with him I find that which I often heard of your Lordship, that there is much more in him of understanding than any stranger to him would think. And for mine own part, I find that whereof I take comfort. (HMC 1.95)

Two days later, on August 17, Thomas Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex writes to Rutland: “I doubt not you hear of a marriage concluded between my Lord of Oxford and my Lord of Burghley’s daughter” (HMC 1.96).

Five years later, in January 1576: Maid of Honor Eleanor Bridges writes to Rutland: “Lady Mary de Vere, sister of the Earl of Oxford, is sworn one of the Privy Chamber. The court is as full of malice and spite as when you left” (HMC 1.107).

On February 15, 1577: R. Brakinbury writes from the Court to the Earl of Rutland:

I hope to see you here this merry Shrovetide. Mrs. Borow makes her offering on Monday next. This will be a long Lent to Lady Mary Vere and Mrs. [Mistress] Sidney, for at Easter *consummatum erit*. I hope that two of your kinswomen will take up two more noblemen, as Mrs. Paston Lord Stourton and Mrs. Chaworth Lord Gormanston. Our new maids have not entered yet in love, but our old choose new servants because they

wax merry. The last from Flanders says that it is yet likely to be peace, but I believe it not. France is in garboil [discord] in each part. We hear nothing yet from Sir John Smith in Spain. For all this in France there is nothing in the Court but dancing and triumphing by day and almost nightly executions. God amend them! Lord and Lady Talbot are here. Lord Pembroke is much made of and lodged in the house; Lord Oxford in the old sort [his usual accommodation] (HMC 1.110-11).

“Mistress Sidney” was Mary Sidney, soon to marry the Earl of Pembroke.

The following year, November 11, 1577, Thomas Screven writes to Rutland from London:

. . . The marriage of the Lady Mary Vere is deferred until after Christmas, for as yet neither has Her Majesty given license, nor has the Earl of Oxford wholly assented thereto. (HMC 1.115)

Six years later, on May 27, 1583, Roger Manners writes from Greenwich to his uncle:

I make myself ready to wait on her Majesty at Theobalds where, it is thought, Lord Oxford will work some grace. We are not likely to have any great progress this year. The Lord Chamberlain yet lives, but there is no great hope of his recovery. (HMC 1.150)

The Lord Chamberlain was Thomas Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex. It is thought that Sussex was Oxford’s mentor and role model during his early years at Court.

A few days later, on June 2, Roger Manners writes from the Savoy to his uncle:

Her Majesty came yesterday to Greenwich from my Lord Treasurer’s. She was never in any place better pleased and sure the house, garden and walks may compare with any delicate place in Italy. The day she came away, which was yesterday, my Lord of Oxford came to her presence, and after some bitter words and speeches, in the end all sins are forgiven and he may repair to the court at his pleasure. Mr. Raleigh was a great mean herein, whereat Pondus is angry for that he could not do so much. (HMC 1.150)

The “bitter speeches” were no doubt due to the reason for his banishment from Court, his impregnation three years earlier of Ann Vavasor, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen. This letter contains the only known reference to William Cecil as “Pondus” (Altrocchi 10).

There is also a narrative of the treason trial (February 19 to March 5, 1601) of the Earl of Essex, the Earl of Oxford being listed as one of twenty-seven judges (HMC 1.370-1).

No smoking gun was encountered in the analysis of letters at Belvoir Castle to or about Edward Manners or his family. The total lack of letters from de Vere to one who was his companion for a large part of his teen years is a conspicuous void. Surely they wrote to each other during the early 1570s when Oxford was at Court and Rutland was in Paris. That none of these letters survives suggests that they were simply too personal to be allowed to fall into other hands. The likelihood of this is shown by the many letters that survive from this period inscribed: “burn this.”

Difficulties in further Manners research

Quite obviously, what is not considered meaningful in one historical epoch may carry immense significance to a future generation. It is not impossible that what the Historical Manuscript Commission excluded during their incomplete transcription of letters could include important information relevant to the authorship debate. It should be clear that for purposes of Oxfordian research, every letter in the Manners collection during the years from 1563 through 1587 should be reviewed in its original form and entirety. Unfortunately, that may not be possible any time soon.

All Manners family letters are now bound in chronological volumes. In 1888 an index was published entitled, *The Manuscripts of His Grace The Duke of Rutland Preserved at Belvoir Castle*. Researchers no longer need plow through the accumulated impedimenta of centuries in muniment rooms, attics or stables, but they do need to get special permission for access from the present Duke of Rutland. In recent years this has rarely been granted, and we would not encourage anyone to try at present. As with many English noble homes, scholarly access to the castle is restricted for diverse and often quite valid reasons, varying from a concern about divulging intimate secrets of honored ancestors to concerns over English income tax implications. Access to Belvoir Castle will require some delicate negotiations on the part of researchers with the kind of connections that few Oxfordians have at present.

Though results from the Rutland paper may seem disappointing, the even more disappointing results from the Sidney/Pembroke papers are actually more typical.

The Herbert family letters

Wilton House, situated southwest of London near Stonehenge, was the family home of the Earls of Pembroke and, for most of her life, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke. Despite an age discrepancy of more than thirty years, in 1575 the widowed second Earl took sixteen-year-old Mary Sidney as his bride. Mary was a fine poet, a gifted and highly cultured woman. She was not only accomplished in French, having translated De Mornay, she was conversant with Italian as well. Her library at Wilton was richly stocked, containing a number of Italian works. All her biographers believe that her reputation as a writer suggests that she wrote far more than was published under her name (Hughes *Sidney* 71-108).

Beyond their obvious interest in literature and the theatre, Mary and her sons, the “incomparable paire of brethren” for whom Shakespeare’s First Folio was produced, had several obvious connections with the de Vere family. The eldest son, William Herbert, later third Earl of Pembroke, was at one time the leading candidate for the hand of Oxford’s second daughter, Bridget Vere, while his brother Philip, First Earl of Montgomery, later Fourth Earl of Pembroke, married Oxford’s youngest daughter, Susan. Thus Wilton House would seem to be a likely source for smoking guns.

Unfortunately a major house fire in 1647 destroyed all but the center of the east front and most of the contents of the house. Carol Druce, current Wilton House Curator, thinks only part of the first floor was destroyed, not including the muniment room, but states that no one is sure.³ At

the time of the fire, of the four (Mary, her sons and Susan Vere Herbert) only Philip was still alive.

For many years all Pembroke letters and most Wilton House documents have been stored at nearby County Hall, Trowbridge, a temperature controlled facility. But even here there is little to be found,⁴ no more than twenty letters from the seventy-two years spanning 1553 to 1625—the period most likely to contain references to de Vere—and no letters at all to the Earls of Pembroke. For the following sixty-three years (1625–1688) there are only twelve letters, all on business matters. None contain a reference to Edward de Vere.

Why the lack of Herbert family personal letters?

English nobility was for centuries imbued with the importance of keeping family memorabilia, often designating special muniment rooms to harbor documents, both important and trivial. In a highly literary and prominent family in the late 1500s and early 1600s, one would expect a rich muniment harvest. So what happened to the missing Herbert family letters? Alas, no one can say. Fire, such as the 1647 fire that may have destroyed the muniment room of Wilton House, has been a constant threat to these great family archives over the centuries. However, in the case of the Pembroke papers no personal letters exist from after the fire either—not until 1688—so the 1647 fire can't be the sole cause. It was fire that destroyed their city mansion, Baynard's Castle, in the great London fire of 1666, which also destroyed another Herbert house in London. The Civil War of 1642 to '49 brought another kind of threat. An intriguing legal warrant, dated November 3, 1643, from Philip Herbert reads:

These are to will and authorize you that, for their better security in these times of danger and distraction, you fail not to carry all my Evidences and Writings which concern my Estate in your Custody, to Carisbrooke Castle in the Isle of Wight, there to remain until I give Order for their Removal, and this shall be your Warrant. Given under my Hand & Seal the 3rd of November 1643.

To my Auditor Mr. Thomas Dennett
Pembroke & Montgomery (WSRO 2057/E1/1)

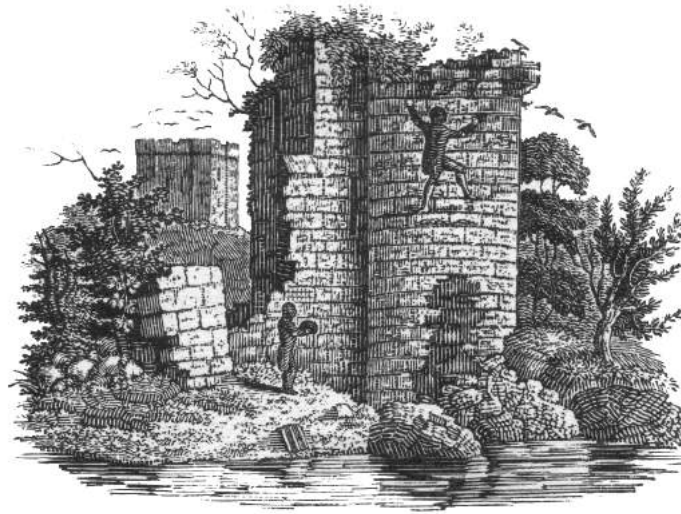
On the outside of the warrant is written the subject of the document: “Endorsed. My Lord wrote for sending Away his Evidences at Wilton into the Isle of Wight.” The Isle of Wight is just off the southern coast of England, not far from Wilton. From 1642 to 1647, Philip Herbert was Governor of Carisbrooke Castle, which is so secure that it was used by Cromwell's Parliamentarians in 1647 to house King Charles I for eleven months prior to his execution. Today the castle is preserved as an important historical monument.

Had muniments been sent to Carisbrooke Castle in 1643 for safe-keeping they would have escaped the Wilton House fire of 1647. The present castle curator, however, states confidently that all castle rooms have been searched a number of times and no Pembroke or Herbert family documents have been found.⁵

In sum, this search of Herbert family archives was negative. Wilton House, the family seat

since 1542, contains no letters from Edward de Vere or concerning him, nor does the Trowbridge storage facility, nor does Carisbrooke Castle. And so far the search of HMC files for letters mentioning de Vere in all other noble houses except those at Robert Cecil's Hatfield House, already repeatedly analyzed, has yielded only one letter to him (in French) and six letters that mention him, none of them containing a smidgeon of evidence linking him to the works of Shakespeare.

This research discovered significantly fewer references to Edward de Vere than Oxfordians might postulate for their literary giant of the Elizabethan Golden Age of Language and Literature. Yet, despite this negative yield, it is altogether possible that there are still important Oxfordian secrets undiscovered among the letters and documents of England's noble families. Oxfordians are encouraged to get involved in this type of historical literary sleuthing. —————



Endnotes

¹ These and many other archives, such as the county record offices, can be located on the Historical Manuscripts Commission web site: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk or <http://www.hmc.gov.uk>

² The original letter in its entirety is as follows:

Monseigneur, je desire infiniment de vous faire paroistre par quelque effect l'honneur que je vous porte, ayant esté toujours bien veu de vous; mais d'autant que je n'ay trouvé encores aucun subject [sic] assez digné de vous divertir de vos plus serieux affaires, je n'osoy prendre la hardiesse do vous escrire, de peur d'estre trop mal advisé de vous importuner de lettres qui ne meriteroyent pas d'estre seulement overtes: si non en ce qu'elles vous asseureroyent de l'éternelle service que je vous ay vouë et a toute votre maison; vous suppliant très humblement, Monsieur, de l'avoir pour agréable et de me tenir pour celui qui est prest de recevoir vos commandemens de telle devotion que je seray toute ma vie vostre très humble serviteur et neveu.

Thanks to Julia Altrocchi Slatcher, Catherine Pettit and Bret Helvig for help with the translation, including some medieval French words.

³ Personal communication from Carol Druce, Librarian and Custodian of Wilton House documents, 2002.

⁴ Personal communication from Steve Hobbs, Archivist, County Hall, Trowbridge, England, 2002.

⁵ Personal communication from Rosemary Cooper, Curator of Carisbrooke Castle, April, 2004.

Works Cited

ABBREVIATIONS

EB	Encyclopedia Britannica. 1970.
HMC	Historic Manuscripts Commission
WSRO	Wiltshire Shropshire Record Office
WNID	Websters New International Dictionary. 2nd Ed. 1934.

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