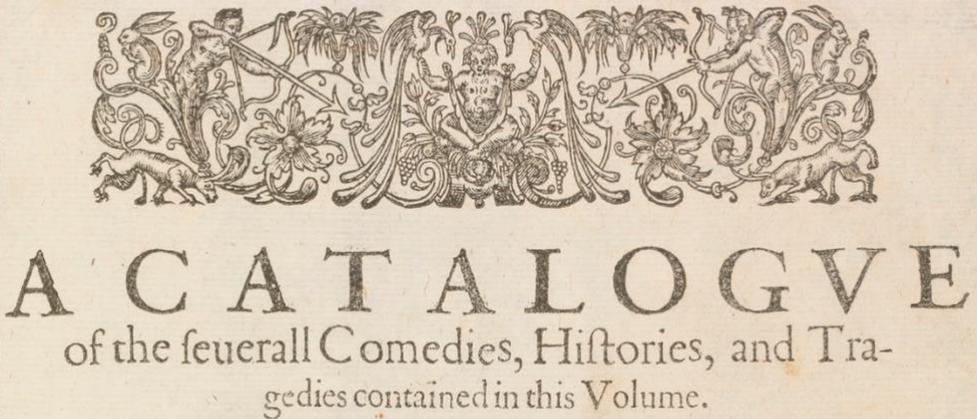


From a talk given to the De Vere Society in September 2015.

New evidence for de Vere from Tilbury Church

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The pages of the First Folio of Shakespeare's works printed in 1623, contain engravings of an animal which must have astonished those who first saw it. After all, considering the cost and difficulty of producing the Folio, let alone the anticipated exalted readership, who in their right mind would place two urinating beasts on the front page?



Shakespeare's First Folio (1623): Catalogue page

Yet it was the same extraordinary animals which flank the figure of Hera in the tableau (above) that first suggested an intimate connection with the family of de Vere. Particularly with Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, who, in turn, was connected to the dedicatees, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery.

The central figure here is of Juno (Hera), crowned with lotus blossom and seated on a floral throne whilst holding aloft her attributes, the peacock. The Queen is seen being menaced by two figures, Cupid on the left, and Heracles on the right: the two representing opposing passions, love and war, the same themes that form the bulk of the plays and sonnets. In deconstructing the tableau, it's possible we may discover something of the identity of the real person behind the name Shakespeare, and whether this was intended as a hidden message to posterity. In that case everything shown on the colophon is the product of a careful design; not just an assembly of unrelated parts.

Leverets



Let us look at the two young hares (leverets) at the top corners which hold their paws to their mouths, almost as if to speak *if they could*. Then 'hares speake' is an anagram of the word 'Shakespeare', just as leveret, can be seen as analogous to L(ord) E(dward) Vere-T(rentham). Hardly just a fortuitous assembly, considering that Elizabeth Trentham was the earl's second wife. The two animals then are clearly not just decoration. Their purpose, we could say, is to proclaim on the pages of the First Folio, that Edward de Vere, husband of Elizabeth Trentham is Shakespeare.

Urinating Beasts.



In each of the bottom corners, we see two fantastic animals: the front half of each is clearly an ox with horns, but the rear has the curly tail (*canda canis*), and the hindquarters of a greyhound. Moreover, as if to confirm the appearance, the animal is urinating just like a dog, even with cocked leg! This figure was adopted by John de Vere, the 13th Earl of Oxford, (1442-1513). Like his father the 12 earl, John de Vere was a staunch supporter of Henry VI and the

Lancastrian cause. He was one of the main commanders for Henry VI at Barnet and for the future Henry VII at Bosworth in 1485.

The calygreyhound emerged after 1485. This fantastic beast is unique in heraldry and combines the forms of two animals: (i) the **caley** (or colly), an old term for the white hind, which was the personal badge of Joan of Kent, mother of Richard II, and used by subsequent Plantagenet kings up to Richard III, who died in battle in 1485.

(ii) the **greyhound** of Henry VII's mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort.

The dynastic heraldry of the Lady Margaret is illustrated in her *Book of Hours*, made in about 1500 in which the greyhound is shown supporting her family arms. It appears too in the female heraldry of Henry VI,



confirming the essentially feminine character of the calygreyhound. Its absence among the badges of the 13th Earl of Oxford leads one to conclude that it was the personal badge of his first wife Margaret Neville, daughter of the Earl of Salisbury, and sister to the Earl of Warwick, the 'Kingmaker'.

The beast in the Tower

By joining the two noble animals, the White Hart of the Plantagenets, and the Greyhound of the Tudors, the calygreyhound symbolised the union of the houses after the defeat of Richard III at Bosworth Field in 1485; a union that was cemented by the marriage between the new king and Elizabeth of York (1466- 1503) and symbolised by the Tudor rose which combined the red and white roses of the contending families. Although the 13th Earl of Oxford, mentions the beast several times in his will as being used on his church vestments and silver, there was no figure identified as a calygreyhound. The animal had sunk almost without trace in the vast swamp of the medieval bestiary.

But now have we discovered a figure. A lucky break came in the pages of the *Monuments of NW Essex* containing the entry: *Tilbury Juxta Clare, the Church of St. Margaret. On the N wall of the tower, a crude representation in plaster or mortar of a winged beast.*



The tower at St Margaret's was, we know, built by Elizabeth the countess of Oxenford, in 1519. She was the second wife of the 13th Earl, and a devout lady. The only winged beast in the de Vere repertoire however, is the Harpy, a mythical creature with the head of a woman and the body of an eagle. Originally a Yorkist

symbol, it was taken by the 13th earl John as his 'Arms of Assumption' following the death of Richard III Expecting then to see the harpy, one is confronted instead by an animal with large ears like a donkey, a curly tail and wings, placed high on the north wall inside the tower of St. Margaret's Church.

The church guide says the 'winged' beast was researched by a previous incumbent, the Rev. Philip Gray, who decided it was an ass, used in French mediaeval processions

on religious feasts and holidays, the wings being a cross tree of wood to bear a load. Paraphrasing perhaps, the Flight into Egypt, or a talisman against evil. The problem of the curly tail not being a biblical feature seems to have been disregarded. Centuries of whitewash have obscured some of the detail, and any colouring has vanished. Nevertheless, crude or not, as far as we know, this is the only image remaining that shows us what a calygreyhound actually looked like.

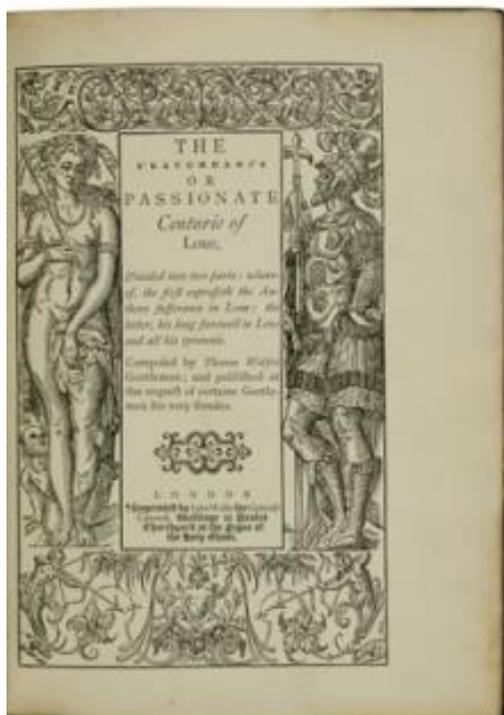
Beginning at the front, the long neck and shape of the head and ears is typical of a deer, or hart, the lack of antlers suggest a hind or female deer. Moving to the rear end, the legs and curly tail, though badly executed are those of a dog or greyhound. The 'wings' are in fact, an upper case letter 'V'. The point at the bottom can be seen under the belly.

This then is the calygreyhound. The hart is of Richard II, the posterior greyhound is Margaret Beaufort, Henry VI, VII, Henry VIII *et al*, and the large embossed letter 'V' indicates 'Vere'.

It's reasonable to suggest that this form was the antecedent to the animals we see today on the 1623 First Folio of the works of Shakespeare. However, we have to account for the modifications to the church model seen on the Folio. Title page of *Hekatompathia*

To answer this question requires a journey back to the year 1582, when with the assistance of the Earl of Oxford, Thomas Watson dedicated his book of 100 sonnets to Edward de Vere, and called it *The Hekatompathia*.

Beginning from the top of the page, there are two cuckoos, the sacred bird of *Hera*. Also two letter 'A's, signifying excellence, derived from the medieval term 'A per se A'. Facing each other are, on the left Psyche and Cupid, who are meant to illustrate the journey of the soul through life to Nirvana. On the right appears Zeus, who made Psyche immortal and married her to Cupid. At the bottom is a familiar scene, very similar to the one that appears as a recut version on the First Folio 41 years



later, and curated probably, by the de Vere/Herbert families. The two sparring oxen are an obvious pun on the earl's title of Oxford, and the illustration, though cropped, shows the normal ox's tail. The plate for the colophon for the First Folio is a close copy but with the addition of the two hares and an important modification to the oxen rebus of the Veres. Even if readers did not recognise the animal, the embossed letter 'V' would have proclaimed 'Vere' for all the world to see.

But if we accept that the collection and publishing of the First Folio was an Oxfordian family affair, it follows that the tableau would have been the subject of considerable debate. If anything had to go, it was the now-obsolete white hart of Richard II, and in its place the family put the oxen of the de Veres joined to the greyhound of Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, which animal continued as the royal personal badge. The partnership of the earls of Richmond and Oxford was emphasised and embodied in this new animal, framed in the same setting as Watson's *Hekatompathia*. whose original was adopted by the countess of Oxford when she built the tower of St. Margaret's Church in 1519.

References

1. *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*. Oxford University Press.
 2. *Lady Margaret's Book of Hours*. Duke of Northumberland, Alnwick Castle.
 3. Note: Badges of the 13th Earl of Oxford are to be seen in the clerestory windows of SS Peter & Paul Lavenham, Suffolk.
 4. The Rev. Severne A. Ashurst Majendie. *Some Account of the Family of De Vere, The Earls of Oxford, and of Hedingham Castle in Essex*. (London) H.T. Smith & Son. 1904.
 5. *Monuments of NW Essex*: RCHM Vol. 1
 6. A label on the tower states: "... Elizabeth Countess of Oxinford in the yere of our Lord 1519 added this tower the rebuilt Church of S. Margaret's " [Margery Golding, wife of the 16th Earl of Oxford, mother of the 17th Earl, received Tilbury Juxta Clare in dower].
- Note: Harpy supporter of the de Vere arms: *When a man of any degree whatsoever has taken prisoner in lawful war, any gentleman, nobleman or prince, he may bear the arms of that prisoner, and transmit them to his heirs for ever*". National Encyclopaedia Vol. VII, (London) Wm .Mackenzie

NB. In contrast to the identity of the Calygreyhound proposed in this article, some bestiaries describe it as having the body of a cat, but with talons as feet, sawlike antlers and a long tufted tail. A more unlikely name for such a beast is hard to imagine.