

## Coming of Age:

### Five Milestones in the Life of Edward de Vere, 1571-72

By Jan Cole

In the year 1571, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, achieved his majority, having reached 21 years of age. Ranking high among the peers because of his ancestry, he assumed the hereditary role of Lord High Chamberlain to the Queen. He had already seen some involvement with the military under the Earl of Sussex during the 1569 rebellion in the north<sup>1</sup> and had already been receiving dedications as a patron of literature, initiating his career as a learned courtier and poet.<sup>2</sup> His ranking as an Earl gave Oxford close access to the Queen in her Privy Chamber and - already famous for his skills at dancing, horsemanship and the joust - he quickly became one of the Queen's favourites. A year later, on 11 May 1572, Gilbert Talbot wrote to his father, the Earl of Shrewsbury, that "the Queen's Majesty delighteth more in his [Oxford's] personage and his valiantness than any other."<sup>3</sup>

In 1571 Queen Elizabeth was 38 years old, the Earl of Leicester, was 39, and William Cecil, 50. Of the courtiers and literary men Oxford had known in his childhood, those still alive in 1571 included Thomas Smith, aged 57, and recently recalled to court as a member of the Privy Council, and the soldier-poet Thomas Churchyard, who had been a page to Oxford's uncle, the Earl of Surrey. Churchyard, who was aged 51, was continuing to publish a succession of volumes of occasional verse. Of those poets who would become famous over the next two decades, Philip Sidney was 17 years of age and preparing to go abroad the next year on a continental tour. Edmund Spenser was aged 18 and studying at Cambridge, where his close friend, Gabriel Harvey, aged 21, had just received a Fellowship. Walter Raleigh, aged 17, was attending Oriel College, Oxford.

With no rivals of his own age, the stage was set for Oxford's rise at court. In fact, there were five important milestones for Oxford in 1571. These were:

- The completion of his wardship and taking control of remaining lands;
- His engagement and marriage to Anne Cecil, July-December 1571;
- His first summons to sit in the House of Lords as a peer, April-May 1571;

- His first diplomatic task in attending upon the French ambassador during the Queen's progress, August-September 1571;
- His achievement of the chief honour at the Accession Day tilts with a precious gift from the Queen, November 1571;
- His first published writing associated with Bartholomew Clerke's Latin translation of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, the epistle to the reader dated 3 January 1571 (old dating).

This essay will deal mainly with the significance of the last of these 'milestones.'

### **Links between Hoby's *Courtier* (1561) and Clerke's *Courtier* (1571)**

The 1561 English *Courtier* and the 1571 Latin *Courtier* translations are linked by Thomas Sackville's involvement with both. Sackville wrote a commendatory sonnet to Hoby's translation. In addition, the book included an epistle from John Cheke, written shortly before his death (1557). Cheke had been Hoby's tutor at St John's College, Cambridge. Cheke's daughter, Mary, married (as his first wife) William Cecil, also educated at St John's, and Thomas Cecil was their son. Thomas Hoby had travelled in France, Germany and Italy in the 1540s-50s and had married Elizabeth Cooke, the sister of William Cecil's second wife, Mildred. These family and Cambridge college relationships were echoed in the 1571 translation, which contained: a) Clerke's epistle to Sackville; b) Sackville's epistle to Clerke; c) Dr John Caius's epistle to Clerke; d) Oxford's epistle to the reader; e) Clerke's epistle to the reader'; and f) commendatory poems from Clerke's friends.

Thus, the 1571 *Courtier* looked back (via these relationships) to 1561 and to the earlier intellectual circle of educational and religious reformers at St John's, Cambridge in the 1540's, and now placed Oxford amongst this circle. Not only had Oxford been educated at St John's but also entered the circle by his engagement to Anne Cecil. Just as William Cecil was related to Thomas Hoby through Mildred (who became Hoby's sister-in-law), so Oxford was related to William and Mildred Cecil (as their son-in-law), and through them, related back to Hoby.

There is also a significant link between Oxford and Hoby's travels in Italy and to the interest in Italian literature and culture that Oxford would soon pursue in his own travels of 1575-76. Hoby died in 1566 when Oxford was sixteen, but it is entirely likely that Oxford had sight of Hoby's extensive travel journals and discussed Italy with his widow in his mid-to-late teens. Hoby's itinerary bears many similarities with that of Oxford's in 1575-76.

## The 1571 'Courtier'

In 2011, there was an interesting exchange of articles in *The Oxfordian*, which discussed two alternative claims respecting the authorship of Shakespeare's works. In 2010 Sabrina Feldman had raised some intriguing claims for Thomas Sackville as the author. This article was reviewed by Oxfordian, Ron Hess, who maintained his position on the authorship, and Feldman then replied to Hess.<sup>4</sup> Each noted the main literary links between Sackville and Oxford.

First, the 1572 *Courtier* was translated into Latin by Sackville's secretary, Bartholomew Clerke. The claim in B.M. Ward's Oxford biography that Clerke had known Oxford at Cambridge is speculative but plausible. On the other hand, Clerke was surely Sackville's secretary, as he said so himself in his Latin dedication of *Courtier* to Sackville. Although Oxfordians are aware of Oxford's Latin dedication to Clerke, they seem unaware that a longer, even finer, Latin dedication to Clerke was made there by Sackville.<sup>5</sup>

Another link between Sackville and Oxford can be found in Gabriel Harvey's 1577 *Rhetor*, which contains the text of Harvey's two-day speech on the principles of rhetoric. Harvey dedicated the work to Bartholomew Clerke, a senior rhetorician he admired and who had requested that the *Rhetor* be published. He also praised Sackville and Oxford in *Rhetor* as "two most noble and magnificent lords ... perfect courtiers of unsurpassed excellence." From this context, it is clear that Harvey meant to praise them in part for the eloquent commendatory Latin epistles contributed to Clerke's Latin translation of Castiglione's work.<sup>6</sup> Clerke's Latin *Courtier* (*De Curiali Sive Aulico...*) was first published in early 1572 (by modern dating), but bears the date 1571 (old dating) on the title-page.<sup>7</sup> Oxford's Latin epistle to Clerke bears the date 3 January 1571 (i.e. 1572).<sup>8</sup>

Oxford may, indeed, have met Clerke at Cambridge in the 1560s, and Sackville and Oxford almost certainly met via William Cecil at Cecil House in the 1560s. However, it would be most interesting if we could find an occasion when Oxford, Sackville and Clerke were all together during the period when the Latin *Courtier* was being translated, or at least being discussed as a project. Fortunately, by 1571, we can.

## The Earl of Oxford's Summons to Parliament

The third Parliament of Elizabeth I's reign was held from 2 April to 29 May 1571. This was a very important 'milestone' for the 20-year-old Oxford. It was his first official summons to attend as Lord Great Chamberlain (LGC) and as hereditary peer in the

House of Lords. In his capacity as LGC, he had the privilege of attending the Queen at the official opening of Parliament, taking his place prominently in the procession and holding her robe or train as she took her place upon the Chair of State. Using the original Journals of the House of Lords, Simon d'Ewes reported the spectacle in 1682:

On *Monday* the second day of *April*, the Parliament beginning (according to the Writs of Summons sent forth) her Majesty about eleven of the Clock came towards *Westminster*, in the ancient accustomed most honourable Passage, having first riding before her the Gentlemen Sworn to attend her Person, the Batchellors Knights, after them the Knights of the *Bath*, then the Barons of the Exchequer, and Judges of either Bench, with the Master of the Rolls, her Majesties Attorney General, and Sollicitor General; whom followed in Order, the Bishops, and after them the Earls, then the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Hat of Maintenance was carried by the Marquess of Northampton, and the Sword by the Earl of Sussex. The place of the Lord Steward for that day was supplied by the Lord Clinton, Lord Admiral of England; the Lord Great Chamberlain was the Earl of Oxenford and the Earl Marshal, by deputation from the Duke of Norfolk, was the Earl of Worcester.

Her Majesty sate in her Coach in her Imperial Robes, and a Wreath or Coronet of Gold, set with rich Pearl and Stones, over her Head; her Coach drawn by two Palfries, covered with Crimson Velvet, drawn out, imbossed and imbroidered very richly. Next after her Chariot followed the Earl of Leicester, in respect of his Office of the Master of the Horse, leading her Majesties spare Horse. And then forty seven Ladies and Women of Honour; The Guard in their rich Coats going on every side of them. The Trumpeters before the first, sounding; and the Heralds riding, and keeping their rooms and places Orderly.

In Westminster Church, the Bishop of Lincoln Preached before her Majesty, whose Sermon-being done, her Majesty came from the Church, the Lords all on foot, in order as afore; and over her Head a rich Canopy was carried all the way.

She being entered into the Upper House of Parliament, and there sate in Princely and seemly sort, under a high and rich Cloth of Estate; her Robe was supported by the Earl of Oxenford, the Earl of Sussex kneeling, holding the Sword on the left hand, and the Earl of Huntingdon holding the Hat of Estate, and the Lords all in their Rooms on each side of the Chamber; that is to say, the Lords Spiritual on the right hand, and the Lords Temporal on the left. <sup>9</sup>

Present amongst the lords at this Parliament was, of course, Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst. After the Queen's speech, Oxford's formal summons to his first Parliament was recorded in Latin:

Hodiè retornatum breve quo **Edwardus Comes Oxon.** præsentì huic Parlamento summonitus fuit, qui admissus fuit ad suum in sedendo præhementiæ locum, salvo cuiq; jure suo.

(Today there was a short session in which Edward Earl of Oxford was summoned to this present Parliament. He was admitted to his own seat at his own station in his own right.)

*Journal of the House of Lords: April 1571*

[www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/jrnl-parliament-eliz1/pp136-145](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/jrnl-parliament-eliz1/pp136-145)

Also present during the same parliament was Bartholomew Clerke, sitting in the House of Commons as the returned MP for Bramber in Sussex. This was also something of a 'milestone' for Clerke, primarily for two reasons. First, before he became Cambridge University proctor for the second time in 1569, rumours had circulated that he was unsound in religion. He was supported by the Earl of Leicester against the Puritans at Cambridge, and the latter's influence was probably behind his return as MP in 1571. Second, at the parliamentary session on 19 April 1571, he made a memorable speech at the second reading of the Bill of Usury, quoting Aristotle, Plato, Saint Augustine and the psalmist.<sup>10</sup> Clerke was an eloquent speaker and, of course, a learned rhetorician and Latinist. It is not a great stretch to suppose that then, as now, those that attended parliament knew each other socially and privately, as well as in their public capacities.

It has been suggested that it was Sackville who commissioned his secretary, Bartholomew Clerke to translate Castiglione's *Courtier* from Italian into Latin.<sup>11</sup> When the translation was started is not clear, but it seems possible that it was either in progress by April 1571 or that it was started soon afterwards, probably after some private conference between the three men. In fact, we find them together again later the same year, when in August 1571, the French ambassador visited England. He was met by Sackville (who had already met the ambassador in France) and Lord Admiral, Charles Howard, at Blackfriars on 12 August. Joining the Queen's Progress on 30 August, they were at Audley End in Essex, where Sackville, the Earl of Oxford, Thomas Smith, Charles Howard, Sir George Carew, Thomas Cecil, and others, were in the entourage. They escorted the ambassador from Audley End to Cambridge

University, where they were met by the vice-chancellor, John Whitgift, and visited the library of Andrew Perne at Peterhouse College.<sup>12</sup> At Audley End, their host was Thomas Howard, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk, who would be arrested a few days later.

It seems likely that, since Sackville, Clerke and Oxford were all together at Whitehall almost daily from 2 April to 29 May 1571, and again in Cambridge from 30 August to early September 1571, that Oxford (freshly summoned to his first sittings in the Lords and already known for his excellent education and knowledge of Latin), was especially chosen by Sackville to write the epistle to the reader, which would appear in the printed version. This task may have been regarded as a suitable token commemoration for Oxford's official entry into public, parliamentary and court life. What more appropriate place for such a commemoration than in a translation of Castiglione's *Courtier*? The epistle is, to my knowledge, the first published writing of Oxford's to appear. It twice refers to Clerke as "my good friend." At the end of the epistle, Oxford says "when I read this courtly Latin, to me it seems that I am listening to Crassus, Antonius, and Hortensius discoursing on this very theme." Incidentally, these names all appear in Shakespeare's plays.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Significance of 1571 and What Happened Afterwards**

The year 1571 represented a pinnacle of success for the young Oxford. Any court cynic of the time may well have commented that it could not last, and that fickle Fortune would soon reverse her wheel and topple the young Earl into disgrace and misfortune. This did, indeed, happen and the seeds of change were already present. It is often suggested that the downfall and subsequent execution of Oxford's cousin, Thomas Howard, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk, was a catalyst to a significant change in Oxford's personality (leading to erratic behaviour) and to his relationship with William Cecil.

What became known as the Ridolphi plot was uncovered in the summer of 1571 while the Queen was on progress in East Anglia. Norfolk had become involved in it largely through his servants, but also by his rash agreement to marry Mary, Queen of Scots, without discussing this with Queen Elizabeth. The plot would have assassinated Elizabeth, released Mary, and placed her on the throne with the help of the northern Catholic supporters and a Spanish invasion. Norfolk was taken into custody in the first week of September 1571, just days after Oxford and Elizabeth had been his guests at Audley End. He was escorted to the Tower on 4 September 1571 and attended there by Thomas Smith.<sup>14</sup> At his trial on 16 January 1572, Norfolk was condemned for high treason, little more than a week after Oxford completed his epistle for Clerke's *Courtier*, and probably during its printing.

It has been said that the serious downturn in Oxford's relationship to Cecil dates from this time, and that Oxford tried hard to prevent Norfolk's execution. He would have appealed directly to Queen Elizabeth for Norfolk's life. In fact, the records show that by April 1572, Elizabeth had signed and revoked a warrant for his execution four times. Finally, a letter to Cecil dated 11 April 1572 (the day before Oxford's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday) proves that she was still prepared to stay the execution. She could not make her heart match her head on the matter and, significantly, allowed this letter to stand in lieu of a warrant:

The causes that move me to this are not now to be expressed lest an irrevocable deed be in the meanwhile committed. If they will needs a warrant, let this suffice, all written with mine own hand.

Your most loving sovereign, Elizabeth R.<sup>15</sup>

The letter was endorsed by Cecil and used by him as the instrument of Norfolk's execution on 2 June 1572. In the early 1600s, Sir Walter Raleigh made it clear to Robert Cecil that his father had been responsible for Norfolk's execution. Four months of warrants and revocations had elapsed, and the role of Oxford's appeals to Elizabeth in her vacillations and in her reluctance to execute Norfolk is very suggestive, especially when it is placed beside Oxford's presence with them both in August 1571 at Audley End. The Queen's sadness and withdrawal on 3 June 1572 is on record.<sup>16</sup>

Oxford's own feelings about Norfolk's execution represent the beginning of his antipathy towards Cecil, his doubts about his marriage, and his eventual downturns in fortune as a courtier, together with his subsequent concentration on literary patronage and the theatre. In 1573, he supervised Thomas Bedingfield's translation of *Cardanus' Comfort* and had some of his own poems in print. By the summer of 1574, he had left the country without the Queen's permission, being brought back by Bedingfield to explain his actions to the Queen, then on progress at Bristol. By 1575, he was allowed to travel to France, Germany and Italy, but Anne's pregnancy during his absence led to his suspicions that the child wasn't his, beginning a long period of separation, thereafter. By 1577, Oxford had lost the living connections with his childhood and his early manhood in the deaths of Thomas Smith, his aunt Frances Vere (the mother of the executed Duke of Norfolk), and the poet George Gascoigne. By 1578, Oxford had quarrelled publicly with Philip Sidney, and by the early 1580s, had been 'grounded' by the Queen for two weeks over quarrels with the Earl of Leicester. Soon afterwards, he began a literal self-exile from the court by buying Fisher's Folly outside the city walls in Bishopsgate and purchasing the 'Great Garden' property outside Aldgate, next door to the Boar's Head theatre. Thus began the great decade of

his involvement with the theatre and the literati of London (Lyly, Watson, Munday, etc.) from which so much circumstantial evidence arises to support his candidacy as the author known as ‘Shakespeare.’

Although Oxford would still appear at court for certain specific duties, he obtained no official office and would never again reach the giddy heights of his 1571 success as a ‘courtier’ befitting Castiglione’s model.

## Notes

1. Cecil’s accounts of expenditure for this campaign from March to September 1570 are listed in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* (1867), Elizabeth, Addenda 1566-79, p.327
2. The following translations had been dedicated to Oxford: Arthur Golding, *The Histories of Trogus Pompeius* (1564); Thomas Underdowne, *An Aethiopian History* (1569); Arthur Golding, *The Psalms of David* (1571)
3. Lodge, *Illustrations of British History*, ii, pp.100-101
4. Feldman, S. ‘The Swallow and the Crow: the Case for Sackville as Shakespeare’, *The Oxfordian*, vol. XII (2010), pp.119-137; Hess, R. ‘Did Shakespeare Have a Literary Mentor?’, *The Oxfordian*, vol. XIII (2011), pp.146-152; Feldman, S. ‘A Response...’, *The Oxfordian*, vol. XIII (2011) 153-165.
5. Hess, *op.cit.* p.150
6. Feldman, ‘A Response...’, pp.159-160.
7. *De Curiali Sive Anlico...* The 1606 Latin edition is viewable on Google Books.
8. See Nina Green’s website for the translation of Oxford’s epistle by Dana Sutton.
9. *Journals of the House of Lords 1571* at British History Online.
10. See Bartholomew Clerke at History of Parliament Online.
11. Town, E. *A House ‘Re-Edified’: Thomas Sackville and the Transformation of Knole 1605-1608*, PhD Thesis, University of Sussex (2010), p.87 – thesis online as PDF.
12. G.J.Gray, *Athenae Cantabrigiensis* (1861), p.389; Nelson, A. *Monstrous Adversary* (2003), p.73
13. For example, Crassus in *Antony & Cleopatra*; and Hortensius in *Timon of Athens*.
14. Strype, J. *The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith* (1820), p.106
15. Text of letter in May, S. *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works* (2004), pp.140-141
16. Hilton, L. *Elizabeth I, Renaissance Prince: a biography* (2014), p.205



### ERRATUM

Re: 'Coming of Age: Five Milestones in the Life of Edward de Vere, 1571-72,'  
*DVS Newsletter*, July 2016, pp.15-22

I stated in error in the above article (page 20) that Thomas Howard 4th Duke of Norfolk was at Audley End in the summer of 1571 when Queen Elizabeth, William Cecil, Thomas Smith and Oxford were there. Audley End did indeed belong to the Duke of Norfolk in 1571, having come to him from his second marriage to Margaret Audley. However, the Duke himself was not acting as host there in 1571. He was at this time under house arrest in London at his own mansion at Charterhouse which was referred to as 'Howard House.'

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