

‘Signatures’ of Edward de Vere in Anonymous Plays

By Charles Graves

Arden of Feversham (1592)

Arden of Feversham is a play noted by Richard Malim in *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of Shakespeare* (p. 34) as having followed *Murderous Michael* (1578) in its composition, and Malim attributes the play to the Earl of Oxford, among others. Michael was one of the adherents on the side of Alice Arden in the plot to kill her husband, Thomas, in February 1550/1. In particular Malim illustrates the parallels in *Arden of Feversham* with the ‘Gad’s Hill Affair,’¹ in which the play shows a scene mimicking Oxford’s men’s assault on William Cecil’s servants on the road to Rochester in May 1573 (Act V, scene IV, p. 105). In the play, Black Will says he robbed the constable at Gad’s Hill, and that he will leave England (after murdering Thomas Arden) and “go to Flushing.” Interestingly, Flushing in the Netherlands was Oxford’s original destination when he visited Bruges and Bruxelles in July 1574, soon after his own ‘Gad’s Hill’ incident in 1573.

One other reference in *Feversham* that supports an Oxfordian authorship is the introduction of the character Franklin as Thomas Arden’s friend and counsellor. Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, in the section on King Edward VI (1577), does not mention a Franklin in the telling of the murder of Thomas Arden, indicating its source came from elsewhere. There was, however, a William Frankelyn who was chancellor of Durham and also President of Queens’ College, Cambridge (1526-28), where Oxford had been admitted as a scholar at age nine. This may be the same person as the Franklin in the play. The evidence is in some of the opening lines in *Feversham* where Franklin tells Thomas Arden:

my gracious Lord, the Duke of Somerset hath freely given to thee and thy heirs, by letters patent from his Majesty, all the lands of the Abbey of Feversham (Act 1, Scene 1)

The historical William Frankelyn was a “salaried official as counsellor resident with Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond and Somerset and illegitimate son of King Henry VIII and Bessie Blount.”² It is also noted that in 1536, Frankelyn was dean of Windsor and later a prebendary for the rectory of Chalford, St. Giles, Buckinghamshire. He died there in 1556 and was buried, “but his will met with disapproval for a grant was made to one J. Glynn of so much as he could recover of goods, chattels and money, destined by Frankelyn for “superstitious purposes.”³

This William Glynn was President of Queens’ College, Cambridge 1553-7, where he was Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity and vice chancellor, just prior to Oxford’s arrival in 1559. Thus, both the Frankelyn and the Glynn family would likely have been known to Oxford, along with William Frankelyn’s identification with the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII:

On Thomas Wolsey’s accession to the see of Durham he confirmed William Frankelyn in the chancellorship. The chancellor made himself useful to the bishop in devising plans for increasing the revenues of the diocese.⁴

One other connection between Oxford and Franklyn would be Chalfont St. Giles, where William Franklyn died in 1556. The village is next to Chesham in Burnham, Buckinghamshire, near where the Veres held lands after their cousins the Bolbecs. It is also next to Chesham Bois, where a de Bois family held property. Some discussions in the Vere household about their neighbour the Rev. Franklyn, perhaps when Edward was small, may have influenced his opinion about the reverend’s relationship to the dissolution of the monasteries.

In Franklin, the playwright chose the right character as a companion to Thomas Arden, as Thomas had also received benefits from the dis-established monastic lands, i.e. Feversham Abbey. Oxford, if the author, had thus enlarged the scope of the historical murder of Thomas Arden by introducing the personality of Wolsey’s close colleague. Franklin also had been a known supporter of Henry VIII’s policy regarding the monasteries. Would another author of the play *Arden of Feversham* have included the President of Queens’ College as companion to Thomas Arden? If so, it would have likely been another poet who had been at the college; however, no other such poet has appeared.

The Troublesome reign of John, King of England (1591)

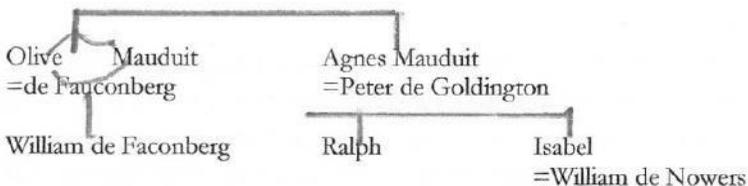
The full title of the play is the *Troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the discoverie of King Richard Cordelions Base Sonne (vulgarly named the Bastard Fauconbridge): also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey. As it was (sundry times) publikely acted by the Queenes Majesties Players, in the honourable Citie of London*⁵

We take for granted that the Fawconbridge in the play refers to the family of de Fauconberg.⁶ Richard I (the ‘Lion-Heart’) had an illegitimate son, Philip the Bastard (de Fauconberg), who was lord of Cognac and Merpens *jure uxoris*. Philip deserted his father and did homage to his grandfather Henry II in the inter-family struggle. The question was whether Cognac belonged to Poitiers or to Angoulême, as from Cognac the whole county of Angoulême could be overrun. After King John’s marriage to Isabel of Angoulême, the men of Angoulême were placed under the direction of the seneschal of Poitou, and a special seneschal was appointed for Angoulême. Then Philip the bastard was ‘brought out’ in Cognac, Merpens and Jarnac; in other words, he was taken into John’s side. H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, in *Governance of Medieval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta* (1963), say that Philip the Bastard killed the viscount of Limoges, Aymar, because Aymar contested Richard I’s claim to some gold at Chalus.⁷ Philip then went to England under John’s protection. This aspect of Philip’s life is reproduced in *Troublesome*.

However, there may be other individuals to which the play refers. Fauconberg was an East Yorkshire family at Ryse and was registered at the time of the *Domesday Book* (1086) as being held by Franco de Fauconberg, then being vassal of Drogo de Beuvriere. The early de Fauconberg family history is noted fully in Charles Graves’, *Families of the Domesday Book, vol. III*.⁸ Franco’s great-great grandson Walter de Falconberg was living at Pontefract in Yorkshire and married Agnes Fitzsimon, daughter of Simon Fitzsimon of Brixworth, Northamptonshire.⁹ Simon Fitzsimon of Brixworth had married Maud de Ryse, who held fees at Brixworth in 1262. His son Simon died in 1280, but his daughter married Walter de Falconberg of Pontefract. Of particular note, the Fitzsimons held in nearby Scaldwell, Orlingbury Hundred, where “later the Trussel family held,”¹⁰ the family of Oxford’s paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Trussel. These villages are just five miles north of Northampton.

Of equal interest is the Vere association with the Nowers, also affiliated with the Fauconberg line. John Mauduit, of the family of royal chamberlains, held a seat at Eston Mauduit. He had three daughters as his heirs, Agnes, Flandrina and Amice. Agnes Mauduit married Peter de Goldington, whose mother was the elder sister of Robert de Saucy of the Plumpton Pury manor of Paulerspury in Northampton. The Trussel family also held lands in Eston Mauduit, since 1402.¹¹ At Lowick, the Nowers held a seat since at least 1217,¹² with a John de Nowers in 1316 and 1/8 fee held in Lowick by John de Nowers later, which included holdings in Daventry, Northamptonshire. Drayton House in Lowick was held by the de Vere family since Robert de Vere, son of Alberic II and brother of Aubrey, first Earl of Oxford. Drayton House continued in the hands of his descendants who took the name 'de Drayton.' Thus, Trussel held in Scaldwell, where the Fitzsimons also held, and Walter de Fauconberg held in Eston Mauduit, where they would have known the de Nowers. Therefore, Edward de Vere would have been well acquainted with the de Nowers family since they were both living in Lowick.

Besides this, Agnes Mauduit Goldington's daughter, Isabel, also gave some inherited lands constituting 10 acres of woods and a share in the advowson to a William de Fauconberg. His is evidently the same family as that of Walter de Fauconberg of Brixworth and of Ryse.¹³ These 10 acres eventually went to Ralph, Isabel's brother. William de Fauconberg was the son of Agnes' sister Olive – this means that Olive Mauduit had no doubt married a de Fauconberg. Since Agnes' father John Mauduit was active at Eston Mauduit circa 1206, we can infer that Isabel and her husband William de Nowers must have occupied land at Eston about 70 to 80 years later.



As mentioned, the Trussels were at Eston Mauduit six generations up to Elizabeth Trussel, Edward's grandmother, so there is a slight possibility that at one generation or another, through the various wives of these Trussels, there is some genealogical connection with de Fauconberg. If so, certainly Elizabeth Trussel de Vere would have transmitted this information down to her descendants, the de Veres of Headingham Castle. In particular, since the story of Philip the bastard's connection with de Fauconberg was a widespread historical tradition, information about the de Fauconbergs of Northamptonshire would attract some attention.

The Robert de Fauconberg family

In an article on Aimar V de Limoges¹⁴ the historian Roger of Hovedon provides further information on Philip of Cognac (i.e. Philip the bastard) and the death of Aimar who was the 'Lymoges, Duke of Austria' in *Troublesome*. Roger was perhaps a cleric in orders and was an admirer of King Henry II and his works on English constitutional laws. He went on the Third Crusade with King Richard I, joining him in Marseilles in 1190. Upon his return in 1192, he began his *Chronica*, which was a history of England from 732AD to 1192AD. If some of the source of *Troublesome* was Roger of Hovedon's work, with its detailed story of King Richard I, then the inclusion in *Troublesome* of the story about Robert de Falconbridge's ambassadorship in Austria and the conception of Philip the bastard by Dame de Fauconberg at the embassy house may be factual. An article on Roger of Hovedon notes that from 1192, the Cronica is "an independent and copious authority."¹⁵

There was no historical Limoges, Duke of Austria, but one explanation about the reason why Aimar V de Limoges was identified as such in *Troublesome* was that Leopold of Austria captured King Richard I in his domains and the emperor Henry V exacted a ransom for Richard's release. Moreover, Viscount Aimar of Limoges was being besieged by Richard I when Richard I was killed. These were conflated into 'Duke of Austria' vis à vis Aimar of Limoges in the play.



Richard I

When the author of *Troublesome* wrote its Part I, a sequel was planned. It would have covered events in France and England following the aborted death of Prince Arthur. The author in this first Part gave Philip the Bastard, son of Dame de Fauconbridge, an essential role, equalling that of King John of England, Eleanor of Aquitaine, King John of France and also the dauphin. He appears on almost every other page of the printed text and expresses himself most energetically. It appears that the author enjoyed penning his lines, and certainly Philip became one of the dominant personages in *Troublesome*. All of King John's plunder of the monasteries at Canterbury was given over to Philip, whereas Holinshed's *Chronicle* does not mention Philip in such a role. In fact, it does not mention Philip at all, which indicates that the author of *Troublesome* probably had read Roger of Hoveden's accounts about King Richard and the birth of Philip the Bastard.

The Queen's Men (players) was supposed to be anti-Catholic¹⁵ and its productions supporting the philosophy of the Queen's main anti-Catholic bureaucrat Francis Walsingham. Was the author anti-Catholic in *Troublesome*? The play was making fun of friars and nuns but this was being done by Philip the bastard and Holinshed's mention of anti-Catholicism as a state policy was moderated in the play. In general, the Roman Catholicism presented in *Troublesome* was balanced and the religious preferences of the author or authors was not extreme in any way. One of the main concerns of the play was how the authors dealt with King John's conscience and the play seems to have treated this factor successfully.

Moreover, the author fills *Troublesome* with Philip the Bastard's opinions on all the relevant topics of King John's era. This may reflect a considerable interest of the author in promoting Philip the Bastard. It may reflect a desire to bring into the light a personage related to the de Fauconberg family of Northamptonshire, with whom the Vere and Trussel ancestors lived in close proximity. And Vere and Trussel may even have had a Fauconberg ancestor in that county.

Combined with the fact that Oxford himself descended from King John, if we believe the author to be Oxford, then the earl may have been presenting two lines of decent in his own pedigree. And we should be aware that the origin of the Fauconberg family is probably the Fauquembergue located between Hesdin (Somme) and St. Omer (Pas de Calais), the precise areas where the early ancestors of Edward de Vere (Alphonse de Vere, Alberic I de Vere) inhabited before the Conquest. With all this in mind, a Vere interest in the Fauconbergs seems quite normal and makes sense, more so than it would for any other author.

1. *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of Shakespeare*, Richard Malim, p 33.
2. *Wikipedia* biography of William Frankelyn
3. *Ibid*
4. *Ibid*
5. *Troublesome Raigne of John King of England ...*, ‘Tudor Facsimile Texts,’ supervision of John S. Farmer, Subscribers for the Editor, 1911.
6. F.M Powicke, *Loss of Normandy 1189-1204*, 1960, pp. 32-3
7. H.G. Richardson and G.O Sayles, *Governance of Medieval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta*, 1963, p 329.
8. Graves, Charles, *Families of the Domesday Book*, vol. III, pp. 79-82.
9. Graves, Charles, *27 Essays on Edward de Vere and William Shakespeare*, 2015, pp. 273ff.
10. Cf. *Victoria County History for Northants – Orlingbury Hundred*, p. 149
11. Graves, Charles, *Families of the Domesday Book*, vol. IV, pp. 71-74
12. *Ibid*
13. Graves, Charles, *27 Essays on Edward de Vere and William Shakespeare*, 2015, pp. 273ff.
14. *Wikipedia* biography of Aimar V De Limoges
15. *Wikipedia* biography of Roger of Hovedon