

# All the World's been Staged

## By

### E.M. Dutton & L.I. Gerald

Readers' Note: (The Public Records & State Paper Office forgeries must be briefly mentioned. Besides the libraries of Devonshire House, Bridgewater House and Dulwich College, one of the branch repositories of the Public Records and the State Paper Office was a golden well where the forger's handiwork has been traced. In fact, there is one document contained in a parcel marked "Bundle, No. 222, Elizabeth (1596)" which has been certified a forgery from Mr. J. P. Collier's hands. (Hamilton N.E.S.A. *An Inquiry*. London: Richard Bentley, 1860.) Our investigation in this article, does not take its references from this forged bundle (No. 222, Elizabeth 1596), and therefore what is being told here, is not based on those forged documents).

## The Burbages, The Alleyn's, & Francis Bacon

The Globe theatre was built in 1599 and in 1600, Philip Henslowe (managing director of the Admiral's Men) and his son-in-law Edward Alleyn<sup>1</sup> (head of the acting company; both owners of the Rose Theatre) engaged a friend of Cuthbert Burbage<sup>2</sup> (son of James Burbage<sup>3</sup>) to build a theatre for them under the same style as The Globe in Golden Lane; it was afterwards called The Fortune theatre. This friend of theirs was called Peter Street. After the construction of the new theatre, the Burbages, though removing their theatre to the south, continued to live in Shoreditch, an area, alleged by many Stratfordians, to have been the dwelling place of Shaksper, their prodigal son.

Mrs. Stopes, the Shakespearean scholar, tells us that Shaksper, did not live in Shoreditch itself but he was not far off. He lived in the parish of St. Helen's in Bishopsgate, where Anthony Bacon in 1594 was residing to his final days in 1601, and shared a room with his servant, William Lawson. This fact very much disturbed his mother, Anne Bacon, who feared "lest his servants might be corrupted by the plays to be seen at The Bull." During the year of 1573, there were various fencing contests held at The Bull in Bishopsgate.

It is curious to realize that he [Shaksper] was assessed on £5, which implies that he lived in a larger and better house than either of the brothers Burbage. That again suggests a possibility, which has never been suggested, that his family was with him during some years of his life in town.

C. C. Stopes. *Burbage & Shakespeare's Stage* (1913)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (b.1566–d.1626)

<sup>2</sup> (d.1636)

<sup>3</sup> (d.1597)

<sup>4</sup> P. 86. London: Alexander Moring Ltd. (1913)

Mrs. Stopes' theory is difficult to corroborate; however, the Subsidy Roll for St. Helen's, Bishopsgate (October 1598) assesses a "William Shakespeare on goods" on a levy for 13s. 4d. In the marginal reference, the word *affid* is entered, which would mean that this "William Shakespeare" did not pay at the time, but had entered an affidavit as to his reason for not paying.<sup>5</sup>

In an article in *The Athenaeum* published in March 26, 1904, Professor Hales wrote that Shakespeare's name also appears in the same Subsidy Rolls (above-mentioned) for the years 1595/6 and 1596/7 with smaller levies in proportion, but they had not been collected; the 13s. 4d., previously mentioned, was therefore increasing. Furthermore, in the great Roll of the Pipe of 40 Eliz., 1598, there is an entry: "Residuum, London: William Shakspeare in the Parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate Ward, owes 13s. 4d., of the subsidy," and an answer to this is found in the Roll of the Pipe of 41 Eliz. It is not certain if this particular subsidy was settled, but in the Bishop of Winchester Accounts there is (for a sum of money) payments from various persons at the time.

We do not know if the above "William Shakespeare" in the Subsidy Roll related to the Stratfordian actor; however, Stratfordians are adamant that it was their prodigal son there mentioned, and having no means to disagree with them, we keep this under consideration and track down the events of the time Shaksper was living in London in Bishopsgate. Before we do, let's continue with our initial case.

In the Easter term of 1599, Giles Alleyn brought in a Bill of complaint<sup>6</sup> against a man called Peter Street, who was a good friend of Cuthbert Burbage. The charge was that Mr. Street (on January 20) came and "trod down and consumed the grass;" pulled down a building (The Theatre) belonging to Alleyn worth £700. The damages, added to the loss, were reckoned at £800. Mr. Street denied all wrong-doing except treading down the grass.

A Royal Commission was appointed to hear formal depositions on June 5, 1600; depositions were taken. A Robert Vigerous, acquainted with both parties, stated that "about four years past" he had drawn up a new lease of Holywell for James and Cuthbert Burbage, who offered to take The Theatre for a new term of ten years at £24 a year, that he believed an offer of £100 as a consideration accompanied the draft of agreement. The deponent had drawn it up himself; Burbage had come to his rooms (in the Temple at that time), paid him his fees, and promised him a satin doublet when the agreement was completed. But he never got it.

To confuse matters further, a man called Thomas Neville, of Bricklesea in Essex, gave a rather confused statement of the same events, adding that James Burbage had not paid £30 of his rent, and Cuthbert had promised to do so, with the other conditions about two years ago. The conclusion was that on June 11, an arrest for Alleyn was made.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Excheq Lay. Subsidy Roll. London: 35 Eliz. The Subsidy Rolls were first discovered by Joseph Hunter in 1845.

<sup>6</sup> Coram Rege Rolls, Trinity term, 42 Eliz., R. 587.

<sup>7</sup> Court of Requests. Eliz., Bundle 372.

Giles Alleyn now brings a similar complaint against Cuthbert Burbage, in the custody of the Marshall, at Hilary term, 1600/1, the same time the Earl of Essex was on trial, and the Globe Theatre Company was concerned over the examination of Augustine Phillipps, one of the acting men of The Globe, and of Sir Gelly Merrick (Commander over the Essex House). The complaint against Burbage was for a “breach of covenant.” Cuthbert said they had no right to bring the case after the last decision; Alleyn and his wife said they had, so an appeal against Cuthbert and Richard Burbage was made in the Star Chamber, on November 23, 1600/1.

## **Examinations of Actors in the Essex Trial**

In the meantime, Augustine Phillipps and Sir Gelly Merrick were being examined:

Examination of Sir Gelly Merrick  
February 17, 1600.<sup>8</sup>  
Public Record Office  
Domestic State Papers, Elizabeth.  
Vol. 278, No. 78

He said that upon Saturday last he dined at Gunter’s in the Company of the Lord Mouteagle, Sir Christopher Blount, Sir Charles Percy, Ellis Jones, and Edward Bushel, and with others he does not remember.

After dinner that day and at the mention of Sir Charles Percy, and the rest, they all went together to The Globe [theatre] over the water [river Thames] where the Lord of Chamberlain’s Men usually played and there somewhat before the play began Sir Charles telling them that the play would be of Harry the third.

Whether Sir John Davies<sup>9</sup> were there or not, this examine cannot tell, but he said he would be there if he could. He cannot tell who procured that play to be played at that time except it were Sir Charles Percy, but as he thinks, it was Sir Charles Percy.

Then he was at the same play and came in somewhat after it was begun, and the play was of King Harry the third, and of the killing of King Richard the second, played by the Lord Chamberlain’s players.

Sir Gelly Merrick

*Ex. per: J. Popham, Edward Fenner*

The Lord Mouteagle mentioned above, was the same person who on October 26, 1605, ten days before the meeting of Parliament and the alleged Gunpowder Plot received an anonymous letter. The letter was vague of details and made no sense, yet warned Lord Mouteagle to absent himself from the Parliament’s opening ceremony. This letter was taken to Sir Robert Cecil by Lord Mouteagle, who “promptly divined”<sup>10</sup> its meaning and the precise danger

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Green. *Calendar* for 1598-1601. P. 575.

<sup>9</sup> Misread as “Danvers” in the *Calendar*.

<sup>10</sup> Mr. Green. *Calendar* for 1598-1601.

indicated, although Cecil allowed King James to have the fame that he was himself the first to interpret it when it was shown to him five days later.

Furthermore, the play mentioned in Sir Gelly Merrick's examination is noted *Harry III.*, the killing of Richard the second which was played by the Lord Chamberlain's Players. This should have procured the arrest and questioning of the author of that play, yet it did not.

The Examination of Augustine Phillipps  
Servant unto the Lord Chamberlain and one of his players  
February 18, 1600, *upon his oath.*<sup>11</sup>  
Public Record Office  
Domestic State Papers, Elizabeth  
Vol. 278, No. 85

He said that on Friday last was Thursday Sir Charles Percy, Sir Jocelyn Percy and the Lord Mouteagle with some there, more spoke to some of the players in the presence of this examinee to have the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard the second to be played the Saturday next promising to get them 40s., more than their ordinary to play it.

Where this examinee and his fellows were determined to have played some other play, holding that play of King Richard to be so old and so long out of use as that they should have small or no company at it. But at their request this examinee and his fellows were content to play it the Saturday and had their 40s., more than their ordinary for it and so played it accordingly.

Augustine Phillipps

*Ex. per: J. Popham, Edward Fenner*

Augustine Phillipps is the same person who bequeathed by his Will in 1605, "to my fellow William Shakspeare a thirty shilling piece of gold." He was also one of twenty-three persons who, with Shaksper, were charged with obtaining "heraldic honours by fraudulent representation," Mr. Chapman tells us.<sup>12</sup>

Both examinations were summed up in the "Report of the Trial" printed from Le Neve's manuscript,<sup>13</sup> and explained by Mr. Hargrave at the time of its publication: "And the story of Henry the fourth being set forth in a play and in that play there being set forth the killing of the King upon a stage; the Friday before Sir Gelly Merrick and some others of the Earl's [Essex] train having a humour to see a play, they must needs have the play of Henry the fourth. The

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. Green. *Calendar for 1598-1601*. P. 578.

<sup>12</sup> William H. Chapman. *Shakespeare: The Personal Phase*. 1920.

<sup>13</sup> Stebbing, the Herald, writing to John Dugdale, Esq. January 24, 1718: "There is a project on foot for reprinting the *Antiquities of Warwickshire*. The undertaker, I hear, is one Mr. Osborne, a bookseller in Lombard Street, who has all the old plates, and the book of additions made by Sir William Dugdale. He designs in a short time to print proposals for carrying on the work, and has got leave to search the Records in the Tower, for making what further enlargements he can. This Mr. Le Neve and Mr. Hare, who join in their humble service to you, desired me to acquaint you with all, and that if you have any exception against this undertaking they will not encourage or assist the undertaker therein." Published in William Hamper's *Life of Sir William Dugdale*. London: Thomas Pavisson, 1826.

players told them that was stale, they should get nothing by playing of that, but no play else would serve; and Sir Gelly Merrick gives forty shillings to [Augustine] Phillipps the player to play this, besides what so ever he could get.”<sup>14</sup>

The account of the Essex trial was also given in William Camden’s *Annals*,<sup>15</sup> which Francis Bacon was main editor and who in 1604, wrote and published an *Apology* that gave his reasons for prosecuting Essex in 1601, also mentioning the play that is referred to in the above statements:

Some few days before the rebellion about February 1, 1600, with great heat and violence, he [Essex] had displaced certain gentlemen lodged in an house fast by Essex-house, and there planted divers of my Lord’s followers and accomplices, all such as went forth with him in the action of rebellion. That the afternoon before the rebellion, Merrick, with a great company [The Globe’s] of others that afterwards were all in the action had procured to be played before them the play of deposing King Richard the second. Neither was it casual, but a play bespoken by Merrick. And not so only, but when it was told him by one of the players that the play was old, and they should have loss in playing it, because few would come to it, there were forty shillings extraordinary given to play it, and so thereupon played it was. So earnest was he to satisfy his eyes with the sight of that tragedy, which he thought soon after his Lordship should bring from the stage to the state, but that God turned it upon their own heads.

Appleton Morgan, who was the cofounder of the New York Shakespeare Society, in his *Shakespeare in Fact and in Criticism*, says: “Two things are patent to the reader. The play had been tried upon the stage before 1600, for one of the players told Merrick that it was old. It had been upon the stage for several years, having probably run its course, and it was not popular enough to draw a crowd; and so they extracted forty shillings from Merrick, as an extraordinary incentive, before they would play it. It is mentioned by [Francis] Meres, and hence the original play must have been written before 1598.”

The play in question was published in quarto in 1597 and in 1598; the deposition scene<sup>16</sup> was not printed till 1608. From the allusions in the lines before and after the omission, in the quarto of 1597, it is clear that this scene must have been in the original play; it was probably struck out on account of its political significance.

Mr. Dowden’s comment shows room for doubt whether the play ordered by Sir Charles Percy was Shakespeare’s, or another on the same subject: “That this was Shakespeare’s play, is very unlikely;”<sup>17</sup> and Mr. Hales (endorsed by Frederick J. Furnivall<sup>18</sup> the English scholar) asks: “Considering the facts that the Company employed by the Essexians was that to which

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<sup>14</sup> F. Hargrave. *State Trials*. Vol. VII., Column 60. The Trial of Sir Christopher Blunt, Sir Gelly Merrick and others, for High Treason, March 5, 1600. (1778)

<sup>15</sup> Edition Hearne: P. 867. 1717.

<sup>16</sup> 11. 154, 318 of Act IV., sc. i.

<sup>17</sup> Sh. Primer. P. 87. 1877.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick J. Furnivall (b.1825–d.1910) His work. *Shakspeare*. Introduction. P. 34, is cited here.

Shakespeare belonged, and that the play asked for answers in description to Shakespeare's *Richard II.*, can we hesitate to believe that the play was indeed Shakespeare's?"<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Simpson tells us that Sir Charles Percy, who is mentioned in Augustine Phillipps' examination, was "the 3rd son of Henry 20th Earl of Northumberland, who had married one of the families of Cocks, and through her was Lord of Dumbleton in Gloucestershire, near Campden, and not far from Stratford-upon-Avon. He was with Essex in Ireland, and accompanied him in his fatal ride into the city in February 1601. He was evidently one of Shakespeare's admirers, perhaps one of his friends. Through him, the dramatist may have got some of the vivid stories about the Percies in Part I of *Henry IV.*"

Regarding the authenticity of both examinations given above, we give Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps' account that he published in 1846 in a work entitled: *Memoirs of the Actors in Shakespeare's Plays*:

All authorities mention that shortly before the 'insurrection' of the Earls of Essex, Southampton, early in 1601, Sir Gelly Merrick, Cuff, and some others of their friends, negotiated with the Company of actors usually playing at the Blackfriars and Globe theatres, in order to procure the representation of *Richard II.*, on the evening anterior to the rising. It was this circumstance which made the Queen afterwards say to [Peter] Lombard, [Keeper of the records in the Tower,] when he presented to her his pandects of records in the Tower: 'I am Richard the second, know you not that?'

Certain it is, that a tragedy entitled *Richard II.*, was acted by the players of the Lord Chamberlain, of whom Shakespeare was one, on Saturday, February 7, 1601, the evening before the defeat of the insane enterprise headed by the disappointed and irritated Earl of Essex. It had been the intention of the Company to have acted some other more popular play on that night: but friends of the Earl of Essex had an interview with some of the leaders of the association; and at the instance of those friends, the Tragedy (then considered 'an old play' and not likely to be attractive) was substituted. To compensate the actors for their trouble, and for the probable loss they should sustain by the revival of an old drama, the exhibition of which, it was supposed, would advance the purposes of the insurgents, Sir Gelly Merrick and others, as was sworn upon their trial, agreed to give the performers 40s., beyond the money that might be taken at the doors of the theatre.

The document which I have recovered is the account given by Augustine Phillipps, servant to the Lord Chamberlain, and one of his players, of what passed at the interview between the friends of the Earl of Essex and the members of the Company, when the former consented to pay, and the latter to accept 40s., on condition that they should substitute *Richard II.*, for the play intended to be performed on February 7, 1601. The date of the paper is February 18, 1600, but at that time the New Year did not commence until March 26, so that February 18, 1600, was in fact, February 18, 1601.

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<sup>19</sup> Hales. *Academy*. 1875.

It appears that, on the failure of the 'insurrection' certain persons were appointed by the Crown to take the preliminary examinations of the different witnesses against the offenders, and as Shakespeare was still an actor among the Lord Chamberlain's Servants, as well as an author solely employed by them, it might have happened that he would be the witness, or one of the witnesses, to prove the agreement, yet we do not even know that he was present when it was entered into, for Phillipps tells us that the friends of the Earl of Essex, being Sir Charles Pryce, Jostlyne Pryce, and the Lord Mounteagle (he does not mention Merrick nor Cuff) 'spoke with some of the Players in the presence of this examinant' but he does not give the names of the other players, and it is very possible that Phillipps was the sole witness to the fact on the arraignment and trial of the prisoners.

He [Phillipps] distinctly gives the title of the play, calling it *The Deposing and Killing King Richard the Second*, but he does not inform us what newer and more attractive drama it was to displace, at the instance of the two Pryces and Lord Mounteagle. This examination is signed by Augustine Phillipps in his own firm hand, and with both his names at length, and not merely Phillips, as it appears at the close of his Will & Testament, dated May 4, 1605, and proved by his widow on the 13th of the same month. He survived his examination, therefore, only about four years, and died at his country residence at Mortlake.

J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps. *Memoirs of the Actors in Shakespeare's Plays* (1846)<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, we are told by Stratfordians that the Stratford actor played with the Company before the Queen at Richmond on February 24, 1601, the night before Essex's execution. It is evident that if he did and had been regarded as the author of the "seditious play," he would have been the angry Queen's prisoner, instead of being called upon to amuse her by his "gambols at this moment."<sup>21</sup>

Chapman well says how "the players were interrogated and it was proved that the performance of *Richard II.*, was by request. Nevertheless students of Elizabethan literature, when they take up Shakespearean criticism, find it difficult to understand why the author of the play escaped punishment for committing an offense much more serious than any of the author's literary contemporaries, and for which they were imprisoned."<sup>22</sup> It is a shame that Chapman did not give us his opinion at the time, why "the author of the play escaped punishment."

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<sup>20</sup> 8vo. P. 83 (1846)

<sup>21</sup> Robert Frazer. *The Silent Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1915.

<sup>22</sup> William Hall Chapman. *Shakespeare: The Personal Phase*. 1920.

## Alleyn and Burbage Continued

Giles Alleyn had thought that he saw a chance, now that the Essex conspiracy had thinned the ranks of the friends of The Globe acting Company, when the players had even been touched themselves, of getting what he would call a “true bill” heard without influence being exerted against him.

Alleyn says how “the Theatre was erected at the cost not of Burbage but of Braynes to the value of 1.000 marks;” he gives as a reason why he could not sign the second lease, that the £200 had not been spent, and that the building had been assigned to John Hyde. The lease was not signed, but Cuthbert remained on the premises after the expiry, and therefore the right to The Theatre clearly remained to the landlord.

In the meantime, Cuthbert Burbage unlawfully confederated on December 28, 1598, with Richard (his brother), Mr. Street, Mr. William Smith (a friend), John Maddox (solicitor), and Richard Lane (Deputy Registrar) “to draw up an order, which it did not appertain to him to do, thereby abusing” the Court and should not draw up “a demurrer” being a legal plead in a lawsuit.

Cuthbert however, drew up a legal plead, and let the matter rest, till the last day of the term where he made an oath in Court that he had broken order by “making that demurrer.” He was charged with contempt of Court, and was brought to London by a “pursuivant, a man very aged and unfit to travel, to his excessive charges in journey and otherwise to his great discredit and disgrace among his neighbours.”

Both the Burbages reviled witnesses for not having spoken the truth and “threatened to stab them if they did it again.” Giles Alleyn said Cuthbert had “maliciously bribed” Richard Hudson and Thomas Osborne to commit perjury about the costs of £200 promised to be spent on repairs by James Burbage. “By which unlawful practices your said subject did then lose his cause. Further, all the suits had been prosecuted against your subject by the malicious unlawful maintenance of William Smith, who spent money in acquiring illegal proof.” Alleyn was charging a Deputy Registrar of bribery; it brought in Francis Bacon’s involvement.

On June 12, 1602, Richard Lane (Deputy Registrar) denied taking any favours, or committing any kind of forgery. On June 17, Richard Hudson and Thomas Osborne said that none of the matters with which Giles Alleyn charged them were true and demurred against his Bill being brought against them. The Court therefore referred the case to the consideration of the “Right Worshipful Francis Bacon, Esq., and he reporteth that the said Bill is very uncertain and insufficient, and that no further answer needeth to be made thereto.”

This is one of the two cases found where Francis Bacon is connected with the theatre and the Burbages; the other legal case Bacon was involved in was at the Chancery against a William Burbage, about property left to his brother Anthony Bacon.<sup>23</sup>

## The Keystone: Robert Cecil

In the State Papers Office, under the date July 5, 1597, a letter is found. Sir Walter Raleigh<sup>24</sup> (Military and Naval Commander) writes to Sir Robert Cecil:<sup>25</sup> “I acquainted the Lord General [John Norris]<sup>26</sup> with your letters and kind acceptance of your entertainment. He was wonderful merry at the conceit of *Richard II.*”<sup>27</sup> This letter is written almost two years prior to the Essex rebellion (1600). Two questions arise from this letter:

(1) Is it possible that, through the known sympathies of the Scotch King James for the Earl of Essex, the players who had performed for him *Richard II.*, thought themselves safer for a while under his protection? If so, a malicious plot was brewing under Cecil’s hand against Essex, almost two years before he was executed. Historical entries show the animosity between Essex and Raleigh, and are well recorded; did Raleigh have his hand in Cecil’s plot against Essex, as early as 1597?

(2) Nearly all who were involved in the Essex rebellion were also involved in the alleged Gunpowder Plot (1605). We could ask: Did Cecil use these play actors as his Agents? Was the Stratfordian actor among them? Mr. Bowden, a Shakespearean author, connects Shaksper’s religion with the Catholics and in the Essex upraise.

The conspiracy failed; Essex himself was beheaded. The Earl of Southampton was sent to the Tower. The Earls of Rutland, [Lord] Mounteagle; Sirs John Davies, C. Danvers, C. Blount; Robert Catesby [involved later in the Gunpowder Plot] and William Green, both Warwickshire men; John Arden, the poet’s connection; John Wheeler, John Shakespeare’s friend and fellow-recusant, all Catholics, were among those involved in the consequences of the conspiracy. The poet, although his play was condemned, himself escaped. Hayward instead was chosen as the victim of the royal vengeance, and was imprisoned and racked. But here again, as in the Lucy whippings and imprisonment, so now in the Essex conspiracy we find the poet connected apparently with the Catholic party.

Henry Sebastian Bowden. *The Religion of Shakespeare* (1899)<sup>28</sup>

Not every fact, in Bowden’s statement, is correct. First, the writer John Hayward evidently was not racked; Francis Bacon managed to lighten Elizabeth’s ruthless action against Hayward, and

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<sup>23</sup> Chancery D. & O., Book 1590, 32-33 Eliz. f. 533, 621, 626, 684, 691.

<sup>24</sup> (b.1552–d.1618)

<sup>25</sup> (b.1563–d.1612)

<sup>26</sup> b.1556–d.1599)

<sup>27</sup> Dom. Eliz. 264 10

<sup>28</sup> PP. 101–102. London: Burns & Gates (1899)

definitely had much to do in influencing this.<sup>29</sup> Second, there is no mention of a Shaksper or a Shakespeare in any court trial when Essex was brought to justice, that would allow us to determine that he was ever suspected, or if he had “escaped” charges. Finally, there are only old rumours that circulate on the “Lucy whippings;” tales that excuse Shaksper fleeing his hometown and deserting his family.

## **An Act of Treason by the Ardens**

We offer a credible documented fact of treason against the Arden family, which in our opinion is the reason why the Stratfordian actor fled his hometown. The case comes from the Stratford town records gathered by Richard Savage who was Secretary and Librarian of Shakespeare’s Birthplace and Trust, and also Deputy Keeper of the Records of the Corporation of Stratford. These documents can be found in his *Minutes and Accounts* published in 1924 (Vol. X., Dugdale Society). It will be seen from this account that the Ardens (Shaksper’s mother’s kinswoman and namesake) were of Catholic faith. The following warrant is at the time John Shaksper, father of the Stratfordian actor, applied for a grant to impale his wife’s Coat-of-Arms in his own new Coat.

Warrant to pay to Elizabeth and Mary Arden, daughters of Edward Arden, late convicted of High Treason, 40 marks a year each for life, out of revenue assured for life to their mother Mary Arden in lieu of dowry, and come by reason of her offence into her Majesty’s hands. This warrant was directed to the Late Lord Treasurer, Eliz., and is now to pass the Privy Seal, directed to the Exchequer, as there is no warrant there to continue the annuities.

Acts of the Privy Council (May 11, 1599)

On October 25, 1583, John Somerville, son-in-law to Edward and Mary Arden, left his house which was located six miles north of Stratford-upon-Avon, for London. He left with the intention of shooting the Queen. He was arrested the next day and taken to Oxford to await hearing at Westminster and was then sent to the Tower.

Mrs. Stopes in her *Shakespeare’s Family* (1901) tells us how “Edward Arden was a temperate follower of the old faith; but his son-in-law, John Somerville, an excitable youth, seemed to chase under the increasing oppression of the Catholic Church and its adherents. The evil reports concerning the Queen and Leicester increased the friction. Shut out from travel or active exercise, as all Catholics then were by law, he studied and pondered, and his mind seemed to have given way in his sleepless attempts to reconcile faith and practice.”<sup>30</sup>

On November 2, 1583, the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Thomas Wilkes, arrived at Charlecote to “search in the matter” and to act with Sir Thomas Lucy for the “apprehension” of those implicated in the treasonable act. The next day, Mr. Wilkes and Sir Thomas Lucy together with Mr. Edward Aglionby and Mr. Rafe Griffin (who was master of the Leicester

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<sup>29</sup> See Bacon’s *Apology* to the Earl of Southampton published in 1604.

<sup>30</sup> London: Elliot Stock.

Hospital in Warwick), raided Park Hall that was only twenty miles from Charlecote, and took both the Ardens prisoners. Four days later, Mr. Wilkes wrote from Charlecote to Sir Francis Walsingham, the Elizabethan spymaster:

Unless you can make Somerville, Arden, Hall (the priest), Somerville's wife and his sister, to speak directly to those things which you desire to have discovered, it will not be possible for us here to find out more.

State Papers Dom. Eliz. clxiii. 54 f.

John Somerville, Edward and Mary Arden, together with Hugh Hall (family priest) were indicted at Warwick on December 2, 1583, two months after Somerville stepped out of his house with the intention to shoot the Queen. All perpetrators were tried in London on December 16, and found guilty. Mary Arden was pardoned, but her husband Edward was executed at Smithfield on December 20, and the previous evening John Somerville was found hanged in Newgate. Their heads were set up on London Bridge. There is a "secret advertisement from Exeter suggests that Somerville was hanged by the Catholics to avoid greater evil," as recorded in the State Papers.<sup>31</sup>

Indictment found at Warwick against the said John Somerville, Margaret Somerville, and the said Edward Arden, late of Park Hall, aforesaid, gentleman, and Mary, his wife, Francis Arden, and the said Hugh Hall for that on the 22nd October, 25 Eliz., at Edreston, they conspired to compass the death of the Queen, and change the pure religion established in the Kingdom, as well as to subvert the Commonwealth, and in order to carry such their treasons into effect, the said Margaret Somerville, Edward Arden, Mary Arden, Francis Arden, and Hugh Hall at Edreston, the 24th Oct., 25 Elizabeth, by divers ways and means incited John Somerville to kill the Queen and thereupon the said John Somerville traiterously said 'I will go up to the Court and shoot the Queen through with a pistol,' and on the following day he took a pistol, gunpowder, and bullets, and journeyed therewith from Edreston towards London, the Queen then being in her house called St. James, in the County of Middlesex, near the same city, in order to carry his treasons into effect.

Baga de Secretis, Pouch xlv., mems. 9 and 10

Mr. Henry Rogers, the town clerk of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1577, was now operating as an Agent to Sir Thomas Lucy; he assisted the latter and Mr. Wilkes (Clerk of the Privy Council) in the search for "books and writings" of an incriminating nature. For his services, Mr. Rogers received sixty shillings at St. James' on November 20, 1583.

Richard Savage, in his mass bulk of town records says: "If Shakespere was in his [Henry Rogers'] employment he may have had a hand in this." Mr. Savage meant the search for "books and writings" of an incriminating nature. It would be a peculiarity why young Shaksper, in 1583, at the age of nineteen, only a year after his alleged marriage to Anne Hathaway, would be in the employment of the Town Clerk, who was also an Agent to Sir

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<sup>31</sup> Dom. Ser, Eliz., 168, 24.

Thomas Lucy. This point of view was also held by Mr. Simpson who had supposed that young Shaksper at the time, had served Edward Arden, his mother's cousin, in the capacity first of a page, and then in that of an Agent, under the assumed name of William Thacker. However, in an article published in *The Edinburgh Reviewer* of the time, it had been shown that William Thacker was a real personage being then a servant to the Somervilles "at his own request, that he had served him about three years," according to his examination on December 6, 1583.<sup>32</sup> Regardless, this does not rule out that "William Thacker" could have been a cover name of Shaksper's even though there was still a real person by that name.

The family priest, Hugh Hall, is generally known to have turned informer, and "sacrificed the rest," reports Froude in his *History*.<sup>33</sup>

The Record of the Sessions held at Guildhall on December 16 (before the justices appointed to try the prisoners) record how "John Somerville, Edward Arden, Mary Arden, and Hugh Hall, being brought to the bar by the Lieutenant of the Tower, are severally arraigned. John Somerville pleads guilty, Edward Arden, Mary Arden, and Hugh Hall plead not guilty. Venire from the county of Warwick awarded instanter. Verdict guilty. Judgment against the male prisoners and the female prisoner as is usual in cases of high treason. Execution on the 20th."

A letter on April 1, 1593, written by the Privy Council to a Mr. Thomas Bigge, Mr. John Harryson, and Mr. Henry Dingley, relates thanking them for "searching the house of Thomas Throgmorton in Coughton Park, where Mistress Arden, wife of the traitor Arden that was executed doth dwell at this present. Because it should seem by your letter to Mr. Topcliffe [Elizabethan torturer] there was resistance offered at such time as you did search the house, and that they of the household then did not carry themselves with that dutiful course and obedience they ought to do, and that divers superstitious things and furniture for mass was there found, and it was confessed that a seminary priest was harboured there, who was conveyed out of the way, or lieth hid in some secret place. We have thought good to require you to commit to prison as well the said Mistress Arden as the rest of her servants to be proceeded withal, according to the qualities of their offences, which we refer to your discretion."<sup>34</sup>

One of John Somerville's servants, John Purton, was imprisoned in the Marshalsea Prison for having told William Somerville that one of the clerks of the Privy Council was searching his brother's house. "He petitioned Walsingham for release, as he did this in ignorance; and after confession of all he knew, he was pardoned."<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Stopes continues on an interesting fact. After the above act of treason, "the family kept quiet during the Reign of Elizabeth; but William [Somerville] was Knighted on July 23, 1603. He was appointed sheriff of the county in 8 James I." William Somerville died in 1616. That a family member of such an espionage act was Kinghted upon the enthronement of King James, has many inferences to be considered, especially for the year 1605, when the Gunpowder Plot had emerged and all those who could

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<sup>32</sup> State Papers, Dom. Ser. Eliz., clxiii., 72, 21 Nov.

<sup>33</sup> Vol. VI., P. 609.

<sup>34</sup> State Papers, Dom. Ser. Eliz., clxxi., 35.

<sup>35</sup> C. C. Stopes. *Shakespeare's Warwickshire Contemporaries*. Shakespeare Head Press, 1907.

be mustered to assist (by the Privy Council) to capture the perpetrators. A possible royal favour of Knighthood in return for a treachery against fellowmen and fellow believers in the Catholic faith.

Dr. Nares, in his *Memoirs of Burghley*, enters in the table of contents: Case of Arden and his family,<sup>36</sup> but there is no allusion to the Ardens in the text, “as if it had been cut out;” Stopes complains. The *Letters and Memorials of Burghley*, which were edited by Murdin, are silent on the treason act of the Ardens; and the *Memorials of the Reigns of Mary and Elizabeth*, a sort of political diary by Burghley, printed at the end of the volume, omit from the annals of this year all reference to this case, though much more trivial incidents are recorded. “Altogether,” Stopes says, “the whole affair is so discreditable to all Edward Arden’s judges and the methods of justice of his times that it is almost preferable that they should somehow or other have come to feel ashamed of their action, and try to hide it, probably after the Earl of Leicester’s death. Every trait in the character of Edward Arden becomes doubly interesting to those who believe in the transmission of family characteristics, and who see in Edward Arden, the so-called traitor, the relative of William Shakespeare.”<sup>37</sup>

## The Players & the Gunpowder Plot (1605)

There is also mention of Shaksper’s involvement in the alleged Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Our first reference comes from Mr. Yeatman, who in an article he published in the *Saturday Review* (1906) tells us how “the muniment [document] rooms of Shakespeare’s friends and especially of those implicated in Cecil’s invention, the Gunpowder Plot, should be carefully ransacked. There can be little doubt that the Poet himself was a ‘suspect,’ and as such banished from London. He had only just escaped the Essex ‘rebellion,’ which ended with that nobleman’s life; but even Cecil’s twenty years of resolute government had not given him the courage to prosecute. Besides that, the numerous friends and relations of the Poet, some in the highest positions, would make such a prosecution dangerous, if not impossible.”<sup>38</sup>

We know Thomas Kyd<sup>39</sup> (poet, play actor and Marlowe’s roommate at the time of the latter’s assassination in 1593) together with Robert Baines, a “bed-fellow” that Marlowe had met in Flanders, gave written depositions against Marlowe prior his assassination to Sir John Puckering (Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England). Thomas Kyd tries to reason why he was suspected as being Marlowe’s partner, and all these depositions can be found in the British Library of the Harley Manuscripts.<sup>40</sup> There is no doubt that Kyd, when arrested, underwent the trials of torture to confess whatever it was Elizabeth’s Privy Council needed in order they arrange so bogus a story that could be fed to the public so Marlowe’s death be justified.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Vol. III., Chapter X. P. 183.

<sup>37</sup> C. C. Stopes. *Shakespeare’s Warwickshire Contemporaries*. Shakespeare Head Press, 1907.

<sup>38</sup> *Is William Shakespeare’s Will Holographic?* P. 3. (1906)

<sup>39</sup> (b.1558–d.1594)

<sup>40</sup> 6848 f.154.

<sup>41</sup> Lochithea. *Spyglass Duets: The Elizabethan & Jacobean Plotters*. iUniverse publications, 2009.

Posterity has heard but little of the wicked deeds perpetrated against justice and humanity by the Tudor Monarchs and their unscrupulous Agents. For example, a man named Parker was employed by Burghley to “counterfeit a confessor,” and to visit in the dark of night certain prisoners in the Tower, who had confessions made-up in the usual form. The result of this was the arrest and execution of several innocent men, and the imprisonment of others, of whose fate their friends could learn nothing.

Burghley’s Agents, according to their own correspondence with their noble patron, were ready and willing to perpetrate the most murderous and treacherous deeds against confiding men whose friendship they had won. Another example is Dr. Astlowe, an eminent physician, who resided in London about 1575, was racked for being friendly towards the Queen of Scots when he paid her a professional visit. Dr. Appleton Morgan writes that: “The unfortunate doctor was racked twice almost to death, at the Tower.”

We know also that Kit Marlowe<sup>42</sup> (poet and play actor) was himself an Agent, counterfeiting money in Flanders prior to his assassination; a killing that was termed “a great reckoning in a little room,” as Shakespeare also noted in his play *As You Like It*.

We also know that Ben Jonson (play actor and poet) had connections with the British intelligence of the time of the Gunpowder Plot, the same year Shaksper, “his friend” as the Stratfordians call him, had bought a £440 worth moiety of the tithes of Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopston, and Welcombe.

We give two letters written by Ben Jonson to Sir Robert Cecil. The first is dated May 4, 1605, six months prior to the Gunpowder Plot (November 5). The letter shows that Ben Jonson was already in receipt of some favours from Cecil, which no doubt he had done some past intelligent service. The second letter is dated November 8, 1605, three days after the Gunpowder Plot.

British Museum collection of Cecil’s letters  
MSS. 61778, fol. 437  
Letter written by Ben Jonson to Robert Cecil  
May 4, 1605<sup>43</sup>

It has still been the tyranny of my fortune, so to oppress my endeavours that before I can show myself grateful (in the least) for former benefits, I am enforced to provoke your bounties for more, may it not seem grievous to your Lordship that now my innocence calls upon you (next the deity) to his defense. God himself is not averted at just men’s cries, and you that approach that divine goodness and supply it here on earth in your place and honours cannot employ your aides more worthily than to the common succor of honesty and virtue, how humbly so ever it be placed.

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<sup>42</sup> (*b.1564—d.1593*)

<sup>43</sup> This letter can also be found in Haynes and Marsden’s collections. Original spelling has been kept.

I am here my most honourable Lord, unexamined, or unheard, committed to a vile prison, and with me a gentleman (whose name may perhaps have come to your Lordship), one Mr. George Chapman, a learned and most honest man, the cause (would I could name some worthier, though I wish we had known none worthy our imprisonment) is a (the word Yerkes me, that our fortune hath necessitated us to so despised a course) a play, my Lord, whereof in hope there is no man can justly complain that hath the virtue to think but favourable of himself, of our judge being an equal care; may, [*sic*] if with prejudice we be made guilty for our time, we must embrace the asinine virtue 'Patience.'

My noble Lord, they deal not charitably who are too witty in another man's works, and utter sometimes their own malicious meanings, under our words; I protest to your honour and call God to testimony (since my first error which yet is punished in me, more with my shame than with my bondage) I have so attempered my style that I have given no cause to any good man of grief, and if to any ill by touching at any general vice, it hath always been with a regard and sparing of particular persons. I may be otherwise reported, but if all that be accused should be presently guilty, there are few men would stand in the state of innocence. I beseech your most honoured Lordship suffer not other men's letters or faults past to be made my crimes, but let me be examined, both by all my works past and this present and not trust to ruin me but my books, for she is an unjust deliverer both of great and small actions, whether I have ever (in anything I have written private or public) given offence to a nation, to any public order, or state, or any person of honour, or authority; but have equally laboured to keep their dignity as my own person safe.

If others have transgressed, let not me be entitled to their follies, but least, in being too diligent for my excuse, I may incur the suspicion of being guilty, I become a most humble suitor to your Lordship, that, with the honourable Lord Chamberlain (to whom I have in like manner petitioned), you will be pleased to be the grateful means of our coming to answer, or if, in your wisdom, it shall be thought unnecessary that your Lordship shall be the most honoured cause of our liberty. When saving us from our gereson you shall remove us to another, which is eternally to bind us and our muses to the thankful honouring of you and yours to posterity and your own virtues have, by many descents of ancestors, enabled you to time your honours. Most devoted in heart as words.

Ben Jonson.

British Museum collection of Cecil's letters  
MSS. 61778, fol. 437  
Letter written by Ben Jonson to Robert Cecil  
November 8, 1605<sup>44</sup>  
[Three days after the Gunpowder Plot]

May it please your Lordship to understand there hath been no want in me, either of labour or of sincerity, in the discharge of this business to the satisfaction of your Lordship and the state, and whereas, yesterday, on the first mention of it, I took the most ready course (to my present

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<sup>44</sup> Original spelling has been kept.

thought) by the Venetian Ambassador's Chaplain, who not only apprehended it well but was of mind with me, that no man of conscience or any indifferent love to his country would deny to do it, and withal engage himself to find one absolute in all numbers for the purpose, which he willed me (before a gentleman of good credit, who is my testimony) to signify to your Lordship in his name.

It falls out since that that party will not be found (for so he returns answer), upon which I have made attempts in other places, but can speak with no one in person (all being either removed or so concealed upon this present mischief), but by second means I have received answers of doubts and difficulties that they well make it a question to the arch-priest with such like suspensions. So that to tell your Lordship the plainly my heart; I think they are all so enweaved in it that it will make 500 gentlemen less of the religion, within this week, if they carry their understanding about them.

For myself, if I had been a priest, I would have put on wings to such an occasion and have thought no adventure, where I might have done (besides His Majesty and my country) all Christianity so good service. And so much have I sent to some of them; if it shall please your Lordship, I shall yet make further trial. You cannot, in the meantime, be provided. I do not only, with all readiness, offer my services but will perform it with as much integrity as your particular favour, or His Majesty's right in any subject he hath can exact.

Your Honour's most perfect servant and lover.

Ben Jonson

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The second letter was not written from a prisoner, but from an intelligent Agent, perhaps imprisoned a little more than he cared for, who would wish to perform his duties in freedom outside the Tower walls, instead of within; certainly it was not the letter of a voluntary prisoner. Ben Jonson's reference to the extent of capability (if only he were a priest) in betraying the faithful, seems to suggest that he was even willing to undertake the villainous part (which some others, as well as Father Garnet, had already carried out) of entering the priesthood still more effectually to betray those who went to him in confession.

Ben Jonson, "born a Calvinist, became a Catholic," says Mr. Hepworth Dixon, "after the Powder Plot he joined the Court religion and helped in hunting down his colleagues."<sup>45</sup> We may ask, did his "friend" Shaksper ever assist in the intelligence service to capture the Gunpowder plotters? Did the "Sweet Swan" also turn Catholic like Rare Ben?

The money Shaksper needed (£440 in today's currency £40,000) to buy "the unexpired term of the moiety of the tithe-lease of Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe" would have been generated from some lucrative source. We know from history that the intelligent service was not humble to its Agents in the Elizabethan era; however, in the Jacobean era, and

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<sup>45</sup> *Royal Windsor*. Vol. IV., P. 92.

under the effects of a Gunpowder Plot, King James and his treasury would not have been stingy to capture the plotters.

Up to now, we see how Cecil was manipulating the actors and the writers, including Shaksper, to masquerade as Catholics in order to get their confessions where the information obtained was given to Cecil, and the eventual confiscation of their lands if found guilty of treason. These proceeds could very well be the source of Shaksper's payment for his tithe-lease at Stratford.

Sir Edward Coke, at the trial of the gunpowder conspirators had said of the plot: "Ages to come will be in doubt whether it were a fact or a fiction." William Harris in 1753 noted that it was "well-known, that many of the papists then and now have denied the fact, and imputed the whole of the affair to the artifice of Salisbury and we are told, that others of opposite principles have confidently asserted, 'that there never was any such thing,' really as the Gunpowder Plot, but that it was a plot of King James' contriving, to endear himself unto the people."<sup>46</sup>

Not many hours after the peculiar discovery of the plot, the fugitives were heard of in Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and Staffordshire, the native counties of several of those men who attempted to rally others, and levy war against James' Crown. In all, there were thirteen men (including Guy Fawkes) who had been participators in the alleged treason: Guy Fawkes, Francis Tresham, Robert Catesby, Thomas Percy, Robert Winter, Thomas Winter, John Wright, Christopher Wright, John Grant, Robert Keyes, Ambrose Rookwood, Sir Everard Digby and Thomas Bates.

John Grant in particular is of interest to us; he was a Warwickshire man. His residence was in Norlook that is situated between Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon. He was well descended, and connected with several old families in the shires of Warwick and Worcester. Although, according to Father Greenway, John Grant was of a "taciturn disposition," in the opinion of Father Gerard he was of "a very fierce and mettlesome temper," and implicated with his friends in the Essex rebellion, as nearly all of the conspirators were.

All the prisoners were at once taken to London; they were confined, frequently examined by the Privy Council, to trace if possible, further ramifications of the conspiracy, and especially to involve Catholic clergy-men. "The great object of the government now was to obtain evidence against the priests."<sup>47</sup> Torture was used, is evident by the following extract from a letter on December 4 from Robert Cecil writing to Mr. Favat complaining that he could obtain little or no evidence against the really important persons:

Most of the prisoners, have willfully forsworn that the priests knew anything in particular, and obstinately refuse to be accusers of them, yea, what torture so ever they be put to.

Brit. Mus. MSS. Add. 6178, fol. 625.

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<sup>46</sup> (a) William Harris. *An Historical and Critical Account*. 1753; (b) Causabon. *Of Credulity and Incredulity*. Vol. I, P. 202, 8vo, London, 1668.

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Gardiner. *History of England*. Vol. I, P. 267. Ed. 1883.

We close by giving Mr. Yeatman's account:

Certain it is that Shakespere's chief friends and patrons, many of whom were his relations, belonged to the Catholic faith, and he had a very close connection with the so-called conspirators upon whom Cecil so adroitly sprung 'The Gunpowder Plot,' which it is not unlikely was his own invention, created in order to enable him to destroy the Catholics, because King James, through Cecil's persecution of the Catholics, was, like his predecessor, becoming truly obnoxious to the country.

Cecil was actually wringing from them for the Treasury some £360.000 a year. James was a very weak man, and had he given way, in all probability Cecil and the other devout Protestants, who had gorged themselves with Church property, might have been called upon to disgorge it. This convenient stalking horse of 'No Popery' had always been sufficient as it was in the revolution of 1688, to drive the people out of their senses, and so to obtain a fresh lease of Church revenues, under the pretence of fostering liberty.

Shakespere had undoubtedly committed himself by something like complicity with the conspirators, for in both *Julius Cæsar* and *Hamlet* he had invoked sympathy on their behalf, and his historical plays were exercising a certain influence upon the populace. For a long time he must (as a Catholic) have been an object of suspicion to Cecil, not merely on account of his relationship and friendship with Southampton and Essex, but for his personal connection with so many of the malcontents."

John P. Yeatman. *The Saturday Review* (1906) <sup>48</sup>

*Authors' websites: [www.lordverulam.org](http://www.lordverulam.org) / [www.sirbacon.org](http://www.sirbacon.org)*

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<sup>48</sup> *Is William Shakespeare's Will Holographic?* P. 25. (1906)