

EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 46

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Does the Don triptych portray the ancestors of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford? [Part 2 of 4]

Sir Edward Don (1482?-1552), eldest son and heir of Sir John Don, died at the approximate age of seventy in 1552 (McFarlane 8-9, 53), when his sister Margaret's great-grandson Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was about two years old.

Sir Edward held a number of offices during the early part of the reign of Henry VIII, serving as a gentleman-usher of the King's chamber, as sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire and, in 1521, as a member of the retinue of Henry VIII at Calais (McFarlane 53, 55; Newton Dunn 16). As Sir John Don's heir, he inherited several properties, including manors at Horsenden and Saunderton in Buckinghamshire. Four and a half centuries later, the manor houses owned by the Dons are gone, but the two small churches which served them still stand.

About 1507, Sir Edward married Anne, daughter of Sir John Verney of Middle Claydon, Buckinghamshire (McFarlane 53-4). In a pedigree of the Verney family given in the *Visitation of Hertfordshire*, Sir John Verney is said to have been cup-bearer to Queen Anne Boleyn (23). His son, Sir Ralph Verney -- Sir Edward Don's brother-in-law -- was chamberlain to Princess (later Queen) Mary (Lipscomb 178).

Sir Edward Don and Anne Verney had only one child, a daughter Elizabeth (d. before 1551), who married Sir Thomas Jones (d.1559) of Abermarlais, sheriff of Carmarthen and Cardigan. Sir Thomas

Jones and Elizabeth Don had two daughters, Anne and Frances (Newton Dunn 16). Anne Don married John Cotton of Whittington, Gloucestershire and had three sons -- Richard, William and Ralph (only Ralph appears to have had an heir, Don Cotton, who, in a pedigree of 1623, is shown as having two daughters) (Maclean 45-6). Frances Don married Ralph Lee of Saunderton, and had a daughter, Anne (who married George Aisby of Harefield, Middlesex), and a son, Edward Don (or Dunn) Lee (d.1598), who married Anne, daughter of Richard Heywood (Meyrick 199).

Edward Don Lee was sheriff of Carmarthen from 1588-1594 and a Member of Parliament during the years 1584-1587 (Newton Dunn 17). In the latter capacity, he is chiefly remembered for his presentation of John Penry's petition to the Parliament of 1586-87 (Neale 153). A year later, John Penry found a permanent place in history by acting as manager of the secret press which printed the Marprelate tracts, a transgression which doubtless played a large part in his execution in 1593, although he was hanged for treason on other grounds. This link with the Marprelate tracts makes Edward Don Lee's relationship with his fellow Welshman of considerable interest, particularly when it is realized that Sir Edward Don's great-niece, Grisold Hughes (d.1613), was, at the time of the printing of the first of the Marprelate tracts in 1588, the wife of Edward Neville (d.1589), an uncle of Job Throckmorton, another individual intimately connected with the management of the Marprelate press (Carlson 97; *DNB*, 248-50; Cokayne 34-5).

Another curious circumstance which has been remarked upon by more than one observer is the fact that John Donne (1572-1631), poet and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, bore the same coat of arms as Sir Edward Don -- the arms of the Dons of Kidwelly, described as "azure, a wolf rampant (or salient) argent, with a crest of a sheaf (or knot) of snakes" (Bald 20; Meyrick 199; Newton Dunn, unpag; Clive 151). A portrait of the poet painted in 1591 when he was eighteen years of age shows this coat of arms in the upper right hand corner, bearing a label for difference which, according to Bald, designates an eldest son. Donne also used this coat of arms on one of his seals, and it appears as well on his monument, impaled with the arms of St. Paul's Cathedral (Bald 20-1, 533-4).

The inference that there is a close link between the poet and Sir Edward Don is further substantiated by their mutual family connections. They appear, for example, to have been connected through the Heywoods: the poet's mother was the daughter of the epigrammatist and interlude writer John Heywood (d.1580) while Sir Edward Don's grandson, Edward Don Lee (d.1598), married a daughter of Richard Heywood (see above). The two men seem also to have been connected through the Herberts: the Dons of Kidwelly were kinsmen of the Herberts and their companions in arms during the Wars of the Roses, and, in a dedicatory epistle to his edition of the poems of William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke (1580-1630), John Donne's son publicly claimed descent from the Herberts, stating that he was obliged to them "not only by descent" but "by many favours" (Bald 21; McFarlane 5, 7; Newton Dunn 14). Finally, further evidence of a link between the poet and Sir Edward Don is suggested by the former's association with Sir John Wingfield (d.1596), the brother-in-law of Mary de Vere (1554?-1624), a lineal descendant of Sir Edward Don's sister, Margaret. Both Donne and Wingfield served under the Earl of Essex in his 1596 expedition to Cadiz, where Wingfield died a hero's death. If not a relative or personal friend, Donne was at the very least an admirer of Wingfield, whose fall in battle he commemorated in the following epigram:

Il Cavalieri Gio. Wingfield

Beyond th'old Pillers many have travailed
Towards the Suns cradle, and his throne, and bed.
A fitter Piller our Earle did bestow
In that late Iland; for he well did know
Farther then Wingefield no man dares to go (Bald 83-4; Gosse 51)

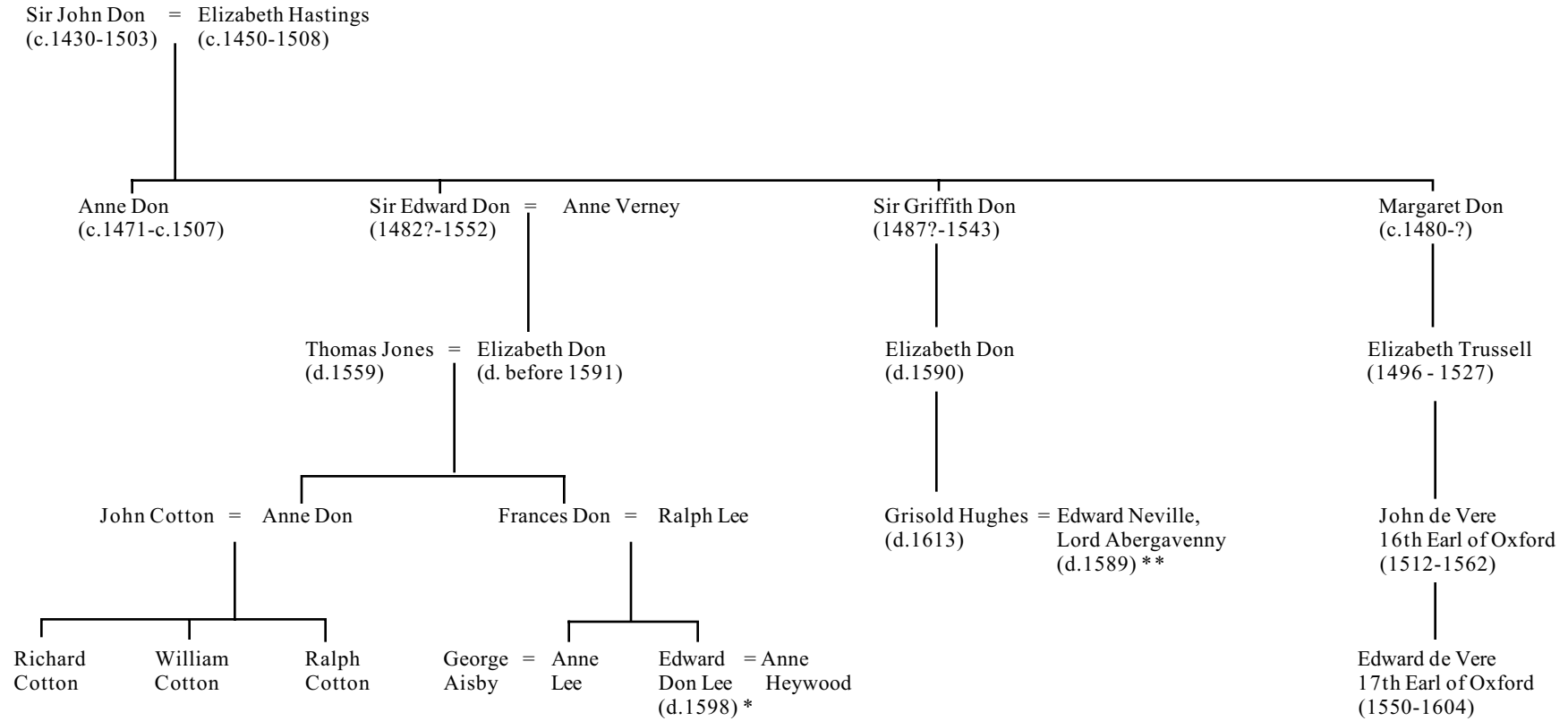
In summary, the life of Sir Edward Don is of particular interest for its connection with two intriguing problems of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods: the obscurity surrounding the secret printing of the Marprelate tracts, and the paternal antecedents of the poet and divine, John Donne.

Issue #47 of the *Edward De Vere Newsletter* will deal with the life of Sir John Don's second son, Sir Griffith Don.

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DESCENDANTS AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS OF SIR EDWARD DON



* Edward Don Lee presented a petition to Parliament on behalf of John Penry, the manager of the secret press which printed the Marprelate tracts.

** Edward Neville was the uncle of Job Throckmorton, who assisted John Penry with the management of the secret press.



Portrait of Sir John Don from Don Triptych