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Was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, contracted to marry one of the sisters of Henry, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, because of their common Hastings ancestors?

In 1562, Henry Hastings, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, entered into a contract with John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford (d.1562). The agreement stipulated that the 16th Earl's heir, Edward de Vere, should, within a month of his eighteenth birthday, marry one of the Earl of Huntingdon's sisters, either Lady Elizabeth Hastings or Lady Mary Hastings. The agreement provided for a dowry of 1000 marks in addition to the jointure of £1000 which Lady Mary and Lady Elizabeth possessed under the terms of their father's will (Cross 29).

The 1562 marriage contract was never fulfilled. On December 19, 1571, a few months after his twenty-first birthday, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, married Anne Cecil at Westminster Abbey, with the Queen in attendance (Ward 63); at the same time, as part of a double ceremony, Lady Elizabeth Hastings married Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester (Pearson). Lady Mary Hastings died unmarried (after having had, in 1582, the distinction of a proposal of marriage from Czar Ivan the Terrible) (Cross 29-30).

The 1562 marriage contract prompts two questions. The first of these questions -- *Why did the marriage fail to take place?* -- is probably unlikely to be answered definitively 400 years after the fact. Henry Hastings, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, and his sisters had, through their mother, Katherine de la Pole

(d.1576), a direct claim to the throne (Cross 7). In addition, the Hastings family was descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, second son of King Edward III (McFarlane 56-7). Perhaps Queen Elizabeth objected to a union between the scion of the de Veres and the daughter of a family with claims to the throne which rivalled her own.

The second question -- *Why an alliance between these two particular families?* -- is perhaps more susceptible of explanation. The rationale for the marriage contract probably lies in the fact that Edward de Vere and Henry, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, had a common ancestor, Sir Leonard Hastings (d.1455).

Sir Leonard's son William, Lord Hastings of Ashby de la Zouch (d.1483), ancestor of the Earls of Huntingdon and grandfather of George, 1st Earl of Huntingdon, is familiar to readers of Shakespeare's plays as the "Lord Hastings" who is executed on the King's orders in *Richard III*. Another of Sir Leonard Hastings' children, his daughter Elizabeth (d.1508), married Sir John Don (d.1503), ancestor of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. John de Vere, 15th Earl of Oxford, married Elizabeth Trussell (1496-1527), daughter of Sir John Don's daughter, Margaret Don, and Edward Trussell (1478-1499), a ward of William, Lord Hastings, and, after William Hastings' death, a ward of Sir John Don. Elizabeth Trussell, grand-daughter of Sir John Don and Elizabeth Hastings, was the grandmother of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (McFarlane 3, 9, 56-7).

Interestingly, portraits of Sir John Don and Elizabeth Hastings and their eldest daughter Anne still

survive in the Chatsworth altarpiece in the National Gallery in London. The altarpiece, painted by Hans Memling, shows Sir John Don and his wife Elizabeth wearing the "Yorkist livery collar, with Edward IV's personal badge, the lion of March, as a pendant" (McFarlane 1-2, 4). On the pillars in the background are the Don and Hastings coats of arms.

In summary, the projected marriage between Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and one of the sisters of Henry, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon was, in all probability, a recognition and reinforcement of Hastings family ties which dated back to the Wars of the Roses.

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ANCESTRY OF EDWARD DE VERE AND HENRY HASTINGS

