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Was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, the "annotator" of a copy of Hall's Chronicle? [Part 1 of 3]

On June 22, 1940, Alan Keen, an antiquarian bookseller, discovered an unusual volume in a collection he had just purchased from the library of an English country house in Yorkshire. What attracted Keen's attention to this particular volume -- a copy of the 1550 edition of Hall's Chronicle -- was its fascinating marginal annotations.

These annotations consist of 406 marginal notes (some 3600 words) "carefully extracting the pith and pattern of Hall's history, signposting details for easy reference, and only very rarely expressing [the author's] own views". The notes follow Hall as he outlines the principal events of the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V, and end abruptly at the beginning of the reign of Henry VI (Keen 7, 211).

In the opinion of H.T.F. Rhodes, an expert consulted by Keen, the annotations are written in a "secretary cursive" hand containing "a mixture of Gothic and Roman forms"; the handwriting is "skilful", controlled, "legible" and "highly simplified in terms of contemporary techniques of design". In Rhodes' view, the handwriting has "not yet attained its settled form", and is that of a young man (Keen 7, 161).

There are two signatures in the margins, both written by one "Richard Newport", and elsewhere in the volume Newport's initials appear beside the date "6 April anno 1565". The handwriting of these signatures is "completely different from that of the anno-

tator", thus establishing beyond question that Sir Richard Newport himself was not the annotator, although he had the volume in his possession in 1565. In addition, the name "Edward" appears twice in the volume, "once in ink (just prior to the entries describing the death of Richard II), and once pricked out with a pin" (Keen 5, 210).

Keen strongly suspected that the annotations had been made by Shakespeare (29), and he devoted ten years to a search for evidence in support of that hypothesis. He began by tracing Richard Newport, whom he found to be Sir Richard Newport (d.1570) of High Ercall, Sheriff of Shropshire.

Sir Richard Newport came from a family of considerable standing in Elizabethan society. Both his father, Thomas Newport, and his mother, Anne Corbert, could trace their lineage to ancestors who arrived in England with William the Conqueror (Burke 314, 602). Through his mother, Sir Richard Newport was also a descendent of the Vernons of Haddon and, through the Vernons, related to the Talbots, Earls of Shrewsbury, the Hastings, Earls of Huntingdon, and the Devereux, Earls of Essex (*DNB*, v.19, 319-24; v.20, 278-80; Keen 218; Devereux, v.1, 7).

Through his wife, Margaret, Sir Richard was related to the Bromleys. His father-in-law, Sir Thomas Bromley (d.1555?) was an executor of the will of Henry VIII, and one of the Council appointed to advise Edward VI during his minority. Under Queen Mary, Bromley was appointed Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. Bromley's second cousin, another

Sir Thomas Bromley (1530-1587), was appointed Solicitor-General in 1569, and in 1579 succeeded Sir Nicholas Bacon as Lord Chancellor and Lord Keeper. He was involved in two famous trials of the period, that of Thomas, Duke of Norfolk in 1572 and Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1586; he presided over the latter trial as Chancellor, and it was he who affixed the Great Seal to the warrant for Mary's execution (*DNB*, v.2, 1308-11).

Sir Richard Newport's daughter, Magdalen, married Richard Herbert of Montgomery (d.1597), and was the mother of Edward, 1st Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), and of the poet George Herbert; she is also remembered for her friendship with the poet John Donne (Keen 114-5, 218). Sir Richard Newport's grandson, Richard Newport (1587-1651), was created 1st Baron Newport, and his great-grandson, Sir Francis Newport (1619-1708), a royalist during the Civil War, was after the Restoration created Earl of Bradford (*DNB*, v.14, 356-7, 359).

Unfortunately, none of the information Keen gathered on Sir Richard Newport provided him with any hard evidence in support of his hypothesis that the annotations were the work of Shakespeare, and the identity of the annotator was still an unsolved mystery when Keen published his findings in 1954.

A new hypothesis has recently been proposed which perhaps sheds some light on this problem. It has been suggested that the annotator of Sir Richard Newport's copy of Hall's Chronicle was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550-1604) (Frazer 10).

Details gleaned from the annotations themselves lend support to this hypothesis. For example, Oxford's first name, "Edward", is found twice in the volume -- once written in ink, and once pricked out with a pin. It seems not unlikely that the person who wrote the name "Edward" in the volume was the annotator himself, and that the annotator was therefore someone named Edward.

Then there is Rhodes' view that the annotations were written by a young man whose handwriting had not yet attained its settled form. If the annotations were

made at any time during the three years before Richard Newport signed the volume in 1565, or at any time up to seven years thereafter, they would have been made at a time when Edward de Vere was a young man 12-22 years of age.

The nature of the annotations provides further support for the theory of Edward de Vere's authorship. They were indisputably written by a studious individual with a keen interest in history.

A number of contemporary dedications attest to both Oxford's love of learning in general, and of history in particular. Thomas Underdowne, in dedicating to Oxford his 1569 translation of Heliodorus' *Aethiopian Historie*, speaks of Oxford's "great skill", joined with "such sufficiency of learning", and John Brooke, in 1577, makes mention of Oxford's pursuit of learning from his "tender years" and of his "excellent virtue and rare learning". Thomas Twyne (1543-1613), in dedicating to Oxford his 1573 translation of Lhuyd's *Breviary of Britain*, refers specifically to Oxford's interest in history, hoping that Oxford will bestow on his work "such regard as you are accustomed to do on books of Geography, Histories, and other good learning, wherein I am privy your honour taketh singular delight" (Ward 14, 30-1, 84-5).

As Keen notices, the annotator also had an interest in military matters (16). This was true of Oxford as well. A letter is preserved which he wrote, at the age of nineteen, to Lord Burghley, mentioning his desire to "see the wars and services in strange and foreign parts" and serve in the 1569 Scottish campaign (Ward 39-40). Oxford's interest in military matters is further borne out by Geoffrey Gates' dedication to him of his treatise, *The Defence of Militarie Profession* (Ogburn 599).

Finally, as Keen points out, the author of the annotations occasionally takes issue with Hall's derogatory comments about Roman Catholic clerics. For example, Hall wrote:

The most ambitious desire and avaricious appetite of certayne persones calling themselves spiritual fathers, but indeede carnall covetous and greedy glottons aspir-

ing for honour and not for vertue to the proud see of Rome (Keen 12).

Beside this passage, the annotator indicated his disapproval by writing:

The Author (if he dyd write it) wrote it in the afternoone (Keen 12)

Nothing is known of Oxford's early religious training. However, several of his close kinsmen, in particular some members of the Howard and Arundel families, were Catholic, and it was claimed by the French ambassador, Mauvissiere, that Oxford himself was temporarily reconciled to the Catholic Church when he was in his mid 20's (Ward 207-9, 230). It is thus possible that the religious views of the youthful annotator are consistent with religious influences on Oxford prior to the death of his father in 1562, and before he came to live in the household of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, a firm proponent of the Reformation.

A further piece of evidence which perhaps support the theory that Oxford was the annotator is the fact that one of Oxford's early tutors was Lawrence Nowell, Dean of Lichfield, whose family was distantly connected to Sir Richard Newport.

In his extensive research into the provenance of the annotated edition of Hall's Chronicle, Keen traced a series of interconnected families which included the Nowells of Read Hall in Lancashire (36, 121-2, 225). The three Nowell brothers who lived during the reign of Queen Elizabeth distinguished themselves in a variety of ways. Robert Nowell (d.1569) was a benefactor of the poet Edmund Spenser and the geographer Richard Hakluyt (Keen 197); Alexander Nowell (d.1601) was Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral; and Lawrence Nowell (1520-1576) was a scholar who compiled an Anglo-Saxon dictionary and, in 1563, had in his possession the Beowulf manuscript (Hannas 3; Kiernan 120, 162). In June, 1563 Lawrence Nowell wrote to Sir William Cecil suggesting that the period of his usefulness as Oxford's tutor was drawing to a close ("I clearly see that my work for the Earl of Oxford cannot be much longer required") (Ogburn 44). Presumably, Nowell left his position

shortly thereafter, when Oxford was thirteen years of age. It may be that the annotated copy of Hall's Chronicle went with Nowell, either as a gift or loan, when he gave up his duties as Oxford's tutor, and somehow wound up a year or so later in the hands of Sir Richard Newport, who was distantly related to the Nowells through the Houghtons, Gerards, Holcrofts and Fittons (Keen 218-21; 224-5).

However, it is not necessary to look that far afield for a connection between Sir Richard Newport and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sir Richard Newport's relative by marriage, Sir Thomas Bromley (1530-1587), had connections to Lord Burghley, in whose home Oxford lived from the age of twelve. Lord Burghley was Sir Thomas Bromley's patron, and Bromley succeeded Lord Burghley's brother-in-law, Sir Nicholas Bacon, as Lord Chancellor and Lord Keeper (v.2, 1309). By an indenture dated January 30, 1575, Oxford placed Bromley and others in charge of the management of his financial affairs while he was absent from England on a continental tour (*Essex*).

Burghley (and later, Oxford) were also distantly connected by marriage to Sir Richard Newport. Burghley's brother-in-law, Sir Nicholas Bacon, had a brother, James, who was a brother-in-law of John Pakington, whose wife Elizabeth was Sir Richard Newport's sister (Hussey 4, 31; Pakington 8). Years later, Oxford's daughter Bridget also married into a family with close connections by marriage to Humphrey Pakington, son of John Pakington and Elizabeth Newport. It is thus quite possible that the annotated edition of Hall's Chronicle passed from Sir Richard Newport to Oxford, or from Oxford to Sir Richard Newport, because of the existence of a chain of family connections.

In summary, then, a considerable amount of circumstantial evidence lends support to the theory that the annotator of Hall's Chronicle was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. His first name, his age (if the annotations were made circa 1565), his studiousness, his interest in history and military matters, and his possible Catholic sympathies as a youth all match

characteristics of the annotator of Hall's Chronicle.

Since several of Oxford's letters have been preserved, the theory of his authorship can be further tested through handwriting analysis. In addition, it may be possible to discover the library from which the copy of Hall's Chronicle originated: according to Keen, a pressmark "EEd." is found pasted inside the upper cover, indicating that the volume was once shelved as part of a large private collection (91). Finally, further research into the Newport family may reveal hitherto unsuspected connections between Sir Richard Newport and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

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RELATIVES BY MARRIAGE OF SIR RICHARD NEWPORT

