

Sutton House Society Newsletter

November 2002

For all interested in the past, present and future of Sutton House, Hackney

SUTTON HOUSE SOCIETY

A.G.M

NOVEMBER 21ST 2002

The Annual General Meeting of the Society for 2002 will be held at Sutton House on Thursday 21st November at 7.30 pm.

The agenda will include a review of the past year, the election of a new committee, and a discussion on future developments at Sutton House in the light of the new management plan.

Please try to come along if you can.

Will the real Will step forward !

William Shakespeare is currently high up in the voting for the greatest Briton of all time. However doubts concerning his true identity were raised at this year's annual lecture at Sutton House. Who was Shakespeare? Was he a merchant and part-time actor from Stratford-upon-Avon or was he a poet and nobleman from Hackney? As Hamlet once said, *'that is the question'!*

The following article was written by Mike Llewellyn who attended the lecture. We should love to receive for future publication any contribution from members or friends, particularly (for balance) if they support the Stratfordian scenario.

Was 'Shakespeare' Edward De Vere?

Was 'Shakespeare' a pen name? Could the writer really have been Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who lived and died in Hackney? At the lively Sutton House Annual Lecture on 24th October, Brian Hicks, Chair of the de Vere Society, outlined the arguments. He pointed out that authorship doubters include some big names like Charles Dickens, Sigmund Freud, Mark Twain, Orson Welles, Mark Rylance and Sir Derek Jacobi, among others. It's hard to believe they are all misguided.

The indisputable facts are that the poems and plays were published under the name 'Shakespeare' or 'Shake-speare', and

that there are records of a man from Stratford-upon-Avon whose name was most usually spelt 'Shakspeare'. The records of Shakspeare show a business man with a financial interest in the London theatre, and probably a small part actor. A main plank of the authorship question is that, in spite of phenomenal searching, nothing has been found showing Shakspeare as a writer (no record of his education, nothing in letters, no receipts, passing references, surviving manuscripts etc etc). There is no record that he called himself a writer, nor that his children, his grandchildren, their families, or his neighbours, or poets, playwrights or diarists of the time did. This wasn't typical: every other known Elizabethan writer left a

paper trail of records showing they were writers.

So the silence around Shakspere is strange and unique. Nothing in his own handwriting has been found, except six shaky signatures on legal documents. Handwriting experts say they're not from the same hand. Could it even be that Shakspere was illiterate, like his father and daughter? He made no reference in his will to plays, manuscripts, books or shares in the theatres. The record of his death is simply 'William Shakspere gent.'. His death went unnoticed by the literary world, whereas other big literary figures were eulogised and buried in Westminster Abbey. The dedication on the Stratford monument is ambiguous, and makes no reference to the plays or poems, nor to Shakspere as an author.

Shakspere died in 1616, and in 1623 the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published. The preface poses many puzzles, and gives no biographical information; Ben Jonson calls the writer 'sweet swan of Avon' — but 'Avon' means 'river' and the reference is followed by a reference to the Thames. The copperplate engraved portrait on the title page shows a huge head which seems to be floating above an absurdly small tunic. The right side of the front of the tunic seems to be the left side of the back. The face seems to have two right eyes, and light comes from several different directions. A curving line from the left ear to the chin gives the face the appearance of a mask.

If Shakspere wasn't 'Shakespeare', who was? Brian Hicks emphasised that there is no proof that de Vere was Shakespeare, but there is an accumulation of circumstantial evidence. The works of Shakespeare reveal someone who received the best education available. The playwright's many sources include works in several languages, including some unavailable in English. And Shakespeare's outlook is aristocratic. Almost all the plays are set in courtly or wealthy settings, and the noble characters are natural and convincing. The lower-class characters tend to be comic. Fourteen of the plays have Italian settings and show a detailed knowledge of Northern Italian customs, geography etc. Was

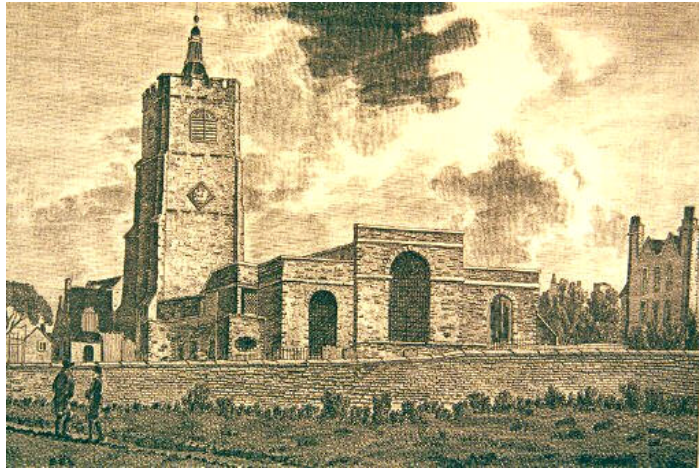
this because de Vere spent over a year travelling in Northern Italy?

De Vere was closely involved with the theatre, and his writing was highly praised. Francis Meres, 1598, wrote in *Palladis Tamia*: 'The best for comedy among us be Edward Earl of Oxford'. William Webbe, in the 1586 *A Discourse of English Poetry*, wrote of 'the deserved commendations of many honourable and noble Lords and Gentlemen in Her Majesty's Court, which, in the rare services of poetry, have been and yet are most skilful; among whom the right honourable Earl of Oxford may challenge to himself the title of the most excellent among the rest.' Gabriel Harvey praised Edward de Vere's writing in *Gratulationes Valdinenses* (1578), ending intriguingly with: 'Thine eyes flash fire, thy countenance shakes a spear ...'

At the meeting, Brian Hicks was careful to state only corroborated facts and avoid conjecture. But many questions are raised. Why use a pseudonym? Why the secrecy? And why did Shakspere come to be seen as the author, if he wasn't? There may be a fairly simple reason: the social taboo against a member of the aristocracy being a published playwright, as if he had a paid profession. *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589, attributed to George Puttenham, explains that 'in her Majesty's time that now is are sprung up another crew of Courtly makers, Noblemen and Gentlemen of Her Majesty's own servants, who have written excellently well as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first that noble gentleman, Edward Earl of Oxford.'

Edward de Vere lived in Stoke Newington (Church Street) between about 1592 and 1596, and in Brook House, Hackney, from 1596 to his death in 1604. He was buried in the old church of St John at Hackney, which was demolished in the 1790s, leaving only the clock tower. Certainly de Vere is an intriguing figure, and the authorship debate is alive and fascinating.

Perhaps next time someone convinced of Shakspere's authorship could argue their case?



Hackney Church burial place of de Vere in 1604

In January I will be giving a presentation at the de Vere Society meeting, on de Vere's death in Hackney, showing plans of the old St. John's Church and so on. The meeting is at the Globe Theatre, Southwark, on Saturday 11th January 2003 from 10 a.m. If you're interested in coming, or in any aspect of all this, contact me!

MIKE LLEWELLYN —mikell91@hotmail.com — 0208802 9313

Mike Gray writes

At Sutton House we have an interest in both camps. Clearly de Vere's links with Hackney make his case appealing to us. However some circumstantial evidence for the Stratford man comes from the fact that Shakespeare's great friend, the godfather to his twins and the executor of his will was one Hamnet Sadleir.

The builder of Sutton House, Ralph Sadleir, himself a Warwickshire man, was apparently a kinsman of Hamnet. Shakespeare's twins were called Hamnet and Judith after their godfather and godmother. They were born in 1585 but Hamnet died in 1596 shortly before Shakespeare is thought to have written *Hamlet*. The real Danish King's name is usually spelt 'Amleth'. Withycombe's *Oxford Dictionary of English Names* gives Hamlet as an alternative to Hamnet, both derived from *Hamo* meaning in old German 'a house'. Is it possible that the death of Shakespeare's only son was the inspiration for the name of the play? If so where does that leave de Vere ?

Sutton House has another tenuous link with Shakespeare (whoever he is). John Machel the younger who lived in Sutton House for over 50 years in the second half of the 16th century was first cousin to Thomas Lodge the playwright and poet (1558–1625). Lodge and Machel are mentioned together in several court cases involving their families. It would be very likely that Lodge would have visited his cousin at Sutton House. Lodge is best known for his work *Rosalynde* described as 'a pastoral romance diversified with sonnets'. *Rosalynde* was later dramatized as *As you Like it*, by Shakespeare.

A New Member

Members may have seen David Starkey's recent programme on Edward VI and noticed that some of the scenes were filmed in Sutton House. Dr. Starkey gave the very first Annual Lecture at Sutton House in 1992 on the subject of Sir Ralph Sadleir and has visited the house on many occasions, using the oak-panelled rooms in his programmes on the Tudors. He has kindly agreed to become an honorary member of the Society. He writes, 'I'm flattered to be asked to become an honorary member of the Society and delighted to accept. Let me know if I can help in any way.' A second programme in Starkey's latest series *The Unknown Tudors* on Queen (bloody!) Mary is on Channel Four, on Thursday 14th November at 9.00 pm.

News From The House

Sandford Award

We are very pleased to be one of just a half a dozen National Trust properties to be receiving the Sandford Award. The Sandford Award is a prestigious national award that recognises innovation in the provision of education. It is recognition of the work that has been done in Sutton House over the last 10 years and is the second time we have been honoured in this way. The certificate will be received in early December and we will be proud to display it alongside the Civic Trust and Europa Nostra Awards that we received after the completion of the restoration work in the early nineties.

Property Management Plan

Comments have been received and the plan is due to be finalised any day now. One of the recommendations of the plan was that it was important for the Property Manager to maintain and develop relationships with external organisations, including Sutton House Society. To this end a meeting of Sutton House Society committee members and Sutton House Local Committee members was held at Sutton House on Wednesday 6th December. The future of the Local Committee was discussed, as were good future relations with Sutton House Society.

Conservation statement

Sutton House is working with Richard Andrews and Robert Thorne to produce a conservation statement for the house. This will build on the extensive body of knowledge about the history of the house, and make some recommendations about the future management of the property.

The conservation statement is being guided by a steering committee consisting of Richard, Robert, key house staff, Lissa Chapman (representing Sutton House Society) and Robin Cousins (representing Sutton House volunteers). There will be a public meeting at Sutton House at 7.00 pm on Monday 2nd December 2002. At this meeting Robert Thorne will put forward his views to date on the conservation issues facing Sutton House, and ask for comments from the audience. Contact Siân Harrington (020 8525 9054) for further details.

Staffing news

Carole Reeves, Area Manager for London, left the National Trust at the end of September. Staff at Sutton House will miss her support and wisdom very much. Diana Owen, one of the other area managers in the Thames & Solent area, is providing area manager cover for Sutton House in the interim, and it is hoped that a replacement for Carole will be in post in January or February 2003.

SIÂN HARRINGTON 10/11/02

Forthcoming events at Sutton House 2002

Art Gallery

6th November – 1st December 2002: NOEL PAINE: *Recent Small Paintings and Drawings*. Paintings inspired by the urban landscape.

4th December – 22nd December 2002: SHAUN CATON: *The Eye Has It*. A vibrant exhibition of work inspired by natural forms in nature.

Walks, talks and lunches

Sunday 8th December 2002, 11.00 am: *Glimpses of Tudor Hackney*. A walk by MIKE GRAY followed by lunch at Sutton House. £15.

Other events

Discovery Day 15th December 2002, 11.30 am to 5.00 pm: *Christmas Past and Presents*. Activities for children and families. Free.

Saturday 30th November and Sunday 1st December 2002, 11.30 am to 5.00 pm: *Christmas Craft Fair*. Over 30 craft stalls selling jewellery, ceramics, textiles, silver and Christmas decorations. £1.50 for adults; accompanied children free.

Friday 13th December 2002: *Candle-Lit Carols*. Join in the carols lead by our singers, and enjoy a glass of mulled wine. £5 for adults, £3 for children.

Comments and contributions to Mike Gray 16B Clapton Passage E5 8HS
mikeg@hollyvillas.fslife.co.uk