

## Autumn Meeting of the De Vere Society

*Kevin Gilvary reports on the meeting at  
Henley-on-Thames on 20 September 2003*

The DVS returned to the picturesque town of Henley-on-Thames for our autumn meeting. The day was warm, the meeting cheerful, the ideas exhilarating. Henley is less famous for debating literary issues than for its famous rowing regatta – fine young men in stripey blazers and old men in pink ties, with pink faces and pink gins. Yet with its lovely high street leading to an ancient bridge, Henley is strangely evocative of what Stratford-upon-Avon must have looked like before the advent of the tacky gift shops and cheap eating houses.

First on the agenda was a consideration by Richard Malim: Did Oxford know Ronsard? With Richard expounding the arguments and Patricia Poullain reading the French we found out more. "Pierre de Ronsard (1524-85), poet and humanist, was the central figure of the French poetical Renaissance" (Oxford Guide to French Literature). His Elegies, Mascarades et Bergeries were lyrical pieces for court entertainments, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth and including poems addressed to herself, to Dudley and to Cecil. There is a prediction that a great poet has been born in England who will extol the exploits of English kings. This prophecy was seen as fulfilled towards the end of his life. Who else but Oxford-Shakespeare? Perhaps Ronsard is an undervalued influence on Shakespeare (eg more than just Sonnet 104 'To me, fair friend, you can never be old.')

Next we received a detailed report from Mike Llewellyn on The Shakespeare Authorship Conference held at Shakespeare's Globe in June 2003. This was an ambitious week-end event sponsored by the Shakespeare Authorship Trust and chaired by the Globe's Mark Rylance. An early note of encouragement was struck by the invitation to ask questions and rely on argument rather than fall back on invective like a bad smell. The case for Shaxper was put by William Rubinstein Professor of History at the University of Wales Aberystwyth, whose article on the Authorship in History Today August 2001 aroused considerable interest. [Copies available from the editor.] Rubinstein outlined 12 main reasons for taking the Stratford man at face value. These will be reported in the next newsletter – with a suitable

rebuttal for each. Since Charles Beauclerk, president of DVS, was unable to attend, Nicholas Hagger put the case for De Vere. His detailed and thorough exposition of the Oxfordian case was very well received and drew praise both for its conviction and for its lucidity. The case for Bacon was put weakly as the speaker concentrated more on Bacon's philosophy of learning rather than why he might make a good candidate for the Authorship. A better case was put for Marlowe. (See page 21 of this newsletter for a review of the Marlovian case in the TV film 'Much Ado About Something'.)

The second day was devoted to reasons why the Authorship matters to one particular play, Richard II which was in production at the time. It seems that only an Oxfordian interpretation makes sense of R2. Positive reference was made to the DVS leaflet 'Richard II, Richard II and the Earl of Oxford' which has been on sale in the Globe bookshop (see letters pp 24-25). Much credit must go to the Globe's artistic director, Mark Rylance, for organising the event, which is to be repeated next year.

We then heard from the society's former treasurer, Alan Robinson, on Shaxper's finances. Alan described how the Shaxper family had gone from some affluence in William's youth through penury to considerable riches. Since there is little to show how he got his money (and it is laughable to think he did it as a professional playwright), it would appear to derive from illegal activities. (Alan's paper will appear in the next newsletter.)

The afternoon was given to consideration of celebrations for De Vere's quater-centenary in 2004. Sadly, we will not be able to go to Cambridge. With the House and Keep at Hedingham unavailable, Charles Bird explained how the parish council hope to stage an exhibition on De Vere in the village. Sally Hazelton's Edward's Presents will premiere in Southwark in January. Many suggestions were made. An event for the first week-end in July is planned for the Globe or nearby. The committee will now consider how best to mark the occasion.

Thanks to Alan Robinson for organising the DVS autumn meeting in Henley's medieval barn.