

DVS Quartercentenary Commemoration of the death of Edward de Vere

A summary of the June 2004 meeting of the DVS by Philip Johnson

William Cecil, Edward de Vere's guardian and father-in-law, would have made a good president of the Chartered Insurance Institute; but it's hard to suppose that De Vere would have bothered to pay annual premiums to any of its corporate members, had AXA-through-to-Zurich existed in his lifetime. Nevertheless, Mike Llewellyn and Sally Hazelton imaginatively and efficiently organised the Society's celebrations at Institute's headquarters with its nearby bust of Shakespeare and monument to Hemmings and Condell. The venue was also close to the sites of De Vere's homes in the City and its 1930s baronial architecture and appointed accoutrements were worthy of the distinguished earl. The celebrations were enjoyed by about fifty of his present supporters, including several new members and guests from the Continent and North America, on Saturday 26 June, two days after the 400th anniversary of De Vere's death.

The event was further buoyed up by the fact that the anniversary, the Oxfordian authorship claims and our meeting had been publicised in the media on the preceding days, thanks to the promotional efforts of Kevin Gilvary and Richard Malim.

Proceedings began with the AGM; then Elizabeth Imlay reported encouraging progress on the book of Oxfordian essays, which she is generously preparing for publication later in the year.

It was Kevin Gilvary's task to develop the celebratory mood and, happily, the earnest-sounding "Why I'm an Oxfordian" turned out to be an informative and entertaining tribute in the style of Edward de Vere: This is your life!, with a wide range of illustrations standing in for the unavailable hero and his associates.

After the well-presented luncheon, we were entertained by actors from the London Academy of Performing Arts, directed by Juliet Aykroyd. They presented staged readings of apposite extracts portraying Shakespeare: Ben Jonson's Everyman Out of His Humour (1599), and De Vere: Amy Freed's The Beard of Avon (2001) and two scenes from Hamlet (1589 ?).

Now it was the turn of Professor William Rubinstein from the History Department at

University of Wales Aberystwyth to provide a distinctive stimulus to the event. His aim was to move the authorship debate forward, without being a 'party-pooper'. He is a convinced anti-Stratfordian: Shakespeare of Stratford did not write the works; apart from his name on the First Folio, there is no fit between the Stratford man and the plays. Although De Vere is the most convincing of the publicised alternative candidates, Bill finds serious weaknesses in the Oxfordian case:

- the only tangible evidence is the Geneva Bible in the Folger Library
- like Shakespeare of Stratford, De Vere has no authorial paper-trail
- there is no evidence of a relationship with the Earl of Southampton
- De Vere had his own theatre company and he was a known play-wright.

Oxfordians have made a cogent case for the publication of the First Folio in 1623, but they also need to identify the "grand possessors", to establish the continental connections by which De Vere continued to receive books and information, and they should explore De Vere's links with the "humanist" element in the plays. Bill Rubinstein accepts the conventional dating of the works, c1590 - 1610, which he therefore believes remains problematic for Oxfordians.

There was a lively discussion with members of the audience who raised questions and challenges. Professor Rubinstein believes the real author has not yet been publicly identified – but soon will be. He appears to be involved in the search, but – apart from indicating the parameters required for the true author (Looney's method, suitably expanded) – would say no more!

With closing time approaching, Kevin Gilvary showed some little known images of de Vere. Charles Bird outlined De Verean events at Castle Hedingham. Richard Malim concluded a successful meeting by introducing the Research Fund, which will be an ongoing Commemoration of the Quartercentenary, and provide a means of following up Professor Rubinstein's suggestions.