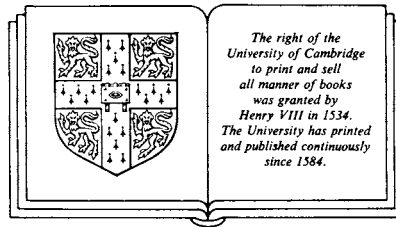


A COMPANION TO HENSLOWE'S DIARY

NEIL CARSON



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1 · PHILIP HENSLOWE AND HIS ‘DIARY’

PHILIP HENSLOWE was the fourth of seven children of Edmond and Margaret Henslowe (or Hensley) of Lindfield, Sussex. We do not know when he was born, but it is likely to have been between 1550–60, which would have made him about sixty when he died. He appears to have acquired little of either education or patrimony, and to have begun his career as an apprentice or servant to a London dyer by the name of Henry Woodward. Philip’s diligence in the execution of his duties must have recommended him (at least to his mistress), for on 14 February 1579 (a mere two months after her husband’s death), Agnes Woodward and Philip Henslowe were married. At a stroke, the former servant acquired not only a readymade family (6-year-old Joan and 4-year-old Elizabeth), but also a substantial estate.

Henslowe was probably in his mid- or late twenties at the time of his marriage; his new wife was considerably older. No record of Agnes’ birth date survives and the only clue we have to her age is a deposition made after Henslowe’s death in 1616 alleging that she was then a hundred years old. This testimony by Philip’s nephew is almost totally untrustworthy, however, since it would make Agnes fifty-nine years old at the time her second daughter was born (and sixty-three when she married Philip). It is more likely that she was in her early fifties in 1579.

Whatever their relative ages, the Henslowes appear to have suited one another, and with his newly acquired resources Philip began to prosper. In June 1584, he negotiated for the purchase of 60 dozen goat skins (Mun. 86, 87). The following year he secured what was probably his first piece of real estate, a property in Southwark known as the Little Rose (Mun. 15). It was described as tenements with two gardens, and according to Greg may have been a brothel (1904: II, 3). As early as 1593 he may have owned an inn called ‘the ffolles head’ (f. 1v); two years later he acquired the adjoining ‘James is head’ (f. 3v), and sometime subsequently a property known as The Barge, the Bell, and the Cock, and also possibly one called The Unicorn (Greg 1904: II, 25, 26). He also invested in numerous rental properties, and his income from this source rose steadily in the seventeenth century.

Henslowe’s elevation from ‘servant’ to prosperous burgher is pleasantly edifying, but it is not entirely the story of a self-made man. Quite apart from his good sense in marrying money, Henslowe was fortunate enough to become allied to another shrewd and ambitious entrepreneur in the person of Edward Alleyn. This came about in October 1592, when the actor married Henslowe’s step-daughter, Joan Woodward. Alleyn and Henslowe obviously had much in common, for they became partners in a variety of highly successful business enterprises. Of the two men, it was probably Henslowe who gained most by the alliance. According to testimony given in 1616, the

'Industrie and care' of Alleyn contributed greatly to the 'Bettering of the Estate of the said Philip Henslowe' (PRO STAC8/168/18).

It would be unfair, however, to attribute all of Henslowe's success to his relatives by marriage. In the course of his life he won a series of honours which were no doubt in good measure a result of his own efforts and ability. In 1592 he was appointed Groom of the Chamber to Queen Elizabeth, a post that required him to spend considerable time at court (Ms I, 11). Following James's accession, he became Gentleman Sewer of the Chamber, and in 1607 he was elected vestryman (along with Edward Alleyn) of the parish of St Saviour. A year later he became a churchwarden, and in 1612 he was appointed one of six governors of the Free Grammar School of the parish. By the second decade of the seventeenth century, therefore, the poorly educated apprentice had attained what Greg describes as 'an assured and honoured social position among his fellow citizens' (1904: II, 15).

What can we deduce from all this? Such a position is not, of course, incompatible with the ignorance and greed sometimes attributed to Henslowe. To determine whether or not these worldly honours were hollow we need to know more about Henslowe's personal life. Here the documents illustrating Henslowe's relations with his extended family are valuable. The complicated and sometimes acrimonious dealings reflected in letters and legal documents provide some clues to the motives and feelings of the man. While the evidence is not always as unambiguous as we might hope, it does provide a useful background against which to judge his activities in the theatre.

Philip was the second youngest of five sons, and in worldly terms quite likely the most successful. He had no children of his own, but, owing to rather tragic circumstances, he became involved in the raising of several nieces and nephews. The first of these was Francis, son of his eldest brother, Richard, who died in 1574. Sometime about 1590, when Francis would have been about twenty-four, Henslowe received an appeal for assistance to obtain his release from prison. He obliged at a cost of 16s. 4d. (Ms III, 5). Between January 1593, and May 1594, Henslowe employed Francis in his pawnbroking business, at the end of which period he advanced him £15 to pay for a share in the Queen's Men (f. 2v). The following June, Francis borrowed another £9 for half a share in an unnamed acting troupe (f. 3v). In December 1597, Philip lent him £7 to help him buy a house on the Bankside (f. 62). By 1604 he was performing with the Duke of Lennox's Men (f. 100), but sometime after that he was again in prison (this time for stealing a horse), and had to borrow £5 from his uncle to obtain his freedom. There is no record that Francis repaid any of these debts. Then in 1606 Francis and his wife died, probably of the plague, and an undated note among Henslowe's papers records charges 'laid owte' for their funeral (Mss IV, 57, 58).

The relationship between Henslowe and his second nephew, John, is, if anything, even more poignant. Philip had been of assistance to his second brother, Edmond, and on a number of occasions had loaned him money to buy real estate and to pay off his creditors (f. 122v). But he became more deeply involved in the family affairs when Edmond fell sick sometime in 1591. Henslowe rode down to the family place in Sussex, paid for Edmond's care and for the threshing of his crops, and finally under-

wrote the costs of his funeral and the legal expenses connected with his will (f. 122v–123).

Edmond's estate was substantial. He owned a 'mansion house' and shop at Buxtead, and from the sale of this and his household goods he hoped to endow his family. He bequeathed £20 to his wife, and to his daughter, Anne, he promised a dowry of £100 to be paid one month after her marriage. Apart from several small legacies, the remainder of the estate was to be divided equally between his wife and his two other children, John and Mary, the former to receive his portion on reaching maturity and the second a month after her wedding. Perhaps the most curious provision of Edmond's will, however, was his wish that Philip in his capacity as executor should assume responsibility for the care of his children during their minority. The terms of the will are very specific:

I make my brother Philip Hensley sole exequutor and doe desire him to deale for my childrenns behalfe the beste he can Prouided allwaies that he sustaine no lesse theareby But that out of the said goodes, he shoulde be paide all suche iuste costes and charges as he shalbe at in compassinge anie of these bequestes, ffor I would have him and his wief, take my childrenn as their owne and with them their seuerall porc[i]on, and to see them brought vp in the feare of god till suche time as they shall come to age themselves.

(PRO, P.C.C., PROB 11/79, 212–212v probated 15 Dec. 1591, cited by Cerasano (1985) in an unpublished appendix.)

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Edmond's widow Margery had other ideas about the raising of her children. As Henslowe reports it, she 'ded desyer to haue the bordinge & bringyn vp of her owne iij cheldren after al the good weare [ap]prayed wch the one halfe was to her sealf & the other halfe vnto John & mary wch was valewed to 30 li, & for that halfe she was contented to bord them & scolle them' (f. 124). The wording is ambiguous, but the phrase 'that halfe' presumably refers to John and Mary's portion which Margery kept in addition to her own.

The arrangement seems to have worked well until Margery's death three years later. At that time the children 'cameal vp to . . . London'. Henslowe claimed sometime after 1595 that they had 'bene euer sence at [his] carges & as [he had] payd for ther borde to ther mother [he looked] a cordynge to the will to be a lowed yt agayne' (f. 124). The phrase 'to ther mother' is puzzling, but Henslowe seems to be claiming only those expenses incurred after the children arrived in London on 27 February 1595. According to the detailed calculation drawn up, probably in the summer of 1595 and set out on folios 122v to 123v, Henslowe spent some £85 on his brother's family, but appears to have benefited little from the will. The portions of John and Mary seem to have been consumed paying for their upkeep; of Anne's legacy of £100 there is no further mention; and Philip reports that he 'never had any thinge of [Edmond's] but the howse' (f. 41v) which contrary to the provisions of the will was not sold until after Margery's death when it brought £80, less than Henslowe's expenses until that time.

It is not known how old the children were when they came to London, but the two eldest were quickly apprenticed (John to a dyer and Mary to a seamstress) which suggests they were in their mid-teens (f. 124v). Of his two nieces, Ann was eventually

married, but Mary fell ill of a 'dead pallsey' in 1605 and was rendered 'lame' and unable to work. Henslowe lent John money to take his sister home to his house. Thereafter he paid two shillings a week for her keep until she died in 1607.

Up until this point Henslowe's dealings with his poor relatives seem to be marked by a sense of responsibility and possibly even generosity. His subsequent relations with his nephew John, however, are more complex. After Francis's death in 1606, John was the sole surviving male in the Henslowe line and the most obvious heir to Philip's fortune. Not improbably there were considerable hopes and pressures centred on the young man. Unfortunately he seems not to have been able to live up to them. At some time after his arrival in London he left his master, and Philip apprenticed him again, this time to a waterman. About 1598 he 'layd owt' £5 to buy a boat, and several years later in 1605 he paid £14. 16s. to buy John a place as one of the King's watermen (f. 124). The year before that, Edmond's will had again been challenged in the courts and Philip had financed John's legal defence (f. 123v).

Any of these transactions might have caused friction between the two men. But it was apparently John's taking his uncle to court that produced an irreparable rupture. The details of the case are unknown, but, according to witnesses in 1616, it was the source of a bitter breach between uncle and nephew. Jacob Meade asserted that Henslowe 'heild a very hard conceipt of [John because] . . . in former tymes [John] had sued & troubled [his uncle] for goods wch were some tyme the plaintiffs fathers . . . as the comp[lainant] pretended' (PRO C.24/431/23 and ST.CH. 168/18 cited Chillington 1979). Not improbably the litigation grew out of John's suspicion that he had been cheated of his inheritance in some way by his uncle. Whatever the cause, it seems to have permanently poisoned relations between the two, for when they met 'by chance or otherwise in any place . . . [Philip] would scarcely vouchsafe to speake vnto [John] or so much as to take notice of [him] otherwise then by some slight careless salutation or a nod of his head or such like'. As a consequence of this hostility, Henslowe by the time of his death had vowed that John 'should not have a foote of the land or one peny worth of the goods wch were [Henslowe's]'. Accordingly he effectively disinherited his nephew by passing part of his estate (which was officially valued at £1700. 12s. 8d. but may have been worth as much as eight times that amount) to John's son and the remainder to his wife, Agnes, who in her turn willed it to Joan and Edward Alleyn.

The picture which emerges from these documents is not simple. Clearly Henslowe was capable of what looks like vindictiveness, but we know little of the circumstances that aroused it. His treatment of his relatives apart from John seems to have been fair and the tone of his letters to Alleyn is simple and warm (Mss I, 10, 12, 13, 14). Whereas the provisions of Edmond's will would seem to have opened the way for Henslowe to appropriate the inheritance to his own use until the children were old enough to claim it, he does not appear to have done so. On the contrary, he seems to have treated his sister-in-law, Margery, with consideration and tact. While there is no reason to suppose that he treated his business associates with the same tolerance he showed to members of his family, neither is there any irrefutable evidence that he did

not. The complaints of actors about his hard dealings in 1615 constitute a special case which will be dealt with later. During the period the diary covers, however, Henslowe's relations with players and playwrights seem to be marked by the same patience and fairness he showed towards his own relatives.

THE 'DIARY'

If for the sake of convenience we continue to use the word 'diary' to refer to Henslowe's theatrical account book, we must do so with the understanding that it is a misnomer. The volume which Philip acquired from his elder brother John he used for various purposes after 1592. Indeed, one of the first things to strike a modern reader primarily interested in the theatre is just how much of the volume is given over to non-theatrical affairs. Memoranda, receipts, recipes, and notations on a multitude of subjects from real estate to family business abound. While at first these auxiliary interests seem to present a bewildering confusion, it is possible to group them under a few general headings.

To begin with, the volume frequently served Henslowe as a sort of 'commonplace book' in which he recorded interesting and miscellaneous bits of information. These range from aphorisms (f. 1), to card tricks (f. 18v), to medications (ff. 16v, 17v, 18, 136v), to memoranda of events such as the wedding of Edward Alleyn and his step-daughter Joan (f. 2). Closely related to these entries are various memoranda which Henslowe made to help him remember such things as the measurements of the wainscoting in Alleyn's house (f. 2), the fact that he had put his horse to grass (f. 24v), and the details of a farm he may have considered buying (f. 111v).

The incorporation of such apparently irrelevant material into an account book seems strange to a modern reader and is sometimes seen as evidence of Henslowe's disorganized mind or sloppy methods. But account books of the sixteenth century were neither so neat nor so homogeneous as today's ledgers. Merchants frequently intermixed their financial statements with various personal matters, such as rules for conduct or treatments for coughs and other ailments (Yamey 1940: 5). The account book of the leading sixteenth-century merchant of Ipswich was little more than a rough book whose erasures and cancellations make it almost indecipherable. Even the most successful and eminent merchants of the period often show very elementary techniques and slovenly execution (Ramsay 1956: 186). Sir Thomas Gresham, for example, used a mixture of roman and arabic numerals (the latter gradually replacing the former in England in the sixteenth century), and mixed company and personal business in his books. In this respect, at least, Henslowe's practice in his diary is perfectly normal for his time.

Another use Henslowe soon found for his volume was as a depository of various legal and semi-legal records. These include several agreements and contracts which were signed and witnessed, and would therefore have had some weight in a court of law if the terms were ever challenged. Entries range from simple signed acknowledgements of indebtedness such as that of Arthur Langworth (f. 88), to more specialized

memoranda. Henslowe recorded payments received as rent (f. 43), or on private debts (f. 103), and collected signed testimony relating to payments he made for 'the bargain for the tenements on the Bankside' (f. 98v). He also itemized various bonds committing one individual to underwrite the debt of another (f. 2), or agreeing to a forfeiture in the case of non-payment of debt (f. 259v), or the failure to fulfil a promise (f. 97v). Elsewhere in the diary he transcribed agreements which would not have had legal status in the form in which we find them. For example, a partnership between Alleyn and Henslowe on the one hand and John Ackley and Nicholas Dame on the other seems to be no more than a summary of the terms of the contract (f. 204). Entries relating to an agreement between Alleyn and Langworth (ff. 24, 25) would also appear to be merely descriptive, since neither of the parties has signed them. In these cases, Henslowe is probably simply reminding himself of the terms of official documents deposited elsewhere.

A better notion of Henslowe's use of the diary for business purposes can be derived from the accounts relating to his dealing with, and on behalf of, his son-in-law, Edward Alleyn. These accounts are recorded on folios 238–23 where Henslowe reversed the book and began working from the back towards the middle. The record has the appearance of a ledger. One page contains a series of expenses incurred by Edward Alleyn in connection with his house during an indeterminate period before and after 24 November 1592. On the facing page a column of figures adds up to £13-04-02 (exactly £5 less than the actual amount of Alleyn's expenses). An account of further expenses described as charges 'as hath bene layd owt a bowt edward alenes howsse' begins on folio 237 and appears to list items paid for by Henslowe (possibly after Alleyn left to travel in the provinces after 31 January 1593). The accounts go back to 4 November, and extend to September 1594 (probably an error for 1593) (f. 235). Henslowe drew up an account of what he was owed on folio 234v, and repeated it on 234.

These pages are interesting because they are much more systematic than most of the accounts in the diary. Expenditures are carefully itemized, and it would appear that they have been transcribed from other sources. This is suggested by the fact that five items paid for by Alleyn appear in exactly the same phraseology in Henslowe's accounts, although the mistake was caught and the duplicate entries are crossed out. Henslowe made no effort to total the expenses until very near the end of the account when he entered a sub-total and then a final total in the left margin opposite the last entry. The sum (£154-12-00) seems to be 12s. 1d. too high, but it is possible that Henslowe was making some kind of correction which he has not shown in the book. The figure has been carried over to the top of folio 234v, but Henslowe reckoned Alleyn's debt using a very different set of figures from those on the previous pages. What is significant about these entries is that they show that as early as 1592 Henslowe was capable of neat and meticulous book-keeping, of bringing all expenditures relevant to a particular enterprise together, and of drawing up a balance of debits and credits. The *raison d'être* of the Alleyn accounts was clearly to provide a comprehensive record of expenditures so that Henslowe could reclaim his money.

A similar need explains the series of records relating to Henslowe's activities as executor of his brother's estate. As we have seen, Henslowe attended his brother in his last sickness, and after his death assumed increasing responsibility for the family. In 1595, after the death of his sister-in-law he arranged for the sale of the house, and about the same time drew up 'A Juste note of what [he had] Lent vnto edmond Henslowe . . . & Layd owt . . . [for his] children' (f. 122v). The account was compiled from different parts of the diary where he had recorded expenditures from 1592 to 1595, and was presumably prepared so that he could present a claim against the estate (f. 124).

In the two examples so far discussed Henslowe was acting as an agent, and in such circumstances he demonstrated that he was reasonably painstaking. In the second case, for example, he meticulously retranscribed the expenditures on folios 39, 40, 41, and 41v, although presumably he could have done his calculations without going to this extra trouble. Why he did so is not clear unless it was to present the account to other eyes which might have been confused by the original entries made over a number of years. The transcription is, perhaps, a tacit acknowledgement of the occasional or irregular nature of the original accounts.

Henslowe probably learned his book-keeping techniques as an apprentice. Since he is referred to on different occasions as a citizen and dyer, the business in which he developed his skills was what today we would describe as a service industry. Material brought to the shop was presumably processed and returned and the only book-keeping necessary would be to keep track of the changing inventory of material to be dyed, and to record payment for the process. The system Henslowe learned, therefore, was probably a fairly simple one, for English business practices were in considerable flux in the mid-sixteenth century. Early account books frequently record only credit dealings, the entries being crossed out when payment was received. Such entries often did not occur in chronological order, since the costliness of paper necessitated the use of every empty space available (Yamey 1940: 5). Nevertheless, these primitive methods of book-keeping were adequate for most business requirements and lasted in England well into the seventeenth century.

The need of merchants to take frequent inventories, and their desire to be able to reckon their current financial position more readily, led as early as 1211 in Florence to a system of double-entry book-keeping. This method called for the recording of every transaction both as a credit and a debit, and made possible a regular balancing of the accounts. For example, instead of a sale of cloth being entered only once as an increase in cash, it would be listed twice (as a cash increase and as a deduction from the stock). In this way the total of current assets (stock plus cash and accounts receivable) can be more easily compared with current liabilities. The more efficient double-entry system made its way slowly from the large Italian mercantile firms to the smaller businesses of Europe. It appears that it had become established in the more up-to-date counting houses of London by the middle of the sixteenth century (Ramsay 1956: ciii), but individual tradesmen clung to the older methods for another hundred years.

The most relevant feature of the double-entry system for our purposes is its use of

a variety of different kinds of books. Originally, one volume would have been used to record transactions as they occurred. In such a book, sales and purchases, cash and credit entries might follow one another chronologically without distinction. From an early date, however, merchants tended to replace a single comprehensive book with a number of separate volumes each devoted to a particular type of transaction (Defoe 1738: 34). A complete system required three volumes: a journal or day book listing credit transactions; a cash book for cash transactions; and a ledger in which the entries from the journal and cash books would be summarized in separate accounts for each customer.

It is very probable that the book-keeping system that Henslowe learned as a young man was not adequate for the enterprises of his maturity. After his marriage to Agnes Woodward, Henslowe lived almost entirely on investment. His wealth consisted of his capital, held partly in real estate, partly in loans and partly in cash. His real annual income would be what he received in rent and interest less the amount he spent to earn that income. To determine his financial position at any time he would have had to be able to total his assets in property, credit and cash, and deduct from them his current liabilities in expenses or bad loans. It would have been extraordinarily difficult to do these things using the diary alone. For example, Henslowe made no distinction between cash and credit transactions. The sale of a jewel to William Sly (f. 15) was recorded in the same way as a loan to Richard Jones (f. 34v). And yet in the first case the item should be deducted from some inventory of jewels, while in the second the amount should be subtracted from the cash on hand. The existence of a rent book from the years 1504–1611 (Ms XVIII, 6) and a 'building book' referred to by Alleyn (Ms IX, 24 Dec. 1621) suggest that the diary contains only a partial record of Henslowe's financial dealings. There is no consolidation of entries to present a more or less comprehensive financial picture, and, indeed, it is difficult to deduce why some of the records were kept at all.

This is certainly the case with many of his real estate transactions. Documents relating to this aspect of Henslowe's business have survived among the muniments and manuscripts preserved at Dulwich College. Greg has collated all the evidence to put together as complete a picture of Henslowe's speculations in property as is possible. Here we will consider the diary entries only as evidence of Henslowe's book-keeping methods. The fullest accounts are those with Mrs Keyes in April and May of 1599. On folio 42v, Henslowe itemized what he had 'payd for mrs keyes' and on folio 43 what he had 'Receud of mrs Keyes Reant'. This is a conventional record of income on the right hand side and payments on the left. Thus receipts totalling £4-6-0 are offset by expenditures amounting to £4-7-8. These latter are made up of rent paid on Mrs Keyes' behalf, a loan of £1-00-0, and the transfer of certain rents received. The accounts are not totalled or balanced, but the debit side is crossed out. Once again, the more complete form of these accounts may be a result of the fact that they were prepared for someone other than Henslowe himself.

Such a conclusion might be supported by the lacunae in the remaining real estate records. Where Henslowe listed his own payments (to John Malthouse for example)

he did so without explanation and without reference to any income. His 'Reconynge' drawn up on folio 19 shows various legal expenses incurred in connection with the purchase of tenements which may have been part of the messuage on the Bankside known as The Barge, the Bell and the Cock (Greg 1904; II, 297). There he itemized various charges amounting to £4-7-02 (which he incorrectly totalled as £4-11-11 at the bottom of the account). That these costs are only part of the expenses involved in the transaction is suggested by the 'ttotalis' £131-06-11 entered at the bottom left of the account, but there is no indication in the diary of what this total represents or how it was arrived at. It is clear, therefore, that the 'malthouse Recknyge' is only a partial record of Henslowe's transactions relating to The Barge, the Bell and the Cock, and that further accounts including the purchase price of the property, expenses for repairs and amounts received in rent must have been kept elsewhere. Like the other reckonings for Alleyn and Mrs Keyes, this was probably prepared as a kind of statement of account.

The majority of the real estate entries seem to be memoranda of some kind, but in most cases it is difficult to see why they were preserved and impossible to deduce their relationship to Henslowe's investments as a whole. They seem to fall into three categories: statements of expenses (including rent), reminders of agreements (ff. 24, 25, 98) and accounts of rental income. There are several brief summaries of expenses, such as the cost of repairs for The Fool's Head (f. 1v), the amount paid for painted cloth, wainscoting and turned pillars for The James' Head (f. 3v) and costs for repairs to Hugh Daves' house (ff. 6-6v), mending a wharf (f. 21) and building a house on the Bankside (f. 32). Few of these accounts are added up, and when they are, as in the case of the Bankside property, the addition is inaccurate. It is also interesting that sometimes entries are made before the cash is actually paid out and then subsequently cancelled by writing 'no' in the left-hand margin (f. 32). These cancellations have been taken into consideration when the account was totalled, but there is no indication of what income (if any) the sums were charged against.

Another expense incurred by Henslowe was his annual rents. The only record of these is a memo on folio 178v showing yearly charges of £52-14-8 beginning in 1602. There is no indication of when these rents were due, or how often they were paid, and no evidence of an attempt to balance these expenses against income received from the properties. That Henslowe was in receipt of rents is shown by accounts on the facing page. There he enters 'A note of alle my tenentes & what they paye yearley' (f. 178). This entry has the appearance of an *aide memoire* rather than an active account, although a series of dots and strokes following each name may indicate instalment payments. On the whole, therefore, the diary entries relating to Henslowe's investments in real estate appear to be little more than casual jottings for particular purposes rather than a systematic attempt to keep track of his changing financial position.

The same could be said of the extensive records of personal loans. From very early in his business career Henslowe found it necessary to extend credit to his associates and customers. Though not as widespread as today, the use of credit was an integral component of sixteenth-century business and trade. There were three main types of credit instruments: the bill of debt (a promissory note in English usually written by the