

A COMPANION TO HENSLOWE'S DIARY

Henslowe's 'diary' is a unique source of information about the day-to-day running of the Elizabethan repertory theatre. Philip Henslowe, a theatrical entrepreneur, kept records of his financial dealings with London companies and actors from 1592–1604.

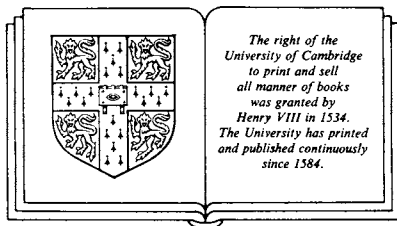
The diary itself is difficult to decipher. Neil Carson's analysis is based on a much more thorough correlation of Henslowe's entries than has been attempted before, breaking down into clear tabular form the main items of income and expenditure and drawing conclusions about the management procedures of the companies, the professional relationships of actors and playwrights and the ways in which plays were written, rehearsed and programmed.

Previous speculation has dismissed Henslowe himself as ignorant, disorderly and grasping. Carson shows him to have been a benign and efficient businessman whose control over the actors' professional activities was much less extensive than has often been supposed.

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NEIL CARSON



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TO MY MOTHER AND THE
MEMORY OF MY FATHER

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PREFACE

NOT SURPRISINGLY the editing of Henslowe's diary has always taken precedence over its explication. Commentaries have been rudimentary or have lagged well behind the publication of the original material. Edmond Malone, the first to make scholarly use of the manuscript, apologized that it was not in his power 'to arrange those very curious materials in their proper places', but did not wish that 'the publicke should be deprived of the information and entertainment' they would afford (1790: I, Part 2, 289). Malone's extracts printed in his edition of *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (1790) were the only selections from the diary and papers available to most scholars until J. Payne Collier's edition of the diary, published in 1845. Collier's commentary was devoted almost entirely to an explanation of the document's relevance to the study of Shakespeare. Furthermore, it was coloured by his attitude to its author whom he described as 'an ignorant man, even for the time in which he lived, and for the station he occupied'. Collier's assessment seems to have been based entirely on the fact that Henslowe 'wrote a bad hand, adopted any orthography that suited his notion of the sound of the words . . . and kept his book, as respects dates in particular, in the most disorderly, negligent, and confused manner' (1845: xv). Collier himself made no attempt to improve the order of the work, however, and added materially to its confusion by introducing a number of forged entries.

The first serious effort to see some kind of pattern in the document was made by F. G. Fleay in his *Chronicle History of the London Stage 1559–1642* (1890). Fleay drew up an abstract of the performance records and loan accounts, but ignored most of the non-theatrical material which he described as being 'of no conceivable interest to anyone'. His analysis of the Henslowe records had an important influence on later work, as did his call for a new edition of the diary. 'Collier's edition', he wrote, 'is a disgrace to English literature, and the Dulwich authorities would do well to have it re-edited by a competent hand, with careful elision of his numerous forgeries, and with the matter arranged in serviceable consecution . . . without infringing on the accuracy of the text' (1890: 95).

Greg's editions of the diary (1904), and papers (1907), and his volume of commentary (1908) more than met the need Fleay identified. They have now served nearly three generations of scholars and in some respects will not likely be superseded. The Foakes–Rickert edition of the diary (1961) introduced many new readings, and the Scolar facsimiles of the diary and papers (1977) enable students to puzzle out their own interpretations of the text. But Greg's discussions of the many individuals mentioned in the diary will probably stand for many years, as will his account of the lost plays.

PREFACE

Nevertheless, a reassessment of Greg's assumptions and some of his interpretations is overdue. As Foakes and Rickert observed, scholarship in the last eighty or more years has suggested new possibilities of interpreting difficult entries. Furthermore, there is a compelling need for a functional abstract of the diary's contents to which scholars can refer. The absence of an agreed-upon basis for analysis and comparison means that each scholar must do this preliminary recasting of the accounts himself, and can only with great difficulty check the conclusions of others. The purpose of this volume, then, is to present the matter of the diary in that 'serviceable consecution' advocated by Fleay without, it is to be hoped, the infringement of accuracy he warned against.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Specialists and non-specialists alike will recognize how much this work owes to previous scholars. I would like to acknowledge particularly the advice and assistance of Carol Chillington Rutter whose challenging questions and criticism were invaluable, and the support and encouragement of William Ingram and R. A. Foakes.

I am also grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support, and to the University of Guelph for a period of leave during which I was able to complete a first draft of the manuscript.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ES *The Elizabethan Stage* by E. K. Chambers. 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1923.
- HD *Henslowe's Diary* edited by R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- HP *Henslowe's Papers* edited by W. W. Grèg. London: A. H. Bullen, 1907.
- Mun. Muniments in the Henslowe papers.
- Ms Manuscript(s) in the Henslowe papers.
- PRO Public Record Office
- SR *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London: 1554–1640* edited by Edward Arber. London, 1875–94.

A NOTE ON STYLISTIC CONVENTIONS

Pagination. To avoid confusion between modern editions, references to Henslowe's diary are to the original manuscript in the form f. 1 (folio 1 recto) or f. 1v (folio 1 verso).

Currency. English currency dates from Saxon times when the basic unit was a silver penny known as a sterling. Large amounts were estimated in pounds of sterlings each one containing two hundred and forty pennies. In Norman times the 'pound' was divided further into twenty shillings and the three basic units were referred to in Latin manuscripts as *libra*, *solidus* and *denarius*, terms which were shortened to '£', 's' and 'd'. By Elizabethan times a bewildering number of coins had been introduced, but all of them could be related to the basic units. Henslowe occasionally refers to unfamiliar coins such as marks, but his accounts are kept in the traditional form, and his calculations in pounds, shillings and pence. Frequently he substitutes hyphens for the more usual symbols and it is this system (1-10-6) that has been adopted in this commentary.