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978-1-107-05432-5 - The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography

Edited by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells

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The Shakespeare Circle



This original and enlightening book casts fresh light on Shakespeare by examining the lives of his relatives, friends, fellow-actors, collaborators and patrons both in their own right and in relation to his life. Well-known figures such as Richard Burbage, Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton are freshly considered; little-known but relevant lives are brought to the fore, and revisionist views are expressed on such matters as Shakespeare's wealth, his family and personal relationships, and his social status. Written by a distinguished team, including some of the foremost biographers, writers and Shakespeare scholars of today, this enthralling volume forms an original contribution to Shakespearian biography and Elizabethan and Jacobean social history. It will interest anyone looking to learn something new about the dramatist and the times in which he lived. A supplementary website offers imagined first-person audio accounts from the featured subjects.

PAUL EDMONDSON is Head of Research at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. He has authored and co-edited numerous articles and books on Shakespeare, including *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (with Stanley Wells, 2004), *The Shakespeare Handbooks: Twelfth Night* (2005) and *Shakespeare: Ideas in Profile* (2015).

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Illustrations

COVER IMAGE.

In March 1818 the artist Benjamin Haydon wrote to his friend John Keats, 'I shall certainly go mad! In a field at Stratford-upon-Avon, in a field that belonged to Shakespeare; they have found a gold ring and seal, with the initial thus – *W. S. and a true lover's knot between*. If *this* is not Shakespeare who is it? – a true lover's knot!!' The story of this ring is told by the antiquarian Robert Bell Wheler (1785–1857), solicitor of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the interleaved and annotated copy of his *Guide to Stratford-upon-Avon* (1814), now in the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive. The find was made by the wife of a labourer named Martin in a field next to the churchyard on 16 March 1810. The ring was encrusted with sediment. Wheler bought it but it had already been cleaned, destroying what might have been useful evidence. He was not able to identify any 'Stratfordian of that period so likely to own such a ring as Shakespeare'. It is a heavy gold signet ring from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century which would have been used to authenticate documents by creating an initialled seal. Michael Wood has suggested that Shakespeare may have lost his ring close to the church after his daughter Judith's wedding on 10 February 1616. In his will, dated 25 March 1616, the phrase 'whereof I have hereunto put my hand and Seale' was altered by the substitution of the word 'hand' for 'Seale', which was crossed out, supporting the suggestion that he had lost his ring.

FIGURE 1.

Artist's impression of New Place drawn in 1994 by Pat Hughes and commissioned by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for an exhibition.

Pat Hughes © *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*.

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FIGURE 2.

The Tudor House, Long Itchington, Warwickshire.

Photo: © Tara Hamling.

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FIGURE 3.

The College, Stratford-upon-Avon (demolished 1799). Engraved by F. Eginton from a drawing by Robert Bell Wheler and reproduced from his *History and Antiquities of Stratford-upon-Avon* (1806).

Reproduced by kind permission of Stanley Wells. 156

FIGURE 4.

Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton. Attributed to John de Critz the Elder (1551/52–1642), c. 1593. Oil on panel, 24 x 17¾ inch (610 x 438 mm). *Reproduced by kind permission of The Cobbe Collection, Hatchlands Park.*

© *The Cobbe Collection.* 281

FIGURE 5.

John Fletcher. By an unknown artist. Oil on panel, c. 1620. 36⅛ x 28 inch. (918 x 710 mm).

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Preface and acknowledgements

In co-editing this book we have benefited from many kindnesses, not least from our colleagues Madeleine Cox and Helen Hargest in the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, and from Alec Cobbe and Tara Hamling.

Our contributors have responded generously to our editorial requirements, especially our decision to use the Harvard author–date system which has allowed us to produce the book entirely without footnotes. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Shakespeare’s work are taken from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford University Press, 1986; 2nd edn 2005). Quotations from early texts are given in modern spelling unless there is good reason to preserve the original. Earlier versions of many of the essays were presented at the kind invitation of Dominique Goy-Blanquet as a seminar in Paris which formed part of the Shakespeare 450 conference hosted by the Société Française Shakespeare.

This book forms part of the worldwide commemorations of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death. In conjunction with its publication our friends and colleagues at Misfit Inc., A. J. and Melissa Leon, have produced a digital platform through which everyone can hear free of charge the re-imagined voices of the people in Shakespeare’s life who were closest to him. You can find out more at www.theshakespearecircle.com.

Throughout our enterprise we have felt deep gratitude for the encouragement and expertise of Sarah Stanton, who has guided the composition of the book from initial conversations through to completion. Rosemary Crawley at Cambridge University Press has been unfailingly helpful at all stages of production.

The following abbreviations are used for archival sources:

Folger	The Folger Shakespeare Library
SBTRO or SCLA	The Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive
TNA	The National Archives
WAAS	Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Services