

*A little "Light Reading"
submitted by Joe Rodriguez*

*For the Parishioners of:
The Catholic Parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation
King's Lynn, Norfolk,*

----- 0 0 0 0 0 0 -----

Who Wrote Shakespeare?



Staff and students from Shakespeare's old school in a birthday parade through the town to put flowers on his grave

April 23, 1564 — By common consent William Shakespeare was born on this day in history. There is no formal record of his birth but church records in Stratford-upon-Avon show he was baptised there on 26 April that year. Traditionally, infants were baptised three days after being born.

His death in 1616 came on his birth date of 23 April which, coincidentally, is St. George's Day, the national day of England.

The bare facts that we know of his life can be summed up quickly, because they are sparse. He was born at a house in Henley Street, Stratford, in 1564. His father, John, was a glove-maker and an alderman of the town. In 1582 William married the pregnant 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. He was 18.

Ten years later, by then a father of three children, he was being mentioned in London as a playwright and poet. After several years in London he returned to Stratford and died in 1616. He is buried in the town's Holy Trinity Church where he was baptised.

The late Hugh Trevor-Roper, former Oxford University history professor, was among the

many scholars dismayed by the few facts available. He wrote that he found Shakespeare's elusiveness "exasperating and almost incredible."

"After all," Trevor-Roper wrote, "he lived in the full daylight of the English Renaissance in the well documented reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I and since his death has been subjected to the greatest battery of organised research that has ever been directed upon a single person.

"And yet the greatest of all Englishmen, after this tremendous inquisition, still remains so close to a mystery that even his identity can still be doubted."

What we do know is that Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems and other verse. Collectively, his works are known as the ultimate expression of humanity in the English language. His plays have been translated into every major living language and continue to be performed – and enthusiastically received – throughout the world.

But the sheer scale of this achievement fostered doubts that took hold in the nineteenth century. The works brim with knowledge of the law, court life, military affairs, medicine, statesmanship, antiquity, life abroad and so on.

The anti-Stratfordians, as they have become known, believe it is not possible that the son of a glove-maker in a provincial town, with questionable education, could be responsible for all this.

What is much more likely, they believe, is that the plays and poems were written by a well-connected aristocrat who did not wish to be associated publicly with the "vulgar" trade of playwrighting.

Various names have been put forward over the years, including Sir Francis Bacon, the Earl of Derby and even Queen Elizabeth I. With their claims – and those of many others – failing to stand up to close scrutiny, Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, became the outstanding favourite.

The major stumbling block over Oxford's candidacy – supported by, among others, actors Mark Rylance and Derek Jacobi – is that he died in 1604, before plays such as Macbeth, King Lear and The Tempest were even written.

Anti-Stratfordians, whose number have included scholars with such celebrated names as Thomas Looney, Sherwood E. Silliman and George M. Battey, counter this by saying that Oxford wrote the plays, then he died and they were gradually released over a period of time to the waiting world.

The argument goes on. In 2007 Mark Rylance and Derek Jacobi launched their "declaration of reasonable doubt" on the internet. Rylance said in interviews: "We make no claim to know exactly what happened, who wrote the works. There is a genius at work in there somewhere,

but it's not William Shakespeare. Other reasonable scenarios are possible."

In the film *Anonymous*, released in 2011, Oxford is portrayed as the secret author of the plays. A jobbing actor named William Shakespeare is but a drunken buffoon who staggers onstage and takes the writing credit simply because nobody else will.

Adrian Noble, who ran the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1991 to 2002, says the idea that Bacon or some cabal wrote the plays is, on the basis of his experience, "utter nonsense."

Acclaimed Shakespearean directors such as Peter Hall and Trevor Nunn agree. "This speculation is just a terrible waste of time," says Hall.

In a newspaper interview Nunn asks: "Who is Ben Jonson? He is Shakespeare's great rival and a real talent. Garrulous, argumentative, jealous, proud, and deeply committed to exposing hypocrisy and corruption. Not a man to kowtow to nobility or privilege.

"What does he do? It's Jonson who coins "the Swan of Avon" (ie the declaration that the author of the plays is from Stratford), and it's Jonson who declares that he is "for all time" and then claims him as "MY Shakespeare".

"Why on earth," Nunn continues, "would Jonson, who owes nothing to anyone, and who had competed with Shakespeare throughout his professional life, take part in a cover-up to help the Earl of Oxford deny that he had anything to do with the theatre?" This, says Nunn, is "game, set and match to Shakespeare".

Professor Stanley Wells, chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, describing Rylance's declaration as "pompous," retorted: "No one doubted Shakespeare's authorship until the late eighteenth-century, and the first serious investigator was Delia Bacon. She spent a night in Holy Trinity Church in 1856 intending to open the grave, presumably thinking it might contain a slip of paper saying "It wasn't me, try Christopher [Marlowe], or Francis [Bacon], or de Vere [Oxford].

"Poor thing, she lost her nerve, came to believe she was the Holy Ghost surrounded by devils, and died in a lunatic asylum."

Wells added: "The proper reaction to the fact that Shakespeare of Stratford portrayed a great gallery of people of all kinds and ranks, that he wrote vividly about countries he probably didn't visit, and that he had a supreme understanding of the human heart is not "How could he have done it?" but "How wonderful that he did!"

* The house where Shakespeare was born still stands and is now both a tourist attraction and headquarters of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Also still standing and fully functioning in the town is the grammar school, founded in 1295, where it is believed Shakespeare was educated and learned Latin, Greek and the classics.

*A little "Light Reading"
submitted by Joe Rodriguez*

*For the Parishioners of:
The Catholic Parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation
King's Lynn, Norfolk,*

----- 0 0 0 0 0 0 -----

Spain Declares War Against the United States



April 24, 1898 — Explorer Christopher Columbus landed on Cuba's north-eastern coast in 1492 and claimed the island for the new Kingdom of Spain, which had sponsored his journey of discovery. For the Cuban people, there followed 400 years of slavery, degradation and rebellion.

Here's what Columbus wrote about them in his diary: "They brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for glass beads and hawks' bells.

"They willingly traded everything they owned. They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron.

"They would make fine servants. With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want."

This became the policy of the Spanish who took over Cuba following Columbus's discovery. Resentment simmered among the islanders but it was not until 1868 that a major rebellion

erupted resulting in what became known as the Ten Years' War, with 200,000 Spanish casualties.

In 1892 the Cuban Revolutionary Party was formed with the aim of achieving independence from Spain. The Spanish reacted with suppression, creating "reconcentrados" – fortified towns that are seen as forerunners of the Second World War concentration camps. Up to 400,000 Cubans died from starvation and disease in the "reconcentrados".

As rioting took hold in Havana, the United States sent in a battleship – the USS Maine – "to protect American interests". But within days of anchoring in Havana harbour the Maine was ripped apart by an explosion, killing three quarters of the crew – about 250 men.

The cause of the explosion was never established but some American newspapers – particularly William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal – had no doubt: it must have been a Spanish mine.

As hysterical headlines poured off the presses, public opinion veered towards war amid chants of "Remember the Maine! To Hell with Spain!" Congress demanded independence for Cuba and authorised the use of force to achieve such an end.

Spain at first severed diplomatic relations but then on April 24, 1898 declared war against the United States. The next day Congress in turn declared war on Spain.

The war lasted for ten weeks, America's far superior forces inevitably gaining victory over the Spanish.

Probably the most famous encounter came on July 1 when Colonel Theodore ("Teddy") Roosevelt – who was to become US President in 1901 – led the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry, known as the "Rough Riders," in the Battle of San Juan Hill. He did so carrying a pistol recovered from the Maine.

Task & Purpose, a military and veteran-focused website, reports: "[It was] a bloody struggle to gain the high ground above enemy naval concentrations in the harbor of nearby Santiago de Cuba.

"The action cost [the US] over 1,000 soldiers – nearly five times as many as the Spanish – but despite the grave loss of life, Roosevelt overtook the enemy position and carried the day."

Two days later the Spanish fleet was destroyed at the Battle of Santiago de Cuba, leading to surrender of the city.

After the war Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of Paris under which Spain ceded Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam to the US for \$20 million and Cuba became a protectorate of the United States.

It gained independence from the US in 1902 and would not hit international headlines again until President John F Kennedy faced down Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Hitler's Diaries Fail Forensic Tests

April 25, 1983 — "Hitler's Diaries Discovered!" screamed the front page of the German magazine Stern on this day. More conservatively, the Sunday Times in London – which had agreed to pay paid Stern £600,000 to share in the glory of this stunning story – offered its readers a "world exclusive" on "The Secrets of Hitler's War."

German journalist Gerd Heinemann had told Stern that 62 volumes of diaries written by the Führer between 1932 and 1945 had been recovered from a plane crash in East Germany at the end of the war. The magazine paid out £2.5 million for them.



*Konrad Kujau with his faked Hitler diaries
in a Hamburg court in 1984*

But it turned out they were fake – created by Konrad Kajau, a notorious Stuttgart forger and antiques dealer calling himself Herr Fischer.

Before paying out, Stern had employed experts to compare handwriting in the "diaries" with other examples of Hitler's writing. They concluded, to Stern's initial great satisfaction, that all were written by the same person. They were right, but it later turned out that the "genuine" Hitler handwriting they looked at had also been forged by Kajau!

In London, Rupert Murdoch's Sunday Times had turned for assurance to historian Hugh Trevor-Roper who enjoyed huge academic prestige after publication in 1947 of his book, "The Last Days of Hitler".

He told bosses at the newspaper he was satisfied that the "diaries" were genuine.

Trevor-Roper later became skeptical, however, and expressed his doubts when Stern admitted it did not know the identity of the East German source supplying the volumes.

With suspicion mounting, and amid fears of possibly facing charges of illegally circulating Nazi propaganda, Stern submitted three of the volumes to West German police for examination.

Forensic analysis quickly revealed that they were fakes, the paper and ink used for the "diaries" not being available until well after the war. They had actually been produced between 1981–83 by Kujau, who had previously forged and sold paintings which he also claimed were the work of Hitler.

Heidemann, making the most of his opportunities, had been creaming off money from Stern by inflating the sums that he claimed had been demanded by Kujau. So, after the forgery was revealed, he was convicted of fraud and, like Kujau, was sentenced to 42 months in prison.

As a result of the "Hitler Diaries" fiasco, two top editors at Stern were fired. And the reputation of Hugh Trevor-Roper, who became Lord Dacre and died in 2003, never fully recovered.

But Kujau, brazen and opportunistic, never looked back. After his release from prison, not wishing to waste his skills, he opened a gallery selling his "genuine forgeries" of paintings by Hitler, Rembrandt, Dali, Monet, Van Gogh, and other masters. The works sold at high prices and became so popular that other forgers moved in and began to produce counterfeit reproductions of his counterfeits!

*A little "Light Reading"
submitted by Joe Rodriguez*

*For the Parishioners of:
The Catholic Parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation
King's Lynn, Norfolk,*

----- 0 0 0 0 0 0 -----

Record-Breaking Sheila, the High-Flying Aviator

April 27, 1922 — In the high-flying world of female aviators, names such as Amelia Earhart and Amy Johnson immediately spring to mind. But almost forgotten English flyer Sheila Scott, who was born on this day, deserves praise and wider recognition too.

Between 1965 and 1972 she staked her place in aviation history with more than 100 flying records, trophies, and awards. She made three solo flights around the world and became the first pilot, male or female, to fly directly over true North Pole in a light aircraft.

Born as Sheila Christine Hopkins at Worcester in the heart of the English countryside, she went on to serve as a nurse at a naval hospital during the second world war. In 1943 she began an unsuccessful career as an actress, adopting the name Sheila Scott.



*Sheila Scott in the cockpit of her
Piper PA-24-260B Comanche G-ATOY in 1966*

Her life was to change in 1958 when she learned to fly, purchasing her first plane – a converted Tiger Moth – the following year.

In 1966, Sheila made her first around-the-world flight, covering about 31,000 miles in 189 flying hours. It was the first such solo flight by a British subject, the longest-distance solo flight, and only the third around-the-world flight by a woman.

Then records began to tumble: between London and Cape Town in 1967; across the North Atlantic the same year; across the South Atlantic in 1969; from equator to equator over the North Pole in 1971, becoming the first woman to pilot a flight circling the world by way of the North Pole in a light aircraft.

After her record polar flight, she made a third around-the-world flight, earning her 100th world-class record, including a new time from Darwin, Australia, to London of three and a half days, beating the previous record by one and a half days. In 1967, she set 23 world records in just one year.

In 1974 Sheila found time to write her autobiography, "Barefoot In The Sky", which was published by Macmillan. In it she wrote of her Arctic solitude, describing her flight over "acres and acres of lonely desolate ice-packed sea as if everyone else on earth had mysteriously disappeared and I had wandered out into space to some other planet."

Despite her prowess in the sky, Sheila was less successful on land and failed her driving test three times. After finally gaining her licence at the fourth attempt in 1971 she said: "It is terribly difficult to adjust to driving a car when you are accustomed to using your feet on rudder pedals. I wanted to haul back on the steering column and fly away."

Her record-breaking achievements did not bring the financial rewards she might have hoped for and Sheila always struggled for funds. Her sad and lonely final days were spent in a London bedsit. She died of cancer in 1988, aged 66.