

Sir Henry Neville

Dates:

c. 1562-1615

Background:

- * On his father's side, Neville was directly descended from Ralph de Neville 1st Earl of Westmoreland, who appears on stage in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*; Ralph's son the 2nd Earl, is on stage in *Henry VI* part 3; many other Nevilles appear in the Shakespeare history plays.
- * His mother was the niece of Sir Thomas Gresham, the great merchant, and founder of the Royal Exchange and Gresham College.
- * Baptised and lived at Blackfriars in the building that later became the Blackfriars Theatre and at Billingbear Park, about six miles from Windsor.
- * Educated at Merton College, Oxford, where he studied classics, including Latin and Greek, astronomy and mathematics, under his tutor, Sir Henry Savile.
- * Toured Europe for four years with Savile, and others, including Robert Sidney (brother of Philip Sidney the poet). They visited France, Germany, Bohemia, Poland, Vienna, Venice, Verona and Florence. They met astronomers, mathematicians, philosophers and researched Greek and Latin manuscripts.
- * On his mother's death Neville inherited John Gresham's fortune including ironworks and a palace which had belonged to Archbishop Cranmer (who gave it to Henry VIII), in Mayfield, Sussex. Neville lived at Mayfield from c1585 - 1593. He manufactured and exported cannon, selling the works when he was appointed ambassador to France in 1598.
- * He inherited Billingbear in 1593. He was responsible for the royal forest and hunting grounds near Windsor.
- * Katherine Killigrew, his wife Anne's mother, was one of the famous classically educated Cooke sisters (Allen, 2013).
- * Neville was related to Francis Bacon and Robert Cecil.

Famous For:

- * Neville became a popular hero after his imprisonment in the Tower (1601-3), along with Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, for his part in the Essex rebellion. He was, in effect, leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons from about 1607 until his death. He was a candidate for Secretary of State after Robert Cecil's death.

The Case:

- * Neville's life parallels the accepted course and chronology of Shakespeare's works. In particular, scholars have long been puzzled by the great change in Shakespeare's writing around 1601, when he revised *Hamlet* and then wrote the other great tragedies and problem plays. While this accords with nothing in Shakespeare's life, it can be read as a response to Neville's traumatic imprisonment (James, & Rubinstein, 2005).
- * Neville's library books are preserved at Audley End House, to where they were fortunately removed by the Neville family before fire destroyed Billingbear in 1924. Many of the books are annotated with notes relevant to Shakespeare plays including *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of The Shrew*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*. Other unmarked books in the Neville library are sources for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. The volumes

include Ovid, Plautus, Horace, Tacitus, Appian, Petrarch, Ariosto, Erasmus, de Montemayor and Castiglione. One example is a 1580 edition of *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto printed in Venice. This is a recognised source for *Much Ado About Nothing*. As Neville was in Venice in 1581 it seems reasonable to presume the book was bought there by him and brought back to England. It has many passages underlined, showing it was read throughout. Cairncross (1976) stated the evidence showed that Shakespeare read *Orlando Furioso* in the Italian.

- * In 1583 Neville travelled to Scotland with Walsingham and Essex on a diplomatic mission.
- * In 1595 he attended the Garter Ceremony at Windsor castle where he had lodgings: this experience and his knowledge of Windsor is consistent with his possible authorship of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.
- * For almost all of Neville's adult life he served as a J.P. and as a Member of Parliament. He was Ambassador to France in 1599-1601.
- * Neville's knowledge of falconry and hunting, forestry, farming, astronomy, law, politics, geography (including France, Italy, Windsor), languages, ancient Greek theatre, Roman history, poetry, music, the recruitment of soldiers, ships and sea voyages, munitions, cannon, metallurgy and lapidary work what we find in Shakespeare's works (Casson, Rubinstein & Ewald, 2018).
- * His life experiences can explain the development of Shakespeare's writing: for example many early plays are set in places in Italy which he visited during his travel, Venice, Padua and Verona; *Henry V* takes us to France with scenes in French at a time that Neville went as ambassador to France and wrote letters in French; *Measure for Measure* with scenes in prison and the threat of execution was written at the same time that Neville was recovering from the trauma of imprisonment with the ever present threat of execution; the title of the next play, *All's Well That Ends Well*, could reflect the celebratory mood Neville might have felt after his release; *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* are meditations on Jacobean politics in which Neville was deeply involved; *The Winter's Tale*, with its father-daughter themes and climactic wedding feast, was written the year two of his daughters were married.
- * As a senior investor in the Second London Virginia Company Neville had access to the Strachey letter which was a source for *The Tempest*.
- * Burgoyne (1904, xvi) suggested that Neville was the original owner of the Northumberland Manuscript, dated to 1596-7, which identified William Shakespeare as the playwright of *Richard II* and *Richard III* before they were published as by "Shake-speare" in 1598. Neville left notebooks, letters and documents. His handwriting is similar to Hand D: the only manuscript believed to be by Shakespeare (Casson & Rubinstein, 2016).
- * Worsley MSS 47 (held in the Lincoln Archives) is a copy of *Leicester's Commonwealth* and is in Neville's own handwriting. Dated c1585, it predates the Shakespeare history plays and is a possible source for them. There is evidence of a bias favouring members of the Neville family in the history plays (Bradbeer & Casson, 2015).
- * Neville owned a lute and grew up in a household where music was important, indeed a household where at least one composer lived. Neville's step mother's maid married Thomas Morley. He composed the music for *It was a lover and his lass*, a song in *As You Like It*. Morley was a pupil of William Byrd who gave a book of keyboard music to Lady Neville in 1591. The initials HN are on the first page (probably for Henry Neville: Neville's father). The manuscript was completed in Windsor. At the time Lady Neville was living at Billingbear near Windsor. Sonnet 128 shows Shakespeare was familiar with keyboard music.
- * Neville's handwriting and habits of annotating books suggest that he was the annotator of the Halle's *Chronicle* which was discovered in 1940, a source for the history plays (Keen & Lubbock, 1954; Casson, 2010: chapter 4).

- * John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont gave a play manuscript (*A King and No King*) to Neville before Shakespeare started co-writing with Fletcher. They all attended the Mermaid Club (Gayley, 1914). In 1615 Beaumont wrote what may be a cryptic reference to Neville's funeral "at Windsor" in the same sentence as a reference to Shakespeare (Rubinstein, 2012: 146).
- * Neville was admired by Ben Jonson who wrote an epigram celebrating him. Jonson was resident at Gresham College (founded by Neville's mother's uncle) when he edited the First Folio.
- * Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton was imprisoned with Neville, 1601-3. He wrote a manuscript defending Richard III's reputation, in which he said the king had been defamed in plays. He dedicated this to Neville (Bradbeer & Casson, 2015: Appendix A). Shakespeare dedicated his long poems to Southampton. Neville had known him since he was a boy and they became political allies with Southampton being described as Neville's "champion" by John Chamberlain in 1612 (McClure, 1939: vol 1, 387).
- * Three poems by Neville have been discovered, one a signed manuscript. Ben Jonson, John Chamber and George Carleton referred to the Muses in relation to Neville. Chamber and Carleton indirectly refer to theatre.
- * In his letters Neville used Shakespearean vocabulary (Sawyer, 1725; Casson & Rubinstein, 2016: 115, 131).
- * Henry Killigrew was Neville's father-in-law and he was one of the government editors of the 1587 edition of Holinshed, Shakespeare's main source for the history plays. Neville knew Ralph Newbury, (1535-1608) the printer of Holinshed. In 1603, Newbury purchased the manor of Wolfines in White Waltham from Neville. While still in prison Neville reminded himself to "write to Mr. Newbery" (Berkshire Record Office: D/EN/F45/1-2.) He needed to raise money to pay the heavy fine imposed on him. Both are buried at Waltham St. Lawrence.
- * There is evidence of connections between Neville and two of Shakespeare's publishers: Thomas Thorpe and William Jaggard. Southampton's *Encomium of Richard III*, which he dedicated to Neville, was eventually printed in a collection of *Essays of Certain Paradoxes* in 1616 by Thomas Thorpe, who had published *Shake-speares Sonnets* in 1609. The date of publication of the *Encomium*, 1616, is one year after Neville died. A copy of this edition is to be found in the Neville library at Audley End House. The printed version is based on Southampton's version, including virtually all the additions he made to the text. The fact that the version printed by Thorpe is that given by Southampton to Neville is evidence of a connection between Neville and Thorpe because this unique manuscript must have been the source. A copy of Thomas Milles' *A Catalogue of Honor* which was annotated by Neville between 1610-12 (he referred to Prince Henry being alive and he died in 1612) is also in the library at Audley End. This book was printed by William Jaggard who was the printer of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (the first volume to include Shakespeare sonnets) and both the *False* and *First Folio* of Shakespeare's plays. Neville's copy of *A Catalogue of Honor* seems to have been a proof copy (the picture of James I was printed upside down). Neville was carefully correcting the text and suggesting cuts. Some of his suggestions were indeed picked up by the editor because there are printed slips of these corrections pasted into another copy of *A Catalogue of Honor* to be found in the British Library (BL 608.1.4). This then is evidence of a possible relationship between Neville and Jaggard in 1610-12. (Casson, Rubinstein & Ewald, 2018).
- * Five independent researchers have found the name "Henry Neville" encoded in various ways in the dedication to the 1609 *Shake-speares Sonnets* and in the sonnets themselves. This was how Neville's authorship was discovered (James, 2008; Leyland & Goding, 2018). Neville used similar codes in his diplomatic letters.
- * Neville's secrecy and discretion: Described as "discreet" by John Davies of Hereford in his *Microcosmos* of 1603, Neville hid his authorship of a political document until forced in

Parliament to reveal it (James 2011, 16-50; Casson & Rubinstein, 2016: 48-50). He was imprisoned for not telling the government what he knew about the Earl of Essex's plans before the rebellion.

* William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke was Neville's chief backer in the Privy Council during his last years as an MP trying to negotiate with James I. William and Philip Herbert, 3rd and 4th Earls of Pembroke, patrons of the *First Folio*, became patron and mentors of Henry Neville's oldest son Henry and grandson Richard. In December 1628 the Earl of Montgomery (Sir Philip Herbert), appointed Henry a gentleman of the privy chamber in extraordinary. Moreover, following his death, Pembroke purchased the wardship of his son (Casson & Rubinstein, 2016: 37).

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