

INTERVIEW with CHARLES BEAUCLERK DVS Founder (1986) and Honorary President (2022)

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Interviewer

Today we're delighted to introduce you to our very special guest. He's a classical scholar, a successful writer, Oxfordian, a descendant of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, founder of The de Vere Society and a lifetime honorary member – Charles Beauclerk. Hello Charles, thank you for joining us.

Charles

Hello. Pleasure.

Interviewer

We are interviewing Charles about founding The de Vere Society, his experiences as an Oxfordian, and of course Edward de Vere. So let's get started. Charles, when did you first become aware of the Shakespeare Authorship Question?

Charles

I became aware of it almost subliminally through my grandfather. He was President of the Shakespeare Authorship Society and he owned the Gheeraert's portrait of Edward de Vere. So we used to go to his house in the river in Chelsea almost every Sunday and he used to talk a bit about the subject and I think I do remember asking about the portrait and he telling me something. But I was fascinated by the portrait. So it was in the air and in the conversation.

Interviewer

Right.

Charles

But it wasn't until I was sixteen that my godmother in South Africa found a copy of Looney's book in a second-hand store, a first edition, and sent it to me. And that's when I really became engaged with the subject and realised it was something important.

Interviewer

And became an Oxfordian?

Charles

And became an Oxfordian, that's right.

Interviewer

So I'm going to ask you now to cast your mind back to 34 years ago – wow, 34 years ago – to the heady days of 1986 when you were studying at Oxford University and it was then you founded The de Vere Society. What inspired you to do that?

Charles

I think ... one thing above all was probably the publication of Charlton Ogburn's book *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* in 1984.

Interviewer

Right.

Charles

After Looney's book I hadn't really read much into the subject. But when this book came it was like a thunder clap and I remember I was visiting my grandfather again at his house and he had a copy. He'd been sent a complimentary copy by the publisher and I picked it up and spent the next few weeks reading it. And again it was a transformational experience I think. And I wrote to Charlton and told him of my plan to set up a society when I went to Oxford and he said, 'Oh, come over and stay in South Carolina'.

So I spent probably the year before I went to Oxford, my gap year, preparing and getting ready and meeting as many Oxfordians as I could. Telling them of my plans. And I suppose the two big influences were Charlton Ogburn through his book and also the Millers in Louisiana. That's Judge Minos and Ruth Miller. She'd done an exceptional amount of research and work, had a magnificent library in her house down there, and they had actually bought the portrait of Edward de Vere from my grandfather.

Interviewer

No way!

Charles

He never intended to sell it. But he had a financial disaster, he moved to France and he was sending a batch of pictures to Sotheby's when he was not in England at the time, and they went to the house to collect them and that was one that was taken by mistake. So rather tragically it was sold for two thousand pounds.

Interviewer

Gosh.

Charles

Yeah, in 1978. So, anyway, they were very generous in helping and provided me with many books to start The de Vere Society library and so on. So I met them too on that same trip that I met Charlton Ogburn. It was a slightly surreal trip, the Miller section of it, because Judge Miller, who was in his seventies by then insisted that I meet him at Disneyworld first, in Florida and then we'd spend three days there. I thought – three days? And then fly to Baton Rouge from there.

So anyway I said yes. And that was quite an experience. Yes, I mean even down to having breakfast one morning with Hoop-Dee-Doo, this giant bird, presumably with a person inside it. But anyway, they were all very generous, very encouraging and they were both big inspirations and behind the society.

Interviewer

Amazing, amazing. So when you set it up how was Oxfordianism accepted at Oxford University?

Charles

Well, I guess there were really two reasons I set it up. The first was to – because naively I believed that, you know, I could create a rational debate in the University, that the professors would engage – and I just didn't know at that time. And I just couldn't believe, I thought these people just didn't know about the subject and ... but I was in for quite a shock in that sense, there was great hostility from the professors or a wall of silence if you like. But students really embraced it and so our meetings were always very well attended. Our very first meeting was at Balliol College and I was the speaker at that one. I remember Boris Johnson was one of the people who attended that, our inaugural meeting. So it ... but

anyway, we then had, you know, we had Enoch Powell, we had Lord Trevor-Roper, Hugh Dacre, the historian. So a lot of distinguished speakers and a lot of publicity at the time. I mean, there were lots of newspaper articles about this and I think that was the point, that I wanted to engage people in debate, and the academics in particular, but I also wanted to ensure that Edward de Vere became known as an important Elizabethan figure ... because, you know, he was under a shadow, had been for hundreds of years and it was important that people learnt about him, that he was a figure in his own right. So that's why I called it The de Vere Society rather than Shakespeare–Oxford or whatever.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Charles

So yes, it was ... they were good days and there was great excitement and we had The de Vere Society library there and many people volunteered to be officers of the society. So it was largely run by students. Our Senior Member was a Fellow of All Souls, Dr. Edmund Ford and so on.

Interviewer

Nice.

Charles

I think though the funniest experience I had was receiving a letter from A. L. Rowse, the historian ... not long after I had set up the society and he was fulminating against Edward de Vere. And he said, 'You've got plenty of ancestors to be proud of, why don't you leave this wastrel alone?'

Interviewer

Really?

Charles

And he said 'Stop ...' – I remember this line – 'Stop this crackpot nonsense promulgated by Dr. Looney L-U-N-Y.' And then he put 'aptly named' in brackets, you know, the usual things. But that just obviously encouraged me the more.

Interviewer

Yes. So you had your difficulties setting that up, OK I understand that.

Charles

Yes, yes.

Interviewer

Well not long after that in 1988 you organised a Moot Court at Temple Hall with an opposing counsel for William of Stratford and Edward de Vere. Now this was presided over by three Lords?

Charles

That's right, yes.

Interviewer

Can you tell me how that day went?

Charles

Well this was done to raise money for the Shakespeare Globe Trust. So the Globe Theatre had not been built then but Sam Wanamaker had been trying to get it built since 1970 and the site had been approved. It was as near as they could get to the original site. And he was tireless in raising money promoting this venture. And so this was an excellent cause and he got behind it, which was really the key to the success of it.

And it was modelled slightly on the one the year before in Washington, with the three Supreme Court Justices. So we had two counsel – we had Lord Alexander of Weedon, who was the highest-paid lawyer in the country, for the Oxfordian case and Sydney Kentridge for the Stratfordians. And then there were expert witnesses ... and unfortunately this is where we came slightly unstuck because Charlton Ogburn was meant to be our expert witness but he was ill, and at the last moment he pulled out. So in stepped Dr. Lionel Lancelot Ware, the founder of MENSA from Lincoln's Inn, and he was also Chairman of the Shakespeare Authorship Trust ... valiantly stepped in but he was rather monosyllabic. And that was just his ... his style. He thought if he was being cross-questioned he must give away as little as possible.

And they had Stanley Wells, obviously he was very well briefed.

They were also, were meant to have Samuel Shoenbaum but he was too ill to come as well. So from that point of view it was a bit of a disappointment, there weren't the sparks that I'd hoped that there would be and the verdict was in favour of the Stratford man this time round. Jeffrey Archer was the MC, so it was a colourful occasion and afterwards The de Vere Society put on a ball at the Mayfair Arts Club ... and all the participants of the trial attended – Sam Wanamaker was there, his daughter Zoë, and I think it's safe to say we probably bankrupted the society that evening. We tried to get permission to serve swan, so we had to write to the Queen, but that was denied. Anthony Bonhôte, now deceased, he was organising it but he spent most of his time that day on the telephone – when he should have been doing other things – trying to arrange for two live leopards to be brought in ...

Interviewer

Oh my goodness me.

Charles

... to sit on chains either side of the door. So he probably ... so anyway yes, a lot was spent. I think we ordered ... I think he ordered something like eighty gallons of mead from the monks at Lindisfarne Island off Northumberland.

Interviewer

Wow.

Charles

So yes, and we were drinking that for the next five years as far as I can remember. So it's not everyone's taste. But anyway it was a good occasion and ... but an example of, you know, what we were trying to do that we were trying to actively promote Edward de Vere and the cause and get as much publicity as we could. Keep it before the public.

Interviewer

I mean ... did you think 34 years later The de Vere Society would be still going strong?

Charles

No, no, certainly not after that night. But no, and it's very satisfying that it has and that's owing to, you know, valiant people who stepped in, like Christopher Dams who took over after that, after the Oxford years, and it is very satisfying to see that it's continued and is flourishing and is in very good hands today. But no, I didn't. I didn't think it ... I think naively I thought in those days that this would have been long, long ago accepted by the public. I mean, it's so obvious to any of us, um, who know the evidence ... um, what the truth is that it's difficult to understand why it takes so long.

Interviewer

Yes. What is your take on how Oxfordianism has grown since the DVS began?

Charles

Well ... it's grown in many ways, in many directions. Of course, when we started there wasn't the Internet, for instance, and that's been a big change. So I remember we used to write thousands of letters and postcards and send them all over the world and to America and other places.

So you relied much more on meetings. I think we did get together a lot more often – and especially having the university as a centre there. But even after that I think ... but you know, our membership was always ... the aim was always around two hundred ... I'm sure it fluctuated quite a bit. I think what's happened today, what's changed is public awareness in schools now – I'm not talking about universities but in, you know, secondary school and so on – people have a fair chance of learning about it and through the Internet and so on. So there's greater public awareness. I'd say among the acting fraternity, so many of them – and these are the people that actually have his words coming through their mouth, and through their bodies – so they in a way know more about him more deeply than others. And to have all the leading actors that we do saying that this makes sense and so on, I think is a great testament to the truth of the theory.

Interviewer

It does speak volumes, doesn't it?

Charles

It does, yes, yes. But I suppose you could say also that maybe things haven't moved as much as one would have thought. In the sense that in the academic world – and that's obviously the tough nut to crack – and I remember in America I met so many, spoke at so many prep schools, high schools where the teachers had accepted it and they were teaching it in the class – it was amazing. In a way it wasn't happening over here.

But as soon as you got to the universities then you were ... it was a high stone wall and they would not engage except to mock it and make *ad hominem* attacks. And that really hasn't changed. So the academic mafia are as vicious and tenacious as the political mafia. And that's something, that's something that has to change obviously, there is a culture change required. But I have come to believe as I've got older that this will happen, it will inevitably happen. A number of things have to come together for it to happen but it *will*, it will happen.

Interviewer

So in those early days how did you handle that frustration? It must have been frustrating, especially having just set up The de Vere Society.

Charles

It was frustrating but I think I didn't waste too much time worrying about that. I think I was just too involved in trying to create new opportunities, doing more research, and there were so many people. I mean, every day you'd get a letter from someone saying 'I'm interested and this is what I'm looking into', and so on. And maybe then if we'd had the Internet and the opportunity to synthesise all that effectively it would have been, it would have been powerful but I think the one danger I see today is that people almost accept people as part of the furniture and there's this thing called the Authorship Question. And oh yes, there'll be Oxfordians and, you know, that's how it'll always be.

Interviewer

Right, right.

Charles

So ... that's the thing I ... but no, I mean, even today I don't actually get angry about it anymore. I probably did then, but I don't now. I mean, it enriches my life, I'm sorry that there are a lot of people that just shut themselves, or just shut it out from their lives. Because I think it could enrich their lives too.

Interviewer

Yes, I heartily agree with that. You must have felt a great pressure and a huge responsibility being an Oxfordian and a descendant of Edward de Vere. Tell me about that.

Charles

Yeess. I think ... firstly I felt, I suppose my first – I can't lie – I just felt very proud of the connection. But I also felt ... emotionally connected in a sense to Edward de Vere as a kind of outsider. That resonated with me quite deeply. But I think that for me it's his words to Horatio about telling his story and reporting his cause aright.

And you know, that's a great rallying cry and it's, you know, it's difficult not to respond to that.

Interviewer

Powerful, isn't it?

Charles

That's always what I kept before my mind, that this was a duty. And I think I did feel a sense of responsibility in that regard. And on the whole it was a great benefit to me. If I hadn't had that connection I probably would never have been able to do the tour in America, I wouldn't have got the same publicity for The de Vere Society. Of course you're always going to have snipers and I had this a lot – both in America and over here – of people saying 'Well of course you would say that he's Shakespeare because, you know, he's your ancestor', etcetera. But again, that's just part of the deal, isn't it?

Interviewer

Yes.

Charles

So yeah, I think ... for me, what's been, always been the most – what's become the most important thing are the works. And I think that's how you deepen your relationship with Edward de Vere, is through the works. And you know, that's a process that will always continue.

Interviewer

So who better to ask than the founder of the DVS to explain why Edward de Vere wrote the works attributed to William Shakespeare?

Charles

Wow. Yes ... that is quite a question. I think on the surface if you're just looking at the artistic life – for instance, both of Shakespeare and of Edward de Vere – you've got a mystery with both. And they each solve the other's mystery. So with Shakespeare you've got a body of work which is entirely mature, there are no juvenilia, no early works. So it's implausible in terms of a human life because you just don't have those artistic developments – whether they're stylistic, emotional and so on.

Whereas with Edward de Vere you have the opposite mystery. You have someone, some of whose early poetry we have, who was praised as a playwright by his contemporaries. Is praised by some of the greatest poets of the time, like Edmund Spenser and yet – nothing after 1590. So you've got two half-lives and it's always struck me that those, when you put

those two together then they solve each other's mysteries.

But for me the big question with the authorship and Edward de Vere is: take *Hamlet*.

I mean, clearly whoever wrote that poured his soul into it and kept revising it again and again. So he was writing it ultimately not for the theatre – he originally did – but ultimately for us to study at our desks, because it runs for five hours uncut, you know, it would not have fitted into Elizabethan playing time and so on.

Interviewer

Exactly.

Charles

No one can read that work without realising that this is the man Shakespeare. Whoever you think he was, he is Hamlet. So where is Hamlet at the court of Queen Elizabeth?

I mean, he's clearly a courtier, go and find him. And there's only one character that remotely fits that bill, you know, in my view and that is Edward de Vere. When you consider that Edward de Vere was a complete man of the theatre, you know, he was a writer, he was a director, he was an actor and he was a patron. Those four things, all Hamlet's those four things. I mean, why does he insert the speech into the Mousetrap?

I mean, that's Shakespeare telling us Hamlet writes and that's his speech. He's an actor and Polonius praises for him 'Fore God, well spoken my Lord', etcetera, etcetera. And he instructs the actor, he directs the players and he's a patron. So you've got those four things. The complete man of the theatre who's also a dispossessed courtier. He's an insider, but he's an outsider at the same time.

And so, and you can see that with Hamlet ... you know, he's the prince – we're told by Claudius that he's the most immediate to the succession and yet Hamlet tells us that he is dreadfully attended. He doesn't have many attendants, he hasn't got the money he wants, and so on. So you've got two stories happening at once. You've got the story based on his sources, that he is the legitimate prince. But then you've probably got another story underneath which is the author's own story, whereby he's describing someone who's clearly not legitimate. And if you take Hamlet as an illegitimate prince it solves so many problems in the play.

That gets us onto a big thing, you know, surrounding Edward de Vere's birth and there are so many different views of that. But from my perspective, the two match up very closely, Hamlet and Edward de Vere. And I think that's what Freud realised, you know, when he became an Oxfordian. He realised that the psychology expressed in the plays matched that of Edward de Vere very closely. And you can't write works and live a life that are totally at odds.

Interviewer

Yes.

Charles

And that's what we've got with the Stratford theory. And the madness that accompanies that is that the scholars are then forced to say that the more the life is divorced from the works then the greater the imagination of the author.

Interviewer

Fantastic, fantastic. The man that created these undeniable works of genius – he must have been as mesmerising to be around and probably just as intimidating to behold. In your opinion what kind of man was Edward de Vere?

Charles

Ooh, that's a difficult one. We do learn quite a bit about him from accounts of his contemporaries. Most often when they're trying to insult him, like the Arundel-Howard libels are I think a gold mine as far as the character of Edward de Vere goes. And they can't help praising him even when they're doing him down, which is interesting. But I think the important thing to remember about him is that he was a child of state. So whatever you think about his parentage, whether the de Veres were his real parents or whether he was the son of – illegitimate son of – the Queen, there was an identity crisis there. There was a frail sense of identity, he was moved around a lot early on, he may have even had different names. But we know obviously that he went to live with Sir Thomas Smith and his wife and had much of his education there. When the 16th Earl of Oxford died then he was sent to Cecil House in London but he obviously did spend time at Hedingham too with the de Veres. But I think, you know, for me I see a boy with a frail sense of identity who didn't have that unconditional love as a child but who turned to the theatre to try and sort of piece himself back together again. I mean, it's very much like Humpty Dumpty.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the King's horses and all the King's men,
couldn't put Humpty back together again.

But it's through the characters in his plays that he's kind of trying to heal that early split in his psyche. And of course he had ample opportunity because his ... the 16th Earl of Oxford had his own company of players.

Interviewer

Yes.

Charles

So they would have spent the winter at Hedingham and they would have been like uncles to him and friends and so on. So ... I think that out of that I see someone who eventually may have been a little bipolar, who had these periods of kind of annihilation and then a period – inner annihilation – and then periods of grandiosity. But was a compulsive storyteller because that's the healing, isn't it, the writing?

Interviewer

Yes.

Charles

So the ... whatever you intend to write consciously, the unconscious knows the whole truth and will always interject the truth and will tell your story, your essential myth. So the unconscious itself is like a concealed poet. And it was particularly active with him for all the reasons I've just given. So I think he could be probably exhilarating to be around but also at the same time I think he was prey to bouts of depression and could be very difficult. He could be cruel, we know that. He treated his first wife very badly and regretted that for the rest of his life. And she died and he tried to expurgate it through his works – *Othello* and, you know, *All's Well that Ends Well* and so on. *Hamlet* as well. So yes, very complex, paradoxical, figure in many ways. I think bewildering to his contemporaries, probably didn't understand him. And of course he had so many sides, not just to his nature but also he would have had so many different personae according to who he was dealing with as well.

Interviewer

Right.

Charles

So to me it's interesting that the greatest writer in our language has the most ... ghostly identity if you like. I think that says something, it's our sense of ego that probably blocks the full force of the unconscious, you know, as a creative force.

Interviewer

That stuff is fascinating ... I'm afraid I'm going to put you on the spot again, forgive me. If you could meet Edward de Vere and ask him one question, what would it be?

Charles

Ah yes. Well, that is a wretched question. I think I would probably ask him ... What was the greatest sorrow in his life? Because I think from that you would learn so much about him and so much about the motivation for his works. I've been thinking of Shelley's line that poets are cradled into poetry by wrong. They learn in suffering what they teach in song. And so I think by asking him about that sorrow, I think you would learn an awful lot and it would open up various things. Hopefully he'd keep talking for a long time.

Interviewer

Yes. Fantastic answer by the way. In 2010 you released your book *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom*. Explain what it's about and how to get hold of it.

Charles

Yes, *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom* – I wanted to do two things: I wanted to build on the work of Looney, whose book I still think is the best book on the Authorship Question, the most exciting to read. I wanted to build on that in the sense of going deeper into the psychology of Shakespeare, what the works reveal about his psychology, making those connections if you like. And also to continue the work of someone like Caroline Spurgeon and her book *Shakespeare's Imagery*. So looking at the various symbol clusters and image clusters that he uses. She had noted, for instance, the connection between dreaming and kingship, that these two images go together with him a lot. And so again I wanted to try and read those symbols if you like and see what they said about the creative process in him. So that's what fascinated me and it's not so much the genius of the man – because we know obviously that whoever wrote these works had a fabulous mind and imagination – but really the human Shakespeare.

So very often the artist is much greater than the man. Sometimes the man is greater than the artist but a lot, the artist is greater than the man. And they would be the first to admit that things come through them, which they're not completely in control of. And we know with him that his creativity was a bit on the Mozartian scale. From what we know of what Arundel said about how his rhetoric flowed and so on. You know, he had that very natural gift. And I imagine him a bit like Dickens playing out his characters, you know, among his friends and so on. Channelling them, as it were. So I wanted to present Shakespeare as a believable human being. So not just have this two-dimensional genius that the Stratfordians go to, but add a bit to all that had been done in the Oxfordian realm as well.

Interviewer

Almost bring him to life?

Charles

That's right, yes, exactly. And that was originally published by Grove in America. I couldn't get a publisher in England, in fact I lost my long-time agent as a result of it 'cause she was so horrified by the idea of it.

Interviewer

Really?

Charles

But yes, Grove Atlantic in America published it and it did pretty well there but then has since been remaindered and is now published by Thistle. And they are an online publisher so you order it and then they'll print it out for you and send it to you. But you can get the old copy on Amazon as well and Advanced Book Exchange and all those places.

Interviewer

Fantastic. Can you tell us something about your years lecturing in north America? And your time as President of the Shakespeare Oxford Society? Does the approach differ in the Authorship Question over there as to here?

Charles

Well I found it very refreshing going over there, just people were so open-minded about it. The range of people that came to talks, you know – you might give a talk in rural Pennsylvania and a few farmers might turn up and so on. But you'd realise that, you know, they read Shakespeare in their spare time and so on, they were deeply interested. But also in schools as well, I spoke a lot at high schools, prep schools and so on and to meet teachers who had really developed their own understanding of the subject and were presenting it to their students and debating the subject, talking about it and so on. That was a great thing to see.

Obviously I met the same resistance in universities, but I did speak at quite a few of those too. Not always I must say at the English or History departments. I remember at the University of Washington, in Washington State, I had to be sponsored by the Forestry Department. And then the English – I learnt later that the English and History professors had told their students *not* to attend. And ... so yes, it was not a very full auditorium ...

Interviewer

So you still had your challenges although it was far more widely accepted?

Charles

That's right, yes. But there were definite challenges with that. But again, it was wonderful to see the whole movement growing over there. And the research that was being done – and still is being done by so many people. And of course now there's so much cross-fertilisation between the two continents as far as research goes and everything. Now that we have the Internet and so on. But yes, I think it was a very important part of my life. I mean, eventually I sort of came to feel more like a missionary than a lecturer. I felt a bit burnt out and I did it for five-and-half years. But I did, you know, I did become through it the first professional Oxfordian. I actually made my living out of it, you know, being paid for the lectures and so on. So that in itself showed that you could – and I think other people since have probably followed – but you could do it, you know. So yes, it was a wonderful experience.

Interviewer

Fantastic. And finally I'm going to force you on the quick-fire round. We've got a stop-watch right here. So I'm going to deal with Edward de Vere's relationships, OK? I'm going to give you some names; if you give me a quick-fire round answer please.

Margery Golding, his mother.

Charles

Margery Golding ... yes, now was she his mother or was she his foster-mother? I don't think he had much of a relationship with her, I don't think there was much warmth there. Either on her part or on his. We don't know much about her except her brother, who was a Puritan scholar, was an influence on Edward de Vere and the development of his mind.

Interviewer

John de Vere.

Charles

John de Vere – again I think maybe a ghostly presence somewhat. Not sure that he was his real father but obviously again he was his guardian and foster-father for a while. He died when he was twelve. I think again, I think of the ghost in *Hamlet*. I think that he looked up to him, probably idealised him, looked upon him as a hero. And that image always stayed with him. Unfortunately we don't have any portraits that survive of John de Vere so we don't know what he looked like. But I will say that the name Edward is not one of the de Vere names interestingly.

Interviewer

William Cecil, Lord Burghley.

Charles

Ah yes. Now William Cecil, a remarkable man. One of the new men, very ambitious but he had made himself indispensable to Elizabeth's brother, Edward the Sixth. He was already building up a constituency of political support then. And when Elizabeth came to the throne, he immediately protected her and set himself up as her, you know, the Keeper of the Cupboard of Skeletons maybe, you could say. And he ruthlessly guarded that. But he created a paranoid political culture. I don't know how he managed, or how he had enough hours in the day to create the webs of intrigue that he did and how he managed to keep control of the government in the way he did. I think John – Alford I think is the name – in a recent biography described his method as that of controlled political schizophrenia.

But he was the father-in-law of Edward de Vere and this was very much a political marriage, I think, that was forced by Burghley – that was one of his deals with Elizabeth and it turned out to be disastrous, largely because he was so interfering ... in the marriage and obviously was very protective towards his daughter but very controlling as well at the same time.

She was – but so I think that in a way he was – the grit in the oyster that helped create this pearl that we call Shakespeare. The two men never got on and they never could. Burghley could never understand someone of the kaleidoscopic depth and complexity of Edward de Vere, and I think he understood Burghley only too well, that's the difference.

Interviewer

Robert Cecil.

Charles

Robert was William Cecil's hunchbacked son. He had been brought up in the same household as Edward de Vere, at Cecil House. He was considerably younger but he would have looked up to Edward as a kind of elder brother and a figure to look up to. He was hunchbacked, he had one leg longer than the other, so he had this handicap but he was incredibly bright. And desperate to be loved. And that desperation to be loved turned sour ... when you realise that, you know, people didn't really like him. And so I think he's a bit of a sad character. I think Shakespeare did satirize him as Richard the Third but he wasn't a pantomime villain alone, I think he was a sensitive man at heart who followed his father down this route of political control.

And so he really took over when his father died in 1598. And I think that he was one of the ones who ensured that Edward de Vere would not be known as Shakespeare, because there was too much to lose. Because he and his father had been lampooned in the plays. And of course the plays speak of a political reality which is very different from the one that's been presented to us by the historians. And of course, the first historian, Camden,

was commissioned by William Cecil to write his history of Elizabeth's reign, so it was very much an official history.

Interviewer

Anne Cecil.

Charles

Yes, Anne Cecil. Well one thinks immediately of Ophelia. By all accounts she was a very sweet-natured girl and again she grew up almost as Edward de Vere's sister. And you can see why, you know, he may have loved her like a sister but you can see why he didn't necessarily want to marry her. I think she was a naïve girl but she was – again, she was interested in poetry and the arts, she was cultured, she wrote poetry herself and some of it survives. But she was caught between the points of mighty opposites, in this case her father and her husband. And if we can read back from Ophelia that might even have affected her mental health. But she died young and yes, she's one of the victims of this story and it's still – I feel sad when I think about her.

Interviewer

Queen Elizabeth.

Charles

Ah yes, Queen Elizabeth. Well, where do you begin? It's very difficult ... what was her relationship with Edward de Vere? We're told that certainly as a young man that she delighted in his company more than in any other, in his valiantness, his dancing, obviously his poetic skill, his conversational skill, his repartee. They shared so many interests. I mean, she was incredibly well educated, she spoke Latin, Greek, Italian, many other languages fluently. She was as well educated as Thomas More's daughters and as brilliant. So they had so much in common, the two of them, and I think that she recognised that his works would be the ornament of her age and of her reign. So she didn't want them destroyed but she also didn't want her reputation destroyed because she had as carefully crafted a myth as Shakespeare did.

You know, he was the Stratford Man and so on and she was the Virgin Queen. And that was a political truth or reality, but it was not a biological one. And so the succession became the big issue of her reign. And of course it's the big issue of Shakespeare's plays. I mean, the failure of succession is the big problem of the history plays, it's also Hamlet's problem, and it's definitely Shakespeare's problem. Either that or he was a severely deluded man. You know, like someone wandering around London in an old coat ... saying that he's the King of England. So you know, you can't have it both ways. Either he was talking about real things or he was, you know, severely schizophrenic.

So back to Elizabeth. I mean, she had a very troubled childhood like him, and again you just have to look at that work she wrote when she was eleven. She translated a book called *The Glass of the Sinful Soul* by Marguerite of Navarre, which was all about expiating the sin of incest. And there had been rumours that her father and mother – so Henry the Eighth and Ann Boleyn – were actually father and daughter. Very strong rumours at the time that Henry had had an affair with her mother, Elizabeth Howard. So whatever you make of that, that was part of the psychological aura in which she grew up, and the atmosphere, general atmosphere. So it's difficult at this remove to realise just how damaged a lot of these people were. And if you look at the Court culture of the time a lot of these people, as you know a good many of them, were unsure of their parentage. And of course they'd been sent away as children to be brought up by others of a similar status and so on.

But for Elizabeth I think it was all about survival. She knew that if she put a foot wrong that that could be the end of her and of course she'd had that big scandal with Thomas Seymour. When she was a teenager she'd almost lost her head, he had lost his. I think it was then that she decided she needed that image to present to her people and she chose the image of the Virgin Queen. And so for the Church of England she became the equivalent of the Virgin Mary and so on. It was very powerful and it worked in so many ways for her. BUT it precipitated a succession crisis, that was the big problem. And Shakespeare's works are at the heart of that. I mean, that's what I've come to believe, at the heart of that succession crisis and they comment upon it. And once you realise that, then the whole history changes and that's another reason why this has not been fully accepted or revealed yet, because it changes too much at once for people.

Interviewer

Henry Wriothesley.

Charles

Ah yes, OK. He was ... OK, again very much like Edward de Vere a child of state, he was one of the Wards of Court. Some people believe that these Wards of Court were in fact the royal bastards, but whether you accept that or not, whether you accept a royal connection for him ... he certainly led a charmed life to begin with. He seemed to have a very strong connection with Edward de Vere, and certainly if Edward de Vere is Shakespeare we know that those two poems were dedicated to him. He was addicted to the theatre we're told. He was a very beautiful young man, I think he was vain, but he loved all the pleasures of the time, he was a bit of a dandy.

But his life is divided into two halves because following the Essex Rebellion when he cast his hat in the ring with Essex and was condemned to die as a result of taking part in that uprising, he spent obviously a few years in the Tower of London, and when he came out I think he was a very different man. A sort of deepening had taken place and after that he seems to have been very thoughtful and very – you know, at the forefront of many of the movements about colonising America and all that sort of thing.

We don't know to what extent he tried to protect Shakespeare's legacy or was involved with the First Folio but it wouldn't surprise me if he was. But that's another figure where again you realise you're just, we're in the infancy of research, there's so much more to find out about him and that's why I would urge people to become involved in this subject because you don't have to be a scholar or a professional of any kind. You know, find a corner of this vast subject that you're prepared to love and really put yourself into and you can make a real difference. And of course it doesn't have to be in the realm of scholarship. You can organise events, you can do publicity or whatever but ... yes, definitely.

Interviewer

Anne Vavasour.

Charles

Anne Vavasour I feel was ... this was really an affair of passion. The two were hugely attracted to each other. She came from a cultured family in the north of England. I think she was very bright. But also the two just had this sort of urgent connection and maybe it was refreshing for him to be with someone who wasn't so much part of that, you know, Whitehall circle and so on. They of course had a son together, Edward Vere – who by all accounts did become a playwright himself and may have been the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. I think I've got the right play. So yes, that's something it would be nice to know more about. I mean, clearly it involved him in fights with her family. And it's very interesting that her family on some level disapproved of him, even though sort of socially he was

further up, a lot further up the scale than them. And one of them makes a comment, a very interesting comment ... about Oxford as a kind of shadow. Or they talk about Oxford's shadow. Which again may refer to his persona ... as a writer. Again there's so much that we don't know for sure.

Interviewer

Elizabeth Trentham.

Charles

Elizabeth Trentham I think was – and this was Oxford's second wife – I think she was his sanctuary. So by that time I think he'd been through a lot in the 1580s and this was his opportunity for some stability. She and her brother sorted out his financial affairs, they were able to provide him with a secure home and this was the time when he's turning himself into Shakespeare and where he needs that kind of stability. They had a wonderful house, King's Place, which had its own theatre there where they could put on plays to friends and so on. And maybe, you know, give certain of his plays – or even just scenes and sketches, you know – a try. So it sounds quite idyllic from that point of view. I mean, obviously he had his demons to contend with as always but I think she did provide him with a measure of stability. We know that she was a cultured lady, clear-headed, and I think she could stand up to others who might want to take advantage of him, because that of course was one of his big problems in life, he was too trusting.

Interviewer

OK, and finally, his works.

Charles

His works, yes. Now, well his relationship with his works ... I mean, would have been all-consuming and I think this is one thing that Elizabeth Trentham would have understood and she would have given him the space to work when he needed to work. But his relationship with the works is a very complex one. I always think of ... well I think of *The Winter's Tale*, which seems to be about the fate of his works, you know, Perdita being put out to sea, being cast onto the waters as a baby and then being found by these illiterate shepherds and brought up as theirs, as it were. And then of course, you know, her royalty is recognised, it's an intrinsic quality, and along with that royalty being recognised we have the resurrection of Hermione – which seems to suggest that he was looking forward to the day when he would no longer be a kind of icon, just his works, but would be a living human being to people.

But that takes me to the scene in *Henry VI Part 3* where Queen Margaret places Richard Duke of York – who's a pretender to the throne – on a molehill as it's described, binds him to a chair and places a paper crown on his head, and then mocks him for being a – what she calls a 'fee'd entertainer'. So I think that is – I mean, it's savage but it gives you also an idea of how he felt about his works, it was a paper crown, you know. It wasn't a gold crown, it was a paper crown and I think there was a lot of ... bitterness there underneath and bewilderment at the way things had gone in his life as well. And back to *The Winter's Tale*, this casting the royal child on the waters and not knowing where it would wash up. He didn't know when he died what the fate of his works would be. That's the thing.

Interviewer

And my final question – what would you say to those thinking of joining the DVS and why do you think they should join?

Charles

Yes, now ... I think that people should join The de Vere Society first and foremost to respond – as I was saying before – to Hamlet’s injunction to Horatio to tell his story. I can guarantee that this will enrich their lives and my first piece of advice would be – read the works. Not only is that the single most valuable piece of evidence we have on the authorship, but you’ll learn more about Edward de Vere, the author, from those works than any other documents that we might happen to find. The second thing I’d say is ... don’t try and engage the Stratfordians in debate and expect that you’re going to have a rational discussion, because you won’t. I’ve wasted a lot of time debating them and always been disappointed. Not only when I’ve been debating but watching other people debating. There’s never quite a connection, you always come away disappointed. So don’t expect it, it’s not going to happen, it really isn’t. And the other thing I’d say is – yes, get involved, and whatever your strength is, put it to work for the Society, there’s something you’ll be able to do. And it is a question of constant effort, of putting this case before the public. Even if it’s meeting people and you’re talking casually, mention it and so on. It will enrich your life though, it really will, so join the Society, it’s a great bunch of people.

Interviewer

Thank you, Charles, that’s great advice, and it’s been a pleasure to interview you today. And we would love it if you would come back for future talks.

Charles

I would with pleasure, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW