

# Wherefore Art Thou, Grandfather?

## Introduction:

Biographers of William Shakespeare have long held the view that his father, John Shakespeare, is the same man as a John, son of Richard, recorded in Snitterfield - just a short distance from Stratford. This seems to be based on very circumstantial evidence, which, once proposed, is repeated by successive generations of writers without recourse to the evidence. What seems to escape the attention of most of these authors is that, in addition to John and his father Richard, there were other Shakespeares in the village, who most seem at a loss to explain.....if they even try!

Another John Shakespeare, who lived a large part of his life in relative obscurity in the town of Clifford Chambers, which incidentally borders Stratford on Avon, mentions most of these 'other' Snitterfield Shakespeares in his will, and his direct relationship to them is confirmed by this, as well as evidence from the parish registers.

Anyone researching the surname Shakespeare in Warwickshire can hardly fail to have seen a number of biographies, of which there are a great many, dealing with the 'Bard of Avon.' Just about all of these tell us of his father, John, and his grandfather, Richard, who was supposedly a farmer in Snitterfield - a short distance from Stratford. Actually we cannot be certain of the name of John's father.

Anyone reading these biographies, armed with a knowledge of the relevant documentation, will soon come to realise that a significant number of the authors concerned are content to repeat what has been written before, without consulting any original material. That this is so can be shown by the fact that in many cases the source of the information used can be readily identified. As an example, Michael Wood, whose television series "In Search of Shakespeare" (based on his book of the same title) was recently aired on B.B.C. television. Here, in the first episode he states "...Wroxall...his [William's] grandfather was Bailiff here, and his aunt Joan was Prioress". Certainly a Richard Shakespeare was Bailiff of Wroxall, and his sister Joan, was Sub-Prioress. The suggestion that he was William's grandfather was first proposed by Yeatman in his book "The Gentle Shakespeare" in 1889. However, this theory was 'put to bed' in the early twentieth century by E K Chambers and Charlotte Stopes<sup>1</sup>, who convincingly demonstrate that the Bailiff is well documented as being at Wroxall all during the time that his namesake was farming in Snitterfield. He ended his days on a farm at Haseley, which he had long held from the manor of Wroxall, in about 1559, and Haseley (or Hatton - the parish registers are mixed) is also where the burial<sup>2</sup> of his sister, the former Sub-Prioress is recorded.

That John Shakespeare, Glover, of Stratford, had a connection with Snitterfield there can be no doubt: in 1579 he and his wife, Mary, sold a freehold in

Snitterfield which was part of Mary's legacy from her father, Robert Arden. It may be mere coincidence that Richard Shakespeare was a tenant of Robert Arden on another property - Chambers demonstrates that the land sold by John and Mary Shakespeare of Stratford was a *completely different* property to that tenanted by Richard Shakespeare of Snitterfield<sup>3</sup>.

Possibly the discovery of this document detailing the sale of Mary Shakespeare's property in Snitterfield, taken with that of the administration of the goods of Richard Shakespeare by his son John, prompted early writers to identify as the grandfather of the poet this Richard, who appears in documentation in Snitterfield spanning just over three decades, culminating in his goods being appraised by John Shakespeare, definitely his son, after his death in 1561<sup>4</sup>. This link seems to be the clue seized upon by the biographers in identifying John of Snitterfield with John of Stratford. What they fail to explain is that John is here described as "*Johannes Shakespere de Snytterfyld agricola.*" As John the Glover is known to have been resident in Stratford since at least 1552<sup>5</sup>, when he was famously fined for having an illegal dung heap outside his house, why is he here described as 'of Snitterfield' nearly a decade later. That he is also described as 'agricola' is perhaps easier to explain - while he was by this time well established as a glover in Henley Street, it is not unlikely that he may have had farming interests elsewhere.

Herein lies the crux of the problem. Early writers and genealogists have taken the record of this John, who administered the goods of his father, Richard, and supposed him to be the same man as John, the 'Glover', of Stratford, and this idea has been continued by biographers ever since.

Stopes ("Shakespeare's Family") does not seem sure of this link: she writes: "we are **reasonably** sure that our John was the son of the latter, if he administered his goods in 1560-61<sup>6</sup>." Chambers writes in a similar vein: "***It would be unreasonable not to accept him as the 'Johannes Shakespere de Snytterfyld agricola'***, who with 'Thomas Nycols de Snytterfyld agricola' sealed a bond for the proper administration of the estate of 'Richard Shakespere deceased late whiles he lyved of the parishe of Snytterfyld', and to whom a grant of administration on the same day as son of 'Ricardus Shackespere' is recorded at Snitterfield."<sup>7</sup>

That there were other Shakespeares in Snitterfield is barely mentioned, with one exception (Henry), by most Shakespeare authors. Most of them write of Henry, identified as John's brother, and therefore Richard's son, in a declaration of 1587: John Shakespeare was sued in the Court of Record by Nicholas Lane in respect of £10, which was part of a debt of £22 due to Lane from "Henricus Shaksper, frater dicti Johannis"<sup>9</sup>. A lot also agree that the Thomas Shakespeare, who baptised a son, John, at Snitterfield in 1581 is *probably* another brother. In 1582 both 'Hary Shakspere' and John appear in lists of witnesses for a law-suit which concerned a farm on the Warwick College manor in Snitterfield once occupied by

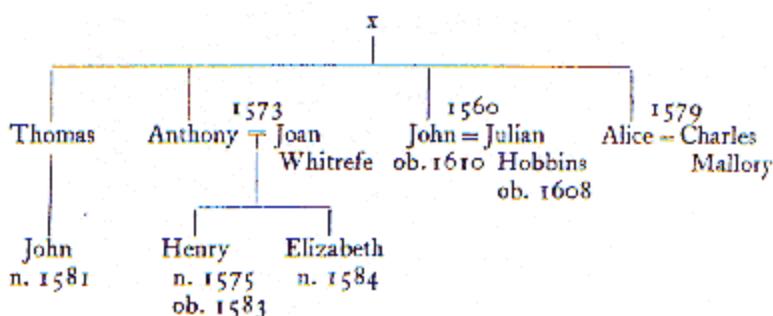
Richard Shakespeare. One of the other Shakespeares recorded at Snitterfield may be highly significant. This is Anthony Shakespeare, who is recorded as being a 'Billman' in a muster book of 1569. This is almost certainly the same Anthony, for the name is very unusual, whose daughter Elizabeth was baptised at Stratford in 1583.<sup>10</sup> The parish register informs us that he was 'of Hamton.' The other two Shakespeares in Snitterfield not mentioned here previously were Margaret, identified in her burial entry as Henry's wife, and a Johanna, the only record of whom is also a burial<sup>11</sup>, in 1595 - she could have been the wife of Richard, Thomas or Anthony (his wife was indeed named Joan<sup>12</sup>), or an unmarried daughter of any of the other Shakespeares mentioned: sadly there is no conclusive evidence to support any of these relationships. Note that the Stratford baptism of Anthony's daughter identifies him as 'of Hamton.' This is possibly another connection to John and Henry - John rented a farm at Ingon, where he is again described as 'agricola', in the neighbouring parish of Hampton Lucy, and two children of Henry are recorded<sup>13</sup> in the registers of the same parish.

This is where a new and previously unexplored trail begins. This same Anthony is mentioned in the will of John Shakespeare (died 1610), of Clifford Chambers - a town then in the county of Gloucestershire, but bordering Stratford on Avon. The will also mentions this John's nephew, also John, the son of his brother Thomas. Here then is a link between this John and his brothers Anthony and Thomas, both connected to Snitterfield. Chambers writes<sup>14</sup>:

*"A plate on a bier in St. Helen's Clifford records 'Will of John Shakespear of Clifford Chambers. To the Church Here. The Beere that is now in the Church, which I have caused to be made upon myne own cost and charges, 1608. Julian Shakespeare was buried y<sup>e</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> of June same year.' This date does not quite agree with the register. Mr E. I. Fripp has kindly given me the following extracts from the will at Gloucester:*

*'To my cousin John Shakespeare, son to my brother Thomas Shakespeare 45<sup>s</sup>, to my brother Anthony Shakespeare 10<sup>s</sup>...to my son-in-law <step-son> John Hobbins yearly during the life of my sister Alice Mallory to ear plough and sow the land of my said sister.'*

*This makes it possible to link John of Clifford Chambers with Thomas of Snitterfield, who had a son John, and probably also with Anthony of Snitterfield. Nor do I see any reason to suppose that the Anthony of Budbrooke, who appears also as Anthony of Hampton in the Stratford Register, is distinct. Anthony is not a common name. If so we get :'*



The Clifford Chambers parish registers add the following detail:

- 1554, Oct. 7. Marr. John Hobbins and Julyan Brown.
- 1560, Oct. 15. Marr. John Shaxspere to Julyan Hobbins, widow.
- 1579, Feb. 4. Marr. Charles Malary to Alice Shaxspere.
- 1583, June 10. Bur. Henry sonne vnto Antony Shaxspere.
- 1587, Oct. 18. Bur. Katheryn Morres, servunt vnto John Shaxspere.
- 1608, July 22. Bur. Julian Shakespeare.
- 1610, Oct. 29. Bur. John Shaxspere.

Interestingly there was one other Anthony Shakespeare, and he was of the same generation as Richard. He appears in the records of the manor of Wroxall with his mother Ellen Cockes (she had evidently remarried). The same documents tell us that his deceased father was John Shakespeare. From these records we also know that this Anthony and his mother had moved from Wroxall to Budbrooke. It is in Budbrooke that we have a fleeting glimpse of a Richard Shakespeare (possibly Anthony's brother) who is recorded in a 1525 Subsidy Roll. He then vanishes from the records in Budbrooke - could he be the Richard whose continued documentary existence in Snitterfield begins just three years later? The conclusion that Richard of Snitterfield had a son named Anthony makes this connection a possibility - these were the only two Anthony Shakespeares to have existed until the early nineteenth century.

The evidence of the Clifford Chambers will, supplemented by a number of parish registers is compelling, and is a lot less circumstantial than that which tenuously links John the Glover, of Stratford, with John 'agricola' of Snitterfield. Apart from Henry - confirmed as a brother of John Shakespeare of Snitterfield - and therefore son of Richard - by other documentary references, and who had died prior to the date of the Clifford Chambers will - the will of John Shakespeare of Clifford Chambers confirms his relationship to all of the other Snitterfield Shakespeares (here we may possibly include also Johanna, the isolated female burial, who may be the widow of Anthony - whose wife we know was named Joan, often rendered as Johanna in records of this period). If we accept, as seems most likely – there being no evidence to indicate otherwise - that there

was but one John Shakespeare in Snitterfield, son of Richard, and brother of Anthony, Henry and Thomas (and uncle of Thomas's son John), consistently described as a farmer or 'agricola', who seemingly disappears from Snitterfield around the same time as he appears in Clifford Chambers, then the John Shakespeare from Snitterfield *cannot be the poet's father*. This would mean John of Stratford's father - the poet's grandfather - must be sought elsewhere. There is no shortage of candidates, most, if not all, of which have been considered before - and rejected, probably because those seeking the identification were searching for Richard when in actual fact the name of the poet's grandfather remains unknown.

<sup>1</sup> "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 28, App. E, p. 364; "Shakespeare's Family," C C Stopes, 1901, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> 21 Oct. 1571, 'mortua et sepulta erat Domina Jana aliquando una monicarum Wraxall': Hatton Parish Registers.

<sup>3</sup> "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Admin. Bond at Worcester.

<sup>5</sup> "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> "Shakespeare's Family," C C Stopes, 1901, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> "Shakespeare's Family," C C Stopes, 1901, p. 114., "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Stratford Parish Registers.

<sup>11</sup> "Johana Shaxspere mortua est et sepulta January quinto, anno 1595": Snitterfield Parish Registers.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Shakespeare married Joan Whiteref at Budbrooke, 14 November 1573: Budbrooke Parish Registers.

<sup>13</sup> 1582, June 10. C. Lettyce the Daughter of Henrye Shakespere, 1585, Oct. 16. C. Jeames the sonne of Henrye Shakespere, 1589, Sept. 25. B Jeames Shakespere of Yngon: *Hampton Lucy Parish Registers*.

<sup>14</sup> "William Shakespeare - a Study of the Facts and Problems", E K Chambers, 1930, App. A, p. 17.