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Edward Gregorie — a ‘Bunbury scholar’

‘A narrow vol., rebound in vellum and kept in a case, pp. 194 parchment (numbered 1-192 due to omission of pp. between 119, 120) pp. 4 paper’ is the description in the catalogue of the Cheshire County Record Office of ‘Bunbury Register 1559 to 1653,’ the title embossed in gold on a red background on the cover of the volume. The volume contains principally the records of the baptisms at the parish church of St Boniface, Bunbury, Cheshire, between 1598 and 1653; marriages between 1593 and 1653; and burials between 1559 and 1649.1

The registers have particular interest to students of medieval drama in view of the colophon to the Huntington manuscript of the Chester Mystery Cycle, HM2. This reads:

Deo gratias, This ys the laste of all the xxiiiie pageantes and playes played by the xxiiiith craftesmen of the Cyttie of Chester, wrytten in the yeare of our lord God 1591 and in the xxxiiiith yeare of the reigne of our sovereigne Ladye queene Elizabeth, whom God preserve for ever. Amen. Finis. By me Edward Gregorie, scholler at Bunburye, the yeare of our lord God 1591

Edwardus Gregorie.2

F.M. Salter questions the authenticity of the colophon.3 R.M. Lumiansky and I have indicated our dissent from his view, comparing the practice in MS Bodley 175 and the difficulties raised by his thesis.4 But in 1980 we had still not identified the scribe named.

In 1607 the minister at Bunbury, Richard Roe, initiated a new copy of the church records left by his predecessor, Philip Street.5 The authenticity of the new copy is validated at regular intervals — usually at the foot of each page — by some formula such as ‘Collatum cum exemplari Philippi Street et comprobatum per nos’ (p 81) or ‘Concordat cum originali, test.’ (p 147) followed by the names of the vicar — eg, ‘Riccardum Roe, Minist. de Bunb.’ (p 95) — and of his two church wardens — ie, ‘Ed. Gregorie, John. Stockton, gardianes.’ The names are not signatures. Since the 1608 record of baptisms also bears these names (p 10), Gregorie and Stockton were evidently the ‘guardians’ for that year and were then released from office.

The records themselves contain only two references to Edward Gregory. Under

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baptisms, p 5: ‘1601 March 22 Edmund the supposed sonne of Edward Gregorie.’
The entry is in a section which Gregory himself verified. Unfortunately it does not
give the name of the child’s mother. And under burials, p 158: ‘1628 Aprill 22
Edward the sonne of John Gregory of the paryshe of Tatnall.’ The entry seems to
suggest that Edward was not born in Bunbury but in the neighbouring parish of
Tattenhall. Although we cannot be absolutely certain that the churchwarden,
putative father and deceased were the same man, or that he is the same man as the
HM2 scribe, there are no other ‘Gregories’ in the entries of this time and ‘Edward’ is
not a particularly frequent Christian name. The paucity of surnames might bear out
the view that Edward was not a member of a Bunbury family. And given the dates
and his evident literacy, it seems probable that this man is indeed the HM2 scribe.

Questions still hang around Gregory. I have not yet found records of his birth or
possible marriage, or further records concerning his ‘supposed’ son. Most tantalising
of all, the records give no indication of why he should assume the title of ‘scholar.’
Probably further investigations into the local records which I am undertaking will
answer some of these questions, and perhaps also identify the ‘Richard Gregorie’
named on the first page of the manuscript.

NOTES

1 Page numbers cited below refer to the pencilled numbers on the pages.
2 R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills (eds), The Chester Mystery Cycle, vol 1: Text, EETS, SS 3
4 The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Reduced Facsimile of Huntington Library MS2, with an intro-
duction by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, Leeds Texts and Monographs: Medieval Drama
Facsimiles VI (Leeds 1980), xvi, fn 18.
5 The date is confirmed by the entry on p 82:

Here endeth the Register of Philip Street taken out
of the Copie that hee left per me Ri. Roe.

A perfect Register of all that were maryed in
the parish Church of Bunb. from the feast of St. James
1607 faithfully collected by [cancelled] by me Richard
Roe then Minister of Bunb.