Abstract:

The following note presents evidence to suggest a relationship between Edward Alleyn and the Sherley family of Wiston in Sussex. Through an examination of local archives, Henslowe’s Diary, and other theatre history, the note argues that the ‘Edward Allen’ recorded in Anne Sherley’s Will could be Edward Alleyn. In so doing, it suggests a connection between Alleyn and the Sherley brothers dramatized by Day, Rowley and Wilkins in *The Adventures of the Three English Brothers* (1607), and Henry Sherley, the author of *The Martyred Soldier* (1622/3)

Edward Alleyn’s other Sussex network.

The Will of Anne Sherley (Shirley) of Wiston in Sussex ̶ the wife of Thomas Sherley the corrupt Treasurer at War during the Dutch campaign in the 1580, the mother of Thomas, Anthony and Robert whose exploits in Europe and the near east were fictionalized in Day’s, Rowley’s and Wilkins’ play *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607), and the grandmother of the playwright Henry Sherley, who was killed in a duel in 1627 ̶ contains a bequest of a gold ring with a death’s head to ‘Mr. Edward Allen and his wife’.[[1]](#endnote-1) Nina Green’s transcription of the Will allows for ‘the remote possibility’[[2]](#endnote-2) that the Edward Allen recorded in the document is Edward Alleyn the actor. This ‘remote possibility’ is based upon Alleyn’s connections to Philip Henslowe who was born in Sussex and who maintained county interests after his move to London. The following note will demonstrate that the Alleyn-Henslowe Sussex network is more expansive than has been generally recognized and that those county connections can be extended to include the Sherley family. In so doing, the case will be made that Edward Alleyn the actor may well have received the bequest of a ring from Anne Sherley, while demonstrating the links between Sussex’s two major theatrical families.

Although Alleyn’s most significant Sussex connection was his relationship with Philip Henslowe, Alleyn’s family had interests in Sussex which predated Alleyn’s entry into the Henslowe circle. Alleyn’s father held leases to property that included the manor of Barnham, a parcel of land in the honour of Petworth, with additional land in Barnham and in Yapton.[[3]](#endnote-3) Alleyn’s father also appears to have had political connections in the west of Sussex, evident in the support provided by Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, when Alleyn faced attempts to strip him of the mastership of Bedlam in 1561.[[4]](#endnote-4) That support suggests a greater regional connection than simple landownership; the Sussex interests of Edward Alleyn senior were thus in the west of the county, far closer to the Sherley estates at Wiston than Broyle Park and Lindfield, the key Sussex sites associated with Philip Henslowe. The connection between the Alleyns and branches of the Howard-Fitzalan family continued during Edward Alleyn’s theatrical career and again provided a link with west Sussex, affording Alleyn and Henslowe a county profile beyond Lindfield.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Henslowe was born in Lindfield, his father was Master of the Game at Ashdown Forest and Broyle Park in eastern Sussex, his sister Margaret was married to Ralph Hogg the Sussex iron master of Buxted, and his brother John was Hogg’s office manager.[[6]](#endnote-6) Philip Henslowe’s Diary was originally the office ledger of John Henslowe;[[7]](#endnote-7) as such, it provides a useful record of the Sussex iron industry. Although Henslowe’s Diary is an invaluable resource for the study of the theatrical world of early modern London, it also provides a fascinating insight into Henslowe’s other business interests. The Diary and the considerable surviving correspondence of Henslowe and Alleyn reveal on-going financial interests in Sussex and continuing personal relationships with figures from Sussex. The most significant and recurrent Sussex resident recorded in the Diary is Arthur Langworth: the latter provides evidence of Henslowe’s activities as a proto-bank/money lender; Langworth also acted as Henslowe’s and Alleyn’s agent during their negotiations for the reversion of the Mastership of the Royal Game of Bears, Bulls and Mastiff dogs, and he provides a connection between the Henslowe/Alleyn circle and the Sherleys.

Langworth borrowed a considerable amount of money from Henslowe. The Diary records loans of £206 in December 1594,[[8]](#endnote-8) £10 in June 1595 (delivered to Langworth by Joan Alleyn),[[9]](#endnote-9) forty shillings on 23 May 1598 with a further twenty shillings on 27 May.[[10]](#endnote-10) The Diaryalsorecords an agreement between Alleyn and Henslowe for £126 at Michaelmas (29 September) 1596,[[11]](#endnote-11) with further loans from Henslowe of ten shillings on 20 June 1604, with another forty shillings on 29June.[[12]](#endnote-12) Cumulative loans of a further £30 are recorded, including the suggestion of a £3 loan while Langworth was in the Marshalsea.[[13]](#endnote-13) The Diaryalso contains the details of a number of property transactions between Langworth, Henslowe and Alleyn. The Diary records Langworth’s purchase of a house and land from Henslowe with an undertaking to make payment on 16 May 1595. The agreement was witnessed by Edward and Joan Alleyn.[[14]](#endnote-14) This purchase was followed in June 1595 by the sale to Langworth of the Sussex home of Henslowe’s deceased brother and sister-in-law. The cost of the property was £80 and the sale was witnessed by Alleyn.[[15]](#endnote-15) A further property sale is recorded on the 5 July 1595, with Alleyn agreeing to sell Langworth the lease of the parsonage at Firle for £3,000, with payment to be made over the course of twenty years. The proceeding was witnessed by Henslowe.[[16]](#endnote-16)The details surrounding this property transaction became increasingly convoluted, as described by W. W. Greg in his edition of the Diary which was supplemented by his analysis of documents in the Alleyn-Henslowe Muniments.[[17]](#endnote-17) These additional documents confirm Langworth’s position within the Henslowe-Alleyn circle and also reveal a relationship between Alleyn and Arthur Langworth’s son John. Alleyn assigned a new lease for the Firle parsonage to John Langsworth in December 1596;[[18]](#endnote-18) Greg suggests there was ‘a regular assignment from John Langworth to Alleyn’.[[19]](#endnote-19) The Henslowe-Alleyn archive also contains letters from John Langworth to Alleyn about land and to Henslowe about tithes.[[20]](#endnote-20) The Diaryand the wider Henslowe-Alleyn documents are clear: the Langworth family was involved in a sustained financial relationship with both Henslowe and Alleyn, with Arthur acting on their behalf in wider business ventures.

In June 1598, Langworth was engaged in negotiations for Alleyn and Henslowe as part of their campaign to obtain the reversion of the Mastership of the Royal Game. Alleyn was in Sussex at the time, staying at Langworth’s home at Broyle Park. While there he received letters from Henslowe and Langworth reporting on the progress of the negotiations for the reversion of the Mastership.[[21]](#endnote-21) Alleyn was still at Broyle in September 1598 when he received a further letter from Henslowe about the Mastership and informing him of the death of Gabriel Spenser as a result of his duel with Ben Jonson.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Alleyn was in Sussex once again in October 1603 when Joan Alleyn wrote to him about the death of the Robert Browne, leader of the theatre company at the Boar’s Head.[[23]](#endnote-23) Alleyn’s location on that occasion is unclear; it is not impossible that Alleyn was again at Broyle although the fragment of the address reads ‘vex[ ] Susse[ ] ’.[[24]](#endnote-24) Of possible significance is the commendations in the letter to ‘Mr. Chaloners [sic] and his wife’[[25]](#endnote-25) and the information at the end of the letter that ‘a youthe who said he was Mr. Francis Chalo[ ]’s man’ had attempted to borrow money from Joan Alleyn.[[26]](#endnote-26) This is almost certainly Francis Chaloner of Lindfield. If the ‘Mr. Chaloner’ in the letter is Francis Chaloner then it could indicate that Alleyn was staying in Lindfield, the home village of Henslowe, or that he was expected to see Chaloner at some stage. This would indicate a personal relationship between Chaloner and the Alleyns. The Chaloners were contemporaries of the Henslowes in Lindfield and Thomas Chaloner – Francis’s brother – is listed as a debtor in the Diary, with money borrowed in 1592.[[27]](#endnote-27) More importantly, the Chaloners were Arthur Langworth’s in-laws: John Langworth was married to Thomas Chaloner’s daughter Mary.[[28]](#endnote-28) The Chaloner-Langworth connection provides the first concrete link between Alleyn and the Sherleys. Mary Chaloner, Arthur Langworth’s daughter-in-law, was the great-granddaughter of Alice Sherley.[[29]](#endnote-29) Alice Sherley was the aunt of Sir Thomas Sherley, the husband of Anne Sherley: as such Mary Chaloner was a cousin of Anne Sherley’s sons and grandson.[[30]](#endnote-30) The former – Thomas, Anthony and Robert – were dramatized in *The Adventures of the Three English Brothers,* while Henry Sherley – Thomas’s son and Anne’s grandson – was the author of *The Martyred Soldier* which was performed at the Fortune in 1623. It is this Sherley involvement with the London stage which provides a further possible connection between Alleyn and the Sherleys.

A staging of *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* appears to have included a cameo appearance by Will Kemp. The Kemp scene is set in Venice but this section of the play is almost certainly staging the actual meeting of Kemp and Anthony Sherley in Rome in 1601.[[31]](#endnote-31) At that meeting Kemp claimed kinship with Sherley through Sherley’s mother Anne; the latter’s maiden name was Kempe and she came from Ollantighe in Kent.[[32]](#endnote-32) Kemp claimed kinship with the Ollantighe Kempes.[[33]](#endnote-33) Thus we have a possible familial relationship between Anne Sherley and an important member of the London stage, a relationship identified in a play performed by Queen Anne’s Men at the instigation of Thomas Sherley.[[34]](#endnote-34) Although this does not prove a direct connection between Alleyn and the Sherleys, it does demonstrate a relationship between Thomas Sherley and one of the London theatre companies and suggests that Kemp could provide a link between the Sherleys and Alleyn. By 1601/2, Kemp was a member of Worcester’s Men. Kemp is listed in Henslowe’s Diaryfor this period with entries relating to theatrical expenditure and monetary loans.[[35]](#endnote-35) As such, from 1601 to his death Kemp can be positioned in a matrix of theatrical and Sussex associations which includes the Alleyn-Henslowe network and the Sherleys.

Henry Sherley provides a similar theatrical connection between Alleyn and the Sherleys. Henry Sherley’s only extant play *The Martyred Soldier* was licensed for the stage in 1622/3 for the Lady Elizabeth’s Men and then for the Palsgrave’s Men at the Fortune. Alleyn owned the Fortune so it is possible that Alleyn knew Henry Sherley, particularly if Sherley was responsible for more plays than the one surviving text; moreover, if Alleyn already knew the Sherley family, then that relationship may have helped to facilitate Henry Sherley’s entry into the London theatrical scene. The previous understanding between Thomas Sherley and Queen Anne’s Men, the possible kinship between Kemp and the Sherleys, Kemp’s financial dealings with Henslowe and Alleyn, and the relationship between Alleyn, the Chaloners and the Langworths all allow for the extension of the Alleyn-Henslowe Sussex network to include the Sherleys. This is turn allows for the possibility that the Edward Allen in Anne Sherley’s Will was Edward Alleyn the actor.

The geographical locations or connections of the beneficiaries in Anne Sherley’s Will suggest that the Edward Allen mentioned in the document was someone from Sussex or someone with Sussex links. Once Anne Sherley’s relatives and servants are excluded, the remaining beneficiaries of the Will are neighbours or friends from Sussex, or people with clear Sussex connections. On that basis, the expectation would be that Edward Allen had a similar county presence. Edward Alleyn the actor certainly fulfils that criterion. Research of extant material in local archives does reveal other potential Edward Allens/Alleyns during the period 1550 – 1623. The surviving Wiston archive held at West Sussex Record Office contains reference to an Edward Allen (recorded as Allin) who held land close to the Sherley estate. This Edward Allin was alive in 1601;[[36]](#endnote-36) however, the burial record for Wiston lists the death of Edward Allin (rendered as Allen) in March 1608.[[37]](#endnote-37) Examination of the surviving baptismal and burial records of the parishes surrounding Wiston reveal one Edward Allyne baptised in January 1577; however, the record also lists the death of the same Edward Allyne in March of 1577.[[38]](#endnote-38) The baptismal records for parishes in Chichester, Rye, East Grinstead, Steyning, Frant, Cuckfield and Kirdford list Edward Alleyns (or variant spellings) born after 1550 without a corresponding entry in the burial registry.[[39]](#endnote-39) In addition, the baptismal record of St. Nicholas’s Church in Brighton lists a George Allen the ‘supposed son of Edward Allen’, baptised in May 1589;[[40]](#endnote-40) Bosham’s parish records contain reference to three children of Edward Aylin baptised in 1619, 1623 and 1625;[[41]](#endnote-41) Mid Lavent’s records lists the baptism of Thomas Alin, the son of Edward, in March 1614,[[42]](#endnote-42) and Ifield’s records list the baptism in January 1619 of John Allen, the son of Edward Allen.[[43]](#endnote-43)

If we discount those at the top end of the search range as being too young to be the Allen of Anne Sherley’s Will, and if we exclude those from the geographical extremes of Sussex as being unlikely candidates given the absence of an obvious connection with the Sherleys and those parts of the county, then we are left with two potential Edward Alleyns from Chichester, one from Bosham, one from Mid Lavent and one from Kirdford. The baptismal dates and locations of these five men make them candidates to be the Allen of the Will. Without further evidence of their lives in Sussex or any interaction with the Sherleys then it is impossible to confirm or discount them as the beneficiaries of the Will. However, it is equally impossible to discount Edward Alleyn the actor as a candidate. Alleyn had clear Sussex connections and it is possible to link Alleyn and Henslowe to the Sherleys via theatrical networks and local familial and economic interests. In the face of that evidence connecting Sussex’s two major theatrical families, the case for Alleyn as the beneficiary in Anne Sherley’s Will must be considered a genuine possibility.

1. The National Archives Prob 11/141, ff. 270-2, modern spelling transcript by Nina Green, http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. www.**oxford-shakespeare**.com/Probate/PROB\_11-141\_ff\_270-2.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. S. P. Cerasano, ‘Edward Alleyn’s Early Years: His Life and Family’, *Notes and Queries* (June 1987), 240; see also Cerasano, ‘The Patronage Network of Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama* (2000), 85. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, 82 – 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. S. P. Cerasano, ‘Philip Henslowe’, *DNB* (2004) (accessed 2/9/14). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. S. P. Cerasano, ‘The Geography of Henslowe’s Diary’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 3 (Fall, 2005), 331; see also R. A. Foakes ed. *Henslowe’s Diary* (second edition) (Cambridge, 2002), xv, xix – xxiv. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, 171 – 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, 191. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid*,* 60 – 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 54. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid, 173. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid*,* 237. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, 190. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid*,* 81. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 52. In his edition of the *Diary*, Greg suggests that the sale of the parsonage was undertaken by John Langworth, Arthur Langworth’s son, see W. W Greg ed. *Henslowe’s Diary*, 2 volumes (London, 1904), 2. 293. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See <http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/images/MSS-3/Article-009/01r.html>, http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/images/MSS-3/Article-033/01r.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The letters are available at <http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/images/MSS-2/Article-002/01r.html> and http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/images/MSS-2/Article-001/01v.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Foakes ed., *Henslowe’s Diary*, 286. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, 297 – 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, 298. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid*,* 297. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, 298. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. John Comber, *Sussex Genealogies: Ardingly Centre* (Cambridge, 1925), 82. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. John Comber, *Sussex Genealogies: Lewes Centre* (Cambridge, 1933), 258 – 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Martin Butler, ‘William Kemp’, *DNB* (2004) (accessed 2/9/14). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Anne Sherley’s mother was Cecily Cheney. The Cheneys were an old Sussex family; Cecily Cheney’s father was Warden of the Cinque Ports

    (see http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/CHENEY.htm) and other branches of the Cheney family were involved in the Wealden iron industry. The 1574 list of Wealden iron masters includes Abergavenny and Darrell – both families were linked to the Cheneys through marriage. In addition, Anne Sherley’s distant relative Ninian Chaloner from Cuckfield is also named on the list. It is therefore possible that members of Anne’s extended maternal family were associates of the Henslowes, given their involvement in the iron industry in the east of Sussex. Ralph Hogg, Philip Henslowe’s brother-in-law is the most famous iron master included in the list. For the iron master list see J. J. Goring ‘Wealden Ironmasters in the age of Elizabeth’, in *Wealth and Power in Tudor England*, eds E. W Ives, R. J Knecht, J. J Scarisbrick (London, 1978), 224. The relationship between the Lindfield and Cuckfield Chaloners, see Comber, *Sussex Genealogies: Ardingly Centre*, 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Butler, ‘William Kemp’. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Anthony Parr ed., *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* in *Three Renaissance Travel Plays* (Manchester, 1995), xxi. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Foakes ed., *Henslowe’s Diary* 196, 214, 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Wiston MS 2214. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Wiston parish records, held at WSRO. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Ashurst parish records, held at WRSO. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Frant and Rye parish records, ESRO; Chichester (St. Pancras), Cuckfield, East Grinstead (St. Swithun’s), Kirdford and Steyning parish records, WSRO. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. St. Nicholas parish records, Brighton, ESRO. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Bosham parish records, WSRO. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Mid Lavent parish records, WSRO. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Ifield parish records, WRSO. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)