

# WHO WAS ARTHUR BROOKE?

## Author of *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*

Nina Green



In stormy wind and wave, in daunger to be lost,  
thy stearles ship (O Romeus) hath been long while betost;  
The seas are now appeasd, and thou by happy starre,  
Art come in sight of quiet haven; and now the wrackfull barre  
Is hid with swelling tyde, boldly thou mayst resort  
Unto thy wedded ladies bed, thy long desyred port.  
God graunt no follies mist so dymme thy inward sight,  
That thou do misse the chanell that doth leade to thy delight.  
God graunt no daungers rocke ylurking in the darke,  
Before thou win the happy port, wrack thy seabeaten barke.

Arthur Broke, *Romeus and Juliett* (Munro 30)



Did Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, know Arthur Brooke, author of *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet*? The answer to this question depends very much on who Arthur Brooke really was. In 1908, J. J. Munro provided a partial solution to the problem of Arthur Brooke's identity. His analysis of five contemporary documents demonstrates that Arthur Brooke died in the wreck of the Queen's ship, *The Greyhound*, on March 19th, 1563, and that he was a close relative of William Brooke, Lord Cobham (1527-1597) (165).

### Stow's account

The first document considered by Munro in his inquiry into Arthur Brooke's identity is the account of the wreck of *The Greyhound* found in Stow's *Annals*:

For you must understand that Sir Adrian Poinings, being Knight Marshall, upon his return into England, went not back again. And then was Sir Thomas Finch of Kent appointed to go over to supply the room of Knight Marshall, who making his provision ready, sent over his brother Erasmus Finch to have charge of his band, and his kinsman Thomas Finch to be Provost Marshall; whilst he, staying till he had everything in a readiness to pass over himself, at length embarked in one of the Queen's ships called the Greyhound, having there aboard with him, besides three score and six

of his own retinue, four and forty other gentlemen. . . . And as they were on the further coast towards Newhaven [i.e. Havre], they were by contrary wind and foul weather driven back again towards Rye. They forced the captain of the ship, a very good seaman named William Maline, and also the Master and mariners, to thrust into Haven before the tide, and so they all perished, seven of the meaner sort only excepted, whereof three died shortly after they came on land. After this mischance, Edmund Randoll was appointed Knight Marshall. (165)

There is no mention of Arthur Brooke in Stow's account of the wreck of *The Greyhound*. However, when Munro compares Stow's account with four other contemporary documents: verses by Thomas Brooke, an epitaph by George Turberville, a letter from Henry Cobham to Thomas Chaloner, and an entry in Henry Machyn's diary, we see that, taken together, these five documents establish conclusively that Arthur Brooke perished in the wreck of *The Greyhound* on March 19th, 1563. They also offer further clues to his identity.

### **Why was *The Greyhound* bound for Newhaven?**

The ship in which Brooke and all on board lost their lives was bound for Newhaven (Le Havre) to join the English forces there. In the spring of 1562, the religious struggle in France had once more broken into civil war. The two Huguenot leaders, the Prince of Condé and Admiral Coligny, appealed to the English to aid the Protestant cause against the Catholic forces of the Duc de Guise, and after considerable diplomatic maneuvering, a treaty was signed in September 1562 under which control of Le Havre was turned over to English occupation forces in return for the dispatch of English troops and money. In October, three thousand English troops went to Le Havre under the command of the Earl of Warwick. In December, however, Condé was taken prisoner by the Catholic forces, and the English began to fear that the Catholic and Huguenot forces would soon reach an accommodation. In February 1563, shortly before the reinforcements on board *The Greyhound* met their tragic fate, the leader of the Catholic party, the Duc de Guise, was assassinated, which removed the principle barrier to a reconciliation between the two opposing sides. Both Huguenots and Catholics then turned against the English, and on July 29th, 1563, the English garrison at Le Havre, beset by plague and French attacks, was forced to surrender (Dewar 89-97; Beckingsale 101). These historical events form the backdrop to Arthur Brooke's death on board *The Greyhound*.

### Verses by “Thomas Broke, the younger”

The second document considered by Munro contains verses by “Thomas Broke, the younger, to the Reader.” These connect Arthur Brooke with literary pursuits, and state that he died in the shipwreck of an unnamed vessel. According to Munro, the verses are found in “folio 308” of the only other known work by Arthur Brooke, a book published in 1563 under the title *The Agreement of Sondry places of Scripture, seeming in shew to Jarre*. They read as follows:

Example, lo, in Brooke before thine eye,  
Whose praised gifts in him did late abound,  
By shipwreck force'd, alas, too soon to die,  
Helpless of all entomb'd lies underground. (xxii)

Since the author of this brief elegy has the same surname as the unfortunate Arthur Brooke, it may be possible to identify Arthur through his relationship to “Thomas Broke, the younger.” Although Munro did not follow up this point, fortunately the identity of Thomas Brooke can be established from contemporary references. He was the younger of two sons, both named Thomas, born to George Brooke, Seventh Lord Cobham, (1497-1558) and his wife Anne Bray. The elder Thomas was born in 1533, the younger in 1539 (McKeen 700-1).

George Brooke and his wife Anne both died in 1558, referring to the younger Thomas in their respective wills as “Thomas Broke the yonger of that name who is my sixte sonne” and “my sonne Thomas Cobham thonger [the younger]” (9-10). Thomas Brooke, the younger was, therefore, a younger brother of two high-ranking and influential personages of the Elizabethan era: William Brooke, eighth Lord Cobham and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, the eldest son and heir of George Brooke and Anne Bray, and his sister, Elizabeth (Brooke) Parr, Marchioness of Northampton and close personal friend and confidante of Queen Elizabeth.

The fact that verses commemorating Arthur Brooke’s death were written by a brother of Lord Cobham lends support to Henry Machyn’s claim that someone closely connected to Lord Cobham died in the wreck of *The Greyhound*.

### Turberville’s epitaph

The third document which Munro considered in his inquiry into Arthur Brooke’s identity is a poem entitled “An Epitaph on the death of Master Arthur Brooke, drowned in passing to Newhaven.” The “Epitaph” is found in George Turberville’s *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs and Sonnets*, published in 1567 as “newly corrected with additions” (indicating the existence of

an original, but now unknown, first edition) (Rollins 291). The title of Turberville's *Epitaph* confirms that Arthur Brooke's death occurred in the course of a voyage to Newhaven. The poem also confirms the purpose of the voyage ("as he to foreign realm was bound/ With others more his sovereign queen to serve"). Although the name of the ship is not mentioned, it seems evident that Turberville is talking about the wreck of *The Greyhound* (Munro xxiii). More important, Turberville's epitaph identifies the Arthur Brooke who drowned while on a voyage to Newhaven as the author of *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet*. Turberville specifically mentions Brooke's skill in translating the story of "Juliet and her mate." He provides another important detail about Brooke, his youth, with the phrase "his years in number few." (For the full text of Turberville's poem, see Appendix, pages 68-69)

### Henry Cobham's letter to Sir Thomas Chaloner

The fourth document considered by Munro in his inquiry into Arthur Brooke's identity is a letter from Henry Cobham to Sir Thomas Chaloner written May 14th, 1563, almost two months after the wreck of *The Greyhound*.

Henry Brooke, who, according to *The Dictionary of National Biography*, always used Cobham as a surname (610) and who is referred to in the Patent Rolls as "Henry Brooke alias Cobham" (518), was another son of George Brooke, seventh Lord Cobham (1497-1558). Thus he was the brother of both William Brooke, Eighth Lord Cobham (1527-1597) and Thomas Brooke "the younger." Sir Thomas Chaloner (1521-65) was a personal friend of the Brooke family (McKeen 165). They had an additional connection in that Cobham had accompanied Chaloner when the latter was first sent as ambassador to Madrid in 1561 (*DNB* 610). Cobham was therefore writing to the ambassador as a close family friend and associate in his letter of May 14, 1563. The relevant portion of the letter reads:

Sir Thomas Finch was drowned going over to Newhaven as Knight Marshall in Sir Adrian Poinings's place, who is come over. James Wentworth and his brother John were cast away in the same vessel, on the sands near Rye, and little Brook and some other petty gentlemen. (Munro 165)

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*Nina Green is an Oxfordian researcher who has written numerous articles on Elizabethan matters. Since 1996, she has monitored the Oxfordian netgroup Phaeton at <nrgreen@direct.ca>. The above is an expansion of her article by the same title from the October 1989 issue of her publication: The Edward de Vere Newsletter: 1340 Flemish Street, Kelowna, BC, Canada, V1Y 3R7. The present article incorporates new research findings by Ms. Green since 1989, as well as an important new document, a transcript of Arthur Brooke's admission to the Middle Temple in 1561. This document was obtained by the late Tal Wilson, who prior to his death this past spring requested that she bring it to the attention of scholars interested in the Elizabethan period.*

The similarity between Henry Cobham's account of the shipwreck in which Arthur Brooke perished and that of the wreck of *The Greyhound* in Stow's *Annals* enabled Munro to conclude that "in view of the parallel circumstances and the dates, we are justified in believing that 'little Brook' is our own Arthur Brooke, the poet" (165). However, an equally significant point about Henry Cobham's letter to Sir Thomas Chaloner is the fact that Arthur Brooke's death is here remarked upon by yet another of Lord Cobham's brothers. This cannot be mere coincidence, and points to some sort of family connection, particularly in view of the intimate tone of Henry Cobham's reference to "little Brook".

### **Machyn's diary**

An important clue to this family connection is found in an entry in Henry Machyn's diary, the fifth document considered by Munro in his inquiry into Arthur Brooke's identity. Munro quotes Machyn in order to pinpoint the date of the wreck of *The Greyhound* (which is not given in Stow's *Annals*). As printed in Nichols' edition of Machyn, the complete entry from Machyn's diary reads as follows:

The 21st day of March, tidings came to the Court that one of the Queen's ships called the Greyhound was lost going to Newhaven; the captain was Sir Thomas Finch, Knight of Kent, and his brother and one of my lord Cobham's brothers and two of my lord Wentworth's brethren and many gentlemen and minstrels; one of my lord Warwick's nephews, and a good Master; and many mariners and soldiers to the number of [blank]. (Nichols 302)

Although he does not name Arthur Brooke, Machyn gives all of the other relevant details: the name of the ship, its destination, the name of the captain, and the date on which news of the wreck reached the court. Machyn then states that one of the gentlemen who was lost going to Newhaven in *The Greyhound* was one of Lord Cobham's brothers; an assertion which is also made in *The Dictionary of National Biography* article on Sir Thomas Finch (19).

Although Machyn was wrong in claiming that it was one of Lord Cobham's brothers who died, Machyn is, in general, a reliable witness. As Nichols says, Machyn was:

. . . a citizen of London, of no great scholarship or attainments. . . but the matters of fact which he records would be such as he either witnessed himself, or had learned immediately after their occurrence: and the opinions and sentiments which he expresses would be shared by a large proportion of his fellow-citizens. (Nichols page v.)

How did Machyn come to confuse Arthur Brooke, who died in the wreck of *The Greyhound*, with one of Lord Cobham's brothers, none of whom was involved in the wreck?

### Arthur Brooke, son of Cranmer Brooke

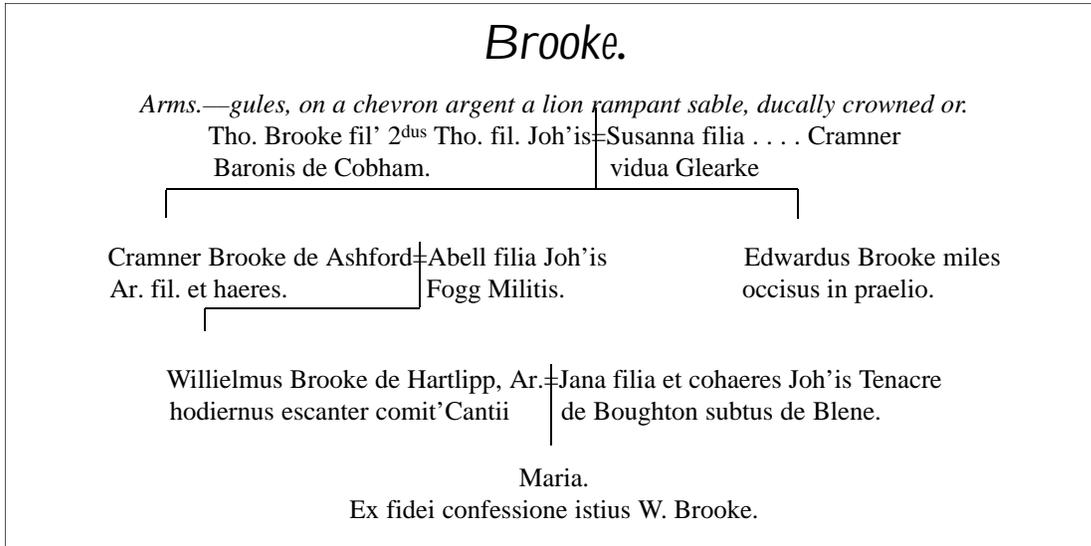
In his two-volume life of William Brooke, eighth Lord Cobham (1527-1597), David McKeen has amassed a great deal of information about the Cobham family and its connections. According to McKeen, William Brooke had thirteen brothers and sisters in all. There were four sisters (Elizabeth, Anne, Mary and Catherine) and nine brothers (Henry the elder, George, Thomas the elder, John, Edward the elder, Henry the younger, Thomas the younger, Edmund, and Edward the younger). The Elizabethan antiquary Robert Glover, a contemporary of Lord Cobham, recorded the births of thirteen of the Brooke children, ending with the birth of Catherine in 1544. The birthdate of the fourteenth child, Edward the younger (who was probably born after 1544), is unknown (5-11).

It is fairly clear that none of the nine brothers of Lord Cobham identified by McKeen could have been the individual who perished on March 19th. Both Henry and Edward (the elders) were deceased by 1551. George died in 1570, Thomas the elder in 1578, Henry the younger in 1592, and John in 1594. The dates of the deaths of Thomas, Edmund and Edward (the youngsters) are not known; however, Thomas was still alive in 1571 and McKeen finds evidence that Edmund and Edward were alive until 1587 (5-11, 700-2).

Having accounted for all Lord Cobham's known brothers, we must consider whether Arthur Brooke might actually have been born, like Edward, sometime after 1544. This is not likely in view of the fact that fourteen children (Lord Cobham and his thirteen known brothers and sisters) are represented on the tomb of George and Anne Brooke erected, three years after their deaths, in 1561. The possibility that Arthur Brooke was a brother of Lord Cobham can thus be ruled out. Yet Machyn, a reliable contemporary witness, asserts that it was "one of Lord Cobham's brothers" who died in the shipwreck. Could there have been another youth in Lord Cobham's household who might have been known to outsiders as Lord Cobham's "brother"?

Three "nephews" are mentioned in the 1558 will of George Brooke, seventh Lord Cobham. These three "nephews" were the offspring of his late brother Thomas, who had died in 1547, and who had been a member of the household staff of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. He married Cranmer's niece, Susan, and they had a son, Cranmer Brooke (MacCullough 203). According to a pedigree in The Harleian Society's *Visitation of Kent*, 1619 (Figure 1, next page): "Tho. Brooke fil' 2dus Tho. fil. Joh'is Baronis de Cobham" married "Susanna filia . . . Cramner [sic] vidua Glearke." They had two sons "Cramner [sic] Brooke de Ashford" and "Edwardus Brooke miles occisus in praelio" ("Edward Brooke, knight, killed in battle"). No further details regarding Edward Brooke are given in the pedigree. Presumably he was killed in battle before he had an opportunity to marry and beget heirs.

Cranmer Brooke did marry, however. His wife is named in the pedigree as "Abell filia



The Brooke pedigree from the Visitation of Kent, 1619. (Cranmer is misspelled in the original.)

Joh'is Fogg Militis.” And immediately beneath the name Cranmer Brooke in the pedigree appears the note “Ar. fil. et haeres” (“Arthur, son and heir”).

The relationships shown in this Brooke pedigree are consistent with other historical records which have a bearing on the identity of Arthur Brooke. Thus, the “Ar. fil. et haeres” named in this pedigree is almost certainly the Arthur Brooke who wrote *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* and who perished in the wreck of *The Greyhound* on March 19th, 1563.

This view is supported by the coat of arms given in the pedigree, which is that of the Lords Cobham: “Gules, on a chevron argent a lion rampant sable, ducally crowned or.” In addition, the pedigree itself indicates that the person who provided the information for it was a reliable source: William Brooke, son and heir of Cranmer Brooke by his wife Abell Fogg. Moreover, McKeen’s exhaustive researches into the life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, confirm the relationships given in the pedigree. A genealogical chart at the end of McKeen’s two-volume life of Cobham shows the marriage of Thomas Brooke (d. 1547) and Susan (Cranmer) Clarke (whose third husband was Anthony Vaughan). Finally, as stated earlier, George Brooke’s will of 1558 mentions three “nephews”, the offspring of his late brother Thomas. The word “nephew” was used more loosely in Elizabethan times than it is today. It could certainly have included a great-nephew, which was what Arthur Brooke was to George Brooke, seventh Lord Cobham.

The Brooke pedigree also accords with the five documents which Munro examined in his quest to establish the identity of Arthur Brooke, particularly the entry in Machyn’s diary in

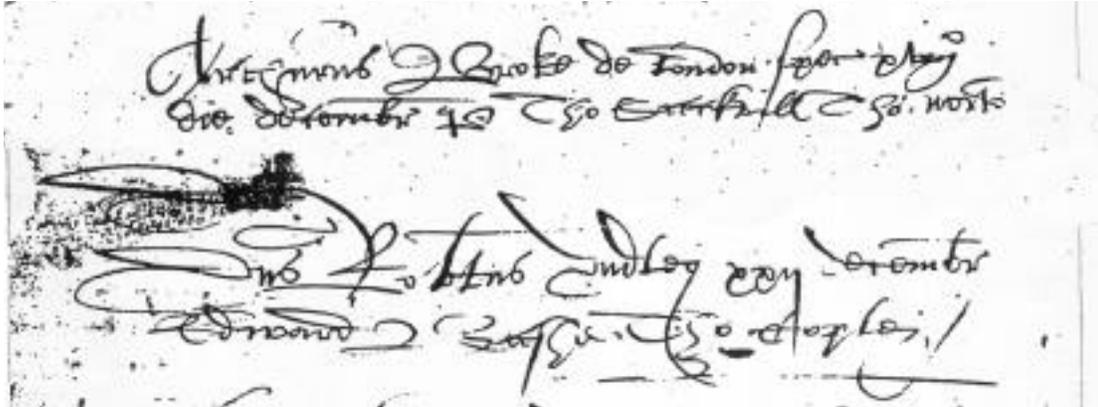


Figure 2: The notice (top) in the Inner Temple admission register for 1547-71 reads: "Arthur Broke, of London. 18th December. Specially admitted. Pleg. Tho. Sackvill, Tho. Norton." The one beneath it reads: "Lord Robert Dudley, 22nd December. Pleg. Edward Bashe, Tho. Copley." Dudley was Lord Governor at the Christmas festivities in December 1561.

which Arthur Brooke is called a "brother" of William Brooke, eighth Lord Cobham. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the Elizabethan period the word "brother" could be used to refer to a variety of male kinsmen: "brother. b. including more distant kin: A kinsman, as uncle, nephew, cousin." It may be that Machyn used the word "brother" in this loose sense, or it may simply be that Machyn was uninformed about Arthur Brooke's true relationship to Lord Cobham. If Arthur Brooke was living in Lord Cobham's household, it would have been easy for Machyn and others to have mistaken him for one of Lord Cobham's many brothers. The truth, however, seems to be that Arthur Brooke was the son of Lord Cobham's first cousin, Cranmer Brooke.

### Arthur Brooke as a law student at the Middle Temple

On February 4th 1562, the Inner Temple Parliament ordered that 'arthur broke shall have a speciall admittance without anything paying in consideration of certen playes & shoves in christmas last, set forth by hym' (Cunliffe 517). It would appear, however, that Arthur Brooke had been admitted to the Middle Temple as a law student nearly two months earlier, on December 18th 1561. A transcript of the December 18th admission obtained from the Middle Temple archives by the late Tal Wilson records that Arthur Brooke of London was specially admitted on that date with Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton as his pledges (Figure 2, above). Sackville and Norton are known to students of English literature as the authors of *Gorboduc*, one of the earliest of English tragedies. *Gorboduc* was acted in the Inner

Temple Hall on Twelfth Night 1561 (Drabble 231), and it is interesting to find Arthur Brooke himself, according to the Middle Temple records, involved with dramatic activities in the Christmas season of the year of his admission.

One might well wonder how Arthur Brooke came to have Sackville and Norton as pledges for his admission to the Middle Temple. A possible answer lies in the fact that Thomas Norton and Arthur Brooke were distantly related by marriage. Norton was Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's son-in-law (Graves 20) and, as has been mentioned earlier; Arthur Brooke was likely the grandson of Archbishop Cranmer's niece, Susan (Cranmer) Brooke. This relationship can be placed in a larger context of political links between Archbishop Cranmer, and the Brookes, Lords Cobham. George Brooke, seventh Lord Cobham, was a close friend of Archbishop Cranmer, and one of Cranmer's chief allies in Kent, and, as was mentioned earlier, George Brooke's brother, Thomas (d.1547), was in Archbishop Cranmer's service. Later Archbishop Cranmer was one of those who helped clear the way for the marriage of George Brooke, Lord Cobham's daughter, Elizabeth, to the divorced William Parr, Marquess of Northampton (MacCulloch 367). When viewed against this background, Thomas Norton's sponsorship of Arthur Brooke seems a natural outgrowth of the familial and political links between the Cranmer and Brooke families.

### **Did de Vere know Arthur Brooke?**

Oxford and Arthur Brooke were both connected to the nobility, were only a few years apart in age, and shared an interest in literary pursuits. Moreover, Lord Cobham and Lord Burghley were very close personal friends, and it seems likely that Lord Cobham would have been a visitor at Cecil House in the Strand where Oxford lived from 1562 on (77). In addition, Oxford and Lord Cobham were both related to the Nevilles, Earls of Westmorland. Clearly these two young men, Oxford and Arthur Brooke, were members of the same circle.

Given these connections, the likelihood is strong that Oxford was personally acquainted with Arthur Brooke. In any case it seems impossible that Oxford would not have been familiar with the long poem with which Brooke is credited, the *Tragicall History of Romeus and Juliett*. Since this is the acknowledged principal source of one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, *Romeo and Juliet*, we find that, as with Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, personal ties can be demonstrated between the author of a main source for a work of Shakespeare and Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford. \_\_\_\_\_ ©

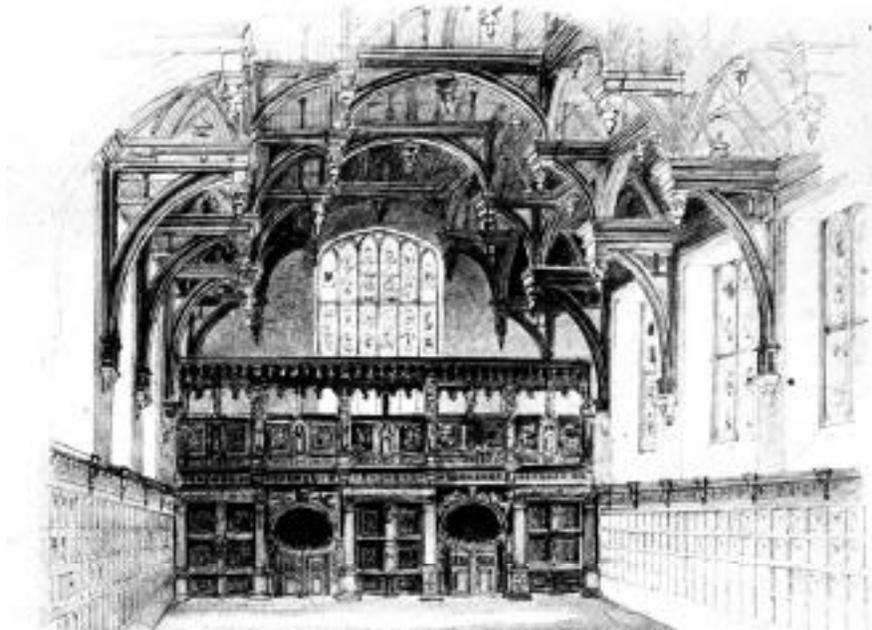
## Appendix

An Epitaph on the death of Master Arthur Brooke,  
drowned in passing to Newhaven.

At point to end and finish this my Book,  
Came good report to me, and willed me write  
A doleful verse, in praise of Arthur Brooke,  
That age to come lament his fortune might.  
Agreed, quoth I, for sure his virtues were  
As many as his years in number few:  
The Muses him in learned laps did bear,  
And Pallas' dug this dainty Bab did chew.  
Apollo lent him lute for solace' sake  
To sound his verse by touch of stately string,  
And of the never fading bay did make  
A laurel crown, about his brows to cling,  
In proof that he for metre did excel,  
As may be judged by Juliet and her mate:  
For there he showed his cunning passing well  
When he the tale to English did translate.  
But, what? as he to foreign realm was bound,  
With others moe his sovereign queen to serve,  
Amid the seas unlucky youth was drowned,  
More speedy death than such one did deserve.  
Ay me, that time, thou crooked Dolphin, where  
Was thou, Arion's help and only stay,  
That safely him from sea to shore didst bear?  
When Brooke was drowned why wast thou then away?  
If sound of harp thine ear delighted so  
And causer was that he bestrid thy back,  
Then doubtless thou moughtst well on Brooke bestow  
As good a turn to save him from the wrack.  
For sure his hand Arion's harp excelled,  
His pleasant pen did pass the other's skill,  
Whoso his book with judging eye beheld  
Gave thanks to him and praised his learned quill.

Thou cruel Gulf, what meanst thou to devour  
With supping seas a jewel of such fame?  
Why didst thou so with water mar the flower,  
That Pallas thought so curiously to frame?  
Unhappy was the haven which he sought,  
Cruel the seas whereon his ship did glide,  
The winds so rough that Brooke to ruin brought,  
Unskilful he that undertook to guide.  
But sithens tears can not revoke the dead,  
Nor cries recall a drowned man to land:  
Let this suffice t'extol the life he led  
And print his praise in house of Fame to stande,  
That they that after us shall be and live  
Deserved praise to Arthur Brooke may give.

George Turberville, *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs and Sonnets*  
(Munro 143b-144b)



*The great hall of the Middle Temple, where plays were performed, including some of Shakespeare's.*

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Arthur Brooks is a Harvard professor, PhD social scientist, bestselling author, and columnist at The Atlantic who specializes in using the highest levels of science and philosophy to provide people with actionable strategies to live their best lives. Arthur Brooks is a Harvard professor, PhD social scientist, bestselling author, and columnist at The Atlantic who specializes in using the highest levels of science and philosophy to provide people with actionable strategies to live their best lives. Meet Arthur. Featured In. Keynote Speaking. As a behavioral social scientist, prolific author, and in-demand speaker, Arthur has given over 1,400 speeches in the last decade in 145 cities around the world.