

Prelude

THIS IS THE story of a hunt that began when a parcel of immaculately drawn diagrams arrived at my home through the post some twenty-five years ago and that has continued right up to the publication of this book.

In 1992 I became the licensee of the Collection and published my first book, *The Byrom Collection* in 1992. My work with the drawings had really begun.

A reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe was about to be built in Southwark, London. It was my wish that the theatre drawings in the Collection should be in the public domain to help with that project, if possible. An understandable aspiration, I thought, but I had not anticipated the challenges which that wish brought. Establishing the provenance of the drawings, and the absence of experts who understood the geometry and numerology inherent in them, were only two of the major difficulties I had to face. But I found an important clue in my hunt when I was able to identify certain brass plates connected with some of the drawings and decided to search for the place where those plates could have been made. This led me to Tintern in Monmouthshire, where the first brassworks in England and Wales was set up in 1568. A detailed account of this part of my adventure is given in *Kingdom for a Stage*, published in 2001.

A further ten years on and I have learned totally unexpected facts about the history of Tintern, its medieval origins, the great landowners of the area – particularly the various families of the Herbert dynasty including the Elizabethan Earls of Pembroke and their forebears – and the role of Sir Francis Bacon, his involvement with the brassworks and his association with individuals connected with the playhouses and players. The church and churchyard of St. Michael at Tintern Parva in particular have produced a succession of surprises.

'History' is the perceived view of past events recorded for posterity. But that perceived view is always subject to change. New facts, once proven, have to be accommodated. Our universities have hitherto been the traditional channels for original research, and been responsible for the adjustment of past perceptions. However today, with such rapid technological

changes in the dissemination of information, they no longer have control of all new data.

Moreover, in the UK at present, socioeconomic and commercial pressures seem to influence more and more the academic areas that merit particular attention. In this context the private researcher becomes an even rarer figure whose views receive comparatively little consideration. I am not complaining when I say I have enjoyed neither public bursary nor private patronage to carry out my research. I merely wish to disabuse others of that mistaken assumption. I have financed my work myself, believing in the importance of the Collection and its value to scholarship at large.

My hope is that, in sharing the fruits of my personal odyssey with others, some of the connections made along the way may be of use to them and perhaps throw light on related subjects that they themselves pursue.

Some mysteries still remain to tantalise us, but this hidden chapter in our country's cultural history is now ready to be revealed.

Bon voyage.