

## HENRY KING, A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE POET

The poet and cleric Henry King was born, in the year 1592 at Worminghall, a village close to the border with Oxfordshire.

Three generations of the family had associations with the parish, for both Henry himself and his father John were born there, while his son John founded the fine set of almshouses in the village . The family clearly had a long association with Worminghall, but each as adults followed a life as clerics so that inevitably they each acquired positions in the Church of England in places well beyond the bounds of Buckinghamshire.

Henry's father John had risen through the church hierarchy eventually to be Bishop of London, while Henry himself later was to move to Chichester and serve as Bishop there. He was educated at Westminster School, then moved on to Christ Church in Oxford where his father served as Dean, and soon after graduation, he was ordained priest, rising rapidly to become Archdeacon of Colchester in 1517.

That year he met and married Anne Berkeley a well born young woman with whom he was said to be "ideally happy". It is a sad reality that life in the seventeenth century could be short, even for the upper classes, and that death grazed voraciously on a population unprotected from accident and disease , so little wonder that she herself died young in 1524, after four of her six children died in infancy.

Deeply mourning, King wrote what some have described as one of the greatest elegiac poems in the English language – "The Exequy".

Sleep on my *Love* in thy cold bed  
Never to be disquieted!  
My last good night! Thou wilt not wake  
Till I thy fate shall overtake:  
Till age, or grief, or sickness must  
Marry my body to that dust  
It so much loves; and fill the room  
My heart keeps empty in thy Tomb.  
Stay for me there; I will not fail  
To meet thee in that hollow Vale.  
And think not much of my delay;  
I am already on the way,  
And follow thee with all the speed  
Desire can make, or sorrow breed.

Much of King's poetry is inevitably religious, but he also wrote secular verse. He is to be associated with that loose grouping of lyricists later to be called the Metaphysical Poets, and among his friends were the best known of the metaphysicals, John Donne, and the playwright Ben Jonson.

Many of his poems are elegies, including a lengthy lament on the death of King Charles I, executed in 1649 at the end of the Civil War. King had been on the Royalist side during that troubled period when Parliamentary victory resulted in the

abolition of the episcopacy; for three years, he returned to Buckinghamshire and lived with his son at Langley in the south of the county. He died in 1669, and it was a year later that another son, John King, founded as a memorial to his father the almshouses that adorn the village.

**Graham Aylett.**