

## QUESTION 44

What part did Delia Bacon play in the Shakespeare authorship discussion?

Graham Holderness

The Shakespeare Authorship controversy really begins with a remarkable New England scholar Delia Bacon, who in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century concluded that there was an inexplicable gap between the Shakespeare biography, and the philosophical understanding to be found in the works. The plays must therefore have been written by a group of educated and worldly courtiers, including Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh, who hoped to replace monarchical tyranny with republican liberty, but in defeat turned to literature, writing under cover of the Shakespeare disguise. Bacon used remarkably modern methods of literary analysis, argued that the plays were written collaboratively, and that they contained a radical political agenda, all many years before these ideas became current. But her intellectual isolation forced her into the pursuit of a ‘monomania’, and her unfortunate collapse into mental illness enabled her opponents cruelly to label her as a madwoman. In every respect her career shaped the future of the Shakespeare Authorship Question.