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Raphael Holinshed

Complete Works



Series Fourteen

The Complete Works of
RAPHAEL HOLINSHED

(c. 1525-1582)



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God save the Queene.

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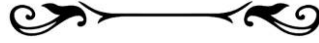
The Complete Works of
RAPHAEL HOLINSHED



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Complete Works of Raphael Holinshed



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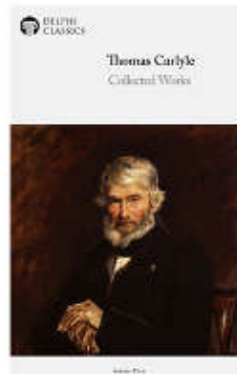
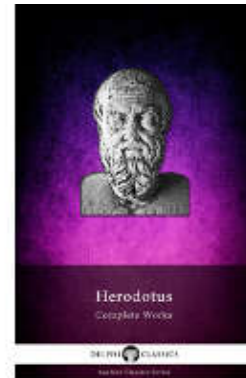
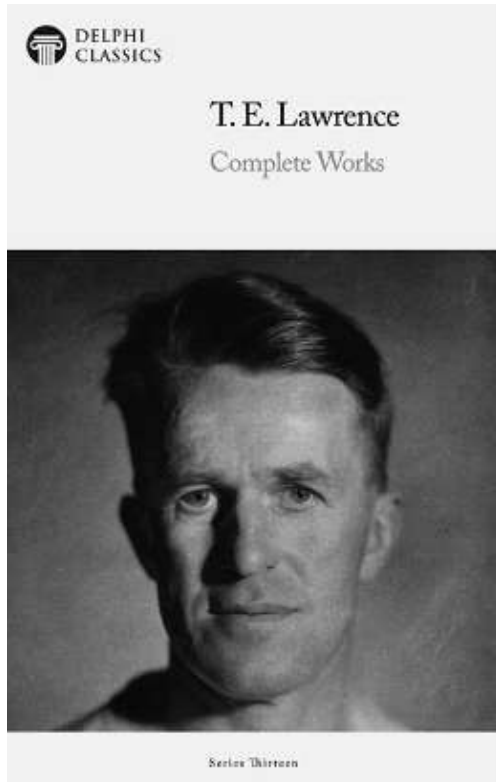
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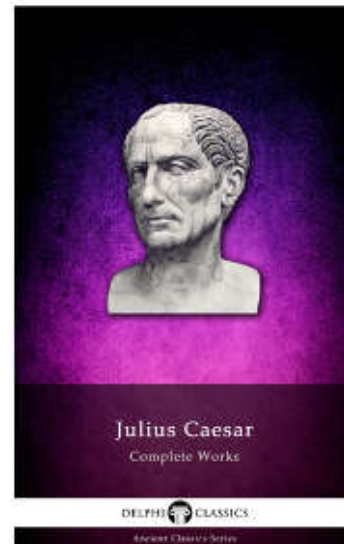
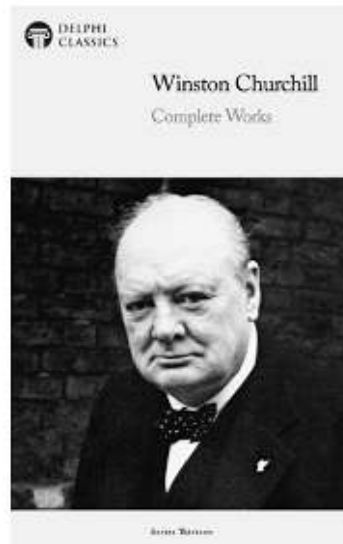
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HISTORY AT DELPHI



The English Chronicles



Sutton Common, Cheshire — little is known about Holinshed's life. He was most likely born to Ralph Holinshed of Cophurst in Sutton Downes.

Brief Introduction to Raphael Holinshed



The celebrated Renaissance-era English chronicler Raphael Holinshed appears to have been born in Cheshire in c. 1525. We know very little about his life. He is assumed to have received an education from Christ's College in Cambridge, which lists a student under the name Holinshed attending the college from 1544 to 1545. In his later years, he frequented London, where he worked as a translator for the printer Reginald Wolfe.

In 1548 Wolfe had hit upon the idea of a "Universal Cosmography of the whole world, and therewith also certain particular histories of every known nation". He wanted the work to be printed in English, with maps and illustrations. Wolfe acquired many of John Leland's works, and with these he constructed chronologies and drew maps that were up to date. When he realised he could not complete this project on his own, he hired Holinshed and William Harrison to assist him. It is likely that due to his experiences at Cambridge University, Holinshed had achieved a respected reputation as a translator. It appears that he produced no other works — so occupied was he with the gargantuan project of the 'Chronicles'.

Wolfe died with the work still uncompleted in 1573. The project then shifted to a work specifically about the British Isles and it was run by a consortium of three members of the Stationers' Company. They retained Holinshed, who employed Harrison, Richard Stanyhurst, Edmund Campion and John Hooker. In 1577, the work was published in two volumes after censorship by the Privy Council of some of Stanyhurst's contributions on Ireland.

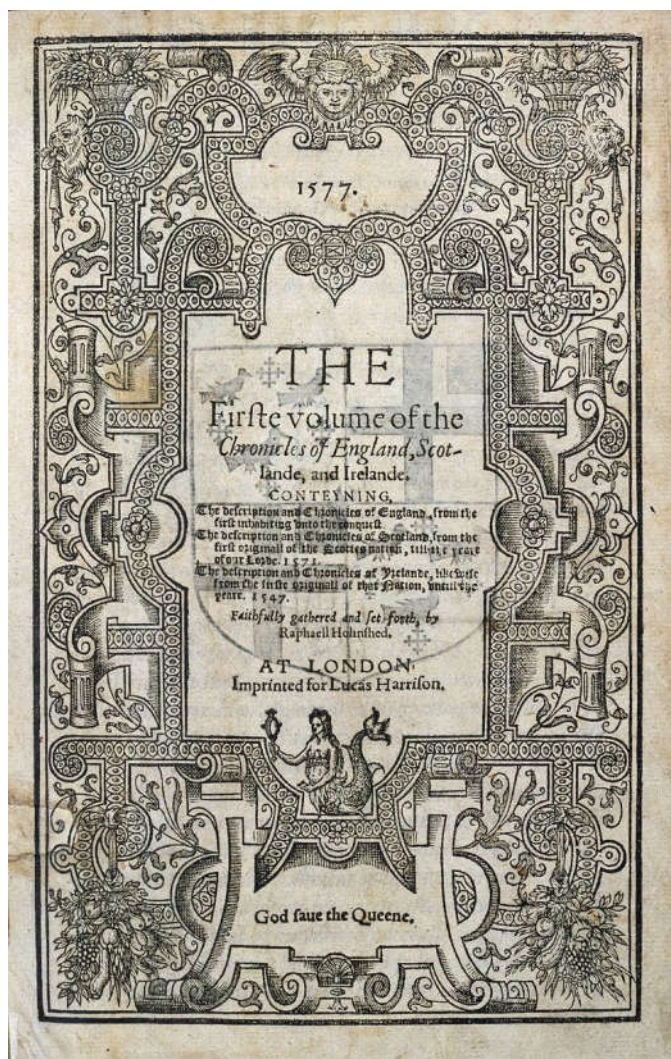
A few months after the grand work had been licensed, Holinshed had retired to the countryside near Warwick, where he died in c. 1580. His will was proven on 24 April 1582, leaving his belongings and estate to a Mr. Burdet, whom he referred to as his master. The 'Chronicles' was published soon after his death. The collaborative work was characterised by a set of rhetorical figures and thematic paradigms that establish the national, royal, chivalrous and heroic ideals defining a state, its monarch, its leaders and the political role of the common people.

William Shakespeare, as well as numerous other writers of his day, is believed to have used the revised second edition of the 'Chronicles' (1587) as the source for the majority of his history plays, the plot of *Macbeth* and portions of *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*. Shakespeare's most famous 'borrowing' is his extensive use of the tale of Macbeth, though there are significant modifications. One instance is the Three Witches, whom Holinshed describes as "creatures of the elderwood... nymphs or fairies". Nymphs and fairies were generally viewed as beautiful and youthful, but Shakespeare's witches are characterised as ugly, dark and bizarre. The playwright made these changes to heighten the suspense and darkness of the play. Also, the 'Chronicles' provide no descriptions of Macbeth's character, so Shakespeare improvises on several points. The characters of Banquo and Fleance were also taken from Holinshed's work, but they are now considered to be inventions of the sixteenth century. In Holinshed, the character of Macbeth is primarily depicted as a good ruler, a king, who was fair and just for 17 years. The plot portrays King Duncan as a minor and weak king. It is possible that the reading of Shakespeare's King Duncan was inspired by the tale of King Duffe also contained within the 'Chronicle'. This story follows a similar narrative, as King Duffe and his murderer Donwald's actions echo

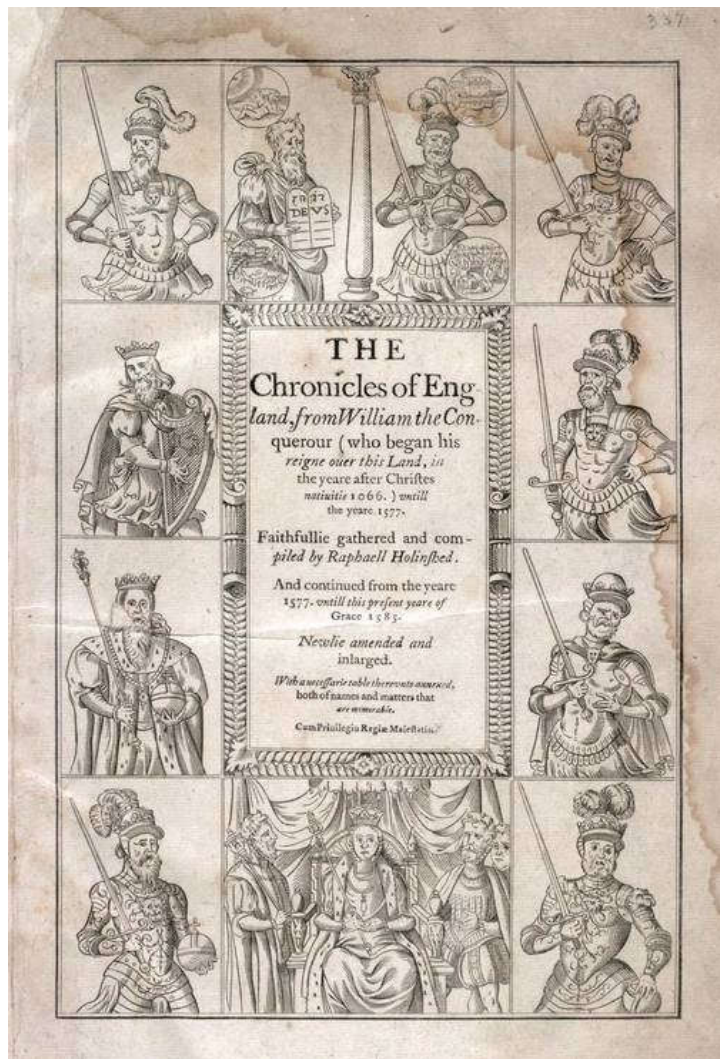
the narrative of King Duncan and Macbeth. The bad omens following the murder of Duffe are similarly mirrored in Shakespeare's tragedy.

The 'Chronicles' was compiled largely uncritically from many sources of varying degrees of trustworthiness. The introductory description of England and the English was the work of Harrison, while Stanyhurst completed the sections relating to Ireland. Holinshed himself was largely responsible for the history of England and Scotland, the latter being mainly translated from the works of Hector Boethius and John Mair. On its first publication in 1577, the 'Chronicles' enjoyed an eager welcome and wide and lasting popularity. It provided a valuable repertory of historical information that was not readily available to the majority of Tudor readers. The enormous number of authorities cited attests Holinshed's and his successors' industry. The style is clear and never elevated. His protestant bias is very marked throughout and his treatment of early times is uncritical. The Elizabethan dramatists drew many of their plots from Holinshed's pages, which in turn helped change the course of English literature and establish its reputation of pre-eminence in drama.

The texts of the first and second editions were expurgated and the excisions from the second edition were published separately in 1723. An edition of the complete, unexpurgated text of 1587, edited by Sir Henry Ellis and titled 'Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland' was published in six volumes in 1807. This is the text that appears in this collection.



The 1577 first edition title page



The 1587 title page

An Historical Description of the Island of Britain



1807 TEXT, EDITED BY SIR HENRY ELLIS

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TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE, AND HIS SINGULAR GOOD LORD AND
MAISTER, *S. WILLIAM BROOKE KNIGHT*,

THE NAMES OF THE AUTHORS FROM WHOME THIS *HISTORIE OF
ENGLAND* IS COLLECTED.

CARMEN CHRONOLOGICON THOMÆ NEWTONI CESTRESHYRIJ.

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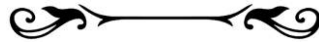
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THE CHRONICLES OF holinshed having become exceedingly scarce, and, from their Rarity and Value, having always brought a high Price whenever they have appeared for Sale, the Publishers have thought they should perform an acceptable Service to the Public by reprinting them in a uniform, handsome, and modern Form.

It cannot now be necessary to state the Importance and interesting Nature of this Work. The high Price for which it has always sold, is a sufficient Testimony of the Esteem in which it has been held. Holinshed's Description of Britain is allowed to contain the most curious and authentic Account of the Manners and Customs of our Island in the Reign of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, in which it was written. His History of the Transactions of the British Isles, during these Periods, possesses all the Force and Value of contemporary Evidence, collected by a most skilful Observer; and the peculiar Style and Orthography in which the Work is written, furnish a very interesting Document to illustrate the History of the English Language.

The original Edition of the Chronicles of Holinshed, it is well known, was published by their Author in a mutilated State. A Number of Pages, which had obviously been printed with the rest of the Work, were found to be omitted, except in a few Copies obtained by some favoured Persons. In the present Edition, these Castrations are faithfully restored; and in order that the Purchaser may depend upon finding an exact as well as a perfect Copy, it has been a Law with the Publishers, not to alter a single Letter, but to print the Work with the utmost Fidelity from the best preceding Edition, with the Author's own Orthography, and with his marginal Notes. The only Liberty taken, has been to use the Types of the present Day, instead of the old English Letter of the Time of Elizabeth.

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