

## *Twelfth Night* on Twelfth Night

Suppose I could convince you that William Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* for a performance before Queen Elizabeth I on Twelfth Night, 6 January 1601/02? Suppose I demonstrated that Shakespeare laced his play with anagrams because the Queen loved word-games, and anagrams were all the rage at Court? What if I persuaded you that Thomas Nashe (masquerading as the court fool Will Sommers) was his inspiration for Feste? And I deciphered the name of the mysterious Quinapalus as an anagram of two saints – and Picrogromitus as the anagram of a Pope? To ice this improbable cake, what if I could prove beyond a reasonable doubt that, *by royal fiat*, the ‘twelve day of December’ was Christmas in Elizabeth’s England – and Sir Toby’s mock-carol is only one of the play’s calendrical pranks? Finally, suppose I could persuade you that Shakespeare’s comedy about fraternal twins (with the boy believed lost at sea and drowned) is the playwright’s attempt to reconcile himself to the death of his only son?

If I could do all that, it would change the way you (and the rest of us) think about *Twelfth Night* – wouldn’t it?

That’s precisely what I intend to do – and I’ll begin by proving that during the Christmas revels of 1601/02, Shakespeare and Company played before Queen Elizabeth on Twelfth Night.

### The royal performance on Twelfth Night

John Manningham’s diary tells us that on the night of 2 February 1601/02 a crowd of privileged young Englishmen and their mistresses and wives attended a play believed to be Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* in the hall of the Middle Temple, one of London’s four legal-social men’s foundations collectively known as the Inns

of Court.<sup>1</sup> The occasion was Candlemas, officially the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (Anglican), the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic), and the Blessing of the Candles (both). It was also a traditional night for playing, being the closing night of Elizabethans' hyper-extended wintertime revels which began at Christmas.<sup>2</sup>

In 2000, Anthony Arlidge QC, defender of the White House Farm murderer Jeremy Bamber and Master of Entertainments at the Middle Temple, proposed that *Twelfth Night* had its premiere at that venue on Candlemas 1601/02.<sup>3</sup> Arlidge's brief received cool reception; there was a sense that we had been down this road (to disappointment) before with Leslie Hotson.<sup>4</sup> What most severely taxed Arlidge's argument is that the play is named for Twelfth Night, not *Candlemas*, or *What You Will*. That it might have been written for or received a first performance on 2 February struck a loud discordant note.

I propose to put the question of *Twelfth Night's* royal (and perhaps first) performance to rest.<sup>5</sup>

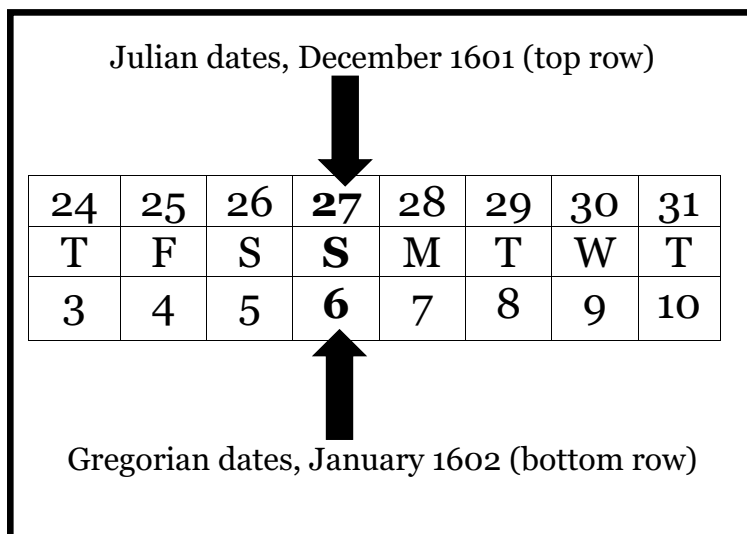
Although scholars have carefully scrutinized the records of year-end royal revels for 1601/02, they have failed to notice an important detail. I will demonstrate that Shakespeare's company performed before the Queen on a previously unrecognized date: Twelfth Night, 6 January 1601/02. Allow me to make that good.

During the Christmas revels of 1601/02 seven court performances are recorded. The dates are 26 and 27 December; 1, 3, 6, and 10 January; plus one more on 14 February, St Valentine's Day.<sup>6</sup> So there was a performance of a play before the Queen on Twelfth Night, 6 January. But records show that the company which performed that night wasn't the Lord Chamberlain's Men but the Children of the Chapel. For their part, we know that the Chamberlain's Men (likely including Shakespeare) performed before the Queen on four dates: 26 and 27 December, 1 January, and 14 February.

*What scholars have failed to recognize is that Sunday 27 December 1601 in the antiquated English Julian calendar was, according to the reformed Gregorian calendar, Sunday 6 January 1602, Twelfth Night.*

Figure 1 shows the rival calendars with the eight last days of Julian 1601 matched to the corresponding dates in the Gregorian

Julian dates, December 1601 (top row)



24	25	26	<b>27</b>	28	29	30	31
T	F	S	<b>S</b>	M	T	W	T
3	4	5	<b>6</b>	7	8	9	10

Gregorian dates, January 1602 (bottom row)

1 Julian and Gregorian calendars, 1601–02

calendar for January 1602. As one can see, the date on which Shakespeare's company performed at Court – Sunday 27 December Julian – was Sunday 6 January Gregorian, Twelfth Night.<sup>7</sup> But would Elizabethans who were living by the scientifically discredited Julian calendar be aware of the 'correct' date in the Gregorian reformed calendar?

After the Bible, almanacs were the most widely circulated printed documents in Shakespeare's England. Almanac-makers – who counted many recusant Catholics among their subscribers – routinely printed the rival calendars side by side in so-called 'dual almanacks' as an 'aide to travellers', or so they claimed. Figure 2 shows a typical example, December in *Farmer's Almanacke*: the Julian dates are in the first left column, the Gregorian in the fifth. Looking closely at the entry for 27 December Julian, one can see that the left column lists the Julian 27 December beside the entry 'John Evang.', signifying the Feast of St John Evangelist. The corresponding Gregorian date is 6 January, which is followed by the entry 'Epiphanie', that is, Twelfth Night.

It was common knowledge among lettered Elizabethans that while they were observing the Feast of St John the Catholic world

Julian date			Gregorian date			
24	a	< Fast	Capri. 1.	3	d	
25	b	Christmas day	Capri. 14	4	e	New Moone.
26	c	Steven martyr	Capri. 25	5	f	the .xxv. daye
27	d	John Evangelist	Aqua. 9	6	g	Epiphany
28	e	Innocents	Aqua. 20	7	A	

2 *Farmer's Almanacke*, December 1601

was celebrating Twelfth Night. And that included many families in those parts of England where the Old Religion haunted the shadows. As Richard Wilson exhibited so persuasively in *Secret Shakespeare*, the playwright's home town of Stratford and the county of Warwickshire were thick with recusants and riddled with priest-holes. Shakespeare, we can be sure, knew 27 December was Twelfth Night.<sup>8</sup>

We now recognize that Shakespeare and company performed before the Queen on Twelfth Night. But was their play *Twelfth Night*? While we have no certain knowledge, we may be able to draw an appealing inference.

In December 1601 the company's repertory included a number of luminous alternatives. Setting aside Shakespeare's histories as long in the tooth and inappropriate for a festive evening, the company might have played *Julius Caesar* or an early *Hamlet* (neither a dainty dish to set before a Queen) or *As You Like It*, which I believe they had played before Elizabeth on Twelfth Night one year earlier during the visit of Duke Orsini (see the discussion below). Among other candidates, *Much Ado* had been assigned to the printers, as had *Merchant*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, which suggests that those plays were past their prime.

Yes, the company could have played any number of old plays by Shakespeare or new plays by other authors. But, thumbing the company's repertory of Shakespeare plays on hand, *Twelfth Night* becomes an attractive choice for a royal audience, a royal venue, and, above all, the occasion. I will show that on the basis of

internal evidence, that Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* with an eye towards two performances: one before Elizabeth on 6 January 1602 Gregorian, and a second at the Inns of Court on 2 February 1601/02 Julian.

### *Twelfth Night*, Twelfth Night, and Candlemas

The holy day known as Twelfth Night is also known as the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord (Anglican and Catholic),<sup>9</sup> which remembers the discovery by the Magi of the infant Jesus in the manger.<sup>10</sup> In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* the action climaxes when – for the first time in three months and one day – Viola and her brother Sebastian discover each other alive. Seeing the identical (though fraternal) twins side by side before her, Olivia cries, 'Most wonderful!' (5.1.219). In Shakespeare's time 'wonderful' had not lost its sense of the miraculous. In *Henry V*, when the King reads out a report of the scale of the English victory at Agincourt, Exeter exclaims, 'Tis wonderful!', that is, miraculous (4.8.114). Henry immediately declares, 'Come, go we in procession to the village: And be it death proclaimed through our host To boast of this or take that praise from God Which is his only' (115–18).

Candlemas celebrates two acts of recognition described in the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 2. On the fortieth day after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem to complete the rites of *post-partum* purification required of Jewish mothers. She brought with her the infant Jesus, a first-born son. In the Temple the family first encountered Simeon, to whom it had been revealed 'by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ'. Luke describes Simeon taking the baby Jesus in his arms and declaring, 'mine eyes have seen thy salvation ... A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel' (Luke 2:22–32). This is overheard by the elderly widow and prophetess Anna, who 'gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him [Jesus] to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38).

On Candlemas, 2 February, the audience at the Inns of Court was offered a play which climaxes in two acts of recognition, Viola-Sebastian and Sebastian-Viola, presented on a holy day commemorating two acts of recognition. Perhaps this association stuck; twenty years later Shakespeare's company, then the King's

Men, would perform *Twelfth Night* before James at Whitehall on Candlemas, 2 February 1622.<sup>11</sup>

But *Twelfth Night* is equally appropriate as an entertainment for Twelfth Night, 6 January, the Feast of Epiphany and commemoration of the recognition of the infant Jesus by the Magi. The fifth act of Shakespeare's play is packed with epiphanies large and small – including Olivia's discovery Malvolio is not mad, his discovery that Maria wrote the letter that gulled him, everyone's discovery that Toby and Maria have married. The centrepiece of these epiphanies is the twins' discovery that they're both alive – coupled with Orsino discovering that Cesario is the eligible female Viola – and Olivia's discovery that her new husband Sebastian is a complete and utter stranger (which, remarkably, doesn't alarm her in the slightest).

Clearly, the play is appropriate to both occasions. But wherefore came its strange title, *Twelfth Night*, or *What You Will*?

### What who will?

For centuries, the phrase *or What You Will* has been a bafflement to Shakespeare's commentators and directors alike. Much of this difficulty derives from mistaking 2 February as the date of the play's first performance, or for which it was purpose-written. True, time out of mind, religious plays and pageants had been performed in English churches at Candlemas; many portrayed the visit of Mary and Joseph to the Temple and the recognition of infant Jesus. And *Twelfth Night* does climax with a powerful scene of mutual recognition. But, as noted, Shakespeare named his play for Twelfth Night, not Candlemas.

As to speculation about the first night of *Twelfth Night*, Leslie Hotson simply got it wrong when he argued Shakespeare wrote the play as the entertainment at Whitehall on Twelfth Night 1600/01 for Elizabeth and Duke Orsini. Shakespeare's play features a young woman nicknamed 'Madonna' – a name associated with the Virgin Queen of Heaven – who is courted by a duke named Orsino. And Elizabeth did style herself the 'Virgin Queen'. But had Virginio Orsini really travelled to London with flirtation in mind? Virginio was married, and a play implying a liaison with Elizabeth would have given offence to both parties, not to mention Orsini's wife, Flavia. In fact, after the play Orsini wrote to her, describing the

evening's entertainment as *una comedia mèscolata, con musiche e balli*, a comedy mixed with music and dancing.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the choice of entertainment, we know that Lord Chamberlain George Carey earlier had made a note to remind himself

to confer with my Lord Admirall and the Master of the Revells for takeing order generally with the players to make choyse of play that shalbe best furnished with rich apparel, have great variety and change of Musicke and daunces, and of a Subject that may be most pleasing to her Majestie.<sup>13</sup>

*Twelfth Night* fulfils all the conditions of Orsini's and Carey's descriptions save one: there are no dances intrinsic to the play except for the capering of Toby and Andrew in 1.3, though the players may have performed their traditional jig at its conclusion. On the other hand, both Orsini's and Carey's descriptions neatly fit *As You Like It*; as noted, I believe this play joined the repertory of the Chamberlain's Men by May 1600, and it was this play that was performed before Orsini, Queen, and Court on Twelfth Night 1600/01. *As You Like It* includes music, singing, and dancing as well as Rosalind's gentle jibe at Italian influence on the tastes and manners of English tourists returning from the Continent – certain to elicit a round laugh from its English auditors and a knowing smile from their noble guest (4.1.30–4). As I have suggested above, Shakespeare had completed *As You Like It* in early 1600 to commemorate the seven years' anniversary of the death on 30 May 1593 of his friend and mentor, Christopher Marlowe.<sup>14</sup> The play was in hand, and was a letter-perfect response to Carey's requirements for a royal performance on Twelfth Night 1600/01.

As for *Twelfth Night*, in 1958 L. G. Salinger noted that the play embodies the sense of revelry and misrule that were traditional in Elizabethan celebrations of the Twelve Nights of Christmas.<sup>15</sup> Though certain modern directors have attributed an 'autumnal' atmosphere to the play,<sup>16</sup> its links with Twelfth Night are certainly beyond dispute, and its title is more than appropriate – at least the *Twelfth Night* part. But what about that dependent phrase? What did Shakespeare intend to convey when he wrote '*or What You Will*'? And, not incidentally, who is *You*? Is *You* us, the audience? Or just some general *You*? Or can *You* be a certain someone who had the power to will today's date?

Scholarly attempts to crack the *or What You Will* crux have a long, inglorious, and often humorous history. Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), no mean Shakespearean – he produced in 1726 the *Variorum* and *Shakespeare Restored*, followed by his own edition of the plays in 1733 – wrote to William Warburton: ‘There is no circumstance that I can observe in the Play to give occasion to this name; nothing either to fix it down particularly to Twelfth Night, or to leave it so loose and general a description as What You Will.’<sup>17</sup> A hundred years later, Joseph Hunter (1783–1861) found the play’s title ‘has no kind of propriety or congruity when looked at in connection with this play; and this must have been evident to Shakespeare himself, since he added to it *or What You Will*. It might be called *Twelfth Night* or by whatever other name.’<sup>18</sup> In July 1887, Hermann Conrad writing in the *Preussische Jahrbücher* inferred that Shakespeare, after puzzling over a title for his play, threw up his hands, crying, ‘What to call it, I know not.’ Modern editors have done no better.<sup>19</sup> But the keen-eyed Barbara Everett recognized that ‘the “sub-title” [*or What You Will*] is really no sub-title, but a generic, perhaps primary, and certainly important part of the title.’<sup>20</sup> In fact, the answer to this riddle is surprisingly simple and as calendrical as play’s title.

### The Equinoctial Rule of Eusebius

It had been known for a millennium that the calendar which *Julius Caesar* imposed on the Roman world in 45 BC was faulty. It depended on an estimate of the length of the solar year which was a trifle too long. As a result, the Sun ran ahead of the Julian calendar by one day every 128 years, and the solstices and equinoxes arrived one day earlier each year.<sup>21</sup> By AD 325 the Vernal Equinox which Caesar had set on 23–4 March had precessed to 21 March. This presented a significant problem for the Church: Roman and Alexandrine mathematicians could not agree on the date of Easter, the most important date in the Church calendar. To deal with this and other schismatic issues Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, whose leading light was Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (265–340?). When the Council discovered that their hard-pressed mathematicians still could not agree a solution, they decided to hack the Gordian knot. They published and promulgated an Equinoctial Rule for uniformly dating Easter throughout the Church: henceforth, the first new Moon after 21 March would be



recognized as the Paschal Moon, and Easter would be celebrated on the Sunday following. The Equinoctial Rule associated with Eusebius remained in force for 1,257 years.

In 1582, after his own mathematicians had struggled with the problem for more than a decade, Pope Gregory XIII imposed on Catholic Europe the reformed calendar which bears his name and is now the standard for most of the world. By then, the equinoxes and solstices were observed thirteen days before their nominal dates in Caesar's original calendar; for example, the Vernal Equinox expected on 23–4 March was observed on 10–11 March. To excise the extra days accumulated by the faulty Julian calendar, Gregory removed ten days from October 1582; the day after 4 October became 15 October. Curiously, Gregory did not fully correct the calendar to the year when Caesar imposed it – nor to the year of the birth of Christ – either of which would have obliged him to excise thirteen days from the present year. Instead, Gregory and his advisors chose to align their reformed calendar to AD 325 – when the Equinox had been observed on 21 March – perhaps to commemorate the Council of Nicaea and the Equinoctial Rule of Eusebius, perhaps because ten was an easier (safer?) number to accommodate than thirteen.<sup>22</sup> Gregory's alteration left England, which reckoned by the old Julian calendar, ten days behind. To keep Sun and calendar in synch in future, Gregory decreed that only centennial years divisible by 400 would be leap years – which meant England would fall another day behind in 1700, 1800, and so on.

Not one to be left ten days behind the whole world, Elizabeth consulted mathematicians John Dee, Thomas Herriot, and Thomas Digges, who satisfied her that the Gregorian reform – though Catholic and based on the Nicæan formulation rather than Caesar's original – was substantially correct.<sup>23</sup> But when Elizabeth moved to adopt the new calendar Archbishop Grindal declared he would support a reformed calendar (and martyrology) only 'after consultation with our brethren [co-religionists] overseas'.<sup>24</sup> To allow Grindal to do so would have effectively repealed the Act of Appeals (1533); it was a price Elizabeth could not and would not pay. Despite calls in Parliament for calendar reform, Elizabeth stood firm. As a consequence England continued to live by its outdated, discredited Julian calendar until Lord Chesterfield's reform took effect in 1752.

So it was Elizabeth's royal will – though not her fault – that fixed the English Twelfth Night on 27 December for the next 168 years.

And it is Elizabeth who is the You of Shakespeare's title, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*.

That is the solution to one of Shakespeare's most long-debated and vexatious riddles. Below, I'll suggest solutions to a number of *Twelfth Night*'s other nagging cruces: Who is Quinapalus? Picrogromitus? Who inspired Malvolio and Feste? And what's the meaning of those exasperating letters M.O.A.I.?

### Notes

- 1 Manningham wrote: 'Feb. 2. At our feast wee had a play called "Twelue Night, or What You Will," much like the Commedy of Errores, or *Menechmi* in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practise in it to make the Steward beleeeve his Lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfeyting a letter as from his Lady in generall termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and pre-scribing his gesture in smiling, his appaiaile, &c., and then when he came to practise making him beleeeue they tooke him to be mad.' John Bruce, ed., *Diary of John Manningham, of the Middle Temple, and of Bradbourne, Kent, Barrister-at-Law, 1602–1603* (Westminster: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1868). Manningham took Olivia to be a widow, perhaps because of her black apparel of mourning for her brother.
- 2 On Candlemas Eve, families across England took down the ivy, holly, mistletoe, and assorted greens that had decked their halls and cottages since Advent, and began looking forward to the start of a New Year – 25 March according to the English Julian calendar – the withering of winter and first whispers of spring.
- 3 His most intriguing argument relies on Feste's description of Malvolio's dungeon, 'Why it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clearstores toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony' (4.2.36–8), which hardly describes a dungeon but could make a fair description of the hall of the Middle Temple. Anthony Arlidge, *Shakespeare and the Prince of Love: The Feast of Misrule in the Middle Temple* (London: Giles de la Mare Publishers, 2000).
- 4 Hotson argued that *Twelfth Night* premiered before Elizabeth and an Italian visitor, Don Virginio Orsini, Duke of Bracciano (1572–1615), on Twelfth Night 1600/01. Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (London: Macmillan, 1954).
- 5 Hotson did scholarship a serious disservice by titling his book *The First Night*. ... It hardly seems likely that Shakespeare's company would have performed a new play for the very first time before the monarch.

Court performances were lucrative and prestigious for players, playwright, and patron; they were not to be taken lightly. If my inference is correct and *Twelfth Night* was purpose-written for two performances on 6 January 1602 Gregorian and 2 February Julian 1601/02 ... and if the former date was the Elizabethan equivalent of the modern English 'press night' or premiere ... when and where might the players have 'previewed' their new play so as to work out the staging and the kinks before a live audience? I'd be glad to hear from anyone who can offer insight at drsohmer@aol.com.

- 6 Arlidge, *Shakespeare*, 237.
- 7 Which Elizabethans often referred to as 'Twelfth Day at night' in order to clearly signify not the eve but the evening of 6 January.
- 8 Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion and Resistance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 82.
- 9 During the medieval period, when a day was reckoned to begin at sunset, the eve rather than the night of 5–6 January constituted Twelfth Night.
- 10 Some scholars believe this visit, if it took place at all, came at a time when Jesus was two years of age. See Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, eds, *The Oxford Companion to the Year* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.
- 11 John H. Astington, *English Court Theatre 1558–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 255.
- 12 Hotson, *Twelfth Night*, 15.
- 13 David Cook, ed., *Dramatic Records in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber, 1558–1642*, Malone Society Collections 6 (Oxford: Malone Society, 1962), 31.
- 14 *As You Like It* was entered in the Stationers' Register on 4 August 1600, but remained unpublished until the First Folio of 1623.
- 15 'The sub-plot shows a prolonged season of misrule, or "uncivil rule", in Olivia's household, with Sir Toby turning night into day; there are drinking, dancing and singing, scenes of mock wooing, a mock sword fight, and the gulling of an unpopular member of the household, with Feste mumming it as a priest and attempting a mock exorcism in the manner of the Feast of Fools.' L. G. Salinger, 'The Design of Twelfth Night', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9 (1958), 118.
- 16 Roger Warren and Stanley Wells cite productions by John Barton and Peter Hall in their edition *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.
- 17 Quoted in John Nichols, *Illustrations of the literary history of the eighteenth century: Consisting of authentic memoirs and original letters of eminent persons; and intended as a sequel to the Literary anecdotes* (London, 1817), II.354.

- 18 Joseph Hunter, *New Illustrations of the life, studies, and writings of Shakespeare* (London, 1845), I.396.
- 19 Hermann Conrad, 'Was ihr wollt', *Preussische Jahrbücher*, July–December 1887 (Berlin: George Reimer, 1887), 1–33.
- 20 Barbara Everett, 'Or What You Will', *Essays in Criticism* 35 (1985), 304.
- 21 Caesar's Egyptian mathematician, Sosigenes, calculated the solar tropical year at 365.25 days. To account for the quarter-day, Caesar added a leap day in February every four years so as to keep the date aligned with the cycle of the Sun. But the solar year was only 365.224 days long; Sosigenes' tiny error – 11 minutes, 42 seconds – accumulated to a full day every 128 years. That is: every 128 years the Sun, solstices, and equinoxes precessed (moved earlier) by one day in the calendar.
- 22 Or perhaps because Caesar was a pagan and it was more fitting to refer to a 'Christian' decree than an idolater's.
- 23 Lord Burleigh has left us a charming aide-memoire in which he recalls perusing a treatise by John Dee and consulting him. Dee proposes an alteration of eleven days, and Burleigh admits, 'I am not skillfull in the theoreeks to discern the pointes and minutes, but yet I am inclined to thinke him in the right line.' Burleigh proposes a conference of mathematicians from the universities to assess Dee's proposal. The note closes with a mysterious reference: 'There appeareth great cawse to have this conference accelerated, for that it [the calendar] is requisite, for a secrett matter, to be reformed by November.' William Cecil, 1st Baron Burleigh, 'Memorial Concerning Dr. John Dee's Opinion on the Reformation of the Calendar', British Library, London, MS Lansd. No. 39, Art 14, Orig.
- 24 Edmund Grindal, Archbishop of Canterbury, Letter to Queen Elizabeth, 6 March 1583, British Library, London, Add. MS 32092.