

**The Making of Marlowe: Poet, Playwright, Provocateur: Exhibition at The Beaney
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A new exhibition in Canterbury offers a rare opportunity to encounter Marlowe's world through a wide range of objects, images and texts. Co-curated by The Beaney and The University of Kent's Marlowe Project, this comprehensive yet accessible exhibition brings key aspects of Marlowe's life into focus, giving visitors a tangible sense of the social, educational and religious contexts from which his writing emerged.

The exhibition is relatively compact, occupying one large room, and follows a clear chronological sequence. Beginning with the Marlowe household, visitors can examine the original marriage document between John Marlowe and Katherine Arthur, the parish register that records Marlowe's baptism and an inventory of his father's goods. The accompanying commentary suggests that, while the value of John Marlowe's possessions was not high, the family maintained a well-provisioned household and probably entertained friends at home. This archival evidence is complemented by life-size replicas of the tools, materials and wooden racks used by early modern shoemakers, as well as excavated crockery, cutlery, thimbles, jugs and jars, which help create a vivid picture of everyday life in Canterbury during Marlowe's childhood. A striking map adds a spatial dimension to this picture, identifying places Marlowe would have known, including the Bull Stake, Westgate, Eastbridge Hospital and St George's Church. This emphasis on Marlowe's relationship with Canterbury will be the focus of a forthcoming walking-tour app, advertised at the exhibition, which will enable members of the public to follow in Marlowe's footsteps through the city.

The exhibition then moves beyond Marlowe's household to the demanding education he received at The King's School. Visitors learn that the boys studied for around fifty hours each week, beginning early in the morning with lessons in translation, rhetoric and debate. The inventory of headmaster John Gressop's estate offers a revealing glimpse of the school's intellectual environment, listing a substantial collection of books to which Marlowe likely had access. Sketches of the school's exterior and classrooms illustrate life at the institution, and younger visitors can try writing with a quill as the young Marlowe might have done. Beyond the classroom, notices of contemporary events, such as Elizabeth I's progress to Canterbury in 1573, place Marlowe's childhood firmly within the ceremonial and political life of the city.

Dominating the next section is a print of the famous purported portrait of Marlowe as a young Cambridge student. Fashionably dressed and self-assured, the sitter appears keenly conscious of how far he has advanced from his modest origins in Canterbury. The surrounding display offers an overview of Marlowe's university life, encompassing his studies, his possible literary acquaintances and the unexplained absences that have generated so much speculation.

From Cambridge, the display turns to espionage and the international religious conflicts that sparked Marlowe's dramatic imagination. Maps of contemporary intelligence routes place Marlowe within a Europe riven by political and religious conflict. The wider historical context encompasses the Spanish Armada and the French Wars of Religion, including the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, which is vividly depicted in a print of François Dubois's famous painting. This turbulent world is evoked through artefacts including a battlefield powder flask, a medal commemorating English support for the United Provinces in their resistance to Spanish rule and clippings from melted coins. Together, these objects conjure the world of warfare, religious division, shifting allegiances and clandestine activity familiar to Marlowe's audiences, past and present.

Marlowe's plays take centre stage in the next, clearly signposted section. Booklets provide a concise introduction to his drama, while panels explain the power of Marlowe's 'mighty line' and its impact on contemporary audiences and fellow playwrights. Of particular interest is the mention of Marlowe's apparent co-authorship with Shakespeare of *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, which is explored in The New Oxford Shakespeare edition of these works. The plays' continuing life in performance is captured through photographs and continuously screened footage from modern productions, including the first staging of *Doctor Faustus* at Shakespeare's Globe in 2011.

Attention then shifts from Marlowe's theatrical achievements to his encounters with the law. A map of Flushing places the alleged coining incident in its geographical setting, while images of Newgate Prison help visitors to imagine Marlowe's brief imprisonment there, following his involvement in violent altercations in London and Canterbury. These episodes are documented in original legal records, including William Corkine's complaint against Marlowe for assault and documents relating to the Flushing affair. The opportunity to try on contemporary costumes allows younger visitors to step imaginatively into this dangerous world, adding a lighter note to the dark themes explored in the exhibition.

The final months of Marlowe's life are framed by the intense scrutiny under which he found himself in 1593. A panel lists some of Richard Baines's allegations, while an interactive

display invites visitors to consider what might have happened during the fatal encounter in Deptford, with a display of contemporary daggers giving this familiar story an unsettling immediacy.

Fittingly, the exhibition concludes by tracing Marlowe's posthumous influence, particularly the ways in which Shakespeare and nineteenth- and twentieth-century actors and directors have responded to his drama. Looking ahead, the forthcoming *Oxford Marlowe: Collected Works* promises to invite a new generation of scholars to examine Marlowe's work afresh. This thoughtfully curated exhibition makes its own valuable contribution to that reassessment, bringing together in one place a rich body of texts and artefacts for academics to examine, while offering an absorbing introduction for visitors encountering Marlowe for the first time.