

Cambridge as 'Christopher Marlen'. Elsewhere he is recorded as 'Morley' and 'Merlin', among others. In like manner, Philip Henslowe, the impresario, indifferently wrote 'Henslowe' or 'Hensley' when signing his own name, and others made it *Hinshley*, *Hinchlow*, *Hensclow*, *Hynchlowes*, *Inclow*, *Hinchloe* and half a dozen more. More than eighty spellings of Shakespeare's name have been recorded, from *Shappere* to *Shaxberd*. (It is perhaps worth noting that the spelling we all use is not the one endorsed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which prefers *Shakspere*.) Perhaps nothing speaks more eloquently of the variability of spelling in the age than the fact that a dictionary published in 1604, *A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Words*, spelled 'words' two ways on the title page.

Pronunciations, too, were often very different from today's. We know from Shakespeare that *knees*, *grease*, *grass* and *grace* all rhymed (at least more or less), and that he could pun *reason* with *raisin* and *Rome* with *room*. The first hundred or so lines of *Venus and Adonis* offer such striking rhyme pairs as *satiety* and *variety*, *fast* and *haste*, *bone* and *gone*, *entreats* and *frets*, *swears* and *tears*, *heat* and *get*. Elsewhere *plague* is rhymed with *wage*, *grapes* with *mishaps*, *Calais* with *challice* (the French town was often spelled 'Callis' or 'Callice'). .

Whether or not it was necessary to pronounce all the letters in a word — such as the k's in knight and knee — was a hot issue. Shakespeare touches upon it comically in *Love's Labour's Lost* when he has the tedious Holofernes attack those 'rackers of orthography ... who would call calf "cauf", half "hauf", neighbour "nebour" and neigh "ne"'. .

Our May meeting on **Tuesday 11th** will be
“The 1851 Religious Census of Worcestershire and Birmingham”
by **John Aitkin** – former lecturer at the School of Continuing Studies,
University of Birmingham.

Regards Mike Fisher