Peter van Durant (ca. 1513–1584) alias Pickle Herring: A Contribution to the Possible Genesis of an Early Modern Clown Persona

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Throughout the seventeenth century the early modern clown persona known as Pickelhering (Germany), Pekelharing (Netherlands and Flanders) and Pickle Herring (United Kingdom) enjoyed immense popularity on European stages. This highly visible stage figure could also be found performing as an assistant to a charlatan in the marketplace, although the popular medical practitioner could of course assume both roles as Tetje Roen did in Amsterdam in the early eighteenth century (Scheltema 1832: 171, 224–225; Vanhaelen 2003: 26, 36–37, 72–76, 85–86, 92). Despite all this popularity, the origins of the Pickle Herring have long been shrouded in mystery.

To my knowledge, the first specialist to propose a connection between the stage persona, Shakespeare's Falstaff and a real historical person was William Rendle who in 1879 had received a letter from Colonel Joseph Lemuel Chester who mentioned the burial in 1584 of a beer brewer named "Peter van Durant" who had used as his alias the nickname "Pickell Heringe" (Rendle 1886: 209). In his monograph *The Inns of Old Southwark*, Rendle (1888: 38) pursued this tip and even extended it to Shakespeare's Falstaff as well as to the continental stage persona:

> Hanswurst, the Dutch [= German] Pickel-herringe, was noted for his gormandizing appetite and Falstaffian dimensions. Pickel Herring was the popular name of a buffoon among the Dutch… Between herrings, pickled herrings, Pickle Herring at St. Olave's, and Fastolfe, and again between Pickle Herring as Jack Pudding, and Falstaff, Shakespeare's prince of Jack Puddings, the suggestive coincidences are very curious.

For many decades, Rendle's observations lay fallow, until recently discovered by Peg Katritzky (2013: 159–168) who provides additional data on the cultural history of the pickled herring and its association with heavy drinking, particularly in the latter half of the sixteenth century in Southwark which was probably London's most popular entertainment quarter with its bear arenas, theatres, famous inns, ale and

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beer houses, brothels, and of course the Southwark Fair officially established by King Edward VI in 1550, when Southwark itself was incorporated into the City of London.

But what might be the origin of this stage persona? In establishing a social context for the potential genesis of this figure, Peg Katritzky resurrected the name of "Peter van Durant" who is described in his proved will from 1584 as having the alias "Picklehering", also spelled "Picklehearinge". While it is known that other historical personages such as the writer Robert Greene had led rather dissolute lives that might qualify them as prototypes for Falstaff (Greenblatt 2004: 218–220) or the Pickelhering (Alexander 2002: 465) or that the Dutch satirical comedian Pieter van der Morsch can be linked, albeit posthumously, with the Pekelharing clown (Hogendoorn 1968: 71, [83]), concrete evidence has been lacking.

Before continuing, I would like, however, to re-examine Christopher Marlowe's reference to "Peter Pickle-herring" as the godfather of the allegorical figure of Gluttony in the Faust A-manuscript completed around 1588, some five years after the death of van Durant, but not published until 1604. This alliterative name incidentally would also re-appear around 1662 in Christoph Blümel's German manuscript entitled *Der Jude von Venetien* (Flemming 1931: 247). It is apparent that in the German-speaking areas the Christian name "Peter" has almost always been replaced by "Hans", perhaps in order to convey a connection to the older German figure of the "Hanswurst" or as a reference to the "English John or Jan", a designation for the clown figure familiar from earlier troupes led by John Spencer and Thomas Sacheville. Marlowe's reference, by the way, may shed light on the reason for the alias: namely a craving for the salted fish readily available to Durant who lived at the very epicenter of London's herring industry along the Thames, just east of London Bridge, and in a house also called "Pickle Herring". At this time, it should be noted, each house had its own name as there were no street numbers.

It is certainly possible, as Peg Katritzky suggests, that actors and writers such as Greene and Thomas Nash as well as Southwark's most famous resident, Shakespeare, and comic players, namely Will Kemp, Thomas Pope and Augustine Phillips who all attended the parish church of St. Saviour's just to the west of St. Olave's (Rendle 1878: xxii), frequented the famous tavern inns in Southwark and some undoubtedly knew Peter Pickleherring alias Durant (if I may reverse the word order to make a point).

Clearly the nickname must have been of great importance to establish the validity of Durant's identity, for otherwise it would not have been mentioned in the will or the burial note in the parish registers. This is reminiscent of the codicil to another will signed by a contemporary of Durant's as "Nicholas Wilkinson, *alias* Tooley" (Nungezer 1929: 374–375). Wilkinson was a friend of Augustine Phillips (Nungezer 1929: 282) and adopted the stage name "Tooley" (a colloquial spelling for St. Olave's based on pronunciation), presumably because it was the area that he wanted to be associated with. Davies incidentally has surmised that "Pickle Herring" referred to the area to the immediate east of St. Olave's Church (12), an assumption confirmed by papers in the Southwark Local History Library and Archive (Pickle Herring in Southwark). By assuming the nickname "Pickleherring" and applying it to his house which contained a brewery, this uprooted German-born immigrant seems to have followed a practice evidenced by Tooley, although there is no proof

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to date which would suggest that he ever acted on a stage. This does not preclude the possibility, however, that he may have acted in amateur performances in one of the inns nearby, if not in his own brew house.

Because van Durant represents perhaps the best lead so far into the origin of the clown figure, I would like at this point to expand on Peg Katritzky's chapter by concentrating on what is known about van Durant's life and work in Southwark. Since orthography was not settled in the sixteenth century, an initial problem involves the various spellings of his name in the source materials from 1541 until 2013. Peter van Durant is the form used in the will and the one I will use throughout the article, but we also find his name spelled in various ways in the source materials, in particular the *Returns of Aliens* (volumes 1 and 2) from 1541–1582/3 (Kirk 1908: IV, 352): Peter van Duran, Peter Vanduran, Peter Wanduran, Peter van Durane, Peter van Durant, Peter van Duraunte, Peter Van Duraunte, Peter van Duraurite (Rendle 1886: 209), Peter van Duren, Peter van Düren (Ellis 1952: 32), Peter Vandurenge, and possibly also Peter Vanduryng or Peter John Duaraunt.

Judging by the subsidy returns of 1571 he was born in "Highe Ducheland" (Kirk 1902: II, 100), presumably around the year 1513. If this is true, and the information presumably was provided by Durant, he was not born in Gelderland, at that time an independent duchy that was not incorporated as a province of the Spanish Low Countries by the Habsburg Emperor Charles V until 1543, some years after van Durant had emigrated to England. However, van Durant and/or his family must have moved to Gelderland prior his immigration to England around the year 1531, i.e. at a time when London's population was exploding from a base of 50,000 in 1500 to around 80,000 by 1550 (Goose and Luu 2005: 13). Of these, 5,000–6,000 were of foreign provenance (Goose and Luu 2005: 15). The move by Durant may have been caused by economic considerations and/or by the very unstable situation caused by the Guelderian wars that had been waging since 1492. Was his family from Düren, today located in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, or not? Perhaps. In 1952 Ellis assumed so, no doubt based on his name and the fact that he was from Gelderland, and he may be right, yet there is no proof at the current time and therefore no compelling reason for Ellis to have changed the spelling of his name to Düren. Indeed, other individuals with very similar names, i.e. Peter van Duren, can be found in Nijmegen (Malden 1905: 108) and elsewhere in the early seventeenth century.

Whatever the case, Peter van Durant attended St. Olave's English parish church in the ward of Bridge Without in Southwark, London:



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At this church which no longer exists most of the parishioners were indigent and/or foreigners (Stow 1598: 340) of Flemish, Dutch and German extraction (Uckelman 2004: 88), so much so that the new cemetery created around 1545 across the road from the church was known as "the Flemish burying grounds". No differentiation was however made at the time between Dutch or Flemish and German and any one of the designations could be applied to one and the same individual. Religious persecution and wars had caused a large influx of immigrants into London in the late 1560s, and by 1571 there were 10,000 "strangers" (as foreigners and others from outside the city were referred to) living in London (Luu 2005: [192]). Of these, 946, most of whom were Flemish, were domiciled in Southwark (Kirk 1907: III, 375).

In 1541 the subsidy rolls first make mention of Peter Vanduran (also spelled Wanduran) as a "foreigner" attending St. Olave's parish church (Kirk 1900: I, 31–32). The title "master" appended to his name suggests that he was a master or first brewer, provided of course that he was already in the beer trade, but this is not something that can be gleaned from the vague descriptor "in goods" which is used in most entries in the subsidy returns from 1541 until 1562 (Kirk 1900: I, passim). At the time van Durant had servants named Bott, William, Mathew and John. This is in conformity with the 1540 statute that limited the number of foreign employees, if that is indeed what they were, to just four. The amount of his van Durant's subsidy for 1541 being £25 and 25 shillings implies that he was one of the five wealthiest men in the parish and a citizen of means by the age of twenty eight.

From 1550 until at least 1552 van Durant is named as one of the five wardens of the St. Olave's church (Daniel-Tyssen 78), which is a testament to his strong standing in the community, but one must remember that such appointments more often than not depended on the economic status of the parishioner. Prior to van Durant, Henry Leake, a brewer and the wealthiest man in the parish, was for example also a warden at St. Olave's (Daniel-Tyssen 78). If van Durant is identical with "Peter Vanduryng", business, however, may not always have gone so well, as he had but one servant or employee in 1551, namely Nycholas Tysson (Kirk 1900: I, 228). Such a downturn may well have been caused by outbreaks of the plague and of the sweating-sickness in that year. According to the eminent physician, John Kaye or Caius, the sweating-sickness affected "either men of wealth, ease or welfare, or of the poorer sort, such as were idle persons, good ale drinkers and taverne haunters" (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 1910: 187).

This reversal of fortune was in all likelihood just temporary. A few years later, in 1558, van Durant is clearly identified as a beer brewer. Given the large number of immigrants from the Low Countries and Germany living in Southwark at the time and their preference for beer over sweet English ale, Durant's involvement in this very promising and profitable trade made good business sense: "From its first use as 'Flemish ale' in England, beer was an alien drink, produced by aliens and drunk by aliens" (Bennett 1996: 79). Beer was cheaper to produce and it could be transported easily and stored for longer periods of time than ale. Since the use of hops, the main ingredient separating beer from ale, had been banned in London from 1530 until 1552 because it was a "Protestant plant", Durant may have had little incentive to enter the beer-brewing trade prior to the latter date. However, one must

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remember that until 1550 the ward of Bridge Without in Southwark lay outside both the jurisdiction of the civic authorities in London and the controlling influence of the guilds and that van Durant may well have brewed beer prior to 1558 when he, along with fellow parishioners, Henry Leake and a Richard Marryett, also a church warden at St. Olave's from 1550 until at least 1552 (Daniel-Tyssen 1869: 78), were cited for selling beer over the rate set by the Mayor of London, Thomas Curtys (Malden 1905: 383). All three in fact had sold beer at sixteen pence a barrel above the allowed rate. This citation was directed at subjects and denizens, so Durant must have received his letter of denization prior to this date. He may well have received it on January 28, 1553 after the payment of twenty shillings if he is identical with the "Peter John Duaraunt" mentioned in the patent rolls for this year (*Calendar* 1926: 208). He had already been in London for over twenty years and would have been regarded as a permanent resident and a friendly alien in any case. The spelling "Duaraunt" is obviously very close to other spellings of his surname, and "John" may have been a mishearing or misreading of "van". As a denizen he would have had almost the same rights as a naturalized citizen, but could not inherit property or leave it to his children.

Business must have been booming during this time because by 1562 he had eighteen alien employees (Malden 1905: 385) in violation of the 1540 Act which had limited the number of foreign employees in London to four. According to Malden (1905: 384) the nickname "Pyckle-heryng" appears in an indictment. This is the first reference that I am aware of and pre-dates the mention in the will by some twenty two years. The fact that an alternative name was given in a legal document suggests a number of things. Firstly, there was clearly a need to avoid any misunderstanding as to his legal identity; secondly, the nickname must have been well established by this date and almost certainly originated much earlier; and thirdly, the nickname would endear him to the Flemish immigrants in Southwark who were well known for their love of pickled herrings and beer, while today such a sobriquet would be seen as an excellent marketing device for his business, particularly since the name of the brewer and the house in which the brewery was installed were identical.

In addition to being a brewer Durant claimed to be a barber-surgeon in his petition to the London Court of Aldermen in 1563, a year in which the plague was to claim almost a quarter of the city's populace (Luu 2005: 196):

> At this Courte, Peter van Duran, a stranger born, who professethe y^{e} knowledge & science of surgery, was licensed by the said Courte to sett vp bylles vpon postes, in suche parts of this Cytye as to him shall seame good, to give the people knolege of his said science. And he agreed & graunted to the said Courte, to deale very honestly with all theym that he shall take vpon hym to cure, for ye charges concerning y^{e} same (Vicary 1888: 163).

A subsequent reprimand in late 1563 of the "empiric" (i.e. quack) Peter Vanduran by the small and largely uninfluential London College of Physicians (Pelling 1979: [165]), which was probably primarily interested in preserving its medical monopoly, does not appear to have been effective (*Annals* 1563: I, 22b). A footnote to the above quotation indicates that a certain Sidney Young believed that

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the Minute-Book of the Barber-Surgeons contained an order to remove van Durant's bills (Vicary 1888: 163), yet it seems unlikely that this guild would have ignored the licensing by a higher authority. As an alien, van Durant would in all probability not been permitted to join the London Barber-Surgeons' Company, but belonged rather to the large group of local unlicensed practitioners who relied on their own observations and empirical experience to offer cures (Pelling 1979: 185). Since he is offering his help to treat those afflicted by the plague, it is likely that not only the civic authorities but also the poor as well as the immigrants in St. Olave's parish would have welcomed his services, particularly since fees at that time were determined by the ability of the patient to pay (Pelling 1982: 485). No other references to Durant's activity as a "surgeon" have surfaced, and his main vocation seems to have been that of a beer brewer from 1558, if not earlier, until his demise in 1584.

Durant's occupational diversity is not surprising for England in the sixteenth century. As Pelling points out, the lack of a clear demarcation between nutriments and medicines "…had its economic consequences: physicians dominated the emergent Distillers Company in London, and, as we shall see, medical practitioners were closely connected with the food and drink trades at all levels" (1982: 486). As a medical practitioner Durant must have been aware of the curative effects associated at this time with herring, the various parts of which were supposed to have had a broad range of uses including the promotion of digestion, the removal of mucous, the improvement of circulation, the restoration of appetite and the driving off of illnesses. Pickled herrings were also tied to the soles of feet in an attempt to reduce fever or cure dropsy; herring fat was believed to cure rabies and scabs on the chest; a fish broth made from the herring's bladder was thought to facilitate urination; eating a herring at night without a liquid could, it was said, cure a cough; the ashes of a whole herring were used to eliminate kidney stones; salted herring broth was seen as a remedy for high fever, cancer, tumors, goitres and other health issues (Zedler1735: col. 1692–1696). Alcohol also had both nutritional and medicinal uses and was viewed positively as a gift from God if consumed in moderation, but negatively if it led to drunkenness and other socially unacceptable behaviour. Beer, it should be noted, was drunk in much greater quantities than today because of its nutrients and because water was prone to carrying disease. It had a much lower alcoholic content at one percent and was also used as an anti-inflammatory and as a cure for anxiety, depression and other ailments.

Where did Durant have his practice? Was it outside, or perhaps more likely, inside his house also known as "Pickleherring"? Pelling (1982: 504) mentions that barber-surgeons, and van Durant apparently considered himself to be in this group, were often highly skilled in music and frequently provided instruments such as the lute and the cittern for their patients to engage in an impromptu amateur performance. Although foreigners were not permitted to keep a tippling house outside where they could serve food and drink, they could certainly do this inside in an effort to circumvent the law or even hire a tippler or ale-wife for that purpose. It is therefore conceivable that van Durant might have augmented his earnings by having beer and pickled herrings sold outside his business and that he could have provided musical entertainment at the same time. The house itself almost certainly

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had a board by the front entrance with a picture of one or more pickled herrings, as is the case in a seventeenth-century Dutch painting by Jan Havicksz. Steen depicting a country inn with a sign at the top right that reads: *PeculHarings* (Rendle and Norman 1888: 38):



Did he also trade in pickled herrings, like his famous predecessor Sir John Falstolfe whose palatial house on Stoney Lane (Rendle and Norman 1888: 36) was close to the site of van Durant's brewery known as "Pickelherringe" (Hume 1977: xxiii; Rendle 1886: 209)? The land on which the brewery stood, it should be noted, had belonged to Falstolfe who "owned four messuages called beer houses" (Prockter and Taylor 1979: 35) in the vicinity. One of these "messuages" (i.e. buildings and gardens) was the "Beer House" which is shown on the Braun and Hogenberg map from 1572 (Prockter and Taylor 1979: 32) and depicted in a painting by Joris Hoefnagel which has been dated to around 1569:



According to Peter Ackroyd, this brew house was located "beside Pickle Herring Stairs" (2003: 677). If this was indeed the property associated with van Durant − and location and function point in this direction − it was not identified at this time as the house known as "Pickle Herring".

In 1604 van Durant's building was let by the new owner, Sir William Gardiner (1570–1621/22) who had himself inherited the "interest and the lease of

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the brew house called 'Pickle heringe'" in 1597 from his father William Gardiner J.P. (Hotson 1931: 331), to a German-born potter named Christian Wilhelm for the purpose of making smalt (Davies 1969: 12), although Wilhelm later would become a well-known Delftware potter and may also have sold vinegar and aqua vitae (Davies 1969:15). The pottery buildings would presumably have adjoined the building (Davies 1969: 18), although it is clear that the ovens for making smalt had been installed inside the house.

Herring had been shipped from Herringfleet to the prior of St. Olave's as early as 1371 if not before then (*The Paston Letters* II, 4), but this area may not have become the centre of the herring trade in London (Rendle 1888: 36) until Falstolfe, a fish merchant, born in or around Yarmouth and owner of much real estate in Southwark, including the Boar's Head tavern on High Street, established a palatial residency at Fastolfe Place on the west side of Stoney Lane where he remained until 1454 (Ellis 1952: 31).

The origins of place names in this neighborhood such as Pickle Herring Street (Hyde 1982: 13), which according to John Rocque's map of 1746 ran parallel to the Thames from Stoney Lane to Horseleydown Lane, are unknown, but do not seem to antedate van Durant's nickname that can be traced back to as early as 1562. At the northern end of Vine Yard were Pickelhering Wharf and Pickleherring Stairs (Hyde 1982: 13), all of which were close to van Durant's house of "Pickellherringe". The names may possibly be traced back to the fact that Falstolfe shipped large quantities of herrings from Great Yarmouth to sell to the monks at Bermondsey Abbey and to the fact that he owned many properties in the Pickle Herring area or perhaps even, as Ellis tentatively suggests, to van Durant himself (1952: 32). These place names, apart from that of the house, appear only after the death of van Durant in 1584; the earliest reference that I have so far come across has been to "Pekelharing kay" in 1612 (Edwards 1974: 120) and refers to just the dock area. In point of fact, nobody to date has been able to connect these place names beyond any doubt with van Durant. The Agas map from 1561/70 seems to indicate a path along the Thames at this location (Prockter and Taylor 1979: 29) while the painting by Hoefnagel from 1568/69 clearly shows a path behind the house. Stow's map from 1598, however, does not mention a Pickle-Herring Lane or Street, although this absence is hardly proof that it did not exist.

Based on the new evidence, I would however like to examine a number of options for the possible genesis of this stage figure. Does the nickname, for example, indicate that van Durant had a craving for this salted fish himself? Or was he mocking the Flemish immigrants in Southwark who were known for the way in which they ate their beloved pickled herrings and who had been stereotyped as notorious drunks in general, with Falstaff himself depicted as a "Flemish drunkard" in Shakespeare's play *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2.2.22)? One famous resident was Shakespeare's clown, Will Kemp, who apparently lived in St. Savior's parish in Southwark (Nungezer 1929: 220) until his presumed death in the plague year 1603 (Wiles 1987: 41). This is important because in an earlier article I have argued for Kemp as a prototype for the Pickelhering persona on the continent (Alexander 2007: 486) and he may well have known the wealthy brewer who lived nearby.

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The Catholic moralist and aspiring playwright Richard Flecknoe (ca. 1605–1677) who had been in Belgium a number of times in the 1640s and who could have witnessed performances of the English Players with their popular clown in Brussels or Ghent was the first in England to mention the Pickle Herring as a clown persona whose low humor he associates with tavern drinkers and which was appreciated perhaps only by very tolerant beer brewers/barkeepers. In a work published in 1656 he wrote: "So your Dutch, and more Northern nations, could never get past Jack puddings and Pickle-herrings, stale jests yet, which none but Beer Brewers can laugh at…." (Flecknoe A3v). It is clear that pickled herrings and such alcoholic beverages as ale, beer and/or wine were kin commodities for many, including the Flemish and other foreigners living in London, something that is already implicit in Marlowe's juxtaposition of "Peter Pickle Herring" and "Margery March-beer" as the godfather and godmother of the allegorical figure of Gluttony (Marlowe 1995: 160). It may be assumed that Marlowe frequented the many entertainment venues in Southwark and if he had Peter van Durant alias Pickle Herring in mind when he wrote the A-text to Faustus, then the nickname could well have derived from a predilection for the pickled fish which was possibly served at the house also known as "Pickle Herring." We might also add a third topic at this point, and one mentioned explicitly by Flecknoe, namely humor in any of its multifaceted forms. Food, alcohol and humor are the three primary ingredients underlying tavern behavior and the early modern clown persona known as Pickle Herring.While evidence is still lacking, it is possible that van Durant himself may have told such jests in his brewery or as a customer at one of the nearby inns or beer houses. It was also not unheard of for a brewer to be an actor as was the case with Anthony Jeffes who was a player until 1609, then a player and brewer until 1613, before finally dedicating himself to the beer industry (Power 2012: 175).

Let us at this point, however, return to van Durant's biography. In 1567 he is undoubtedly one of twelve "Dutch" brewers listed in the ward of Bridge Without. In that he had only four foreign employees (Andrewe Gelbote, Bartholomaeus Johnson, Elger Colmester and James Toope) in this year (Kirk 1900: I, 347), van Durant was clearly in conformity with the law from 1540.The patent rolls for June 4, 1567 list him as one of several beer brewers licensed for life in London, Westminster and "Sotheworke" (i.e. Southwark). They have been pardoned for employing more than four foreign-born servants in the past and are permitted to hire an additional four servants above the number allowed by statute on condition that the master brewer or the second brewer be an Englishman. In addition, these brewers were permitted to retain any foreign-born servants above the new ceiling of eight until Michaelmas, in order to permit these employees to make arrangements for employment elsewhere or to return to the continent (*Calendar* 1976: 19).

By 1571 the number of servants employed by van Durant had increased to nine (five Germans, three Dutch, and one from Cleves). Three of these were "draymen" responsible for delivering the barrels of beer on their heavy horse-pulled carts.For practical reasons and perhaps to conceal their foreign origin and/or status, they have anglicized their Christian names, e.g. Hermann = Harmon, Johann = John. It was also not unusual for the whole name to be anglicized as was the case with the Dutch-born printer James Nicholson who lived and worked in Southwark in the

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1530s (Pettegree 1986: 85), i.e. at the same time as van Durant. These servants ranged in age from eleven (sic) to thirty and had been in England from three months to eight years. The following passage from the patent rolls containing this information is by far the most informative entry that we have on van Durant:

> Peter van Durant, berebruer, of thage of lviij^{ty} yeres, borne in Highe Ducheland, haith bynne here a longe tyme, and haith ix^{en} seruantes as followeth. Hilliard, his seruant, of thage of xx^{ty} yeres, Hollander, haith bynne here v yeres, and came to worke. Bartholomewe Thomas, dreyman, of thage of xxx^{ty} yeres, borne in Highe Ducheland, and haith bynne here v yeres, and came to worke. Andrewe Anderson. Dreyman of thage of xxv^{tye} yeres, Clevener, haith byne here vi yeres, and came to worke. Wybert Isbrayne, drayman, of thage of xxvj^{ty} yeres, a Hollender, haith byn here towe yeres, and came to worke. John Packe, boteman, of thage of xxx^{ty} yeres, borne in Highe Ducheland, and haith byne here viij yeres, and came to worke. Peter Clayse, tooneman, of thage of xxvj^{ty} yeres, Hollender, haith bynne here iiij yeres, and came to worke. Harman Clayster, bruer, of thage of xj yeres, haith byne here vj monethes, borne in Highe Ducheland, and came to worke. Arnolde Cloysnam, a toonman, of xx^{ty} yeres, Highe Ducheman, haith byn here iij monethes, and came to worke. John Polyn, a tooneman, of thage of xix yeres, Highe Ducheman, haith byne here iij monethes, and came to worke (Kirk 1902: II, 100).

As one of the fourteen "Dutch" brewers in the ward of Bridge Without, van Durant clearly favored workers from German or Dutch-speaking areas, perhaps because of their knowledge of the German brewing process based on the Purity Law of 1516 and perhaps because they were more productive and reliable than their Flemish counterparts who were often stereotyped as drunkards. After all, why, if this were the case, would one put a fox in a hen house?

From 1571 until 1584 there is regrettably a lacuna in the biography. Fortunately, a copy of the will containing his nickname exists in the Public Record Office of the National Archives (Will of Peter van Durant 1584). The parish register for St. Olave, Bermondsey, recorded the burial of "Peter Van Durannte alias Pickell Heringe, brewer" on August 4 (Burial 1584). In his probated will dated September 25, 1584 he included directions for the interment of his body in the chantry (chapel) of St. Olave's parish church rather than in the Flemish Burying Grounds to the south of the church, as some specialists have indicated. He was sick when he signed and sealed his final will and testament on July 27, leaving his entire estate to his wife, Mary, after providing money for the poor and the preacher who would hold his funeral service. His wife may well be identical with the widow Mary Durant of St. Olave's parish who left all her possessions to her "welbeloved uncle Roger Montagne" (a London skinner) in a will proved on January 25, 1605 (Will of Mary Durant 1605). If this is indeed the wife of Peter van Durant, she did not remarry and understandably makes no mention of the Pickleherring property that had been leased out to William Gardiner, presumably after the death of her husband, and then sold to his son prior to her demise.

As long as the reason for the Pickleherring nickname remains unknown, it will not be possible to establish a direct connection with the popular clown persona of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless it is to be hoped that the information on van Durant and the socio-cultural context presented in this short article will not only

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correct some false assumptions made by past specialists but also provide the impetus for further archival research that will hopefully ascertain once and for all whether or not Peter van Durant was indeed the historical prototype for a fascinating and important early modern stage figure.

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Abstract

In the 1880s, the social historian William Rendle was the first to suggest that there might be close connections between the popular figure of the continental stage clown known as "Pickelhering", a London brewer named Peter van Durant who bore the intriguing nickname "Pickel Heringe", and Shakespeare's Falstaff. This speculation did not, however, fall on fertile ground until recently when revived by the theatre historian Peg Katritzky who provided ample evidence that in Elizabethan Southwark the consumption of pickled herrings was frequently accompanied by heavy drinking.

By culling pertinent information from a wide variety of printed and archival sources and elaborating on the socio-cultural context, I hope to remedy this lack of biographical data in the belief that van Durant offers the best hope yet for explaining the genesis of an important stage figure from the seventeenth century and one who still lives on today in the popular imagination.

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