**William Shakespeare**

**Guide to records**

**Coventry Archives** is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP. Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

**Opening hours:** The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

**Introduction**

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon and returned home after his career as a playwright at the London theatres. As such, the best Shakespeare collections on his life and work are held in London (the British Library) and Stratford-Upon-Avon (the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Library). However, as a region close to Stratford, Coventry holds a range of Shakespeare-related documents including archival materials, books, pamphlets and newspaper articles. The main strength of this collection is that it captures how Midlands towns have engaged with Shakespeare since his death: through libraries, festivals, theatre, exhibitions and tourism.

The Coventry Archives collection also contains valuable details about Shakespeare institutions in Stratford. There are illustrations and programmes for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, built in 1932. This acted originally as a theatre, library and picture gallery, and is now known as the Royal Shakespeare Company. Photos and prints show the various buildings over the years, including the fire that destroyed the 1922 structure.

There are pamphlets relating to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, an organisation that manages several historical sites across Stratford including Shakespeare's Birthplace, New Place (a later residence), and his mother Ann Hathaway's cottage. This includes illustrations of the Birthplace over the years, and detail about the opening of the Shakespeare Centre museum in 1951.

Another major institution documented in the Coventry Archives is the Shakespeare Memorial Library, later known as the Birmingham Shakespeare Library. This was founded by Non-Conformist preacher George Dawson in 1864, and it soon became the largest publicly-owned Shakespeare collection in the world. Today, while the collection is now confined to low-oxygen storage vaults, it boasts around 100,000 items, and can be accessed via appointment at the Library of Birmingham Wolfson Archives. Coventry Archives holds indexes of the Birmingham Shakespeare collection up until the 1970s, and pamphlets showing the development of the reading room space over the years.

For those interested in theatre history, there are programmes of Shakespeare productions at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, as well as the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre/Royal Shakespeare Company.

Shakespeare tourism is incredibly well-documented in Coventry Archives, with many books and pamphlets falling under the title of 'Shakespeare Country'. This was the common name given for Stratford and the surrounding areas, and there are many guides for both local tourists and those from further afield. Some tourist guides are very specific, exploring the Holy Trinity Church which holds Shakespeare's grave and monument, or describing the Elizabethan garden at New Place. A particular highlight is the quirky 'Kid's Guide to Stratford-Upon-Avon' from 2014, featuring a poetic conversation with a swan.

Tourists also flocked to Stratford for celebrations of the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, and there is still an annual procession throughout the town on April 23rd. The first celebration of this kind was the 1769 Jubilee organised by the actor David Garrick, and our collections include a detailed pamphlet about this event by Dr Levi Fox (former Coventry City Archivist and later Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust), and prints showing the procession taking place. In the years since, there have been exhibitions and special theatre performances for the anniversary, and the Coventry Archives documents these events also. The Tercentenary of 1964 was a major example, during which Coventry hosted a run of Hamlet at the Belgrade Theatre, and the Herbert Museum & Art Gallery ran an exhibition entitled'400 Years of Shakespeare in Czechoslovakia'.

Due to the close proximity, we also hold academic work on the history of Stratford, focusing on the early modern period and the Victorian period. There is a small amount of biographical work about Shakespeare as an individual in our overflow book section, held in the archive basement. These books can be searched and requested through the general Coventry Libraries catalogue online.

The Coventry Archives Shakespeare collection offers a unique perspective on how the people of Coventry and the West Midlands more widely regarded Shakespeare and his home town.

**Archival Material**

PA2935/1/8/36 - Programmes for the Royal Shakespeare Company

PA2935/1/8/1 - Programmes for the Belgrade Theatre

PA2935/1/8/33 - Programmes for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre

**Overflow books in Archives Basement 1**

TL016 - Indexes of the Shakespeare Memorial Library Birmingham

TL910 - Shakespeare's Country (tourism, guides and local Stratford-Upon-Avon history)

TL920 - Biographical info

**Illustrations (Highlights)**

TM72.65.268 - Bust of Shakespeare from the monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, 1827 (print)

TL72.83 - Birthplace, as it appeared previous to 1769 (print)

TL72.83 - Birthplace, view from the street, early 20th Century (photo)

TL72.83 - Birthplace, view from the garden (postcard)

TL72.83 - Birthplace, view of interior when it was in use as a shop, 1823 (print)

TL72.83 - Birthplace - library interior (postcard)

TL72.83 - Shakespeare's birthplace, also showing Garrick's Jubilee procession 1769 (print)

TL394.268 - Planting an oak-tree on Primrose Hill, to celebrate the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth, 1864 (Print, Illustrated London News)

TL658.844 - Auction for the sale of Shakespeare's birthplace, at the Auction Mart, 1847 (drawing)

TL394.1 - Shakespeare commemoration banquet in a pavilion at Stratford, 1864 (print, Illustrated London News)

TL394.5 - Shakespeare jubilee procession, 1864 (print)

TM394.268 - Stratford-Upon-Avon festival, 1906, group showing theatre staff (photo)

TM72.83 - New Place, Stratford; said to have once been the residence of Shakespeare, 1790 (print, from a 17th century drawing)

TL725.82 - Destruction of Memorial Theatre by fire, 1926 (photo)

TL72.582 - View of Shakespeare Memorial, before 1922 fire (photo)

JN022.657 - 'Shakespeare Today' exhibition of some current editions of his works. Arranged by City Libraries Cataloguing Dept. Display in City Museum, May 1st 1964 (4 photos)

**Local Studies Material (available in the Reading Room)**

**Pamphlets**

TK910 - The Shakespeare Country: a Guide to Stratford and Surrounding Areas, 1981

TL012 - Booklets on the Shakespeare Memorial Library/Birmingham Shakespeare Library - 1964, 1971, 1975

TL708 - Illustrated Catalogue of the Pictures (&c) in the Shakespeare Memorial at Stratford-Upon-Avon, 1896 (a theatre, library and picture gallery - now the Royal Shakespeare Company)

TL727 – Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Miscellaneous Material - including the Annual Meeting of the Trustees (1905), leaflets with admission prices, souvenir programme of the official opening of Hall's Croft (1951)

TL727 - Official Opening of the Shakespeare Centre (at the SBT), in 1964, for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth

TL791.6 - Shakespeare's Birthday Celebrations - 400th Anniversary, 23rd April 1964. Including detail of the procession, position of national flags, list of events in Stratford-Upon-Avon and other regions

TL791.6 - A Splendid Occasion: The Stratford Jubilee of 1769, by Levi Fox

TM712 - History of Shakespeare's Garden, Stratford-Upon-Avon (at New Place), 1922

TM726.5 - Where Shakespeare Rests: The Church of Holy Trinity, Stratford-Upon-Avon, by Beatrice and Percy Home, 1924

TM910.2 - A Rose is a Rose! A Kid's Guide to Stratford-Upn-Avon, 2014, by Penelope Dyan

**Reading Room Books**

TM900 - Family Life in Shakespeare's England, Stratford-Upon-Avon 1570-1630. 1996

TM910.84 - Victorian SUA in Old Photographs, from the collections of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, edited by Nicholas Fogg. 1992

TM725.82 - The Theatres of Stratford-Upon-Avon 1875-1992: An Architectural History, by Marian J Pringle. 1993