

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A BIOGRAPHY

By Elissa Wolf

Since William Shakespeare lived more than 400 years ago very little is known about him for certain. However, surviving records relating to Shakespeare and his family offer us a glimpse of his life and work.

### Birth and Childhood

William Shakespeare was baptized on April 26, 1564, at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-Upon-Avon; his birthday traditionally celebrated on April 23.

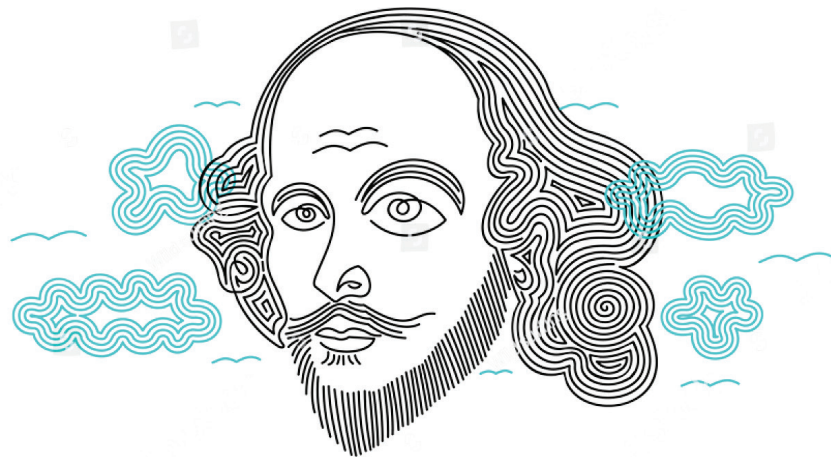
John Shakespeare married Mary Arden, who came from a prominent farming family. Together the couple had eight children, with William being their eldest surviving child. John Shakespeare was a leather worker, who specialized in glove making, but over the years he also held many civic positions within Stratford.

These civic positions likely meant John was able to send William to the local grammar school, where he learned writing, along with Latin and Greek languages and literature. Shakespeare most likely attended school until the age of 14 or 15.

### Marriage and Children

In 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. He was 18 and she was 26, at the time Anne was expecting their first child Susanna. In 1585, the couple had twins, Judith and Hamnet.

By 1592 we know that Shakespeare was in London, while Anne and the children lived in Stratford. Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, died in 1596 at the age of 11. His older daughter Susanna married John Hall, a physician, in 1607. In 1616, a few months before William Shakespeare's death, his daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney.



### Shakespeare in London

The first mention of Shakespeare as a known London actor and playwright is in 1592, called out by rival dramatist Robert Greene. There was a plague outbreak in 1593, forcing theaters to close. During this time Shakespeare published a long poem, *Venus and Adonis*.

In 1594 Shakespeare became a founding member and shareholder in the company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men. He remained with the company for the rest of his career, with it later being renamed the King's Men in 1603. Over the years, Shakespeare became steadily more famous in the London theater world and his company performed at court more often than any other.

### Final Years

Of Shakespeare's last years, not much is known. Among the last plays that Shakespeare worked on was *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which he wrote in collaboration with John Fletcher, most likely in 1613. He died at age 52 on April 23, 1616—the date traditionally associated with his birthday. On April 25, he was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

In his will Shakespeare notoriously left his wife Anne his "second-best bed." Anne died in 1623 and was buried next to her husband. Seven years after Shakespeare's death, in 1623, the First Folio was collated by his friends and colleagues from the King's Men.

## A TIMELINE · Courtesy of Folger Shakespeare Library\*

- 1564: William Shakespeare born in Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1582: Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway
- 1583: Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, is born
- 1585: Shakespeare's twins, Judith and Hamnet (?), are born
- 1592: Shakespeare is first alluded to as a playwright, in Greene's *Groates-worth of Wit*
- 1593: Shakespeare's first printed poem, *Venus and Adonis*, appears
- 1594: Shakespeare's first printed play, *Titus Andronicus*, appears
- 1596: Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, is granted a coat of arms; Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies
- 1597: Shakespeare purchases New Place in Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1598: Shakespeare is first mentioned as a sonneteer and author of 12 plays in *Palladis Tamia*
- 1599: Shakespeare's father is granted a confirmation of arms; Shakespeare's acting company takes down its old theater and uses the timber to build the Globe
- 1600: Extracts from Shakespeare's plays and poetry appear in *Bel-vedere*, the first printed literary commonplace book to include plays
- 1601: Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, dies
- 1602: The heralds dispute the legitimacy of a group of coat of arms, including Shakespeare's; Shakespeare ratifies his purchase of New Place
- 1603: Shakespeare's acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, becomes the King's Men at the accession of James I; *Hamlet* appears in print
- 1607: Shakespeare's daughter Susanna marries John Hall
- 1608: Shakespeare's mother, Mary (Arden) Shakespeare, dies; his granddaughter Elizabeth is born
- 1609: Shakespeare's *Sonnets* appears in print
- 1613: Shakespeare purchases the Blackfriars gatehouse in London; the Globe burns down during a performance of *Henry VIII* and is rebuilt within a year
- 1616: Shakespeare writes his will; his daughter Judith marries Thomas Quiney; Shakespeare dies
- 1623: The First Folio is published; Shakespeare's widow Anne dies

## FIRST FOLIO FACTS: CELEBRATING 400 YEARS

By Elissa Wolf

This year we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Folio. It is generally thought that between 700 and 750 copies of the First Folio were printed in 1623. But before Shakespeare's work was memorialized in "leather" and he became a household name, Shakespeare was baptized in Stratford-Upon-Avon.

*As You Like It* was first published in the First Folio

Out of the 36 plays in the First Folio, 18 had never been published before: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, *Henry VI, Part 1*, *Henry VIII*, *Julius Caesar*, *King John*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Timon of Athens*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

The First Folio was put together by two of Shakespeare's fellow actors and friends, John Heminge and Henry Condell.

The First Folio was published in London by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount.

The First Folio is the first time Shakespeare's plays were grouped into comedies, tragedies, and histories.

The title page of the First Folio includes an original portrait of Shakespeare, engraved by artist Martin Droeshout. This portrait is one of few portraits of Shakespeare that is considered authentic.

The First Folio includes a poem to the reader by the playwright Ben Jonson, one of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Some scholars suggest that a bound copy of the First Folio cost £1 when it was first published, roughly \$200 today.

Only 235 copies of the First Folio remain today.

