

THE PLAYWRIGHT: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small Warwickshire town, in 1564, William Shakespeare was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a glover, and Mary Arden, the daughter of a wealthy farmer. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but baptismal records point to it being the same as that of his death, April 23.

He probably attended what is now the Edward VI Grammar School, where he would have studied Latin literature, and at 18, he married a farmer's daughter, Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, born in 1583, and, two years later, the twins Hamnet (who died in childhood) and Judith.

Nothing further is known of his life until 1592, when one of his earliest plays (what is now the first part of *Henry VI*) became a hit in London, where Shakespeare was now working as an actor. Soon afterwards, an outbreak of the plague forced the temporary closure of the theatres, and Shakespeare turned for a while to writing poetry. By 1594, however, he was back in the theatre, acting with the company known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He quickly established himself as one of

London's most successful dramatists, with an income that enabled him, in 1597, to buy a mansion back in Stratford. In 1599 he became a shareholder in London's newly built Globe Theatre.

In 1603, Shakespeare's company was awarded a royal patent, becoming known as the King's Men. Possibly as early as 1610, the playwright retired to his home in Stratford-upon-Avon, living there – and continuing to invest in real estate – until his death on April 23, 1616. He is buried in the town's Holy Trinity Church.

In the first collected edition of his works in 1623, fellow dramatist Ben Jonson called him a man “not of an age, but for all time.” Not only did Shakespeare write some of the most popular plays of all time, but he was also extremely prolific, composing 38 (canonically accepted) plays in 23 years. Covering many subjects and styles, including comedy, tragedy, history and romance, his works are characterized by expansive plots, extraordinary language and humanist themes. Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity in his lifetime, and 400 years after his death, he is still the most produced playwright in the world.