

The Great People.
William Shakespeare
(1564 – 1616)



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in 1564, in [Stratford-upon-Avon](#). Located in the centre of England, the town was (and still is) an important river-crossing settlement and market centre. The register of Stratford's Holy Trinity Church records Shakespeare's [baptism](#) on 26 April. He is traditionally said to have been born on 23 April.

John Shakespeare, William's father, was a successful Stratford businessman, in the glove-making and wool-dealing trades. He had settled in Stratford by 1552 and later bought property in the town. John Shakespeare married [Mary Arden](#), the daughter of Robert Arden. John and Mary set up home in Henley Street, Stratford, in the house now known as [Shakespeare's Birthplace](#). John and Mary lost two children before William was born. They had five more children, another of whom died young.

As the son of a leading townsman, William almost certainly attended Stratford's 'petty' or junior school before progressing, perhaps at the age of seven, to the [Grammar School](#), which still stands.



It is not known what Shakespeare did when he left school, probably at the age of fourteen, as was usual. In November 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of Richard Hathaway, a local farmer. Her home, now known as [Anne Hathaway's Cottage](#), still stands in the village of Shottery, a mile from Stratford. At the time of their marriage William was eighteen and Anne was twenty-six. Their first-born child, Susanna, was baptized on 26 May 1583. Two years later twins followed Hamnet and Judith, baptized on 2 February 1585. Shakespeare's elder daughter, Susanna, married John [Hall](#) a Stratford physician, in 1607, and gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, the following year. Elizabeth was married twice, to Thomas Nash in 1626, and to John Bernard in 1649. However, she had no children by either husband. Hamnet died in 1596, at the age of 11 and was buried in Stratford on 11 August 1596. The cause of death is unknown. In 1616 Judith married Thomas Quiney, a Stratford vintner, in 1616 by whom she had three sons, Shakespeare Quiney, who died in infancy, and Richard and Thomas, who both died unmarried, early in 1639 within a month of each other.



Shakespeare's reputation was established in London by 1592; in that year another dramatist, Robert Greene, was envious of his success and called him 'an upstart crow'. Shakespeare's earliest plays included the three parts of *Henry VI*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare's first printed works were two long poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594).¹ In 1594, Shakespeare joined others in forming a new theatre company, under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain, with Richard Burbage as its leading actor. For almost twenty years Shakespeare was its regular dramatist, producing on average two plays a year. Shakespeare's success in the London theatres made him wealthy and in 1597 he bought [New Place](#), one of the largest houses in Stratford. Here he probably wrote *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. In 1598, the author of a book on the arts, Francis Meres, described Shakespeare as the best contemporary dramatist and mentioned twelve of his plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard II* and *Henry IV*.

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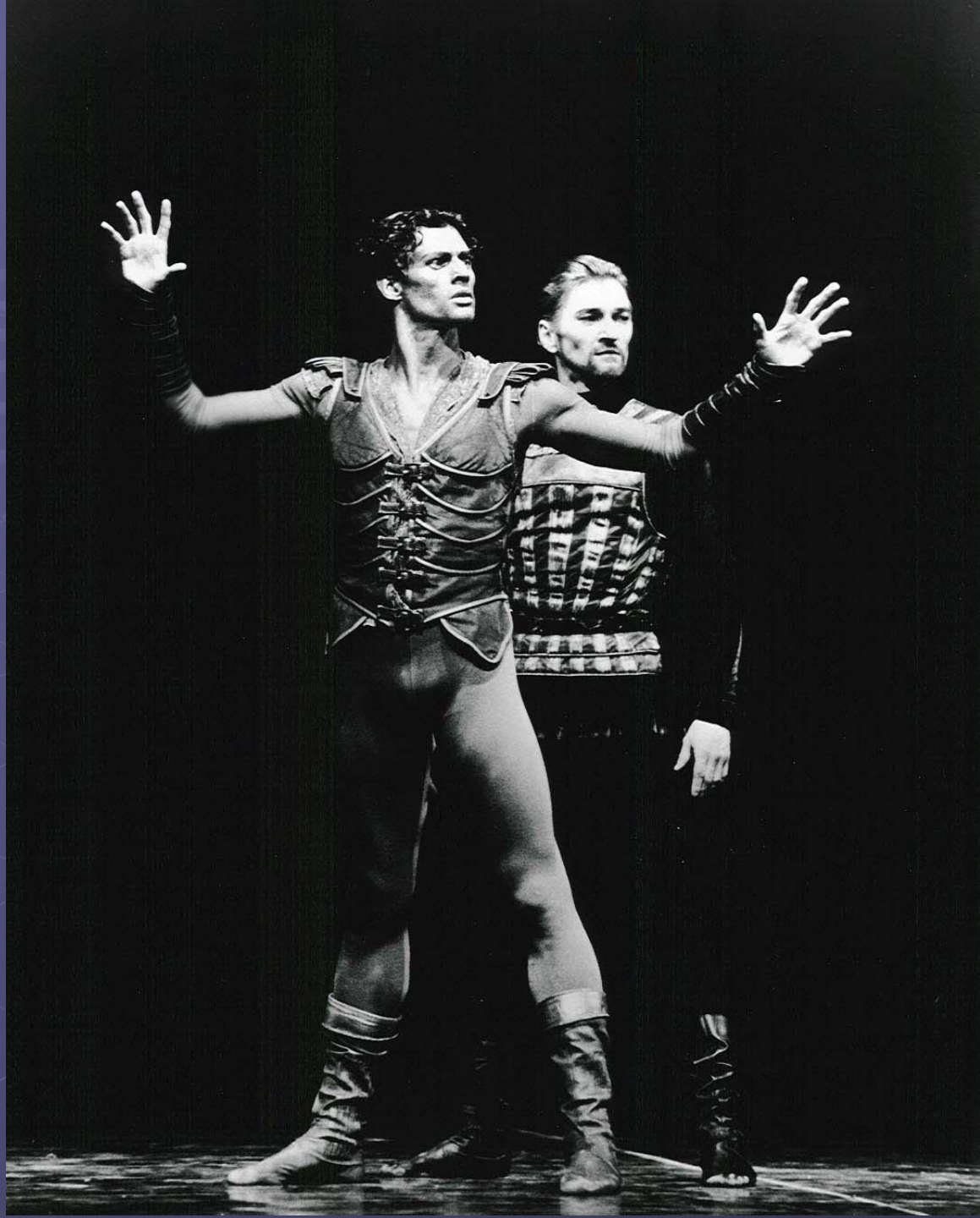
William Shakespeare

THE WINTER'S TALE



In 1599 he became a part owner of the Globe Theatre, and in 1608 of the Blackfriars Theatre. Two of his plays, *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*, were almost certainly written during the year in which the Globe opened.

In 1613, during a performance of *Henry VIII*, a fire broke out and destroyed the Globe, but it was rebuilt the following year. Some of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies were written in the early 1600s, including *Hamlet* and, after James I's accession, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. His late plays, often known as the Romances, date from c. 1608 to 1612 and include *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. He retired to Stratford in 1613. From around 1611 Shakespeare seems largely to have disengaged himself from the London theatre world and to have spent his time at his Stratford house, New Place. In March 1616 he signed his will, in which he left substantial property and other bequests to his family and friends, including theatre colleagues in the King's Men.



Shakespeare died in Stratford, aged fifty-two, on 23 April 1616, and was buried in [Holy Trinity Church](#) two days later. Shakespeare's burial is recorded in Stratford's parish register as having taken place on 25 April 1616. On the stone of Shakespeare's grave are the lines

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones
And curst be he that moves my bones.

His widow, Anne, died in 1623 and was buried beside him. Shakespeare's family line came to an end with the death of his grand-daughter Elizabeth in 1670.