

## An excursion to Stratford-Upon-Avon (13 July 2024)

During the two-week summer programme that I attended at Cambridge University, I enrolled in an optional excursion to Stratford organized for students to see a play at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.



Despite the long drive (two hours and half each way), this was a memorable experience that I would recommend to any Shakespeare's fan! We had two hours and a half of leisure time between our arrival at Stratford and the beginning of the play, so I made the most of it. Here is my photo album!

Stratford is a market town with more than 800 years of history, containing many buildings including "five beautifully preserved Tudor homes and gardens, all directly linked with William Shakespeare and his family" (according to the map/guide of the tourist information centre!).

From the Riverside coach Park, I went to the Visitor Centre at the end of Bridgeway, to get a map. I then walked to the city centre, through Bridge Street to Henley Street, in which stands Shakespeare's Birthplace.



Henley Street is a picturesque pedestrian street, with many cafés, shops and restaurants.





And there it is, the house of Shakespeare's parents, where William was born in 1564:



View of Shakespeare's Birthplace from Henley Street

You can buy tickets to visit the house at Shakespeare Centre, just on the left. Tickets are expensive, £ 19.50 for an adult, so I would recommend buying a combined ticket for three houses at £ 26 if you can spend more time in Stratford: [Shakespeare's Birthplace](#). Tickets can be used within one year.

The content of the house is quite interesting, and the gardens are delightful:



Birthplace seen from the garden





View towards the visitor shop



Opposite view from the visitor shop towards the house

After this first visit, I went back to Bridge Street down to Waterside, near the River Avon, in the direction of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre: [Our theatres | Royal Shakespeare Company \(rsc.org.uk\)](https://www.rsc.org.uk/our-theatres)



This was a very enjoyable walk. The new, transformed theatre was opened on 4 March 2011 by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. At its back we find the older Swan Theatre.





The Swan Theatre

On Waterside, I passed by “The Other Place”, another theatre, then went on in the direction of Holy Trinity Church to see Shakespeare’s Tomb, on Southern Lane then Old Town.



Partial view of Holy Trinity Church from the graveyard

Welcome to Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, one of England's most beautiful parish churches.

Holy Trinity is the church where William Shakespeare was baptised, where he worshipped and where he is buried. We are delighted to welcome the thousands of visitors who come each year to view his final resting place. We are also an active parish church serving the needs of local people. In fact, Christians have been worshipping God on this site for over 1,000 years.

Whether you live locally or are visiting us from far away, you are assured of a warm welcome! Our aim is that all who come to this beautiful and holy place will be moved by the atmosphere of prayer and praise, an echo of the millions of prayers offered here over the centuries. We hope that you will encounter the transforming love of God in this special place.

The Rev'd Patrick Taylor, Vicar.

There has been a church on this site since at least 713 when a Saxon monastery was built here, although, a church on the banks of the Avon in Stratford is first mentioned in the charter of 845, signed by Beorhtric (Bertulf), King of Mercia. This would have been a wooden construction. It is very likely that the Normans replaced this with a stone building but no trace of either remains.

The present building dates from 1210, with the oldest sections being the tower, transepts and nave pillars. The North and South aisles were added in the 1300s and the Chancel in the late 1400s.

#### 1. Crossing

This is the oldest part of the church. The four massive pillars date from 1210 and support the tower and spire.

#### 2. Misericords

There are 26 of these carved, wooden seats found on each side of the chancel. They were for those attending long services allowing them to rest without actually sitting down. They date from the 1400s and some depict life in those times, often in lurid detail! A booklet with more information is available in the church shop.

#### 3. Chancel

William Shakespeare and his wife Anne are buried here along with members of his family. He was buried here in 1616 because he was a 'lay rector'. You will see a bust on the wall erected in 1623 by his widow and friends. Close by are copies of the **register entries** for his baptism and burial and the **original font** where he was baptised. The **chained bible** dates from 1611 and would have been read from in this church during Shakespeare's lifetime.

#### 4. High Altar

One of the very few pre-reformation stone altars still in use in England today. It was found buried underneath the floor where it had been hidden during one of the Reformation purges in the 1500s when many statues, carvings and other church treasures were lost.

#### 5. St. Peter's Chapel

This chapel is open for private prayer. You will find the American window here, unveiled in 1896 by the American ambassador and is inscribed 'The Gift of America to Shakespeare's Church'.

#### 6. Chapel of Thomas Becket

This chapel was dedicated by John de Stratford, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1331. The window above depicts how it may have looked during a medieval mass.

#### 7. Clopton Chapel

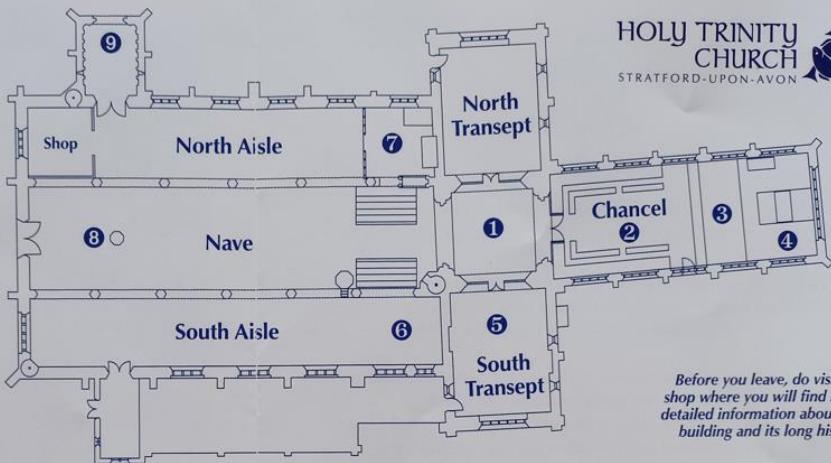
Directly ahead is the grand tomb of Joyce Clopton (d 1635) and her husband George Carew Earl of Totnes (d 1629). Lord Totnes was master of Ordnance to James I of England. To the left are the effigies of William Clopton (d 1592) and his wife Anne.

#### 8. The Font

This is near the door as it is the 'spiritual door' to the church through baptism. Face the high altar from this point and you will notice that the central line deviates to the left. It is believed that this 'weeping chancel' represents the inclined head of the crucified Lord.

#### 9. Sanctuary Knocker

This is on the inner porch door that you came through and dates from the 1200s. Anyone touching the ring could claim sanctuary in the church for 37 days.



Before you leave, do visit the shop where you will find more detailed information about this building and its long history.



Outside and inside views of the West door, and the font (see 8 in the map above)



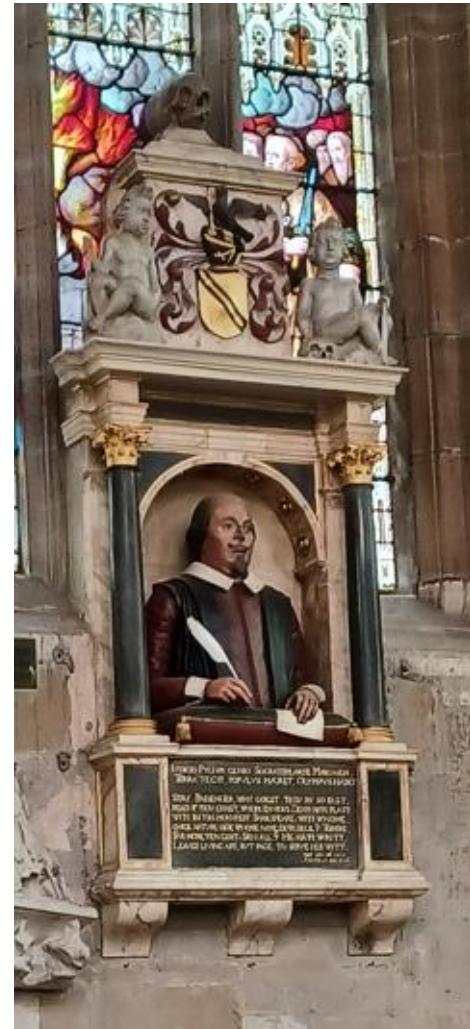
The Nave (view of the Crossing and the Chancel)



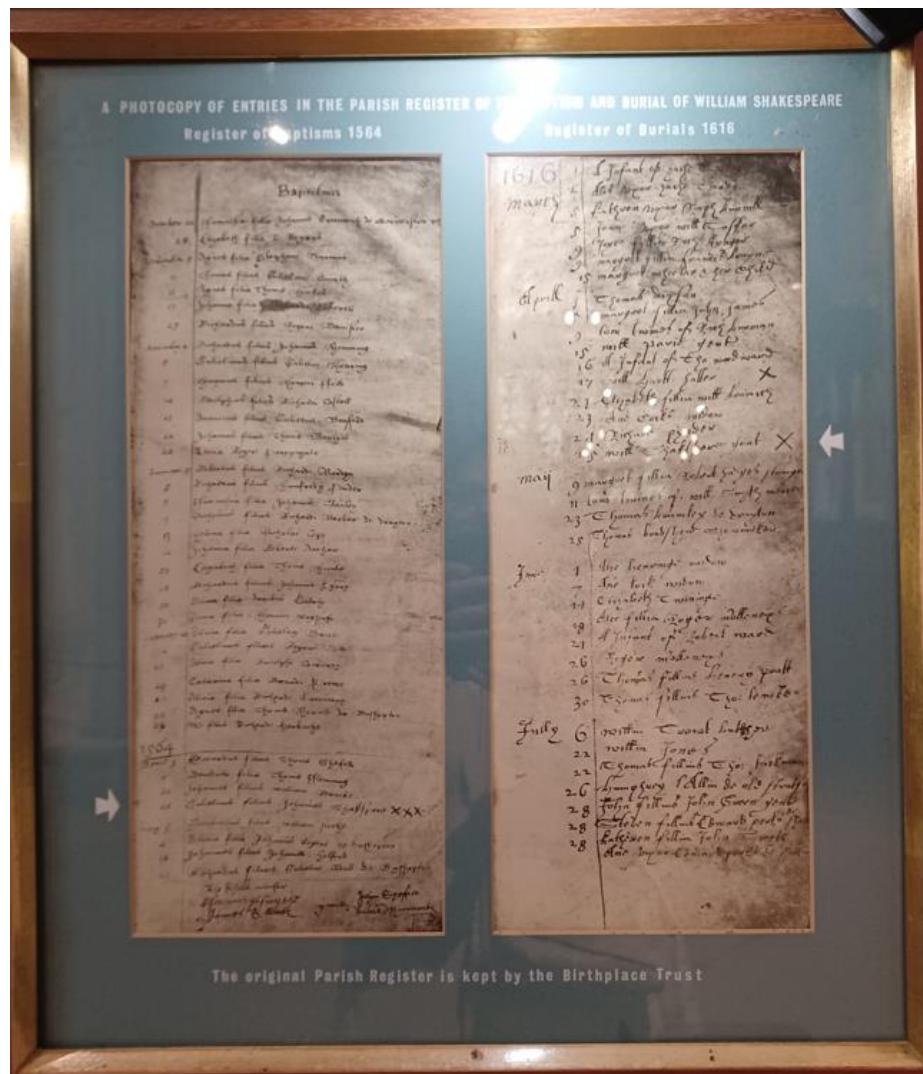
The Chancel (3)



Tombs of Anne and William Shakespeare



View of Shakespeare's bust



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Photocopies of entries in the Parish register of the birth and burial of William Shakespeare

Outside the church, I saw a picturesque range of cottages with wisteria in College Lane:



I went back to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre by the Avonbank gardens:



I noticed the names of the boats: Cressida, Viola, Portia, Ursula, Ophelia, Volumnia... all evoking female characters in Shakespeare's plays.



RSC posters for the 2024/2025 season and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

For a first live experience of a play by Shakespeare, I would not have chosen *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but did I enjoy it, nonetheless!

[The Merry Wives of Windsor | Royal Shakespeare Company \(rsc.org.uk\)](https://www.rsc.org.uk/productions/the-merry-wives-of-windsor)



The stage and part of the auditorium of the RS Theatre



Eva Anglessy, 14 July 2024