

To be or Knot to be? Where did Shakespeare tie the Knot?

New Exhibition Unravels the Mystery

- The drama of a man below the age of consent marrying an older woman already pregnant with his child: That was Shakespeare's wedding, but where did it take place?
- For the first time all evidence has been brought together to exploring the myths and legends of where William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway.
- The exhibition will be free to view at Coventry Cathedral from 31st January to 12th February.

And Thereby Hangs A Tale is a new exhibition from the Churches Conservation Trust, the national charity protecting historic churches at risk. For the first time all evidence of William Shakespeare's wedding is brought together in one place to explore the internationally famous mystery of where Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway.

The exhibition was made possible by a £47,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Shakespeare's wedding, held in 1582, was a social drama: William, 18 years old, was below the age of consent. His parents would have had to provide signed permission for the marriage to Anne, eight years his senior and already pregnant with William's child. The age difference and the fact Anne was pregnant out of wedlock has been the subject of much historical debate – perhaps a shotgun wedding?

All this debate stems from just two historic documents: proof of the granting of a Marriage Licence and its underwriting Bond. Much has been made from the few facts we can glean from these sources, especially a discrepancy in the spelling of Anne's surname. Historic fact has started merging with fiction. Tales of a second woman, Anne Whateley – said to be Shakespeare's true love – whose beau was stolen by the evil spinster Hathaway, read more like one of his plays than a historic analysis, yet have filtered into his official biographies. Its time to dispel these myths, challenge the fiction and go back to the original sources in an attempt to find the truth...

Evidence for and against the five churches laying claim to Shakespeare's wedding is presented with visitors able to make their own minds – assisted by historical records, artefacts and stories from the time. The five churches are:

- **St Martin's Church, Worcester:** A church close to where William would have signed the Bond and got his Marriage Licence. The register from the time still exists but has pages missing - pages that cover the very period when Shakespeare's marriage would have been taken place, yet have been mysteriously removed. Stories suggest that the pages, were removed by early Shakespearean fans? William was a celebrity during his lifetime.
- **All Saints' Church, Billesley, Stratford-up-Avon,** cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. Billesley was the location for wedding of Shakespeare's granddaughter Elizabeth Nash to John Barnard in 1649. At this time Billesley Church was in a state of ruin, run down and ramshackle. Both Elizabeth and John were people of wealth and unlikely to have chosen backwater unloved church not fitting with their social status unless one of them had close personal ties to the place. It is claimed Elizabeth insisted on the venue because of the strong family connection - her grandparents, William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, were married there.
- **All Saints' Chapel, Luddington:** Shakespeare's signature has been seen on parish registers, states a respected Victorian Shakespeare biographer, S.W. Fullom. But the registers no longer exist – said to have been burned by a Curate's wife to boil a kettle!
- **St Andrew's Church, Temple Grafton:** In the frame because of the wording on the Marriage Bond which states "*WM Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton*" [SIC]. It was traditional at this time for brides to get married in their own parish. But evidence suggests that the entry is a clerical error, both because Anne's surname is incorrect but also because in the other marriage document she is referred to as *Anne Hathwey of Stratford*. [SIC].
- **Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon:** Shakespeare was baptised at the church, all his children were baptised here and he and Anne are buried here. This is very much Shakespeare's church, but not for his wedding it would appear – the Parish records for time are comprehensive and make no mention of William and Anne's wedding. Could they have missed this important event?

Of these five churches, only All Saints, Billesley and Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon survive, the rest of have been lost to the Nation.

And Thereby Hangs A Tale is also online at: www.visitchurches.org.uk/shakespeare

Loyd Grossman, Chairman, The Churches Conservation Trust, said “*Our historic churches represent 1,000 years of British history and stories. This new exhibition explores the myths and legends of our greatest storyteller and the churches at the centre of Shakespeare’s marriage mystery.*”

“We hope visitors to the exhibition will be inspired to visit the surviving historic churches mentioned in the mystery and also feel compelled to visit the historic churches in their own communities. It is only through bringing historic churches back into every day use that they can be saved for future generations.”

And Thereby Hangs The Tale is taking place as part of the World Shakespeare Festival 2012. The exhibition will tour to other major venues across the West Midlands [dates and venues below].

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Press information:

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Exhibition tour dates:

- Anne Hathaway’s Cottage (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust): 16th September – 29th January 2011
- Coventry Cathedral: 31st January – 12th February 2012
- Worcester Cathedral: 14th February – 26th February 2012
- Leamington Library: 28th February – 20th March 2012
- Coughton Court (National Trust): 24th March - 16th April 2012
- Holy Trinity Church, Stratford: 18th April – 17th May 2012
- Church of St Mary Magdelene, Croome Park (National Trust): 19th May – 3rd June 2012
- Abington Park Museum, Northampton: 5th June – 10th August 2012

About the Churches Conservation Trust (www.visitchurches.org.uk) :

- The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) is the national charity protecting historic churches at risk. Established under Ecclesiastical Law on 1 April

1969 the Trust now cares for 344 historic churches – the largest collection of historic churches in the country.

- The charity receives its churches in the form of 'vestings' from the Church Commissioners. All the CCT's churches remain consecrated and are often used for occasional worship.
- The CCT saves churches by working with local people to bring them back into the heart of the community or every day use as a social, tourism, educational or community resource. The CCT's care of its Grade I and II* buildings has given it an international reputation in conservation and regeneration of buildings.
- The charity requires a minimum of £9 million (£1.5m per year, for the next six years), to fill its funding shortfall . The charity received £3.1m from the DCMS, prior to the Comprehensive Spending Review. This funding attracted £1.3m of conditional match-funding from the Church Commissioners and a further £1.2m of philanthropic donations, grants and self generated income;
- Chairman of the Trust is Loyd Grossman OBE FSA, who was appointed in 2007. Crispin Truman is Chief Executive.

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