Shakespears Life Essay, Research Paper

England’s greatest poet and playwright was born at

Stratford-upon-Avon, the son of a tradesman and

Alderman of Stratford, John Shakespeare in 1564.

William, the eldest son, and third child (of eight) was

baptised on 26th April 1564 and probably educated at

Stratford Grammar School, but little is

known of his life up to his eighteenth year. He did not

go to University and his younger contemporary and

fellow-dramatist, Ben Johnson, would later speak

disparagingly of his “small Latin, and less Greek” in

the eulogy prefaced to the Firs Folio. However the

Grammar School curriculum would have provided a

formidable linguistic, and to some extent literary,

education.

Although, in 1575 when he was eleven, there was a

great plague in the country and Queen Elizabeth

journeyed out of London to avoid its consequences and

stayed for several days at Kenilworth Castle near

Stratford enjoying “festivities” arranged by her host

Lord Leicester. It is probable these events may have

made a strong impact on the mind of young William.

At the age of Eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, eight

years his senior. Five years later he left for London.

William worked at the Globe Theatre and appeared in

many small parts. He first appeared in public as a poet

in 1593 with his Venus and Adonis and the following

year with The Rape of Lucrece. He became joint

proprietor of The Globe and also had an interest in the

Blackfriars Theatre.

The play writing commenced in 1595 and of the 38 plays

that comprise the Shakespeare Cannon, 36 were published

in the 1st Folio of 1623, of which 18 had been

published in his lifetime in what are termed the Quarto

publications.

Love’s Labour’s Lost and The Comedy of Errors appear

to be among the earliest, being followed by The Two

Gentlemen of Verona and Romeo and Juliet. Then followed

Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II, Titus Andronicus,

The Taming of the Shrew, King John, The Merchant of

Venice, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, All’s Well that Ends

Well, Henry IV, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Henry V,

Much Ado about Nothing, As you like it, Twelth Night,

Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, Othello,

Measure for Measure, Macbeth, King Lear, Timon of

Athens, Pericles, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus,

Cymbeline, A Winter’s Tale, The Tempest, Henry VIII and

The Two Noble Kinsmen.

When he retired from writing in 1611, he returned to

Stratford to live in a house which he had built for his

family. His only son, Hamnet died when still a child.

He also lost a daughter Judith (twin to Hamnet), but

his third child Susanna married a Stratford Doctor,

John Hall and their home “Hall’s Croft” is today

preserved as one of the Shakespeare Properties and

administered by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

In 1616 Shakespeare was buried in the Church of the

Holy Trinity the same Church where he was

baptised in 1564. Tradition has it that he died after

an evening’s drinking with some of his theatre

friends. His gravestone bears the words:-

Good frend for Jesus sake forebeare,

to digg the dust encloased heare,

Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones,

And curst be he yt moves my bones.

In his will Shakespeare left his wife, the former Anne

Hathaway, his second best bed. We cannot be sure of the

reason for this. It may have been the marital bed the

best bed being reserved for guests. It may suggest that

they had a not altogether happy marriage which

nevertheless produced three children, Susanna, born on

May 26th 1583 and twins , Hamnet and Judith, born on

February 2nd 1585. These entries appear in the Holy

Trinity Register.

There is no direct evidence of the marriage of William

Shakespeare to Anne Hathaway although most historians

accept that an entry in the Bishop’s Register at

Worcester in November 1582 regarding the issue of a

marriage licence to William Shaxpere and Anne Whateley

of Temple Grafton does not refer to the famous bard.

However the following day a guarantee of ?40 was

undertaken in Stratford by two yeomen of the town

against the prevention of the legal marriage of William

Shagspere and Anne Hathway on only one reading of the

banns. In 1582 , ?40 was a considerable sum of money

and one cannot believe that the simple fact of Anne’s

being three months pregnant would warrant it. No

marriage of an Anne Whatelely has ever been traced,

neither has the marriage of Anne Hathway, but lack of

record does not mean that it did not happen.