

Shakespeare's Lost Domesticity

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Shakespeare's Lost Domesticity: material responses to absence in Stratford-upon-Avon

Figures:



Figure 1: Chapel Street, site of New Place, c. 1900. SBT SC2/3.



Figure 2: a carving set labelled 'Shakespeare's Mulberry Tree'; nineteenth century. SBT 1978-2.



Figure 3: Thomas Sharp, a pastry cutter stamped 'Shakespeare's Wood Sharp Stratford on Avon'. SBT 2005-15.

Shakespeare Relics



SWORD AND LANTERN



FIRE-GRATE AND FIRE-DOG



A WRITING-DESK

A VALUABLE collection of relics of Shakespeare has, through the death of a relative, just come into the possession of Mr. Thomas Hornby, of Kingsthorpe. The relics have been taken from Stratford-on-Avon to Kingsthorpe, and Mr. Hornby, who has just had the treasures arranged in his house, has allowed some friends and Shakespearean scholars to view them. The *Northampton Mercury* publishes an interesting description of the relics, from which we learn that Shakespeare's birthplace came early into the possession of a branch of the family named Hart, descendants of Shakespeare's sister Joan, and so remained till 1793. The then owner, Thomas Hart—the sixth in a direct line from Joan Shakespeare—lost his only child in her infancy. Having no issue, he requested Thomas Hornby, a relation of his own, to "take to the remains of the relics belonging to Shakespeare, and rent the house where Shakespeare was born, and take the things by valuation." The articles were valued by Thomas Taylor, auctioneer, of Stratford, May 20, 1793. He lived there till his death, and his widow lived there till October, 1820, when she was compelled to leave by an extraordinary charge of rent. So far Widow Hornby's own account. Of this "extraordinary charge of rent" an interesting story is told. Thomas Hornby, while negotiating the purchase of the house, told a Stratford friend his intention of purchasing the property the following day. The friend (Mr. Court), taking time by the forelock, got up very early the next morning, and, going to the landlord, bought the cottage before Thomas Hornby appeared. The new owner gradually raised the rent to 40*l.* in place of the modest 10*l.* that had hitherto been paid, and Mrs. Hornby accordingly marched out, taking with her every stick and stone she could possibly move, and, what is more, whitewashing out some of the names pencilled on the wall, and notably some writing of Washington Irving, whom she never forgave for his unflattering description of herself. She took a house almost opposite Shakespeare's birthplace, erected a great sign-board to induce visitors to patronise her new establishment and advertised her relics far and near. It was a severe struggle, for the original birthplace was a powerful competitor. Mary paraded her curiosities, guaranteed genuine by affidavits and declarations of all manner of people. Some of them we illustrate.

Here visited thousands in all conditions of life, as evidenced by the two books containing the signatures of visitors. After her death less show was made of the things, and in recent years, chiefly in order to preserve them, they have been kept out of sight of the general public. Under Mr. Hornby's direction they have now been conveyed to Kingsthorpe.

Though, from an inventory made by Mary Hornby herself, it is evident that some have disappeared since she was turned out of Shakespeare's house, a wealth of riches remains. Chief interest will be divided between the pictures and the oak furniture. To the general public the chairs and chests will be the most pleasing. There are four oak chairs and part of a fifth—this last accompanied by the declaration of Thos. H. Knight that it is "the very identical chair which the immortal Bard usually sat in." Whatever may be said of this, the other four are indisputably contemporary with Shakespeare. Two are fine substantial carved oak chairs, one very small, for a child, beautifully carved, and at least, the larger one, wonderfully comfortable to sit in. For this large chair too, Elizabethan chairs adorned with crowns, and said to have been given to Shakespeare by Lord Southampton. It is remarkable that they are almost counterparts of one of the chairs sold at the recent sale at



A LOCK



CARD AND DICE BOX



A DEED-BOX



PORTRAIT OF SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER JUDITH

Abington Abbey, the last home of the last of Shakespeare's grandchildren, Lady Barnard. Two oak chests finely carved, an oak desk, four carvings of figures, portions of a bedstead, and so on, are among the other pieces of furniture.

The oil-paintings include a fine portrait of Shakespeare's sister Judith, in a lovely dress. Two others, in oval gilt frames, were docketed by Mary Hornby as Dr. and Mrs. Hall—Shakespeare's favourite daughter Susannah and her husband. Representations of these two Stratford worthies they cannot be. In all probability one is a portrait of Mrs. Hall's daughter, Elizabeth Hall, who married Mr., afterwards Sir John, Barnard, of Abington Abbey. There is little doubt that investigations will show that they are good likenesses of the former owners of Abington, Sir John and Lady Barnard. Another painting represents Miss Clapton in a trance, and another is of a young lady in very high headgear. Yet another is a later portrait of Mr. Green worshipping before a crucifix. These last two require better identification.

To return to the personal relics. There is an iron grate and a fire-dog taken out of Shakespeare's house; and a lock off a door, the door of Shakespeare's birth-chamber. A remarkable iron box, a little deed-chest, with circular lid, of a date anterior to Shakespeare, perhaps by two centuries, some of the most interesting of all. There is a sword mentioned by Washington Irving; it is a heavy weapon, and seems to have been intended for service rather than for stage display. Perhaps in those days, however, stage-properties, as such, were unknown. A large plaster cast, painted in vivid colours, taken from the wall of the house, is another curious relic of Shakespeare and the past. It is undoubtedly early seventeenth-century work. It bears the date 1602. It is a crude representation of David attacking Goliath, and bears, in gold letters:—

Goliath comes with sword and spear,
And David with his sling;
Altho' Goliath rage and sneer,
Down David darts him bring.

There is a curious old dice and card-box, with armorial bearings in gilt—Shakespeare, in his early youth at least, was fond of such things. This treasure is reputed to have been a present from some Spanish royalty in return for a goblet or tumbler that Shakespeare gave him.

Less intimately connected with Shakespeare's spare, but rich in Shakespearean associations, are three books containing signatures of visitors. The first contains the names of visitors to the birthplace of Shakespeare from 1812 to 1819, the last name in the book being opposite August 26 of that year. This book has autographs of many famous personages of the period. The other two books contain the signatures of visitors to Mary Hornby's second house. There is a large coloured bust of Shakespeare, a replica of the bust in the church, and there is a facsimile of the stone containing the world-known lines:—

Good friend, for Jon's sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here,
Hail to the man that spurs three scores,
And come to us who never stir bones.

There is also a lantern "made of the remains of the window-frame belonging to the poet's study by a relation during Shakespeare's lifetime"—according to a catalogue printed for Mary Hornby in 1820. A small wood-carving is a representation of Shakespeare leaning on a pillar, on which are masks for Comedy and Tragedy. This is affixed to a stand of mulberry wood, a portion of the tree Shakespeare planted in his last home, "New Place." There are several bits of this tree, a host of documents, plaster casts, portraits, carvings, and engravings among the many articles at Kingsthorpe. It will be impossible to describe them more accurately, or even to gauge their value or interest, until there has been time for more careful examination.—Our illustrations are published by permission of Mr. Hornby, the owner of the relics.



CHILD'S CHAIR AND PORTION OF BEDSTEAD



A PLASTER-CAST FROM THE WALL OF SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE



A CARVED OAK CHAIR



A CARVED OAK CHAIR

THE RELICS OF SHAKESPEARE WHICH HAVE RECENTLY BEEN REMOVED TO KINGSTHORPE, NEAR NORTHAMPTON

Figure 4: 1 April 1893; a page from 'The Graphic' newspaper with illustrations and text, 'Shakespeare's Relics'.



Figure 5: wood from the collection of Paul Morgan, SBT collection, Box 120; includes a piece of lintel SBT L2004-8/1. NEW PHOTOGRAPHY ON ORDER.

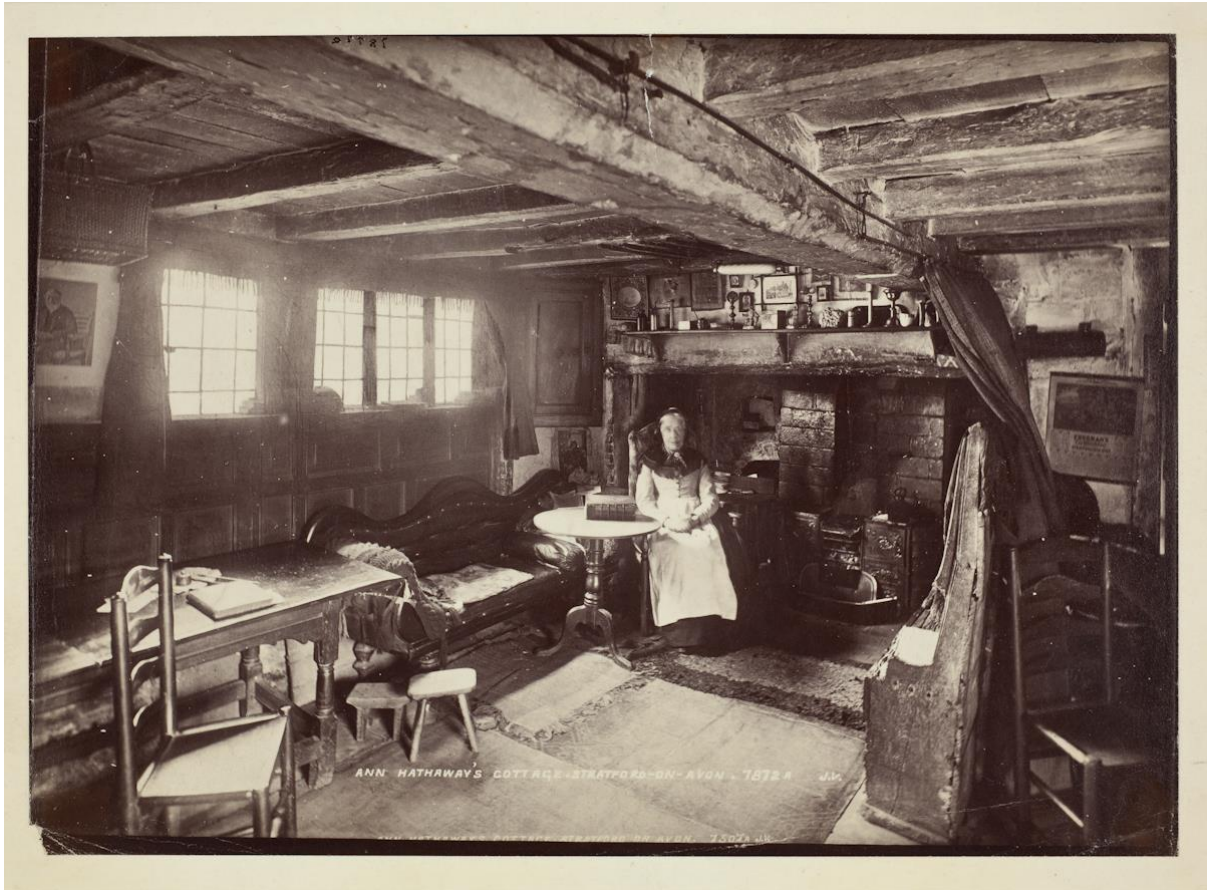


Figure 6: Black and white photograph and one colour-tinted postcard of the parlour, Anne Hathaway's Cottage, with Mary Baker seated in corner. c.1888. SC8/7872a.



Figure 7: Pratt plate depicting Anne Hathaway's Cottage; earthenware decorated with polychrome prints, one of a set of six showing different Stratford sites connected to Shakespeare, c.1850. SBT 1972-9/1.



Figure 8 & cover image: Shakespeare Distillery, New Place edition mulberry gin, with label showing the New Place mulberry and stamped with the seal from ring alleged to have belong to William Shakespeare, purchased October 2017. Bottle of mulberry juice said to have come from the original mulberry, c. 1756. SBT1868-3/87. NEW PHOTOGRAPHY ON ORDER.