

## Shakespeare's Lost Domesticity

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

'people's engagement with the world does not simply consist in deducing the meaning of people, places and things or what they represent, but also in *presencing* that which is absent in one way or another'.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst a set of photographs of Stratford-upon-Avon taken around 1900 is a view without much visual interest. The perspective is from the street and there are buildings to each side with trees in the background and a streetlight in the right foreground, but framed at the centre is an empty area of land surrounded by a low wall and railings (Fig. 1). The photograph captures an absence at the heart of 'Shakespeare's Stratford' - the site of his house called New Place, his Stratford home between 1597 and 1616. This photograph, and the countless others like it, is a material response and record of engagement with the lost building. It makes substance and meaning out of absence.

This article examines a range of cultural and creative responses to the loss of domestic material culture associated with William Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon. It views the material culture and heritage of Shakespeare's hometown in negative, that is, by bringing into focus what has gone as the context for what exists. Our research contributes to growing interest in the physical and metaphorical construction of Stratford-upon-Avon, a topic described in 2012 as 'ripe for analysis'.<sup>2</sup> Here we point to the significance of the stripping of domestic fabric and items from the town in shaping, sustaining and extending a sense of Shakespeare's domesticity. The term 'domesticity' is used here to refer not just to home and family life but also the 'quality or state of being domestic', which implies interaction with the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Bille, F. Hastrup & T. Flohr Sorensen, eds., *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss* (New York: Springer, 2010), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Scheil, 'Preface', Special Issue of *Critical Survey*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 1-3. As Scheil observes, 'every reimagining of Stratford assembles a combination of real locales such as Holy Trinity Church, the Henley Street Birthplace, Anne Hathaway's Cottage and New Place, and adds a notion of 'Shakespeare' to produce a particular conception of 'Stratford'. We build on such observations and research that has emerged mainly within literary scholarship, through the application of historical material approaches and with particular sensitivity to the meanings and functions of domestic space and materials.

domestic environment.<sup>3</sup> Based on extensive investigation into the museum collections of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT) we provide a historical and critical framework through which to interpret lesser-known, even problematic, elements of this internationally-recognised collection.<sup>4</sup> In developing a lens through which to approach and understand what otherwise may be regarded as inauthentic or anomalous accessions within the SBT collection, this article demonstrates how processes of destruction and loss of domestic material fabric associated with Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon had an allied trajectory of creative production and peculiar preservation. It also looks beyond the properties cared for by the SBT to consider disputes about the wider material environment of the town as evidence of historical and present-day tensions involved in the ownership and presentation of this unique heritage site.

In a 2014 special issue of this journal devoted to ‘Shakespeare and the problem of biography’ Brian Cummings observes: ‘From its beginnings, the life story of Shakespeare has been haunted by a sense of loss and a concomitant desire to fill in the gaps.’<sup>5</sup> Recent developments in Shakespearean biography acknowledge and engage creatively with these archival gaps.<sup>6</sup> In its focus on the built environment and material objects our article can be understood as a parallel investigation into the matter of ‘the absent presence of Shakespeare’s life’. It is argued that the processes by which absence is understood and reconciled, and the things generated as response to loss, provide an ‘alternative’ material record and vision of Shakespeare’s homelife that should be studied on its own terms.

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<sup>3</sup> *OED*. 1a.

<sup>4</sup> Our research to date has focused on the SBT as the custodians of the Shakespeare Family Homes and associated objects. There is, however, great potential for further research to extend our model for studying material responses to loss to other sites and collections.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Cummings, ‘Last Words: The Biographemes of Shakespeare’, in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 65: 4 (Winter 2014): 482-490, 484.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Lena Cowen Orlin’s ingenious response to archival absence for her biographical subject, Anne Hathaway, ‘Anne by Indirection’ *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 65: 4 (Winter 2014): 421-454, and the collection of essays forming an ‘alternative biography’ edited by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, *The Shakespeare Circle* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The research presented here engages with a range of scholarly work and approaches across the fields of material culture, anthropology, literary biography, social studies, heritage and tourism. The ‘material turn’ in historical disciplines over the past two decades has focused attention on how people interact with the built environment and crafted things. The emergence of a multi-disciplinary field of early modern material culture has established the importance of studying everyday objects and domestic materiality as part of a wider interest in the experiences of relatively ordinary people in Shakespeare’s lifetime.<sup>7</sup> This work moves beyond analysis of objects to examine material interactions and the practices and behaviours involved in ‘thinking with things as well as words’.<sup>8</sup> Critical approaches to material culture emphasise the need to study the movements of things across space and time while a wider definition of ‘materiality’ encompasses the relationship between presence and absence, the intangible and metaphysical.<sup>9</sup> The present article responds in particular to concepts explored in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, a collection of essays that includes contributions from anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and social scientists addressing the ways in which absence can be used to think in broader terms about a range of environments.<sup>10</sup> This volume provides a multi-disciplinary exposition of the influence of loss and absence on material constructions, arguing that, ‘as an ambiguous interrelation between what is there and what is not, absences are cultural, physical and social

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<sup>7</sup> See, in particular, Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds., *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Paula Findlen, ed., *Early Modern Things: Objects and Their Histories 1500-1800* (London: Routledge, 2012); Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster, eds., *The Routledge Guide to Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016); Lena Cowen Orlin, ed., *Material London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> The importance of studying ‘things in motion’ has been a hugely influential part of the development of modern approaches to material culture, especially the essays by Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: CUP, 1988). The diachronic trajectories of things are examined by Jonathan Gil Harris in ‘Shakespeare’s Hair: Staging the Object of Material Culture’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 479-491, while Dinah Eastop addresses ‘material culture in action’ whereby people continue to perpetuate ritual practices involving recovered historical objects even where the historical conditions and belief systems underpinning those practices are no longer understood, in *Everyday Objects*, 145-156.

<sup>10</sup> Bille, Hastrup & Sorensen, eds., *Anthropology of Absence*.

phenomena that powerfully influence people's conceptualisations of themselves and the world they engage with.'<sup>11</sup> Morgan Meyer's review essay has refined our response, reminding us to ask ourselves: 'how is absence performed, materialized and objectified?'.<sup>12</sup>

Our research connects this work with recent analyses of the history and heritage of Stratford-upon-Avon. Nicola J. Watson's exploration of literary tourism contextualises the transformation of Stratford-upon-Avon into 'Shakespeare's Stratford' within the eighteenth-century development of the writer's house as a tourist destination.<sup>13</sup> Julia Thomas has located the 'invention' of Stratford-upon-Avon as tourist attraction with the marketing of the Birthplace in the Victorian period while Katherine Scheil's work on the afterlife of Anne Hathaway and her cottage has established the appeal of Anne and this location in creative imagining, cultural memory, tourism and diplomacy.<sup>14</sup> David Hume's recent work on the material culture of tourism offers a response to Susan Stewart's *On Longing*, first published in 1984.<sup>15</sup> Stewart's work, conceived within a wide-ranging framework based in literary theory and an exploration of how objects invoke the narrative of experience has had an enduring influence on those engaging with the material culture of souvenirs. Stewart's claim that 'nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss' positions souvenirs as an essential response to the ephemeral nature of the event (an experience) to which it was once related.<sup>16</sup> However,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>12</sup> M. Meyer, 'Placing and tracing absence: A material culture of the immaterial', *Journal of Material Culture*, 17, no. 1 (2012): 103-110.

<sup>13</sup> P. Hubbard & K. Lilley, 'Selling the past: heritage tourism in Stratford-upon-Avon', in *Geography* (2002): 221-232; Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: readers and places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Julia Thomas, *Shakespeare's Shrine: the Bard's Birthplace and the invention of Stratford-upon-Avon* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Katherine Scheil, 'The Second Best Bed and the Legacy of Anne Hathaway', *Critical Survey*, 21, no. 3 (2009): 59-71; 'Anne Hathaway's Cottage: myth, tourism, diplomacy', in *Celebrating Shakespeare, Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, eds. C. Calvo and C. Kahn (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 330-349; Katherine West Scheil, *Imagining Shakespeare's Wife: The Afterlife of Anne Hathaway* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> David Hume, *Tourism Art and Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2015); Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 145; according to Stewart the souvenir is made to stand in the place of a no-longer present event to which it was once related. The souvenir signifies the loss of that event and the trace of the event is concentrated in it. The souvenir can recall the wholeness, now lost, to which it perpetually refers.

while many of Stewart's creative hypotheses are illuminating, there is a need to test and refine her formulations within more recent material and heritage frameworks. The attention we have paid to the ways in which objects serve as proxies not just for an event but for the lost material world of a third person – in this case, William Shakespeare - offer alternative approaches based in material histories.

Our study therefore argues for closer critical attention to the relationship between material culture and Shakespearean biography. Brian Cummings has summed up the core problem for biographers thus: 'Shakespeare's life exists as a kind of black hole of antimatter in relation to the vast nebula of his fame.'<sup>17</sup> Though he does not use the term, Cummings sounds a note of caution about material practices of 'presencing' in response to this void. There is, he points out, a danger that the monuments we produce to remember Shakespeare are 'hazardous, perhaps even wrong' ways of remembering, a form of 'false memory' because modern constructions aim 'to make us feel the past as present'.<sup>18</sup> While it is clear that material strategies of presencing are inherently false, they are not necessarily hazardous as long as their forms, and the impulses that produced them, are interrogated and contextualised. Indeed, the material things created as a response to the destruction or erosion of Shakespeare's *domestic* environment specifically can complement the work of literary scholars concerned with constructions of his identity as both unknowable (genius) and familiar (everyman).<sup>19</sup> Our evidence suggests a desire to reconcile through material means the problem of his intellectual and archival remoteness by focusing on an accessible humanity for Shakespeare, as evoked through the physical remnants of his home life and

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<sup>17</sup> Brian Cummings, 'Shakespeare, Biography, and Anti-Biography', Shakespeare's Birthday Lecture 2014, Folger Shakespeare Library: [https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Shakespeare%27s\\_Birthday\\_Lecture:\\_%22Shakespeare,\\_Biography\\_and\\_Anti-Biography%22\\_\(2014\)](https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Shakespeare%27s_Birthday_Lecture:_%22Shakespeare,_Biography_and_Anti-Biography%22_(2014)) [accessed 3/7/2018].

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Scheil, *Imagining Shakespeare's Wife* on 'the shift from an eighteenth-century Shakespeare who is "the abstract semi-divine authority" to the more humanised Shakespeare of the nineteenth century', p.35.

town. And yet in pursuing such a connection visitors to Stratford have been simultaneously frustrated and enticed by material absence, stimulating a range of creative responses and artefacts which form a parallel tradition of imagining his life to written biography. While biography is an accepted scholarly practice, there is a level of academic disdain around what has been labelled as ‘Shakespeariana’; our task here is to begin to address the neglected material tradition of *presencing* the absent Shakespeare, paying close attention to form as well as the practices such items evoke.

Jonathan Gil Harris is among the few scholars to engage critically with ‘false’ material remnants of Shakespeare. Writing about a particularly evocative artefact, ‘Shakespeare’s hair’, Gil Harris describes the nineteenth-century inscriptions on the card accompanying the hair to elucidate its synecdochical and commodity value.<sup>20</sup> Most of the items considered in the present article also have associated texts – in the form of inscriptions, labels, letters and poems – and these details enhance the narrative quality and cultural value of the material artefact. Attention to this conjunction of thing and text allows us to access the diachronic, even polychronic, dimensions of materiality, the latter, according to Harris, being the ability of an object to draw upon many different moments, dates, periods or ages of time.<sup>21</sup> As a result of an object’s polychronicity, it ‘can prompt many different understandings and experiences of temporality’ which Harris defines as the relations between now and then, old and new, before and after.<sup>22</sup> Allowing for this polychronic quality allows us to move beyond seeing the addition of texts to things as a cynical attempt to impose meaning and value on these items, which are first and foremost a fundamentally *material* response and understanding - attempts to convert the unknowable, untouchable Shakespeare into something tangible - that is subsequently given textual expression and endorsement.

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<sup>20</sup> Harris, ‘Shakespeare’s Hair’.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

## Shakespeare's Family Homes

The core of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's museum collection is a portfolio of five historic properties connected with Shakespeare and his family: his birthplace, the childhood homes of his mother, Mary Arden, and wife, Anne Hathaway, the marital home of his daughter Susanna Hall, known as Hall's Croft, and the site of New Place, Shakespeare's own main residence from 1597 to 1616, but demolished in 1759 and quite possibly the most photographed empty plot in England until a new entrance façade was constructed in 2016. These sites have been developed as part of the elevation of writer's houses into a particular genre of tourism, of which Stratford-upon-Avon has long been seen as an exemplar.<sup>23</sup> Literary tourism is now a highly sophisticated sector of the heritage industry and the 'Shakespeare Family Homes' as they are now collectively presented on the Trust's website attract local, national and international visitors.

At the heart of this thriving industry in Stratford is a striking material absence; the loss of virtually all domestic fabric from the houses dating from Shakespeare's lifetime. While built structures of early modern origin remain at four of these sites, their interiors are wholly recreated or represented.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile the form of the lost building at New Place is evoked through the latest presentation of the site as a garden of contemplation, where visitors are invited to 'walk in Shakespeare's footsteps' entering through 'a new entrance on the site of the original gatehouse' and around 'a contemporary landscape that reveals the footprint of the Shakespeare family home...[giving] an impression of the scale of New Place'.<sup>25</sup> While

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<sup>23</sup> Watson, *Literary tourism*, 59-68; Alison Booth, *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries* (Oxford: OUP, 2016); Anne Trubeck, *A Skeptic's Guide to Writer's Houses* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> The discovery in 2000 by N. W. Alcock and Robert Bearman that the SBT had been presenting the wrong property as Mary Arden's House, and the subsequent shifts in presentation of the site, demonstrates that Shakespeare's domestic heritage is still vulnerable to loss and that its essence is readily transportable; Maurice Weaver, 'Mary Arden's House Falls Foul of Comedy of Errors', *The Telegraph*, 30 November 2000: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1376220/Mary-Arden-House-falls-foul-of-comedy-of-errors.html> [accessed 4/3/2018]; N.W Alcock with Robert Bearman, 'Discovering Mary Arden's House: Property and Society in Wilmcote, Warwickshire', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2002): 53-82.

<sup>25</sup> SBT, visitor pamphlet for New Place.



the SBT owns an internationally-significant collection of early modern artefacts, there are no domestic possessions with a verifiable claim to have been owned by Shakespeare. The famous seal ring, engraved with the initials WS, may be the closest material connection with Shakespeare to have survived, but its provenance is not unbroken.<sup>26</sup> Shakespeare's workmanlike will of 1616 references a few choice objects – a bed, a bowl, a sword – yet it offers little sense of engagement with his belongings, and while the SBT holds a run of inventories for Stratford for the period 1538-1699, inventories for the Shakespeare properties over his lifetime are not among them.<sup>27</sup> There is, therefore, an essential paradox in what the SBT can offer its visitors keen to 'peek inside the homes' associated with, yet ultimately materially detached from, Shakespeare.<sup>28</sup>

What follows establishes the complex strands of destructive, generative and protectionist responses to Shakespeare's domestic heritage, exploring the connections between impulses to procure (thereby damaging) material fabric; efforts to compensate for loss through forms of cultural production, and resistance to threatened loss of what we term 'substitute domesticity'. We identify at least two common strategies to deal with material loss in Stratford. One has focused on the natural environment of Stratford and created a series of tropes in which trees and wood have become the medium through which Shakespeare's connection to his hometown can be expressed, understood and experienced. Another is the ability of portable objects to transport a sense of Shakespeare's domestic environment to new locations. This 'dispersed domesticity' has allowed conceptions of Shakespeare's home life in Stratford to have a material presence well beyond its geographical and temporal boundaries.

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<sup>26</sup> SBT 1868-3/274. The ring was found in 1810 near the churchyard of Stratford-upon-Avon's Holy Trinity Church.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, PROB1/4. J. Jones, ed., *Stratford-upon-Avon Inventories 1538-1699*, 2 vols, Dugdale Society Publications, vol. 40 (2003).

<sup>28</sup> Trubeck, *A Skeptic's Guide to Writer's Houses*, 5.

## New Place

A particular form of dispersed domesticity is represented by a group of crafted items associated with the loss of New Place, Shakespeare's town house in Stratford. The house lived in by Shakespeare was comprehensively rebuilt in 1702 and then demolished in 1759.<sup>29</sup> The widely-repeated story narrates how the owner of the house, the Rev. Francis Gastrell, cut down a mulberry tree in his garden in c.1758 in a fit of pique, having apparently lost patience with unwanted callers keen to see a tree reputed to have been planted by Shakespeare, demolishing the house itself in 1759.<sup>30</sup> Gastrell allegedly sold the mulberry wood to various craftsmen and items fashioned from Shakespeare's mulberry tree were in circulation by 1760.<sup>31</sup> Soon after the loss of both the tree and the house, a visitor to Stratford wrote that 'death, however, in taking Shakespear from the world so early, is, I think, far outdone by a man now living in or near this town; for there was till lately the house in which Shakespeare lived, and a mulberry tree of his planting'.<sup>32</sup> Enterprising craftsmen, of whom Thomas Sharp appears to have been the most successful, harnessed the desire for mulberry that allegedly led to the tree's demise, at the same time reproducing the kind of objects that might be expected to have been found in the house. By the end of the eighteenth century, mulberry tree artefacts were central to the Shakespeare souvenir trade in Stratford. As their number increased, the authenticity of the mulberry objects was called into question and in 1799 Sharp swore an affidavit confirming their authenticity.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it is not necessarily clear that the desire of people to own these items relied on an assurance of authenticity; the complex

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<sup>29</sup> The loss of 'Shakespeare's House' was felt even before the demolition of the rebuilt property, as evidenced by George Vertue's sketch made in 1737 based on 'something by memory and ye description'. British Library, Add. MSS 70438.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Edmondson, Kevin Colls and William Mitchell, *Finding Shakespeare's New Place* (Manchester: MUP, 2016), 194-8; this story is rehearsed in many accounts of Shakespeare in Stratford. James O. Halliwell, *An Historical Account of the New Place, the last residence of Shakespeare* (1864), pp. 218-236 gives a useful account of Gastrell's tenure.

<sup>31</sup> R. Bearman, 'Sharp Practice', *Focus*, June 1981, 27-8.

<sup>32</sup> Halliwell, *New Place*, 223.

<sup>33</sup> SCLA, ER34/4

relationship between material and location, form and function suggests a more nuanced appreciation of how these objects referenced both loss and restitution.<sup>34</sup>

The collection of mulberry objects held by the Trust is one of the most substantial and significant.<sup>35</sup> Many claim a direct connection with Shakespeare's 'original' mulberry tree; Thomas Sharp had a set of tools to stamp this authentication on the mulberry wares he crafted in the 1760s, and these are also in the Trust's collection.<sup>36</sup> The practice of claiming mulberry wood as originating from the tree at New Place was enthusiastically taken up by other manufacturers and various later items also claim to be crafted from Shakespeare's mulberry. A late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century mulberry-wood casket made by John Marshall declares on the front to be 'Shakespeare's Mulberry Wood'.<sup>37</sup> A carving knife and fork with mulberry wood handles of uncertain date has metal plaques on the handles identifying them as from 'SHAKESPEARE'S MULBERRY TREE'.<sup>38</sup> [Fig. 2]. A host of other objects crafted from mulberry wood have no direct connection with Shakespeare or New Place yet have merited accession in the Trust collections. While the early, ornate mulberry pieces have attracted some attention (and high value at auction), we are more interested in this wider range of mulberry paraphernalia. What is striking about the SBT collection of mulberry items is the kind of genteel domestic idyll they constructed; mulberry wares include tankards, goblets, small caskets, toothpick cases, snuff boxes, tobacco stoppers, sugar tongs, and a ladle.<sup>39</sup> An early, delicately carved pastry cutter made of mulberry wood is stamped with the text 'SHAKESPEARE'S WOOD/SHARP/STRATFORD-UPON-AVON' [Fig. 3].<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Schoch makes the same point about Shakespeare heritage sites in 'The Birth of Shakespeare's Birthplace', *Theatre Survey*, 53, no. 2 (September 2012): 192.

<sup>35</sup> As acknowledged by S. J. Bowe, *The Material Culture of Mulberry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 108-112.

<sup>36</sup> SBT 2000-36.

<sup>37</sup> SBT 1973-19.

<sup>38</sup> SBT 1978-2.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. a lidded tankard made from mulberry wood and oak and bound with brass, probably late 18th to early 19th century (SBT 1868-3/1145); a pair of sugar bows, made from the wood of the mulberry tree, carved and perforated (SBT 1868-3/286); a wooden ladle, supposedly of mulberry wood (SBT L1959-3/98).

<sup>40</sup> SBT 2005-15.

object makes a very specific claim to material authenticity (wood derived from Shakespeare, and fashioned by Thomas Sharp as the principal manufacturer of mulberry wares); secondly, it situates that authenticity within a specific location (Stratford-upon-Avon); thirdly it associates all three subjects, Shakespeare, Sharp, Stratford, with the humble domestic pastime of baking. It embodies a somewhat incongruent confluence of associations: intellectual genius, high craftsmanship and manual domestic labour.<sup>41</sup>

The homely, everyday nature of these mulberry wares created an implicit, if problematic, connection to Shakespeare's own domesticity. Associated with the tree he himself allegedly planted within his own property these items were shaped, and gave shape to, an eighteenth-century vision of Shakespeare's home life that substantially pre-dated its nineteenth-century incarnation after the Trust's acquisition of the Birthplace in 1847 and Anne Hathaway's Cottage in 1897.<sup>42</sup> This wooden tableware is anachronistic; in Shakespeare's lifetime wooden tableware (known as *treen*) was associated with low social status, and it was metalware such as pewter and silver that marked out gentlemanly status.<sup>43</sup> In his will Shakespeare refers to his 'plate' and a silver-gilt bowl.<sup>44</sup> Yet wooden items are the most substantial category of crafted objects that first connect Shakespeare with a domestic life.

The popularity of the mulberry objects was indissolubly linked to the widening 'bardolatry' given expression in the Garrick Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769 and which is widely recognised as a seminal point in the transformation of Stratford into Shakespeare's town.<sup>45</sup> While ceremonies and performances celebrated Shakespeare's genius, these wooden

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<sup>41</sup> A matching rolling pin also stamped with 'Shakespeare's Wood' is in the Folger Shakespeare Library. Call number Wood no.1.

<sup>42</sup> The domestic nature of many mulberry wares may reflect the rise in status of the kitchen as a space for display and sociability in the eighteenth century, see Sara Pennell, *The Birth of the English Kitchen, 1600-1850* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. George Edelen (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press for The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1968), 127.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, PROB1/4.

<sup>45</sup> Watson, *Literary tourism*, 61.

tablewares evoked his essential, mundane humanity, if of a gentlemanly variety (as can be seen by the inclusion of his coat of arms on some items).<sup>46</sup> But the creation of these objects in the crucial period following the demolition of New Place in 1759 suggests that they need to be understood as a generative response to the loss of Shakespeare's domestic environment, serving as a material substitute to fill the very real physical void left by the substantial town house at the heart of Stratford. It has been argued that the loss of New Place was central to the elevation of the Birthplace property and it is entirely possible that the survival of the house at New Place may have created a different identity for the house on Henley Street.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the mulberry objects recognised the status of New Place as Shakespeare's adult home even as the Birthplace was being presented by its then occupants as a building in which one could experience something of Shakespeare's home comforts. The explicit claim to material authenticity, as the 'original' wood of the mulberry planted by Shakespeare - 'SHAKESPEARE'S WOOD' - creates what Susan Stewart refers to in her discussion of 'authentic experience' as 'a nostalgic myth of contact and presence' which can only be appreciated in relation to the material absence it emerges from.<sup>48</sup> To paraphrase and extend Stewart's formulation as applied to our subject: the memory of the house is replaced by the memory of the tree and the memory of the tree is replaced by these objects.<sup>49</sup>

There is a limit, however, to the extent to which the mulberry souvenirs fit within Stewart's conceptual framework. In particular, Stewart's identification of souvenirs as fetish items, an identity further explored by Hume, is problematic on several counts.<sup>50</sup> As Hume

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<sup>46</sup> E.g. A carved goblet by Thomas Sharp, carved with bust of Shakespeare, his arms and crest, c.1760, SBT 1868-3/1056.

<sup>47</sup> Schoch, 'The Birth of Shakespeare's Birthplace', 187-190. It is possible that the Birthplace might have become 'John Shakespeare's House' in the model of the other family properties - Mary Arden's Farm, Hall's Croft and so on - had New Place survived.

<sup>48</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 133.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 'In this process of distancing the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object'.

<sup>50</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 135; Hume, *Tourism Art and Souvenirs*, 50-83 for an extended discussion of how he sees souvenirs within the concept of the fetish.

discusses, fetish is a loaded term based in concepts that are open to challenge.<sup>51</sup> As the origins of its use to describe allegedly ‘primitive’ belief systems show, the pejorative and contested nature of the word can lead to the connection of certain categories of material culture with social behaviours that may attract academic disdain. Ian Ousby’s account of the distaste for tourism and its associated practices that was a feature of some scholarship on the subject is part of the same discourse underlying Nicola J. Watson’s description of the ‘embarrassment’ that the practice of literary tourism can cause in academic circles.<sup>52</sup> Moving past this discourse means reconsidering ‘souvenirs’ in terms of the wide range of material culture connected to and available at heritage sites as broader than those items purchased as an expression of the social behaviour connected to holidays, a setting which informs much of Hume’s discussion.<sup>53</sup> The Shakespeare objects considered here suggest rather that these items respond to a sophisticated understanding of located materials connected to a long historical tradition. As Stewart and Hume acknowledge, souvenirs are not a fixed category of objects and those used as part of the cultural construction of the person ‘Shakespeare’ and the material environment ‘Shakespeare’s Stratford’ have complex identities reflected in the terms with which they were historically described.<sup>54</sup> The early descriptions of items connected to Shakespeare as ‘relics’ and ‘memorials’ (usually referring to salvaged fabric and newly-crafted items respectively) suggests that we are bound to consider these objects within a framework that acknowledges both the religious terminology and culture of commemoration that became attached to Shakespeare sites.<sup>55</sup> We contend, moreover, that the domestic origins, connotations and applications of what may be categorised too straightforwardly as ‘Shakespeare souvenirs’ is significant in order to offer a more nuanced understanding of how

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<sup>51</sup> Hume, *Tourism Art and Souvenirs*, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Ian Ousby, *The Englishman’s England: taste, travel and the rise of tourism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 5-7; Watson, *Literary tourism*, 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Hume, *Tourism Art and Souvenirs*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 138.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas, *Shakespeare’s Shrine*, 17.

Shakespeare's lost domesticity in Stratford has been *presenced* through highly specific material responses.

### **The Birthplace**

Shakespeare's birthplace and childhood home in Henley Street in Stratford was a literary tourist destination long before 1847 when it was bought by the Shakespeare Trust.<sup>56</sup>

At this time the property was dilapidated and bare, having been stripped of its contents and fixtures in 1820. The Trust then embarked on a wholesale programme of 'restoration', creating the image of Shakespeare's Birthplace that we see today. But it is the stripping of the property and the subsequent redisplay and dispersal of its material fabric in the early part of the nineteenth century that is the focus here. Mary Hornby as tenant of the property on Henley Street acknowledged as the birthplace of Shakespeare acted as occasional house tour guide between 1793 and 1820. During her tenancy Hornby, like previous owners, allowed paying visitors to chip shards of wood from fixtures and furniture from the property. One such visitor in the spring of 1786 was Thomas Jefferson, then serving as American minister to France who was on a tour of England with John Adams, American minister to Great Britain. Adams recorded in his diary his visit to the Birthplace, 'They Shew[ed] us an old Wooden Chair in the chimney corner where He sat. We cut off a Chip according to the custom.'<sup>57</sup> A note in Jefferson's handwriting preserved with the splinter of wood on loan to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation - and displayed in Jefferson's bedroom - says 'A chip cut from an armed chair in the chimney corner in Shakespear's house at Stratford on Avon, said to be the identical chair in which he usually wrote, if true, like the relicks of the saints, it must

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<sup>56</sup> The saving of the Birthplace for the nation was in response to a threatened loss; the American showman P.T. Barnum proposed to buy the home and ship it brick-by-brick to the US.

<sup>57</sup> [www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive](http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive) [accessed 9 March 2018]; diary of John Adams', entry for 4-10? April 1786.

miraculously reproduce itself. Cut by myself in 1785'.<sup>58</sup> The widespread practice of taking chips of wood from objects and buildings connected to Shakespeare suggests shared features with those 'sampled' souvenirs identified by Stewart.<sup>59</sup> However, within our critical framework of material loss it is notable that reverence for the original environment communicated by such chips co-exists with a desire to procure in full knowledge that such consumption contributes to the erosion and cumulative loss of historic features. Perhaps this apparent paradox can be explained by the spirit of scepticism displayed by Jefferson. This scepticism may still be present as part of visitors' complex responses to Shakespeare sites, yet rarely detracts from the pleasure derived from encounters with such objects or ownership of these fragments. A sense of connection to Shakespeare is not necessarily about accepting the veracity of oral history or the authenticity of material remains, but requires that these stories and remnants seem appropriate to the version of Shakespeare being sought out in a particular time and/or place. The interest in wood from a chair or mulberry tree salvaged from Stratford and experienced in the context of a compelling narrative around domestic life suggests that the combination of location and story can override a desire for authenticity of the sort that derives from a proven relationship between object and person.

In 1820 Mary Hornby was forced out of the house on Henley Street by a massive rent hike. She took with her not only the quantity of oak furniture from the property but also its internal fixtures, including decorative panels and locks from doors. She rented another house almost opposite the Birthplace and set up the fixtures and furniture as a rival tourist attraction. The exhibition of 'Shakespeare Relics' remained a popular attraction in Stratford for some time after Hornby's death then was sold off as a collection and eventually passed to a new owner in the 1890s. A newspaper feature of 1893 describes and illustrates the relics as

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<sup>58</sup> <https://www.monticello.org/site/blog-and-community/posts/whose-chip-it-anyway> [accessed 9 March 2018]; images of the chip and the accompanying note and a short outline of the authorship issues surrounding the note.

<sup>59</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 138-9, 'sampled' souvenirs are here defined as unfinished items not available for general purchase and usually taken from a particular site.



then presented at Kingsthorpe House, before being dispersed at auction in 1896 [Fig. 4].<sup>60</sup> It shows some of the star exhibits including a writing desk, sword and lantern, various carved wood items including several chairs and some paintings. The accompanying text also mentions that some items taken from the Birthplace by Hornby in 1820 had already been lost and it is likely that she and her heirs had sold off some items to souvenir hunters.

The creation of the ‘Shakespeare Relics’ exhibit constructed a very specific notion of Shakespeare’s domestic environment. The constituent parts of the exhibit prompted the creation of an imagined vignette – the wooden writing desk and several carved chairs suggest a relaxed yet stately writing environment with the presence of a hearth evoked by the fire dog and grate and flickering light provided by the lantern. In its displaced then itinerant status as a moveable entity, the Shakespeare Relics display promoted a competing vision of domesticity distinct from the writer’s house experience. It operated through the presentation of dislocated objects as distinct from the locatedness of the house visit. While the significance of the birthplace property as ‘Shakespeare’s Shrine’ is widely acknowledged, notably by Julia Thomas in her book with that title of 2012, the dislocated domesticity created by the stripping of the Shakespeare relics from that building in large part fuelled and fostered the elaboration of Shakespeare as an imagined construct.<sup>61</sup> The severing of the connection between relics and shrine arguably enhanced the potency of both as agents of nostalgia and sentiment. The material loss each form of exhibit represents – the loss of fixtures from the house and the lack of house for the fixtures – paradoxically adds to the emotional and imaginative power of both as incomplete visions of domesticity. The deficiency involved in the presentation of either house or furnishings created space for a mutable domesticity for Shakespeare, an imaginative

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<sup>60</sup> *The Graphic*, 1 April 1893.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas makes a similar observation about the imaginative power of absence in discussing the unfurnished rooms of the Birthplace after the mid nineteenth-century restoration; ‘It was an emptiness that worked, paradoxically, to fill the rooms, to make them more evocative, allowing visitors to furnish them in their imaginations, to envisage what the house must have been like when Shakespeare lived there’, *Shakespeare’s Shrine*, 75.

reconciliation between the two that could respond to individual and cultural expectations of the national poet more readily than the static, inflexible set-piece that their material conjunction would have provided. The visible loss that had already occurred acted as spur and validation for subsequent removal and dispersal, possibly salving the conscience of those participating in such practices. In short, it is proposed that the loss of material fabric from the Birthplace contributed in no small part to its success as a heritage destination.<sup>62</sup>

### **Chair and Chimney**

The notes recording Thomas Jefferson's visit to the Birthplace discussed above describe a paired material *foci* of chair and chimney that proved to have an enduring impact on the afterlives of salvaged pieces of wood and subsequent material re-production. Two objects from the SBT collection demonstrate this continued focus on these significant domestic signifiers of repose and reflection, as well as the potency of claims to historical and material authenticity, however anecdotal or convoluted the provenance.

The first example is a panel-back armchair made in 1890 by James Plucknett and Co. of Warwick.<sup>63</sup> Armchairs have a particularly interesting place in the mythology and heritage of Shakespeare in Stratford and there are many extant examples that have been claimed to have accommodated his derriere at home or elsewhere in the district. The SBT owns several of these, including the so-called 'Falcon Inn chair' and the 'Courting Chair' - both are now accepted to date from the 1630s at the earliest, well after Shakespeare's death.<sup>64</sup> The acquisition of these chairs stood in for the loss from the Birthplace of the original

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Shakespeare's Shrine*, 104; Thomas also notes the differentiation after 1867 between the residence and the relics but suggests this separation functioned as the eradication of 'dubious objects'.

<sup>63</sup> SBT 2015-4/4.

<sup>64</sup> The 'Falcon Inn Chair' (SBT 1865-5) is a c.1630 oak panel-back armchair with an old label glued on the back of the panel: 'Chair from the Falcon Inn, Bidford where Shakespeare held his Club meetings'. The 'Courting Chair' (SBT 2002-49) is a mid-seventeenth-century oak and walnut panel-back armchair, purported to be the courting chair of Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway (purchased from Anne Hathaway's Cottage in 1792). The back panel is carved with the Shakespeare Arms on a shield, the other the crest of a bird wielding a spear, flanking the (later) incised inscription of the initials 'W A S' in gothic script. See Scheil, *Imagining*, 35-43.

‘Shakespeare chair’ (the one seen by Jefferson in 1786) which was bought a few years later by the Polish art and curio collector Izabela Czartoryska and shipped out of the country, it is now in the National Museum in Kraków. Czartoryska described her negotiations to procure the object: ‘the house-owner, not a particularly wealthy woman, explained to us that, apart from being attached to this memento (which was so dear to her as she was a member of Shakespeare’s family, and wished to immortalise the fact), she also made a fair income from it, since everyone who visited her house was willing to pay handsomely for the tiniest shavings or splinters from the chair, which they would set into rings and medallions.’ The woman, presumably one of the Hart family, eventually agreed to accept twenty guineas for the chair (minus its legs, which were allowed to remain) as compensation for this emotional and financial loss.<sup>65</sup> Washington Irving wryly commented on the magical properties of the Shakespeare’s Chair he was shown during his visit to the birthplace by Mary Hornby in 1815: ‘It is worthy of notice also, in the history of this extraordinary chair, that it partakes something of the volatile nature of the Santa Casa of Loretto, or the flying chair of the Arabian enchanter; for though sold some few years since to a northern princess, yet, strange to tell, it has found its way back again to the old chimney corner.’ It is notable that Irving’s pleasure in his visit was in no way diminished by his knowledge of Hornby’s scam, indeed he recommends all travellers to succumb to gullibility wherever possible, ‘I am always of easy faith in such matters, and am ever willing to be deceived, where the deceit is pleasant and costs nothing’.<sup>66</sup>

The chair considered here makes no claim ever to have seated Shakespeare yet derives its authenticity as at one remove. A brass plaque on the back asserts that it is a ‘Replica of chair in which Shakespeare is said to have / sat when he wrote most of his plays

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<sup>65</sup> Parts of chair legs are part of the bundle of wood from the Birthplace purchased at the Hornby sale, now in the Folger: ART Inv. 1180.

<sup>66</sup> Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, gent* (1819-20), (Charles & Meryll Company, 1911), 374.

and which was formerly / in the possession of Paul Whitehead the poet laureate / afterwards of John Bacon of Barnet. Then of the Rev. T.J.Judkins / of St Pancras, then of the Rev Walter Field, Vicar of Godmersham / Kent, & now in 1890 of E. Ledger Esqre of the ERA'.<sup>67</sup> So this Victorian chair was created as a copy of another extant object that, the inscriptions suggests, is credible because it has passed through the ownership of various worthy gentlemen – as if this biography of the original, yet absent, chair somehow transferred to its simulacrum. Seemingly admitting the deficiency of this borrowed provenance, the plaque goes on to assert the object's claim to material integrity; it states 'Made from oak out of Warwick Castle / with a piece of wood from Shakespeare's Birthplace at / Stratford inserted in the seat of the chair.' The first claim to material locatedness evokes the antiquarian interest in Warwick Castle as a local landmark associated especially with the Wars of the Roses, which provided such inspiration to the playwright. Possibly the carved architectural scene with towers and crenellations (if that is what they are) in the panel-back is meant to suggest this building. Yet, here again there is a tacit acceptance of the inadequacy of this oak and the need to augment its material credentials with the insertion of a small remnant of wood allegedly from the Birthplace. The absence of any verification for this diamond-shaped piece, especially compared to the protracted provenance detailed in the rest of the inscription, is notable. Its placement within the seat is significant, suggesting a continued desire for physical contact between the historical fabric of this particular (birth)place and the seated body.

The other half of the material equation in early visitors' experience of Shakespeare's domesticity was the chimney or hearth. Thus fireplace lintels from the Birthplace, especially the birthroom, provided another source for souvenir shards of wood. In the collection of the SBT is a particularly well-documented example, intriguing for what is absent as much as what survives. The otherwise uninspiring chunk of wood becomes significant because of its

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<sup>67</sup> SBT 2015-4/4; a panel-backed chair.

provenance as detailed in associated letters [Fig. 5].<sup>68</sup> In one, headed ‘Archaeological Association Meeting on April 25 1860’ it is described how one Dr Kendrick sent the item for exhibition at the meeting, explaining that:

‘A friend of mine has a large piece of the lintel of the fire-place in Shakespeare’s house at Stratford, one side of which is still blackened by the smoke. The way it came into his possession is clear, that I have myself no doubt of its genuineness. But my principal reason for mentioning it is, that my friend gave me permission to cut off a small piece for myself, as it had already been greatly shortened to make goblets, &c. On the carpenter sawing off the piece I chose, he laid open a rather large auger-hole running almost through the beam, but closed and nearly filled by a plug of deal well fitted to the hole in the timber, and made fast by another plug of smaller size being driven into it. In the space left between the end of the plug and the bottom of the auger-hole was part of a small wooden cross, apparently carved with a knife. It was carefully bedded in coarse tow<sup>69</sup>, and a number of grains of barley were also taken from the cavity.’<sup>70</sup>

The letter goes on to describe the little cross and speculate about the reason for its concealment within the lintel of the old fireplace. It is described as one inch and a quarter in height and eight tenths in diameter at the base and likely made of willow. The letter references a sixteenth-century source (Michael Woode’s *A Dialogue or Familiar Talk Between Two Neighbours* of 1554) to suggest that the cross was a holy palm cross taken home and embedded within the fireplace as a protection against the devil. This interpretation gains some plausibility in the light of very recent scholarly interest in deliberately concealed

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<sup>68</sup> SBT L2004-8/1, an item from the collection of Paul Morgan, (1915-2006), librarian, local historian, a governor of the RSC and a life trustee of the Trust. The collection is stored together in SCLA Box 120.

<sup>69</sup> In the textile industry, a tow is a coarse, broken fibre, removed during processing flax, hemp, or jute. Flax tows are often used as upholstery stuffing.

<sup>70</sup> SBT L2004-8/2.

garments and objects in buildings, which has pointed to the possible apotropaic function of such items as well as the significance of the hearth area in popular belief.<sup>71</sup>

While the little cross was presented along with the piece of lintel to the members of the Archaeological Association meeting, it did not pass with the lintel and the letters into the SBT collection. The section of lintel, if indeed that is what it was, does have a large hole through the centre and while the cross is missing, the letters allow us to imagine in this hollow groove this other little piece of wood fashioned into a religious symbol and wrapped in its package of textile fibres. The remnant of the lintel, then, is another artefact redolent of loss (of Shakespeare/Shakespeare's Birthplace/Shakespeare's domesticity) but here with the additional material absence of the cross. The story of the lost cross made tangible through the holed piece of lintel is particularly tantalising, considering the value that such a personal object of faith attached to Shakespeare's biography would hold.

### **Shakespeare's Wood**

As production of small mulberry artefacts gave way to larger items, other wood connected to Shakespeare and Stratford became part of this tradition of presencing.<sup>72</sup> Lintels and other pieces of salvaged wood from the birthplace were transformed into 'goblets &c.' while composite objects such as a box combining wood from the mulberry tree and the Market Cross started to appear.<sup>73</sup> The material procurement of 'Shakespeare's wood' participated in an established route around the material environment of the town of Stratford, exemplified by other items in the collection of Paul Morgan. Pieces of wood alleged to come from the Birthplace, the crabtree at Bidford (under which Shakespeare was said to have fallen asleep

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<sup>71</sup> Deliberately Concealed Garments Project website: <http://www.concealedgarments.org/>

<sup>72</sup> A mulberry box made by Thomas Sharp c.1760 has a note affixed to the inside lid: 'This box was made of the real mulberry tree planted by Shakespeare in Stratford upon Avon just after it was cut down and before it was used up at the time of the [Garrick] Jubilee, when much fictitious mulberry wood supplied its place, for the purpose of memorial articles'. SBT 1868-3/449.

<sup>73</sup> SBT1903-8. John Marshall also made boxes incorporating wood from 'the barn at New Place', SBT1868-3/895.

and which had been integrated into Shakespeare's material environment as early as 1762), the mulberry tree at New Place, and the pews of Holy Trinity Church, create a biography of Shakespeare from birth, through youth and established prosperity at New Place to burial and final resting place [Fig.5]. This journey follows the 'imaginary biographical trajectory' established by Garrick and rehearsed yearly in the procession for Shakespeare's birthday.<sup>74</sup> However, the ability of this journey to take place as an imaginative experience suggested by small pieces of wood shows how vital wood is to the recreation not only of 'Shakespeare's Stratford' but specifically of Shakespeare in Stratford.

The mulberry objects and other wooden items connected to Shakespeare function within cultural practices in which wood and trees are central in mitigating loss.<sup>75</sup> In this context, the use of objects made from mulberry as a response to the absence of Shakespeare's home at New Place is part of a narrative in which the mulberry trees take on anthropomorphic characteristics. The poem written by David Garrick for the Jubilee in 1769 was an early model for the mulberry as a sentient being: 'matchless was hee/ who planted thee/ and thou like him/ immortal shall be'.<sup>76</sup> That this was apparently sung to a goblet made of mulberry a decade after the loss of the tree itself was one of the most significant steps in the tree's reincarnation. As noted earlier, Gastrell's felling of the mulberry had been positioned as an act of vandalism against Shakespeare's memory soon after its fall, an act that was magnified as Shakespeare's fame grew.<sup>77</sup> The longevity of the story of the tree's destruction and the extraordinarily harsh response to Gastrell's action is exemplified by a poem written by Dante

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<sup>74</sup> Watson, *Literary tourism*, 62.

<sup>75</sup> There is a substantial multi-disciplinary literature dealing with trees and social practices. Paul Cloke and Eric Pawson, 'Memorial trees and treescape memory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26 (2008) is particularly useful.

<sup>76</sup> D. Garrick, 'Shakespeare's Mulberry Tree', (1769), poem available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004808164.0001.002/1:4.18.4?rgn=div3;view=fulltext>

<sup>77</sup> Halliwell, *New Place*, 218-236.

Gabriel Rossetti in 1853 in which he suggested that Gastrell should have been hanged.<sup>78</sup>

Around the same time that Rossetti wrote his poem, in an intriguing act of regeneration whose origin is unclear, another mulberry tree was growing at New Place and was referred to by Halliwell in his account of the site. Halliwell was inclined to accept it as a descendant of Shakespeare's tree and by the early twentieth century the mulberry in the Great Garden was firmly established as a 'scion' of that planted by Shakespeare.<sup>79</sup> The nurturing of mulberry trees at New Place became both restitution for the initial loss and representative of the reverence due to sites and objects connected to Shakespeare. The tree within the confines of the site of the house was reputed to occupy the spot of that cut down by Gastrell and was to be lost twice more. In 1969, Dame Peggy Ashcroft planted a new mulberry in the garden.<sup>80</sup> By 1970 there were three mulberry trees in the gardens of Shakespeare's former home, all said to be descendants of that planted by Shakespeare. New Place may have ceased to be a home for people but in the process of its re-enactment as a garden it became home to a 'family' of mulberries that both stood proxy for Shakespeare's own family and recalled him through its genesis in the tree that he allegedly planted. As home to the mulberry trees, New Place continued to be a domestic space. This was strengthened through connections between the language of ancestry and that of horticulture. The word 'scion', denoting both 'a young member of a rich or important family' as well as 'a plant that is cut from a plant and fixed to another plant in order to grow there' was widely used to talk about the mulberry trees. Repetition of the term emphasised the inherent nobility of Shakespeare's genius at the same time as upholding the lineage of the mulberry trees.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'On the site of a mulberry tree, planted by William Shakespeare, felled by Rev. Gastrell' (1853); poem available at <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/9-1853.delms.rad.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Halliwell, *New Place*, 226; 'one can hardly but feel inclined to confide in the accuracy of the general tradition at Stratford that the tree now standing in the Great Garden of New Place is a veritable offspring from the original'. Mulberries are vigorous self-seeders and can also grow from feeder roots at some distance from another tree.

<sup>80</sup> Further significance was given to this tree when Dame Peggy's ashes were scattered beneath it in 1991.

<sup>81</sup> 'scion', OED.



The personification of the mulberries as a family connected to Shakespeare not only drew on the well-established ability of mulberry and other wood to convey Shakespeare in Stratford but offered them a particular kind of protection. When natural damage occurred, as on Monday 12 August 1946 when the mulberry nearest to the site of the house blew down in a storm, the tree was mourned and memorialised through a poem printed in the *Stratford Herald* that recalled that written by Garrick in 1769.<sup>82</sup> In autumn 1946, the storm-felled tree was replaced by a scion raised by the SBT Head Gardener and planted by Caroline and Charles Flower, children of local grandee and then chairman of the SBT, Colonel Fordham Flower. Another poem appeared, alongside a picture of the replanting under the headline ‘Mulberry of the Third Generation’.<sup>83</sup>

There is, however, a peculiar tension connected to trees in urban spaces that can be magnified by their position within heritage sites. This tension can create divisions that have as much to do with prevailing power structures as with the trees themselves and is particularly acute in Stratford, where the trees exist in an environment that elicits calls for continuity and pressure to change simply because of its status as Shakespeare’s home town. In summer 2012 the tree planted by the Flower children became the subject of controversy when the SBT applied for permission to remove it as part of the *Dig for Shakespeare* archaeology project. The tree stood on an area of the site that ongoing research had identified as the location of the main part (the hall) of Shakespeare’s house. The new imperative created by the dig at New Place meant that the tree’s identity shifted from memorial of Shakespeare’s domesticity to obstacle to its recovery. In response to the Trust’s request for permission to remove the mulberry tree, Stratford Town Council raised an objection with Stratford District Council and a tree protection order was placed on the mulberry.<sup>84</sup> In the dispute which

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<sup>82</sup> *The Stratford Herald*, Friday August 16, 1946, front page.

<sup>83</sup> *The Stratford Herald*, Friday December 13, 1946, front page.

<sup>84</sup> Stratford District Council, TPO 201/125.

followed, both sides contested the identity of the tree – the District Council suggested that the tree was the one planted in 1969 while the Trust identified it as the tree planted in 1946.<sup>85</sup>

The removal of the New Place mulberry in 2012 can therefore be understood as part of a wider conflict over control of Stratford's treescape which is intimately bound up with its identity as Shakespeare's hometown. The planned loss of the mulberry produced a protectionist response by the District Council that contrasted with its approach just a few years before during the redevelopment of the Bancroft Gardens area next to the river Avon and adjacent to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Part of the 'World Class Stratford' project, in which Stratford District Council was a lead partner, this redevelopment involved the removal of forty-four trees, provoking considerable condemnation from local and national commentators.<sup>86</sup> Journalist Quentin Wilson wrote in *The Spectator* that 'A committee of madmen have decided that this precious heritage site should now be known as 'World-Class Stratford'. And to prove it the council unveils a £3.5 million improvement to a garden area in the town centre. Once lined by mature trees, it's now a cold expanse of stark new paving stones and stainless steel handrails.'<sup>87</sup> The perceived misapplication of Shakespeare's heritage as justification for changes to Stratford's treescape pointed up competing visions of the town between official authorities with a desire to transform and update, and the wider community that demonstrated a strong attachment to its established landscape. This dispute suggests the extent to which 'Shakespeare's Stratford' is contested and multi-dimensional in ways that we still need to map formally.

At New Place, the absent mulberry tree is now remembered by a new bronze sculpture of a hawthorn near the site where the mulberry stood. The vulnerable mulberry,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., point 5.

<sup>86</sup> The stated aim of this project was to 'Ensure that Stratford meets the challenge to be the most significant and rewarding place for experiencing Shakespeare's legacy and genius', *Report of Cabinet Meeting*, Warwickshire County Council, 31 January 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Quentin Wilson, 'Diary', *The Spectator*, Australian edition, 24 June 2009; Graham Young, 'Stratford Bancroft Gardens £3m Makeover A Terrible Mistake', *Birmingham Mail*, 14 August 2009.

felled three times across three centuries, has been replaced by a permanent structure that embraces the practice of memorial wood through branches cast from hawthorn originating from Mary Arden's farm. This wood, now transformed into metal, links Shakespeare with his mother and the forest of Arden whose southern reaches bordered the parish of Aston Cantlow. This sculpture placed at the centre of 'the heart of the home' (as this area is inscribed within the outline marking out the lost building) is testament to the power of wood as a medium through which to materialise absence. However, as metal it will not change in the same way as a living tree and is a fundamental transformation in the way in which the New Place trees memorialise Shakespeare and his family. Loss and replacement of Stratford's treescapes takes place as a constant exchange between the alleged presence and potential absence of anything which might have been part of Shakespeare's own experience.

### **Anne Hathaway's Cottage**

At Anne Hathaway's Cottage, a discussion of lost domesticity may seem counter-intuitive since the Cottage is one of the most materially complete and well-documented of the SBT's buildings; it preserves much of its medieval and early modern form and remained occupied by Hathaway family descendants until 1892 when it was acquired by the Trust.<sup>88</sup> The transformation of Hewlands Farm into Anne Hathaway's Cottage as part of the literary creation of Shakespeare's love affair with Anne has already received considerable attention. As Nicola J. Watson puts it, 'by the 1880s Shottery had evolved into a satisfactory location for the heady mix of rustic chivalry, merrie Englandism, botany and romantic domesticity overseen by fairies that 'Shakespeare's England' was supposed to have been'.<sup>89</sup> Katherine Scheil has explored the Cottage as central to Anne's domestic construction as well as noticing

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Bearman, 'Anne Hathaway's Cottage', in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, Stanley Wells, Michael Dobson, Will Sharpe, Erin Sullivan, eds. (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 10-11.

<sup>89</sup> Watson, *Literary tourism*, 86.

its role as a potential response to the absence of New Place.<sup>90</sup> As Scheil has written, ‘The Hathaway cottage itself is a material reminder of Anne’s domestic life, but it also acts as a repository of material household goods from the period’, as the same time observing that items displayed in the cottage rarely date from the sixteenth century.<sup>91</sup>

As early photographs of Mary Baker, the last family custodian, in the parlour indicate, the furnished rooms in use meant that at Anne Hathaway’s Cottage at least, there were all kinds of domestic things to see [Fig. 6]. The Cottage was uniquely placed to provide a proxy for those things missing from the Birthplace and New Place, namely, a domestic environment for Shakespeare. While the identity of the Cottage rests on a ‘myth of idealized romance’, from its earliest presentation it has fostered an imaginative elision between the Hathaway family home and Shakespeare’s home.<sup>92</sup> While Scheil has noticed the modern sale of domestic items such as ‘cookies, gardening tools, tea towels and other domestic items’ as part of Anne’s construction as ‘a symbol of early modern domesticity’, such items rarely reference the early modern period but rather sustain the Cottage as the location of Anne and William’s domestic relationship. Like Mary Hornby at the Birthplace, Mary Baker was instrumental in using objects as a medium through which the Cottage’s identity could be carried beyond its location in Shottery, adding ceramics to wood as a material central to this process of dispersing Shakespeare’s domesticity. Baker not only followed Hornby in allowing visitors to chip pieces of wood from the settle on which William and Anne allegedly sat together but she also sold off furniture and crockery on view in the parlour as Hathaway heirlooms.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Scheil, ‘Second Best Bed’, 69.

<sup>91</sup> Scheil, ‘Second Best Bed’, 61. See also Scheil, *Imagining*.

<sup>92</sup> A tendency that is often implied but sometimes made explicit, e.g. in James Walter’s *Shakespeare’s True Life* of 1890, see Scheil, *Imagining*, 58.

<sup>93</sup> Levi Fox, *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: A Personal Memoir* (Norwich: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust with Jarrold Publishing), 256; Fox recounts an item being returned by the grand-daughter of one souvenir hunter. Fox remarked that Baker ‘clearly managed the sight-seeing with an eye to profitable business’.

Although the Cottage was attracting visitors by the end of the eighteenth century, many of whom were keen to take mementoes from the site, most souvenirs connected with Anne Hathaway's Cottage date from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. These objects often have a strong visual impact and link in specific ways with contemporary domestic spaces and practices, at the same time sharing function and sometimes form with the earliest mulberry artefacts. Early items included plates and potlids such as those made by F.R. Pratt in Staffordshire from around 1850 to 1900 [Fig. 7]. The plate illustrated formed part of a set depicting various Shakespeare sites in Stratford and the Victorian celebrity chef, Alexis Soyer, addressing the 'Modern Housewife' in 1850 offers an insight into how such ceramics were used, suggesting that such decorated plates provided guests at evening parties with 'a subject for conversation to those who have visited them'.<sup>94</sup> These Stratford views use the plates as a way of engaging in the journey established by Garrick and which relied upon the material landmarks in Stratford connected to Shakespeare. The use of domestic material culture to integrate Anne Hathaway's Cottage into this itinerary in the mid-nineteenth century reflected the way in which mulberry items sustained the memory of New Place as a domestic site.

Items connected to Anne Hathaway's cottage are perhaps the most obviously souvenir-like in modern terms, in that they are usually purchasable, site-specific and created within a developed tourism narrative. The vulnerability of these items to the discourse of embarrassment referred to earlier means that they are rarely taken seriously as historical artefacts and yet a substantial number have been accessioned into the SBT collection, suggesting an understanding of their significance as a category of Shakespeare's material heritage. Indeed, such objects capture memory and share the qualities of the property in ways which act as powerful expressions of identity. These souvenirs enable visitors to the Cottage

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<sup>94</sup> Alexis Soyer, *The Modern Housewife or Ménagère* (London, 1849), 331.

to communicate an appreciation of literary and cultural history within the styling of their own homes at the same time as they carry the domestic relationship between William and Anne with them. Items such as a miniature tealight holder in the form of the Cottage, a wooden trinket box with a print of the Cottage on the lid and a small metal tray engraved with the Cottage show how closely these souvenirs fit within the representative items discussed by Stewart.<sup>95</sup> By the mid-1970s, when mass tourism and days out in locations like Stratford were part of the social landscape, items such as small milk jugs and tea-towels appear strongly connected to a tradition in which souvenirs were mass-produced, low-cost items that were reliant on individual narratives of past experience to give them meaning.<sup>96</sup>

However, souvenir items connected to Anne Hathaway's Cottage use a very limited set of motifs that evoke and extend a particular kind of domesticity. These motifs - the cottage and garden, the courting settle and the Hathaway bed - establish the cottage as the location for a particular kind of domesticity. The wooden courting settle (chipped away at for many years) and the Hathaway bed - currently illustrated together on a single postcard - are used to communicate the domestic relationship of Anne and William Shakespeare despite no evidence that either of them ever saw, used or touched either piece. Meanwhile, the image of the Cottage first published by Samuel Ireland in 1792 and adapted for the Pratt plates and potlids in the nineteenth century cemented a standard presentation of the Cottage that has proved particularly durable. A fine china mug launched in 2016 includes a modern design yet the image of Anne Hathaway's Cottage in its rural setting is a familiar one, acknowledging and continuing the traditional forms and imagery of early souvenirs. The mug includes a depiction of a man gardening whom we are invited to imagine as Shakespeare, just as the

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<sup>95</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 136. SBT 1998-22/2, a tealight holder in the form of Anne Hathaway's Cottage; SBT 1991-97, a Mauchline trinket box; SBT 2003-14, a small metal tray.

<sup>96</sup> SBT 1998-5/14, a small pottery jug; SBT 1990-16/6&7, teatowels with a design by Julia Killingbeck.

mulberry tree has also served as evidence of his horticultural pursuits.<sup>97</sup> The inauthenticity of depictions of the Cottage in its rural setting, and furniture that was never used by the Shakespeares is part of a material recreation of Shakespeare's domestic environment that functions in the same way as mulberry trees that Shakespeare may or may not have planted and 'relics' which may or may not have come from the Birthplace. The success of these responses to material absence may be derided in some quarters for their dubious historical likelihood but they can be understood as strategies that have their own history. Buying into Shakespeare's domestic life through souvenir wares is not necessarily an unthinking, passive consumer response to the heritage industry, but may represent a knowing, positive and prolonged engagement with crafted wares that have an ongoing utilitarian value in domestic life. Prattware potlids and modern teatowels are part of the same long tradition of *presencing* Shakespeare's lost domesticity.

## **Conclusion**

Material loss has played an essential part in the development, construction and presentation of Shakespeare's homelife in Stratford-upon-Avon. The creation of domestic objects in mulberry following the demolition of New Place served as material substitute for the loss of his home and dispersed a sense of Shakespeare's domestic environment through a range of wares that evoked imagined scenarios and behaviours, from drinking to baking. These newly manufactured objects formed a parallel strand of substitute domesticity alongside the many shards of chair and chimney lintel taken from the Birthplace. Mary Hornby further extended this portable domesticity for Shakespeare by using the stripped-out material fixtures and furnishings of the Birthplace as a dislocated moveable attraction that compensated for the loss - possibly emotional, certainly financial - of what had been her home, as well as

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<sup>97</sup> Edmondson, Colls, Mitchell, *New Place*, p. 117; Paul Edmondson here refers to the planting of the mulberry tree in this context.

Shakespeare's. At Anne Hathaway's Cottage, Mary Baker contributed to this tradition of dispersing the materials of Shakespeare's domestic life by selling off the family tablewares from the parlour so that ceramic wares took their place alongside wooden items in the loss and re-production of material fabric from Shakespeare's houses. The nineteenth-century ceramic souvenirs and the products sold in the giftshop today have created a dominant and portable vision of the domesticity evoked by the Cottage that is not constrained by place. In buying a mug, teapot or teatowel we can all take home the materials of 'Shakespeare's domesticity'.

Meanwhile the various New Place mulberries functioned as a substitute family on the site of the Shakespeare household and these trees have been the focus of both destruction and reproduction. In the present day, tree sculptures that evoke Shakespeare's mother's farm and the forest which dominated its hinterland, continue this legacy of replacing Shakespeare's lost domesticity. Powerful, yet displaced, symbols of domestic life – desk, chair and casket – that recall those items exhibited by Mary Hornby are re-produced in monumentalised form as newly created artworks in the latest presentation of New Place as a garden of contemplation.

To understand the relationship between the material heritage of William Shakespeare, the development of Stratford-upon-Avon as a heritage town, and responses to material loss in heritage contexts, we need to take a holistic approach to both object and location. This requires a historical framework that works across time and space and which treats early material responses as the start of a series of connected phases in which current responses can also be situated. This is exemplified by the most recent addition to souvenirs made from mulberry, the special edition of mulberry gin produced by the Shakespeare Distillery, an addition whose provenance creates a direct relationship with juice bottled in the eighteenth century (made, so an accompanying label states, from 'some mulberries gathered from the



tree planted by the renowned poet Shakespeare’).<sup>98</sup> The gin, made from mulberries gathered from the trees at New Place in 2017, is packaged in a bottle that carries an image of a New Place mulberry and the WS signet ring alleged to have belonged to Shakespeare [Fig. 8].<sup>99</sup> This ring has become widely used to ‘stamp’ Shakespeare’s authority on purchasable objects, echoing Thomas Sharp’s stamping of ‘Shakespeare’s Wood’ on the mulberry items produced in the eighteenth century. As the original ring has some claim to be an early modern artefact, it draws this new addition to Shakespeare’s material heritage back towards his own lifetime, not just through the initials ‘WS’, but because it references a practice – sealing documents with hot wax – that is no longer commonplace. The time in which Shakespeare lived can seem entirely disconnected from many of the objects on which this article focuses. Yet Stratford’s material heritage provides us with a record of generations of responses to the loss of Shakespeare’s contemporary world. The complex relationship between the town’s modern identity and its early modern past is bound up in questions of cultural identity, social behaviour and historical verisimilitude that we have yet to fully explore. Through the planting of particular flowers and herbs to the quotations that are scattered around the town (on walls, in pavements and in the names of commercial enterprises), the effect is always to remind us that here is a place where the past is being constantly re-framed in the present. Stratford is itself a polychronic object in which the urge is towards the early modern even where this can only be achieved by naming a new housing estate ‘Hathaway Gardens’, an act of incorporation into the material object, ‘Shakespeare’s Stratford’.<sup>100</sup>

That Stratford is a place in which Shakespeare can be accessed remotely through an imaginative journey prompted by unshaped pieces of wood, or pictures on plates, is as central to its success as a heritage town as the ability to move in real time between the five

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<sup>98</sup> SBT 1868-3/87.

<sup>99</sup> <https://shakespearedistillery.com/product-category/new-place-mulberry-gin/>

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.bellway.co.uk/new-homes/south-midlands/hathaway-gardens> [accessed 5/7/2018]

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust properties - the ‘homes and haunts’ in which the absence of Shakespeare’s lived world first invited a material response. The allied processes of creative re-production and establishing substitute material foci to compensate for Shakespeare’s lost domesticity are not a tangential aspect of this response but rather a strategy of *presencing* which can be historicised across four centuries and which continues in the present day.

(11783 words)

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