THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 169:
SHAKESPEARE DOCUMENTED

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 169: Shakespeare Documented. In this episode, we're going to take close look at the life of William Shakespeare. He is generally considered to be the greatest poet and writer in the English language, and his plays are known throughout the world, and that has led to a great deal of interest in the man behind all of those words. But the historical record has never been able to satisfy that desire for information. We actually know relatively little about the man who many call the 'Bard of Avon.' That information gap has led to a great deal of speculation and conjecture and has been the source of endless debates and arguments. This time, we're going to peel back those layers of conjecture, rumor and mythology to determine what we actually know about the man from Stratford-upon-Avon. We'll do that by blowing the dust off of old documents to see what those records and accounts actually say. And along the way, we'll try to separate fact from fiction.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Also, one other quick note. I recently spoke with Michael Lavers of the Level Up English Podcast about the history of English. And in a separate interview, I spoke with Glen Speering of the Australians Teach English Podcast about the development of the Australian dialect of English. Both were fun discussions, and if you're interested in listening to those interviews, they are out now. Just look for the Level Up English Podcast and the Australians Teach English Podcast.

Now with that, let's turn to this episode, and let me begin by noting that this episode is a little unusual. I'm not really going to move our overall narrative forward this time. In fact, this episode is bit of a digression because we reached an important milestone in the last installment. At the end of that episode, I discussed the first reference we have to William Shakespeare as an actor and playwright in London. That reference came from the deathbed writings of a disgruntled playwright named Robert Greene, and it was a harsh attack on the man he called 'Shake-scene.' He called the young Stratford writer an 'upstart crow' who was emulating other more-established playwrights.

That was a significant landmark because we have finally reached the point in the podcast where we can talk about the man who is generally considered to be most important writer in the history of the English language. Over the next few episodes, we'll take a closer look at his plays and his poetry. And as we examine those works, I'll try to show how they shaped the English language, and I'll provide some historical context to explain how those works reflect the culture of the late Elizabethan period. But while I may be able to talk about those very important pieces of literature, I'm not going to have a lot to say about the man himself because his personal life is not very well documented.

Probably the most well-known poet prior to Shakespeare was Geoffrey Chaucer. And when I talked about Chaucer in the earlier episodes of podcast, I was able to weave many of the personal details of his life into the overall historical narrative of the late 1300s. And that's because, even though he lived two centuries before Shakespeare, we know a fair amount about Chaucer's personal life. Chaucer was a commoner, but we might say that he was 'noble adjacent.' He was the brother-in-law of John of Gaunt – one of the most important nobles of the late 1300s. The wives of Chaucer and Gaunt were sisters. Chaucer also had an important government job as the comptroller of the customs at the port of London. And he eventually served in Parliament for a brief period. So historical records provide some important personal details about his life.

But that isn't really the case for William Shakespeare. Like Chaucer, Shakespeare was a commoner and a poet, but the personal details of his life are sketchy. Though he wrote poems, he is most famous today for his many plays, and as we've seen in earlier episodes, theaters were not held in high regard at the time. I mean, yes, many people loved to go to see the plays of Shakespeare, and Christopher Marlowe, and Thomas Kyd and others, but the theater didn't have the air of sophistication that it has today. It was more like a punk rock concert. The theaters were located in seedy areas on the outskirts of town because the city authorities in London wouldn't allow them within the city limits. Actors and playwrights were equated with vagabonds, and thieves and drunkards. And the theaters were often located next to or nearby brothels and other places with a bad reputation. It wasn't exactly the Royal Shakespeare Company that we know today. And the plays were considered somewhat disposable. They weren't really considered to be important works of literature at the time. In fact, most of them have been lost to history. It is thanks to a very fortunate decision shortly after Shakespeare's death that his plays were preserved. A couple of the remaining actors in his acting company decided to collect the scripts of his plays and publish them a few years after he died. That was not normally done at the time, but thanks to that collection, we have most of Shakespeare's plays today, and were it not for that collection, Shakespeare would have probably faded into history and would have been forgotten by all but the most ardent fans of Elizabethan literature.

But of course, that didn't happen. Most of Shakespeare's plays were preserved, as were his sonnets and a few other long poems. And in the centuries that followed his death, the Bard of Avon acquired the reputation as the greatest writer in the English language. And I think we can actually go further than that.

I think a very good argument can be made that William Shakespeare is the most famous English person to live prior to the 20th century. I'm excluding people who have lived within the past century or so because of our modern celebrity culture. But in terms of historical figures, I'm not sure that there is an English person more famous around the world than Shakespeare. Maybe Queen Elizabeth I, maybe Henry VIII, but even they don't have the cultural relevance that Shakespeare has.

And therein lies the problem. A man who is one of the most famous historical figures in English history – probably the most important writer in the history of the English language – and yet, we know relatively little about the man with any certainty. And many people have been frustrated by that information gap for centuries. Writers have produced countless biographies consisting of

hundreds of pages each, yet the known facts of Shakespeare's life could probably be covered in single chapter. Almost everything else is speculation, conjecture, assumption, and reasonable guesswork.

So that's really the reason for this episode. Before we move on with the story of English, I thought it would be helpful to try to separate fact from fiction and documentary evidence from speculation. My goal in this episode it to provide the known facts of Shakespeare's life and the reasonable conclusions that can be drawn from those facts. So in a sense, this will be a short biography of the man. Of course, we'll explore some of these facets of his life in more detail as move forward with the story when we can put them into a larger historical and literary context. But given that there are so many books and articles about Shakespeare, and so many controversies about his life, I thought it would be helpful to determine exactly what the historical records have to say about him.

So let's begin at the beginning – with the birth of Shakespeare. We don't know the exact date that he was born, but the Birthplace Records Office in Stratford maintains a record of baptisms that were performed in the local Holy Trinity Church in the mid-1500s. And those baptismal records contain an entry for an infant named William Shakespeare, son of John Shakespeare. The records indicate that William was christened on April 26, 1564. Since newborns were usually christened about two or three days after they were born, it is assumed that Shakespeare was born about three days earlier. So the traditional date of his birth is usually given as April 23, 1564, but again, that is based on the baptismal record. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 37-8*]

I should also note that birth dates can be difficult to determine during the Elizabethan period – especially for commoners – because, very often, there are no surviving birth records. For example, Ben Jonson was a contemporary of Shakespeare and a fellow playwright. He may have actually been the most popular playwright in England at the time Shakespeare's death. But we run into the same problem when trying to determine his date of birth. Again, the surviving records are a bit hit-and-miss.

Now I mentioned that the baptismal records identify William's father as John Shakespeare. And most Shakespeare biographies tend to dedicate at least a chapter or two to John because his life is pretty-well documented. He was a glover or glove-maker by trade, and because of that, many people love to point out William's humble working class roots. But there is a bit more to his father's story.

William's father John eventually became involved in the local government of Stratford. He served as a burgess and an alderman. In September of 1568, when William was four years old, John was elected Bailiff, which was basically Stratford's equivalent of the mayor. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 36*] He also served as a local Justice of the Peace, so he emerged as a prominent figure in the community. John also acquired several properties in Stratford, and in 1572, he was accused of serving as a broker or middle-man in the local wool trade. That was actually against the law since he wasn't properly accredited to do that. A short time later, the records show that he stopped attending the local council meetings, and in later years, he apparently had some financial problems because he started to mortgage his properties and default

on his debts. That has been the source of much speculation by later historians, but again, the records only reveal what happened. They don't reveal why.

Now as William grew into an adolescent, he presumably attended school. That's where he would have learned to read and write and where he would have been exposed to some of the basic classical texts which were part of a standard grammar school education. And as the son of a local official, he would have had direct access to the grammar school in Stratford called the King's New School. In fact, he would have been entitled to a free education there. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 40*.] But the records of the school have been lost for the period in which Shakespeare lived. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare, Bill Bryson, p. 37*.] So there is no documentary proof that Shakespeare actually attended the school, but his plays show an intimate knowledge of such schools – especially a scene in The Merry Wives of Windsor where a student is given a Latin lesson straight from William Lily's Grammar textbook that was used throughout Grammar Schools in England at the time. So most scholars today agree that Shakespeare had at least a basic grammar school education, but again, the records have been lost to history.

With respect to university records, those are much better preserved, but again, there is no record of a William Shakespeare attending a university during this period. Again, the general consensus is that his education never extended beyond grammar school.

So we really don't have any mention of William in the public records from the time of his birth in 1564 until his marriage in 1582. He was 18 years old in that year, and the registry of the Bishop of Worcester shows that a marriage license was issued to William and his fiancé Anne Hathaway on November 27. Now the actual marriage licence no longer exists, but we do have this entry in a clerk's register showing that the licence was issued on that day. A separate marriage bond was issued the following day that also contains William and Anne's names. So we have these two documents that confirm the marriage in late November of 1582, and as with so much of Shakespeare's life, it is surrounded by controversy.

As I mentioned, William's new wife was Anne Hathaway, but Anne's name doesn't appear as Hathaway on one of the two surviving documents. The bond paperwork issued on the second day has her name listed correctly as Anne Hathaway. But on the first day, the clerk who maintained the register wrote down the name as 'Anne Whateley.' This discrepancy has led to wild speculation among some modern historians. The dispute has filled many chapters of many books. Who was Anne Whately? What happened to her? Was Shakespeare engaged to two different women? What was going on?

Well, the mystery can be solved by taking a closer look at the registry. It appears that the clerk who maintained the registry and wrote down the entries about the people who came to the office each day was very careless. The register contains several clerical errors, including the name Barber written down as 'Baker' in one place, and the name Bradely written as 'Darby' in another place. The name Elcock is recorded as 'Edgcock' in one entry. And on the same day that William and Anne appeared before the clerk to get their marriage license, a man named William Whateley had appeared in regard to a completely separate matter involving a dispute over tithes. The

careless clerk apparently had Whateley's name on the brain when he wrote down Anne's name as Anne Whateley, instead of Anne Hathaway. But again, the next day, it was properly recorded. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 56-7*.]

And this raises another frustrating point for researchers. Not only are local records often missing this far back in time, but even when they exist, they're only as good as the person who was maintaining them. And when a discrepancy like this appears in regard to someone as prominent as William Shakespeare, it can lead to all kinds of speculation and conjecture.

Now beyond Anne's name (or names), we don't have much information about her, but when she died 40 years later, her gravestone contained an inscription that said she was 67 years old at the time of her death. So based on that, a simple calculation reveals that she was 26 or 27 years old when she married William. So she would have been eight or nine year older than him.

Of course, the surviving records don't tell us very much about William and Anne's relationship, but a slightly later record does shed some light on the timing of the marriage. The baptismal register of Stratford's Holy Trinity Church confirms that William and Anne had a daughter named Susanna in May of the following year. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 57*] That was six months after the marriage, which means that Anne was apparently three months pregnant when the marriage took place. And that raises the possibility that the two decided to get married after she found out she was pregnant.

Two years later, the couple had two more children – twins named Hamnet and Judith. Their christening is recorded on February 2, 1585 in the Stratford parish register.

Now so far, we have been able to identify the documents related to William's marriage and the birth of his three children, but after that, there is no further mention of him until Robert Greene's book that we examined at the end of the last episode. That was the book that referred to Shakespeare as 'Shake-scene' and called him an 'upstart crow' who had suddenly become very popular on the stages of London as both an actor and a writer. The seven years in between the birth of William's twins and his appearance in London are a mystery. Again, numerous legends and stories have popped up over the centuries to explain his whereabouts during those years, but nothing is clearly documented.

It also seems likely that William would have been in London for some time before Greene's book was composed. It would have taken some time for him to rise within the ranks of a local acting company to become a full-fledged actor and playwright. And as we saw last time, Greene's book specifically references a line from Henry VI, Part Three. So some of Shakespeare's plays had already been composed by that point.

Now this takes us to the most interesting part of William's life – his years as a playwright in London. Over the following two decades, the plays and sonnets that we associate with him today were composed and performed. Unfortunately, it's very difficult to pinpoint exactly when each play was written and the order in which they were composed.

It may be tempting to think that there is some master registry of plays that were performed in the theaters around London during this period, but there isn't. All we have are scraps and pieces of information. And those scraps provide an incomplete picture. Nevertheless, Shakespeare scholars have been able to piece together a general chronology of the plays. Now there isn't complete agreement about every play, but a general order can be discerned.

We should begin our look at the plays by noting how plays were typically composed during this period and what happened to them after that. Some playwrights were part of a larger acting company and others were freelancers writing for any company that would take their work. It appears that Shakespeare was mostly associated with a specific acting company over the years, though the name of the company changed as its primary patron changed – from the Lord Chamberlain's Men to the King's Men.

As I've noted before, the theaters didn't like to repeat the same play within a short period of time. And it was common for acting companies to perform a different play each day of the week during their run at a particular theater. That meant there was a high demand for new plays, and they were constantly being churned out.

Sometimes, the composition of the plays was a collaborative effort. Several writers would work together to produce a draft, and Shakespeare may have also worked with other writers on a few occasions. But for the most part, scholars think that he produced most of the plays by himself. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare & Co., Stanley Wells, p. 25*]

Once a draft was completed, it was submitted to the acting company where any final revisions were made. From that point, the play belonged to the acting company, not the author. Writers rarely felt the need to retain a copy of the original draft, and virtually none of those initial drafts survive to this day. Again, that is true for all playwrights of this period, including Shakespeare. None of the early drafts of his plays in his own handwriting have ever been found. In fact, as we'll see, the only handwriting we have from him is six shaky signatures recorded late in his life.

Now initially, acting companies didn't see any need to publish their plays. The plays were strictly for public performance, but in the early 1590s, unauthorized versions started to appear. Plays become so popular that many people wanted a printed copy that they could read at their leisure. So some crafty entrepreneurs would go to watch a specific play and take notes as the actors performed their scenes. They might even work with one of the performers in the play to flesh out the dialogue. And then they would publish their unauthorized version of the play. There were no copyright laws at the time, so it wasn't against the law to publish those versions, but they were often of very poor quality.

Meanwhile, the acting companies themselves would sometimes arrange for the publication of a popular play. The play would be sold to a printer, who would produce a version for the public. These authorized versions were obviously of better quality, and they appeared from time to time. But again, most plays never received that type of formal publication. In all, it appears that about half of Shakespeare's plays were published during his lifetime as either poor unauthorized versions or higher quality official versions. And I make that point to emphasize that the plays that

are performed today come from that later collection assembled after his death, not from the rare versions that were published during his lifetime.

Now the plays in the later collection were not dated, so that makes it very difficult to pinpoint when each play was written, and therefore, in what order the plays were written. But as I noted earlier, scholars have been able to establish some pretty firm dates for some of the plays and loose dates for most of the others.

In some cases, there is an outside reference that helps to date a play. For example, in the last episode where I talked about Robert Greene's book that mentioned Shakespeare, I noted that Green referred to him as having a 'Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde,' which was a parody of a line that was used in the play Henry VI, Part Three where the Duke of York referred to Queen Margaret as "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide." Well that specific reference confirms that Henry VI, Part Three had been composed by the time Greene wrote his book. And since that was Part Three, it means that Part Two had also been composed by that date. And Part One may have also be composed by that point, though there is some evidence that it might have been written last as a prequel. But either way, that's a good example of how an outside reference can help to determine the date of a play or at least a last possible date in which the play could have been written.

Along those same lines, historians have been able to find some letters and publications that mention one of the plays by name or describe the play in such detail that it is obvious which play is being referred to. And again, that type of evidence can prove that a play was written prior to the date of that letter or publication.

Also, as I noted, about half of Shakespeare's plays were printed during his lifetime as either authorized or unauthorized versions. Some of those publications contain dates which confirm that the play was composed prior to that date. Also, all publishers in London were part of a guild called the Stationer's Company. And printers were required to report each new publication to the guild, and those records called the Stationer's Register have been well-preserved. Those records can also be used to establish the dates of some of the plays, at least the ones that were published and properly registered.

Sometimes a play will mention a specific event or occurrence, and that can also help to date the play. If nothing else, it can establish a cut-off date prior to which the play would have been written.

Through this pain-staking process, scholars have been able to piece together a general sequence and order of the plays, but there isn't complete agreement about that because some of the plays don't have any outside evidence that points to their date. For those plays, scholars tend to look at stylistic elements. Shakespeare's style of writing evolved over the years, and some plays fit better into some periods than others.

Again, as you can see, the documentary evidence is sketchy and not nearly as complete as historians would like.

Now having placed Shakespeare on the stages of London in 1592 thanks to Robert Greene's critical comments, we can proceed from there. But the next piece of evidence doesn't come from the stage. It actually comes from a book of poetry. As it turns out, just when we have evidence of Shakespeare's plays being performed around London, there was an outbreak of the plague which closed all of the theaters. I'll talk more about that development in the next episode, but with the theaters closed, there was a lot of down time for the actors and playwrights. And it appears that Shakespeare spent that time writing poetry.

Though there is no way to know for certain, it is generally believed that Shakespeare's sonnets were composed during this period when the theaters were closed. He composed short poems like sonnets, and he also composed two long poems intended for publication. That was the traditional way that poets and writers made money, and in 1593, a poem called 'Venus and Adonis' was published. It contains a dedication from Shakespeare to the Earl of Southampton, who was his patron at the time. This particular poem is notable because it is the first published work to identify Shakespeare as the author. And it was also quite successful as a published work. So the first published work of the bard was a poem, not a play. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 135*]

A few months later, he published another extended poem call 'The Rape of Lucrece.' And as I noted, most scholars think the sonnets were also composed around this same time, but more on those later.

Shortly after the two poems were published, the theaters started to re-open, but the plague returned from time to time, and the theaters would continue to be closed and opened in response. During Christmastime in 1594, Shakespeare's acting company – the Lord Chamberlain's Men – performed at Queen Elizabeth's court. The surviving accounts of the Queen's Chamber specifically mentions William Shakespeare as one of the actors, and it's the first surviving record to show that he was part of a specific acting company. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 183*]

A little over a year later, Shakespeare received some tragic news. His young son Hamnet died in Stratford. He was 11 years old, and the Stratford burial register confirms his death on August 11, of 1596. The cause of death is unknown, but he died during another outbreak of the plague, so that may have been cause.

A few weeks later in the final weeks of 1596, Shakespeare pops up again in the public records as part of a legal dispute. His name appears in the records of London's Public Record Office. He was one of four people named in a legal document called a 'writ of attachment.' The document stated that the person bringing the action was seeking 'sureties of the peace' against the four named individuals. It isn't clear what the filing was about, but many modern scholars think it may have stemmed from another public order to close the theaters. Shakespeare and the other persons may have threatened the person who tried to close the theater, and that person may have filed the writ in response. But again, the purpose of the writ and the outcome of the dispute is not known for certain. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 216*]

The same records office contains another reference to Shakespeare the following year – in 1597. His name is mentioned in a list of people near St. Helen's Church in Bishopsgate who had not paid their local taxes. Now this was the area north of the London city limits where James Burbage has built the first permanent theater in the 1570s. Burbage was closely associated with Shakespeare, and it appears that Shakespeare had been living near the theater for some time, but had recently moved away. The records of unpaid taxes specifically mention that the individuals named may have moved away and no long lived in the area. Another related entry suggests that he may have moved to the bishopric of Winchester, which would have included the region south of the Thames called Southwark. Based on those entries, most scholars think William had recently moved across the river to Southwark because that's where Philip Henslowe had built the Rose Theater, and it is where Burbage's theater would soon be moved and renamed as The Globe. But again, all we can really say for certain from the surviving records is that William had not paid his taxes in Bishopsgate. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 222*]

Another piece of evidence that William had moved across the river has to do with his financial success and prosperity during this period. Around the same time that he failed to pay his taxes in Bishopsgate, we have some other evidence that indicates he was making a lot of money, so his failure to pay taxes wasn't apparently due to a lack of funds. The evidence that Shakespeare was becoming a wealthy man is reflected in deeds recorded back in Stratford at the Birthplace Trust Records Office and in the Public Records Office. Those deeds show that William purchased the second largest house in the town in May of 1597. That's the same time that he didn't pay his taxes in Bishopsgate. The new Stratford house was known as the New Place, and William owned it until his death. So again, we have more evidence that he was moving up in the world.

This is also confirmed by a surviving letter written to Shakespeare in October of the following year. The letter was from a Stratford acquaintance named Richard Quiney. In the letter, Quiney asked to borrow some money from William. The letter is preserved in the Birthplace Trust Records Office in Stratford, and it is the only surviving letter addressed to Shakespeare. It apparently survives because it was never delivered, but from the letter, we can discern that people thought William was a man of some wealth by that point in 1598.

That same year, a copy of Shakespeare's play called Love's Labour's Lost was published. Now other plays by him had been published prior to that point, but none of them identify the author. What makes the publication of Love's Labour's Lost so notable is that it includes Shakespeare's name as the author on the title page, and it is the first one to do so. Remember that some of Shakespeare's poems had been published with his name, but not any plays, in part because the plays belonged to the acting company, not the writer. But apparently, Shakespeare had become so well known as a writer by this point that the publication of Love's Labour's Lost included his name. A short time later, several more of his plays, Richard II, Richard III, and Henry IV Part I, were all published under his name. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 238-9* and *The Genius of Shakespeare, Jonathan Bate, p. 22*]

In this same year (1598), another book appeared which is very important to Shakespeare scholars. It was a booked called 'Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury.' The author was a Cambridge and Oxford graduate named Francis Meres, who apparently traveled in the literary circles of London. We are

led to believe that he knew many of the prominent writers at the time. In one chapter of the book, he compared the writers of his day to those of the classical era. And in his discussion, he specifically talked about William Shakespeare. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare & Co., Stanley Wells, p. 61-2.*] He praised Shakespeare as one of several writers who had enriched the English language. He then wrote, "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For comedy, witness his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love's Labour's Lost, his Loves Labour's Won, his Midsummer Night's Dream, and his Merchant of Venice- for tragedy his Richard II, Richard III, Henry IV, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet." [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 242*]

Now that passage is really important because of that specific list of plays. Thanks to that list, we know that those plays had been composed prior to the date of this book in 1598. It also confirms that Shakespeare was a highly regarded playwright at this relatively early date – about half way through is career.

I should note that that list of plays includes one called Love's Labour's Won, which wasn't published after Shakespeare's death, and no copy of it has ever been found. So if you have an original copy of that play lying around somewhere, you might want to let someone know. It might be worth a few dollars.

So Meres's book is interesting for what it has to say about Shakespeare's plays, but it also interesting for another reason. In a separate passage, Meres mentioned Shakespeare's sonnets – referring to them as "his sugared Sonnets among his private friends." That passage is the first reference we have to the sonnets, and it confirms that most, if not all, of the sonnets had been composed by that point. The passage also indicates that the sonnets were intended for William's private friends and not for publication. And we'll see more evidence of that in a moment.

This same year 1598 is also the year that the theater used by Shakespeare's acting company north of town was dismantled and moved south of town across the river. There it was re-named the Globe. That move was made because the lease at the original location expired, and the landlord refused to agree to terms for a new lease. The land for the new location was leased from a man named Nicholas Brend. Brend had inherited some property south of the river from his father, who had recently passed away. An inventory of the inherited property was prepared for the father's estate a few months later. It lists the property and describes it as containing a newly built structure in the "occupation of William Shakespeare and others." So this inventory shows that Shakespeare was personally involved in the new theater now called the Globe.

In fact, from later evidence, we know that he was a ten percent owner of the Globe. That paperwork comes from a lawsuit filed twenty years later which involved some of the members of the acting company. The surviving legal documents provide the details of the lease agreement, and the percentages owned by each member. Again, Shakespeare is reported as ten percent owner making him responsible for his share of the expenses, but also giving him the right to one-tenth of the profits. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 252*]

Around the same time that the Globe theater was established, a couple of authors mentioned Shakespeare by name in their works. A writer named John Weever offered praise in a book called 'Epigrammes in the Oldest Cut, and Newest Fashion.' He referred to William as 'Honey-tongued Shakespeare' and also made reference to several of his plays.

Meanwhile, a separate unknown playwright mentioned Shakespeare in a series of plays called 'Pilgrimage to Parnassus' and 'Return from Parnassus.' The passage comes from a character who says "Let this duncified world esteem of Spenser and Chaucer, I'll worship sweet Mr Shakespeare." But the context of the statement in the play suggests that it was intended sarcastically. The character who utters the statement in the play is a bit of a joke, and the implication is that some people loved Shakespeare's use of language, while others found it overly pretentious. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 270-1*]

Over the next few years into the early 1600s, more of Shakespeare's plays were published, and by this point, his name was always included on the title page, which again, points to his popularity.

In fact, in the year 1600, a book appeared called 'The Passionate Pilgrime. By W. Shakespeare... Sonnets To sundry notes of Musicke' It was published by a printer named William Jaggard, and as the title indicates, it purported to be a collection of Shakespeare's sonnets. In reality, it only contained two sonnets composed by him. The others were composed by lesser-known poets, and it appears that Jaggard put Shakespeare's name on the title page to mislead buyers. It was an early case of false advertising.

In 1603, Queen Elizabeth died, and she was succeeded by her cousin James of Scotland. The new King James gave his patronage to Shakespeare's acting company, who thereupon became known as The King's Men. The official proclamation that recognized the troupe as the King's Men lists Shakespeare's name, and in fact, it lists his name before those of the other actors in his company – many of whom were highly esteemed as actors.

Within a couple of years, William was making so much money that he purchased a 107 acres of land outside of Stratford.

In 1605, one of his fellow actors named Augustine Phillips died, and in his will, he left William five pounds and a thirty shilling piece of gold.

A short time later, the acting company decided to purchase a separate theater in London called the Blackfriars Theater. A few moments ago, I mentioned a later lawsuit that revealed Shakespeare's one-tenth share of the Globe. Well, the same lawsuit shows that he owned a one-seventh share of Blackfriars.

In 1609, Shakespeare's sonnets finally appeared in a large collection published by Thomas Thorpe. This is the source of the sonnets we have today, but it appears that Shakespeare was not involved in the publication. The exact history of the sonnets is unclear, but as I noted earlier, it is widely believed that Shakespeare composed them around 1592 to 1594 when the theaters were closed – and when he composed other poems dedicated to his patron, the Earl of Southampton. It

is widely believed that the sonnets were intended for Shakespeare's friends, and weren't intended to be published. But it appears that the sonnets passed from his patron Southampton through various intermediaries to Thorpe, and Thorpe realized the value of the sonnets given Shakespeare's fame in the early 1600s, so he decided to publish them. But again, that's a lot of speculation. All we really know for sure is that the sonnets appeared in this collection in 1609.

By this point, Shakespeare's writing career was winding down, and most historians think he was starting to spend more time back in Stratford.

But in 1612, he pops up again as part of a legal dispute in London. In that year, he was called as a witness in a dispute involving the landlord of the house where he had lived during his time in London. The lawsuit concerned a financial dispute between the landlord and the landlord's daughter and son-in-law. The terms of the lawsuit aren't really important, but since William knew the parties involved, he was called to testify about the dispute. He didn't really have much to offer, but since the dispute concerned his landlord, it helps historians to determine where Shakespeare resided during his time as an actor. The paperwork also contains William's signature, which is the first of his surviving signatures. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 360-1*] A lot of historians have noted that the signature is not particularly neat or impressive. And that is also the case with his other signatures, which we'll consider in a moment.

In the following year (1613), William purchased a house near the Blackfriars Theater in London. The surviving paperwork contains two more of his signatures, again both of them very shaky and not particularly attractive. We don't know why he purchased the property because his writing career was almost over by that point, and it seems that he spent the remaining years in Stratford. Most modern scholars think the Blackfriars house in London was simply an investment, and that William didn't actually live there. But again, all we have are the purchase documents.

Three years later, in 1616, William was apparently living in Stratford and in very poor health. And given his condition, he prepared his Last Will and Testament. The Will is dated March 25, 1616. Less than a month later, on April 23, William died at the age of 52. Fortunately, his Last Will survives, and it is the most personal document we have from him.

As with most matters involving Shakespeare, his Last Will is the source of many disputes. In the document, he left some money to his daughter Judith, subject to certain conditions. He left his clothing to his sister, and since William owned the house where his sister resided, he gave her the right to live in the house for the rest of her life. He left some money to his nephews and included a few specific bequests to some other acquaintances. The only thing he left to his wife Anne was his 'second best bed' and related furniture. That was it, and that provision has elicited a lot of commentary and conjecture over the years since she received nothing else in the Will. William left his remaining property, both the land holdings and his remaining personal effects, to his daughter Susanna.

It appears that the Will was actually drafted by William's personal lawyer, Francis Collins. Much of the standard language of the Will matches the language contained in other Wills prepared by Collins. So the document is not in Shakespeare's handwriting, but it does contain his signature on

each of its three pages. So that gives us three more signatures to examine, and just like the other three that I mentioned earlier, these signatures are rough and shaky.

Now the Will was clearly revised at some point. It contains several provisions that have been marked through and changed by inserting new terms in their place . As I noted, the Will consists of three pages, but the first page doesn't match the other two. It appears that the original first page was removed and replaced with a new first page at some point.

Now the three signatures contained on the Will can be added to the other three I mentioned earlier – the one on William's testimony in the 1612 lawsuit involving his landlord and the two on the paperwork associated with the purchase of the Blackfriars house in 1613. That's six in total, and they are all very shaky and rough.

The appearance of those signatures has led to a lot of speculation over the years. Some have argued that if Shakespeare could barely write his name, how could he have written all of the plays that were published under his name? Others dismiss that criticism and suggest that a signature doesn't really tell you anything about the quality of the writer's work. But we also have to consider the very real possibility that something happened to Shakespeare in those last few years that affected his handwriting. Again, this is merely speculation, but some scholars have argued that he suffered from a physical condition that contributed to his retirement around the same time that these signature appeared in the last few years of his life. Some have suggested that he might have had a stroke. But another possibility is that he suffered from a very common condition that affected many scribes and other professional writers. Today, that condition is called focal hand dystonia, but it is more commonly known as 'scrivener's palsy' or 'writer's cramp.'

Now that's not what happens when your hand hurts after writing a long letter or paper. It's a more permanent and debilitating condition that many scribes experienced as they got older. It's a type of nerve problem that develops from the constant process of writing day-after-day, week-after-week, and year-after-year. The symptoms could vary from one person to the next, but for many writers, the condition tended to get worse over time – making it difficult to even hold a pen or quill. It's similar to carpal tunnel syndrome, though medically that's a different ailment. But the point is that such a condition would explain the poor signatures – and also the fact that Shakespeare retired from writing in his late 40s when he was at the height of his popularity. Again, it's all speculation, but you can see how something as basic as a few signatures can lead to so much debate and controversy. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 385*]

Many people have also noted that Shakespeare didn't mention any books or manuscripts in his Will, which seems a little odd for a man who spent his life writing plays and poetry, but the Will does contain a standard provision in which he left his remaining personal effects to his daughter Susanna. That would have included any books and papers that he owned at the time, but again, we don't know for certain if there were any books. We only know that he didn't make a specific provision for them in his Will.

After he died, Shakespeare's body was buried in the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. A short time later, a memorial was added, which provides his date of death. That memorial is of interest to historians because it contains an inscription and also a bust or statue of Shakespeare's upper body.

The date that the memorial was added is unclear, but it is specifically referenced in a tribute associated with the First Folio or collection of his plays that was published seven years later. So it had to have been constructed by then. That means that the memorial was placed in the church while Shakespeare's wife and children were still living, and presumably they would have approved of the inscription and the statue. The inscription reads:

> Stay passenger, why goest thou by so fast?
> Read if thou canst, whom envious death hath placed
> Within this monument Shakespeare: with whom
> Quick nature died. Whose name doth deck his tomb,
> Far more than cost. Since all that he hath writ
> Leaves living art, but page, to serve his wit.

Now I mention that inscription because it specifically commemorates his life as a writer, not merely an actor. And the statue or bust of Shakespeare that was placed above it shows him sitting at a desk writing. And that indicates that he was remembered immediately after his death as an important writer.

The bust or statue that appears above the inscription is also interesting because it is the first visual representation we have of Shakespeare. There are no known portraits of him during his lifetime. Everything we have today comes from after his death, which has led to speculation about their accuracy and whether they even reflect what he actually looked like.

This particular bust depicts him as an older, round-faced, balding man. One Shakespeare scholar described it as the image of a "self-satisfied pork butcher." It has been the source of many later depictions, and again, it is considered to be a somewhat accurate representation since it was apparently made immediately after his death. But others have questioned whether the sculptor who made the bust would have known what Shakespeare actually looked like. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 397*]

Now Shakespeare was a highly regarded writer, but Ben Jonson was probably the most popular writer in England at the time of Shakespeare's death. In fact, a few months later, a massive collection of Jonson's works was published. It included many of his poems and a few of his plays. A collection of works by the same author was unusual at the time, but it apparently made an impression on a couple of the actors who remained in Shakespeare's acting company – The King's Men. By this point, several of the actors in the company had passed away, but John Heminges and Henry Condell remained. And they decided to put together a portfolio of Shakespeare's works that was similar to the Ben Jonson collection. The main difference is that this new collection would consist entirely of plays.

They began the process of gathering the scripts of all the plays that Shakespeare had composed. Remember that those scripts belonged to the acting company. So they had to dig through the company's archives and records to retrieve the various scripts. Where they lacked a good a final script, they were apparently able to locate some of the original handwritten scripts, and in other cases, they probably consulted with the previous published versions. In the end, they gave us the plays as we know them today. In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, the collection was published. The book is known as the 'First Folio,' and it is the book that preserved the plays for posterity. Without it, it is possible that Shakespeare would have been largely forgotten outside of a few Elizabethan scholars.

The book contained 36 of his plays – half of which were apparently published for the first time. It also contained an engraving of Shakespeare on the cover. And that is the other somewhat reliable representation that we have of him. The folio portrait depicts a man who appears to be slightly younger and thinner than the bust that was made for Shakespeare's grave. Our modern image of Shakespeare is largely drawn from this First Folio picture. The image was made by an artist named Martin Droeshout. Several years had passed since Shakespeare's death, so isn't clear how Droeshout prepared the image. He might have used a portrait that has since been lost, but no one knows for certain. At any rate, Heminges and Condell approved the image for the book, and Ben Jonson wrote an introductory poem for the book in which he implied that the picture was a good likeness of the poet. So the folio picture is generally accepted as an authentic representation by most modern scholars. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 407-8*]

Now so far, I've accounted for most of the known facts about William Shakespeare during his lifetime and immediately after his death based on the surviving documents. But his story isn't over yet because, at the time of his death, he was considered a very good playwright and poet, but he wasn't really considered to be the icon that he is today. In fact, Ben Jonson was probably held in higher regard at the time. It would take another century or two for Shakespeare's reputation to eclipse everyone else.

In the century that followed his death, writers occasionally mentioned him and acknowledged his skills, but he was merely one of the great writers of the Elizabethan period. Near the end of the 1600s, a writer named John Aubrey composed a book called 'Brief Lives,' which was essentially a collection of short biographies of prominent people. He included a short biography of Shakespeare, but it didn't really provide much insight. He noted that the poet's father was a butcher, and he reported that Shakespeare had been a schoolmaster in the countryside before moving to London. It isn't clear where that information came from, but many later biographers picked it up and repeated it. [*SOURCE: The Genius of Shakespeare, Jonathan Bate, p. 34*]

Then, a few years later in 1709, a writer named Nicholas Rowe prepared the first detailed biography of William Shakespeare. Rowe was also Britain's poet laureate, so he had a particular interest in Shakespeare, but he ran into a familiar problem as he prepared his biography. At the time, virtually nothing was known about Shakespeare's personal life other than a few basic facts. It's important to keep in mind that much of the documentation I mentioned in this episode had not been uncovered yet. So in preparing his biography, Rowe relied on stories and anecdotes that he picked up from people around Stratford. He reported that Shakespeare's father was a wool

dealer. He also reported that young William had been a deer poacher, and for that reason, he had been run out of town by a local landowner named Sir Thomas Lucy. From there, William had made his way to London to become a playwright. Again, that story was also repeated in later biographies, but there is no solid evidence to support any of it. [*SOURCE: The Genius of Shakespeare, Jonathan Bate, p. 35*]

Shakespeare's reputation during this period was somewhat mixed. At the time, there was still a great deal of emphasis on classical structure in literature, and Shakespeare didn't really adhere to that structure. He mixed comedy and tragedy, and he didn't make constant references to classical figures. So some scholars looked down on his works. But his reputation really started to take off in the mid-1700s. That's when prominent writers like Samuel Johnson – the man who complied the well-known English dictionary – began to argue that Shakespeare deserved to be held in the highest regard.

During the late 1700s, Shakespeare's reputation began to skyrocket. And very soon, people wanted to know more about him. But again, as researchers looked for information, they kept coming up short. As I mentioned, a lot of the documentation we have today had not been discovered yet. By the late 1700s, that gap between Shakespeare's growing reputation and the general lack of information about him started to fuel questions about the authorship of the plays.

In the mid-1800s, an American writer named Delia Bacon wrote a book claiming that William Shakespeare of Stratford had not in fact been the author of the plays attributed to him. She claimed that the plays were written a group of men including Francis Bacon, Sir Walter Raleigh and Edmund Spenser, and that the plays were issued in the name of the young actor from Stratford to hide their authorship. I should mention that Delia Bacon was an eccentric, and she actually ended up in a mental institution later in life, but her book sparked a new cottage industry of writers who claimed that someone other Shakespeare had really written the plays attributed to him.

The so-called 'authorship question' became so popular that prominent people like Mark Twain and Sigmund Freud were soon expressing doubts about Shakespeare's authorship.

Almost anyone and everyone was soon proclaimed as the real author of the plays. Christopher Marlowe was a popular suggestion, even though he had died just as Shakespeare's career was starting. Some even suggested that Queen Elizabeth herself wrote the plays.

In the early 1900s, another candidate emerged – the fifth Earl of Rutland named Roger Manners. This was based on a recent discovery that Rutland's estate had paid some money to William Shakespeare and his fellow actor Richard Burbage to make a painted shield for a jousting contest. It was a curious entry in Rutland's financial records, and it showed a connection between Rutland and Shakespeare. But there was no real evidence that Rutland had written the plays.

Then a short time later in 1920, the unfortunately named Robert Looney published a book in which he argued that Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford had written the plays. This is the theory that gained the most traction, and is still the most popular idea proposed by those who deny

Shakespeare's authorship. Those who believe the Earl of Oxford was the real author are sometimes called 'Oxfordians,' and countless books have been written to make the case for him as the real author. They point to de Vere's education, his extensive travels, his connections to the royal court, and the fact that he did indeed write plays himself.

But despite the popularity of such arguments, and the many books that have advanced them, the mainstream view of most scholars is that the plays we associate with William Shakespeare were indeed written by the glover's son from Stratford. Throughout the podcast, we have encountered many controversies like the disputes over the origin and spread of the original Indo-Europeans, and the relationship between the first Anglo-Saxons and the native Celts, and the many disputed etymologies of common words and terms. But there are few disputes in the history of English that elicit more passionate debate than the so-called 'Shakespeare authorship' question.

And while I am certainly not going to resolve that debate here, I am taking the mainstream view that William Shakespeare was the author of the plays that we attribute to him, though it appears that he did collaborate with other writers on some of the early and later plays. If you happen to be an Oxfordian – and I know that some of you are based on the emails I have received – it doesn't really change the arc of the story going forward because what really matters is the way the plays impacted the English language. And that isn't really debatable at all.

Having given you an overview of Shakespeare's life in this episode, I'm not really going to focus on those personal details in future episodes. Instead, the focus will be on the actual plays and poetry and the way they impacted the English language.

So next time, we'll pick up the story where we left off last time, with events in England in 1592 as plague arrived in London and the theaters were shut down. We'll see how writers like Shakespeare responded to those developments by turning their attention away from drama and back to poetry. And as always, we'll explore how those developments shaped the English language.

One last note before I conclude. As always, I used several sources in preparing this episode. I try to include specific references to source material in the transcripts, so check those out if you are interesting in that information. But I wanted to make a specific note of one particular source that was especially helpful in putting this episode together and that is a book by Ian Wilson called 'Shakespeare: The Evidence.'

So with that acknowledgment, let me conclude as always by saying 'Thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.'