

An Important Anne-iversary! Commemorating the 400th anniversary of Anne Shakespeare's Death

It is all too easy to overlook 'Shakespeare's wife', Anne Shakespeare (née Hathaway) who died four hundred years ago on 6th August 1623. But she was Shakespeare's mainstay, the mother of his three children – Susanna, and the twins, Hamnet and Judith – and very much the mistress of New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, their family home since 1597.

In honour of the anniversary of her death, Anne Shakespeare is being properly commemorated in a special service in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon on Sunday 6th August at 5.00 p.m.

Anne is buried there, in the chancel, next to her famous husband, between his grave and his monument. She survived him by seven years and may have had a hand in the publication of his plays. Whilst people from all over the world visit the church expecting to see the grave of the poet and playwright, they are sometime often pleasantly surprised to see the grave of his wife next to his.

Her epitaph is in Latin, and describes her as a beloved mother. It is thought to have been written by her two surviving daughters. Translated it reads:

*'Mother, you gave me the breast, you gave me milk and life;
Woe is me, that for so great a gift my return will be but a tomb.
Would that the good angel would roll away the stone from its mouth!
And that your form, like the body of Christ, would come forth!
Yet my prayers are of no avail; come quickly, Christ!
That my mother, though shut in the tomb, may rise again, and seek the stars.'*

Rev. Patrick Taylor, the Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon said:

"We are delighted to be holding this very special service to remember Anne, in the church where she was buried 400 years ago. Anne is often in the shadow of her famous husband but the prominence of her grave at the high altar is an enduring testimony to the affectionate regard in which she must have been held by both her family and the people of Stratford-upon-Avon."

Holy Trinity Church has worked closely with Rev. Dr Paul Edmondson, who is also Head of Research at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The locally-based Shakespeare scholar, who will lead the service said,

'Anne Shakespeare seems more relevant to Shakespeare Studies than ever before. I hope the special service at Holy Trinity Church, where she herself regularly worshipped, will be an important milestone in her on-going afterlife in Stratford-upon-Avon, as well as across the pages of Shakespearian biography.'

The service for Anne follows a host of activity led by Dr Edmondson to mark the quatercentenary, including leading two international conversations about her at conferences and two major artistic commissions: a setting of the words of Anne's epitaph to music, a competition with A-Level music students at King Edward VI's School ('Shakespeare's School') and a volume of poems published by Broken Sleep Books, *Anne-thology: Poems Re-presenting Anne Shakespeare*. The collection includes 67 new works, one for each year of Anne's life.

Both the the singing of the anthem, composed by eighteen-year-old Arianna Petard, and readings from of some of the poems inspired by Anne by their authors will be a highlight of the service at Holy Trinity Church. Attendees will also witness the preaching of the first-ever Anne Shakespeare sermon by Professor Katherine Scheil, University of Minnesota, herself a leading expert on Anne.

Professor Scheil said:

'It is an honour to commemorate the life of Anne Shakespeare, a remarkable woman who was a beloved mother to Shakespeare's three children, who ran the large household at New Place, and in essence, who tended the home fires so that her husband could write some of the greatest poetry the world has ever witnessed.'

All are welcome to attend in person. Just turn up.