

Shakespeare 400 at St Andrew by the Wardrobe

Monday 25 April 2016

To mark the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death, St Andrew's celebrates the Bard's links with the parish.

6.30am: Eucharist.

1.00pm: Prayers, performances and a talk on 'The Bloody Question: Shakespeare and Religion' by **Richard Wilson**, Professor of Shakespeare Studies at Kingston University, London.



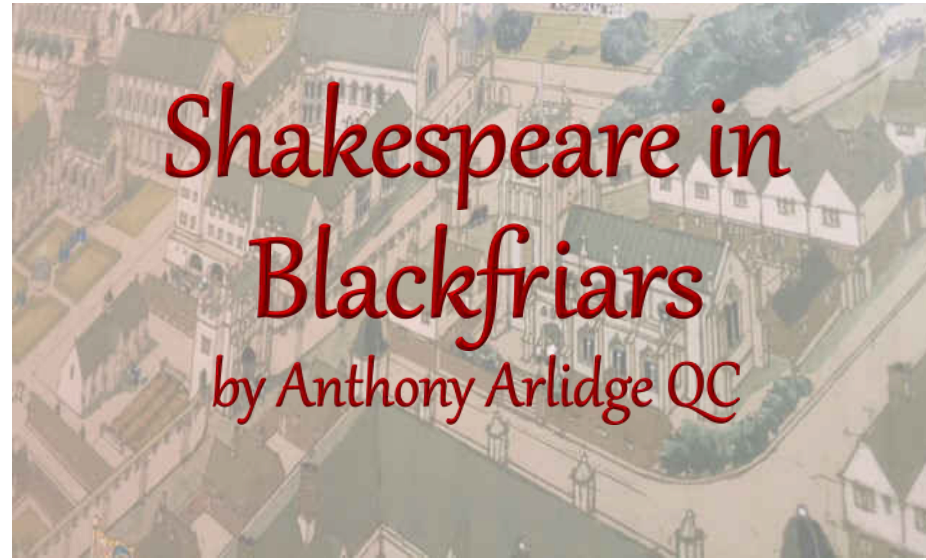
6.00pm: Eucharist, following a format that Shakespeare would have recognised. Music of the era is provided by **The English Chamber Choir**.



7.00pm: Dr **Laura Wright** talks on 'Shakespearean actors and their linguistic—and addictive—legacy'. Dr Wright is Reader in English Language at the University of Cambridge. She works on the history of the London dialect, and can be heard weekly on BBC Radio 4's Word of Mouth'.

Join us after for drinks in the Cockpit Pub, which stands on the site of Shakespeare's home.

Our thanks to Richard Wilson, Laura Wright and The English Chamber Choir. Also to Five St Andrew's Hill for sponsoring this event.



In 1613 the Globe Theatre burned down and Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, moved to the Blackfriars theatre. In the same year, Shakespeare bought part of the old gatehouse of the Blackfriars friary in Ireland Court just off St Andrews Hill. The Black Friars were Dominicans and their friary had existed

from at least the 14th century, running from the present Shoe Lane to the river Thames at Puddle Dock. When the Reformation led to the expulsion of the friars, the former friary was taken into Crown hands and then leased to a variety of people including the playwright John Lyly.

The first venue for Shakespeare's plays had been the Curtain Theatre in Shoreditch, where carpenter and joiner, James Burbage, built London's first theatre and established a company that gained the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain, hence the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Burbage's son, Richard, was the first actor to play many Shakespearean roles. The company prospered sufficiently for James in 1596 to pay £600 for the frater (a room where the friars used to congregate) of the old friary. It was a very large room and he started to convert it into a substantial theatre. Unfortunately for him the Chapel of St Ann's in Ireland Court was a puritan



Richard Burbage

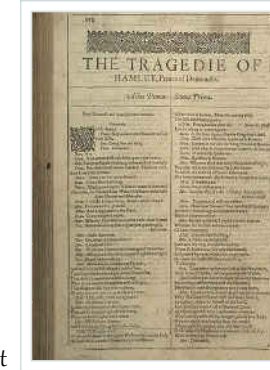


Site of St Ann's, Blackfriars

stronghold. A number of inhabitants of Blackfriars sent a petition to the Privy Council to ban stage plays in the theatre. In the words of the petition, stage plays would attract 'vagrant and lewde persons... beside that the same playhouse is so close to the Church, that the noise of drums and trumpets will greatly disturbe and hinder both the minister and parishioners in time of divine service and sermons.' The Privy Council banned performances. The Chapel of St Ann's and the church of St Andrew by the Wardrobe were destroyed by the Great Fire of London. After this, both were united in one parish, in the present building designed by Christopher Wren (St Andrew's dates back to the 12th century).

The title of St Andrew by the Wardrobe relates to the establishment by Edward III in 1361 of a Royal Wardrobe to house costumes for royal entertainments close by, off Carter Lane. The nearby Pageantmaster's Lane indicates another connection with royal festivities. The Blackfriars Theatre, once completed, was sublet in 1597 by James Burbage to Henry Evans, who with the

Master of the Chapel Royal used the choristers to perform plays there. The locals did not object to a more respectable tenant. The Chapel Royal was entitled to impress boys to sing in the choir. In 1601 a man called Clifton brought an action against Evans, saying that his son could not sing but had been impressed to act, which was without the powers of the Master. Evans was censured. Given that it was an indoor venue, the theatre and the Boys' Company who played there, became so successful that they rivalled the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In *Hamlet*, when the actors arrive at the royal court, the hero enquires of Horatio who they are and Horatio replies they are the best in the city for



First folio, Hamlet

Tragedy and Comedy. So, asks Hamlet, what are they doing in Elsinore? Ah, says Horatio, they have been overreached by an 'eyrie of... little eyases' (a nest of eaglets) referring to the Boys' Company. The eyases would have been pronounced 'eye arses'. Middleton described the

company as a nest of boys that could ravish a man and one can draw one's own inference. The records of a case in the Court of Chancery in 1606 reveal a partnership dispute between those running the Boys' Company; the partners including William Strachey, a member of Gray's Inn and Edward Kirkham, a Yeoman of the Royal Wardrobe. In *Twelfth Night* when Malvolio



Engraving: Malvolio and the Countess

convinces himself that the lady Olivia is in love with him, despite the fact he is only a steward, he says 'there is a precedent for it – the Lady of the Strachey married the yeoman of the wardrobe.' In fact Kirkham was not married to anyone connected to Strachey and the joke seems to have been homophobic.

In 1608 Shakespeare's company, now the King's Men, in which he was a partner, leased the Blackfriars theatre. From then on they used it as a winter venue. There is good evidence that *The Tempest* was staged there and a good possibility

that *A Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* were. It was an upmarket venue, charging five times the prices of the Globe; the most expensive seats were on the stage, where the gallants liked to show off their latest fashions.

When Shakespeare purchased the gatehouse, one of the witnesses to his signature on the conveyance was the landlord of the Mermaid tavern at the back of St Paul's Cathedral. In the early 1600s there was a drinking club, the so-called 'Mermaid Club' that met there on a Friday, and included some of the Elizabethan era's leading literary figures, the poets Jonson and Donne and possibly the great man himself. So let's scotch the rumour that Shakespeare is dead. He is around us and in our speech all the time.



Engraving: Shakespeare and Jonson at the Mermaid Tavern

Anthony Arlidge QC