

Kate's Storytree

Read the story written by visitors to Shakespeare's family homes over five days, 1-5 August 2016.

Chapter one (Shakespeare's Birthplace, Monday)

There once lived a couple called John and Mary. They lived in a beautiful house in a town in Warwickshire. The couple were anxious to have a baby and had already experienced great sadness at losing two baby girls. The time came when John and Mary gave birth to a beautiful baby boy and they called him William. Shortly after, a great threat grew over the town and so Mary took her son away to a nearby village. But William was a strong boy and he grew stronger each year and when April arrived, he would celebrate his birthday.

William spent his days helping his father make gloves. But he was not interested.

'William, come and help me with this glove.' His father would ask. But William was too busy staring out of the window and listening to the passers by.

'William, fetch me that leather so that I can cut it and sew it.' But again, William would be found staring out at the world outside his window. William's father decided that it was now time for him to attend school. William loved school and spent many happy days there.

One day, a theatre group came to visit the town. Everyone was excited, for the theatre group brought with them stories from the London. John knew that the town would be busy and so told William:

'William, today you must help me in the shop, for we are poor and in need of money.'

William defied his father and went to watch the theatre group. He was amazed. He had never before seen such beautiful props and costumes. He returned to his family home and announced:

'Father, I wish to become a writer.'

And that is what he did.

Chapter two (Hall's Croft)

William kept his passion for writing, but continued working for his father until such time that he was old enough to marry. He met a woman called Anne and they married and gave birth to a daughter, Susanna. She was a strong woman, with a strong mind. She fell in love with a doctor called John Hall. He was very rich and provided Susanna with whatever she wanted. They would go to church and spend happy days in their garden tending to the herbs and plants.

William would go to visit his daughter and son-in-law. He was intrigued by all the plants and herbs, gemstones and rocks.

'I wonder' thought William 'How is it that such simple things can do such wondrous things? It is, as if, my young son-in-law could do magic!'

At this, William ran home. For he was full of thoughts about the doctor and his seemingly magical powers.

Chapter three (Anne Hathaway's Cottage)

Now, we have not yet spoken much of Anne, the wife of William. She was the daughter of a farmer who lived in a cottage along the banks of Shuttery brook. Anne and William were very much in love and wished to marry immediately. Anne was older than William and so he had to ask his father's permission to marry her.

'My son, I know that you are in love with this woman. But why the rush? Have you no patience?'

At this William decided to tell his father the truth.

'Father, we must marry quickly as Anne is with child and due to give birth very soon.'

'So be it' replied his father 'then I must get to work. For all the guests must be gifted with a pair of the finest gloves.'

They were married and their wedding day was celebrated with friends and family. Anne wore her best clothes and her hair was crowned with a garland of herbs.

Anne was sad to leave the beautiful cottage that she knew so well. She would miss the surrounding meadows and all the wild flowers that grew there. But her life was to change for she was now married to Mr William Shakespeare.

Chapter four (Mary Arden's Farm)

Mary and William were blessed with two more children, twins by the names of Hamnet and Judith. The three children had inherited characteristics from their parents and were blessed with strong spirits and inquiring minds. As a child, William had spent many years playing and helping with tasks on the farm where his step-grandmother, Agnes, lived. It was here, on this farm that Shakespeare would be told tales of Robin Hood and George the Dragon, for his Grandmother was a great storyteller.

The three children loved their Grandmother Mary. She was a kind woman, bright and articulate. She had a childish spirit but treated everyone with fairness. Mary showed her grandchildren how to tend to the crops and take care of the livestock.

'Grandmother, please may I ride on the horse in the paddock? For I am big and strong and I am sure I shall be very good.' Hamnet asked his Grandmother one day.

'Hamnet, I am sure that you shall be very good and I can see how big and strong you are, but I am too busy to show you. Have patience my child. All in good time.'

But Hamnet, like his father, decided to defy his Grandmother and took hold of the horse in the paddock. He climbed atop the horse, and having watched the workmen before, kicked the horse to move forward. The horse did not move. So Hamnet kicked him again. And still the horse did not move. Hamnet became very angry with the horse and the more he kicked, the more the horse stood still.

Mary had been watching her Grandson from across the farm. She walked over to him.

'Hamnet, I told you not to ride the horse. You disobeyed me.' Hamnet looked at his grandmother as he sat atop the horse, tears streaming down his face. He was stuck.

Mary reached up and picked Hamnet off the horse. She smiled at him 'One day, my child, one day.' Sadly, though they did not know, that day was never to come.

Chapter five (Shakespeare's Birthplace, Friday)

William proved himself to be a great author and playwright and made a fortune writing plays and putting on performances in London. He spent his time in the capital and, back at home, in Stratford-upon-Avon. One evening as he was busy writing in his study, he heard Judith call out.

'Father, Father, come quick! Something is wrong with Hamnet and I do not know what.'

He rushed to Hamnet and upon seeing his motionless body he sent for the doctor but it was too late. Neither William nor the doctor could do anything to revive him. The death of Hamnet echoed through the house causing great suffering to both William and Anne and to his sisters.

Not long after Hamnet's death, William bought a new house in Stratford. The house sat within two beautiful gardens and orchards and the family was very happy there. Both William and Anne loved the countryside and being close to the natural world soothed their grieving hearts. The family experienced many joys and sorrows over the coming years. The death of William's mother brought with it the pain of losing a treasured family member but the birth of a beautiful granddaughter gave the family much to celebrate. They named her Elizabeth.

Elizabeth and William spent eight happy years sharing the special bond that is created between a Grandfather and Granddaughter.

In April 1616, the same month of his birth, William died.

His beloved family was left grieving but there was still joy to be found, for Shakespeare had written a great many stories and within each one, a part of him was to be found.

The end.