

Hall's Croft

House Background

The home of William's eldest daughter Susanna and her husband, the wealthy and successful physician, Dr. John Hall. The couple married in 1607 and had their only child, Elizabeth, in 1608. John Hall treated rich and poor people. He had a number of prestigious patients using treatments made from plants, herbs, animal extracts, gemstones and minerals. The timbered house (using a wattle and daub construction) was built for the family in 1613 and was a three-storey construction. The way the house was built displayed the Hall's wealth to the town. An extension to add a cellar to the property was built at the rear in 1614. When Shakespeare died two years later in 1616 and Susanna inherited much of her father's estate, the family moved to Shakespeare's home, New Place. They sold Hall's Croft some years later to the Smith family, who were successful lawyers. There is evidence to show that the house remained in the Smith family for a long time.

The Hall

Background

This was part of the original house built by the Halls. In 1613 there was no door to the street from this room. It was added in the 1800s. Indeed, where you now enter the Hall from the ticket office/ gift shop would have been the end wall of the house. It is thought that the family probably used the room as a dining room. The floor is original to the construction of the house.

Room Highlights

- 1 Large fireplace that is part of the original building. The fact that a fireplace was built here adds to the evidence that this was originally a separate room. The drill holes around the edge date from Victorian times when a façade was added to the outside.
- 2 Horn lantern hanging above the desk – horn was commonly used instead of glass (which was very expensive at the time).
- 3 Original stone floor was a sign of wealth. Stone was expensive to buy and transport. As it is original to the house, it is likely that Shakespeare would have walked on these stones.
- 4 Wall chart showing Hall's Croft through the ages.

The Parlour

Background

This would have been the main room of the house in the Halls' time and the furniture in the room, although not originally owned by the Halls, dates from the time that they lived here. Its construction is designed to show the family's wealth. The closeness of the timbers and the height of the ceiling showed visitors that this was a wealthy family. The timbers at the front of the house (facing the street) are much closer together than necessary and than those on the rear wall and showed that the Halls could afford the extra wood needed. The relatively high ceiling also showed that they could afford the additional firewood needed to heat the room. The large stone fireplace is original. The original door to the street outside was probably where the small, square raised window is now.

Room Highlights

- 1 Large family portrait in oil on wood, dating from about 1585, showing a family seated around a table laid for a meal.
- 2 Large table in the centre of the room with pewter plates and candlestick.
- 3 Child's high chair made from ash (dated 1580-1640). Thought to have been an example of a wood turner's skills.
- 4 Shelves displaying various pots and jugs from the era.
- 5 Chair with carved cherub head under the window (dating from around 1620).

The Passageway

Background

Originally constructed to allow for the building of a cellar underneath. Unlike traditional cellar storage spaces, this one is only partially underground. It is thought that this might have been done due to the risk of flooding from the nearby river. The passageway allowed the family access behind the parlour and also provided a useful entry/exit for the staircase to the first floor.

Room Highlights

- 1 Pictures of the epitaphs from the graves of John and Susannah Hall.
- 2 Copy of a letter of complaint from one of Dr. Hall's patients.
- 3 Original staircase to the first floor.

The Consulting Room

Background

Set out as Dr. Hall's dispensary may have looked. Doctors at the time did not always see patients directly but made their diagnosis by examining the urine of the patient (which may have been sent around with a servant). Dr. Hall probably had two apothecaries working for him. They would have had the job of making up the remedies or treatments decided upon by Dr. Hall.

Room Highlights

- 1 Colourful apothecary jars or containers around the room. Each one would have held a different ingredient or remedy. They were usually labelled with their contents.
- 2 Bronze pestle and mortar (1581).
- 3 Two paintings. The first, 'Casting the Waters', shows a doctor checking a patient's urine to see what was wrong with him (about 1660). The second painting, 'Interior of an apothecary with a pharmacist mixing a remedy', shows an apothecary at work (about 1673-74).
- 4 Seventeenth century spice grinder, dark brown with a pierced metal plate and a chamber for collecting ground herbs.

Back Hall

Background

Was added in the 1660s by the Smith family to join the house to the kitchen, which (in keeping with Tudor building standards designed to help prevent fire) had been a separate building.

Room Highlights

- 1 Portrait of Mary Harvey, a relative of William Harvey (the physician credited with discovering the circulation of the blood).

Kitchen

Background

A later addition to the house, dating from about 1630, and built by the Smith family to replace the original kitchen. Kitchens in Tudor times were kept separate from the main body of the house due to a justified fear of fire. At ten to eight every evening, the Guild Chapel bell rang to tell the townspeople that it was time to cover their fires, leaving only the covered embers burning until morning. Three major fires in Stratford during Shakespeare's lifetime destroyed a number of properties.

Room Highlights

- 1 Large open fireplace is original to the building.
- 2 Large mechanical spit for roasting meat dates to the 18th century.
- 3 Leather containers and bottles (on shelf above the windows).
- 4 Hooks for the ceiling may have been used for a variety of purposes – to dry herbs and meats or to hang small barrels/containers.

First Floor Landing

Background

The earliest part of the staircase dates from the mid 17th century.

Room Highlights

- 1 Painting 'Death and the Maiden' (about 1570). The painting alludes to the fact that death awaits everybody, despite wealth, learning or power.
- 2 Highly polished and carved oak chest.

Master Bedroom

Background

This room was not part of the building during the Halls' residence but was a separate dwelling joined onto Hall's Croft later by the Smith family. It is set up to show what a bedroom would have looked like during the Halls' time. It has an unusual barrel-ceiling construction.

Room Highlights

- 1 Oak tester bedstead (partially restored with the oldest parts dating back to the early 1500s) with truckle bed.
- 2 Mid 17th century Dutch oak clothes press – clothes would be stored on shelves or in chests, rather than hung up as we do today.
- 3 Warming pan (on the bed).
- 4 Cradle. Although this dates back to around 1680, it has had considerable restoration work done to it.
- 5 Boxwood comb (18th century).
- 6 Close stool (around 1680). An example of a toilet used by a wealthy family. The chamber pot was inside the box and would be removed by a servant.
- 7 Early 17th century portrait of a woman seated with her daughter. The composition of the portrait shows them to be from a wealthy family.

The Exhibition Room

Background

Part of the original house built by the Halls. In their time, this room would have been divided into two or three bedrooms. The location of the large fireplaces at each end of the room suggests that it was divided into at least two bedrooms. The interior of this space has changed many times through the years since it was built. It is now used as an exhibition space and is home to a changing programme of exhibitions.

Servants' Bedroom

Background

Part of the 1614 extension. The Halls had 7-10 servants working for them at Hall's Croft, many of whom would have 'lived-in'. This small bedroom is furnished as it would have looked for one of the high-ranking servants in the house, such as a wet nurse, house steward or apothecary. This room has small windows containing the original glass of the house. One reason that glassed windows in Tudor houses were small is that glass was very expensive and had to be imported from Italy, where it was handmade. If you had glass windows in your home, you took them with you when you moved house. It is possible that Susanna and John Hall did not take these windows with them when they moved as New Place already had glass windows when Susanna inherited it from William Shakespeare.

Room Highlights

- 1 Small windows containing original 17th century handmade glass panels.

Store Room or Bedroom (now an Informal Learning space)

Background

Although its original use is not known, it is thought this room was possibly an access way to the attic, a storeroom or bedroom for servants of a lower status. It is now used as an informal education space. There is also the staircase that goes up to the attic. Lower class servants would have slept in the attics. We also believe the attic acted as a workplace for the apothecaries.

Find out more about the Primary education courses offered at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust:
www.shakespeare.org.uk/education/schools



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