



Introducing WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Ironically, even though Shakespeare was one of the most prolific writers of all time, very little is written about his life. Even his exact birth date is unknown. However, there is record of his baptism at Holy Trinity Church on April 26th, 1564, in a town called Stratford-upon-Avon. Because children were baptized within days of their births, most scholars have agreed that April 23rd is a good guess for his birth date.

Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, wed Mary Arden, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer. John was a leatherworker, an alderman and a bailiff. Because John was a prominent citizen of Stratford, it is assumed that William attended the town's school, King Edward VI Grammar School, until he was fifteen. There he would have studied Latin, classic literature, grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic and astronomy. His father, at the time, was having financial difficulties, so Shakespeare did not attend university.

When he was eighteen, William married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six and expecting their first child, Susanna. They later had twins, Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet died when he was eleven. His only surviving descendant, a granddaughter, died childless in 1670. So Shakespeare has no living descendents today.

The seven years following the birth of his children are known as the "lost years," because there is not much known about Shakespeare's activity at that time. We do

know that he eventually left his family and moved to London in the mid 1580's, leaving his family behind.

By the early 1590's, he was working as an actor and a playwright, often performing for Queen Elizabeth. The theatres were closed in 1593 because of the plague, and at this time, Shakespeare concentrated on writing his narrative poems and sonnets.

In 1594, he became a shareholder in an acting company, the *Lord Chamberlain's Men*. The company later changed its name to *The King's Men* after the coronation of King James in 1603. In 1599, Shakespeare built his own theater, which he called *The Globe*. He enjoyed a prosperous career as both a playwright and a business man.

When Shakespeare died – on his birthday - in 1616, he left most of his estate to his eldest daughter, Susanna, as his son had already passed away. He did not leave his wife with nothing, however, for he left her his "second-best bed."

He left the world with a great deal more, penning two narrative poems, thirty-eight plays and one hundred and fifty-four sonnets. He is known as "The Bard of England" because he is widely acknowledged as the greatest poet from that country. As his contemporary Ben Johnson stated, "He was not of an age, but for all time."

