

# SHAKESPEARE TRAIL



9

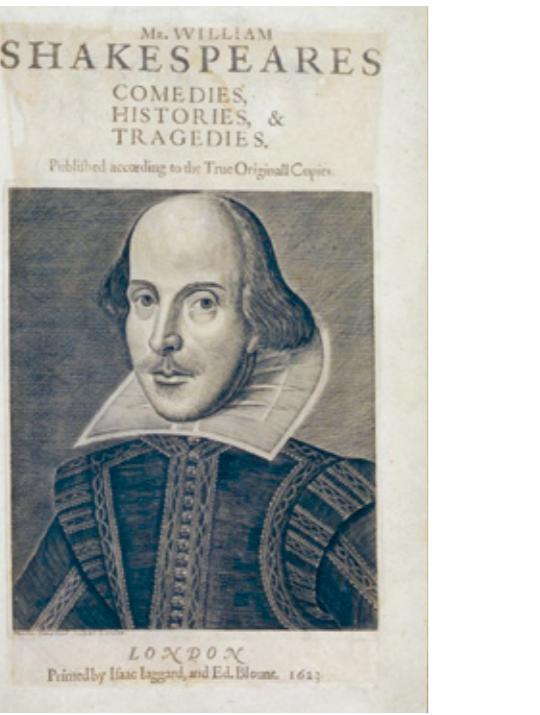
## 9. Ira Aldridge as Othello

Theatre & Performance, Room 106, Level 3

This small painting is also in the 'Celebrity' case.

Othello is described as 'the Moor of Venice'. Just what Shakespeare meant by this continues to be debated. In his time, this might have meant African, Ethiopian or even Indian. The play hinges on the dynamic relationship between Othello and his trusted advisor Iago, whose poisonous words lead Othello to distrust and finally murder his young wife, Desdemona.

Ira Aldridge was the first black actor to play the role onstage in London. Born in America, he made his West End debut in 1833. In a review, *The Times* newspaper included the racist comment that the actor could not pronounce English 'owing to the shape of his lips', but *The Globe*, in contrast, found his speech 'distinct and sonorous'. Aldridge achieved popularity in Russia, where one critic commented, 'it is impossible to see Othello performed by a white actor, even Garrick himself'. Praise indeed, since Garrick was one of the most famous actors of the 18th century.



10

## 10. 'Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies' (The First Folio)

Theatre & Performance, Level 3

This iconic object can also be found in the 'Celebrity' case.

This book is the first collected edition of the dramatic works of William Shakespeare. It comprises 36 plays, 18 of which had never previously been printed. Without the First Folio, we would have no texts of some of the most famous plays, such as *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.

Two actors from Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, John Heminge and Henry Condell, acted as editors. They are responsible for the arrangement in three genres: Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. In an age before copyright legislation, the editors appear to have gone to great lengths to create a trustworthy version of the texts. Touchingly, they also claim in the dedication that they acted, 'without ambition either of selfe-profit, or fame: only to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend & Fellow aliue, as was our SHAKESPEARE'.



11

## 11. Costume for Henry V

Theatre & Performance, Room 105, Level 3

Continue through the Theatre & Performance galleries. The object is in the final costumes case, opposite a case of headdresses and masks. It is at the back on the right hand side.

This costume was worn by Richard Burton in his 1951 portrayal of Henry V at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The images are a quartering of the lions of England and the fleur-de-lis of France to symbolise the king's rule of both countries. The designer wanted the costume to look battle-weary and it is aged to indicate a man of action.

Tanya Moiseiwitsch was a theatre design pioneer. In the 1930s, she designed productions for the famous Abbey Theatre in Dublin.



12

## 12. Figure of Hamlet

Britain 1760–1900, Room 123, Level 4

In the Grand Entrance, facing into the Museum, turn left. Take the marble staircase up to Level 4, Britain 1760–1900. Head through the galleries to Room 123, a room with a staircase on one side. The object is in a small case opposite the window.

Stars of 19th-century theatre were often celebrated in paintings, prints, drawings and ceramic figurines. This one shows the actor-manager John Philip Kemble as Hamlet, the part in which he made his name on the stage in Dublin. The Kemble family dominated the theatrical world of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By the time Kemble made his London debut as Hamlet, his sister Sarah Siddons was already regarded as a great tragedian.



13

## 13. Embroidered Picture

Britain 1760–1900, Room 120, The Wolfson Gallery, Level 4

Continue through the British galleries to Room 120 (also called The Wolfson Gallery). The picture is in a large case in the middle of the room, in the 'Fashionable living' section. The case is opposite the exit to Stair D.

\*While you are in the Grand Entrance, look out for a statue of Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is hidden in a niche opposite the cloakroom. This is to the right of the entrance if you were to enter from the street.

This embroidered picture was intended both as tribute to Shakespeare and as a fashionable expression of romantic sorrow. The allegorical figure is Fame, or the Muse of Poetry. Dressed in classical drapery, she strews flowers on a Neoclassical tomb engraved with the name Shakespeare. Notably the tomb bears little resemblance to his actual grave.

The picture was copied from a print, in turn based on a drawing by the 18th-century painter and decorative artist Angelica Kauffmann. It may have been part of a decorative scheme on walls, furniture or porcelain.



14

## 14. Great Bed of Ware

Britain 1500–1760, Room 57, Level 3

Leave the room by the exit to Stair D. Go down the stairs to Ironwork. Continue on down the stairs to Britain 1500–1760. Once inside the gallery, turn left. Follow the galleries round to the left until you come to Room 57.

This large bed was probably made as a curiosity to attract customers to one of the inns at Ware, Hertfordshire. Ware is 22 miles from London, then a day's journey on horseback or by coach. In Shakespeare's day, the town would have been a convenient place to stop overnight on the way to Cambridge University or other destinations. Visitors carved their initials into the bed or applied red wax seals, which are still visible on the bedposts.



# SHAKESPEARE TRAIL

A tour around the Victoria and Albert Museum

Please give a £1 donation

# SHAKESPEARE TRAIL

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is the most famous writer the world has produced. A playwright and a poet, he was also an actor and a business man as a 'share' (or shareholder) of the Globe Theatre. Shakespeare's cultural reach extends beyond the British stage and tourist industry: in recent times the playwright inspired an imprisoned Nelson Mandela and appeared on *The Simpsons*.

This trail celebrates Shakespeare's legacy and influence, national and international, which continue to grow and evolve. It introduces you to the range of objects in the V&A's collections connected to Shakespeare and to the stories evoked by them.

Start the trail in Room 82 of the Paintings galleries. This is on Level 3 of the Museum.

Use the trail in conjunction with the V&A map.



## 1. Shakespeare's Principal Characters

by Thomas Stothard  
Paintings, Room 82, The Edwin and Susan Davies Galleries, Level 3

Look for the bust near the arched entrance into Silver. Turn to face the entrance so that the bust is on your left. The painting is on the wall to the right of the entrance. It hangs in the middle of the wall.

By the end of the 18th century, scenes from Shakespeare's plays were a fashionable topic for art. The English painter, designer and book illustrator Thomas Stothard featured Shakespearean themes in several paintings, prints and drawings held by the V&A. This painting assembles a selection of characters from the plays. They have been identified as, from left to right: Olivia, Malvolio, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek from *Twelfth Night*; Falstaff, Celia and Rosalind from *As You Like It*; Prospero and Miranda from *The Tempest*; King Lear and Cordelia; Ophelia and Hamlet; and Lady Macbeth and the witches.

## 2. Ariel on the Bat's Back

By Joseph Severn  
Paintings, Room 82, The Edwin and Susan Davies Galleries, Level 3

This small painting is on the next wall to the right. It is on the bottom row in the middle.

The painter Joseph Severn was part of the circle of literary and artistic figures surrounding the poet John Keats. He took this image from *The Tempest*. It features Ariel, an airy spirit on the enchanted island governed by Prospero, the castaway Duke of Milan. Ariel assists Prospero in his magical exploits, and at the end of the play, pleads for his freedom from servitude. This painting refers to one of Ariel's songs, 'Where the bee sucks there suck I: / In a cowslip's bell I lie; / There I couch when owls do cry / On the bat's back I do fly'. Prospero makes amends to Ariel by setting him free, an occasion this song gleefully anticipates. A companion painting hangs nearby.

## 3. Autolycus

By Charles Robert Leslie  
Paintings, Room 82, The Edwin and Susan Davies Galleries, Level 3

The painting is on the opposite wall. It is at the far left hand side, in the middle row.

Autolycus is the comic rogue in *The Winter's Tale*. A 'snapper up of unconsidered trifles', he is shown here selling printed lyric sheets, among other things, to gullible country folk. One of Shakespeare's most endearing characters, he sails through life with a song and a dance while cheating those around him.

The painter Charles Robert Leslie was a great admirer of drama and became known for his imagined depictions of scenes from Shakespeare plays and books by Cervantes and Molière. A friend and biographer of John Constable, Leslie based the background sky and ash tree to the right in the painting on studies by the great landscape artist.

3



## 4. The Downfall of Shakespeare

By William Dawes  
Theatre & Performance, Room 106, Level 3

Leave the room by the archway into Silver. Pass the silver lions and turn left into Prints & Drawings. Turn right into Portrait Miniatures. Follow the signs to the left into the Theatre & Performance galleries. Turn left and walk into the next gallery (106). The painting is in the large case on the left.

In the 18th century, only two English theatres were permitted to stage drama, Drury Lane Theatre and Covent Garden Theatre. In 1761, the great English tenor John Beard took over the management of Covent Garden. He put on more operas and staged fewer Shakespeare plays. This painting bemoans the position of 'theatre' at the time: Shakespeare is dead, stabbed by an opera singer who tramples over his plays. Scales to the left and right of the painting show Music and Pantomime in the ascendancy over Theatre.

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## 6. Shakespeare Advertising Bust

Theatre & Performance, Room 106, Level 3

The costume is in the room's central case. It is in the 'Shakespeare' section.

Benedick spars with Beatrice in a twisted ritual of romance in *Much Ado About Nothing*. At the beginning of the play they are enemies, but they are tricked into eventually revealing their real love for each other. David Garrick, Henry Irving and Kenneth Branagh have all played the role of Benedick.

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Irving was the most celebrated English performer of Victorian times. He was the first to be knighted and was a long-time actor-manager of the Lyceum Theatre. His business manager, Bram Stoker, is said to have based his creation Dracula on Irving's mesmerising powers. Legend has it that driving home from the opening night of a show, Irving's wife asked him, 'Are you going to go on making a fool of yourself like this all your life?'. Irving stopped, jumped from the carriage and never saw her again.

7



7

## 7. Titania Costume

Theatre & Performance, Room 106, Level 3

The costume is in a case on the far wall, in the 'Rehearsal' section.

This simple green synthetic silk robe was designed by Sally Jacobs for Titania in Peter Brook's ground-breaking production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, premiered in 1970 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. It was made for Patricia Doyle, cast as a fairy and understudy to Titania when the show began a world tour in 1972. According to Doyle most of the costumes were destroyed when the tour ended as Brook felt the production had run its natural course.

8



8

## 8. Richard Burton as Henry V

Theatre & Performance, Room 106, Level 3

Walk further into the Theatre & Performance galleries. The object is a large oil painting in a case themed around 'Celebrity'.

Henry V is one of Shakespeare's most famous and enduring characters. The play that bears his name explores the events surrounding the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Even in Shakespeare's time, these events were part of England's narrative of itself as an important world power. The character has been portrayed in different ways. Laurence Olivier played him in film in 1944 as a brash warrior hero. Kenneth Branagh portrayed him as a more brooding figure in 1989.

Richard Burton played Henry V on stage twice. He is represented here in his 1955 performance. Burton's film career spanned some 35 years and over 60 films, though he was as well known for his life off-stage as on. He famously married Elizabeth Taylor twice after first meeting her on the set of the 1963 film *Camelot*.