



## TIMELINE OF SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOLROOM & GUILDHALL FROM MEDIEVAL TIMES

**In this timeline pupils will be encouraged to notice connections, contrasts and trends over time, and to address and devise historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity and difference, and significance.**

### Dates

### History

The Guild of the Holy Cross was a religious organisation in Stratford-upon-Avon, which had been set up to serve its members spiritually, financially, commercially and educationally.

### 1200s

In 1269, during the reign of King Henry III, the Guild was licensed by the Bishop of Worcester to build a Chapel, a Common Hall and a Hospital so that it could pray for the souls of the departed and provide care for the needy, the poor, the aged and the infirm. These wooden buildings would have been at the edge of the built-up settlement of the medieval town, at the corner of Church Street and Chapel Lane, where the Guild Chapel now stands.

The Guild established the School in 1295 and the Bishop licensed a priest called Richard as 'rector scholarum' (schoolmaster). This was the first recorded written evidence of a Schoolmaster.

There is a list of Schoolmasters/Headmasters who have taught in this school on the wall in the Tudor Schoolroom.

### 1300s

The Guild acquired properties in Stratford which it leased out to provide an income that could be used for the benefit of its members. The Black Death, which swept the country in 1348/9, was a particularly challenging and difficult time for the Guild.



Black Death of 1348.

The Black Death, or bubonic plague, was not an isolated incident. It has re-occurred throughout history and notably re-visited Stratford in 1564, the year of Shakespeare's birth, when almost one tenth of the population died from it.

**Bacterium (Yersinia Pestis) caused the plague but how did it spread? What were the symptoms? How were the victims treated? Do we still have the plague today? Are there diseases that doctors find very difficult, if not impossible, to treat today?**

### 1400s

By 1403 the Guild of the Holy Cross 'absorbed' the smaller Mary Guild and incorporated the Guild of St. John the Baptist. Members had to pay fees to join the reformed Guild but this payment could be made in money, in services or in goods. For example, in 1408/9 Simon Groves, a carpenter, built an extension onto the Guild's kitchen; in 1416 John Prynne, a master cook, agreed to look after the arrangements for the Guild's grand annual feast that year. In that year, the food and drink consumed at one feast was

## TIMELINE

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#### 1400s



A Medieval Feast

as listed in the Guild of the Holy Cross: Masters' and proctors' accounts...

Expenses of the Feast.

Payments for wheat, malt, beer for the cook, 7 calves, 16 pigs, pigs' heads, "marybonus" (marrowbone), 4 lambs, 7 sheep, lard, 209 pullets, 2 geese, 12 capons, butter, milk, cream, vinegar, honey, salt, 900 eggs, 3 gallons of wine, fuel, "rissbyn" (rushes) for the hall, pepper, saffron, ginger, mace. Payments also for assistants for the cook, for carrying dishes from the town to the Hall and back, for washing the dishes, to the butcher for killing the calves and sheep, for carrying trestle-tables and forms from the town to the Hall and back.

**Click here** for further information.

How many people do you think this might have fed? How healthy do you think this feast was? What might we have at a feast today that is missing from this list? This was a religious feast: do we have religious feasts today? Could there be a mistake in some of the amounts?

#### 1420s



1427 Schoolhouse

The present Guildhall was constructed between 1418 and 1420. In 1427 a Schoolhouse was added to the far northern end of the Guildhall at a cost of just under £10, with the Schoolroom on the ground floor and a chamber for the Schoolmaster, John Harris, above it.

From the outside the schoolhouse looks like infill between the Guild buildings on either side of it, but it is not! Archaeological analysis and dendrochronology have shown that the timbers used for this house were felled in 1425, confirming documentary evidence that it was built in 1427. It was in effect an extension to the Guildhall. Here two separate sources of evidence have come together to validate the chronology.

#### 1430s



Reconstruction of Altar Wall Painting

Wall painting of God the Father, The Virgin Mary, St John the Evangelist and John the Baptist added to the Priests' Chapel at the far end of the Guildhall.

As the Guild of the Holy Cross had merged with smaller town guilds, those of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is not surprising that those are the figures depicted here.

For more information see the Art sheet in the Teachers' Toolkit at [www.ShakespearesSchoolroom.org](http://www.ShakespearesSchoolroom.org)

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#### 1440s



The Almshouses

The Almshouses were built, extending the Guild buildings and providing homes downstairs for fourteen poor or needy members: the rooms upstairs were rented out to provide income for the Guild.

#### 1470s



1470s Mace © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Guild members were not necessarily local. It is thought that King Edward IV may have visited the town in 1471, possibly the first royal visit. His sons, Edward Prince of Wales and Richard Duke of York, were both enrolled in the Guild. It was around this time that the Town acquired the Mace that is currently held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and which dates back to the 1470s.

This Prince Edward was one of the two princes later to die in the Tower of London at the hands of his uncle who became King Richard III. The mace is a symbol of authority and has been in use ever since that time at ceremonial occasions in Stratford. The mace is kept by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

[Can you find out more about the sad story of the two princes?](#)

#### 1480s

Thomas Jolyffe, one of the priests of the Guild, endowed the school in 1482 by giving it land he owned in and around Stratford. The income from this land was to be used to pay an annual salary of £10 to the Schoolmaster, William Smith, 'to teach grammar freely to all the scholars coming to the school, taking nothing off the scholars for their teaching'.

#### 1490s



Guild Chapel and Guildhall

The Nave, North Porch and Tower of the Guild Chapel were rebuilt using Cotswold stone - the nearest local stone - and paid for by local benefactor Hugh Clopton.

Painted Tudor roses were applied to the walls of the Master's Chamber. These are still visible in the Guildhall today and are reputed to be the oldest surviving examples in England, dating possibly from between the 1490s and mid 1500s.

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## Dates

## History

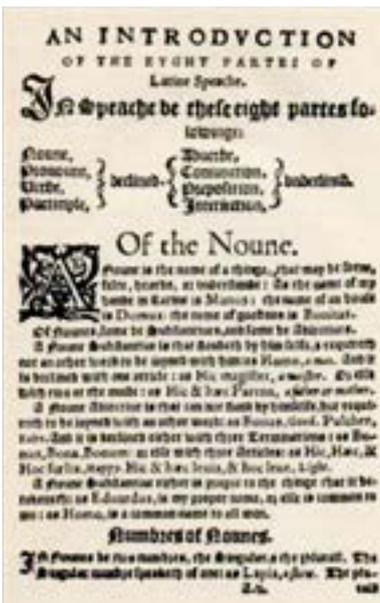
### 1490s



Tudor Rose

Sometimes, as in this case, we do not know the actual date of the paintings, and dendrochronology does not help here, so historians must piece together the information they do have to make a 'best guess'. As the roses are Tudor roses they must have been painted after Henry VII became King in 1485 and united the Houses of York (white rose) and Lancaster (red rose) after the Battle of Bosworth and his marriage to Elizabeth of York.

### 1540s



A page from *Lily's Grammar*

Standard Latin-learning text, *Lily's Grammar*, was authorised by Henry VIII in 1542 for use in all schools. This book influenced the study and teaching of Latin and the understanding of grammar and language in Stratford and in all grammar schools for the next 300 years.

Royal Commissioners visited Stratford in 1545/6 and reported their findings to King Henry VIII. They noted the existence of the free school and recorded that the Guild gave coal and cash every year to the 23 poor people who were living in the almshouses at this time.

Being essentially a religious foundation, the Guild of the Holy Cross became a victim of Henry VIII's policy, as part of the English Reformation, to suppress all monasteries and religious institutions. Thus, the Guild was suppressed by Royal Edict in 1547 and its properties, including the Guildhall, were seized by the Crown the following year, leaving Stratford without local government.

### 1550s



The Court of Record Panel

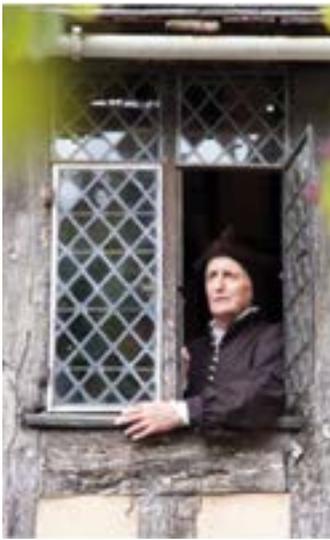
At the beginning of 1553 the inhabitants of the town asked for local government to be restored. This was agreed on 7th June and by Royal Charter, granted on 28th June, only eight days before the death of King Edward VI on 6th July, the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon was created. The new Corporation (Borough/Town Council), consisting of 14 burgesses and 14 aldermen, under the leadership of a Bailiff (Mayor) made the Guildhall its Headquarters. The Court of Record was set up to meet every second week in the Lower Guildhall to try cases of debt, nuisance, breach of contract and violations of weights and measures rules for bread and ale.

(See English section in Teachers' Toolkit for further information.)

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### 1550s



Schoolmaster

### History

In 1556 John Shakespeare was appointed Ale Taster (rather like a Weights and Measures Inspector today). It was an important and respected position which involved monitoring the ingredients used by brewers, checking on the quality and strength of the beer being sold by the innkeepers and publicans in the town, and ensuring that the ale was sold at a fair price. He was also responsible for ensuring that bakers were making and selling bread according to the appropriate weights and measures rules and that they were not cheating their customers by using 'other' ingredients. Appointed to a position of responsibility like this it was his duty to attend meetings but records show that for his times of non-attendance he was fined.

Stratford was well known at this time for its malting industry. There were over fifty malthouses that processed barley for brewing and thirty ale houses where the ale was sold.

Why do you think brewers and bakers did not always produce goods that were as pure as they should have been? What were the punishments for these people? What checks are there nowadays on the quality of our food and drinks? What happens to people who break these laws? What are Stratford's main industries today?

The King's New School (known today as King Edward VI School) was re-founded in 1553 and moved into the Upper Guildhall during the following decade. The school was reconstituted and William Smart was appointed the new Schoolmaster, for which he was paid £20 a year and provided with accommodation.

Etching of a Tudor School Lesson



The style of teaching in Tudor times was formal and strict. It included a lot of rote learning (learning by repetition rather than by understanding) and memorising poems by heart. Teaching methods today are quite different.

How have teaching methods changed since Shakespeare's day?

What brought about these changes?  
Is there a place for rote learning?

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### History

#### 1560s



1560s Mace © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

The new Corporation had a second mace made to affirm its power but it also had the original mace given to the Guild in the late 1400s re-modelled by adding flanges and the royal coat of arms. John Shakespeare, who rose to be Bailiff (Mayor) of the Town may well have carried this mace, or had it carried in front of him on official occasions.

There is evidence that about a hundred years later, in the time of Oliver Cromwell, this mace was re-modelled again when its crown, the clear symbol of kingship, was removed.

Why did the new Corporation want to retain the old Guild mace as well as having a new one made? Was it to show continuity in a time of transition or to show a symbolic change from and break with the past? Or was this all about recycling?

The Schoolroom was moved into the Upper Guildhall. 40-60 boys aged from seven to fifteen sat on benches or forms. Most pupils were the sons of prosperous local families who could afford to send their children to school and who did not need to rely on them working at home in the family trade or business. Under the terms of Charter, girls could not attend the grammar school. Generally they did not go to school but stayed at home to learn how to be good housewives. Although there is some evidence that a few girls attended petty schools. Lessons were free but pupils had to pay for their own candles and firewood. The school day started at 6.00am in the winter and 7.00am in the summer. Boys stopped work for breakfast at 9.00am and went back home for dinner at 11.00am, returning to school for the afternoon session at 1.00pm. The school day ended at 5.00pm but learning did not: boys were expected to spend time at home learning to recite passages and poems by heart in preparation for the following day's tests!

How do Tudor schools compare with modern schools?

How does a Tudor school day compare with a modern one?

Why were girls and boys educated separately and differently?

What were the reasons for this? How do we educate boys and girls today?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of such different methods?

In 1563, as part of the Government's Reformation policy, the medieval paintings in the Guildhall (and neighbouring Guild Chapel) were white-washed under the supervision of John Shakespeare who was Chamberlain (Treasurer) at this time to the Corporation of Stratford. This was to carry out the instruction that required "The removal of all signs of idolatry and superstition, from places of worship, so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glasses, windows, or elsewhere within their churches and houses".



Shakespeare's Schoolroom today



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## History

### 1560s

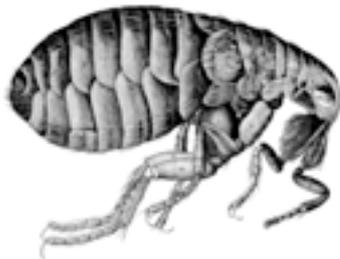


St. John the Baptist wall painting

Do you think John Shakespeare wanted to destroy beautiful paintings that had been part of the Guildhall and Guild Chapel for so many years? Did he do this out of duty or because he believed that it should be done to comply with the new thinking about religion? Did he have a choice? What might have happened to him if he had not done this? This is a 'good news' as well as a 'bad news' story - covering the walls with white-wash did not destroy the paintings, it preserved them! But no-one knew that at the time, or that the paintings would be uncovered hundreds of years later.

11th July 1564. Oliver Gunn, a weaver's apprentice, was the first victim to die from the plague in Stratford. He lived in High Street, at the home of Master Deege, now 'The Garrick' public house.

Many boys would have passed by this house on their way to and from school, and before the epidemic had run its course more than 250 people had died in Stratford, over half of them children. Every family in the town would have been affected by this in some way.



Common flea

30th August 1564. The Corporation met in the garden of the Guildhall as they believed this would reduce the risk of catching the plague, and help prevent the infection spreading any further.

Tudor people did not know what caused the plague or how they could treat or control it. We know that it was carried by the fleas that lived on black rats.

Could having a meeting in the open air instead of inside the Guildhall have made any difference to the progress of the disease and the number of fatalities?

1568/9 John Shakespeare served as Bailiff (Mayor) of Stratford-upon-Avon. During that year a professional theatre troupe visited Stratford. These travelling players were required to appear before the Bailiff and others, in the Guildhall, to be licensed before they were allowed to perform in public. John Shakespeare would have approved the payments made to the actors as recorded in the Corporation's accounts. It is very possible that William would have watched these performances alongside his father.

Licences are still required today for theatrical performances, and films have to be censored and graded before they can be shown in public. In the time of Oliver Cromwell, all theatrical performances, and all forms of entertainment, were totally banned, but when King Charles II came to the throne in 1660 the bans were lifted.

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### Dates

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#### 1570s

From 1571-78 William Shakespeare attended school in the Upper Guildhall, studying English, the classics, the Christian faith and music. As a schoolboy in the 1570s he would have been able to see many performances at first hand when several different companies of players visited Stratford, including the Earl of Leicester's Men who came in 1572-3, 1576-7 and 1578.

#### The history of the Schoolroom & Guildhall continues:

For a further 300 years the lower **Guildhall** continued to be the place where the Corporation met and where the Court of Record was convened but by the 1860s both these functions had been moved to the Town Hall.

The **Schoolroom** has remained in continuous use as a classroom for the past 450 years and is still used on a daily basis today. However, the number of pupils has varied over the years, being reduced to only three after an outbreak of smallpox in 1736. During the 1890s numbers increased, requiring use of the Guildhall as well as the provision of new buildings.

With the Education Act of 1944 the school, now to be known as the King Edward VI School, was opened to all local boys selected through the 11+ examination and the Old Vicarage, a three storeyed Queen Anne house in the courtyard, became the home of the Headmaster. During the later twentieth century further new buildings were added, including new laboratories and the Levi Fox Hall which offers sports and drama facilities and seating for audiences of up to 1000.

In 2012 the School became an Academy within the state system; in 2013 girls were admitted to the Sixth Form and the number on role rose to 700. In 2016 the Schoolroom & Guildhall opened to the public for the first time. **Shakespeare's Schoolroom & Guildhall** is used every morning by King Edward VI School for their lessons, continuing the building's role as a place of learning.