

Objects linked to Shakespeare at the Ashmolean

- Shakespeare's plays are full of references to everyday life in Elizabethan and Jacobean England including clothing, food and evidence of work and play. In many of his plays, royalty play heroes or heroines, but they are also enriched by a cast of ordinary people who Shakespeare would have encountered growing up in Stratford upon Avon.
- Objects at The Ashmolean can help to create a picture of Shakespeare's world, some relating directly to objects described in the plays.
- Many galleries give an insight into the context and setting of Shakespeare's plays including Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt and Renaissance Italy.

Other galleries containing objects linked to Shakespeare's world and plays:

Gallery 42: Early Italian Art

Gallery 43: Italian Renaissance

Gallery 21: Greek and Roman Sculpture and Gallery 14: Cast Gallery

Gallery 16: The Greek World

Gallery 13: Rome

Gallery 24: Life after Death in Ancient Egypt

Gallery 41: England

Gallery 5: Textiles

1. 'Portrait of a woman in a dress worked with flowers', Cornelius Jonson, after 1618



The portrait reflects clothing worn by women in Shakespeare's day. The top is embroidered with floral decoration. Flowers were a recurrent motif in Shakespeare's plays, for example in *A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2 sc. 2* Oberon says 'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows...'

WA 1962.17.17

Gallery 8: Ark to Ashmolean

2. Gloves, mid 1500s, presented to Elizabeth I in 1566 during a visit to Oxford



Shakespeare's father was a glove maker in Stratford. Gloves are frequently mentioned in the plays and used as metaphors. They indicate a person's status and a man might swear by his gloves as a point of honour, 'Ay, by these gloves, did he...' *The Merry Wives of Windsor Act 1*.

AN1887.1

Gallery 8: Ark to Ashmolean

3. Hawking glove, early 1500s, belonging to Henry VIII



Hawking and falconry were aristocratic sports in Medieval and Renaissance times. Hawks had to be managed with skill and care. To avoid sharp talons, a falconer wore heavy gloves and a hood was placed over the hawk's eyes. In *The Taming of the Shrew, Act IV, sc. 1*, Petruchio compares the taming of his wife Katherine to taming a falcon 'My falcon is sharp and passing empty...'

AN 1685.B.228

Gallery 8: Ark to Ashmolean

4. Guy Fawkes' Lantern, early 1600s



Macbeth was written soon after the Gunpowder Plot and was performed for James I. In the famous porter scene he would have carried a lantern like this with a 'window' made of horn. A 'lanthorn' is used to represent the Moon in the Mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *Act 5 sc. 1* Quince declares, 'This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present. Myself the man i' th' moon do seem to be.'

AN1885.653

Gallery 8: Ark to Ashmolean

5. Chopines, late 1500s



Chopines are a type of platform shoe worn to protect shoes and clothes from mud. The height of a chopine became a symbolic reference to a person's social or cultural standing. They are mentioned in *Hamlet, Act 2 sc. 2*; 'By'r lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine.'

AN1685. B.293

Gallery 7: Money: Money & Trade display

6. Venetian gold ducat, Tommaso Mocenigo, Doge of Venice (1414-1423)



The ducat was important gold currency of the late Medieval West. It dominated later medieval trade of the East Mediterranean. A ducat was a very large sum of money in Shakespeare's day, worth the equivalent of £100 today. In *The Merchant of Venice Act 2 sc. 7*, Shylock retorts 'Three thousand ducats. Has a dog money? Is it possible a cur can lend three thousand ducats?'

HRC 6911

Gallery 41: England 400-1600

7. Cloth of Gold, early 1500s



This Cloth of Gold was made for the funeral of Henry VII. The Tudor coats of arms is represented in the embroidered design. In *Anthony and Cleopatra Act 2 sc. 2* Enobarbus describes 'The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne, burn'd on the water..... She did lie in her pavilion, cloth-of-gold, of tissue...'

AN2009.52

Gallery 40: European Ceramics

8. Posset Pot, 1700-1710



Posset was a warm drink made from milk with spices, egg yolk and some alcohol. The special pots to contain this night-cap allowed a person to sip the custard from the top the suck the separated liquor from the bottom. In *Macbeth Act 2 sc 2* Lady Macbeth drugs the grooms' posset 'The doors are open; and the surfeited grooms do mock their charge with snores. I have drugg'd their possets.' WA 163.136.119

Gallery 41: England 400-1600

9. Model Ship around 1605-1630



A model of a typical late Elizabethan merchant ship made in the 1500s, similar to those Shakespeare would have seen moored along the Thames near the Globe Theatre. Many of the plays refer to ships being lost at sea and in *The Tempest*, to people being shipwrecked on distant islands.

AN 1685.B.758

Gallery 20: Italian Renaissance

10. The Hunt in the Forest, Paolo di Dono, called Uccello (1397-1475)



The painting illustrates the kind of forest Shakespeare used as a setting for many of his plays. Forests were believed to be the haunt of fairies and were the context for magical events and transformations. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the setting of the forest is central to the setting and plot. Puck states 'Through the forest have I gone.'

WA 1850.31.A.79

Working with objects: key questions

- Who made it?
- Where and when was it made?
- What materials is it made from?
- How was it made?
- What was it used for? How was it used?
- Who used or owned it?
- How might it be interpreted by different people? At different times?
- What might it have meant to the people who it belonged to?
- Does it remind you of anything?
- Is it complete or is anything missing?
- What can you tell about its purpose, use or significance by any decoration or patterns?

Lines of enquiry: Settings

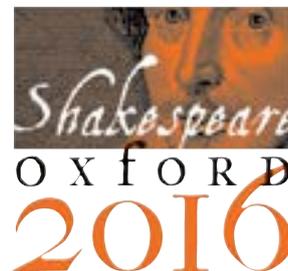
- Explore Museum galleries to discover the settings of Shakespeare's plays:
- Gallery 13: Rome: discover the Ancient Roman world of Julius Caesar. In Gallery 42: Early Italian Art, explore the picture of The Assassination of Julius Caesar.
- Gallery 43: Find out about the Italian Renaissance, setting for plays including The Merchant of Venice and Romeo and Juliet.
- Gallery 24: Egypt, learn about the context for Antony and Cleopatra.
- Gallery 16: The Greek World, setting for Timon of Athens and A Comedy of Errors.
- Which other galleries could you use?

Lines of enquiry: Shakespeare's world

- Use museum collections to find out about life in Elizabethan England including travel and trade, costume, food, religion, art and literature.
- Discover the use of imagery in paintings and artworks from Shakespeare's time, especially Renaissance Italy. How do these link with metaphor and imagery in his writing?
- Find out about the impact of the Renaissance and the influence of the Classical world on art and literature. How is this reflected in Shakespeare's works?
- Explore references to coins including English crowns and Venetian ducats. How does Shakespeare use coins to reveal messages about character, reputation, legitimacy and identity and to influence his plots?
- Explore the history of writing, printing and literacy in Shakespeare's England.
- Stage a scene from a Shakespeare play. Use museum collections as inspiration for the set and scenery. Create props by researching museum objects.



The Triumph of Love by Titian WA 2008.89
Gallery 43: Italian Renaissance



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