



## KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL

SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL

### History of the School Buildings

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#### The Guildhall

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The Guildhall was built in 1417 as a two-storey feast-hall for Stratford's Guild of the Holy Cross. The Guild was a religious organisation originally concerned with the spiritual welfare of its lay members, but eventually providing the School for the young, Almshouses for the aged and becoming the principal civil authority in the town. Apart from maintaining five priests to say Mass for the souls of its departed members, the other main function of the Guild was the holding of several feasts each year. These were accommodated on both the upper floor and in this lower Hall.

Along the length of the Hall, at the far end, remains evidence of the mediaeval Guild. Here, behind the glass panel on the wall, are the faint traces of the Guild's emblem painted onto the plaster. In the centre is Christ on the Cross; on the left, the Virgin Mary; on the right, Saint John the Baptist. Originally, the whole of the interior of the Hall would have been brightly coloured in this way.

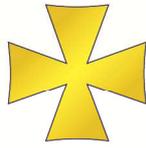
In another panel, there are incisions in the plaster recording the sums spent on a list of commodities including salted fish, herrings, pike and oil. Dating from an important feast, the list is in Latin and notes how much was spent on each item – the herring cost a total of two shillings two pence and two farthings.

#### Upper Guildhall – “Big School”

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The Upper Guildhall became the town's schoolroom in 1553, when King Edward VI granted the Guild's properties to the Corporation.

In Shakespeare's time the whole school of some forty boys was taught in this room, with benches arranged facing each other along either side of the room; the present desks are about 350 years old. The school day began early: a seven o'clock start in winter, six o'clock in summer. Boys entered the school at the age of seven, staying for seven years having mastered Latin and Rhetoric and learnt a little Greek. In the eighteenth century the School was reduced to just three boys during a smallpox epidemic. On the beam, directly above the Headmaster's chair in the Upper Guildhall, is the date '1776' and three sets of initials - perhaps those of the three boys. This remained the school's sole



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SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL

room until the 1880's and is still used as a classroom and as an assembly hall for the Sixth Form.

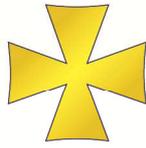
Richard Spender 1930-1940 (Captain of School in 1940 and whom one of the current School Houses is named) wrote the following poem.

### ***Big School - part II of the poem *Embarkation Leave****

Amid the silence and the coolness of this roof,  
Where the hewn beams meet upon the plaster's white  
Like fingers raised in prayer-somewhere here  
Watch the spirits of a host of wise and daring men.  
I stood in this music-filled stillness—  
Eternity stole from the warehouse of Time—  
Hearing in the distance the stamping run and shouts  
Of boys playing. I heard grave voices speak.  
They have taken me by the hand and led me;  
They have strengthened my heart and made it see a Truth  
Which, yesterday, my eyes were feared to look upon.

In and about this building, fourteen years  
I have poured joy into my life,  
Flinging happiness down the throat of my days.  
It is a little thing to walk early out of this garden,  
To open to-day the gate in the wall  
And step out upon lawns and amongst flowers by cool trees,  
If one small child of six may come, as I once came,  
To sit upon this low brick wall  
With the big round cobble-stones,  
And learn to love the little chapel;  
The long beamed building with its crooked leaded windows,  
Whispering, calm in memory, shaded,  
Like a grey-haired mother walking slowly in a garden,  
Smiling at her children at work about the world;  
The odd shaped, tiny lawns; the blue-grey paving stones;  
And the wide, flaked flagstones worn by the ages' running feet.

If he may go, a man, from this same scene,  
One season when the purple and the yellow tree



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Splash the still corner with their fountain's song,  
Taking a sword against the World for Truth  
And bearing in his heart, as I have done,  
The beauty and the humble dignity that clothe this school  
—Then it is good that I should go away awhile.

A voice singing in the empty chapel,  
An echo sleeping in the beams;  
I shall be here to watch the two trees bloom  
Yellow and purple banners into the bird-voiced garden.  
For in this happy place is no brown winter leaf, no fallen petal,  
Nothing but wild beauty in the flowers of youth.

### **The Council Chamber**

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Adjoining the Guildhall, this room became the council chamber of the newly founded Borough Corporation in 1553, following the dissolution of the Guild by the Crown six years earlier.

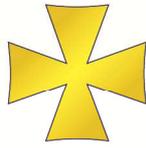
The Guild's buildings and civil functions had been handed over to this Corporation and it was in this room that it continued to administer the School, local justice and maintain the town's bridge. One of the early bailiffs, or mayors, was John Shakespeare, William Shakespeare's father. He was the first bailiff to welcome travelling players to perform before the Corporation in the Lower Guildhall, so it is believed that the young William Shakespeare saw his first play in that room. In the centre of the room is a long, oak Jacobean table, on which for over a hundred years Prefects carved their names or initials.

### **The Muniment Room**

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The Muniment Room is up a sloping wooden staircase behind the Armoury and Big School.

By the 1880s, the room, branching off the staircase on a half-level, had remained unopened and unused for over a hundred years, and there was no key. The Headmaster, Rev. Robert de Courcy Laffan, put his shoulder to the old door and it finally opened to reveal a mountain of documents dating from the sixteenth century. All were subsequently deposited in the Records Office of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust at the Shakespeare Centre in Henley



## KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL

SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL

Street. The room contains one of the oldest Medieval kitchen fireplaces in England.

### **Pedagogue's House**

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Pedagogue's House was first built in 1427 under the supervision of Master Carpenter, John Hasill, for the cost of £9 17 shillings 1 ½ pence and is the oldest schoolroom in England. In the 1890s it was extensively restored. It remained in use as teaching rooms until the late 20th century, and from the late 1940s, the Headmaster occupied one of the upper rooms.

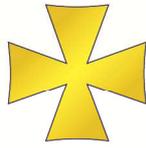
Today, Pedagogue's House is used as offices for the Headmaster and Senior Staff.

### **The Memorial Library**

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In 1923 Headmaster, Rev. Cecil Knight (1914-1945), wished to commemorate those boys who had been lost in the First World War, and the Governors agreed to the building of a Memorial Library in the south-west corner of the school playground. Composed of Warwickshire oak timber framing, the building was filled in between with plaster panels and with a brick lining, the whole being set on a plinth of local limestone. The interior was open to the roof, supported by two oak hammer beam trusses, and the floor was also oak. The building is perfectly in tune with its historic surroundings, and is one of the very few school rooms in the country to be a War Memorial.

The windows are filled in with lead lights, and some of the glass came from an old disused screen in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church. The north window contains stained glass panels showing Henry V praying the night before the Battle of Agincourt, and was given by Mr and Mrs Howard Jennings in memory of their two sons, Second Lieutenant Henry Jennings of the 3rd Worcestershire (1909-1913), and Lance-Corporal Howard Jennings of the Cameron Highlanders (1911-1915). The parents chose Henry V, feeling that 'the illustrious poet [William Shakespeare] who was educated here had, in his matchless language, depicted that spirit of sacrifice and love of country.' The Library bookcases and the bronze memorial tablet were presented by the historian Sir George Trevelyan. The Library was formally opened and blessed in May 1923. On Benefactors' Day in June 1955, an additional memorial plaque with the names of three Old Boys killed in the Second World War was dedicated.



## KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL

SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL

Today The Memorial Library houses the School Archive and holds meetings of the Old Boys' Association and the School Prefects.

### **The Old Courtyard**

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The buildings in The Old Courtyard are the oldest parts of the School. The Guild Chapel stands at the rear of the group flanked, to the west, by the half-timbered Big School and the Guildhall. To the east are Pedagogue's House and The Old Vicarage – a three storied, red brick house built in 1702. Bought for the school in the 1870s as a home for the Headmaster, during the following half-century or so it was used by the school as a Prep School, for boarders, and as a sanatorium, until finally in 1946 it became the established home of the Headmaster. Robert de Courcy Laffan (Headmaster 1885-1895) believed that the quadrangle was one of the chief architectural beauties of Warwickshire, and the poet Richard Spender (1927-1940) wrote of 'the blue-grey paving stones; And the wide, flaked flagstones worn by the ages' running feet.'

### **The Levi Fox Hall**

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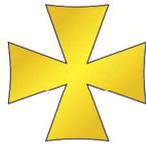
The Levi Fox Hall was opened in 1997. The modular roof sits on a propped hammer-beam structure, and rises above aisles and galleries. It is a contemporary re-interpretation of an English Great Hall of medieval tradition. Able to accommodate audiences of up to one thousand, the main sports floor provides space for basketball, volleyball, football, four cricket nets, four badminton courts or nine fencing pistes. The galleries to both sides of the Hall allow viewing and coaching from above. Drama productions plus School Concerts have been staged in the Levi Fox Hall since its opening. The Hall was named in recognition of Dr. Levi Fox OBE, MA, FSA, DL, who was a member of the School's governing body for over fifty years, with more than half of that time as its Chairman.

Used by the community outside school hours, the Hall has also staged productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

### **The Guild Chapel**

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For over a hundred years, the School has held a morning service in the Guild Chapel. Overlooking the site of New Place where William Shakespeare lived in retirement and died, it is one of Stratford-upon-Avon's most historic and



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SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL

beautiful buildings. It was founded over 800 years ago and has an unusual and interesting history.

The fraternity or Guild of the Holy Cross was already in existence in 1269, when Bishop Godfrey Giffard of Worcester granted a licence to the brethren of the Guild to build a chapel and to found a hospital for the poor priests in the diocese.

The present fabric of the chancel of the Chapel incorporates portions of the original building, but the nave and tower were added in the fifteenth century. By this time the Guild of the Holy Cross had come to be an influential religious fraternity, owning properties and occupying a position of authority in the town. It had an extensive membership and business organisation.

Following the suppression of the Guild at the Reformation, the Chapel, together with the Guild's other properties, was granted by the Crown in 1553 to the Bailiff and Corporation of Stratford. It thus enjoys the peculiar position of being in the ownership and control of the town authority rather than an ecclesiastical body.

The Guild Chapel has played an important part in the life of the community from early days, and was without doubt one of the buildings particularly familiar to Shakespeare. For generations it has served as the Chapel of K.E.S. adjoining, which was also founded by the Guild. It is used as a chapel of unity, with a service of Holy Communion held every Wednesday morning, an Ecumenical Service on the first Saturday of the month and other occasional services.