



# Finding the History in Shakespeare's History Plays

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Saturday, May 31, 2025 - 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. ET

## English History and Shakespeare/Theatre History

English History	Year	Shakespeare and Theatre History
Henry VIII on throne since 1509	<b>1531</b>	John Shakespeare born (approximately)
Henry VIII breaks with Rome	<b>1533</b>	
	<b>1537</b>	Mary Arden born (approximately)
Henry VIII dies; Edward VI becomes king; Reform/Protestantism begins to take hold over reign	<b>1547</b>	
Edward VI dies; Mary I becomes Queen; return to Catholicism	<b>1553</b>	
	<b>1557</b>	John Shakespeare & Mary Arden marry
Mary I dies; Elizabeth I becomes Queen; return to Protestant/Anglican church but gently at first	<b>1558</b>	
	<b>1564</b>	William Shakespeare born
Mary Queen of Scots abdicates Scottish throne and flees to England	<b>1568</b>	
	<b>1569</b>	Catholic plots against Elizabeth I increase
Pope excommunicates Elizabeth and encourages people in England to remove her from the throne	<b>1570</b>	
	<b>1576</b>	John Shakespeare's fortunes begin to decline; the Theatre built in London
	<b>1577</b>	The Curtain built in London
	<b>1582</b>	Shakespeare (18) marries Anne Hathaway (26)
Tylney and Walsingham form Queen Elizabeth's Men acting company	<b>1583</b>	Susannah Shakespeare born
William of Orange assassinated	<b>1584</b>	
	<b>1585</b>	Judith and Hamnet Shakespeare born
Babington plot; Mary Queen of Scots tried and found guilty of treason	<b>1586</b>	
Mary Queen of Scots executed	<b>1587</b>	The Rose built in London
England defeats Spanish Armada	<b>1588</b>	
	<b>1590-3</b>	<i>Two Gentlemen of Verona; The Taming of the Shrew; Henry VI parts 1, 2, 3; Titus Andronicus</i>
	<b>1592</b>	Robert Greene's <i>Groats-Worth of Wit</i> published
Plague hits London	<b>1592-4</b>	Theatres closed
	<b>1593</b>	<i>Venus and Adonis</i> published

	<b>1594</b>	<i>Rape of Lucrece</i> published; Theatres reopen; <b>Richard III</b> performed (written earlier?)
	<b>1595</b>	The Swan built in London
<b>English History</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Shakespeare and Theatre History</b>
	<b>1595-6</b>	<i>Love's Labours Lost</i> , <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , <b>Richard II</b> , <b>King John</b>
	<b>1596-7</b>	<i>Merchant of Venice</i> , <b>Henry IV part 1</b>
Spain sends another Armada that fails	<b>1597</b>	
	<b>1597-8</b>	<b>Henry IV part 2</b> , <i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i> (?)
<b>English History</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Shakespeare and Theatre History</b>
	<b>1598</b>	Lord Admiral's Men and Lord Chamberlain's Men established by Privy Council as only adult companies licensed to play in London; <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>
Earl of Essex arrested for defying orders in Irish campaign	<b>1599</b>	The Globe built in London; <i>Julius Caesar</i> ; <b>Henry V</b> , <i>As You Like It</i>
	<b>1600</b>	The Fortune built in London; <i>Hamlet</i>
Essex rebellion fails; Essex arrested, tried, found guilty, executed; Lord Chamberlain's Men questioned; Queen Elizabeth: "I am Richard II, know you not that?"	<b>1601</b>	<i>Twelfth Night</i> ; Essex supporters hire Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform <b>Richard II</b>
	<b>1601-2</b>	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>
Queen Elizabeth I dies; James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England	<b>1603</b>	Lord Chamberlain's Men become King's Men and participate in coronation of James I
James ends war with Spain; later he adopts title "King of Great Britain," he cannot use it in English statutes, but he forces its use in Scotland	<b>1604</b>	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
	<b>1604-6</b>	<i>Timon of Athens</i> , <i>All's Well that Ends Well</i>
Gunpowder Plot discovered and prevented	<b>1605</b>	
James orders creation of new glad combining English and Scottish flags	<b>1606</b>	<i>King Lear</i> , <i>Macbeth</i>
	<b>1606-7</b>	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
Jamestown founded	<b>1607</b>	
	<b>1608</b>	<i>Coriolanus</i> ; <i>Pericles</i>
	<b>1610</b>	<i>Cymbeline</i>
King James Bible published	<b>1611</b>	First performances in Blackfriars Theatre; <i>The Tempest</i> , <i>The Winter's Tale</i>
James moves his mother's body from Peterborough Cathedral and reinters it in Westminster Abbey; to make room he moves Elizabeth I's body to grave of Mary I; later Prince Henry, heir to the throne, dies and Prince Charles becomes heir	<b>1612</b>	
	<b>1613</b>	<b>Henry VIII</b> ; Globe burns down
	<b>1613-4</b>	<i>Two Noble Kinsman</i>
	<b>1616</b>	Shakespeare dies
	<b>1623</b>	"First Folio" printed

## Information from Royal Shakespeare Company

### Shakespeare's Plays by Date

- **1580 - 1590**
  - **The Taming of the Shrew** Considered to be one of Shakespeare's earliest works, the play is generally believed to have been written before **1592**
- **1590 - 1600**
  - **Henry VI Part II** Believed to have been written in **1591** and Shakespeare's first play based on English history
  - **Henry VI Part III** Written immediately after Part II, a short version of the play was published in Octavo form in **1595**
  - **The Two Gentlemen of Verona** Known to be written around the **1590s** as it was mentioned by Francis Meres in his list of Shakespeare's plays in 1598, no firm evidence for a particular year
  - **Titus Andronicus** Written in **1591/92**, with its first performance possibly in January 1594
  - **Henry VI Part I** Generally assumed to be the 'hairy the vi' performed at the Rose Theatre in **1592**
  - **Richard III** Could have been written in **1592**, shortly before the plague struck, or in 1594 when the theatres reopened post-plague
  - **The Comedy of Errors** Was possibly written for Gray's Inn Christmas festivities for the legal profession in December **1594**
  - **Love's Labour's Lost** An edition of the play in 1598 refers to it being 'presented before her Highness [Queen Elizabeth] this last Christmas', and most scholars date it to **1595-96**
  - **A Midsummer Night's Dream** Often dated to **1595-96**. Reference in Act 1 Scene 2 to courtiers being afraid of a strange lion may allude to an incident in Scotland in 1594
  - **Romeo and Juliet** Astrological allusions and earthquake reference may suggest composition in **1595-96**
  - **Richard II** Typically dated **1595-96**. Described in 1601 as 'old and long out of use'
  - **King John** Written between **1595** and **1597**; an anonymous two-part *King John* was published in 1591 but Shakespeare's version is stylistically close to later histories
  - **The Merchant of Venice** Registered for publication in 1598, reference to a ship *Andrew* suggests late **1596** or early **1597** as a Spanish ship of the name was captured around that time
  - **Henry IV Part I** Probably written and first performed **1596-97**, registered for publication in 1598
  - **Henry IV Part II** Written around **1597-98** and registered for publication in 1600, both parts are based on Holinshed's *Chronicles*
  - **Much Ado About Nothing** Late **1598**, not mentioned in Francis Meres's 1598 list of Shakespeare's plays but included the role Dogberry for Will Kemp, a comic actor who left the company in early 1599
  - **Henry V** Written in **1599**, mentions a 'general... from Ireland coming', could be referring to the Earl of Essex's Irish expedition in 1599
  - **As You Like It** Typically dated late **1599**. Not mentioned in Francis Meres's 1598 list of Shakespeare's plays, unless originally called *Love's Labour's Won*

- **Julius Caesar 1599.** Not mentioned in Meres's 1598 list of plays, seen at the Globe by Swiss visitor Thomas Platter in 1599
- **1600 - 1610**
  - **Hamlet** Dated around **1600**, registered for publication in summer 1602. There are allusions to *Julius Caesar*, which was written in 1599
  - **The Merry Wives of Windsor** Estimated **1597 - 1601**, though an allusion to the Order of the Garter might indicate that it was performed at the Garter Feast in 1597
  - **Twelfth Night 1601.** Not mentioned in Meres's 1598 list of plays and alludes to a map first published in 1599
  - **Troilus and Cressida** Dated **1601-02**, registered for publication early 1603 and alludes to the play *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, which was registered for publication in 1602
  - **Othello** Dated **1604** though some argue for a slightly earlier date. It is recorded to have been performed in court in November 1604
  - **Measure for Measure** Performed at court for Christmas **1604**, probably written earlier the same year
  - **All's Well That Ends Well** No strong evidence for date written or first performed, but it is usually dated **1603-06** on stylistic grounds
  - **Timon of Athens** Estimated **1604-06** based on stylistic similarity to *King Lear*
  - **King Lear** Dated **1605-06**. Performed at court December 1606 and seems to refer to eclipses of September and October 1605
  - **Macbeth 1606.** Certainly more Jacobean than Elizabethan based on the play's several compliments to King James
  - **Antony and Cleopatra** Dated **1606-07**, registered for publication in 1608 and perhaps performed at court in 1606 or 1607
  - **Coriolanus** Perhaps written in **1608**. Allusion to 'coal of fire upon ice' in Act 1 could refer to the great frost of winter in 1607/08
  - **Pericles 1608.** Registered for publication in 1608; Wilkin's novel *The Painful Adventures of Pericles*, cashing in on the success of the play, was published in 1608
  - **Cymbeline 1610.** A performance in 1611 is recorded. Theatres were reopened in spring 1610 after a long closure due to the plague
- **AFTER 1610**
  - **The Winter's Tale 1611.** Performed at the Globe May 1611; dance of satyrs apparently borrows from a court entertainment of January 1611
  - **The Tempest 1611.** Performed at court in November 1611; uses source material not available before autumn 1610
  - **Henry VIII 1613.** The first Globe theatre burnt down in a fire that started during a performance of the play on 29 June 1613
  - **The Two Noble Kinsmen 1613-14;** 'our loss' in the Prologue probably refers to the Globe fire of 1613

## Genres According to First Folio

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- COMEDIES

- All's Well That Ends Well
- As You Like It
- The Comedy of Errors
- Love's Labour's Lost
- Measure for Measure
- The Merchant of Venice
- The Merry Wives of Windsor
- A Midsummer Night's Dream
- Much Ado About Nothing
- The Taming of the Shrew
- The Tempest
- Twelfth Night
- The Two Gentlemen of Verona
- The Winter's Tale

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- TRAGEDIES

- Antony and Cleopatra
- Coriolanus
- Cymbeline
- Hamlet
- Julius Caesar
- King Lear
- Macbeth
- Othello
- Romeo and Juliet
- Timon of Athens
- Titus Andronicus
- Troilus and Cressida

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- HISTORIES

- Henry IV Part I
- Henry IV Part II
- Henry V
- Henry VI Part I
- Henry VI Part II
- Henry VI Part III
- Henry VIII
- King John
- Richard II
- Richard III

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- PLAYS NOT IN THE FIRST FOLIO

- Pericles
- The Two Noble Kinsmen

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Podcast *British History: Royals, Rebels, and Romantics*

Books: *The Tudors by Numbers* (2023) and *Courting the Virgin Queen* (2024)

