

Shakespeare

The Lost Years

Ben Crystal

Stratford in Shakespeare's time was a busy place. It was a market town, people would have travelled far and wide to be here, bringing their life stories with them. If Shakespeare heard them they would have fired his imagination and been great ground for play writing.

At 18 William married a local woman, Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than him.

Dr Anjna Chouhan: *Anne was three months pregnant on their wedding day, so six months later she gave birth to their first child, a daughter, Susanna. And two years after Susanna, twins were born, Hamnet and Judith, a boy and a girl. So he's twenty-two, and he's got three children and a wife. It's a lot of pressure on him. And between having his three children and turning up in London a few years later in the 1590s, Shakespeare goes missing. There is no record of him. So those years in between are called the lost years and there are lots of strange ideas about what Shakespeare did during those lost years.*

Ben: *What are some of your favourite ideas about where he went, what happened to him over these years?*

AC: *I think that William was inspired by travelling groups of actors who came to visit Stratford-upon-Avon when he was living here, and I think that he saw some of their plays when they set up in the streets and in the taverns, and he thought that's for me and travelled to London with them.*

Ben: *Did Stratford have a great influence on his writing?*

AC: *Stratford had a really important influence on Shakespeare's writing. He was inspired by the tradespeople he saw here, the schoolmasters, and especially the countryside. He writes a lot about trees and forests and flowers and herbs in all of his plays, so he is inspired by all of the things that are happening around him.*

There are so many questions we have about Shakespeare that we'll never get answers to, but coming here to Stratford, seeing where he grew up, where he went to school, where he was buried, it brings the man that most of us were introduced to in a book on a page back to life.

Actors: *Where the place? Upon the heath. There to meet with Macbeth.*