

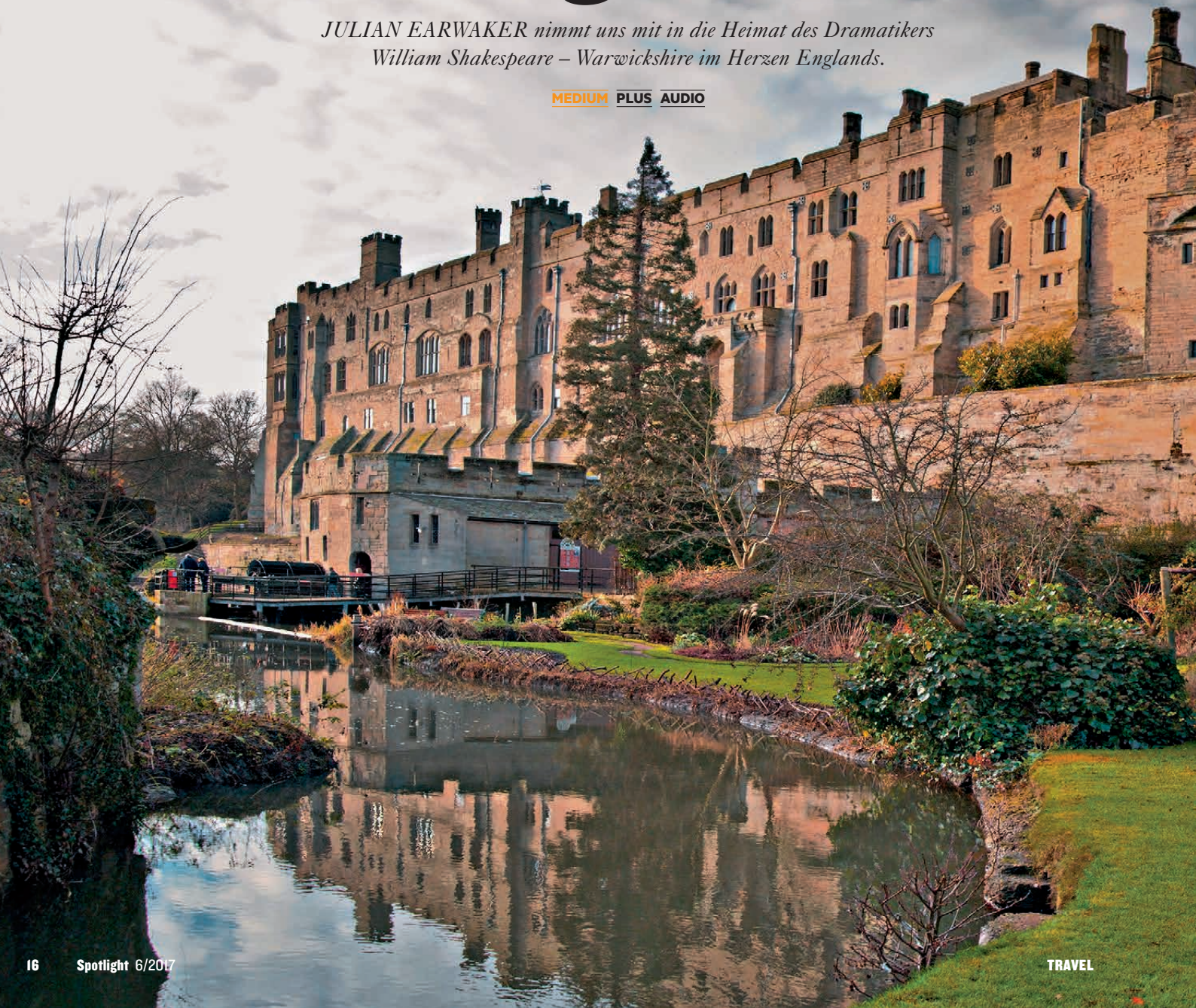


TRAVEL

Shakespeare's England

*JULIAN EARWAKER nimmt uns mit in die Heimat des Dramatikers
William Shakespeare – Warwickshire im Herzen Englands.*

MEDIUM PLUS AUDIO





Far from coast and sea, Warwickshire lies at the heart of England. The northern part of the county is close to Birmingham and Coventry, and as I drive along the busy M42 motorway, it's hard to imagine that this urban area was once covered by trees of the ancient Forest of Arden. William Shakespeare writes about the forest in his plays, and his mother, Mary Arden, came from a well-known local family. Warwickshire, as I am to discover, is very much Shakespeare's England.

Castle and war machine

It's mid-afternoon when I arrive at the county town of Warwick, and the town square is still glistening from an earlier shower of rain. Independent shops sit side by side with coffee houses and restaurants. I wander past fine Georgian architecture and half-timbered medieval buildings, survivors of the terrible fire of 1694 that destroyed much of the town.

One building dominates the view, and it stands just 500 metres from my hotel door: Warwick Castle. The next morning, I climb up stone steps to the castle walls to enjoy a panoramic view beyond the towers to open countryside, the River Avon

glisten ['glɪsɪn]
• glänzen, funkeln

half-timbered
['hɔ:f tɪmbəd]
• Fachwerk-

medieval [,medi'i:vəl]
• mittelalterlich

and the rooftops of Warwick. Dating back to Saxon times, Warwick Castle is one of Britain's finest ancient fortifications. On River Island stands a giant timber trebuchet, a replica of a medieval siege machine. In summer, the machine catapults giant fireballs through the air, while knights in armour ride their horses in jousting tournaments.

Modern-day Warwick is now virtually joined to the town of Royal Leamington Spa to the east, and in the afternoon, I make the four-minute train journey there. The "Royal" in the name was awarded by Queen Victoria. Once a busy 19th-century spa, Leamington still has its impressive Regency architecture and confident feel. I take a walk down to the greenery of the formal Jephson Gardens on the banks of the River Leam. I arrive at the art gallery and museum in the Royal Pump Rooms, where the small but impressive exhibition space sits alongside the library and tourist information centre. The display includes part of the original Turkish baths. Afterwards, I find my way back to the station via the town's many antique shops and arrive back in Warwick in time for supper.

Birth and the missing years

The next morning, I take the 20-minute drive south to Stratford-upon-Avon. The contrast is immediate: coaches stand round the town-centre car parks, and groups of tourists gather on every street corner. Like me, most of them are here to learn about the most famous playwright in British history, William Shakespeare.

Although Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated on 23 April, it is not known exactly when he was born, only that he was baptized at Holy Trinity Church on 26 April 1564. The place of his birth, however, is well known, and I join the queue of tourists outside a half-timbered 16th-century house in Henley Street.

At the entrance to Shakespeare's Birthplace, I am welcomed by a woman wearing a simple blue medieval-style dress and white cap. Helen Smith is a guide with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. She leads me round the house, filling in details of the playwright's life and family.

I studied Shakespeare at school, but learned little about his life and the tumultuous times in which he lived. They were the times of the Protestant Reformation, of religious persecution, a succession of Tudor monarchs and deadly illnesses like the plague. As I walk round Shakespeare's family home, which is decorated and furnished in period style, the man behind the plays begins to come to life. In each room, I am greeted by young schoolchildren from an inner-city Birmingham primary school who are acting as tour guides for the day. This is just one of the ways that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust contributes to the important work of connecting younger generations with Shakespeare, literature and history.

As I look at the workshop of Shakespeare's father, John, who was a glover and merchant, I ask my guide how William became involved in writing, acting and the theatre. "There are various theories. One is that he joined a group of travelling players," says Smith. "Another is that he was actually trading on his father's behalf in London, possibly travelling backwards and forwards to London, and got sucked into the theatre world there."



His first hours: the room where Shakespeare was born



Final resting place: Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare is buried

armour ['ɑ:mə]

► Rüstung

bank [bæŋk] ► Ufer

baptize [bæp'taɪz]

► taufen

behalf: on sb.'s ~

[bi'hɑ:f] ► für jmdn.

coach [kəʊtʃ] UK

► Reisebus

fortification

[,fɔ:tɪfɪ'keɪʃən]

► Befestigungsanlage

furnish ['fɜ:nɪʃ]

► einrichten

glover ['glʌvə]

► Handschuhmacher(in)

greenery ['grɪ:nəri]

► Grün, Grünanlagen

jousting tournament

['dʒɔ:stɪŋ ,tʊənmənt]

► Ritterturnier

knight [naɪt] ► Ritter

merchant ['mɜ:tʃənt]

► Handelsmann

persecution

[,pɜ:sɪ'kju:ʃən]

► Verfolgung

plague [pleɪɡ] ► Pest

playwright ['pleɪraɪt]

► Dramatiker(in),

Bühnenautor(in)

siege [si:dʒ]

► Belagerungs-

spa [spɑ:]

► Heilbad, Kurort

succession [sək'seʃən]

► Aufeinanderfolge

sucked: get ~ into sth.

[sʌkt]

► von etw. erfasst werden

trebuchet ['trebju:tʃet]

► Katapult, Tribok



Shakespeare's Birthplace in
Stratford-upon-Avon



The interior of the Guild Chapel

Partly because there are so many missing pieces to his story, Shakespeare remains a mystery. We will probably never know about his motives or the “missing years” for which there is no documentation about his life. However, we can enjoy the legacy of his written work. Smith reminds me that plays are written to be performed, and she tells me that visitors particularly enjoy watching actors perform on demand in the house and gardens.

New place, old story

Many visitors to Stratford-upon-Avon come from overseas. I ask Smith how they react when they see Shakespeare’s home. “Some people are really moved to tears,” she says. “To come here from China, India or wherever is a big thing, and they can be overwhelmed.”

William Shakespeare was a contemporary of Tang Xianzu, the great Chinese playwright of the Ming Dynasty and “Shakespeare of the Orient”. He also lived at the same time as Miguel de Cervantes, the great Spanish novelist and author of *Don Quixote*. Coincidentally, all three men died in the same year, 1616. But it is Shakespeare’s star that burns the brightest worldwide, partly because of the power of the English language and partly through the brilliance of his prose.

After Shakespeare’s family line died out, his birthplace gradually fell into disrepair. It was rescued thanks to an early form of crowdfunding undertaken by a group of local citizens and celebrities of society, stage and literature, including novelist Charles Dickens. They raised an incredible £3,000 to purchase the house in 1847.

It is not known how often Shakespeare — a married man with children — returned to Stratford during his career in London. In 1597, however, at the age of 33, he bought “The Great House”, one of the largest private houses in Stratford, and renamed it “New Place”. “With its 23 rooms and ten fireplaces, he was making something of a statement,” says Phil Watson, guide at New

Place. Sadly, nothing remains of the original house, which, after much alteration, was demolished by its owner in a disagreement about taxes.

Instead, the grounds of Shakespeare’s “New Place” are today filled with an imaginative display of contemporary art based on the Elizabethan “Age of Discovery”. I pause beneath the branches of a bronze tree blown by the power of Shakespeare’s imagination, a celestial globe, a ship caught in a storm, all installed as part of the celebrations in April last year to mark the 400th anniversary of the playwright’s death. I wonder what Shakespeare would have thought of this modern interpretation of his creative spirit.

“For the age he lived in, he was a genius,” says Watson. “He was pushing the boundaries of his stagecraft. I do think he would have understood this.”

Schooldays and Anne Hathaway

Shakespeare’s father became mayor of Stratford and could afford to have his son properly educated. From New Place, I walk a few metres along the road to the King Edward VI private school. Attached to this ancient place of learning is the Guildhall, a beautiful old building dating from the early 15th century and built as the headquarters and feast hall of a religious order: the Guild of the Holy Cross.

Upstairs on the first floor is the old school room — used to this day by the King Edward VI School, but now open to visitors. With its wooden floorboards and benches, timbered and whitewashed walls, schoolmaster’s desk and chair, the room looks much as it would have done back in Shakespeare’s day. It is “99 per cent certain that William attended this school,” says my guide. After Henry VIII closed down the religious order, the Guildhall was used as a town hall and court. It also saw performances by some of the top touring theatre companies of the time — perhaps filling young William’s mind with ideas of a future.

I stay overnight in the historic Falcon Hotel, directly opposite New Place and the Guildhall. I walk across the room and look out of my window as the low evening light throws long shadows across New Place gardens. In the morning, I’m up early and ready for a two-kilometre walk along passageways and footpaths that will take me to Shuttery, once its own village, but now part of Stratford.

alteration [ˌɔːltə'reɪʃən]
• Veränderung, Umbau

boundaries: push ~
[ˈbaʊndəriz]
• Grenzen sprengen

branch [brɑːntʃ]
• Zweig, Ast

celestial globe
[səˈlestiəl gləʊb]
• Himmelsglobus, Sternenglobus

coincidentally
[kəʊ,ɪnˈsɪdəntʃəlɪ]
• zufälligerweise

court [kɔːt] • Gericht

demolish [dɪˈmɒlɪʃ]
• abreißen

disrepair: fall into ~
[ˌdɪsriˈpeə] • verfallen

feast hall [ˈfiːst hɔːl]
• Bankettsaal

floorboard [ˈflɔːbɔːd]
• Bretterboden, Diele

gradually [ˈgrædʒuəli]
• nach und nach, allmählich

imaginative
[ɪˈmædʒɪnətɪv]
• fantasievoll

legacy [ˈlegəsi]
• Erbe, Vermächtnis

overwhelmed
[ˌəʊvəˈwelmd]
• überwältigt

passageway
[ˈpæsɪdʒweɪ]
• Durchgang

prose [prəʊz]
• Prosa

purchase [ˈpɜːtʃəs]
• erwerben, kaufen

raise [reɪz]
• hier: sammeln

rescue [ˈreskjʊː] • retten

stagecraft [ˈsteɪdʒkrɑːft]
• Bühnenkunst, Bühnentechnik

town hall [ˌtaʊn ˈhɔːl]
• Rathaus

whitewashed
[ˈwaɪtwɔʃt]
• getüncht, geweißst



An English idyll:
Anne Hathaway's
cottage



Artist Thomas Brooks (1818–92) imagines the romance between Will and Anne

The air is clean and fresh and filled with birdsong as I walk through the gardens of Anne Hathaway's Cottage, an attractive half-timbered house under a heavy thatched roof. At the time when William and Anne met, this would have been her family home, and a smaller and simpler residence than I see today. "It was, shall we say, 'rustic', to put it politely," says my red-coated guide, with a smile.

As I tour the house, it's easy to look for signs of romance in every room, but the reality was probably more pragmatic. Anne was 26 and already pregnant when they married. William was just 18, with no qualifications or job. With one child on the way and two to follow, there must have been a lot of pressure on their relationship.

At the Royal Shakespeare Company

It's soon time for me to leave the medieval house and that period of history for a more modern building back on the Stratford waterside. The home of the world-renowned Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) is a large red-brick Victorian structure that has been lovingly redeveloped over the past decade to provide three high-tech theatres, plus cafes, bars and restaurants and a glass-topped viewing tower. It's here that I go first, taking the lift up to the top to enjoy views of the town, river, bridges and boats, treetops and distant countryside.


There's just time for a quick front-of-house tour, coffee and sandwich before I take my seat in the Swan Theatre. In the words of the Bard himself, "The play's the thing", and so I join a large and noisy crowd of schoolchildren for *The Tempest: First Impressions*. These specially adapted RSC versions of Shakespeare plays are edited from the original works, though using the same characters and Shakespearean language.

There's a strong feeling of pantomime as the youthful audience produces sound effects of rain and thunder and eerie noises when Ariel, Prospero's spirit assistant, casts spells. The overall effect is indeed to keep the audience spellbound.

Later, I take my supper in the RSC Rooftop Restaurant, which combines fine food with views across the river. I watch the swans drifting close to Clopton Bridge, the feathers of their wings raised like pairs of cupped hands.

There's one last trip to make before I bring down the curtain on my visit to Shakespeare's England the following morning. It's a five-minute walk from my hotel along the banks of the River

Avon towards the stone spire of Stratford's oldest building: Holy Trinity Church.

Here, in the chancel, are the graves of William Shakespeare, who died in April 1616, his wife, Anne, and other family members. I think of the legacy of Shakespeare's work, the mysteries of his life and the architecture and heritage of this part of the world — and I recall the words spoken by Warwick in *King Henry VI*, part 3, act 5, scene 2: "...what is pomp, rule, reign, but earth and dust? And, live we how we can, yet die we must." 

Bard: the ~ [bɑ:d]
 ► der Barde (= William Shakespeare)

chancel ['tʃɑ:nsəl]
 ► Altarraum

cupped [kʌpt]
 ► hier: hohl, nach unten gewölbt

curtain: bring down the ~ ['kɜ:tɪn] ► beenden

drift [drɪft]
 ► dahintreiben

eerie ['iəri]
 ► unheimlich, gruselig

front-of-house ['frʌnt əv ,həʊs]
 ► Vorderhaus-

heritage ['herɪtɪdʒ]
 ► Erbe

pregnant ['pregnənt]
 ► schwanger

recall sth. [rɪ'kɔ:l]
 ► sich etw. ins Gedächtnis zurückrufen

red-brick ['red brɪk]
 ► Backstein-

redevelop [ˌrɪ:di'veləp]
 ► sanieren

reign [reɪn] ► Herrschaft

renowned [rɪ'naʊnd]
 ► berühmt

rustic ['rʌstɪk]
 ► ländlich, bäuerlich

spell: cast a ~ [speɪ]
 ► einen Zauber wirken

spellbound ['spelbaʊnd]
 ► gebannt, verzaubert

spire ['spaɪə]
 ► Kirchturmspitze

swan [swɒn] ► Schwan

thatched roof [ˌθætʃt 'ru:f]
 ► Reetdach, Strohdach

waterside ['wɔ:təsaɪd]
 ► Ufer

If you go...

Getting there

Fly to London or Birmingham and travel by train to Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon. The journey from Birmingham takes about an hour; from London, between two and three hours.

Where to stay

The Warwick Arms Hotel, Warwick, and the historic Falcon Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon, are both ideally situated. See warwickarmshotel.com and www.sjhhotels.co.uk/stratford

What to see

Step back in time at Warwick Castle. www.warwick-castle.com For Stratford-upon-Avon, see www.shakespeareesschoolroom.org, www.shakespeare.org.uk and www.stratford-upon-avon.org Enjoy the tower, tours, rooftop restaurant and Shakespeare's plays at the RSC. www.rsc.org.uk

More information

See www.visitbritain.com and www.visitbritainshop.de



A production of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in Stratford this year

Fotos: Bridgeman Images; iStock: H. Maybanks/RSC

In our Travel feature (pages 16–22), Julian Earwaker explores Warwickshire and finds out **all about Shakespeare**. Here, you can test yourself on what you have read.

1. The heart of England



- William Shakespeare was born in
A. London B. Stratford-upon-Avon C. Birmingham
- Shakespeare's father, John, worked as a and merchant.
A. glover B. cook C. gardener
- Chinese poet lived at the same time as Shakespeare.
A. Xi Jinping B. Tang Xianzu C. Mao Zedong
- helped raise money to save Shakespeare's birthplace.
A. Teddy Roosevelt
B. Miguel de Cervantes
C. Charles Dickens
- When Shakespeare bought "The Great House" in Stratford, it had rooms.
A. 3 B. 23 C. 13
- By the time Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, she was already
A. studying law B. twice divorced C. pregnant
- If a house is described politely as "rustic", it means ".....".
A. it is really quite basic
B. it is filled with paintings of nature scenes
C. it has very large windows
- Anne Hathaway's Cottage is located in Shottery, a former
A. coal mine B. suburb C. village
- You can see at the Royal Shakespeare Company.
A. plays B. sporting events C. magic shows
- Shakespeare and his wife are buried in in Stratford.
A. Westminster Abbey
B. St Mary's Chapel
C. Holy Trinity Church

Using the word “as”

In this month’s Spoken English (page 54), we look at ways of **using the word “as”**. Here, you can practise what you have learned.

1. How is it being used?

E

Decide whether in the sentences below “as” is being used to mean “when” (W) “because” (B) or “equally” (E).

W B E

- A. The cat came in just **as** I was opening a tin of cat food.
- B. **As** you didn’t pay for your ticket, I gave it to someone else.
- C. It started to rain **as** I set out to come to see you.
- D. I’m just as annoyed **as** you are.
- E. I suppose I’d better go, **as** he asked for me specifically.



2. Fill the gaps

M

Complete the following sentences with the words from the list.

far | hills | know | old | said | town

- A. As you’re going to _____, could I ask you to get me something?
- B. As I _____, we have to be very careful with our budget.
- C. As _____ as I _____, Evangeline will be 28 next month.
- D. It’s a tale as old as the _____.
- E. When you are as _____ as I am, you’ll understand what I mean.

3. Replace it with “as”

M

Each of the sentences below contains a mistake. Correct the mistakes by replacing a word or phrase in each sentence with “as”.

- A. I’m telling you this like a friend.
- B. My brother is as tall than I am.
- C. He works like an accountant in a multinational company.
- D. It’s a matter of fact, I’ve been waiting for you for two hours.
- E. As soon when I saw him, I knew he was going to be trouble.