

The Material Culture and Cultural Heritage of Shakespeare's England



AHRC Collaborative Doctorate 2010-2013

This project is an AHRC Collaborative Doctorate between the [History Department \(/schools/historycultures/departments/history/index.aspx\)](#) and Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham and the [Shakespeare Birthplace Trust \(http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/\)](#) in Stratford-upon-Avon. Peter Hewitt is Doctoral Researcher for the project, supervised by [Dr Tara Hamling \(/staff/profiles/history/hamling-tara.aspx\)](#) at the University and Delia Garratt, Head of Collections and Interpretations at the Trust.

The project is focused on objects, and particularly the collections held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (which includes hundreds of items dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Objects can tell us many things about the society in which they were made and the people who owned or used them. Why some objects are prized over others, and why some objects are collected and preserved as 'heritage' can also tell us about our own society

and our own values.

This project will interrogate the methodological issues involved in using objects to study or present history in both an academic and museums context.

The project has two main objectives:

- To formulate a methodology or set of methodologies to integrate the study of material objects from the early modern period in England with wider historical narratives. This historical study will utilise and focus on the collections of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust because this provides a discrete collection of a varied body of sixteenth and seventeenth century objects with acknowledged significance in relation to the cultural heritage of the nation.
- To analyse and contribute to museum practice in relation to the research, cataloguing, presentation and display of material culture from the early modern period.

Research produced towards this doctoral project will contribute to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's on-line presence as well as their display strategies. The project will also include two events in the summer of 2012:

- a workshop dedicated to the challenges surrounding the study and display of artefacts from the early modern period for academics and museum practitioners
- a display or series of displays of selected objects from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust collection

[Images above - two of the objects held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. A rare allegorical portrait and an Elizabethan medicine or 'recipe' box. Images © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust]