

Dig for Shakespeare

Posted on Tuesday 14th June 2011



Come and join us in our search for Shakespeare's New Place!

Archaeologists from the University of Birmingham, will be giving visitors to New Place and Nash's House in Stratford-upon-Avon a unique chance to dig deeper into the later life of Shakespeare, when the **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust** (<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>) launches **Dig for Shakespeare** (<http://www.digforshakespeare.com/>), an archaeological exploration and visitor experience at Shakespeare's home in the town.

When can you take part?

From 26 March 2010 until the end of October visitors to Stratford will be able to watch as archaeologists unearth the foundations – and hopefully, rubbish tips – of Shakespeare's House, which was demolished in 1759. A special viewing platform has been constructed so that visitors will be able to peek over the shoulders of a team of archaeologists and volunteers as they excavate the area where Shakespeare's house and courtyard stood – an up-close view that will enable them to feel as though they are part of the dig team.

What are we digging?

'We're excavating three areas in total – one large trench will run from the Chapel Street end of the property up to the end of the inner courtyard, a second will investigate the area currently occupied by the herb garden, and the final area will involve the excavation of one quarter of the knot garden at the rear of the building,' explains Dr Diana Owen, Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

'We do not know if the knot garden was an area used by Shakespeare – it may have been a yard simply used by his servants, but this could actually yield some fantastic results, especially if it was an area where rubbish was thrown or the cess pit was located.'

What is the archaeological potential of Shakespeare's New Place?

Kevin Colls, from Birmingham Archaeology at the University of Birmingham, says, 'through documentary evidence we know Shakespeare lived at New Place but we have very little information regarding the layout of the house and gardens at this time. Through archaeological fieldwork, in particular the excavation of structural remains and the recovery of artefacts, we hope to fill in the blanks. Even the smallest sherd of broken pottery has the potential for giving us tantalising glimpses into the life of Shakespeare such as what he liked to eat and drink'.

The complete visitor experience!

To help visitors understand why the Trust is undertaking such an extensive excavation, Nash's House – the building that adjoined New Place, and which was owned by the husband of Shakespeare's granddaughter – will feature a new exhibition focusing on what is known of Shakespeare's life when he returned from London to Stratford and explaining what archaeologists are hoping to find buried beneath the soil.

Visitors will also take a different route around the property, walking through from the front to the rear of the house and exiting through the former education room, which will be relocated to the first floor. They will be guided around the perimeter of the knot garden, where archaeologists and interpretation staff will explain the current position of the dig, before returning to the front of the property along a raised platform, which takes them right between the two other trenches for an unrivalled view of the largest excavation.

Who will be carrying out the excavation?

The dig is being undertaken by archaeologists from the University of Birmingham Archaeology, who will be working on the dig seven days a week