

Question 36

Is it suspicious that no books are mentioned in Shakespeare's will?

Diana Owen

Books were not often mentioned in wills, though might have been listed in inventories. Sadly, the inventory of Shakespeare's possessions does not survive. Those of his possessions that are not named as bequests were inherited by his daughter and son-in-law, Susannah and John Hall, and in John Hall's 1635 will he bequeaths a 'study of books' to his son-in-law, Thomas Nashe, 'to dispose of them as you see good.'

In 1637 the study of New Place (Shakespeare's home) was broken into as part of a legal dispute and 'divers books' and 'other goods of great value' were taken away.

In the collections of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust are two books which might have belonged to Shakespeare. One is Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* of 1579. Our copy belonged to Lord Strange, 5th Earl of Derby, whose company of actors performed some of Shakespeare's early works. Perhaps this is the very copy that Shakespeare used to write his Roman plays. In 1643 Queen Henrietta Maria (whose husband Charles I loved Shakespeare) visited Stratford and was given the life of Katherine de Medici by Susannah Hall, possibly from her late father's own library.