

Question 35

Does Shakespeare's will shed any light on his professional practice?

Mairi Macdonald

Shakespeare's will contains virtually no references to his theatrical life in London. He describes himself as *William Shackspeare of Stratford-upon-Avon... gent'* and the only direct reference to the capital is to the Blackfriars property, part of the extensive real estate left to Susanna. With hindsight we know that *my ffellowes John Hemyngees Rychard Burbage & Henry Cundell* to whom he left 26s 8d each for a mourning ring, were professional colleagues, but intriguingly their legacies are a belated insertion in the middle of purely local remembrances. More relevant to an idea of his theatrical life would have been mention of his theatre shareholding, but shares and leases were regarded as personal estate and would have been recorded in the inventory of Shakespeare's moveable property taken after his death. This, sadly does not survive and we are left, in his will, with virtually no evidence of his professional life or practice.