

QUESTION 37

How was Shakespeare commemorated on his death?

Peter Kyle

Shakespeare was commemorated on his death in 1616 by a fine monument which was erected in Holy Trinity Church. It carries inscriptions praising him as a writer comparable to great figures of antiquity. The Dutch-born sculptor, Gerard Janssen, had a workshop in Southwark near The Globe Theatre and produced the stone effigy for Shakespeare's Stratford friend, John Coombe, for Holy Trinity Church in 1614.

The First Folio of 1623 is itself a great memorial to Shakespeare made possible by his friends and fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell. Shakespeare had left money to both of them to buy mourning rings.

At the front of the First Folio Heminges and Condell write a touching letter to Shakespeare's 'Great Variety of Readers'. There are commendatory poems from the writers Ben Jonson, Hugh Holland, Leonard Digges, and James Mabbe. In an edition of Shakespeare's poems in 1640 there is an elegy by William Basse of which there are also many early manuscript versions, one of them headed 'On William Shakespeare, buried at Stratford-upon-Avon, his town of nativity.'