

## Question 18

What was Shakespeare's social status?

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William Shakespeare was the son of a successful yeoman glover who served a term as mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon. Through his mother Mary Arden, Shakespeare may have been related to the ancient Arden family of Park Hall. In 1596 the Shakespeares successfully applied for a coat-of-arms, which formally gentrified the family. From now on William Shakespeare, player and London playwright, was Master Shakespeare. He was mocked for his pretentiousness by his friend Ben Jonson.

Shakespeare was nothing if not socially ambitious, hence his purchase, a year after the coat-of-arms, of New Place, a large mansion house in Stratford. It seems that he, who was only ever a lodger in London, was keen to be lord of the manor in his home town. Throughout his life he astutely invested in land, tithes, and property; and he did not remit debts. Shakespeare's evident concern with money and status may have its roots in his father's long struggle with debt which confined John Shakespeare to his family home at a time when his teenage son was living there.