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Honors Thesis

WHO OWNS THE BARD?: P. T. BARNUM, CHARLES DICKENS, AND THE
SHAKESPEARE BIRTHPLACE SHOWDOWN OF 1847

by
Abigail Clayton

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English Department
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Advisor: Jamie Horrocks

Honors Coordinator: John Talbot

ABSTRACT

WHO OWNS THE BARD?: P. T. BARNUM, CHARLES DICKENS, AND THE SHAKESPEARE BIRTHPLACE SHOWDOWN OF 1847

Abigail Clayton

English Department

Bachelor of Arts

In the twenty-first century age of globalization, debates over global versus national ownership of cultural heritage remain at the forefront of public consciousness. The cultural ownership of William Shakespeare, who is idealized as both a distinctly British icon and a global literary influence, has become contested ground; but, in fact, as I argue, this tension first boiled to the surface in 1847. In the spring of that year, newspapers advertised that Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon would soon go up for public auction. Rumors immediately began circulating that the American showman P. T. Barnum, who had recently barnstormed through England with the "Greatest Show on Earth," was intent on purchasing it for his menagerie of cultural oddities. In opposition to this foreign threat, a full-blown rescue campaign driven by British media fear-mongering was launched in order to save Shakespeare's home for the nation. Soon, these efforts drew in Britain's own premier showman of the 1840s, Charles Dickens. This episode and its subsequent mythologization, bringing Barnum and Dickens together in what I will term a "celebrity showdown," serves as an important flashpoint for several strands of early Victorian discourse, including heritage tourism, print media and

ephemera, and transatlantic celebrity culture. Drawing upon a wealth of archival material from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the British Library, and other collections, I argue that the events surrounding the 1847 public auction of Shakespeare's birthplace illustrate how a rapidly developing culture of print media spurred to life Victorian consciousness of cultural heritage and new forms of cultural memory.

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Introduction

The most pronounced shift in literary and cultural studies over the first two decades of the twenty-first century has perhaps been a newfound awareness of social, cultural, and economic connectivity across national boundaries. Our field is certainly not alone in this respect, for, as Vilashini Cooppan has suggested, the new millennium's global consciousness "appears to tow traditional academic bodies of knowledge within its orbit: 'adapt,' it seems to say, 'or die'" (15). One such "adaptation" has been an increased discomfort with established ways of interpreting cultural movements or texts within strictly national paradigms. While global communication networks are hardly a new phenomenon, dating at least to the time of the Roman Empire, modern high-speed technology has created what Marshall McLuhan began calling a "global village" even sixty years ago. Despite the politically fraught nature of today's broadly favored term, "globalization," literary scholars have nonetheless gravitated toward a view of literature in the context of these entangled "globalized" networks. This is evidenced by the recent flood of scholarship on the subject, from Edward Said's clarion *PMLA* essay "Globalizing Literary Study" (2001), to books such as Haun Saussy's *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2006) and Suman Gupta's *Globalization and Literary Studies* (2009), to anthologies such as Richard Lane's *Global Literary Theory* (2013). Collectively, this wave of new work calls scholarly attention to historical patterns of cross-cultural exchange that have enabled specific populations to form new identities in relation to one another.

For scholars of British literature, a clear ramification of this global turn and these interrelated identities is the reemergence of the debate over national, versus collective,

ownership of cultural heritage. Britain's pilfering of cultural property from its country of origin has been a source of controversy for over two hundred years, with Lord Byron, among others, leading early calls for the repatriation of cultural artifacts and for the creation of prohibitory legislation against this type of theft. Curators and collectors have long responded to these calls with what seem to be self-serving appeals to "global" heritage, as in the British Museum's argument that iconic artifacts from around the globe only achieve "maximum public benefit" (Ward) when on display in international hubs such as London. Ironically, though, while the British have used this argument in their campaign to keep the Elgin Marbles and other treasures, they have also made fiercely nationalistic arguments to prevent the export of their own cultural property, including, for example, William Wordsworth's love letters to his wife, Mary.¹ As a mark of Britain's national literary heritage and identity, these particular artifacts apparently needed to remain at home.

Such a contradictory, and arguably hypocritical, stance appears in ongoing debates over the cultural ownership of the most widely-adapted English author, William Shakespeare. Shakespeare has been idealized as a distinctly British icon and the preeminent figure in the English literary pantheon, yet, at the same time, his genius and influence have extended well beyond the English-speaking world. Thomas Cartelli, among other post-colonial theorists of the twentieth century, describes how non-Anglophone cultures have repositioned Shakespeare in order to assert their own national values and priorities (2). Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin similarly aver, "There is no

¹ In 1977, Cornell University attempted to acquire a recently discovered trove of letters from Wordsworth to his wife. The British Board of Trade reacted by placing an embargo on the sale of the letters to foreign institutions until the Dove Cottage Trust could raise enough money "to save the important collection for the nation" ("Wordsworth" 12).

single ‘Shakespeare’ that is simply reproduced globally” (7). This fact was highlighted by the 2012 “Globe to Globe Festival” at the Globe Theatre in London, when Shakespeare’s 37 plays were performed in 37 different languages by companies from Mexico to Afghanistan to Japan. The unmistakable point was that “Shakespeare,” in both idea and practice, was the property of no single nation. And yet, the Festival was held in London, implying that even in these transnational times, Britain would always have first claims on the Bard.

The idea of Shakespeare being contested cultural ground is not new to the current age of globalization; in fact, as this paper will argue, it boiled to the surface in a remarkable, yet little-known, imbroglio of 1847. In the spring of that year, newspapers advertised that Shakespeare’s birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon would soon go up for public auction. Rumors immediately began circulating that American showman P. T. Barnum, who had recently barnstormed through England with his “Greatest Show on Earth,” was intent on purchasing the home for his menagerie of cultural oddities. Satirizing this unthinkable scenario, the London-based magazine *Punch* fabricated a story in which “Thomas Phineas” Barnum, upon visiting the house on Henley Street for the first time, exclaims, “[W]ouldn’t it be a beauty, put on wheels, and drawn through all the States?” (“Shakspeare’s,” *Punch* 198). *Punch* gave its readers occasion to wonder if this greedy American could really purchase, and thereby appropriate, a “global” icon for his nation’s own cultural heritage. Could a nation other than Great Britain claim Shakespeare?

In opposition to this ostensible foreign threat, a full-blown rescue campaign, driven by British media fear-mongering, was launched in order to save Shakespeare’s

birthplace for the nation. Soon, these efforts drew in Britain's own premier showman of the 1840s, Charles Dickens. Having achieved iconic stature with his best-selling novels, Dickens was unique among his countrymen in possessing a celebrity persona powerful enough to match Barnum's masterfully created public image. This episode and its subsequent mythologization, bringing Barnum and Dickens together in what I will term a "celebrity showdown," serves as an important flashpoint for several strands of early Victorian discourse. Besides Harland Nelson's festschrift publication, "Dickens and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: 'What a Jolly Summer!'" (1990), Julia Thomas's *Shakespeare's Shrine* (2012) is the sole scholarly work to substantively engage Barnum's and Dickens's involvement in events surrounding the auction; other scholars include the events only as biographical anecdotes.² However, as I go on to demonstrate, the myth of the Shakespeare birthplace showdown stands at the key intersection of nineteenth-century studies in heritage tourism,³ print media and ephemera,⁴ and Barnum's and Dickens's transatlantic celebrity followings.⁵

² Kaplan 230; Gager 106; Sawyer 25

³ Touchstone studies on the formation of British national heritage and literary tourism in the nineteenth century include James Buzard's *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to "Culture," 1800–1918* (1993), Nicola Watson's *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (2006), Paul Westover's *Necromanticism: Traveling to Meet the Dead, 1750–1860* (2012), and Alison Booth's *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries* (2016). While these works include analysis of Shakespeare's birthplace as a preeminent literary pilgrimage destination, they omit discussion of the Barnum v. Dickens episode.

⁴ Tom Mole's *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture 1750 – 1850* (2009) sets up how an industrializing print culture supported an emerging celebrity culture during the early nineteenth century. Laurel Brake, et al.'s *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (2000) and Alexis Easley's *Literary Celebrity, Gender, and Victorian Authorship, 1850–1914* (2011) similarly give important context for the increasing functionality of the press and sensationalist print in the later Victorian era. Additionally, the significance of print ephemera in nineteenth-century media histories has been established by Michael Twyman's "The Long-Term Significance of Printed Ephemera" (2008) and Lisa Gitelman's "Print Culture (Other than Codex): Job Printing and Its Importance" (2013). Together, these studies paint a broad view of nineteenth-century print culture that I use as a foundation in my analysis of the fake news surrounding the Shakespeare birthplace showdown.

⁵ Barnum's and Dickens's popular power and respective cults of celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic have been examined extensively; see Joss Marsh's "The Rise of Celebrity Culture" and Paul Schlicke's "Popular Culture" in *Charles Dickens in Context* (2011), Bonnie Carr O'Neill's *Literary Celebrity and Public Life in*

Drawing upon a wealth of archival material from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the British Library, and other collections, I argue that the events surrounding the 1847 public auction of Shakespeare's birthplace illustrate how a rapidly developing culture of print media spurred to life a changing Victorian consciousness of cultural heritage and new forms of cultural memory. I first demonstrate how the once-tenuous connection between Shakespeare and a British heritage landscape was more permanently forged during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This link, particularly significant in the discussion of global cultural heritage, was solidified by a lineage of visiting Americans, rather than by Britons themselves. In the paper's latter half, I show how this transatlantic search for cultural identity led to Barnum's and Dickens's purported involvement in the 1847 auction. Ultimately, it was fake news that tied these celebrities to Shakespeare's home, but with these ephemeral ties, the Victorian media catalyzed transatlantic tensions over cultural property and national identity that remain significant in today's globalized age.

Remembering Shakespeare in Stratford

While now frequently taken for granted, the association between Shakespeare, as a literary icon, and Stratford-upon-Avon, as the physical location of his birth, did not take hold until the late eighteenth century. At the time of Shakespeare's death in 1616, there was still no concept of a material British heritage landscape. Instead, Ben Jonson's famous elegy published in 1623 idealized Shakespeare as transcending space and time with the exclamation, "My Shakespeare, rise! I will not lodge thee by / Chaucer, or

the Nineteenth-Century United States (2017), and Robert Wilson's *Barnum: An American Life* (2019). However, Barnum's and Dickens's celebrity has not yet been placed in context of debates over the ownership of national heritage.

Spencer, or bid Beaumont lie / A little further, to make thee a room: / Thou art a monument without a tomb” (19–22). Shakespeare, Jonson claims, cannot be “lodged,” or memorialized, in a single place; his “tomb” exceeds individual markers. The literary cult of fame that encompassed Shakespeare in the years following his death was thus upheld by the belief, as Richard Terry explains, that the author’s “writing was inherently a preservatory medium, . . . a memorial to fame altogether less perishable than traditional mortuary monuments” (69–70). These lines suggest that the Elizabethans held relatively indifferent attitudes toward authors’ physical monuments, for most important to an English literary tradition was an author’s ongoing influence (Ross 128). Therefore, Shakespeare’s position in the canon remained largely distinct from his connection with his birthplace, until literary tourists of the Romantic period began embarking on pilgrimages to authors’ homes and haunts.

Drawing upon traditions of the Continental Grand Tour, tourists in England during the mid-eighteenth century began seeking Shakespeare in Stratford, sparking a connection that was then firmly cemented by the inaugural Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769. As Paul Westover outlines in *Necromanticism*, the Grand Tour of Europe, which was the culmination of an elite education for over three centuries, prompted a revival of the classics as men visited authors’ locations of origin. With this new interest in literary biography, and the acceleration of both foreign and domestic tourism, travelers “found” Shakespeare’s grave in Stratford for the first time, just as they had Virgil’s tomb in Naples (38–40). Moreover, when English urbanites were drawn to the small town in swarms for the first time by renowned actor David Garrick’s 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee, the Stratford tourist industry grew to incorporate more than just Shakespeare’s grave.

Nicola Watson's *The Literary Tourist* describes how the Jubilee made the birthplace—a ramshackle, timber-frame home-turned-pub on Stratford's main street—the center of a Shakespeare tourist cult. Reports of the Jubilee in the press were accompanied by the first widely-published illustration of Shakespeare's home on Henley Street (fig.1), and the celebration's rained-out procession had planned to take travelers from the birthplace to the gravesite, therein narrating Shakespeare's life (Watson 62). On the morning of the first day of the Jubilee, performers sang a song especially written for the occasion, proclaiming, "For the Bard of all Bards was a Warwickshire Bard" ("Shakespeare's Jubilee" 3). Shakespeare was thus lauded as a Stratford local for the first time, and his Henley Street home was put on the map for pilgrims in the coming century.

Despite this new idea of Shakespeare as represented by a physical place of origin, and these beginnings of his birthplace as a tourist destination, the site was not yet a heritage or national landmark curated and cared for by cultural historians. In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Stratford had a reputation for being unsanitary and old-fashioned; Garrick famously described the town as "the most dirtiest, unseemly, ill-paved, wretched looking place in all Britain" (qtd. in Thomas 141). With few lodging houses and fewer amenities, Stratford struggled to accommodate the influx of visitors for the Jubilee, and the event was deemed a disappointment by Garrick, visitors, and the press. Nevertheless, the town mounted subsequent Jubilees for sixty years, seeking to establish its claim on Shakespeare. Each celebration was more successful than the first. By the Grand Jubilee of 1830, Stratford had lost its countryside self-consciousness and had made what was once Garrick's event the town's own, highlighting local artisans, tradesmen, and musicians (England 72). Community efforts continued to draw national

attention to Shakespeare and Stratford; however, celebrations such as these were not dedicated to the preservation of Shakespeare in a material sense. As yet, the idea of conserving cultural property remained foreign, but Garrick activated a powerful memorializing spirit tied to the physicality of Shakespeare in Stratford that would be sought out by transatlantic travelers.

Americans at the Birthplace

By 1800, the growing ability and means to travel between America and Britain contributed to an emerging sense of globality, even while for Americans, the work of national consolidation was still underway (Peyser 7). Although British and American identities were inexorably connected, from the English point of view, Americans' lack of deep literary history prevented them from forming a national identity that was distinct or valuable. Touching off something of a cultural war between the Old World and the New, the British critic Sydney Smith wrote in 1820 that Americans "have hitherto given no indications of genius. . . . In the four quarters of the globe who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play?" (80). Smith described Americans' cultural production as unoriginal and insignificant. They had comparatively nothing to call their own, whereas British literary influence had permeated the globe. In the struggle to define American literature, British literature functioned as a stable, common point of origin. English-speaking and English-writing Americans could, in a sense, become a part of an established literary tradition by claiming a writer like Shakespeare, the forefather of British literature and language, as their forefather as well. By so doing, they could construct an American cultural heritage. Significant numbers of American tourists, some of the earliest including America's own forefathers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams,

consequently made their way to Stratford. As Christopher Mulvey states, they did so “on a national mission to establish for [themselves] and for the world that Shakespeare belonged to America, that Shakespeare was America’s national bard, as much as he was England’s” (75).

Rather than native Britons, it was these American visitors, with their romanticized visions of Stratford, who solidified the link between Shakespeare as a heritage icon and his place of birth that had begun to form with the Jubilees. This is seen particularly clearly in the actions of Thomas Handasyd Perkins, a wealthy merchant from Boston who visited Shakespeare’s birthplace in 1812. Perkins observed that visitors before him had been inscribing their names on the interior walls of the home. Doing so seemed to mark their own achievement in visiting, rather than honor the national icon whose property their signatures were defacing. Hoping to change this pattern, Perkins purchased a blank quarto book, wrote at the beginning of it, “Tribute of Respect to the Memory of the Bard of Avon,” and left it with the house’s caretaker, Mrs. Hornby. Perkins’s signature is inscribed on the first line (fig. 2). Stratfordians, and even famous British celebrities visiting the birthplace, seemed to have taken Shakespeare’s locality for granted, regarding his home as little more than a popular relic. Those coming from across the ocean, however, introduced the idea that Shakespeare’s home was something different: a national heritage site that ought to be preserved, curated, and monitored—by a visitors’ book at the very least. The tradition of Americans visiting the site catalyzed this notion of a collective heritage lodged in material artifacts.

Washington Irving’s 1815 literary pilgrimage to Stratford, famously recorded in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, did perhaps more than anything else to secure this

idea. Irving's work sold widely on both sides of the Atlantic and set the stage for the posthumous creation of Shakespeare as a global icon, with Stratford as his heritage locale. Like those before him, Irving romanticized the birthplace, describing it as "a true nestling-place of genius . . . a simple, but striking instance of the spontaneous and universal homage of mankind to the great poet of nature" (316). Much recent criticism, including the aforementioned work by Watson and Westover and Alison Booth's *Homes and Haunts*, chronicles how Irving's visit and the transatlantic popularity of his account forever changed the literary tourist industry, shifting the way Shakespeare and Stratford were remembered globally. Irving's *Sketch-Book* spurred the visits and directed the wanderings of future American literary pilgrims such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, all of whom had read Irving's book and wanted to stake their own American claim on this English literary heritage landscape.

Irving's seminal account also played a key role in the visit to Stratford of America's most popular entertainer of the 1840s: the showman P. T. Barnum. Although British audiences were initially skeptical of Barnum when he arrived in 1844, Robert Wilson's biography describes how Barnum's "potent combination of naïveté, arrogance, persistence, and luck . . . somehow brought to fruition his far-fetched strategy of partnering with the Queen herself" (93). By first gaining the affection of the Queen of England, Barnum secured immense popularity across Britain, a fact he acknowledges in his autobiography. In his writings, he describes how he deliberately snared the British public by exploiting the endorsement of the royal family in order to win hearts and profits (*Struggles* 77). Barnum was incredibly successful, taking in about £500 per day, or \$2,500 in today's money, during his stay in London from March 20 to July 20 1844

(Wilson 92). After several weeks of shows, however, Barnum turned the day-to-day business of his company over to H. G. Sherman and left to dedicate time to lecturing, writing, and touring the British countryside. Barnum's tour included a visit, in September of that year, to the house in which Shakespeare was born—a visit that would supposedly result in his desire to appropriate the shrine for America itself.

By traveling to Stratford, Barnum followed in the steps of transatlantic pilgrims before him who sought to establish American cultural legitimacy through connection to the English national poet. He recorded visiting the birthplace, adding his name to a long line of American tourists in the visitors' book (fig. 3) and examining the tomb where Shakespeare was buried. Most significant in the conversation of transatlantic identity is Barnum's account of staying at the Red Horse Hotel down the street from the birthplace—the same hotel at which Irving and many other American visitors had stayed. There, Barnum asked for a guide-book to the town. The waiter brought him nothing other than Irving's *Sketch-book*. In his autobiography, Barnum said he “was not a little proud” (*The Life* 275) to find that an American's text was the one shaping local and foreign perceptions of Shakespeare's hometown. It was proof that Americans had discerned value where Britons themselves had not, a sign of the kinship between Shakespeare and America. In the later 1869 edition of his autobiography, Barnum further iterated this sentiment, claiming, “Americans appreciate the immortal Bard of Avon as keenly as do their brethren in the ‘Mother Country’ (a ‘Mother’ of whom we are all justly proud)” (*Struggles* 120).

Such a feeling of kinship, however, could not mask the fact that the town—and the home—still left much to be desired. By the time of his visit, Shakespeare's home on

Henley Street had seen the wear and tear of a century of pilgrims, with still relatively no effort made toward preservation. In Barnum's eyes, the solution to this problem was obvious. With his pockets full of both American dollars and British pounds, he could give the birthplace the honor it was due, and the New World the honor it was due, by taking the home apart and rebuilding it in New York. Refurbished and remodeled, it could become a centerpiece in his great American show. Of this idea, Barnum wrote retrospectively:

I greatly desired to honor the New World by erecting this invaluable relic in its commercial metropolis. I soon dispatched a trusty agent to Stratford-upon-Avon, armed with the cash and full powers to buy the Shakespeare house if possible, and have it carefully taken down, packed in boxes, and shipped to New York. He was cautioned not to whisper my name, and to give no hint that the building was ever to leave England. After weeks of delay, the parties having control of the property consented to name a price which they thought they would accept for the Shakespeare House—"to be taken down." (*Struggles* 120–21)

According to Barnum, then, the purchase was a done deal.

Media Humbugger and the Birthplace Auction

Or was it? Barnum's account of his offer to buy Shakespeare's home, quoted above, was not actually made public in the 1840s, nor did it appear in his earliest autobiography, *The Life of P.T. Barnum*, published in 1855. His visit to Shakespeare's birthplace was recorded in the visitors' book in 1844, and, according to him, it was upon this particular visit that he "conceived the idea of purchasing, removing and re-erecting that building in New York" (*Struggles* 120). Yet this recollection—Barnum's memory of

wanting to purchase the home and actually going so far as to make an offer—did not appear until his later autobiography, *Struggles and Triumphs*, was first published in 1869. Only with the historical distance of twenty years does Barnum make reference to this secret plan to buy Shakespeare's birthplace and the acceptance of said offer. No real evidence of this bid, either from the 1840s or from subsequent years, has ever emerged.

However, readers in Britain certainly believed that Barnum had bought, or was about to buy, the home. For the better part of 1847, leading up to the birthplace auction in September, urban and provincial newspapers generated a media firestorm with their ongoing reports that Barnum was attempting to steal Shakespeare's house and take it back to America. When news that the home was going up for auction emerged, the Stratford and London Shakespeare Committees formed to raise funds and collect donations, and they capitalized on these widespread rumors in order to try to purchase the birthplace themselves and save it from this imminent theft. Out of this flurry of newspaper copy arose a narrative that continues to circulate today, a marvelous story pitting the grasping, cultureless Barnum against Britain's savior, Charles Dickens, through whose masterful fundraising efforts Shakespeare's home remained in Britain.

In reality, all of this—to use a word associated with both Barnum and Dickens—is humbug. British print media allowed for the deliberate spread of sensational misinformation and regarding the American in England, jolting Britons into taking ownership of their national heritage and dramatizing a new mutual dependence between global and national identities. Ubiquitous, salacious stories had supported emerging celebrity culture on both sides of the Atlantic since the early nineteenth century, and because of the way in which Barnum's celebrity persona was constructed by the media,

even—and especially—fake news worked to shore up that celebrity. Barnum’s public image was crafted by his lifelong and intentional deception of the public; he took pride in the way he could manipulate public opinion with whatever piece of humbug he fancied (O’Neill 21). So as Barnum watched the story of his imminent theft of Shakespeare unfold from across the Atlantic in the months preceding and the years following the birthplace auction, he was delighted. He capitalized on the publicity and invented this belated and hyperbolic backstory in *Struggles and Triumphs* to corroborate what the British press had so assuredly reported. Humbuggery, not fact, manipulated Victorian public opinion, and it continues to fuel the way the events surrounding the auction have been incorrectly interpreted to the present day.

Although plenty of ephemeral evidence documents this fake narrative, this same evidence—when read more carefully than Victorian readers read it—also lays out a more accurate version of the events surrounding the auction of Shakespeare’s birthplace. By the 1840s, Shakespeare’s home was quite dilapidated (fig. 4); the *London Times* described it as a “venerable and tottering edifice” (“Shakspeare’s,” *The Times* 8). Shakespeare had originally inherited the family property from his father, and then, upon the ending of his direct line of posterity, the home was left to descendants of his sister, Joan Hart. The Hart family did not have the funds to keep the building up properly, allowing it to be changed over the years according to the storefront aesthetic preferences of subsequent tenants. As the house changed hands through the decades, one of the tenants, Mary Hornby, emerged as a self-proclaimed, yet unqualified, caretaker of the birthplace. From 1793–1820, she hosted and interacted with many visitors, including Washington Irving. Mary Hornby remained as the caretaker after her husband died and

ownership of the birthplace passed to the Court family in 1806, but neither she nor the Courts put any thought to conservation. When Thomas Court died in 1818, his will stipulated that the home should be sold upon his wife's death, with, as provincial papers reported, "the sale-monies to be divided among his children" ("Shakspeare's," *Lincolnshire* 7). Court saw the home for its monetary value as a property more than for its cultural value as a national heritage landmark.

Court's wife Ann died in the autumn of 1846, and local papers circulating across the United Kingdom announced the forthcoming sale of the birthplace. A simple line in the *Newcastle Guardian* on Saturday, 7 November 1846 is the earliest known notice to state that "the house in which Shakespeare was born is now for sale" ("The House" 5). At this point, two years after Barnum's visit to the birthplace, there is no mention of him or of any other Americans offering to buy it. Instead, print sources suggest that the Royal Shakespearean Club of Stratford, which had been interested in the preservation of Shakespearean sites since its 1824 inception, appealed to the government to purchase the home in the absence of funds to do so itself ("There" 4). These were the first stirrings of a movement supporting the idea that material cultural property could be central to national history and literary identity. As such, community leaders hoped the British government would sponsor preservation efforts. On 22 November 1846, Lord Morpeth, Chief Commissioner of Woods and Forests, crushed these hopes. He denied the appeals of the Royal Shakespearean Club, stating, "the Members of the Government are disposed to think that the acquisition of so interesting a property pertains still more to the people of England than to the Government" ("Shakspeare's," *The Times* 8). This response from the

government made it clear that it was up to the people to define, purchase, and conserve their own national heritage.

The Royal Shakespearean Club responded by taking matters into its own hands, forming committees and beginning a grassroots movement to raise funds to purchase the birthplace. Local papers agreed to help and urged the British public to care for their heritage, since the government would not move to do so. These notices began to appear in December 1846. On December 3, the *Bath Chronicle* belatedly, and incorrectly, reported that Lord Morpeth was “negotiating the purchase of the house where Shakspeare was born” (“There” 4); in reality, he had already refused to negotiate with the Club. Six days later, on December 9, an “Englishman’s” letter to *The Times* was published. In it, the author claims he has it on good authority that Shakespeare’s house had already been purchased “for the purpose of its being removed to America” (“Intended,” *Manchester* 6). A clipping of this letter was subsequently reproduced in the *Manchester Courier*, *Leeds Intelligencer*, *Cumberland Pacquet*, *Liverpool Standard*, the *Cork Examiner* in Ireland, and even the *Tyrone Constitution* of Northern Ireland—all before Christmas of 1846. Importantly, none of these articles mention a name connected with the reputed removal of Shakespeare’s home to America. The author of the original *Times* letter was certainly wrong in claiming the birthplace had been purchased; he seems to have been equally inaccurate in claiming it was headed to America.

These inaccuracies were not noticed by readers, however, and in the early months of 1847, as the proprietors of the birthplace prepared for its auction, the press continued to circulate what in today’s terms would be called the hottest piece of click-bait: the “fact” that the birthplace was going to be purchased, or had already been purchased, by

an American. It was at this moment, in May of 1847, that *Punch* published its satirical article, explicitly tying the name “Barnum” to the birthplace for the first time.⁶ A masterful piece of humbuggery in its own right, this article takes the form of a fake letter from “T. P.” Barnum to the Mayor of Stratford. Speaking on behalf of “free Americans,” a caricatured Barnum with a horrendous American accent claims, “we, who are the only people on airth who understand English in the clear grit that that ‘varsal [universal] critter Shakespeare writ it—we ought to possess the location in which he fust saw the light” (198). In the midst of England’s “Hungry Forties,” this barely literate American adds insult to injury by following his invitation to “jist say the number of dollars that your Stratford critters want to the immortal location” with an alternate offer to give “the vally [value] of the house in breadstuffs, or hams, or molasses, or any other airthly fixing,” if food would be more valuable to the British than money (“Shakspeare’s,” *Punch* 198). Culturally backwards Americans, this letter implies, have the nerve to claim they are not only smarter than the British, but freer, wealthier, and better able to give Shakespeare’s property the honor it deserves.

Although Victorian readers knew *Punch*’s articles to be written mostly in jest, *The Times* of London and other newspapers across England apparently took “T. P.” Barnum’s letter as further proof that Barnum was behind the purchase of the birthplace. They lent this rumor widespread credibility, circulating still more articles that detailed Barnum’s desire to buy Shakespeare’s home. This unwitting and mistaken campaign grew to full force as dozens of newspapers attempted to galvanize the British public with the rhetoric

⁶ When this article appeared, Barnum himself had already fled the scene. In April 1845, he left for Paris with General Tom Thumb. He returned to England in the summer of 1846 but departed for America on 4 February 1847.

of “saving the birthplace” from foreign invasion, treating the site as a holy shrine that, according to *The Times*, would be “desecrated” by its “passing into the hands of some foreign showman” (“The Meeting” 5). The same July 1847 article goes on to state, “We think it will require no very extravagant outlay to rescue [the house] at all events from the desecrating grasp of those speculators who are said to be desirous of taking it from its foundations and trundling it about on wheels like a caravan of wild beasts, giants, or dwarfs through the United States of America” (5). The writer here blasphemously commercializes the home of England’s national hero, placing it among circus freaks and beasts in an attempt to rouse readers’ righteous anger. If Barnum purchases the birthplace, the article suggests, it will be treated as another oddity in his traveling show and lose its value, a value that derives from its location in England.

The fear manifest in this July article prefaced a wave of articles and advertisements about the auction itself that also used powerful terms of moral persuasion. *The Atlas*, *Leicestershire Mercury*, *Manchester Courier*, *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, and *Banbury Guardian*, among other news outlets, began circulating news that the birthplace auction would be held on 16 September 1847 by the London auctioneer, Mr. Edmund Robins.⁷ Posters printed by the London and Stratford Shakespeare Committees in August 1847, mere weeks before the auction, feature regal, ornate lettering and borders, and they draw attention to the patronage of Prince Albert as they ask the public for donations with which the Committees can buy the home (fig. 5). Other large advertisements, exemplifying the hyperbolic rhetoric of the auction industry, boldly describe Shakespeare’s home as a “heart-stirring relic of a most glorious period, and of England’s

⁷ Robins had inherited the business of his notorious first cousin George Henry Robins, known for his own puffery, who had passed away just seven months earlier.

immortal bard” (*Saving*). The terms “relic” and “immortal” sanctify and canonize Shakespeare, and in so doing, reinforce his national cultural authority. This notice materializes these intangible qualities, tying them to the home’s concrete, financially-bound space via an auctioneer’s name in equally large, bold lettering (fig. 6). Ephemera such as these gave the sale a sense of royal or religious import, trying to convince viewers that by saving the birthplace, they would be saving a national, even spiritual, relic. And yet, even by auction day, the public was barely cracking their pocketbooks to save this “most honoured monument of the greatest genius that ever lived” (*Saving*).⁸

On 16 September 1847, Mr. Robins opened the auction by referring to Shakespeare’s house as a national relic that “would stand for centuries to come, a monument of Shakspeare’s greatness” (“The Sale,” *Globe* 1). The bids initially made by individual speculators started at £1000. They rose to £2100, but none of these offers were made by an American, as had been rumored. In fact, from here on out, there is no mention of Barnum’s supposed offer for the next two decades, when Barnum claims the episode by including it in his autobiography and British newspapers republish this account. Despite this, and still greatly fearing removal of Shakespeare’s home, members of the London and Stratford Shakespeare Committees handed a paper to Mr. Robins, stating:

We, the undersigned, deputed by the united committees of Stratford and London for raising subscriptions for the purchase of Shakspeare’s house, hereby offering a bidding of 3000*l* . . . looking at the duty imposed upon them in undertaking to

⁸ Despite the persistent fundraising attempts of the Shakespeare Committees and the contagious spreading of the Barnum rumors, the public response was lethargic. Prince Albert himself had only donated £250 of the more than £2000 that would be required, and other celebrities such as Lady Byron were only willing to part with £5 (“Subscriptions”).

represent the feeling of the nation, they have come to the resolution of making this large and liberal offer for the property now for sale, without regard to the funds which they at present command, in the confidence that the justice of the public will eventually discharge the committees from the individual responsibility which they thus incur. (“The Sale,” *Globe* 1)

The Committees, lacking the funds necessary for the purchase and thus practicing a bit of humbug themselves, made what was ultimately an unsupported bid with the “confidence” that the public would pay up in the future. Positioning themselves as cultural arbiters, the committees presumed to stand in for a nation at large that was only minimally beginning to consider the value of Shakespeare in terms of national property.

Although legally Mr. Robins should not have awarded the property to an admittedly insolvent bidder, he did. But when he dropped the gavel, the Committees were left trying to figure out how to finish raising the necessary £3000, plus the additional funds needed to restore and conserve the new national landmark. The Committees’ purse was between £1400–2000 short of the £3000 they promised to pay (“The Sale,” *Globe* 1). In order to remedy this dilemma and raise the funds necessary to pay the debt, they put on charity nights and theatrical performances. But when these endeavors proved insufficient, the Committees leveraged the name recognition of someone’s on par with Shakespeare’s own: Charles Dickens. In the nearly two centuries since the birthplace auction, Dickens’s involvement in the campaign to save Shakespeare’s home has become something of a legend. Dickens was an involved member of the London Shakespeare Committee in the months following the auction, and given the widespread rumors about Barnum’s infamous speculation, many popular histories—and even major news outlets—have

found it easy to perpetuate a headline something along the lines of “Charles Dickens saved the house of William Shakespeare from P. T. Barnum.”⁹ However, most scholars are careful to tip-toe around this association, and in his 1990 work, Nelson declares outright that Dickens’s project “came to nothing so far as the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was concerned” (72). His “project,” a series of amateur tours in the name of funding a curator for Shakespeare’s birthplace, was only tangential to the success he is given credit for, but these tours play a large role in Victorian print media’s version of his showdown with the great American showman.

Like Barnum’s supposed offer, Dickens’s involvement in the birthplace fundraising was much exaggerated by sensationalist print media. He was not a member of the London Shakespeare Committee prior to the auction—his name is notably absent from the Committee’s fundraising advertisements in the summer and fall of 1847—nor did he attend the auction itself. Likely, his friend Charles Knight or other associates on the Committees who were present at the bustling auction mart (fig. 7) communicated news of the proceedings to him. Perhaps inspired by *This House to be Sold*, a musical extravaganza by J. Stirling Coyne satirizing the events of the auction, other amateur farces being written and produced in response to the sale, and the Committees’ popular fundraising “Shakespeare Nights” in London, Dickens jumped at the chance to dive back into his theatricals. He had long been fascinated by the stage, writing and acting in his own plays early in his public career in 1836, starting the first iteration of his Society of Amateur Players in 1845, and now, in the wake of these events, reviving the Society in

⁹ Even a quick survey of online resources dedicated to the history of Shakespeare’s birthplace reveals top hits all claiming Dickens led fundraising attempts to save the home (Edmondson; Joynes; Kennedy; Mathieson; Morris).

December of 1847. Dickens produced, directed, and acted alongside his company in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, Elizabeth Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism*, James Kenney's *Love, Law, and Physic*, and the French comic scene *Two O'Clock in the Morning*. They performed in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Edinburgh from May to July of 1848. Floods of advertisements for and reviews of Dickens's amateur tours joined the wash of ephemera in the campaign to pay back the Committees' debt and secure the birthplace for the nation. Some reviews acknowledge the initially poor turnout for his productions and their ultimately amateur acting, but most laud the plays' "unequivocal merits," their "picturesque effect," and their "histrionic excellence" ("Haymarket," *Athenaeum*).

Upon first glance, the ephemeral materials associated with Dickens's tours do seem to suggest that he launched them in order to save Shakespeare's house. Dickens added the Shakespearean comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to his traveling troupe's repertoire in early 1848. He even took members of his company on an inspirational visit to Shakespeare's grave at Holy Trinity Church, prior to their appearance in Birmingham (Gager 107). Headlines on posters for his performances across England all created visual associations between Dickens and Shakespeare's house, making it seem as though Dickens's own barnstorming was aimed at saving the birthplace—or at least raising the money that had been promised by the Committees (fig. 8a). Charles Dickens's own name is printed in large, black, and bolded letters, equal in size to the names of the plays performed. Second in this visual hierarchy are the large letters "Shakespeare's House." Thus, a casual passerby would easily link Dickens to the highly-publicized movement to fund Shakespeare's birthplace. The papers themselves were reporting in a way that

reinforced this link. One paper claimed in a review of Dickens's theatricals that "the apathy which the public has shown in respect to the Shakespere house, and the exoneration of those who have taken upon themselves the responsibilities of its purchase, have supplied the 'distinguished amateurs' with good reason for another series of metropolitan and provincial performances" ("Haymarket," *The Morning*). The association between Dickens and Shakespeare's house would have made sense given Dickens's own standing as a literary celebrity, one whose writing famously seemed to claim, in part, its own moral authority through frequent allusions to Shakespeare's works.

While Dickens has been mythologized in this way as the cultural savior of Shakespeare, his motives and the extent of his involvement are much more equivocal. The small print on the posters clarifies that the amateur theatricals were not raising money to pay the Committees' debt, but to fund a curator for the birthplace—Dickens's friend Sheridan Knowles, an old, down-on-his luck playwright. This is stated with a quote from the minutes of the London Shakespeare Committee meeting in April 1848 on each poster (fig. 8b). Dickens's plays were an extension of amateur theatricals he had started back in 1845 to fund, or pressure the government into funding, pensions for impoverished authors, artists, and scientists (Kaplan 229). Dickens was heavily invested in these shows; his letters show how eager he was for them to be a success and how frustrated he was with the laziness of some of the actors. The actors were all his close friends: his son Fred, his illustrators John Leech and George Cruikshank, his friend and biographer John Forster, and fellow members of his literary circles Mark Lemon and G. H. Lewes. This insular company, a self-serving interest to line the pockets of a friend which ultimately failed, and his own almost negligible donation of £5 to the fund for

Shakespeare's house suggest Dickens was not nearly as invested in saving the birthplace as he was purported to be ("Subscriptions").

Thus, although Dickens's and Barnum's participation in the auction of Shakespeare's house was tangential at best, both celebrities were necessary as parallel types and icons in this narrative of cultural nationalism. Sensationalist print sources orchestrated a heritage campaign that unwittingly began with the humbuggery and caricature of Barnum and continued with the puffery of Dickens's theatrical advertisements and reviews. The British press invoked the cultural power of both celebrities in order to reverse public apathy towards national heritage, creating a showdown that existed only in the minds of mistaken readers. Dickens's amateur productions may not have been a direct response to Barnum's putative threat to buy the birthplace, but the media, conflating both instances, drew a causal relationship between the two showmen. Only if there were foreign opposition, it seemed, would Britons take responsibility for their own literary heritage.

The historical reluctance of Britons to associate literary figures with a physical space, the American pilgrims coming to England to find a cultural identity that America itself was too young to offer, and Britons' own lack of concern for the preservation of physical heritage sites all culminated in the Shakespeare birthplace showdown of 1846–48. The British public was flooded with media vilifying Barnum as a foreign invader come to steal Shakespeare, a symbol of their national identity, and lauding Dickens as the savior of that identity. Multi-media developments and the circulation of images and information made possible by the mid-nineteenth century printing industry allowed their celebrity personas to be manipulated in this way. In turn, the circulation of their public

images produced the “imagined communities” that Benedict Anderson claims lie at the heart of modern nationalism. These communities, complete with their own national ideologies and cultural assumptions, are interconnected by a media ecology, or a complex set of human engagements with and between media (Levy and Mole 103). Extending across the globe, this ecology fostered what Thomas Peyser claims are the imbricated discourses of globalization and nationalism. Britons’ perceived, or assumed, communal response to the threat of a foreign invader championing global heritage was the catalyst for a national heritage industry centered on authors’ homes, all beginning with Shakespeare’s, the most British of them all.

Conclusion

Although fake, the news stories surrounding the sale of Shakespeare’s birthplace provided a foundational narrative of national heritage that has lasted to the present day. The story of the showdown, built on little more than puffery and humbuggery, was nevertheless endorsed Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s 2017 commemorative exhibit *Saving Shakespeare’s Birthplace*. Adjacent panels of the exhibit highlighted Barnum’s supposed attempts to buy the birthplace and identified Dickens as the leader of the campaign to save it (fig. 9a–b). The Trust’s own publicity around the exhibit emphasized the Barnum versus Dickens fiasco (Joynes), which was then, in turn, circulated by respected media outlets from the Shakespeare Folger Library to the *Guardian* (Kennedy). The British media of both 1847 and 2017 drew together two transnational celebrities who also embodied distinctly national tropes—Barnum as the money-grubbing, underhanded American, and Dickens as the reputedly moral, domestic, and best-selling British author. The Trust’s exhibition glorified the heroic rescue efforts of Dickens, as did the news

cycle of 1847, for Shakespeare's home belonged to Britain, and on no grounds could any foreign nation take away this British heritage landmark.

However, at the same time that its panels presented this idea, other panels in the exhibition tried to mitigate such nationalist feelings. The final panel read, in part, "the legacy of those efforts [to save the birthplace], 170 years ago, is still felt today both in Stratford-upon-Avon and throughout the world" (*Saving*). While the Trust claims to be a global center, it is also a distinctly British one. This idea of shared ownership is necessary in order to engage internationally connected audiences, but ultimately, the Trust's marketing seems to say those audiences must come to England in order to access the real power of Shakespeare, thereby interweaving, and mutually enabling, both the global and the national.

This paper's account of the events surrounding the sale of Shakespeare's birthplace, put in the context of these ironic yet simultaneous stances on global and national ownership, calls for an interrogation of the teleological globalization narratives surrounding cultural heritage. While the idea and influence of Shakespeare has, indeed, come to be a global force, Britain has firmly maintained its hold on his historical figure, in part, by rooting him in Stratford. Biographically, and even topographically, Shakespeare has been read and marketed across the world as distinctly British. The birthplace auction of 1847 was among the first of critical events to tie Shakespeare's biography to a physical space in Stratford that now serves as a destination for hundreds of thousands of international travelers. While these travelers may not seek to steal the birthplace for their home as Barnum purportedly did, their pilgrimages are, in part, also evidence of a global culture, heritage, and memory, bringing to life Jonson's Shakespeare

that is “not of an age, but for all time” (43). The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust of 2020 and beyond will continue to champion a global Shakespeare, but one that is equally dependent on a nationalism deeply rooted in the soil of British literary history and material culture.



Figure 1. Richard Green's illustration of Shakespeare's birthplace, 1769; Joynes, Victoria; "The Restoration of Shakespeare's Birthplace"; *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*, 16 Jun. 2017, <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/restoration-shakespeares-birthplace/>.

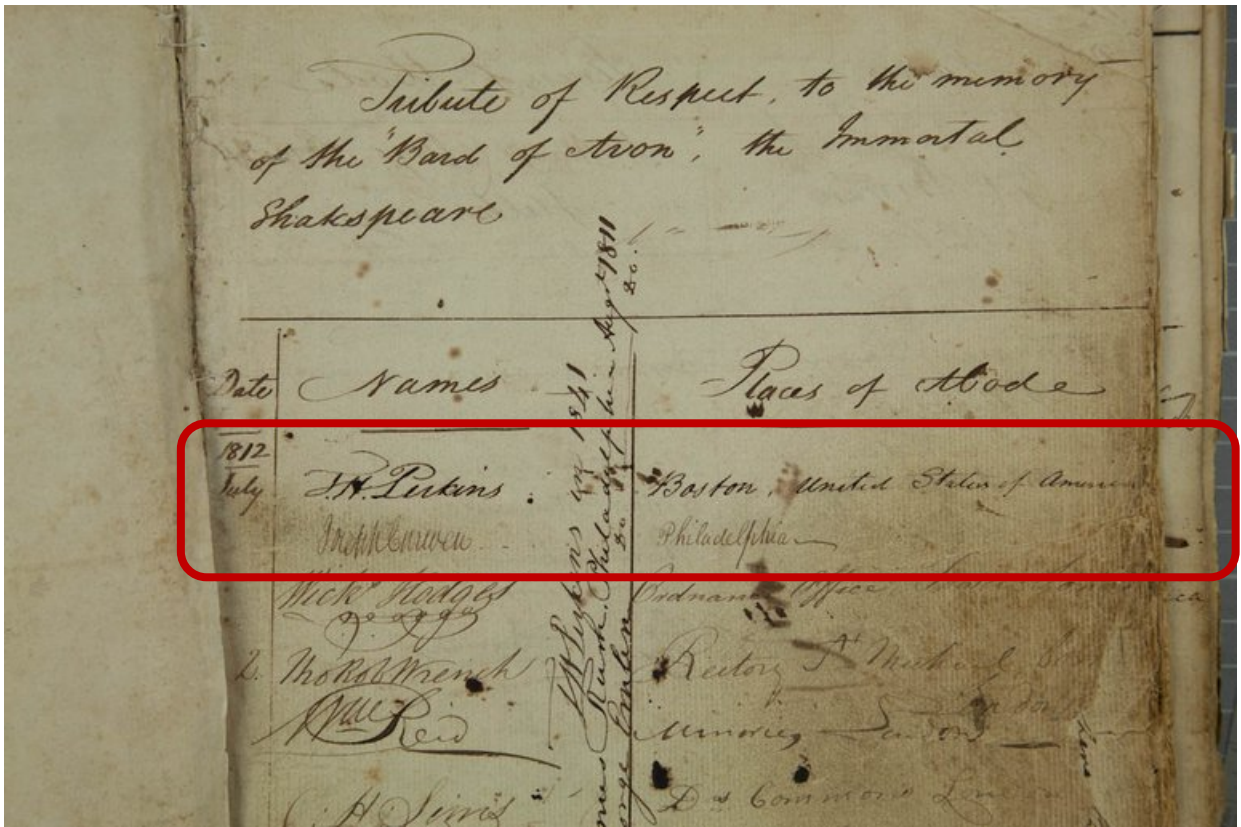


Figure 2. Thomas Perkins's signature in the Shakespeare Birthplace Visitors' Book, 1812; Taylor, Paul; "Our First Visitor's Book"; *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*, 22 Nov. 2016, www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/our-first-visitors-book/.

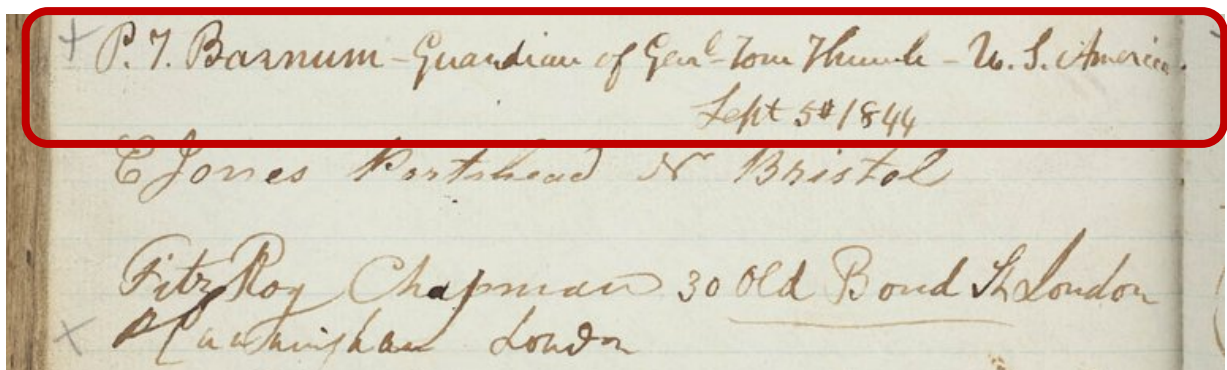


Figure 3. P. T. Barnum's signature in the Shakespeare Birthplace Visitors' book, Sep. 1844; Joynes, Victoria; "Barnum vs. Dickens: Oh What a Circus!"; *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*, 21 Apr. 2017, www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/barnum-vs-dickens-oh-what-circus/.



Figure 4. Photograph of Shakespeare's birthplace on Henley Street, early 1840s; Joynes, Victoria; "The Restoration of Shakespeare's Birthplace"; *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*; 16 Jun. 2017; www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/restoration-shakespeares-birthplace/.

[From an old Print.]

(A) Purchased by the Committee. (B) Portion usually shown as the Birth-Place. (C) Swan and Maidenhead Inn.

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTH-PLACE.

AT
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON.

The House in which Shakspeare was born is announced for Sale by Public Auction on the 15th of September next. A Committee has been formed at Stratford-upon-Avon for the purpose of obtaining Donations to enable them to purchase and save from further decay and desecration the walls which sheltered the cradle of WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. Their intentions are set forth in an Address which has already been published in several of the leading Newspapers, and which is in progress of extensive distribution.

His Royal Highness The Prince Albert has been graciously pleased to honor the Committee with his especial patronage, and has further evinced the warm interest which His Royal Highness takes in this National Object, by a Donation of £200.

The Committee have also the satisfaction to state that the following Noblemen and Gentlemen, connected with Warwickshire by property or otherwise, have been pleased to honor the design with their patronage.

In the event of the property being purchased, the Chief Commissioner of Woods and Forests has signified that that Department of Government "would willingly take charge of Shakspeare's House, as a just object of national care."

A List of the Stratford Committee is subjoined, and also of Bankers, to whom Donations may be paid. A List of the Donations will be published hereafter, and recorded in a Register to be kept at the Birth-Place.

It must be obvious that from the near approach of the Sale, an early announcement of Subscriptions is indispensable to enable the Committee to carry out their intentions.

PATRON,
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE ALBERT.

PRESIDENT,
THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL DELAWARR,
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS'S SECRETARY.

VICE PRESIDENTS,
THE MOST HON. THE MARQUESS OF NORTHAMPTON, PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY,
THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF CLARENDON, LORD LIEUTENANT OF IRELAND,
THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF WARWICK, LORD LIEUTENANT OF THE COUNTY OF WARWICK,
THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF DENBIGH, THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL HOWE,
THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL AMHELBST,
THE VISCOUNT VILLIERS, THE RIGHT HON. THE VISCOUNT LIFFORD, THE VISCOUNT SANDON,
THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD REDSDALE, THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD LEIGH, THE LORD BROOKE, M. P.,
THE HON. C. B. PERCY, THE RIGHT HON. SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART., M. P., SIR ROBERT GEORGE THROCKMORTON, BART.,
SIR THEOPHILUS BIDDULPH, BART., SIR GRAY SKIPWITH, BART., SIR CHARLES DOUGLAS, M. P.,
W. S. DOUGDALE, ESQ., M. P. C. N. NEWDEGATE, ESQ., M. P. E. J. SHIRLEY, ESQ., M. P. W. COLLINS, ESQ., M. P.

THE RIGHT HON. THE VISCOUNT MORPETH, M. P. CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF WOODS AND FORESTS, AND THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD ELLESMERE,
HAVE CONSENTED TO ACT AS PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE
LONDON COMMITTEE.

Stratford-upon-Avon Committee.
THOMAS THOMSON, ESQ., M. D., CHAIRMAN,
The Mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon—Rev. J. Clayton, M. A., Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon—Mr. Adams—Mr. Atkinson—
Rev. W. Barrett, M. A.—John Drinkwater, Esq.—Mr. Flower—E. D. Ford, Esq.—E. Getley, Esq.—Mr. Gibbs—W. J.
Harding, Esq.—H. H. Hobbes, Esq.—Chandos Wren Hoskyns, Esq.—W. O. Hunt, Esq.—Mr. W. C. Lucy—Rev. T.
R. Medwin, M. A.—D. Rice, Esq.—T. Umbers, Esq.—Mr. F. Ward—J. Webb, Esq.—R. B. Wheeler, Esq.

HONORARY SECRETARY, CHARLES HOLTE BRACEBRIDGE, ESQ.,
TREASURER, W. SHELTON, ESQ., MAYOR OF THE BOROUGH OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON,
SECRETARY, MR. E. ASHWIN, TREASURER OF THE BOROUGH OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON.

The following London Bankers have kindly consented to receive Subscriptions, Messrs Glyn & Co., 67, Lombard Street; Jones
Loyd & Co., 49, Leadenhall; Herries & Co., 10, St. James' Street; Deacons & Co., 43, Cheung Chree; Coles & Co.,
50, Strand; Smith, Payne & Co., King William Street; and Hoare & Co., 60, Lombard Street. Subscriptions may
also be paid through Smith, Payne & Co. to the account of the Treasurer of the Committee, at the Old Bank, Stratford-
upon-Avon; and through the Stratford Branch of the Warwick and Leamington Banking Company.
Committee Room, Stratford-upon-Avon,
August 2, 1847.

F. AND G. WARD, PRINTERS AND BOOKSELLERS, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON.

Figure 5. Shakespeare Committee fundraising poster for Shakespeare's Birthplace, Aug. 1847; Joynes, Victoria; "Saving the Birthplace: The Committees"; *The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*, 22 Aug. 2017, www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/saving-birthplace-committees/.

**SHAKESPEARE'S
HOUSE,**
AT
Stratford-on-Avon

MR. ROBINS

Feels highly flattered at having been selected by the Representatives of the late Mr. THOMAS COURT, to submit to Public Competition,
AT THE AUCTION MART, LONDON,
On Thursday, 16th of September, 1847,
AT TWELVE O'CLOCK,
**THE TRULY
HEART-STIRRING RELIC
OF A MOST GLORIOUS PERIOD, AND OF
ENGLAND'S
IMMORTAL BARD**

Which, by the course of events, and directions contained in the Will of the late Owner, must be offered to Public Sale; yet with every fervent hope that its appreciation by the Public will secure for it a safeguard and continuance at the Birth and Burial-place of the Poet,

**THE MOST HONOURED MONUMENT OF THE GREATEST GENIUS
THAT EVER LIVED.**

To attempt to paraphrase this interesting and singular Property would be in vain, for (to quote the Poet's beautiful lines)...
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To draw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or sigh softer light
To seek the beauteous eye of Heaven to garish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.

Mr. ROBINS, therefore, simply invites all those who take an interest in this Monumental Relic (and who is there amongst us does not), to pay a visit to Stratford-on-Avon, in the full assurance that what they will see and feel, now that this remarkable Property may be possessed, will raise a spirit of Competition hitherto unknown. **THE**

Swan & Maidenhead, a thriving Public House,
Which adjoins, with its Out-buildings, forms part of the Property, extending from Henley Street to the Guildpits; the whole of which, be it remembered, is

FREEHOLD.

THE BOOKS OF AUTOGRAPHS, with numerous Poetic Inspirations, CURIOUS ANTIQUE FURNITURE, and several INTERESTING RELICS, will be Sold at the same time.

Visitors may, as usual, inspect this singular domicile; and Printed Vouchers, containing a Copy of the Family Pedigree, and much that will interest the reader, with Fugate Views, a Plan of the Property, and a "nostalgic" in character with the period, may be had (at 2s. 6d.) Six Weeks prior, at the Swan and Maidenhead, Stratford-on-Avon; the Bedford Hotel, and Mr. Evers' Library, Leamington; Dea's Royal Hotel, Birmingham; of Watt & Jagger, Esq., Salisbury; of Pugham, at the Auction Mart; and at Mr. ROBINS' Office in Covent Garden, as above. Alfred Robins, Printer, Vauxhall-bridge-st., Strand.

Figure 6. Flyer announcing the auction of Shakespeare's birthplace, Sep. 1847; *Saving Shakespeare's Birthplace*; 16 Sep.–29 Dec. 2017, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon.



SKETCH FROM THE SALE OF SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, AT THE AUCTION MART, SEPT. 16. 1847.

Figure 7. Sketch from the auction of Shakespeare's birthplace, 16 Sep. 1847; "Sale of Shakspeare's House"; *The Illustrated London News*, vol. 11, no. 282, 25 Sep. 1847, p. 208; *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive*, tinyurl.com/tso2tbr.

Manchester

THEATRE  ROYAL.

AMATEUR PERFORMANCE,
BY
CHAS. DICKENS, Esq.
AND FRIENDS,

In aid of the FUND for the ENDOWMENT of a PERPETUAL CURATORSHIP of
SHAKSPERE'S HOUSE,

To be always held by some one distinguished in literature, and more especially in Dramatic Literature.

(Extract from a Minute of the Shakspeare House Committee, dated 14th April, 1848.)

"The Committee, at the same time, would wish to convey to Mr. Charles Dickens, and the several gentlemen united with him, that as far as they can pledge themselves at present, it is their decided wish that Mr. SHERIDAN KNOWLES should be the gentleman recommended to the Government as Guardian of the House."

ON SATURDAY EVENING, JUNE 3rd, 1848,
Will be presented SHAKSPERE'S Comedy,

**THE MERRY WIVES
OF WINDSOR.**

<p>Sir John Falstaff Mr. MARK LEMON. Fenton Mr. CHARLES ROMER. Shallow (a Country Justice) ... Mr. CHARLES DICKENS. Slender (Cousin to Shallow) ... Mr. JOHN LEECH. Mr. Ford } Two gentlemen duell. } Mr. JOHN FORSTER. Mr. Page } ing at Windsor } Mr. FRANK STONE. Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh Parson. Mr. G. H. LEWES. Dr. Caius, a French Physician. Mr. DUDLEY COSTELLO. Host of the Garter Inn Mr. FREDK. DICKENS.</p>	<p>Bardolph } (Mr. COLE. Pistol..... } Followers of Falstaff } Mr. GEO. CRUIKSHANK. Nym..... } Mr. AUGUS. DICKENS. Simple, Servant to Slender ... Mr. AUGUSTUS EGG. Mrs. Page Miss KENWORTHY. Mrs. Ford Miss EMMELINE MONTAGUE. Mistress Anne Page, in love with Fenton, Miss ANNE ROMER. Mrs. Quickly, Servant to Dr. Caius, Mrs. COWDEN CLARKE.</p>
--	--

To conclude with Mrs. INCHBALL'S Farce of

ANIMAL MAGNETISM.

<p>The Doctor Mr. CHARLES DICKENS. La Flour Mr. MARK LEMON. The Marquis de Lancy Mr. JOHN LEECH.</p>	<p>Jeffrey Mr. GEO. CRUIKSHANK. Constance (with a Song) Miss ANNE ROMER. Lisette Miss EMMELINE MONTAGUE.</p>
--	--

Doors to be opened at Half-past Six, and the Performance to commence at Seven precisely,
By which time it is particularly requested the whole of the audience may be seated.

DRINK CIRCLE, Five Shillings;—PIT STALLS, Five Shillings;—UPPER CIRCLE, Three Shillings and Sixpence;—PIT, Two Shillings and Sixpence;—FIRST GALLERY, One Shilling and Sixpence;—SECOND GALLERY, One Shilling.

The admission to the Dress Circle and Pit Stalls by Tickets only, which may be obtained, and places secured, at the Box Office of the Theatre, on and after Tuesday the 30th instant, from Eleven till Two.

By order, FRANCIS ROBINSON, Honorary Secretary.

Care and Sever, Printers, 15, St. Ann's-street, Manchester.

Figure 8a. Flyer for amateur performances at Theatre Royal, London, 3 Jun. 1848.

ROYAL AMPHITHEATRE.
Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr. W. R. COPELAND, 15, Great Charlotte Street.

AMATEUR PERFORMANCE

IN AID OF THE FUNDS FOR THE
Endowment of a Perpetual Curatorship of Shakspeare's House,
To be always held by some one distinguished in Literature, and most especially in Dramatic Literature,
To be first bestowed on
MR. SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

Extract of a Minute from the Shakspeare's House Committee, dated 14th April, 1848.
"The Committee, &c., &c., would wish to convey to
MR. CHAS. DICKENS
And the several gentlemen united with him, that as far as they can pledge themselves at present, it is their decided wish that Mr. SHERIDAN KNOWLES should be the gentleman recommended to Government as the Guardian of the House."

On MONDAY Evening, June 5th,
Will be presented Shakspeare's Comedy of **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.**

Previous to the Play, a new Shaksperian Overture, composed, Selected and Arranged expressly for this Theatre by Mr. J. R. WEBB.

Sir John Falstaff.....	Mr. MARK LEMON
Fenton.....	Mr. CHARLES ROMER
Shallow.....	(a Country Justice)..... Mr. CHARLES DICKENS
Slender.....	(Cousin to Shallow)..... Mr. JOHN LEECH
Mr. Ford.....	Two Gentlemen Dwelling at Windsor { Mr. JOHN FORSTER
Mr. Page.....	(a Welsh Parson)..... Mr. FRANK STONE
Sir Hugh Evans.....	(a French Physician)..... Mr. G. H. LEWES
Dr. Caius.....	Mr. DUDLEY COSTELLO
Host of the Garter Inn.....	Mr. FREDERICK DICKENS
Bardolph.....	Mr. COLE
Pistol.....	Followers of Falstaff { Mr. GEORGE CRUIKSHANK
Nym.....	Mr. AUGUSTUS DICKENS
Simple.....	(Servant to Slender)..... Mr. AUGUSTUS EGG
Mrs. Ford.....	Miss EMMELINE MONTAGUE
Mrs. Page.....	Miss KENWORTHY
Miss Anne Page.....	(her Daughter, in love with Fenton)..... Miss ANNE ROMER
Mrs. Quickly.....	(Servant of D. Caius)..... Mrs. COWDEN CLARKE

The Costumes (of the Period of Henry IV.) by Messrs. Nathan, Titchbourne Street, London.

To conclude with Mr. Kenny's Farce of

LOVE, LAW, AND PHYSIC.

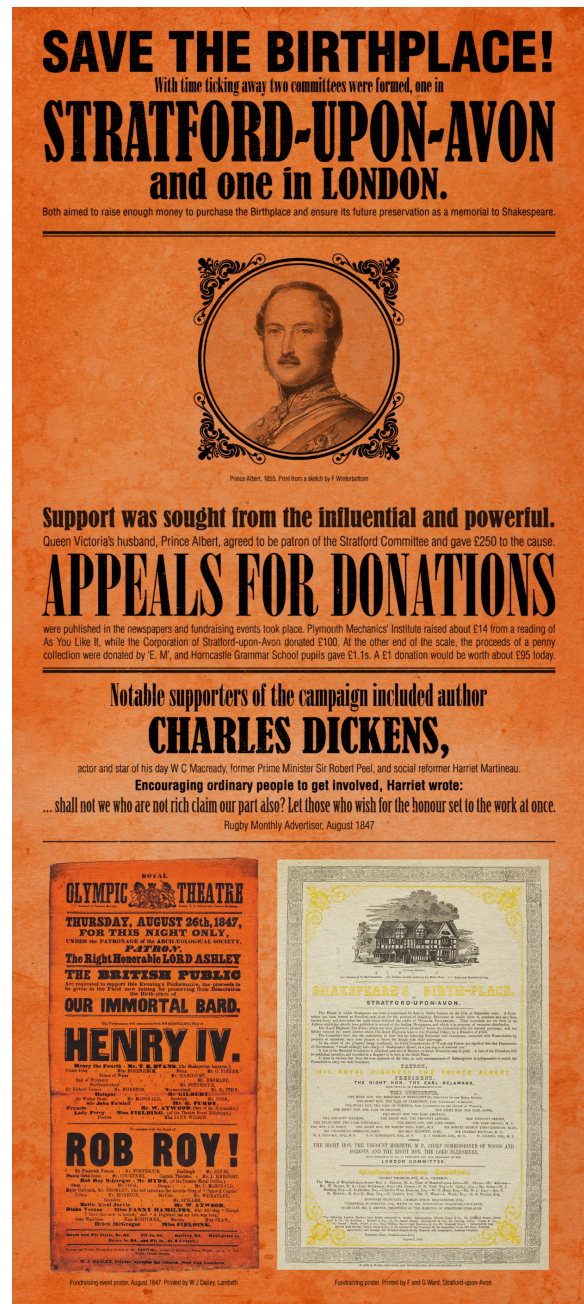
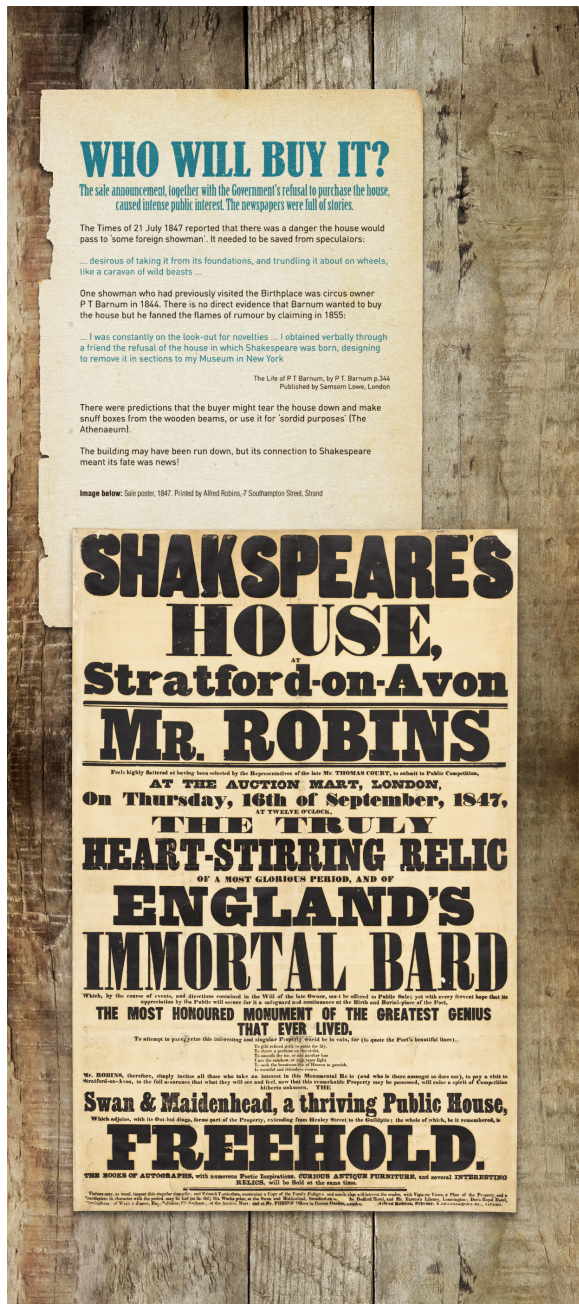
Doctor Camphor.....	Mr. GEORGE CRUIKSHANK
Captain Danvers.....	Mr. FREDERICK DICKENS
Flexible.....	Mr. CHARLES DICKENS
Andrew.....	Mr. G. LEWES
Lubin Log.....	Mr. MARK LEMON
John Brown.....	Mr. AUGUSTUS EGG
Coachman.....	Mr. COLE
Mrs. Hilary.....	Mrs. COWDEN CLARKE
Laura.....	Miss ANNE ROMER

Doors to open at half-past Six, and the Performance to commence at Seven o'clock precisely, by which time it is particularly requested the whole of the Audience may be seated.—The entrance to the Private Boxes & Pit Stalls, is in Roe-street.

Boxes and Stalls, 7s. 6d.; Pit, 5s.; Gallery, 2s.; Private Boxes, for Eight Persons, £4 4s.; for Four Persons, £2 2s.

The Box-office is open daily, from Eleven till Four o'clock.
It is particularly requested that all Places to be obtained by Ticket may be secured before Saturday, the 3rd of June.
No Money will be received on the Night of Performance, except at the Gallery Door.
RICHARD MUSPRATT, Hon. Sec., 1, Royal Bank Buildings.

Figure 8b. Flyer for amateur performances at Royal Amphitheatre, Liverpool, 5 Jun. 1848.



Figures. 9a–b. Adjacent exhibition panels featuring birthplace auction advertisements of 1847; *Saving Shakespeare's Birthplace*; 16 Sep.–29 Dec. 2017, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon.

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