



## A HISTORY OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON'S THEATRES

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- There have been performances in Stratford-upon-Avon since at least Shakespeare's day.
- The first building erected to commemorate Shakespeare was David Garrick's Jubilee Pavilion in 1769, and there have been at least 17 buildings used to perform Shakespeare's plays since.
- The first permanent commemorative building to Shakespeare's works in the town was built in the late 1870s, in the gardens of New Place, but has long since been demolished.
- The RSC's history began with the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which was the brainchild of a local brewer, Charles Edward Flower. He donated a two-acre site by the River Avon and in 1875 launched an international campaign to build a theatre in the town of Shakespeare's birth.
- The theatre, a Victorian-Gothic building seating just over 700 people, opened in 1879 with a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- The original estimate for building the theatre, art gallery and library was £11,224. However, the final bill was closer to £20,000 (the equivalent of just over £1 million today). Charles Flower donated £22,700, along with the land on which the building and gardens are situated. He also donated the building and cottages on the opposite side of the street to the theatre, the rents going towards the maintenance of the building.
- Contributions were also received from many supporters, including actor Sir Henry Irving, American actor Edwin Booth and archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann.
- Oscar Wilde called it "a beautiful building, one of the loveliest erected in England in many years".
- Plays were performed during the weeks of the festival designed to celebrate Shakespeare, which took place each spring. For the rest of the year, the building provided a venue for local events, in addition to a museum and library to study Shakespeare.
- The Memorial Theatre was awarded a Royal Charter in 1925 to recognise almost 50 years of excellence.
- In 1926, the theatre burned down, with only the library and art gallery being saved. The festival went ahead, with Archibald Flower, the nephew of Charles Flower, organising the use of the Stratford Picture House, owned by the family, as a temporary theatre.
- A fund to build a brand new theatre was launched. Originally, it was hoped to raise £100,000, but by November 1927, the sum was £230,818 (the equivalent of approximately £7 million today).
- An international competition was launched in January 1927 to find an architect for the new theatre. The design of 29-year-old Elisabeth Whitworth Scott, who studied at the Architectural Association in London, was chosen unanimously over 26 other designs. George Bernard Shaw commented that her design was the only one that showed any theatre sense. Her theatre was the first public building to be designed by a female architect.
- 1932 – New Shakespeare Memorial Theatre opens, abutting the remains of the old.
- 1961 – Chartered name of the corporation and the Stratford theatre becomes 'Royal Shakespeare.'
- 1974 – The Other Place opened, created from a prefabricated former store/rehearsal room in Stratford.
- 1986 – The Swan Theatre opened, created from the shell of the 1879 theatre from funds donated by Frederick Koch.
- 1991 – Purpose-built new The Other Place, designed by Michael Reardon, opens.
- September 2004 – The vision for the renewal of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre transformation is announced.
- July 2006 – The Courtyard Theatre opens with a staging of Michael Boyd's *Histories*.

- April 2007 – RST closes in preparation for Transformation project.
- November 2010 – Both the Royal Shakespeare and Swan theatres re-open for preview events and activities.
- 23 February 2011 – First full Shakespeare performance on the RST's stage is *King Lear*.
- 24 February 2011 – A young people's Shakespeare version of *Hamlet* opens in the Swan Theatre.

## PERFORMANCE HISTORY

- First performance in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (now the site of the Swan Theatre):  
23/04/1879 – *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- First performance in the RST (which, at the time, was still known as the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which had been re-built following the 1926 fire):  
23/04/1932 – *Henry VI, Part 1*.
- First performance in the re-named RST:  
04/04/1961 – *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- First performance in the Swan Theatre: 08/05/1986  
– *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.
- First performance in The Other Place:  
10/04/1974 – *King Lear*.
- First performance in The Courtyard Theatre (formerly the site of The Other Place):  
09/08/2006 – *Henry VI, Part 1*.
- First performance in the transformed Royal Shakespeare Theatre: 23/03/2011 – *King Lear*.
- First performance in the transformed Swan Theatre: 24/02/2011 – Young People's Shakespeare performance of *Hamlet*.