

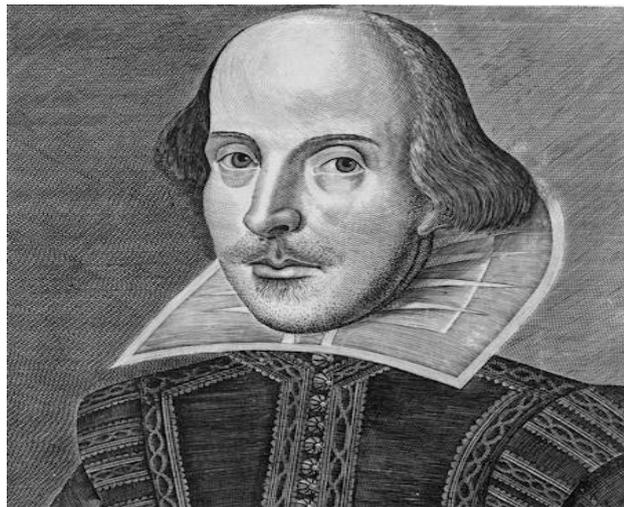
Shakespeare in New Romney

William Shakespeare, the English poet, playwright, and actor, visited New Romney at least three times between 1609 and 1615 to perform his plays.

From the 1500s, licensed actors were organised into permanent companies and in 1603 Shakespeares group was promoted to be the King's players. Formerly known as The Lord Chamberlain's Men during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, it became The King's Men in 1603 when King James I ascended the throne and became the company's patron.

It was as one of the leaders of these 'King's Men' that Shakespeare come to New Romney, with the company including Richard Burbage, the top tragic actor of the time.

More so than now, it was common practice for such theatre companies to tour the provinces, with few companies remaining in London during the summer or early autumn. Every country town with two thousand or more inhabitants reckoned on at least one visit from travelling actors during May and October. In addition, an outbreak of the bubonic plague (the Black Death) in London in 1609 meant that many theatres were closed and theatre companies had little choice but to go out of London to stage their plays.



An engraving of Shakespeare produced in 1622

Shakespeare, who was an actor himself as well as a playwright, came to New Romney with his theatre company in May 1609 and again in April 1612. They also went to Folkestone, Hythe and Rye. The performances in New Romney would have been in the town hall of the day, not the present one, which dates back to 1707.

It is not known which plays were staged on the first visit but Shakespeare's latest works by then were the comedy *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and the tragedy *Coriolanus*. The 'King's Men's' tour of 1612 was for *Julius Caesar* and *Othello* but it is not known which of the two were performed in New Romney.

The 'King's Men' usually consisted of nine actors, including Shakespeare, and it is known that the group was paid a total of 20 shillings for each show in New Romney.

William Shakespeare, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, died on his 52nd birthday on April 23, 1616.