



## Top 12... Literary highlights and attractions

- 1). **William Shakespeare** – born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1632, William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the world's most famous poet and playwright. A favourite of the Elizabethan Court, Shakespeare wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets, 2 long narrative poems and several other poems. His plays are as well loved today as they were 400 years ago, and almost 50% of the world's school children study his work.
- 2). **World Shakespeare Festival** - a celebration of Shakespeare as the world's playwright, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, in an unprecedented collaboration with leading UK and international arts organisations, and with Globe to Globe, a major international programme produced by Shakespeare's Globe. It runs from 23 April to November 2012 and forms part of London 2012 Festival, which is the culmination of the Cultural Olympiad, bringing leading artists from all over the world together in a UK-wide festival in the summer of 2012.
- 3). **Shakespeare's Houses** – the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust owns and manages five significant homes linked to William Shakespeare including Shakespeare's Birthplace, Anne Hathaway's Cottage (his wife's family home), Mary Ardens' Farm (his mother's family homestead), Nash's House and New Place, (his grand-daughters home), and Hall Croft (his daughter's home). All houses are open to the public and host excellent tours and events.
- 4). **Warwick Words** – a week-long festival held in Warwick celebrating 'words'. Warwick has literary connections with figures such as **Tolkien**, who was married in the Catholic church in West Street; **Philip Larkin**, whose parents moved from Coventry to a house in Coten End during the Second World War, and **Walter Savage Landor**, poet and prose writer, who was born in a house in Smith Street, Warwick in 1775 and whose friends included Dickens, Carlyle, Browning and Emerson. The Festival offers story writing and telling sessions, author's readings and performances, discussions, lectures and tours. The 2012 event will be held 1-9 October.
- 5). **Jane Austen** - See 'Sotherton Court' as it is described in Mansfield Park by looking up Stoneleigh Abbey, one-time country seat of Jane Austen's relatives. The author visited in 1806 and wove details of rooms, furnishings and family intrigues into her novels: not least the romantic saga of Elizabeth Lord – her portrait hangs in the Blue Parlour – which is mirrored in the experiences of Anne Elliot in Persuasion. Jane Austen tours are led by a costumed guide at Stoneleigh Abbey.
- 6). **Astley Book Farm**.- Find tomes to treasure at prices to please at one of the country's largest second-hand bookshops. The shop specialises in George Eliot books and has some first editions. Some 75,000 volumes are held, from fiction to antiquarian and out-of-print rarities. The imaginatively transformed farm buildings now boast a new coffee shop for lunch or afternoon tea.
- 7). **Follow in the footsteps of George Eliot** – Take a tour – walking, cycling or driving – in the steps of George Eliot to places the author knew from growing up in Warwickshire. Highlights include inspirations

for her Scenes of Clerical Life: Arbury Hall, model for the 'castellated house of grey-tinted stone' Cheverel Manor, and Astley Church, still recognisable as Knebley Church 'with coats of arms in clusters on the lofty roof'.

8). **Polesworth Poetry Trail** - Stir your imagination on a walk around Polesworth (north Warwickshire), following the trail of ten poems and sculptures that highlight landmarks and events in local history: the abbey and tales of the Devil, the River Anker and famous men – surprisingly, Polesworth was once an important gathering-place for poets such as John Donne, Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton and even Shakespeare.

9). **Elizabeth Gaskell** - As a child Elizabeth Stevenson – better known as the Victorian novelist Mrs Gaskell of Cranford fame – was sent away to school in Warwickshire, including at Barford. Although the neo-classical school building is now a private residence, you can still look around St Peter's Church which the pupils attended. Mrs Gaskell, a pen pal of George Eliot, would draw on her memories of Barford and 'the old low grey church' for her novella *Lois the Witch*.

10). **Rugby School** – the birthplace of the sport Rugby - is a leading co-educational independent boarding school. Rugby School's famous Headmaster, Dr Thomas Arnold, is immortalised in Thomas Hughes' book 'Tom Brown's School Days', which brought Baron Pierre de Coubertin to Rugby School. It was Arnold's legacy that inspired him here and fuelled his vision of the modern day **Olympic Games**. Other literary heroes that were schooled at Rugby include Lewis Carroll, Salman Rushdie and Matthew Arnold. Rugby was also the birthplace of poet Rupert Brooke and Rosemary Macauley.

11). **Shakespeare Country Driving itineraries** - Ideal for visitors on a short break, these circular routes allow you to discover for yourself the hidden secrets of Shakespeare Country. Explore market towns with their individual character and charm, relax in welcoming pubs with traditional ales and home cooked food, and discover peaceful churches, historic attractions and a range of craft and antique centres. Don't miss the The Bell Inn at Welford-on-Avon where Shakespeare drank with Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton and The Kings Head at Aston Cantlow where Shakespeare's parents celebrated their wedding breakfast. You may also like to solve a Shakespearian mystery at Charlecote Park where Shakespeare was allegedly caught poaching deer – the reason he later poked fun at owner Sir Thomas Lucy, 'Justice Shallow' in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV – Part II*. Or did Shakespeare hate Lucy for his persecution of Warwickshire Catholics and his role in the arrest of Edward Arden, head of the family of Shakespeare's mother?

12). **A Story Book in Stone** - Discover Warwickshire's oldest church, St Peter's in Wootton Wawen, and literally read a storybook in stone that begins in the 900s or even earlier, when the church tower was built. This 'one-stop encyclopaedia of English history' features the Saxon Sanctuary Exhibition spanning local life from Iron Age times to the third millennium, with plenty of twists and turns of plot.