

SHAKESPEARE COUNTRY: WARWICKSHIRE

Robin Jones

Millions of international visitors flock to Stratford-upon-Avon in search of Shakespeare, but it was out of the great medieval forest to the north that covered much of Warwickshire that the world's greatest playwright's family originated, and which provided the inspiration for many of his plays.

The volume looks at the heart of Shakespeare's Warwickshire – today, the classic towns and villages with their half-timbered cottages built from Arden oaks, its myths, romance and legend, its rivers and waterways, the green enclaves that survive on the edge of urban Birmingham and Solihull, and the places where the Shakespeare family lived for 300 years. It visits historical sites including moated manors, great houses and castles, the green oases that remain centuries after the forest was cleared, the tourist magnet of Stratford-upon-Avon and considers the artists that came out of the area after Shakespeare, including Hobbit creator JRR Tolkien.

Through more than 200 colour illustrations and a lively and informative text, Robin Jones provides the ideal guide to this much visited yet little known glory of England.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An English graduate of the University of Central England, Robin Jones was born in Shirley, Solihull, attended a grammar school in the town and became a news editor and chief investigative reporter at the *Birmingham Evening Mail* after several years covering Solihull for the paper.

He served as a councillor on Tanworth-in-Arden Parish Council and he and his wife Jenny and two children Vicky and Ross lived at Earlswood Lakes for ten years.

They are shareholders of a local football club, Highgate United, and Robin has also written extensively on non-league football over the years.

His first book, *A Solihull Century*, was published in 1997, and he has also written scripts for video films on the rivers Blythe and Aine and the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal.

Despite moving to Lincolnshire, where he founded *Heritage Railway* magazine, a national glossy enthusiast title, as a photo journalist he has continued to produce historical features on Solihull and Warwickshire for a variety of publications. He is also editor of the British fan magazine for the Beach Boys.

HALSGROVE CATALOGUE

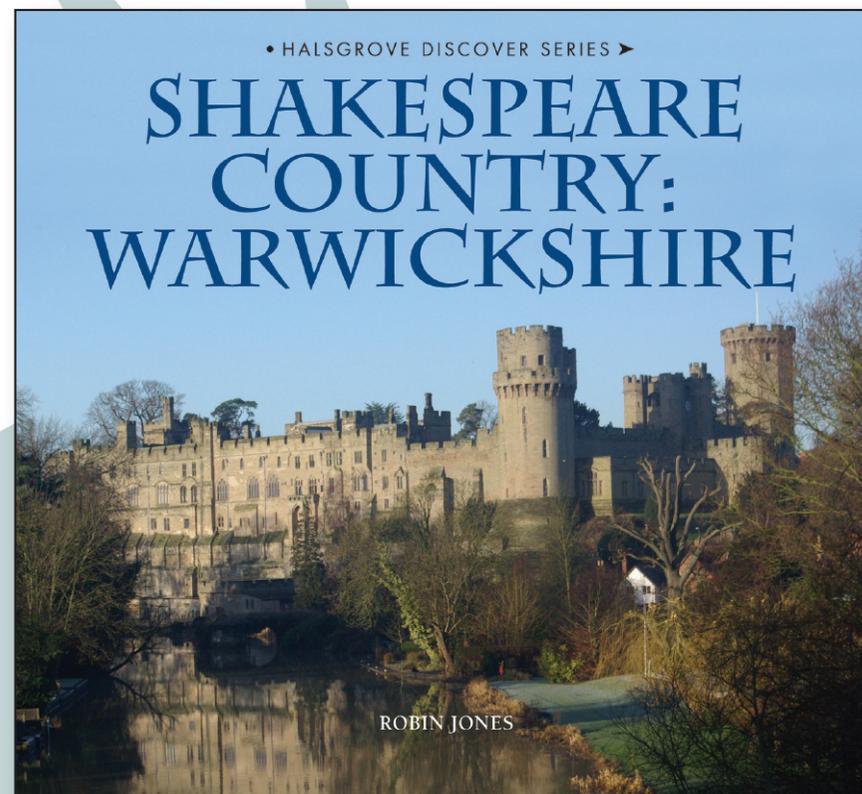
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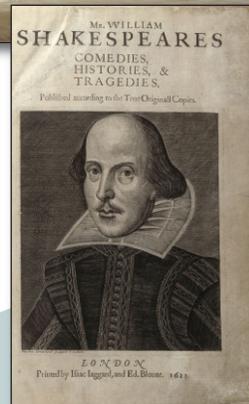


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The birthplace of William Shakespeare in Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon.



The cover of the first folio of 1623.

Example of a double-page spread.



3 THE HEART OF THE FOREST

Ullenhall, Morton Bagot, Preston Bagot, Claverdon, Yarnington, Lowsford

For those wishing to explore deeper Arden, Henley is an excellent place to begin. However, do not expect surprises to modern tourist attractions, as amenities tend not to be more than what you will be no more or less than classic Warwickshire villages nestled in rolling countryside, without the more excessive trappings of commercialisation. Like tourist hotspots elsewhere, they are steeped in history, but you have to find it for yourself, and for many, there is their beauty.

Beginning their existence as forest clearings, and ancient agricultural communities in their own right, what was the historic heartland of Henley's market is now the West Midlands stock-broker hub. Cottages built for farmworkers are now the homes of wealthy commuters, who have abandoned them to perfection.

While Shakespeare instantly comes to mind when Warwickshire is mentioned in any artistic context, the county has been home to many other writers and artists, including an eighteenth-century literary circle which gathered around a steady home in the village of Ullenhall to the west of Henley.

Ullenhall's great mistress, Harriet Hall, was house to Henrietta, Lady Lashborough, banished there by her husband's family after an alleged affair, about which few details ever came to light.

Born around 1700, a half sister to Viscount Bolingbroke, Minister of State to Queen Anne, it was said that Henrietta was taught music by Handel.

In 1722, she married Robert Knight, son of the captain of the South Sea Company – the very same behind the infamous South Sea Bubble. A false economic boom occurred when wild speculation sent the company's shares soaring during 1720, only for the price to spectacularly crash. Henrietta's future father-in-law fled to the continent, but later returned after being pardoned.

Floral displays in the centre of Ullenhall, as seen outside the Old Post Office, now a private house, near Lady Lashborough's gardening interest.



The ruined keep of Kenilworth Castle, vandalism courtesy of Oliver Cromwell.



A summer's day on the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal, as seen from the gardens of the Fleur de Lys.



Henley-in-Arden's famous ice cream parlour.