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KNOWSLEY



Much Ado About Nothing performed at Knowsley Hall by The Lord Chamberlain's Men



SHAKESPEARE AT KNOWSLEY HALL

The year 2016 marked the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, England's greatest playwright and poet. His many connections with the Stanley family in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were celebrated last summer and autumn with three very special events at Knowsley Hall.



Much Ado About Nothing

In August, a memorable sell-out performance of the hilarious, cross-dressing romantic comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, took place on the east terrace gardens with all 750 tickets sold in partnership with Knowsley Borough

Council. The Lord Chamberlain's Men, an all-male touring company, just as all the acting companies were in Shakespeare's lifetime, put on a production full of verve and wit. The event was deemed a great success and further plays will be performed outdoors at the Hall in future.

An International Symposium

In October ten leading Shakespearean scholars from around the world came to the Hall to present their latest exciting research on Shakespeare's connections with the Earls of Derby, their Elizabethan and Jacobean acting companies, and their theatrical links across the North West. Ferdinando, 5th Earl of Derby (c. 1559-94), when known by his courtesy title of Lord Strange, was patron of one of England's leading acting companies known as Lord Strange's Men, who were active during the late 1580s and early 1590s. They performed new plays by young playwrights including Marlowe and Shakespeare at Court as well as at the Rose theatre in Southwark and at venues across England including the principal Stanley family residences in the North West, at Knowsley and Lathom. After the 5th Earl's murder by arsenic poisoning in 1594, his leading actors – among whom were Shakespeare and the comic star Will Kemp – formed the backbone of the newly founded Lord Chamberlain's Men, and they went on to create the Globe theatre on the South Bank. This lively conference, which was organised by the Curator in association with Professor Elspeth Graham of Liverpool John Moores University, together with the Shakespeare North Trust, was held in a packed Stucco Ballroom. It was attended by over 120 people, including academics, curators, literary scholars, historians and theatre professionals. Also present were many interested local people, who are involved with the forthcoming recreation of a Jacobean playhouse in Prescot, which will be based on original seventeenth-century designs for the Cockpit Theatre at Whitehall Palace. This exciting project, which will include a postgraduate centre for Shakespearean studies, is set to open on a key site next to the parish church in Prescot before the end of 2020, and will play a major role in the regeneration of Prescot and educational aspiration across the borough of Knowsley and the North West.

The Recreation of Sir Thomas Salusbury's Twelfth Night Masque at Knowsley Hall

On the night before the Shakespeare symposium, a memorable candlelit dinner was held in the State Dining Room for the

Chef, Paul Macnish, created a special Elizabethan menu, based on research from actual Tudor recipes. During the evening a programme of lively Elizabethan and Stuart dance music, comprised of pavaues and galliards, was performed in Tudor costume by Tapestry of Music, Glynis and Brian Radford, who played a small selection from their extensive collection of replica instruments including shawms and pipes.



After dinner there was a unique recreation – as a staged reading – of Sir Thomas Salusbury's 'A Masque at Knowsley Hall', which had been first performed on Twelfth Night in 1640-41 by the Derby family, household and friends.

On the eve of the Civil War this was originally conceived as a spirited dialogue or contest between the ebullient figure of Christmas and his gambols, contrasted with the puritanical figure of Dr Apothecary and his wraiths. The symbolism of the masque prefigured the chaos and destruction of the Civil War, when Parliament and Cromwell's New Model Army overcame the monarchy and royalist forces, an event that left both King Charles I and James, 7th Earl of Derby, being executed and losing their heads. The playhouses were shut down and Christmas was abolished. This energetic and moving re-staging was directed by Professor Kathy Dacre and performed by students from Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance, while Lord and Lady Derby, staff and friends also read the parts of the Twelve Months. The lead roles were memorably read by Julian Jones (Rose Bruford College) as Dr Apothecary and by the well-known screenwriter The Lord Fellowes as Christmas, whose exuberant performance was memorably curtailed by the whirling ghosts who led him away from the scene.



The Lord Fellowes as 'Christmas'

The after-dinner entertainment then culminated with a first-ever musical reconstruction of a pavane or stately musical dance written for a plucked stringed instrument, known as an opharion, which had been composed by William, 6th Earl of Derby. He was keenly interested in performance, being patron of his own acting troupe as well as of 'Paul's Children', a leading company of child actors in London. The 6th Earl was not only a patron of musicians but a composer himself. This modern recreation of 'The Earl of Derby's Pavane' was made by Dr Jim Wrightson and performed in Elizabethan costume by four dancers from the company lighteningtree. The musical reconstruction and performance of the pavane was co-ordinated by Professor Elspeth Graham. The whole evening was a memorable event and set the scene most appropriately for the exciting new Shakespearean research being presented at the symposium the following day.