

THE KING'S LYNN SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

A Proposal

If I may introduce myself. My name is Andrew Jarvis, and I have been a professional actor and director for 50 years. The last 30 years have been spent predominantly in the works of Shakespeare – and as a result, he has become my major passion and focus. As well as my work as an actor and director in the field, I am also a Board Member of the British Shakespeare Association and Chair of its Fellowship Committee. To give you a fuller sense of my work to date, I have attached my professional Biography with this Proposal.

I became a resident of King's Lynn over two and a half years ago and live in the village of Clenchwarton just outside the town.

I could not be more thrilled to be living in this wonderful town. Among its many delights - and particularly in view of my profession - the Guildhall of St. George stands out as one of its jewels. I have been afforded a tour of the building and its facilities, as well as witnessing a performance by a local amateur group in the theatre. I have to say that I was so impressed by not only the building and its facilities, but also by the potential that the Guildhall offers for a fully developed Arts Centre. Everything about it is so exciting that I can only hope and wish that its so rich potential will be realised. I believe that it could truly become the richest of assets to the town - a place where the community's arts life could flourish and be celebrated. A vibrant and popular centre for the community, as well as a focus of excellence.

Within that context, I should like to propose in this document the creation of a King's Lynn Shakespeare Festival – to be based at the Guildhall of St. George.

Introduction

There is a growing body of evidence which may lead us to assume that the Guildhall of St. George in Kings Lynn, whilst being the oldest and largest Medieval Guildhall surviving in the country, also qualifies as the oldest Guildhall to have offered working theatre, and may indeed be the only surviving Guildhall in which Shakespeare performed.

The accumulating evidence suggests that Shakespeare probably appeared at our Guildhall as a member of the acting company known as The Earl of Pembroke's Men in the year 1592.

What an extraordinary possibility. As the facts become more substantiated, we may arrive at the position of King's Lynn being of central importance as a location for Shakespeare's work.

This reason alone makes a celebration of the work of Shakespeare even more appropriate to the town of King's Lynn, with its extraordinary historical buildings and rich culture. The glorious Guildhall of St. George would seem to be the perfect setting within that context for a Shakespearean Festival.

The Festival Content

My proposal envisages a Festival lasting over a period of two days – a Saturday and Sunday.

The content would be made up of two strands :

(i) **Performance**

(ii) **Lectures and Discussion**

(i) Performance : Throughout my career I have been fortunate indeed to work with some of the leading performers and directors of our generation. Some of these people I count as both colleagues and friends and I am confident that I could enlist their support for our Festival. Their physical presence would also be the strongest of possibilities – obviously depending on dates and availability.

Among those names would be : Dame Janet Suzman, Sir Ian McKellen, Sir Trevor Nunn, Ralph Fiennes and Michael Pennington.

Both Sir Ian and Michael have current One-Man Shakespearean stand-alone programmes which I am sure that I could prevail upon them to perform. Equally, Dame Janet and Ralph would I am sure be open to performing speeches or scenes for the Festival. There could also be the possibility of Sir Trevor leading a Shakespearean Masterclass with all or some of these actors.

There would be an obvious cross-over too into the Lectures and Discussion part of the Festival programme for these participants.

In addition, I would also call upon some of my professional colleagues and friends to join with me in presenting speeches and/or scenes from the Sonnets and the Plays. Actors of the calibre of Chris Hunter (who himself has a current One-Man performance of “Venus and Adonis” in production and on tour), Jessica Turner, Jasper Britton, Michael Fenner, Mike Burnside and Graham Turner.

(ii) Lectures and Discussion : Through my membership of the Board of the British Shakespeare Association it has been my great good fortune to work with and to get to know many leading Shakespearean academics – some of whom I now count as friends. As with my performance colleagues, I am sure that I could enlist both their presence and support for the Festival.

Among those names would be : Emeritus Professor Andrew Gurr (the leading expert on Elizabethan and Shakespearean performance practise and on the nature of provincial touring among the Early Modern Theatre troupes), Sir Stanley Wells (the foremost Shakespearean Scholar of his generation), Emeritus Professor John Drakakis (Among many other publications, Editor of the latest Arden 3 edition of “The Merchant of Venice”), Professor Alison Findlay (Head of Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama at the University of Lancaster), Professor Michael Dobson (Director of The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-Upon-Avon) and Dr. Paul Edmondson (Director of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-Upon-Avon).

I believe that the intermingling of these two strands of Performance and Lectures and Discussion, rightly timetabled, would give an extraordinarily rich experience for everyone present.

It would also be my wish to include sessions, involving both strands of the Festival, where our audience would be fully and actively involved in the proceedings.

Finance

As a Member of the Board of the British Shakespeare Association, I am fully aware of the Grant Aid which they are able to give to this kind of project. I am therefore fully confident that I would be able to obtain a Grant from the BSA to

support the venture. This may be anything up to a figure of around £500 – not a King's Ransome, but certainly a beginning.

In addition, I would look to local business for support. I know that there are several Companies who might look with a sympathetic eye on sponsorship for our Festival. It would take hard work, but I am convinced that there is the possibility of being viewed with that sympathetic eye for such a first-time creative venture.

In terms of expenditure, this would be kept to the very minimum wherever possible. There are unavoidable expenses – such as the hire of the Guildhall itself, programmes, refreshments etc, but beyond that, as I say, it would have to be minimum.

I would certainly want to offer the Festival to the people of King's Lynn on a free basis.

Regarding the services of the participant performers in the Festival, I shall be looking more for their goodwill and financially unrewarded involvement. I think for such a prestigious and exciting first venture into a Shakespeare Festival, they will join me in wanting to offer their support for no payment. That is, if their loyalty to our friendship will stretch that far!

I will certainly offer them travel expenses, because it would be unfair to ask anyone to be out of pocket as a result of their voluntary support. I shall also offer them all food and refreshment to be paid for by the Festival, as a result of the financial support that I hope to obtain.

In terms of overnight accommodation for the participants, I will endeavour to use the same practise as that currently employed by the King's Lynn Fiction and Poetry Festivals – the use of private homes. Although our Festival would be an unknown quantity in terms of having that existing group of people willing to provide accommodation, I'm sure that a crossover of interest between the Festivals would present enough people willing to open their homes. I myself have four spare bedrooms as a starting point – and I can't believe that there won't be any offers to accommodate Sir Ian McKellen or Ralph Fiennes for a couple of nights!

I have presented quite a general picture of what I propose, but I hope that it will be sufficient to provide a flavour of what I would be able to do. Thank you so much for your attention.

Andrew Jarvis