**Shakespeare's life**

During Shakespeare’s time, the English cared little about keeping biographical information unrelated to affairs of the church or state. In addition, playwriting was not a highly regarded occupation, and so people saw little point in recording the lives of mere dramatists. However, a number of records exist that deal with Shakespeare’s life. They include church registers and accounts of business dealings. Although these records are few and incomplete by modern standards, they provide much information. By relating these records to various aspects of English history and society, scholars have constructed a believable and largely comprehensive account of Shakespeare’s life. However, gaps remain. Perhaps the most frustrating gap is the general absence of personal papers that might provide access to the playwright’s thoughts and feelings. As a result, biographers almost always examine the plays and poems for autobiographical clues.

**His life in Stratford**

Shakespeare’s parents belonged to what today would be called the middle class. John Shakespeare, William’s father, was a glove maker who owned a shop in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Stratford is about 75 miles (120 kilometers) northwest of London in the county of Warwickshire. John Shakespeare was a respected man in the town and held several important positions in the local government.

William Shakespeare’s mother was born Mary Arden. She was the daughter of a farmer but related to a family of considerable social standing in the county. John Shakespeare married Mary Arden about 1557. The Ardens were Roman Catholics. Mary may also have been a Catholic, but the Shakespeares publicly belonged to the Church of England, the state church.

**Early years.**William Shakespeare was born in the small market town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, the third of eight children. The register of Holy Trinity, the parish church in Stratford, records his baptism on April 26. According to the custom at that time, infants were baptized about three days after their birth. Therefore, the generally accepted date for Shakespeare’s birth is April 23.

The Shakespeares were a family of considerable local prominence. In 1565, John Shakespeare became an alderman. Three years later, he was elected *bailiff*(mayor), the highest civic honor that a Stratford resident could receive. Later, he held several other civic posts. But toward the end of his life, John Shakespeare had financial problems.

Beginning at about the age of 7, William probably attended the Stratford grammar school with other boys of his social class. The school’s highly qualified teachers were graduates of Oxford University. Students spent about nine hours a day in school. They attended classes the year around, except for three brief holiday periods. The teachers enforced strict discipline and physically punished students who broke the rules. The students chiefly studied Latin, the language of ancient Rome. Knowledge of Latin was necessary for a career in medicine, law, or the church. In addition, the ability to read Latin was considered a sign of an educated person. Young Shakespeare may have read such outstanding ancient Roman authors as Cicero, Ovid, Plautus, Seneca, Terence, and Virgil.

In spite of the long hours he spent in school, Shakespeare’s boyhood was probably not all boring study. As a market center, Stratford was a lively town. In addition, holidays provided popular pageants and shows, including plays about the legendary outlaw Robin Hood and his merry men. By 1569, traveling companies of professional actors were performing in Stratford. Stratford also held two large fairs each year, which attracted numerous visitors from other counties. For young Shakespeare, Stratford could thus have been an exciting place to live.

Stratford also offered other pleasures. The fields and woods surrounding the town provided opportunities to hunt and trap small game. The River Avon, which ran through the town, had fish to catch. Shakespeare’s poems and plays show a love of nature and rural life. This display undoubtedly reflects his childhood experiences and his love of the Stratford countryside.

**Marriage.**On Nov. 27, 1582, Shakespeare received a license to marry Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a local farmer. The two families knew each other, but the details of the relationship between William and Anne have been a source of speculation. At the age of 18, William was young to marry, while Anne at 26 was of normal marrying age. The marriage appears to have been hurried, and the birth of their first child, Susanna, in May 1583 came only six months after marriage. Some scholars have suggested that William may have been forced to marry Anne because she was pregnant. However, birth and marriage records indicate that many women in England at that time were already pregnant before they married, and so Shakespeare’s marriage was not unusual. Early in 1585, Anne gave birth to twins, Judith and Hamnet. The record of baptism marks the start of an important gap in the documentary evidence of Shakespeare’s life.

**The lost years.**Scholars have referred to the period between 1585 and 1592, when Shakespeare was called an “upstart” by a London writer, as the “lost years.” Scholars have proposed a number of theories about his activities during that time. But what is certain is that some time before 1592 Shakespeare arrived in London and began to work in the theater.

Lander, Jesse M. "Shakespeare, William." *World Book Student*. World Book, 2016. Web. 26 Sept. 2016.