

## GETAWAY

Church Street Town House in Stratford



# The Bard's birthplace has another claim to fame...

**N**OW everyone knows where Shakespeare came from but not many people know that Stratford Upon Avon also gave us the Teletubbies!

That was just one of the fascinating facts I learned during a great late spring weekend break to the birthplace of the Bard.

Just two hours down the motorway, but a world away from rainy Manchester, is what can only be described as a town that has been turned into a real-life theme park.

Everywhere in Stratford you see references to its most famous son and 'must sees' for the hordes of tourists from around the world range from the house where Shakespeare was born (amazingly still standing after over four and a half centuries!) to his last resting place inside the beautiful parish church... and almost everywhere he went in between.

This includes the young Will's schoolhouse - still standing all these generations later and directly across the narrow road from our hotel, the almost as old and interesting Church Street Townhouse.

We were the guests of this friendly

**STEVE HOWARTH** visits Stratford as Shakespeare's hometown marks the 400th anniversary of the death of its most famous son

and welcoming establishment, which is right in the heart of 'Shakespeare-land'. The Grade II listed building is a warm, buzzy and welcoming place and has 12 quirky rooms, all providing luxurious en-suite accommodation.

It also boasts a busy bar and all-day brasserie with live music and the atmosphere when we stayed was terrific, with guests from around the world enjoying a traditional pint of Brakspear (don't think there is a link with old Will) and the comfort of a traditional British boozie.

With this year being the 400th anniversary year of Shakespeare's death, Stratford was particularly busy

and the Townhouse is a perfect place to stay, being just a few minutes walk from all the major Bard hotspots.

In the same street are ancient Almshouses and Stratford's oldest pub as well as the playwright's later home - imaginatively name the 'New Place' - and a charming ancient chapel.

Just a few minutes stroll away is the river and Royal Shakespeare Company theatre and the starting point for our first adventure, The Stratford Town Walk. This is where our guide, the knowledgeable and theatrical Owen, took us, and a gaggle of excited tourists from as far

away as China and America, on a two-hour tour of all the key sites in 'Shakespeareland'.

Despite his youth Owen seemed to know his stuff and we learned a great deal about the Bard and Stratford, including the fact that BBC children's favourites the Teletubbies were created in a Stratford town centre studio.

Thoroughly worth the effort, the Town Walk is a great way to make sure you don't miss anything in this bustling tourist hotspot. There is also a Town Ghost Walk for the more adventurous as Stratford lays claim to being one of the most haunted towns in England, with one pub alone said to have 40 resident spooks!

We then stepped aboard one of the Canal and River Tours boats for a 40-minute cruise through locks and onto the river where there were more fascinating Shakespeare facts to learn as the world slipped by at a leisurely three miles per hour.

There really are a wealth of attractions to choose from and we visited the helpful website [www.shakespeares-england.co.uk](http://www.shakespeares-england.co.uk) before setting off. Amongst the many venues listed one particularly caught my eye... the recently renamed and reopened British Motor Museum, just a 20-minute drive from Stratford.

As the M.E.N.'s motoring editor (and a total petrolhead) I could not miss the chance to see a huge line-up of cars spanning almost a century of British production, particularly those made in the Midlands like Austins, Rovers and Jaguars as well as cars from all parts of the country.

There are also weird and wonderful creations including numerous prototypes which never made it into production - like a jet turbine-powered 1960s Rover and a four-seater TR7! It's another must see.

Back to Stratford and, after a great night's sleep and hearty full English breakfast, we left 'Shakespeareland' wondering what the great man would have made of it all... and if hordes of tourists will be coming to see the birthplace of the Teletubbies in 400 years time!

## NEED TO KNOW

■ Rooms at The Church Street Townhouse are from £110 to £200 per night including a full breakfast. For more information see [www.churchst-th.co.uk](http://www.churchst-th.co.uk). Other useful sites to visit are:

■ [www.shakespeares-england.co.uk](http://www.shakespeares-england.co.uk) - [www.stratfordtownwalk.co.uk](http://www.stratfordtownwalk.co.uk) - [www.canalandrivertours.com](http://www.canalandrivertours.com) and [www.britishmotormuseum.co.uk](http://www.britishmotormuseum.co.uk).