Royal Shakespeare Company launches The Play's



The Play's The Thing explores the history of staging Shakespeare's plays

Tomorrow the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) opens the doors of the first exhibition to be held in the newly restored Swan Wing of the theatre, made possible by a grant of £2.8million from HLF.

The Play's The Thing explores the history of staging Shakespeare's plays, focusing on the development and theatre-making of the RSC on the site since 1879.

Shakespeare's plays have been performed in Stratford-Upon-Avon in Warwickshire, where the renowned playwright was born, lived and laid to rest, for over 240 years. The project reveals the stories behind iconic moments in the history of theatre through fascinating original objects from the RSC and Memorial Theatre's archive collection and immersive digital interpretation.

Highlights of the collection

Visitors will get the chance to see the exceptional Chandos Portrait of Shakespeare, painted during the playwright's lifetime, which is on loan from the National Portrait Gallery until 18 December.

Another highlight of the collection is the First Folio, one of only 234 surviving copies of the collection of Shakespeare's plays published in 1623.

Geraldine Collinge, Director of Events and Exhibitions, said: "We have been researching, planning and building this exhibition for over two years, and we are very excited that we can now open the doors and share the many wonderful and fascinating stories behind the making of our productions with our visitors. I'm particularly looking forward to sharing some of the wonderful objects from the RSC Collection that people don't normally get the opportunity to see."

These objects include beautifully crafted costumes and props worn by stars such as Dame Judi Dench, Sir Laurence Olivier and Sir Ian McKellen.

The exhibition is part of a wider project to restore and redevelop the Grade II* listed Swan Wing, the only surviving part of the original Victorian theatre. After the careful restoration of the building's original gothic features, the Swan Wing partially re-opened in April 2016 with a new artwork by artist Steven Follen. To mark this second opening, a new illustration has been commissioned to tell the story of the RSC in Stratford by artist Vic Lee.

Marking Shakespeare 400 in Stratford-Upon-Avon

2016 marks the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare and thanks to National Lottery players, we have invested over £7.5m in Stratford to celebrate the life and works of the Bard.



The timbered 15th-century Guildhall at King Edward VI School

Celebrating Shakespeare 400 in Stratford