

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT THEMES AND RESOURCES

Professor Ewan Fernie, Project Director, introduces the 6 core themes of the ‘Everything to Everybody’ Project.

1 Shakespeare, Inclusion and Working-Class Communities

Birmingham’s Shakespeare Library holds the only First Folio in the world acquired for comprehensive (including working-class) education, and its founders expressly intended the Library to open high culture up for all the people of the city. ‘Everything to Everybody’ seeks to recover this inspiring history. It also seeks to find new ways to remake Shakespeare with people and communities across Birmingham who might not otherwise think that Shakespeare and traditional British culture belongs to them.

2 Shakespeare, Nonconformity and Diversity

The founders of Birmingham’s Shakespeare Library were all Nonconformists in religion, and George Dawson and others are buried in Birmingham’s Nonconformist cemetery, Key Hill. But Birmingham has, throughout its history, encouraged ‘nonconformism’ in many other ways; and Dawson himself advocated and worked to achieve a rich, diverse culture which maximised such freedom. Dawson taught that the sheer diversity of Shakespeare’s characters afforded an image of what a more progressive and tolerant modern world might be. ‘Everything to Everybody’ seeks to connect Shakespeare with Birmingham’s Nonconformist history and with new forms of nonconformism and freedom of expression across the contemporary city.

3 Birmingham and Europe

Birmingham’s Shakespeare Library holds extensive collections in European languages, with an astonishingly rich array of especially German and French materials. Thoroughly European in his outlook, George Dawson strode the barricades of Paris after the revolution of 1848. He was a great supporter of freedom movements in Hungary, Italy and Poland. He was also a devotee of German literature, including German interpretations of Shakespeare – which he argued made Shakespeare more relevant to people’s actual lives. ‘Everything to Everybody’ will celebrate and seek to explore and extend these cosmopolitan connections between Shakespeare, Europe and Birmingham, past and present.

4 A Shakespearean Commonwealth

Birmingham's Shakespeare Library was multi-cultural and multi-lingual from the first. It is a repository of global interpretation and creative response to the world's great dramatist from the West Midlands. 'Everything to Everybody' will explore and celebrate the Library's rich Commonwealth holdings and connections in anticipation of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. George Dawson wanted to establish a 'cultural commonwealth' in the city, but the city has changed considerably since his time, and British cultural imperialism has been criticised. Even while it brings out the intrinsic diversity of the world's first great people's Shakespeare Library, the 'Everything to Everybody' Project will identify current barriers to cultural inclusion, developing new ways of transcending them in the interests of making traditional British heritage more inviting and open.

5 Beautiful Birmingham: Art and Welfare

Nineteenth-century Birmingham came to be regarded as the most artistic town in England. George Dawson explicitly intended Birmingham to be a new Venice or Florence. In fact, he intended Birmingham to be more beautiful than Venice or Florence, because the beauty of Birmingham had an extra, moral dimension deriving from the fact that in Birmingham culture was meant to be shared more equally with everybody. The Shakespeare Library is the best surviving monument to the ethos of linking welfare and culture that Birmingham pioneered. 'Everything to Everybody' will recover this heritage for a city which has often been unfairly maligned as a place without significant architectural or cultural heritage; but it will also explore and pose important questions about the relationship between heritage and welfare in Birmingham now.

The project will culminate with an 'Everything to Everybody' Festival themed around:

6 Ophelia's Flowers: Bringing Shakespeare to Life in Birmingham

Dawson said that Shakespeare was 'the water of life'. He and the founders of the Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library wanted to bring Shakespeare back to life in Birmingham and the 'Everything to Everybody' Project shares that ambition, aiming to bring Shakespeare to life in Birmingham now. In what he called 'A Week-Day Sermon from Shakespeare', Dawson preached in the city on the theme of 'Ophelia's Flowers'. He believed there was a chance to rescue the 'thousands' of Ophelias alive in his day from the doom that Shakespeare's heroine suffers. In honour of Ophelia, Shakespeare and Dawson, the culminating 'Everything to Everybody' Festival will cover the Shakespeare Memorial Room in the Library of Birmingham with flowers. It will celebrate the 'thousands' of Ophelias – of all ages and races – alive in Birmingham now. And it will turn a funeral into a carnival.

Birmingham's Shakespeare Memorial Library is for everyone. Its resources extend far beyond Shakespeare texts, including, but not limited to:

- Local history: the Shakespeare collection makes fascinating links between Shakespeare, Birmingham and the West Midlands; and this project links it with the Library of Birmingham's George Dawson and broader Birmingham collections
- Shakespeare and artwork e.g. illustrations by Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, costume designs by Jean Cocteau
- Shakespeare and photography of productions across ages
- Shakespeare and botany (cross-references Birmingham's collection of Pre-Raphaelite artwork with large number of books on botany in Shakespeare)
- Shakespeare and thousands of musical scores
- Printing from holdings in Birmingham's own Baskerville type to fine printing from Weimar
- Languages: the collection spans items in 93 languages, including 1880s editions in Braille
- Posters from many cultures and constituencies, including historic examples from British schools
- Shakespeare scrapbooks, where individuals have curated their own collection of news, ephemera from productions, illustrations, etc., often presenting them personally

“Everything to Everybody’ really does seek to involve as many people as possible, from across the diverse communities of the city. We’re unlocking the world’s first great Shakespeare library for all, and we want to join with you in re-interpreting and re-making traditional British culture for Birmingham now. This ambitious project will put Birmingham back on the map as a great progressive Shakespearean city, celebrating and promoting a new cultural commonwealth in time for Birmingham 2022.”

Professor Ewan Fernie, Project Director.

EVERYTHING TO EVERYBODY

Using Birmingham's forgotten past to inspire our future:
Unlocking the world's first great people's Shakespeare Library for all



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Professor Ewan Fernie with the bust of
George Dawson.



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HERITAGE
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WEST MIDLANDS
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For more information about the 'Everything to Everybody' Project please see the project website
<https://everythingtoeverybody.bham.ac.uk/> or email shakespeare@birmingham.gov.uk