

A rare early quarto of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*. London: Mathew Law, 1608. 6 7/8 inches x 5 inches (175 mm x 127 mm), [80] pages, A–K4.

The | history of | Henry the fourth, | VVith the battell at Shrewseburie, |
betweene the King, and Lord | Henry Percy, surnamed Henry | Hotspur of the
north. | With the humorous conceites of Sir Iohn Falstalffe. Newly corrected
by W. Shake-speare. | [ornament] | London, | Printed for *Mathew Law*, and
are to be sold at | his shop in Paules Church-yard, neere vnto S. | *Augustines*
gate, at the signe of | the Foxe. 1608.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

Henry IV, Part 1 begins where *Richard II* (1595) leaves off — following Henry’s usurpation and Richard’s death. Henry immediately faces rebellion by supporters of Richard. In the climax of the play, a rebel force led by the Percy family of Northumberland that sought to join a group of Welsh rebels is engaged by the forces of Henry IV in the Battle of Shrewsbury (21 July 1403). Henry’s men, led by Prince Hal his young son, win the battle, although casualties are high on both sides. Ironically, the Percy family had assisted Henry only three years before in deposing Richard. But when land in Cumbria that the Percys felt were their just reward was given to a rival, they were greatly offended and joined the uprising against Henry.

This British Library copy of the fourth quarto of *Henry IV, Part 1* is bound in nineteenth-century red-brown morocco with gold tooling. A stamp on the verso of the front free endpaper (“BOUND BY F. BEDFORD”) identifies this as the work of the noted nineteenth-century London binder Francis Bedford (1799–1883). The spine is divided into six compartments, with “SHAKE | SPEARE | HENRY | THE | FOURTH” in gold within the second spine compartment, and “LOND. | 1608” in the third. The edges of the boards and the turn-ins are also gold tooled, and the leaves’ edges are gilt. A hand-written note by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps regarding this quarto’s rarity is pasted on the verso of the front free endpaper.

This quarto, before its acquisition by the British Museum in 1858, was owned by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps (1820–1889), the English Shakespeare collector and scholar whose *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (1848) was published in several editions. Beginning in the 1870s, he devoted

his time completely to the research of Shakespeare's life. Halliwell-Phillipps was instrumental in the acquisition of New Place, the site of Shakespeare's last home, and in the creation of the Museum at Stratford-upon-Avon (now Nash's House and New Place).

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