

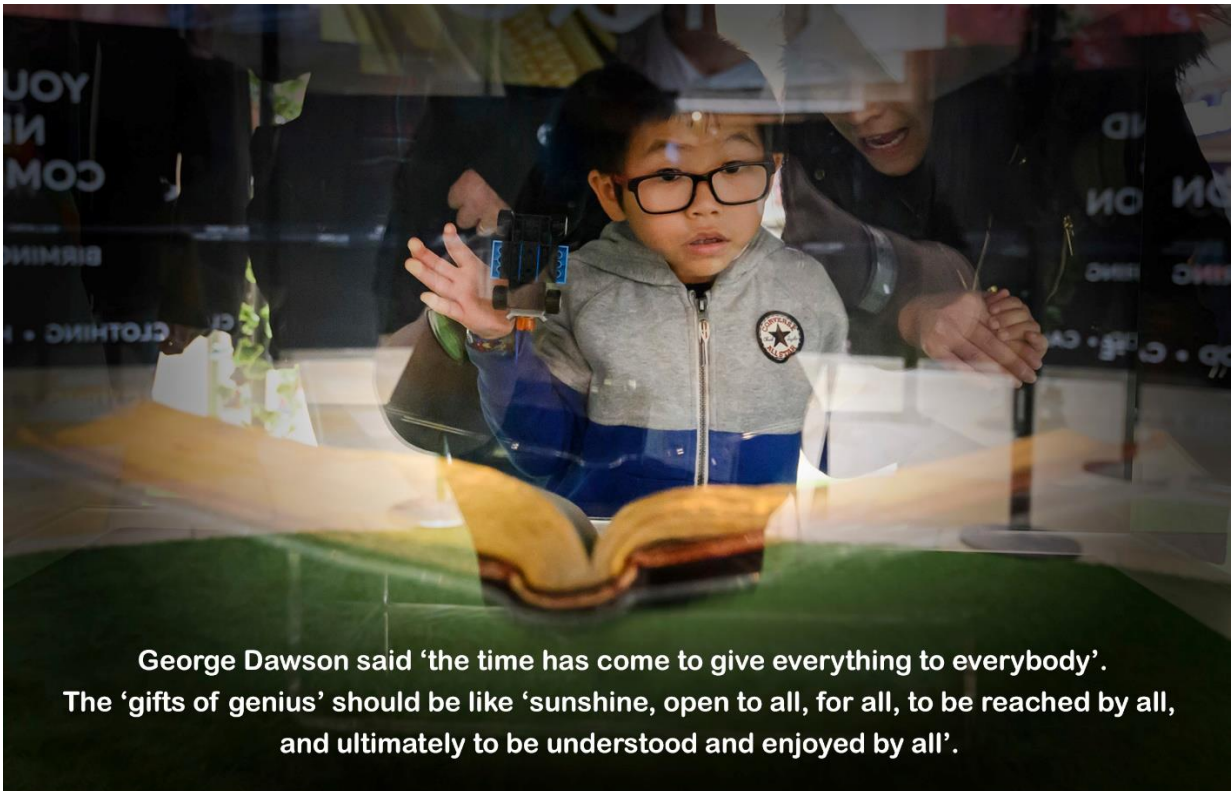
EVERYTHING TO EVERYBODY

CASE STUDY: Taking Birmingham's 400-year-old Shakespeare First Folio out on the road

11,793 people from all over Birmingham city saw the First Folio up-close either in a community venue or in the Library of Birmingham (LoB) between March 2022 and November 2023.



WATCH [First Folio Tour](#) to see how the E2E team overcame internal challenges and took the First Folio out on the road



George Dawson said 'the time has come to give everything to everybody'.
The 'gifts of genius' should be like 'sunshine, open to all, for all, to be reached by all,
and ultimately to be understood and enjoyed by all'.

Birmingham's copy of Shakespeare's First Folio is unique because it is the only one bought as part of a dedicated programme for improving people's lives through culture and education. It was bought in 1881 for all the people of Birmingham, no matter their status. Of the 750 copies printed in London in 1623, only a third still exist and Birmingham's Folio is one of very few in public hands.

The Everything to Everybody (E2E) team achieved an innovative national first by taking the City's precious First Folio on tour to 16 community venues around Birmingham and the West Midlands, including HMP Birmingham where it was viewed by 28 prisoners and 5 staff members.

What was explained and what we asked was well presented ... it was a privilege to get up close and personal to this great book. I was literally a[n] arm length away from it. Many thanks for the experience. [Prisoner feedback]

The Folio's 400th anniversary

The project's extension into 2023 coincided with the national celebrations for the First Folio's 400th Anniversary, giving the team a chance to put the 'Everything to Everybody' ethos into action. During this year alone, the Birmingham Folio was displayed at 9 community venues and 3 LoB events.

Taking it out of the Library

Taking the Folio on tour was a huge logistical challenge.

LoB was initially nervous about the First Folio going out on tour. Typically, such objects would be loaned to similar institutions, so LoB and E2E had to develop an approach that assured conservation professionals.

The Project Manager and LoB Operations Manager carried out multiple risk assessments and overcame a series of internal challenges to obtain appropriate permissions to take the Folio out; make suitable security arrangements to ensure its preservation and safety; and work closely with their chosen partners to ensure correct display conditions at every venue.

As befits a text so fundamental to Britain's theatrical heritage, the Folio arrived dramatically at each venue in a security van, accompanied by a retinue of academics, librarians, archivists, project staff, volunteers, a conservator and a security guard. It was displayed at each site for up to 4 hours in a bespoke case.



The First Folio on tour at Gap Arts, Balsall Heath

- The Folio was viewed in community venues by 3,342+ people who chatted directly with the team about its significance to the City and to themselves.
- Over 6,300 people attended First Folio events in the community.

The impact on communities

It's great that these works have been the property of the people of Birmingham, but the people of Birmingham haven't really known that until now.

Casey Bailey, Birmingham Poet Laureate

Survey respondents described how much they appreciated the fact that the Folio had been brought into their own 'back garden'. This removed the barriers a city-central location can impose on surrounding communities and fostered the sense that the Folio belonged to everybody.

The family-friendly nature of many of the activities encouraged multiple generations of families to engage with the whole event, not just one aspect.

People described how the Folio event gave them an opportunity to come together, either as a family or a community and celebrate.

It was AMAZING! We thought we'd stay an hour and ended up staying the whole day.

This was an inspiring presentation of community collaboration, creativity and togetherness that also taught me a lot about Shakespeare



Desiblitiz's Punjabi bus, appeared at several E2E events and introduced the project to South Asian communities.

The tour details

The tour launched at Birmingham Rep on 7 March 2022, with a film, *Shakespeare's Coming Home*, written and directed by Sean Foley, the Rep's Artistic Director and starring Adrian Lester, project patron, comedian Frank Skinner, and a community cast of 75 performing in BSL and a range of languages.

The Folio visited 16 community venues (13 across the city and one each in Dudley, Sandwell and Solihull) and was on public display at LoB from 27 July to 5 November 2022, and at 3 events to celebrate its 400th anniversary, where it was viewed by 8,500+ people.

Staff at each venue developed an activity programme to complement the Folio and the themes of the Civic Gospel. These included:

- Live dance, poetry, music and drama in English and other languages
- Costumed interpreters and stage craft workshops
- Arts and crafts activities
- Images of Shakespeare texts translated into community languages
- The People's Folio, a scrapbook to which people were invited to add their Shakespeare experiences

First Folio tour venues

- Aston Hall, Aston
- Black Country Living Museum, Dudley
- Dorothy Parkes Centre, Sandwell
- Gap Arts, Balsall Heath
- Grosvenor Shopping Centre, Northfield
- Handsworth Library
- Highbury Hall, Moseley
- HMP Birmingham, Winson Green
- Selly Manor, Bournville
- Sense Touchbase Pears, Selly Oak
- South Yardley Library
- St Barnabus Church, Erdington
- Sutton Coldfield Library
- The Bullring, Birmingham city centre
- The Core, Solihull
- The Hive, Jewellery Quarter

Researched and written by



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