

Westminster Abbey

Poets' Corner



The Irving Society

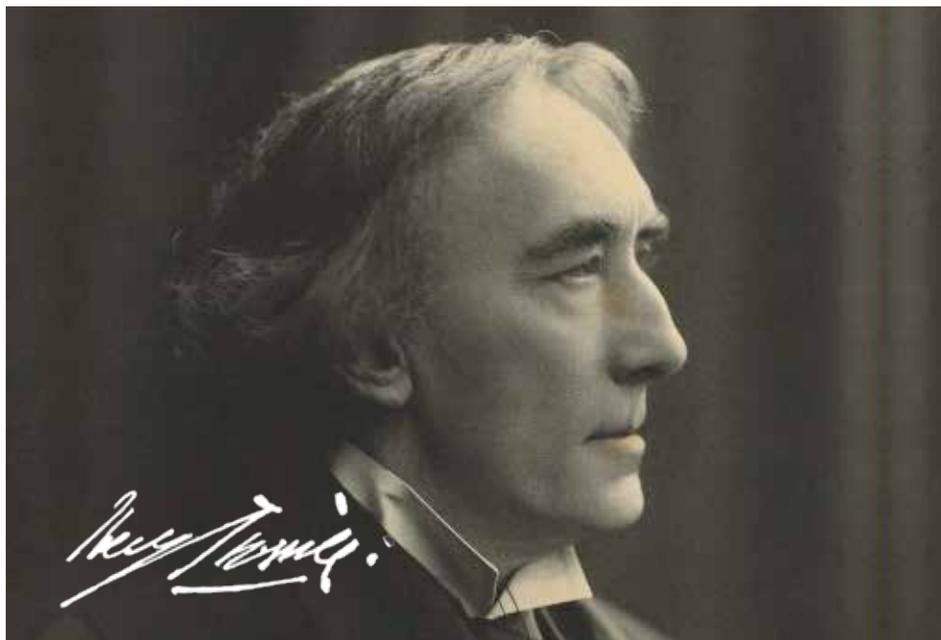
welcomes you to

A Service of Commemoration for Sir Henry Irving, 1838–1905

on the 113th anniversary of his death

Saturday, 27 October 2018

11.30 am



Let us lift our faces when we wish to judge truly of any earnest work of the hand or mind of man, and see it placed in the widest horizon that is given to us. Poetry, painting, sculpture, music, architecture, all have a bearing on their time, and beyond it; and the actor, though his knowledge may be, and must be, limited by the knowledge of his age, so long as he sounds the notes of human passion, has something which is common to all the ages.

Henry Irving,
Address at the Sessional Opening
of the Philosophical Institution, Edinburgh,
9 November 1891



The Venerable David Stanton, Canon in Residence, gives

The Welcome

Good morning, and on behalf of the Dean and Chapter, may I welcome members and friends of the Irving Society, and members of the Irving family, to Westminster Abbey to lay wreaths upon the grave of Sir Henry Irving, marking the 113th anniversary of his death.

We come to celebrate Sir Henry's life and achievements in this holy place where God has been worshipped for more than a thousand years and where kings and queens and the great men and women of our national history and international influence are buried or memorialised.

Henry Irving was buried here on 20 October 1905, under the gaze of Shakespeare and next to the grave of the great David Garrick. Only ten years earlier, he had become the first actor to be knighted, an honour that recognised his efforts to raise the respectability of the English stage.

As we celebrate Sir Henry this morning, so we shall pray that actors, directors, playwrights, designers, technicians, musicians, dancers, critics, and others working in the performing arts may be inspired by his example, and that his work to improve the standing of his profession will continue to guide and to inspire.

The Collect

Grant, we beseech you, merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

All sit

Dr Michael Read introduces Emeritus Professor David Mayer

The Address

David Mayer, Emeritus Professor of Drama, University of Manchester

Dr Michael Read introduces the readers in turn

The First Reading

Frances Hughes, on behalf of The Irving Society

His life has made this iron age
More grand and fair in story;
Illumed our Shakespeare's sacred page
With new and deathless glory;
Refreshed the love of noble fame
In hearts all sadly faring,
And lit anew the dying flame
Of genius and daring.

'Henry Irving' by William Winter (1836–1917)

AT REST BENEATH SHAKSPERE'S MONUMENT: SIR HENRY IRVING'S GRAVE.

Photograph by Lupton.



BY THE SIDE OF SHAKSPERE: IRVING'S LAST RESTING-PLACE IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

Close to the tomb of Garrick, in Paul's Church, Sir Henry Irving's ashes were laid, with impressive ceremony, on the morning of October 20. The service and funeral were magnificent and magnificent, and many of them were left kneeling on the spot where the leader of the English Stage steps his last step by the side of David Garrick, watched over by the countess of Shakespeare.

The Second Reading

Imogen Irving, on behalf of the Irving family

In 1887, Henry Irving gave a speech at the dedication of a fountain in Stratford-upon-Avon. On that occasion, Irving said of Shakespeare:

‘It is above all things as the poet of the people that Shakespeare is supreme. He wrote in days when literature made no appeal to the multitude. Books were for a limited class, but the theatre was open to all. How many Englishmen, to whom reading was a labour or an impossibility, must have drawn from the stage which Shakespeare has enriched some of the most priceless jewels of the human mind! . . . It is not only because Shakespeare is the delight of scholars, or because he had infinite charm or the most refined taste, that he wields the unbroken staff of Prospero over the imagination of mankind. It is because his spell is woven from the truth and simplicity of nature herself. This after all is the heart of the mystery’.

Prospero speaks to Ferdinand and Miranda

You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismayed. Be cheerful, sir.
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

The Tempest, Act IV, scene 1

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

The Third Reading

Jasper Britton, Actor

Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances.
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug
(For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe).
You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,
And spat upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well then, it now appears you need my help.
Go to, then. You come to me and you say
'Shylock, we would have moneys' – you say so,
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard,
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold. Moneys is your suit.
What should I say to you? Should I not say
'Hath a dog money? Is it possible
A cur can lend three thousand ducats?' Or
Shall I bend low, and in a bondman's key,
With bated breath and whip'ring humbleness,
Say this: 'Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last;
You spurned me such a day; another time
You called me dog; and for these courtesies
I'll lend you thus much moneys'?

The Merchant of Venice, Act I, scene 3
William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

In July 1902, following one of his last performances on the Lyceum stage, Sir Henry sat with a few close friends, telling not sad stories of the death of a great enterprise but recalling the triumphs of a glorious past. As they stood to leave, Irving paused, turned to his companions, and confided that after a lifetime of work he was sure of just one thing: that his had been the only great Shylock.

The Fourth Reading

Dame Penelope Keith, President, Actors' Benevolent Fund

Henry Irving loved the country. He was born in the Somerset town of Keinton Mandeville and as a boy spent the first ten years of his life racing across the hills and valleys of Cornwall. He later attributed his stamina to the 'free and open and healthy' years he lived there. 'We rambled much over the hills or down to the rocks at the seashore,' he recalled. After finding success in London, he and Ellen Terry traipsed the countryside of Kent and Sussex in spring and summer by foot, cart, and bicycle.

A little lane, the brook runs close beside
And spangles in the sunshine while the fish glide swiftly by;
And hedges leafing with the green springtide
From out their greenery the old birds fly
And chirp and whistle in the morning sun
The pilewort glitters 'neath the pale blue sky
The little robin has its nest begun
And grass-green linnets round the bushes fly
How mild the spring comes in; the daisy buds
Lift up their golden blossoms to the sky.
How lovely are the pingles and the woods!
Here a beetle runs - and there a fly
Rests on the arum leaf in bottle-green
And all the spring in this sweet lane is seen.

'On a Lane in Spring' by John Clare (1793-1864)

THE GREATEST ACTOR OF HIS DAY: A PICTORIAL RECORD.

THE LATE SIR HENRY IRVING IN SOME OF THE PARTS HE PLAYED AND IN PRIVATE LIFE.



MATHIAS IN "THE BELLS," THE PART THAT FIRST BROUGHT SIR HENRY FAME.
PHOTOGRAPH BY LONDON STEREOSCOPIC CO.



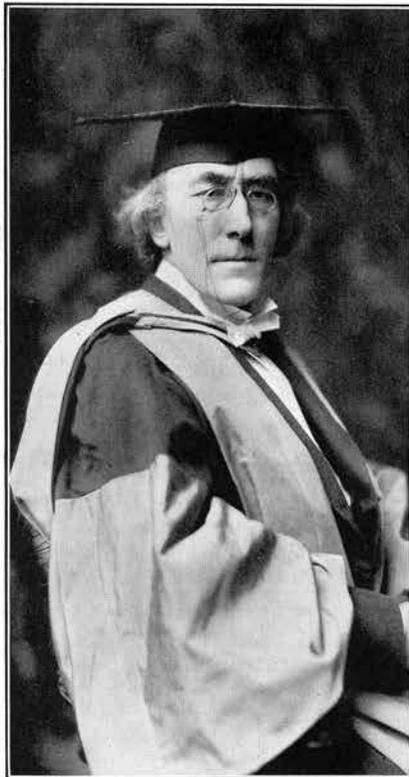
BECKET IN "BECKET" (THE PART SIR HENRY WAS PLAYING IMMEDIATELY BEFORE HIS DEATH), AT WINDSOR CASTLE.
DRAWN BY S. BEGG.



DR. PRIMROSE IN "THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD" (WITH ELLEN TERRY AS OLIVIA).
PHOTOGRAPH BY WINDON AND GROVE.



JINGLE IN "PICKWICK," ALBANY'S VERSION OF "THE PICKWICK PAPERS."
PHOTOGRAPH BY LONDON STEREOSCOPIC CO.



IN HIS ROBES AS LL.D., CAMBRIDGE.
PHOTOGRAPH BY WINDON AND GROVE.



SIR HENRY READING TENNYSON'S "BECKET" IN THE RESTORED CHAPTER-HOUSE OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.
DRAWN BY S. BEGG.



VANDERDECKEN IN "VANDERDECKEN."
PHOTOGRAPH BY LA-GOTTE.



AN EARLY PORTRAIT.
PHOTOGRAPH BY LANCELOT.

THE GREATEST ACTOR OF HIS DAY: A PICTORIAL RECORD.

THE LATE SIR HENRY IRVING IN SOME OF THE PARTS HE PLAYED.



HAMLET IN "HAMLET."
DRAWN BY H. JOHNSON.



SHYLOCK IN "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE."
DRAWN BY F. BARAKKO.



RICHELIEU IN "RICHELIEU."
DRAWN BY D. H. FRISTON.



KING ARTHUR IN "KING ARTHUR,"
DRAWN BY BERNARD PARTIDGE.



ROBESPIERRE IN "ROBESPIERRE."
DRAWN BY BERNARD PARTIDGE.



KING LEAR IN "KING LEAR,"
DRAWN BY BERNARD PARTIDGE.



MACBETH IN "MACBETH."
DRAWN BY BERNARD PARTIDGE.



MEPHISTOPHELES IN "FAUST."
DRAWN BY BERNARD PARTIDGE.



ROBERT LANDRY IN "THE DEAD HEART."
DRAWN BY BERNARD PARTIDGE.

The Fifth Reading

Dr Michael Read, on behalf of scholars of the Victorian theatre

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

'Crossing the Bar' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)
This poem formed part of Sir Henry Irving's funeral in 1905.

All stand for

The Wreath Laying

Dr Michael Read introduces those laying wreaths in turn

On behalf of The Irving Society, Jennie Bisset

On behalf of the Irving family, Harry Irving MBE, great-great-grandson of Sir Henry Irving

On behalf of the family of Dame Ellen Terry, who acted with Sir Henry at the Lyceum Theatre for 24 years, Ellen Terry Craig, great-granddaughter of Dame Ellen Terry

On behalf of the acting profession, Simon Jones

On behalf of the Garrick Club, David Mayer

On behalf of the Actors' Benevolent Fund, Dame Penelope Keith



The Canon in Residence introduces

The Prayers

As we remember Sir Henry Irving, we pray:

O God our Father, who through the ages has caused actors to perceive the world afresh, to enthral and provoke us to thought, reflection, and wonder; and to explore the richness and diversity of our common nature; at this time we thank you for your servant, Henry Irving, remembering him and giving thanks for the beauty of his art; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

O God, who by your spirit in our hearts leads men and women to desire your perfection, to seek for truth and to rejoice in beauty: illuminate and inspire, we beseech you, all who work in the performing arts, that in whatsoever is true and pure and lovely, your name may be hallowed and your Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

We join together in the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Canon in Residence gives

The Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no-one evil for evil; strengthen the faint-hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Visit to Sir John Gielgud's House and Lunch

Immediately following the service, guests are invited to join Irving Society Chair Frances Hughes on a five-minute walk to 16 Cowley Street to see the new English Heritage Blue Plaque marking the residence of Sir John Gielgud from 1945 to 1976. To join the walk, please meet Frances outside the Great West Door at the conclusion of the service. The walk will finish back at Westminster Abbey at approximately 12.45 pm.

The Irving Society committee recommends the Cellarium Café and Terrace, located in the Dean's Yard of Westminster Abbey, for lunch following the service. (No host; please visit benugo.com/restaurants/cellarium-cafe-terrace for menu, pricing, and to make a reservation.) Members of the Irving Society committee will attend from 12.30 to 14.00.

About Poets' Corner

Although the whole of the South Transept is now often called 'Poets' Corner', it has long housed tombs and memorials of other writers, such as historians and theologians. It was not originally designated as the burial place of writers, playwrights, and poets; Geoffrey Chaucer, the first poet to be buried here in 1400, was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey because he had been Clerk of Works to the Palace of Westminster, not because he had written *The Canterbury Tales*. Some two hundred years later, the author of *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser – a great admirer of Chaucer's work – chose also to be buried in the eastern aisle of this transept. These two burials began the association of this part of the church with poets and dramatists, and over time the graves and memorials have spread across the transept. A poem of 1733, 'Upon the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey', is the first known use of that title, but even before this Joseph Addison had written in *The Spectator* about 'the poetical quarter'. Today the walls, floor, and windows celebrate and commemorate six hundred years of literary and artistic achievement.

Actors' Benevolent Fund

For over 135 years, the Actors' Benevolent Fund has supported professional actors and stage managers experiencing hardship due to injury, illness, or old age.

Sir Henry Irving was one of the original founders of the Fund. On 4 May 1882, he chaired a meeting of several influential members of the London theatrical profession to discuss ways to help actors and others who had fallen on hard times. For more information on Irving's central role in establishing the Fund, please visit actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk/about/history#the-beginning.

To learn how you can support the Actors' Benevolent Fund, please visit actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk/support.

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