



5 July 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **British Library to publish a luxury facsimile to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's First Folio**

British Library Publishing is delighted to announce details of a sumptuous, slip-cased facsimile of a complete and special Shakespeare First Folio from the Library's collections. Publication will be on 5 October 2023 and is complemented by a free display and series of events at the Library alongside the wider national and international Folio 400 celebrations.

The First Folio is the most complete record of William Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623, seven years after his death. It is famous for its role in immortalizing the great playwright's work and as an example of seventeenth-century bookmaking and publishing history. The folio format – oversize volumes made of whole sheets of paper folded only once – had previously been reserved for serious scholarly works, so its use for Shakespeare's plays was extraordinary, making it an enduring monument to the Bard.

Were it not for the publication of the celebrated First Folio in November 1623, the Shakespeare we know today would have been very different. In the years immediately after the Bard's death, two of the 'Principall Actors', who had performed alongside him in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (who became the King's Men in 1603), painstakingly collated and edited the Folio text, and arranged for its printing using Shakespeare's own drafts, handwritten records, and theatrical promptbooks. Without the First Folio, there would have been no record of 18 of the best-loved plays including *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*.

British Library Publishing's full-size, authentic facsimile, comprising 912 pages, has been luxuriously recreated in colour as a faithful reproduction of the celebrated 'Phelps-Clifford First Folio', containing one of only four surviving portraits of Shakespeare in its earliest printed state. Each of the famous pages has been meticulously prepared in colour and are bound here in a beautifully foiled, real-cloth case which faithfully presents the fine decoration of the original.

Published on the 400th anniversary of the first publication in 1623, this new slip-cased edition includes a six-page booklet with an extensive introduction by two of the British Library's Printed Heritage Collection curators, Adrian Edwards and Tanya Kirk, who explain the history and enduring significance of what remains the most famous book in English literature. The First Folio facsimile will be priced at £125.

John Lee, Publisher at the British Library commented, “We were motivated by the exciting idea of anyone being able to pick up and be inspired by an authentic copy of one of the most important books in literature. Our team and partners have come a long way from that point and it has been some design, repro and production journey to create a product worthy of this challenge and of such a spectacular anniversary”.

The British Library will also be presenting a special anniversary display of early Shakespeare editions, including the Phelps-Clifford First Folio, in its Treasures Gallery from October 2023 to February 2024. This itself is part of a major series of wider anniversary events including folio displays, lectures, theatre productions and films each detailed and promoted through the Folio 400 celebratory programme ([www.folio400.com](http://www.folio400.com)).

*SHAKESPEARE’S FIRST FOLIO: Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories & Tragedies, Published According to the Originall Copies* will be published on October 5th by British Library Publishing and priced at £125. (ISBN 978-071235-429-5). The volume is co-published by RizzoliElecta in North America.

A full set of accompanying photographs of the original ‘Phelps-Clifford First Folio’ and images of the new slip-cased facsimile volume are available. Please contact: [john.lee@bl.uk](mailto:john.lee@bl.uk)

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## **Notes to editors**

### **The British Library**

We are the national library of the UK and we are here for everyone. Our shelves hold over 170 million items – a living collection that gets bigger every day. Although our roots extend back centuries, we aim to collect everything published in the UK today, tomorrow and far into the future. Our trusted experts care for this collection and open it up for everyone to spark new discoveries, ideas and to help people do incredible things.

We have millions of books, and much more besides. Our London and Yorkshire sites hold collections ranging from newspapers and maps to sound recordings, patents, academic journals, as well as a copy of every UK domain website and blog. Our public spaces are a place to research, to meet friends, to start up a new business or simply to get inspired by visiting our galleries and events. We work with partners and libraries across the UK and the world to make sure that as many people as possible have the chance to use and explore our collections, events and expertise. And we’re always open [online](#), along with more and more of our digitised collection.