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Talbot House, Leicester Road, Anstey, Leicester, Leicestershire LE7 7AT  
Email: [talbotthouse@ansteyfunerals.com](mailto:talbotthouse@ansteyfunerals.com) Website: [www.ansteyfunerals.com](http://www.ansteyfunerals.com)

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### This month's letter is from Revd. Pauline Ashby

We recently had a short break in Stratford on Avon. Always a popular tourist spot, now even more so due to the success of the book and film 'Hamnet'. This tells the story of the death of Shakespeare's young son, and how Shakespeare wrote the play 'Hamlet' in homage to his son and as a way of dealing with his grief. Avoiding the coach parties in the town, we went to Shottery to visit the childhood home of Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife, which was very atmospheric, and well worth a visit.

Back in Stratford we visited Holy Trinity church, where Shakespeare and several members of his family are buried. The graves are in the chancel, very close to the altar, not because of his fame as a playwright, but due to the wealth and position in the town that Shakespeare achieved during his lifetime. We are all equal in death, we're told – but maybe some are more equal than others!

The church has managed to keep its ancient record books, and these list the baptism and funeral of Shakespeare, the baptism of Hamnet and his twin sister Judith, and Hamnet's funeral. However, as Hamnet's death occurred before the family plot in the chancel had been bought, and the manner of his death (he may have died of the Plague) may have required a speedy burial, he lies in an unmarked grave somewhere in the churchyard. Without those two entries in the church records there would be no proof that Hamnet ever existed.

