

Press release for immediate release  
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The Worshipful Company of  
Stationers and Newspaper Makers

## Founding Document of Copyright Leaves England for the First Time

A manuscript register which is one of the founding documents of the principle of copyright is to leave England on loan to the USA for the first time since it was compiled in the late sixteenth century.

Liber B, one of the earliest of a unique set of volumes held at the Stationers' Company in the City of London, will go on loan to the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington in January next year and will feature in the Library's landmark exhibition to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the death of Shakespeare.

The Stationers' Company, which traces its origins back to 1403 and was chartered by Queen Mary Tudor in 1557, is one of more than a hundred livery companies which exist to promote the trades which traditionally they regulated in the City of London. During the reign of Queen Mary the Stationers' Company secured the rights to regulate the book trade and maintained a set of registers where a publisher could record his or her sole right to publish a book – their 'copy right.'

Liber B, which registers publishers' claims to copyright from 1575-1595, records the first publication of works by Shakespeare in his own lifetime, including the play Richard III and Shakespeare's first printed work, the poem Venus and Adonis.

The copyright registers which are considered key sources for the study of publishing in early modern England have never hitherto left England. However, The Stationers' Company's connection to America goes back to the original establishment of England's colonies on the Eastern seaboard of the continent. In 1609 the Company became one of the early shareholders in the Virginia Company which had founded the colony of Virginia in 1607. And Edward Winslow, a Freeman of the Stationers' Company, was one of the passengers on the Mayflower in 1620 and went on to become governor of Plymouth Colony

***'The loan of this unique register documenting the publication of Shakespeare's first printed work to the Folger Shakespeare Library of Washington is a historic event. The copyright registers of the Stationers' Company have never before left England since they were first opened in the sixteenth century. We are delighted to be able to lend this register for the Folger's landmark exhibition Shakespeare - Life of an Icon.'* Helen Esmonde - Master of the Stationers' Company.**

Shakespeare, Life of an Icon will open on 19 January at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC

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#### **About The Stationers' Company**

**The Stationers' Company is the City of London Livery Company for the Communications and Content industries.** The Company's mission is to be the most effective independent forum in the UK Communications and Content industries, actively contributing to the strategic development, success and education of these industries. The majority of our members work in or supply the paper, print, publishing, packaging, office products, newspaper, broadcasting and online media industries.