

## Heath Robinson Museum

### Special Exhibition: Heath Robinson's Shakespeare Illustrations

29 December 2022 - 19 March 2023

Amongst Heath Robinson's early book illustrations is a set for *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*, published in 1902. The quality of the illustrations is mixed. Some seem clumsy and hurried, but in the best of them his genius is beginning to shine through, showing harmony of composition, strong characterisation and an emerging sense of humour.



In 1908 Hodder & Stoughton published *Twelfth Night* with forty coloured plates by Heath Robinson, the first time he had the opportunity to illustrate a complete volume in colour. In his illustrations he did not attempt to provide a literal record of the action, but rather to convey its atmosphere, approaching his task rather as a composer might set about writing incidental music. In his autobiography he said that "The work was a joy to me from beginning to end; my drawings were designed to give a free illustration of the drama."

In 1914 he illustrated *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a mix of coloured and line illustration, and this time the balance has shifted firmly in favour of line. Looking back Heath Robinson said "The old Greek stories of the Wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta; of Pyramus and Thisbe and of life in Ancient Athens as seen through English eyes bewitched me". In these illustrations the use of solid black skies, streams of fairy folk strung out

like the tail of a comet, and strong foreground patterns of wild flowers, vines, foliage or horse chestnut leaves, produce a series of drawings that have great depth and variety of texture. They provide the ideal setting for what he called "most wonderful moonlight night in fantasy."

The First World War effectively put an end to the market for sumptuous, illustrated gift books, but in 1921 Heath Robinson received a commission from the newly established publishing house of Jonathan Cape to provide over four hundred drawings to illustrate a new edition of the complete works of Shakespeare.

The edition was never published as Cape failed to find a US co-publisher to share the costs. However, the majority of the line drawings and at least three large watercolour illustrations had been completed. Fortunately the works were preserved in the Cape archive and a number of them will be included in the exhibition, courtesy of Penguin Random House, their present owner.



## Notes to Editors:

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS

**King Lear:** Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!. Pen & Watercolour, 1922

**A Midsummer Night's Dream:** Puck. So, goodnight unto you all, 1914

### ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The Heath Robinson Museum, is a serious museum with a smile on its face. A permanent gallery allows visitors to explore Heath Robinson's life and artistic development through the gallery timeline, original artworks and interactive exhibits. A further gallery holds special exhibitions which change every three months showcasing selections from the museum collection and other renowned artists and illustrators. An activity studio hosts workshops and has drop-in activities for children. The Museum, which has recently been accredited by the Arts Council, is run by The West House & Heath Robinson Museum Trust, a charity.

In 2016, the Heath Robinson Museum opened thanks to a £1.3 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. At that time, it was the first purpose built museum in London for 40 years and was built thanks to the National Lottery players.

Address: Pinner Memorial Park, West End Lane, Pinner, HA5 1AE

Opening Times: Thursday – Sunday from 11am to 4pm and Bank Holiday Mondays

Entry Fee: Included in cost of museum entry

For further information visit [www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org](http://www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org)

Heath Robinson Museum, Pinner Memorial Park, West End Lane, Pinner HA5 1AE

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The West House and Heath Robinson Museum Trust. Registered Charity Number 1086567

Contact Lucy Smith (Museum Manager) - phone: 020 8866 8420 or email:

[Lucy@heathrobinsonmuseum.org](mailto:Lucy@heathrobinsonmuseum.org) for more information or to arrange a press visit.