

# NEWS RELEASE

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LANCASHIRE



## Curtain rises on new Shakespeare society

Academics from the University of Central Lancashire have played a major role in setting up Britain's first organisation dedicated to the work of William Shakespeare.

Thanks to the work of Kenneth Branagh and recent films, such as Baz Lurhmann's 'Romeo and Juliet', the popularity of the Bard in the box office is at an all-time high. With this in mind, the organisation's founders - a country-wide network of scholars, actors and directors - have agreed that the time is right to join countries such as Germany, France, Japan and Brazil where enthusiasts meet regularly to honour the world's best known playwright.

UCLan Shakespearean scholars John Joughin and Stuart Hampton-Reeves have been instrumental in setting up the British Shakespeare Association (BSA), launched recently at a major conference held at De Montfort University in Leicester and attended by leading actors such as Samuel West and directors Gregory Doran and Michael Bogdanov. Dame Judi Dench, actress and star of the hit film "Shakespeare in Love" has agreed to be the Association's patron.

"Shakespeare has never been more popular", says John Joughin, Head of the Humanities Department at the University of Central Lancashire and Chair of the BSA. "We need to make sure that this interest, promoted by recent box office hits, is kept alive. Shakespeare is a global author who belongs to our past, present and future. It's strange that there hasn't been an association before now."

-more follows-

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He is keen to ensure that the four strands of the BSA – working with performers and directors, the community, with schools and with academics – will enjoy the benefits of increased co-operation during his forthcoming two-year stint as Chair. “We want to put these existing constituencies in touch and exploit the synergies”, he continued.

Membership of the British Shakespeare Association is open to anyone with an interest in the Bard. It aims to hold a major conference every two years with meetings held around the country in between. A website, originally set up by the University of Central Lancashire, [www.britishshakespeare.ws](http://www.britishshakespeare.ws), contains more details about the society and is intended to serve as an archive of expertise and a useful networking tool for all groups involved in the staging, study and enjoyment of Shakespeare’s work.

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**15 September 2003**

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**Notes to editors:**

1. Membership of the BSA costs £15 per year and is open to all. See the website [www.britishshakespeare.ws](http://www.britishshakespeare.ws) for details.
2. John Joughin, Head of Department of Humanities, University of Central Lancashire, can be contacted on 01772 893024.