



**Thoughts from  
Beatie Edney  
playing the part  
of Gravedigger  
in CFT's 2025  
production of  
*Hamlet*.**

I have never worked on a Shakespeare play before, but like working on most plays, background study is useful in that it can feed your imagination. Fortunately I studied the Tudors and Elizabethans at A'level, and so I retained some information. Our version of ***Hamlet*** is loosely Elizabethan, although not strictly adhering to the period.

Shakespeare wrote ***Hamlet*** in about 1599–1601 – this was in the late Elizabethan period. A time of political unrest, with the Essex rebellion, and poverty thanks to poor harvests and famine. We are trying to capture that feeling of political tension and unease. The Elizabethan court had an extensive spy network, thanks to Sir Francis Walsingham. He felt it was crucial in protecting Queen Elizabeth I from numerous plots and conspiracies during her reign. The set has lots of nooks and crannies where people can spy on each other. It's also claustrophobic, which I imagine a court would have been.

Tillyard wrote a useful book "The Elizabethan World Picture" which helped me discover the mind set of the Elizabethans, whose outlook was very different from today. Then they believed in a 'Chain of Being', a structure running from God, angels, royalty, nobles, the common man right down to animals and the devil. The character of the Gravedigger fits into this mindset. The world had an order and there was a strict way to do things. Religion played a very important part in people's lives.



The world was also much smaller. Nowadays we are bombarded with news and information from all over the world. Then it would have taken much longer to share information, but the news of the court would be spread by gossip and knowing servants. So the Gravedigger is well aware of what is going on in Court and that Hamlet has been sent to England.

The most important part of the set for me is the grave site. and the set has been designed with a practical grave and earth that can be dug into which is very useful for my character.