

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Contacts:

Garland Scott, (202) 675-0342, [gscott@folger.edu](mailto:gscott@folger.edu)  
Esther French, (202) 675-0326, [efrench@folger.edu](mailto:efrench@folger.edu)

Curator-Led Press Tour:

Monday, Nov 10, 10am  
Reservations requested, [efrench@folger.edu](mailto:efrench@folger.edu)

## New Exhibition—Decoding the Renaissance: 500 Years of Codes and Ciphers

Exhibition connects modern cryptography with its Renaissance roots

*Best collection of early works on codes and ciphers ever assembled*

On exhibit Nov 11, 2014 – Feb 26, 2015

Washington, DC—Explore the hidden side of Shakespeare’s world with a new exhibition at the Folger that considers early works on codes, ciphers, and concealed messages, as well as the ways in which they influenced the story of two preeminent twentieth-century code breakers, William and Elizebeth Friedman, whose 1957 book debunked claims of cipher messages in Shakespeare's early printed plays.

As the top U.S. Army cryptanalyst, William Friedman led the team that broke the Japanese PURPLE code at the beginning of World War II. He also attempted, but without success, to unravel what remains one of the world’s great mysteries: the fifteenth-century Voynich Manuscript.

“I was surprised to discover that most of the principles and practices in the modern field of cryptography have their roots in Renaissance techniques and technologies,” says exhibition curator Bill Sherman, head of research at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

NEWS RELEASE

201 East Capitol Street, SE Washington, DC 20003-1004

Phone 202 675 0342 Fax 202 608 1719 [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)



The advent of printing, development of diplomacy, and creation of postal systems created an obsession with encryption that produced some of the period's most brilliant inventions, most beautiful books, and most enduring legacies. *Decoding the Renaissance: 500 Years of Codes and Ciphers* offers the first introduction to this intriguing subject, featuring the best collection ever assembled of early works on codes and ciphers.

"I hope visitors will leave with the feeling you get from seeing a good magic trick or completing a difficult puzzle," says Sherman, "with a new appreciation for the importance of codes and ciphers to Renaissance culture and the intimate connections between the birth of the field in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the rebirth of the field in the twentieth."

## Exhibition Highlights

- One of the world's great mysteries still to be solved, the stunning and rarely-exhibited Voynich Manuscript – carbon dated to the early 1400s; written in no known alphabet or language and illustrated with drawings of plants, remedies, and cosmological, astrological, and astronomical diagrams—is being loaned for the first time from the Beinecke Library at Yale University
- The West's oldest systematic treatise on ciphers, *La Cifra* (ca. 1467) by Leon Battista Alberti, the Father of Western Cryptology
- The first printed book on cryptography, *Polygraphiae libri sex* by Johannes Trithemius, 1518
- A message in cipher from Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth I's secretary of state and England's first spymaster
- The very rare 1666 treatise on cryptography by Samuel Morland, drawing on his work intercepting and decoding coded messages during the English Civil War
- A wide range of texts and artifacts from the life and works of William Friedman, the U.S. government's chief maker and breaker of codes from the 1920s to the 1950s, including the Friedmans' work debunking cryptographic contributions to the Shakespeare authorship controversy and computer printouts from the 1940s of his attempt to decipher the Voynich Manuscript

## About the Curator

Bill Sherman is head of research at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and a professor of Renaissance studies at the University of York. He was director of the Centre for Renaissance & Early Modern Studies (CREMS) at York from its creation in 2005 to 2011, and associate editor of

## NEWS RELEASE

201 East Capitol Street, SE Washington, DC 20003-1004

Phone 202 675 0342 Fax 202 608 1719 [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)



*Shakespeare Quarterly* from 2001 to 2012. Sherman is the author of *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (2009) and *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (1997).

Sherman had help from Folger Senior Cataloguer Ron Bogdan.

## Related Folger Programs

### Public Panel

#### The Voynich Manuscript

Tuesday, Nov 11, 7:30pm. \$15.

Join scholars Bill Sherman and René Zandbergen for a discussion of the still un-deciphered Voynich Manuscript, whose secrets have remained hidden for more than 400 years.

### Family Program

#### Become a Spy Master

Saturday, Jan 3, 10-11am. Free. Registration required.

The world of secrets was an important theme of Shakespeare's plays, reflecting the very real spy craft happening in his lifetime. Learn how secrets were kept and discovered. Recommended ages 6-12.

### Family Program

#### Creating a Code

Saturday, Feb 7, 10-11am. Free. Registration required.

Learn what helped spies in Shakespeare's time create and break codes, and then create your own code. Recommended ages 6-12.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit [www.folger.edu/decodingtherenaissance](http://www.folger.edu/decodingtherenaissance) for an online version of *Decoding the Renaissance* that explores selections from this exhibition, case by case.

## VISITOR SERVICES

### Families

A guide to the exhibition for younger visitors and an exhibition scavenger hunt are available. A kids' table in the center of the exhibition hall offers fun exhibition –related activities.

## NEWS RELEASE

201 East Capitol Street, SE Washington, DC 20003-1004

Phone 202 675 0342 Fax 202 608 1719 [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)



### **Tours**

*Monday – Friday at 11am & 3pm, Saturday at 11am & 1pm, and Sunday at 1pm*

Folger Docents offer guided tours of the exhibition, as well as the Folger’s national landmark building, free of charge. No advance reservations required.

### **Group Tours**

Docent-led tours of the exhibition, as well as the Folger national landmark building, are offered for groups of 10 or more. To arrange, please call (202) 675-0395.

## **UPCOMING EXHIBITION**

**Mar 19 through Aug 23, 2015**

### **Ships, Clocks, & Stars: The Quest for Longitude**

*a touring exhibition produced by National Maritime Museums, Royal Museums Greenwich*

To mark the 300th anniversary of the passing of the Longitude Act in July 1714, this landmark exhibition tells the extraordinary story of the race to determine longitude (east-west position) at sea, helping to solve the problem of navigation and saving seafarers from terrible fates including shipwreck and starvation.

## **ABOUT THE FOLGER**

Folger Shakespeare Library is a world-class center for scholarship, learning, culture, and the arts. It is home to the world’s largest Shakespeare collection and a primary repository for rare materials from the early modern period (1500–1750). The Folger is an internationally recognized research library offering advanced scholarly programs in the humanities; an innovator in the preservation of rare materials; a national leader in how Shakespeare is taught in grades K–12; and an award-winning producer of cultural and arts programs – theater, music, poetry, exhibitions, lectures, and family programs. By promoting understanding of Shakespeare and his world, the Folger reminds us of the enduring influence of his works, the formative effects of the Renaissance on our own time, and the power of the written and spoken word. A gift to the American people from industrialist Henry Clay Folger, the Folger – located one block east of the U.S. Capitol – opened in 1932. Learn more at [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)

## **NEWS RELEASE**

201 East Capitol Street, SE Washington, DC 20003-1004

Phone 202 675 0342 Fax 202 608 1719 [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)



# Folger SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

Advancing knowledge & the arts

## **Folger Shakespeare Library**

201 East Capitol Street, SE (one block from the U.S. Capitol)  
Washington, DC 20003

METRO: Union Station (red line) or Capitol South (orange / blue line)

Exhibition open Monday through Saturday, 10am – 5pm; Sunday noon – 5pm.  
Admission is free.

Daily Free Guided Tours of the exhibition and building by Folger Docents:  
11am and 3pm, Monday – Friday; 11am and 1pm Saturdays; 1pm, Sundays.

Public Contact: Folger Box Office at (202) 544-7077 or [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)

Press Contact: Garland Scott at (202) 675-0342 or [gscott@folger.edu](mailto:gscott@folger.edu)

###

## **NEWS RELEASE**

201 East Capitol Street, SE Washington, DC 20003-1004

Phone 202 675 0342 Fax 202 608 1719 [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)

