

Shakespearean Theatre

During the time of Queen Elizabeth, people were devoid of any religious conflicts. They had peaceful life. They needed fun in their life. The audience was interested in watching dramas during their leisure time. Apart from the Royal family and the courtiers, even the common men, the groundlings needed some places where they could enjoy watching plays. So, that was the glorious time of great dramatists like Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and other University Wits to showcase their ability in staging plays. Hence, many playhouses were built in and around London.

Shakespeare performed at the globe and the black friars. Most plays of Shakespeare were performed in the Globe Theater, built in 1599, where there were inner and outer platforms. It was open to all. Working class peasants paid a week's salary to buy a seat in the theater. The "groundlings" paid less to stand in front of the stage for the show. The theater was really small with the audience very much a part of the play. These productions were repeated over many months time and the audiences got to know the actors' lines as well as the stage actors saying them.

They would harass the actors and yell the correct lines to them if they flubbed and groundlings were known to jump onto the stage and show an actor how to wield a sword if they thought it was being done wrong. Many of Shakespeare's plays were also performed at small fairs or playhouses around England. Usually only one original script was submitted by Shakespeare to the production staff who penned in entrances and exits and other directions and used it to give the actors their lines. The actors memorized the lines and acted. Unfortunately, the lines were not always the original lines that Shakespeare had written.

Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, was one of several to perform at the Theatre, appearing there by about 1594. Globe was later built by Richard Burbage. To pay for it, they shared the lease with the five partners (called actor-sharers) in the Lord Chamberlain's company, including Shakespeare. In 1613, it burned to the ground when the roof caught fire during a performance of Shakespeare's Henry VIII. A new, second Globe was quickly built on the same site, opening in 1614.

Globe Theatre Structure :

Open air arena about 100 feet in diameter - The arena was called the 'pit' or the 'yard', The arena was surrounded by three tiers of roofed galleries with balconies (amphi-theatres) -circular shape, Circumference of the Globe Theatre was approximately 300 feet, built of timber, nails, stone (flint) and plaster. There were two doors - the Main entrance and the exit door, the original Globe had a partly thatch roof. Following a fire the second Globe Theatre had a partly tiled roof, the Roof spanned 46 feet

The Globe Theatre also featured a flag pole. The stage was 5 feet high. Two large, ornate pillars supported a roof over the stage which was called the 'Heavens.' Behind the pillars was the stage wall called the 'Frons Scenae' - Above the stage wall was the stage gallery known as ' the Lord's rooms that were used by actors, musicians and rich patrons. Either side of the central Lords Rooms were the 'Gentlemen's Rooms' - Seating Structure - The seats in each of the three levels of galleries were tiered with three rows of wooden benches, increasing in size towards the back, following the shape of the building and structure

Lighting - Natural lighting as plays were produced in the afternoon. However there was some artificial lighting mainly intended to provide atmosphere for night scenes. Heating - There was no heating in the Globe Theatre. Plays were performed in the summer months and transferred to the indoor playhouses during the winter. The Globe theatre was also used for gambling. Globe theatre Facts :

- It was built between 1597 and 1599 in Southwark on the south bank of London's River Thames, funded by Richard Burbage and built by carpenter Peter Smith and his workers .
- The timber for The Globe Theatre was actually reused wood from "The Theatre" – an earlier theatre owned by Richard Burbage's father.
- The Globe was built as a large, round, open air theatre. There was a roof around the circumference which covered the seating area, leaving the theatre looking like a doughnut from above.
- The architectural style of The Globe was similar to the Coliseum in Rome, but on a smaller scale - other Elizabethan theatres also followed this style of architecture which were called amphitheatres.
- The Globe had three stories of seating and was able to hold up to 3,000 spectators in its' 100 foot diameter.
- At the base of the stage was an area called "the pit" which held "the groundlings" – people who paid just a penny to stand and watch a performance.

- Part of the stage was called the “apron stage” – a rectangular platform that thrust out amongst the audience into the pit.
- William Shakespeare was a shareholder who owned 12.5% of The Globe Theatre. As a young writer Shakespeare bought shares in the theatre and benefited financially as his popularity grew.
- Colour coded flags were used outside the theatre to advertise the type of play to be performed – a red flag for a history play, white for a comedy play and black for a tragedy play.
- A crest above the main entrance to The Globe Theatre was inscribed Latin phrase for “The whole world is a playhouse”.
- At the start of each play after collecting money from the audience the admission collectors took boxes full of money to a room backstage – the box office
- A trumpet was sounded to announce to people that the play was about to begin at the Globe Theatre in order for people to take their final places.
- There were no actresses (no women) performing at The Globe Theatre – or any other theatre at that time. Female roles were played by young boys as theatre stages were considered too risk a place for ladies.
- Outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague were so serious in London that the Globe Theatre was forced to close in 1603 and 1608 to restrict its’ spread.
- The Globe Theatre burnt down in 1613 when a special effect on stage went wrong. A cannon used for a performance of Henry VIII set light to the thatched roof and the fire quickly spread, reportedly taking less than two hours to burn down completely.
- After burning down in 1613 The Globe Theatre was rebuilt on the same spot in 1614.
- The Puritans brought an end to The Globe Theatre in 1642 with an order suppressing all stage plays. In 1644 The Globe Theatre was turned into tenement housing, ending 85 years of turbulent history.
- The Globe was generally considered to be a circular building, however when a small part of the theatre’s foundations were uncovered the late 1980’s it seems that the building was actually a polygon of 20 sides.
- In 1997 a third version and faithful reconstruction of The Globe was built

Actors, costumes, and staging: The Lord Chamberlain's Men was a company of actors, or a "playing company", for which Shakespeare wrote during most of his career. Richard Burbage played most of the lead roles, including Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. Formed at the end of a period of flux in the theatrical world of London, it had become, by 1603, one of the two leading companies of the city and was subsequently patronized by James I.

While most women's roles were played by boys or young men in the all-male casts, comic female parts such as Juliet's Nurse might be reserved for a popular adult comic actor, or clown. In addition to their dramatic talents, actors in Shakespeare's time had to fence onstage with great skill, sing songs or play instruments included in the plays, and perform the vigorously athletic dances of their day.

Actors usually did not aim for historically accurate costumes. Instead, they typically wore gorgeous modern dress, especially for the leading parts. Costumes, a major investment for an acting company, provided the essential "spectacle" of the plays and were often second-hand clothes once owned and worn by real-life nobles.

The bare stages of Shakespeare's day had little or no scenery except for objects required by the plot, like a throne, a grave, or a bed. Exits and entrances were in plain view of the audience, but they included some vertical options: actors could descend from the "heavens" above the stage or enter and exit from the "hell" below through a trapdoor. Characters described as talking from "above" might appear in galleries midway between the stage and the heavens.

Shakespeare and the Blackfriars Theatre : Some of the plays of Shakespeare were performed in Blackfriars too. It was the name given to two separate theatres located in the former Black friars Dominican priory in the City of London during the Renaissance. The building, with its large hall, was located in the City of London on the site of the dissolved 13th-century Dominican monastery where the Dominican monks wore black robes - hence the name Black Friars. In 1538 the monastery was closed due to the Dissolution of the Monasteries by King Henry VIII and the building was subsequently used by the Privy Council. Black friars was the location of many historic events, such as the divorce hearing of Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536)

and King Henry VIII (1491-1547) in 1529. A troupe of boy actors called the 'Chapel Children' first used Blackfriars as a Playhouse. Black friars was purchased by Burbage for £600 in 1596. The premises at Blackfriars was well equipped with artificial lighting and other amenities.

