
Elizabethan open-air theatres: Drawing back the Curtain

Behind a pub in Shoreditch, east London, the remains of the Curtain – believed to be the second purpose-built theatre in London – have recently been discovered by archaeologists from the Museum of London who believe the site is one of the best preserved examples of Elizabethan theatre in Britain, **writes Mika Ross-Southall.**

Discoveries at the site so far include the foundation walls of the tiered galleries and the yard which accommodated the standing audience within the playhouse itself.



The Curtain theatre excavation

Built in 1577, only a year after and a short walk from the Theatre, the Curtain is where Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (known from 1603 as the King's Men), are believed to have performed between the ending of the lease on the Theatre in 1597 and the opening of the Globe in 1599.

Theatre (1576-1597): built by James Burbage, father of the actor Richard Burbage, it had a covered stage and three tiers of galleries. From 1594, the Theatre became the playhouse of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. When the lease expired in 1597, the Burbages dismantled, relocated and rebuilt the building in 1599 as the Globe.

Globe (1599 - present): located near the Rose, the Globe was built from the reused timbers of the Theatre. The first version burnt down in 1613, when its thatched roof caught fire during a performance of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. A new Globe was built on the original foundations with an audience capacity of 3,000 and a tiled roof. In 1997 a reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe, championed by US-born actor Sam Wanamaker, opened with a production of *Henry V*.

Rose (1587-1606): built by Philip Henslowe in 1587, south of the River Thames on

Bankside. It had three tiers of galleries and an audience capacity of about 2,000. Performances still take place at the site in Park Street; for more information visit www.rosetheatre.org.uk.

Swan (1595-1600s): Built in 1595 on Bankside, it was the largest of London's playhouses and the only playhouse with a surviving pictorial record of its interior.

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