# The Globe Theatre

A Virtual Trip to London


HAMLET
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
TROY
JULIUS CAESAR
HOLY WARRIORS
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
DOCTOR SCROGGY'S WAR
PITCAIRN
450
JULIUS CAESAR

# The Lure of London

London's large population, and its enthusiasm for plays, meant that thousands of people visited the new theatres every day. New plays were needed to satisfy audiences, and young writers like Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, and William Shakespeare were attracted to try their skills there.

Many of Shakespeare's contemporaries went to university, which only took single men. Shakespeare, who had married at eighteen, was barred. For him, London was the place to be as it was the most profitable place for travelling companies. It was also the most troublesome; the City opposed the theatres because they drew apprentices away from work.

Shakespeare's first ten years of work helped to establish new fashions in plays and to secure professional play-acting and play-writing as sound sources of income.

# The Globe, the Glory of the Bank

James Burbage made plans to replace the Theatre and to build a new indoor theatre in Blackfriars, between the river and St. Paul's Cathedral. However, the local residents blocked it in late 1596, so the Burbages lost their new playhouse and all the money they had invested. It took another thirteen years for the company to repossess the theatre and start using it for winter performances.

Burbage died in February 1597 and two months later the lease of the Theatre expired. For the next two years, his sons Cuthbert and Richard struggled to renew the lease while the company performed in a rented playhouse, the Curtain. At Christmas 1598, they gave up. They leased a plot of land across the river in Southwark, barely fifty metres from the Rose, their rival playhouse. The Theatre was dismantled and its timbers transported across the Thames to Bankside. There in early 1599, the first Globe was built.

After the Blackfriars' fiasco, the Burbages did not have sufficient cash to pay for the new structure so they asked four of the players, including Shakespeare, to help finance the Globe. Now the leading "sharers" in the acting company were their own landlords – sharing the playhouse as well as their acting profits.

For fourteen years, the company prospered in their “house with the thatched roof.” Disaster struck in 1613. During a performance of *Henry VIII* a piece of wadding fired from a stage cannon lodged in the roof, burst into flames and burned the Globe to the ground.

The whole audience left safely by two exit doors, apart from one unfortunate man who, according to Sir Henry Wotton, “had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broiled him if he had not, by the benefit of a provident wit, put it out with bottle ale.” (Side note: the beer they had was WAY weaker that it is today. There was no drinking age, so often time kids were drunk.)

All the company’s costumes and props were rescued together with the manuscripts of the plays. In 1613, half of Shakespeare’s plays were not in print, including *Macbeth*, *Othello, As You Like It,* and *Twelfth Night*. Had the Globe burned at night, these plays might have been lost forever. The theatre was then rebuilt; this time with a tiled roof.

In 1642, all London’s theatres were closed under the City’s Puritan administration. No longer usable, the Globe was demolished in 1644.

# We'll Hear a Play

Londoners from all walks of life, including rogues, pickpockets, prostitutes, and elegant visitors, formed the sometimes rowdy audience. Food and drink were sold during performances and people were able to walk about and meet their friends.

Entrance to the yard – the standing room around the stage – cost one penny. This represented about one-twelfth of a worker's salary. Seated places in the covered galleries rose to sixpence and could only be afforded by the rich merchants and the nobility. Seats in the galleries behind the stage, and on the stage itself, were considered the best. Being seen was more important than seeing.

Even more important was hearing. There were few props and no stage scenery or lighting. It was the language delivered by the actors that captured the audience's imagination.

Shakespeare invented the word “groundlings” for the people who stood around the stage in the Globe’s yard. Hamlet instruct the players:

> *O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious, periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise.*

Philemon Holland gave the name “groundling” in his translation of Pliny to a small ground-feeding fish, a ling, or loach. Loaches have large gaping mouths for sucking algae off the stones of the river bottom. Hamlet’s use of the term perhaps described the look of the people who stood gaping up at the actors from the yard.

# Fun Groundling Facts

- They had to stand the entire time
- There were no bathrooms. Gotta go? No worries. Just *Let It Go!* (Seriously, they went “Number One” and “Number Two” right where they were standing.)
- The floor was nasty. Besides the aforementioned nasties, there was spilled beer, wood chips, gravel, vomit, and whatever else could be spewed, including fake blood from the stage. And it was never cleaned.

# Some of the Typical (Actual) Costumes


Farthingales


Help to dress me, good coz


Queen Elizabeth


Cleopatra

# The Art and Science of Defence

The gentlemanly art of fencing and the mechanics of fighting and weapons were reflected in Elizabethan and Jacobean stagecraft.

On stage, duels and combats, like those between Mercutio and Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* or Edgar and his half-brother Edmund in *King Lear*, were carefully arranged and hugely popular with the audiences.

A wealth of contemporary images and written instructions allows today's Globe to recreate authentic arms as well as convincing choreography for combat.

# Music at the Globe

Many of Shakespeare's plays, especially the romantic comedies, are rich with references to music. *Twelfth Night* begins with a group of musicians playing to Duke Orsino on stage and ends with Feste singing a song to his own accompaniment.


Cittern
11
Renaissance Lute


Slightly less Rich and Famous people
Rich and famous seating
Entrance/ Exit for Actors on Stage
Groundlings Area
Stage
My tour guide


Roof
Covered Seating Area (People were *really* packed in there)
Randoms from my Tour Group


Musicians


Beautifully hand painted roof (“The Heavens”)
Trap Door (“Underworld”)

Bell

Tapestries

See! The Roof is super pretty.

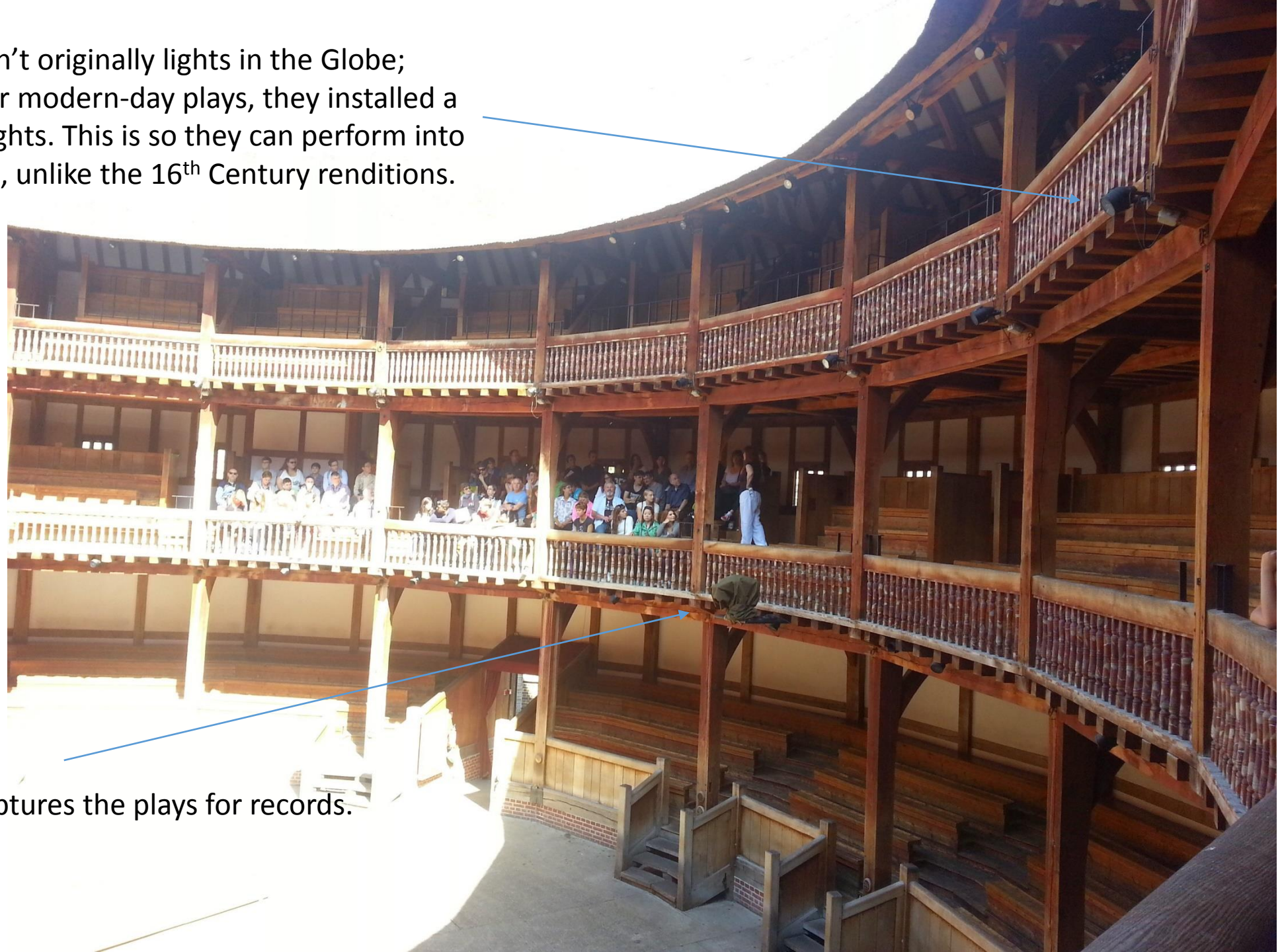
The stage was made of wood.

Wood is cracking.

The “marble” pillars were also actually made of wood. They were carefully painted to look like marble. The “gold”? Yep. Wood too.

Panorama Shot of the entire Globe.

There weren’t originally lights in the Globe; however, for modern-day plays, they installed a few stage lights. This is so they can perform into the evening, unlike the 16th Century renditions.



Camera captures the plays for records.