



Fig. 1: (left) plan of the Globe Theatre remains; (right) site location plan, showing the projected extent of the Globe Theatre remains.

(drawn by Susan Hurman)

# The discovery of the Globe Theatre

Simon McCudden

BETWEEN 3 JULY and 16 October 1989, the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation of the north-western part of the former Courage Brewery site in North Southwark, which is bounded to the north by Park Street and to the west by Anchor Terrace and Southwark Bridge Road. The approximate position of the Globe has been known for some years to be just to the south of Maiden Lane (now Park Street).

## The history of the Globe Theatre

The Globe theatre was built in the spring of 1599 following the construction of the Rose (1587) and Swan (1596) theatres nearby on Bankside.

The cost both of the lease on the Globe estate and of construction was divided, one half being met by Cuthbert and Richard Burbage, and the other half by the actors John Heminges, William Kempe, Augustine Phillips, Thomas Pope and William Shakespeare. The Globe was constructed by a carpenter, Peter Streete, using timbers from the dismantled Theatre which had been built in Shoreditch in 1576 by the Burbage family.

The Globe soon became one of the most popular theatres of the day. Many leading dramatists, including Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker and William Shakespeare, wrote works especially for it. It was the Globe that saw the first performances of (amongst others) *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, with Richard Burbage in the title roles.

The first Globe caught fire and burned down following the discharge of a cannon during the first performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* on 29 June 1613. It was rebuilt in 1614 and was again owned by a partnership, although the builder of the second Globe is unknown. Shakespeare subsequently produced no further plays of his own but the new theatre thrived with works by playwrights such as Beaumont and Fletcher, Heywood, Middleton and Webster. It was pulled down on Cromwell's orders in 1644.

## The discoveries

Only a fraction of the Globe – approximately 12m × 9m (40ft × 30ft) – has been found (Fig. 1). The part uncovered appears to be in the north-east section of the theatre, and comprises three parallel wall foundations, two of brick and one of chalk and timber.

The central chalk and timber foundation, which is of a solid, mortared construction, would have supported the outer gallery wall of the first theatre. No trace of the inner gallery wall of the earlier theatre has been found, but a short length of the substantial brick and mortar foundation for the inner gallery wall of the second survives.

The bottom brick course of the outer gallery wall of the second Globe supported on the foundation for the first outer wall. Brick crosswalls added at the time of the construction of the later theatre extend to the east and link with other brick walls, which may well belong to an outside staircase/turret. The gap in the easternmost wall may be an entrance to the theatre.

Partially overlying one of the two crosswalls between the inner and outer gallery walls of the second theatre are patches of crushed hazelnut shells and silt, remains of the internal floor surfaces. Lying on top of this flooring was a farthing of Charles I (1625-42). Abutting the eastern edge of the outer wall are the remains of the exterior gravel metalling where people may have stood before entering the theatre for a performance.

The build-up of material which covered the remains of the Globe is probably the debris from the destruction and levelling of the second Globe in 1644. It consisted primarily of 17th-century brick and tiles, but included pottery and clay pipes.

### Discussion

Until these discoveries, little was been known about the shape of the Globe, although it is described as



Fig. 2: the Globe Theatre by C J Visscher (1616).

“this wooden O” in the prologue to Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. C J Visscher’s view, published in 1616, shows a three-storey gallery, octagonal in shape and sloping inwards from the top (Fig. 2). A later view by Wenceslas Hollar published in 1647, though drawn in 1630, shows a squat, circular theatre.

The dimensions of the theatre are very difficult to establish because only a small area has been uncovered. The presence of angles within the three main walls and the fact that they are running parallel to each other suggests that the shape of the structure was polygonal. The question of how many sides remain is unresolved, but a computer projection along the chalk and mortar foundation suggests that the diameter of the theatre was between 64 and 80 ft (19 and 25m). A diameter of 80 ft is shown on the projected outline on Fig. 1 (right).

Even though only about 5% of the Globe has been uncovered, important comparisons can be made with the nearby Rose Theatre. Both the Rose and the Globe had hazelnut flooring, and their gallery walls were a similar distance apart. The main difference between the Rose and the Globe is in their foundations. The Rose had mainly chalk foundations, which may have supported brickwork and then timber, while the Globe’s foundations were of chalk with timber for the first theatre and mostly of brick for the second.

### The future

The parts of the Globe uncovered were backfilled between 13 and 20 November 1989 using a method similar to that used at the Rose Theatre site, and equipment was installed to monitor the water and oxygen contents and the acidity of the different soil layers and the covering. Much more of the theatre is expected to lie under Anchor Terrace to the west. The potential for its survival here is very good since there is nearly two metres of build-up between the second Globe destruction level and the bottom of the cellars of Anchor Terrace.

The remains of the Globe Theatre were scheduled as an Ancient Monument on 13 December 1989.

### Acknowledgements

Since before the project began, the site owners, Hanson plc, have been committed to securing the best possible future for the remains of the Globe Theatre. The Museum of London is extremely grateful to Hanson plc for their generous funding of the evaluation, and for their support and encouragement throughout the project.

This article, prepared by Peter Hinton, is based on Simon McCudden’s *Report on evaluation at Anchor Terrace Car Park, Park Street, SE1* (1989).