
*Shakespeare's Playhouses* collects six essays about the four playhouses in which Shakespeare had at least a financial stake: The Theatre in Shoreditch, the Blackfriars, the first and second Globe. These essays, all of them fascinating reading, are not easily categorised. As Herbert Berry explains, they stem from a central principle of scholarly inquiry in these matters: most of what we know, and can hope to know, comes from documents about something else. It is in the fall-out that the interest lies.

Thus, the chapter on the lawsuit concerning the second Globe is concerned with the renewal of the lease. The King's Men, who had rebuilt the Globe at great expense after the fire of 1613, had benefited from a low rental and wanted the lease renewed on moderate terms. The owner, Sir Matthew Brend, thought otherwise.

The issue now seemed to be not whether the King's Men would stay at the Globe after Christmas, 1635, but how much they would pay for doing so. The King's Men meant their questions to show that the rent should not be great because Brend would be much enriched when he finally acquired the Globe. Brend meant his questions to show that the rent had always been too low and that when he should acquire the Globe he would not have a thing worth all those years of low rent. The arguments, however, were tricky for both sides. The King's Men had to establish that the Globe was worth a great deal on one hand but not a greatly increased rent on the other. Brend had to argue that the Globe was not worth much on one hand yet a large increase of rent on the other. (p. 173)

From all this, we learn a great deal concerning the construction of the two Globes. The expert witnesses, naturally, gave diverse evidence. They would. Berry accepts £1400 as about right for the total rebuilding cost, after a close look at the scrap value of the materials that had gone into it. (How thick was the lead? What is 'furre Tymber'?) One feels, as so often in this book, that one is re-encountering issues never far away in English life. Dealing with builders on the vexed question of labour and materials costs is one of them. One is heartened to read that the second Globe added to property values in the neighbourhood: one witness believed 'that the building of the Playhouse hath byn an advancement to the yeerely value of all the houses thereunto neere adiyninge.' (p. 174)

Getting at the true figures for theatre costs and profits is impossible. For one thing, the co-mortgagors of the Theatre, Brayne and Burbage, who kept a 'common box' for the takings, undoubtedly cheated each other. But Herbert Berry has looked hard at the evidence, and reckons that the Theatre took in some £5 a week and yielded a profit of perhaps £190 a year. The second Globe must have done substantially better, and the King's Men can have had no reason to regret their capital investment following the (uninsured) loss of the first Globe. These records
take us closer to the core of what, even in its own day, was the great debating issue: how much does a theatre cost and what does it make?

On another cast into the mysterious past, we follow the chain of reasoning based on a telling anecdote:

This Captaine attending and accompanying my Lady of Essex in a boxe in the playhouse at the blackfryers, the said lord coming upon the stage, stood before them and hindred their sight. Captain Essex told his lord, they had payd for their places as well as hee, and therefore intreated him not to deprive them of the benefit of it. Whereupon the lord stood up yet higher and hindred more their sight. Then Capt. Essex with his hand putt him a little by. The lord then drewe his sword and ran full butt at him, though hee missed him, and might have slain the Countesse as well as him. (pp. 48-49)

It would seem from this that the boxes were continuous to the stage, and on a level with it. Berry pursues the implications for the construction of the stage and boxes at the Blackfriars.

In what is an important find, Berry cites an account of a performance at the Globe in August, 1634. It is nearly 400 words long, and is, as he says, ‘virtually a little review’: it is of Heywood and Brome’s *Late Lancashire Witches*. This piece is ‘dramatic journalism’, a play based on a current witchcraft case. Berry thinks it came about through an official leak, documents concerning the depositions being fed to the dramatists with the idea of heightening anti-witch feeling. Laud, the dominant figure in the Privy Council, would have seen the affair of the Lancashire witches as symptomatic of puritanism on the march. One can point to more recent examples of puritan witch-hunting in that region. The affair moves, in these pages, from theatre review to underground history.

It is the archaeology of social history that is presented here. The prolonged conflict between the Zinzans and the Shelleys, as engrossing as a novel, takes us into the world of dower rights and half-claims to enigmatic legal rights, all focused upon the Globe. In these matters Herbert Berry is a guide of unquestioned excellence: astute, dogged, informed, and sceptical. I especially liked the assessment of Hollar’s work, Hollar the maker of nine maps of London. One is drawn into the fascinating and insoluble mysteries of the scene Hollar and others saw and apparently drew. And yet: ‘One might...argue that on three occasions he drew the Globe not because he thought it still standing but because he liked drawing it.’ (p. 79) So much for the claims of a gifted draughtsman to reproduce the surfaces of actuality! This book is the scholarly distillation of much highly targeted labour. From it one learns, and enjoys learning.

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