

The Globe Theatre: A Historic Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

William Shakespeare is a name that's known throughout the world. Regarded by many as the best writer in history, his work has been translated into just about every language in the world. Many of us no doubt studied one of his plays at school and perhaps some of us even performed them.

Of course, the plays were also performed in Shakespeare's day and if you were in London in the early 1600's, the chances are if you wanted to catch a play, you'd have headed for the Globe Theatre on the banks of the River Thames, just opposite St. Paul's Cathedral. Now 400 years on, visitors to London can once again head for the Globe and see how it would have looked in Elizabethan times.

That's due to the vision of one man. American actor and director Sam Wanamaker came to London in 1949, expecting to find some sort of monument to the Globe Theatre, but instead he found nothing to mark the site where the theatre had once stood. From then on, it became his life's mission to put that right. However, Sam didn't just have some simple statue in mind as a memorial to what was there 400 years earlier. He had a much grander vision, one that involved bringing the Globe back to life for a new generation of theater goers.

It's often easier to have an idea than make it a reality, and that proved to be the case with the Globe. I won't spoil the story, as it's beautifully told in the visitor exhibition at the Globe, but let's just say that building work didn't start on site until 1987, with the construction of the theatre only getting underway six years later in 1993. Sam Wanamaker lived long enough to see that construction start, but sadly he died the same year, without seeing his project completed.

Construction took another four years, but since 1997, every summer has seen performances of some of Shakespeare's greatest works in exactly the same way that they would have been viewed in the days of Elizabethan England. The original Globe was burnt to the ground in 1613, after a fire started in its thatched roof. A mere 50 years later, much of the capital suffered a similar fate in the Great Fire of London. Ever since then, no thatched roofs had been permitted in the city, until the Globe that is. Just another example of the faithfulness of this reconstruction is the fact that there's no roof over the middle of the theatre. So, when you go to see a play there, you're at the mercy of the Great British weather -- and anyone who's ever been to London knows that can mean rain at any time of the year. If you're seated, it shouldn't be too much of a

problem, but for those standing, they could get wet during a downpour!

So how does the theatre work? There are seats, arranged in three semi-circular tiers, costing between £12 and £32 (\$24-\$64 at the current exchange rate), or if you really want to experience a taste of theatre in days gone by, you can buy tickets for as little as £5 (\$10) and stand in the "Yard" in front of the stage to watch the action. Even if you pay for a seat, you're welcome to wander down and join the standing crowd at any time you want to, but it's not for the faint of heart.

It's not just the building that's been recreated to how it would have been in Shakespeare's day. The plays have been as well, and that means interaction between the actors and those in the standing area. According to the guide who showed us around the theatre, this can mean some jokes at your expense, especially if you're near the stage. It's certainly a unique theatre-going experience. Where else in the world can you get taunted by the people you've gone to watch?

As well as theatre performances during the summer months, visitors can learn more about the Globe all year round. The Globe Exhibition is the most extensive in the world dedicated to Shakespeare and takes you back in time to give you an idea about the man himself, those who performed in his plays, and the way of life at that time. Once you've learned about the history of the original Globe, you then find out about the struggle to build the new Globe Theatre.

As part of the exhibition, you'll also be taken on a guided tour of the theatre and this is perhaps the most fascinating part of any visit to the Globe. Your guide explains how plays are performed and points out how things would have been in Elizabethan days. Let's just say after hearing her descriptions, I feel very glad that we have modern restrooms!

Tours begin every 15-30 minutes during opening hours, and once you've finished your tour you can go back into the exhibition and spend as much time as you wish. It's a good idea to allow at least 1.5 hours for the exhibition and the tour. If you're interested in the history of London and England's greatest writer, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre should definitely be on your list of places to visit.

The exhibition is open all year, except for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Outside of the summer season, opening times are 10 am until 5 pm, with theatre tours at all times. During the summer performance season, which this year runs from May 6 until October 9, the exhibition is open from 9 am until 5 pm, but if you want to take the theatre tour,

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you'll have to arrive in the morning. During the afternoon, when matinee performances are taking place in the theatre, visitors are instead taken to the nearby site of the Rose Theatre.

Admission for the exhibits and tour costs £9 for adults, £7.50 for seniors and students, £6.50 for children aged 5 -- 15, with family tickets for two adults and three children £25. For more information, visit <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org>

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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