



Discover one of the world's most famous theatres

Shakespeare's plays are brought to life on its stage.



William Shakespeare

This year marks the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. Many people think Shakespeare is the greatest writer ever to have lived, and this week is a chance to find out more about his life and work as part of Shakespeare Week. During his lifetime, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets – a type of poem. Shakespeare also helped build one of the most famous theatres in London, known as the Globe, where many of his plays were performed. At its most popular it could hold 3,000 people, all eager to watch the latest plays written by the best playwrights of the time.

Theatre in Shakespeare's time



During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, there wasn't much in the way of entertainment. The idea of building a theatre, or playhouse as they were called, for actors to put on plays was new and became very popular. When the Globe was built in 1599 it was one of a few places in London where groups of actors could do this.

The theatre was a hit with everyone in society, from the very poor to the very rich – including Queen Elizabeth herself. Audiences would cheer the heroes, loudly boo the villains, and famous people of the time were often mocked.

William Shakespeare and seven members of a theatre company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men built the Globe on the River Thames after their old theatre closed down.

ICE CREAM OR OYSTERS?

During the interval, audiences at the Globe would snack on hazelnuts, oranges and oysters. Oranges were a special treat in Elizabethan times because it was very difficult to transport them to this country from the warm climates where they grow.



A scene from *The Tempest*, one of Shakespeare's last plays.



A production of *Richard II* performed at the Globe.

NO GIRLS ALLOWED

During Shakespeare's time, women weren't allowed to act. This meant all the female roles were played by boys and young men who wore dresses, wigs and make-up to play the parts. Luckily that's no longer the case today.

DID YOU KNOW?

Queen Elizabeth loved plays, but she also loved another popular entertainment of the time – bear baiting – a savage sport where bears were attacked by dogs.

WOW!

The design for one of the earliest playhouses, on which the Globe was modelled, was based on ancient Roman amphitheatres.



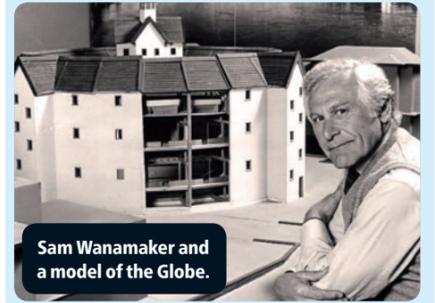
Sam Wanamaker and a model of the Globe.

Going into battle in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.



Titania with her fairy friends in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Rebuilding the Globe



The Globe was closed down in 1642. More than 300 years later, in 1949, an American actor called Sam Wanamaker visited London. He knew how important the Globe had been to Shakespeare and set out to recreate the centuries-old theatre near where it originally stood in Southwark, south of the River Thames.

Since nobody knew exactly what Shakespeare's Globe looked like, with help from archaeologists, Sam used drawings and descriptions from the time to make a good guess.

In the 1990s, building work started, using the same techniques and materials of Shakespeare's day. The theatre roof is made of water reed thatch, based on examples discovered during excavations. Now thousands of visitors come every year to watch plays performed as they were 400 years ago.



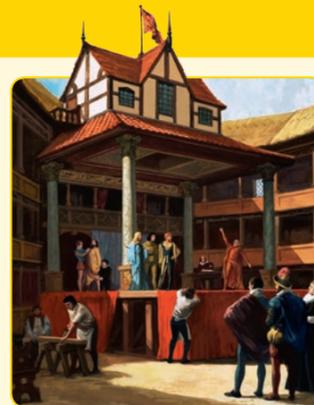
Building the Globe in 1993.

Inside Shakespeare's theatre



The audience

The Globe had different sections for the audience to sit. At the bottom, nearest the stage, was the pit. This was where people who bought the cheapest tickets watched the show – they were known as groundlings. The pit was uncovered, so there was no protection from rain, and there were no seats. Rich people could sit in balconies around the sides of the theatre, where they were protected from the rain.



On stage

The stage itself was the only area in the pit with a roof, to protect the actors' clothes. The roof was called the heavens and had a trapdoor built into it so actors could be lowered onto the stage. There was also a trapdoor in the floor of the stage that led into what was known as hell. Because there wasn't any lighting, all the plays had to be performed during the day.



Henry V is about a heroic king.

Special effects

Special effects were used to make the plays more exciting. To recreate the sound of thunder, cannonballs were rolled along the roof above the stage. Actors would make lightning by lighting firecrackers, which popped and fizzed. They even set cannons off onstage. In fact, the Globe burnt to the ground in 1613 when a cannon didn't fire properly, and the theatre had to be rebuilt.