

Dr Peter Sillitoe, ShaLT

**Collection Enhancement Report No. 14 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance
Department (November 2012)**

The Fortune

NB: Earlier, the ShaLT Collection Enhancement Reports have used the printed collections at the National Art Library (particularly the unique Dyce Collection) to highlight printed texts in terms of issues such as authorship and genre. However, bearing in mind that the key outreach goal of the AHRC funding for the project was to further public awareness about the actual theatre sites (The Theatre, Blackfriars, and so on) it seems highly appropriate for a series of reports to focus on the actual theatre spaces. Thus, this report highlights the Fortune. Indeed, it is envisaged that the T&P Department at the V&A might be able to host a small exhibition of Dyce material in terms of the actual Shakespearean London Playhouses. With this in mind, this report picks-out printed work at the V&A that links to the Fortune. This topic should prove interesting to visitors to a potential exhibition because often the title page is the only evidence we have for the performance of a play at a certain location.

The Fortune replaced the Rose as the main Philip Henslowe/Edward Alleyn playhouse. It was located between Whitecross Street, and Golding Lane, at Fortune Street, Clerkenwell, this outdoor playhouse opened in 1600, staging plays by Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. When it burned down in 1621 it was immediately replaced by a second Fortune, which staged plays until the outbreak of the civil wars in 1642.

In 1600, with the new Globe threatening the livelihood of the smaller Rose, Philip Henslowe and his leading actor Edward Alleyn (also now his son-in-law and business partner) decided to leave Southwark and build a new outdoor playhouse north of the river close to Whitecross Street, a mediaeval market street near today's Barbican arts centre. Although

square while the Globe was polygonal, it was otherwise modelled on the Globe and built by the same man, Peter Street.

As with the Globe, the Fortune prospered through to the 1642 closures. In essence, then, the 1594 duopoly plan remained intact, in which two companies would operate north and south of the river. The Chamberlain's Men, the Burbages and Shakespeare now dominated on Surrey's Bankside suburbs, the Rose closing down within a few years, while the Admiral's Men, Henslowe, Alleyn and the Marlowe plays provided their company with dominance in the northern suburbs of Middlesex. The Fortune continued the tradition of the Admiral's company by playing the Marlowe and Kyd classics from the 1580s and early 90s, though as we move further into the seventeenth century the Chamberlain's Men at the Globe became the leading company in London.

The King's Men now owned, ran and performed in both the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses. The other outdoor theatres – particularly the Fortune and the Red Bull and the older Curtain, all to the north of the City of London – appear now to have gained a strong reputation for putting on plays that appealed to the lower-end of the market. Theatre historians have characterised the Fortune and the Red Bull as 'citizen playhouses' catering for the lower orders of the London community who wished to view scenes of sensational action played at inexpensive outdoor amphitheatres. After about 1600, it does seem clear that such audiences preferred the old plays. As we have seen, the Fortune continued to put on the classics by Kyd and Marlowe. Although these plays were anything but knockabout sensationalism, it is fair to describe them as more violent and exaggerated in tone than were the plays of Shakespeare and Fletcher being written for the King's Men by the time the company started to use the Blackfriars in 1609-10. Indeed, it is easy to visualise a large group of working men and women enjoying *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Tamburlaine* at the Fortune in

the early 1600s, just as the previous generation had done in the late 1580s at the Rose on Bankside.

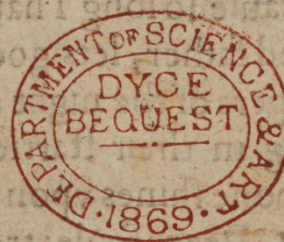
The Fortune and the V&A Collection

The image below (courtesy of the V&A Museum) is taken from the collection's titlepage for Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, a play performed at the Fortune in 1600. Indeed, it is thought likely that the play was put on at the opening night of the theatre.



THE
Pleasant Comedie of
Old Fortunatus.

As it was plaied before the Queenes
Maiestie this Christmas, by the Right
Honourable the Earle of Notting-
ham, Lord high Admirall of Eng-
land his Seruants.



LONDON

Printed by S. S. for William Aspley, dwelling in
Paules Church-yard at the signe of the
Tygers head. 1600.