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**Collection Enhancement Report No. 18 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance  
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**The Globe**

**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 Globe. 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 Globe. 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.

From 1599 to 1642 the Globe was the outdoor playhouse for the Chamberlain's Men (the King's Men after 1603, or 'the Shakespeare company'). Located on the south side of Maiden Lane (now Park Street), under Anchor Terrace, Southwark, just east of Southwark Bridge, the Bankside Globe staged most, probably all, of the plays of William Shakespeare, including famous titles such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*. But it also staged plays by other dramatists, including Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and many plays by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher (who took over from Shakespeare as the resident playwright at the Globe and the Blackfriars).

The Globe on Bankside opened in 1599, the playhouse and its company thriving right through to the 1642 closure of all London theatres. It was set up by the sons of James

Burbage, brothers Cuthbert and Richard. Perhaps more than any other playhouse, the Globe has a story to tell in terms of how it came into existence. James Burbage and his sons were leading the new Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre in Shoreditch, who were often performing Shakespeare's plays at court, whilst their official rivals the Admiral's Men enjoyed sustained success south of the river at the Rose. For the next six years these two were the only companies to play at Court before the Queen. 1596 was the year when James Burbage purchased a £600 freehold on spacious upper-floor rooms at Blackfriars in central London, and got to work on building a second purpose-built indoor theatre at Blackfriars (the previous boy theatres having discontinued now for some time).

Burbage's vision of the Blackfriars indoor playhouse was physically and conceptually a brilliantly innovative scheme, what leading theatre historian Andrew Gurr has called 'the theatre of the future'. Yet it proved a tricky vision to realise. London adult playing companies had until now performed outdoors throughout the year at the various amphitheatres, but acquisition of the new space now made it seem entirely possible for the Chamberlain's to play in an indoor theatre inside the City over the winter months. Although it could only hold a third of the Theatre's audience, the richer, privileged clientele Burbage targeted would pay much more for their indoor seating. However, the well-to-do residents of the Blackfriars precinct strongly objected to a new adult playhouse in their midst and successfully petitioned the Privy Council to cancel the arrangement. The Burbages were therefore left with a brand new indoor playhouse they could not use, unable to open the Blackfriars they actually owned. James Burbage died in 1597, leaving the Theatre and the Blackfriars properties to his sons Cuthbert and Richard.

Unable to successfully re-negotiate the Theatre lease, for most of 1597 and all of 1598 the Burbage brothers were forced to rent the nearby Curtain playhouse for the Chamberlain's performances. Finally, in December 1598, having lost the use of both Theatre and Blackfriars

playhouses, the desperate brothers got the Theatre timbers dismantled and transported across the river, where the Globe was constructed on some newly-leased ground barely 50 yards from Henslowe's Rose. The Globe was an innovation, being bigger than both Theatre and Rose, but also in its uniquely egalitarian financing and management, whereby six company sharers (including Shakespeare) plus Cuthbert Burbage financed the building and running of the new theatre, the company sharers becoming both landlords and their own tenants. Although perhaps a controversial point, when we reflect on this radical move from Shoreditch to Southwark, we should really put less emphasis on the Globe's importance to Burbage and the Chamberlain's Men: either they had been planning to abandon outside playing altogether in order to use the Blackfriars, or, perhaps, they wished to have two types of playhouse, with the Globe as the second choice behind the new Blackfriars indoor playhouse, where playing for high society was the more profitable option.

The situation therefore at the turn into the seventeenth century was that the two sanctioned duopoly companies were established at the Rose and the new Globe on Bankside, the Chamberlain's Men seeming only to have chosen Bankside as a last resort through losing the use of the Theatre and the new Blackfriars. Yet from 1599 to 1642 it is clear that most or all of Shakespeare's plays were performed at the Globe, a fact that was in modern times to help ensure the fame of the Globe.

Despite the largely welcome rise of the playhouses and their plays, the court was not always so well pleased with the Elizabethan players. In 1601, leading aristocrat the Earl of Essex led an abortive uprising against the authority of Elizabeth I. This failed attempt did, however, have a key dramatic link for the purposes of our story: Essex's followers in the Strand had paid the Chamberlain's Men to stage over the river at the Globe a play about the overthrow of Richard II, and this was almost certainly Shakespeare's history play. Presumably, the rebels had hoped to bring about sympathy for their cause and to inspire them

with courage, since the play pointedly raises questions about the nature of monarchical authority and the succession, and includes the ‘deposition’ of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke, who became Henry IV. This notorious scene was removed from the quarto publication of Shakespeare’s play by Sir Edmund Tilney the government’s chief censor of plays. ‘I am Richard II – know ye not that?’ Elizabeth told her archivist William Lambard six months after having Essex executed for the aborted rebellion.

Furthermore, there is one other incident at the Globe that must be told, which created both a stage sensation and a concern for the authorities. In 1624 Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess* played at the Globe to huge audiences for an unusually long run of nine days in a row. It was a stunning success and there were rumours that it may have put on an extra performance each day to meet the audience demand for Middleton’s play. It was a unique sellout theatrical phenomenon, the play quickly becoming both a popular and infamous hit. Indeed, literary scholar Gary Taylor has estimated that over the nine days the play may have been viewed by one-seventh of London’s population.

The Globe continued to stage plays, both old and new, until the closure of all theatres in 1642. Thus, the playhouse that is so firmly linked to the name of William Shakespeare continued to flourish for over twenty-five years after his death. In light of this, we should perhaps remember that although the world’s most famous dramatist was clearly crucial to the success of the Globe, the Blackfriars, and the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men, it is also true to say that London’s leading company enjoyed a very healthy existence for a lengthy period after Shakespeare’s demise.

### **The Globe and the V&A Collection**

The image below (courtesy of the V&A Museum) is taken from the collection’s titlepage for Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Phylaster* a play performed at the Globe in the early seventeenth century.

# PHYLASTER.

OR,

Loue lyes a Bleeding.

Acted at the Globe by his Maiesties Servants.

Written by { Francis Baymont } and { John Fletcher. } Gent.



Printed at London for Thomas Walkley, and are to be sold at his shop at the Eagle and Child in Brittaines Burse. 1620.