

Dr Peter Sillitoe, ShaLT

**Collection Enhancement Report No. 15 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance
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The Red Bull

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 Red Bull. 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 Red Bull. 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.

Along with the Fortune, the Red Bull was one of the so-called citizen outside playhouses. This was located at what is now Haywards Place (previously Red Bull Yard), which runs between St John's Street (where the site can be accessed through a brick archway) and Woodbridge Street, Clerkenwell. The Red Bull opened in 1604 and staged plays through to the 1642 closure (the building actually stood until 1661 in the second year of the Restoration of monarchy). Plays put on here included John Webster's *The White Devil*, as well as numerous plays staged by Queen Anna's Men in the Jacobean period.

Like the Fortune, the Red Bull was enormously popular with the citizens of Stuart London, becoming famous for rousing spectacles and plays with a nationalistic emphasis. Noteworthy plays staged included *The Four Prentices of London* by Thomas Heywood and

the anonymous *Swetnam the Woman Hater*. The Red Bull came into being when it was built by tradesman Aaron Holland, though later in the Jacobean period it was run by the entrepreneurial Christopher Beeston, who soon after set up the indoor Cockpit playhouse.

In the first decade of the seventeenth century the 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. 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 William Shakespeare and John Fletcher being written for the King’s Men by the time the company started to use the Blackfriars. 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. In 1620 it was said that ‘men go to the Fortune in Golding Lane to see the Tragedy of Doctor Faustus. There indeed a man may behold shag-haired devils run roaring over the stage with squibs in their mouths, while drummers make thunder in the tiring house and the twelve and the twelve penny hirelings made artificial lightning in their heavens.’

Meanwhile at the Red Bull, other playwrights were providing texts for what was probably an even lower end of the citizen audience than that of the Fortune, though that should not in any way diminish the artistry and passion in the writing of such Jacobean plays. For example, a number of Red Bull plays survive from this period written by the talented dramatist Thomas Heywood, an author whose two parts of *If You Know Not Me, You Know*

Nobody from 1605 and 1606 were performed by Queen Anna's Men at the Red Bull. Such performances must have maximized the nostalgic emphasis that these play texts embodied, of an era of former British greatness under Queen Elizabeth, coinciding as it did with a time when the Jacobean court was rocked by various scandals, sometimes of a sexual nature. Similarly, Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* gave an onstage voice to the less privileged in society, staging an adulterous relationship and its aftermath in a middle class domestic, rather than a courtly setting.

Like the Fortune, the Red Bull continued to enjoy great success with its working class spectators, not only through the Jacobean period, but also in the years 1625 to 1642 during the reign of Charles I. Furthermore, the idea of the playhouse as exclusively 'citizen' is slightly problematised by the fact that the Red Bull occasionally shared playtexts with its elite indoor partner the Cockpit, a theatre also set up and run by Christopher Beeston.

The Red Bull and the V&A Collection

The image below (courtesy of the V&A Museum) is taken from the collection's titlepage for Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London*, a play performed at the Red Bull in the early seventeenth century.

THE Foure Prentises of London.

With the Conquest of Ierusalem.

As it hath bene diuerse times Acted, at the Red Bull, by the
Queenes Maiesties Seruants.

Written by THOMAS HEYWOOD.



Printed at London for I. W. 1615.