

"Hamlet" has been seen in London before - about fifteen years ago in a version by Thomas Kyd. But nothing could have prepared playgoers for the impact of the new version by William Shakespeare. From its gripping and chillingly dramatic opening with a ghost (played by Shakespeare himself), to its corpse-strewn finale, the groundlings are held spellbound. But as well as its sword-fights, poisonings, suicide and mad scene, it offers a deep philosophical probing into the nature of contemporary man and society. Its blank verse is probably the most intricate and dramatically wrought dialogue ever heard on the stage. In short, it is a play with appeal to high and low, to the ordinary working man and the philosopher. It is also a vehicle for a magnificent performance by Richard Burbage in the title role.

Shakespeare has created a play which immediately enters the realms of the highest literature, and has firmly established the popular theatre as a major art form.

Child Actors in Fashion Blackfriars Opens -Three Years Late

Two Children's Acting Companies - the Children of St Paul's and the Children of the Chapel - have suddenly gained a great increase in fashionable popularity following their "command" performances in front of the Queen. However, they are very unpopular amongst the acting community. Not only do they take away revenue from the adult companies, they have also tempted away important playwrights. Ben Jonson, especially, is writing for them, and using the opportunity to launch a "War of the Theatres" to settle old scores with rival writers and theatre companies.

Yet another theatre has opened in London this year - though this time it is a "covered" auditorium, and is aimed at the nobility and gentry rather than the common man. The former frater of Blackfriars Priory was converted into a theatre three years ago by the late James Burbage at a cost of £600, but the strength of local opposition and the sudden death of Burbage himself meant that the theatre never opened.

It has now been leased to Nathaniel Giles and Henry Evans who intend to revive the Chapel Children's Company. The sudden respectability of such companies following the approval of the Queen is likely to mean there will be little opposition for this second attempt to open the venue.

Thorny Problem for Rose

The Rose Theatre is looking for a new tenant. Philip Henslowe's company has moved into a new venue at the Fortune Theatre, leaving their old home available for rent. A rival acting company, Lord Pembroke's Men, moved in for two dates only, but seems to have been deterred by fears that the Lord Mayor will allow only one theatre to operate on the South Bank, and that will be the Globe. The Rose is now empty, available for hire, but there are no takers.

Some performances known to have been given between 1596 and 1600

1596c

Midsummer Night's Dream
King John
The Merchant of Venice

1597c

Henry IV (Parts 1 & 2)
Love's Labours Lost
The Merry Wives of Windsor

1598c

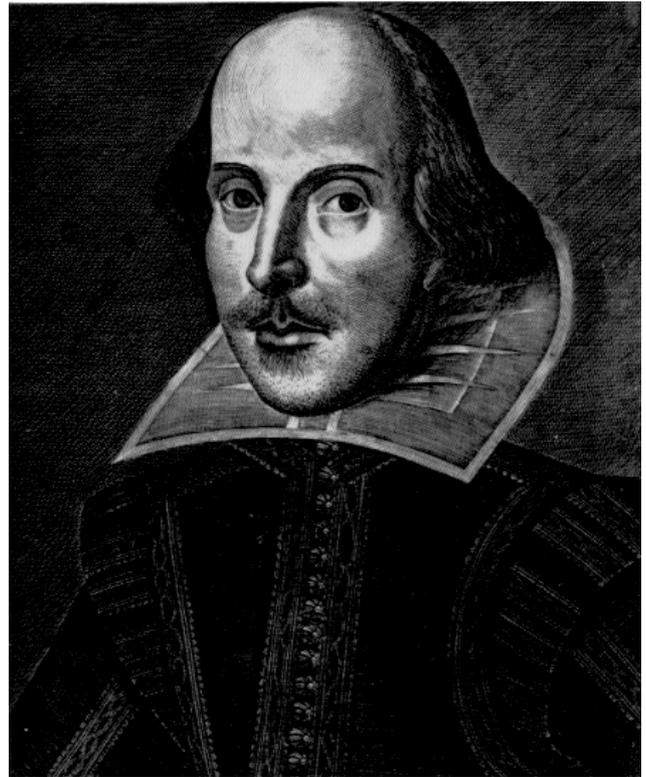
Everyman in his Humour
Much Ado About Nothing

1599c

Henry V
Julius Caesar
As You Like It
Agamemnon

1600c

Hamlet
The Shoemaker's Holiday



National Portrait Gallery

FORTUNE THEATRE OPENS

But Privy Council Rules Other Theatres Must Close

Philip Henslowe has finally succeeded in opening his new theatre, the Fortune, following a long battle with the authorities and the local residents of Cripplegate. The new theatre is near Golden Lane in the Parish of St Giles, and has cost £550 to build - a sum jointly raised by Henslowe and his son-in-law, the leading actor, Edward Alleyn. A statue of the Goddess of Fortune stands over the entrance.

The long-fought campaign to open another theatre in London was hampered by a three-year old edict that all theatres should be demolished - a ruling that has never been enforced. A group of Cripplegate residents insisted that the law should be brought into effect and, as a result, a special meeting of the Privy Council was called.

The Privy Council has decided that only two public theatres should be allowed in London: one south of the river - The Globe- and one north of the river. The decision means that the Curtain Theatre should be closed now that the Fortune has opened, and raises a question as to what should happen to the Rose Theatre. The Council has also ruled that each theatre may only open for two performances a week, and that the Lord Mayor must be responsible for upholding this rule. It is generally felt that these rulings will be unenforceable.

