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978-0-521-03597-2 - Early Cambridge Theatres: College, University, and Town Stages, 1464-1720

Alan H. Nelson

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### *Early Cambridge theatres*

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The excavations of the Rose and the Globe theatres have created renewed scholarly controversy about the reconstruction of English Renaissance theatres. This book engages with this debate by attempting a reconstruction of early Cambridge theatres in the context of the professional theatres of Renaissance London. Cambridge provides a rich source of material: most of the college halls and chapels in which scaffold-theatres were constructed still stand, while records of the Cambridge theatres and the plays performed in them survive in hitherto unrecognized abundance. The Queens' College theatre (1546–9) is reconstructed and illustrated in minute detail. The stage for Trinity College hall (built by Nevile c. 1605), which was the site of numerous royal visits involving plays, is also reconstructed, while the college's tiring chamber, comedy room, and acting chamber are the subject of close detective work. The book includes a full survey of some dozen Cambridge colleges, the university's commencement stage, and extramural theatrical sites used by travelling professional companies, which leads to useful comparisons with the theatres of London. The author concludes with a plea for greater attention to documentary evidence in reconstructing English Renaissance theatres.

This book will be of interest to historians of English Renaissance theatre, as well as to those working on the history of university drama, and the history of the university of Cambridge.

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*Frontispiece* Trinity College hall, constructed c. 1605, looking toward upper end. Door in upper-end wall on left (west) is functional; door on right (east) is currently blocked.

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*Alan H. Nelson*

*Professor of English, University of California, Berkeley*



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*To the memory of Sam Wanamaker, 1919–1993*

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## *Preface*

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My aim is to reconstruct as many early Cambridge theatres as evidence permits, both for their own sakes and for comparison with professional theatres of Renaissance London. The total bulk of surviving evidence is so enormous that to have printed all relevant documents between the covers of this book would have been out of the question, and even to have supplied full citations to every piece of evidence adduced would have increased its size unconscionably. In composing my text and notes, therefore, I have tried to keep in mind a general reader willing to take my word for places and dates, and for the accuracy of my transcriptions. The specialist or the constitutionally sceptical reader who wishes to track down and verify individual pieces of evidence will, I trust, consult not only standard reference works, but two specialized reference works, both of which I have myself edited: the two-volume *Cambridge* collection in the Records of Early English Drama series (1989), here cited as REED; and the unpublished 'The Cambridge University Commencement Stage, 1464-1720', here cited as CUCS, housed in the Manuscripts Room of the Cambridge University Library.

In the course of assembling these documents and arguments, I have encountered numerous instances of generosity, above all from Dr Elisabeth Leedham-Green, Deputy Keeper of the Cambridge University Archives. Dr Leedham-Green is one of many who not only showered me with information, advice, and other forms of assistance, but in fact saved me from a multitude of errors and embarrassments, and in vain strove to save me from yet more. My many other advisors include Richard Beadle, Herbert Berry, Susan Cerasano, John Cotton, Creighton Don, Elizabeth Freidberg, R. H. Glauert, Michael Heaney, William Lepowsky, David McKitterick, Michael J. Petty, Conrad Russell, L. G. Salingar, Clare Sargent, John Twigg, Iain Wright, Abigail Young, and several anonymous readers for the Press. I am grateful to Sarah Stanton of Cambridge University Press for her continuing support from the time this project was little more than an outline on the back of an envelope, and to Rosemary Morris for catching and correcting errors and inconsistencies of style and orthography.

My work has been made possible by the access I have been granted to the libraries and archives of the University of Cambridge and of Queens' College and Trinity College; the Cambridge County Record Office, Shire Hall, Cambridge; the Cambridgeshire Collection, Central Library, Cambridge; the Library of All Souls



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College, Oxford (by correspondence); the British Library, Senate House Library, Institute of Historical Research, and Public Record Office in London; the library of the University of California, Berkeley; and the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

The University of California, Berkeley, has been an important source of support. Its Committee on Research provided me with funds for the hardware and AutoCad software which created my line drawings. The staff of the Berkeley Department of Architecture initiated me into the mysteries of CAD, and allowed me access to the plotter which created the final drawings. The Education Abroad Program of the University of California provided me with the opportunity to spend two years on an administrative appointment within easy reach of Cambridge. Finally, I am grateful to Judith Nelson for putting up with my long periods of absence and abstraction.

News of the death of Sam Wanamaker on 18 December 1993 reached me as I was reading page proofs. Sam Wanamaker lived to see the new Globe's first theatrical performance on 23 April 1993, and though the timber polygon was not complete by the time of his death, he saw his project through to the point where its eventual and even imminent completion was assured. I dedicate this book to his memory.

## *Acknowledgements*

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I am grateful to the following for permission to reproduce illustrations and cite documents:

John Bethell Photography, St Albans: Frontispiece.

The British Library: Figs. 31, 35.

The Director of the Cambridge University Archives: all citations from the University Archives.

The Syndics of Cambridge University Library: Figs. 22, 24, 25, 28, 32, 36.

Cambridgeshire Collection, Cambridgeshire Libraries: Fig. 34.

Ordnance Survey: Fig. 36.

The Folger Shakespeare Library: Appendix 2

The Huntington Library: Figs. 2, 3.

Records of Early English Drama: Figs. 1, 5, 7, 20; Appendix 3.

Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England: Figs. 5, 7, 20, 28 (Crown Copyright).

The Master and Fellows of Trinity College: Figs. 26–7; Appendix 5.

## Abbreviations

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Atkinson            | Thomas Dinham Atkinson, <i>Cambridge Described and Illustrated: Being a Short History of the Town and University</i> (London, 1897).   |
| Chambers, <i>ES</i> | Edmund K. Chambers, <i>The Elizabethan Stage</i> , 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923).   |
| Cooper              | Charles Henry Cooper, <i>Annals of Cambridge</i> , 5 vols. (vol. V ed. John Williams Cooper) (Cambridge, 1842–1908).   |
| CUCS                | ‘The Cambridge University Commencement Stage, 1464–1720’, ed. Alan H. Nelson. Housed in Manuscripts Room, Cambridge University Library.  |
| <i>DNB</i>          | <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 21 vols. (London, 1921–2).  |
| Mullinger           | James Bass Mullinger, <i>The University of Cambridge</i> , 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1873–1911).   |
| <i>OED</i>          | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 13 vols. First edn (Oxford, 1933).  |
| Orrell, <i>HS</i>   | John Orrell, <i>The Human Stage: English Theatre Design, 1567–1640</i> (Cambridge, 1988).  |
| RCHM                | Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England, <i>An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Cambridge</i> , 2 parts with accompanying box of plans (London, 1959).   |
| REED                | <i>Cambridge</i> , 2 vols., ed. Alan H. Nelson, Records of Early English Drama (Toronto, 1989).  |
| Smith, <i>CP</i>    | George Charles Moore Smith, <i>College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge</i> (Cambridge, 1923).   |
| Smith, ‘Academic’   | George Charles Moore Smith, ‘The Academic Drama at Cambridge: Extracts from College Records,’ <i>Collections</i> , vol. II, pt 2, Malone Society (Oxford, 1923), pp. 150–231.  |
| <i>STC</i>          | <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640</i> , comp. A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave; 2nd edn Katharine F. Pantzer, 3 vols. (London, 1976–91). |

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- VCH The Victoria History of the Counties of England, *History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*, vol. III: *The City and University of Cambridge*, ed. J. P. C. Roach (London, 1959).
- Venn John Venn and J. A. Venn, compilers, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Part 1: *From the Earliest Times to 1751*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1922–7).
- W&C Robert Willis and John Willis Clark, *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge and of the Colleges of Cambridge and Eton*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1886; vols. I–III rpt 1988).
- Wing *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, and British America, and of English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641–1700*, comp. Donald Wing, 2nd edn, 3 vols. (New York, 1972–88).

## *Note on sources*

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Cambridge dramatic records up to 1642 are cited from REED (by academic year and institution). An endnote is supplied when a citation is buried in a document several printed pages or more in length, or occurs elsewhere than under the expected year.

Trinity College records from 1661–2 to 1695–6 are cited from Appendix 6 (by academic year).

Cambridge commencement records from 1463–4 to 1719–20 are cited from CUCS (by academic year), a transcription of and guide to records in the Cambridge University Archives, including Grace Books to 1543–4, and MSS U.Ac.1(1–6), U.Ac.2(1–2), and VCV.1–12. An endnote is supplied when a citation occurs elsewhere than under the expected year.

Dating is usually by academic year (e.g. 1563–4), reflecting the standard organization of original documents and published transcriptions. Since most dramatic and degree-granting activity occurred after 1 January in any year, the calendar reference should normally be understood as referring to the *latter* part of the year (here, 1564).

*Text and notes:* I follow printed sources (including my own appendixes), except that I always substitute ‘th’ for thorn; I expand abbreviations silently; I overlook scribal deletions; I include scribal corrections and insertions silently except where the original text is positively ambiguous.

*Appendixes:* I follow rules outlined in REED, pp. 813–16, except that I substitute ‘th’ for thorn. Appendix 3 is a photographic reproduction of the 1640 Queens’ College inventory as printed in REED, pp. 688–93.