

I Introduction

THE HALL at Whitehall Palace stood between the river and ‘the Street’, the highway that ran northwards from Westminster towards the great houses of the Strand. It was built of white ashlar stone, in the late mediaeval style current in the reign of Henry VIII, its lateral walls decoratively battlemented and its roof supported by gilded hammerbeam trusses (plate 1). For generations it served all the expected functions of the public face of the Court, and at festive times was often fitted up as a temporary playhouse where the London acting companies might make their occasional commissioned appearances. In 1665, however, it had been handsomely converted into a substantial Court theatre, and although the plague caused the postponement of most of the first dramatic season planned for the new stage, it reopened in the following year as a permanent scenic house, a notable addition to the small theatre world of London.

Like its temporary predecessors the Hall Theatre was intended chiefly for performances by the professional players, now from Drury Lane and Lincoln’s Inn Fields rather than the Globe or the Red Bull, and the first production to be recorded after the enforced closure was a King’s Company comedy, *Wit without Money*, on 11 October. A week later the troupe from Davenant’s Duke’s Theatre appeared in a fashionable heroic drama, Orrery’s *Mustapha*, for which several scene designs survive, neatly drawn in the hand of John Webb. Webb had also designed the theatre itself, and the plan, section and elevation of its stage which he has left us make it possible to visualize something of the occasion.

While the actors and actresses dressed in new tiring rooms specially constructed behind the old Tudor screen, an audience of courtiers and their guests filtered through the narrow entrances to take their places in an auditorium set up in the southern two-thirds of the hall.¹ They filled twelve boxes and a gallery built across the end wall, and took up their positions by matted benches placed on the paved floor in the manner of a theatrical pit. Before them rose the stage, almost as high as the ushers who stood at its foot, and reaching all across the room from one wall to the other. At this moment, before the play had begun and the boys were everywhere about the house lighting candles, the scene was still obscured by a great curtain, probably of a serge-like material called ‘say’ and capable of being taken up in gatherings by means of ropes and copper rings, the whole framed by an architectural frontispiece which soared to so imposing a height as almost to overwhelm the spectators. At its base the upright surface at the front of the stage was painted to resemble rusticated stonework, four courses high with a dressed coping, so that the

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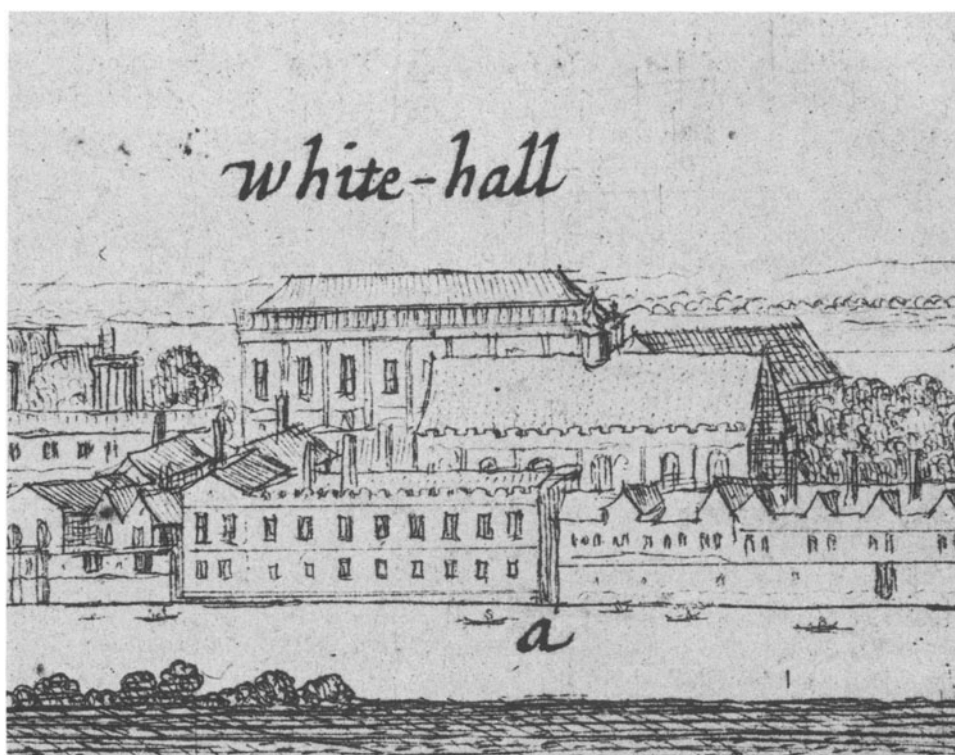
978-0-521-25546-2 - The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 The theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb



1 Wenceslaus Hollar, detail from the *Long View of London* showing Whitehall and the Masquing House

structure seemed massive and impenetrable. The main part of the frontispiece consisted of a border supported by two flat piers, each painted to resemble a giant Doric column, heavily blocked, attached to a pilaster. To either side, beyond the columns, and projecting a few feet forward from them, were balconies set above blind arches of simulated masonry, each topped by a vivid trophy of arms. At the centre, high above the trophies and the columns, a broken segmental pediment sailed over the whole composition, bearing a cartouche with the inscription 'Hi sunt de pace triumphhi. Bella dabunt alios': These are the triumphs of peace. War yields others. And higher yet, borne up by this elevating sentiment, sat the pasteboard figure of Fame, a winged woman blowing a long gilded trumpet. Beyond her the gap between the painted pediment and the real roof was filled with nondescript wooden boarding.

Trumpets of a more worldly kind sounded at a doorway in the western side of the hall and with a flurry the royal party arrived, making its way down a special flight of steps through the standing company in the boxes and benches to the special platform at the centre of the auditorium where the state stood beneath its canopy. There followed the customary music, and at length the curtain rose on the first major play to be performed in the new Hall Theatre.

What the audience saw on that night brought them few surprises. John Webb had designed the conversion, and they had known his work before, at the Cockpit in Drury Lane and at the Duke's Theatre, Lincoln's Inn Fields. The stage was gently raked and closed in at either side by four pairs of movable flat wings. At the rear the backshutters carried a painted scene of architecture designed to close the vista framed by the wings. Above, suspended from an unseen wooden grid, a series of cloud borders were disposed between the wing tops, and a second set of backshutters, painted as clouds, stood immediately above the first at the rear of the stage. They could part if necessary, to reveal a skyborne deity perhaps, but on this occasion they were merely louvred as a screen behind which the musicians were installed. As the play progressed, and the scene shifted from 'Solymans *Camp and his Pavillion*' to the Queen of Hungary's chamber, the side wings of the main stage could all be covered simultaneously by a new set slid in front of them along grooves fixed both above and below; at the same time a new set of backshutters could close over the previous one so that the whole scene was transformed at once. Sometimes also the backshutters would part, slid open by the stagehands, to reveal a further scene beyond, like that of Solyman's tent, in which Mustapha's dead body was displayed. Such inner scenes were composed of three or four separate elements cut out in profile and ranged one behind another in front of a backcloth, a layered picture which the designers called a 'relieve', and which gave a delicate sense of depth to the whole work, finely counterbalancing the towering verticality of the architectural frontispiece.²

I have said that Restoration audiences would have found little that was new in Webb's Hall Theatre, though certainly they would have been struck, as Webb intended them to be, by its generally fine appearance. For years before the Commonwealth Inigo Jones had been developing the kind of stage which Webb was to exploit during and after it, and to Jones the credit is due for the introduction to England of all the scenic elements I have mentioned, the sliding wings, the movable backshutters, the opening clouds and the deep scenes of relieve. Before him the English stage was quite different, and just how different we may judge from a Works account entry for the preparation of the same hall at Whitehall for the performance of a play in the winter of 1601–2:

. . . making ready the haule with degrees [,] the boordes vpon them [,] footpace vnder the state [,] framing and setting vp a broade stage in the midle of the haule [,] makeing a standing for the Lorde Chamberlaine [,] makeing and setting vp viij particions in the haule and entries [,] framing and setting vp a flower [floor] in it [*sic*] the grownd wyndowe in the haulle for the musitions . . .³

Almost the only similarity to Webb's theatre of six decades later is the royal state on its footpace or platform; for the rest the layout is entirely different. The stage is set in the middle of the hall, not at one end, and it is presumably surrounded by the audience. The location of the eight partitions is obscure, but the musicians are removed from the dramatic action on the central stage, being placed on a special floor or gallery constructed in the bay window (the 'grownd wyndowe') near the southeast corner of the room. The Lord Chamberlain has a special standing,

4 The theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb

perhaps a box, in the auditorium, but the rest of the audience accommodation, apart from the state, is in degrees with boarded seats, presumably arranged along the walls of the hall. Within these walls, where Webb was later to construct his long, uni-directional visual theatre, the Works prepared a theatre-in-the-round, where the player was thrust out into the midst of his audience and no wing, shutter or scene of relieve could ever give him support.

Not all Elizabethan preparations of the hall for plays were as distinctive as this – the habit of placing the stage in the middle of the room apparently having been confined to a few years at the close of the reign – but in the period between the accession of James I and the performance of *Mustapha* at the Hall Theatre the staging of drama underwent changes more radical than any that were to follow before the twentieth century. In part the development may be understood as a seismic shift whose causes lie deep within the religious and political movements of Stuart times; in part also it was the result of the narrower control of the theatre after the Restoration, which confined its pleasures to a small and well-heeled constituency. The courtiers of Charles II, their appetites accustomed to the fare of Paris, and even of Italy, demanded the sort of theatre at home that they had enjoyed in exile. The favourite, Betterton, was commissioned by the king to report on the workings of the French stage from personal observation,⁴ and meanwhile a well-known French provincial company, les Comédiens de Mademoiselle d'Orléans, performed spectacular works by Chapoton and Gabriel Gilbert at the Cockpit in Drury Lane.⁵

The new taste for scenes and machines might sometimes be represented as simply a slavish aping of foreign fashions, but in truth it was largely developed out of habits which had long been nurtured at home. The same Cockpit stage that was set for Chapoton's *La Descente d'Orphée* in 1661 had witnessed Davenant's 'operas' two or three years before, dramatic works well equipped with scenes. John Webb's extant designs for one of them, *The Siege of Rhodes*, show how fully their author worked in the tradition established by Inigo Jones, famously in his designs for the Court masque but perhaps more specifically in his scenes created for the Court drama.

That both Jones and Webb designed for the drama as well as for the masque is well known, but the particular quality of their dramatic work has never been adequately distinguished, perhaps because its immediate influence on the commercial playhouses of the London companies was too slight to justify the effort. Certainly students of the seventeenth-century English theatre are right to be sceptical about the extent to which scenery was used in the public and so-called 'private' theatres during Jones's lifetime; what signs there are of its penetration of such stages as the Blackfriars or Salisbury Court are scant and unreliable, and in any case could refer only to a tiny minority of productions.⁶ But at Whitehall and Somerset House the situation was different: there from the time of James's Queen Anne a scenic theatre arose and thrived alongside the traditions of the rhetorical drama. Special stages and auditoria were constructed for pastorals and tragedies,

akin to those employed for the masques, perhaps, but not identical with them. The intellectual sources which fed the imagination of Jones the masque designer also supplied the raw material of his theatre schemes, though in general the latter drew on the Renaissance classicism of Serlio rather than the flightier mannerism of Vredeman de Vries or the Parigi. In later years, when Webb worked with Davenant on *The Siege of Rhodes* and *Mustapha*, this very deliberate English tradition of Renaissance theatre design was still alive, or at least capable of being revived; so that although during Jones's lifetime it generally ran separate from the mainstream of London playhouse production, after his death it remained available to make a specific contribution to the development of the Restoration stage.

Not only were the Court theatres influential in the shaping of the London stage, but they also had the good fortune to go relatively well recorded. They were designed by men who were conscious of their innovatory role and determined to set it down on paper, in great collections of drawings and even in the margins of their books. By contrast the public theatres of London before 1660 have not been well served by Mnemosyne. Not one of them, from the Theater in Shoreditch to the Red Bull in Clerkenwell, survives in a contemporary plan or elevation, and the historian is hard put to do more than speculate about the details of their structure. Yet many of the theatres constructed at Court – sometimes for the very players whose daily lives were spent at the Globe or the Fortune – are known to us in detailed architectural drawings which convey much information not only about such technical matters as the seating, the stage and the scene, but even about the intellectual provenance of the scheme as a whole. One may dream about discovering Peter Street's plan of the Globe or a detailed survey of the Curtain, but in the technical works of Jones and Webb we already possess ample information about a colourful and important strand in the history of the English theatre. In one set of drawings, indeed, we may have something more valuable still: a full and detailed account of the Cockpit in Drury Lane, one of the most influential 'private' commercial playhouses in seventeenth-century London. No positive documentary confirmation of this identification has yet been discovered, but in chapter 3 I shall present the wealth of circumstantial evidence which supports it, some of it in my view decisive. As for the series of fully documented Court theatres which are illustrated in the ensuing chapters, they constitute a substantial body of work in their own right; not even the masques, copiously documented though they are in scenery and costume, survive in such methodical plans and sections as these designs for the dramatic stage, and I make no apology for singling them out for study in this book.

Nevertheless it was the masques, the costliest and most magnificent theatrical events at Court, that dominated Jones's life as a stage designer. Their performance was as much a matter of political mystique as of mere amusement; through such works as *Tethys' Festival* or *Prince Henry's Barriers* the Court mirrored itself and enacted its sometimes dangerously ideal view of British polity. At Shrovetide and Epiphany, at Candlemas and – after 1605 – on Gunpowder Day Whitehall celebrated

6 The theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb

the courtly festivals with a purposive cyclical rhythm akin to that of the Church calendar, demonstrating in canvas, paint and rope that infusion of divine order in an otherwise chaotic world which seems so to have enchanted the Jacobean and early Caroline courtier. Repeatedly the personated forces of discord, represented by the passions or caricatures of the baser affections, were first routed and then transformed with a harmony that emanated from recognizably British deities revealed among the pasteboard clouds. Symbols of political order charmed the senses in music and the dance, and the force of the whole was redoubled by the element of surprise, especially in the scenic transformations, whose end was to strike the audience with that wonder which Aquinas called the beginning of knowledge. The object of the Jacobean masque was both to encourage faith in the monarchy and to confirm it. For most of the period it fell to Jones to design these often elaborate productions and, over more than three decades, from *The Masque of Blackness* in 1605 to *Salmacida Spolia* in 1640, he developed a smooth expertise not only in matters of technical administration – the supply and deployment of materials, the supervision of craftsmen, the invention of scenic techniques – but also in matters of the imagination. He soon established dominance over what the published texts sometimes called the ‘act’ of the masques – their concrete realization on the stage – and although until the 1630s he often shared their ‘invention’ with the playwright Ben Jonson he was broadly responsible for their visual content, for which he drew on a wide acquaintance with continental *intermezzi* and festival designs as well as those strands of Renaissance and especially mannerist art and architecture that he found most amenable to his purposes. The full story of the masques has been told, with generous scholarship, by Stephen Orgel and Sir Roy Strong,⁷ and it reveals how acutely Jones responded to the rich artistic influences of continental Europe, and yet how firmly he remained in independent command of the material he used.

He began as what we should now call a freelance, brought into the circle of Queen Anne of Denmark probably through his association with the Earl of Rutland, in whose household accounts for June 1603 we find mention of a payment to ‘Henygo Jones, a picture maker’.⁸ On the accession of James I and his queen, the earl made an embassy to Copenhagen to present the Order of the Garter to Christian IV, Anne’s brother. Jones was in his train, his presence fortunately noticed by a contemporary diarist.⁹ It is fitting that these first records of his courtly activity should date from the very opening of the Stuart era, which he was to do so much to memorialize, but it is certain that before the opening of the new reign he had already laid the foundations of his aesthetic education. According to John Webb he had spent ‘many years’ in Italy,¹⁰ and although no contemporary documents survive to confirm the nature and extent of his journey he was by 1605 already known as ‘a great traveller’, one whose exposure to foreign influences suggested that he might provide ‘rare devices’ when called upon to design the scenes and machines for a season of academic plays at Oxford. In fact ‘rare devices’ is a fair description of what he did provide when, in the years after 1604, he was invited to

provide settings for Court plays and masques: at Oxford he used the *periaktoi* of ancient authority and more recent continental practice;¹¹ he experimented at Whitehall with the *scena ductilis* (various forms of movable shutters) and the *scena versatilis* (revolves of all sorts); he tried scenic mansions like the pavilions of wood and canvas favoured by the Tudor office of the Revels, and even – in *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610) – combined them with wing settings derived from Sebastiano Serlio. In style he ranged from the classical setting for a throne of c. 1606–9, based on Serlio's description of Bramante's exedra in the Belvedere in Rome,¹² to the pretty gothic revival of *Oberon* (1611), where sophisticated borrowings from du Cerceau enlivened an already elegant design.¹³

During the earlier part of his career at Court Jones's tastes were at their most eclectic, and this was also the time when he was able to continue his travels. His journeys abroad were not frequent, but they were enough to keep alive and significantly to broaden a sensibility already awakened by the sojourns in Italy and Denmark. The sketchbooks and notes he made on his travels, the signs in his subsequent work of a mind opened and disciplined by new experience, the explicit testimony of his associates – all witness the deliberation with which he set out to learn arts that had never been fully understood in England. A year or so after the Oxford plays a friend, Edmond Bolton, presented him with a book inscribed to one 'through whom there is hope that sculpture, modelling, architecture, painting, acting and all that is praiseworthy in the elegant arts of the ancients, may one day find their way across the Alps into our England'.¹⁴ In 1609 he was in France, ostensibly as a messenger,¹⁵ but doubtless seizing the opportunity to renew his acquaintance with foreign architecture: it was after this journey that his masque designs first showed the influence of du Cerceau's *Plus Excellents Bastiments de France* (1607). The journey may even have extended as far as Provence, where Jones 'observed' the Pont du Gard and the ancient theatre at Orange, the former influencing his designs for *Prince Henry's Barriers*, produced in January 1610 soon after his return home.¹⁶

In 1613–14 came the most fruitful journey of all. It began with an embassy towards Heidelberg, to bring on their way the Princess Elizabeth and her new husband the Elector Palatine after their wedding in London, for which Jones had designed *The Lords' Masque* and *The Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn Masque*, both at Whitehall. Now renowned, in George Chapman's words, as 'our Kingdome's most Artfull and Ingenious Architect',¹⁷ Jones entered the train of the young Earl of Arundel, then at the beginning of his career as one of England's most enlightened art collectors and patrons. Once their part in the embassy was accomplished the earl and his friends set off for Italy, there to spend over a year in the sort of active sightseeing that today would be called research. Jones's learning was by now of such repute that his mere presence with the earl was sufficient to prompt Dudley Carleton to write from Venice (on 9 July 1613) that he did not believe a story which had been put about by some members of Elizabeth's train that Arundel intended to return home from Strasbourg only through France:

8 The theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb

I rather believe they were so told to be rid of their companies, and the more because I hear my lord had taken Inigo Jones into his train, who will be of best use to him (by reason of his language and experience) in these parts.¹⁸

But Jones was no mere cicerone. Through Strasbourg and Basle they came to Milan, and thereafter the exact route of the whole party is difficult to reconstruct. It is probable that Jones sometimes left it to travel by himself: he was in Venice, Parma and Vicenza in the autumn and later Arundel was in Bologna, Florence and Siena, but whether Jones was then with him or not cannot be ascertained. Both dedicated themselves to enquiry and learning. Jones kept a sketchbook which records his interest in Italian painting, and he annotated a copy of Palladio with liberal notes on the buildings he saw and the architectural problems he considered.¹⁹ In September he visited the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza, carefully describing its stage on the flyleaf of the book. The winter was spent in Rome, where Arundel obtained permission to excavate an ancient site, sending the marbles he discovered back to London.²⁰ In the new year the little group visited Naples, Venice, Vicenza again, then Genoa and Turin before returning home via Paris. In Venice Jones met Scamozzi, and at some time in the journey – probably before September 1613²¹ – he acquired apparently for his own use a great quantity of Palladio's architectural designs. There is reason to believe that he also acquired for Arundel a collection of Scamozzi's drawings, but these were later to be lost.²²

During this second Italian journey Jones bought books as well as drawings, and we can trace some of his route through his habit of inscribing them with the place and date of purchase. These and other volumes now in the collection at Worcester College, Oxford, show how carefully he read, and how deliberately he noted what he read in marginal comments. The books are as much a witness of his curiosity and readiness to question and learn as the travels are: Serlio, Palladio, Vitruvius and Lomazzo all bear the purposive marks of his pen, and all are incorporated into his growing aesthetic discipline.

It is not my purpose now to trace the adoption and transformation of such sources in Jones's architectural and masque designs, a task already undertaken to good effect by John Harris, Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong.²³ Later chapters will show how deeply some of them shaped his thinking about the theatre, notably the books of Vitruvius and Serlio along with the concrete example of Palladio's Teatro Olimpico. A further influence, less easily documented, was that of the professional theatre world of London, with its business-like commitment to the routines of public performance. The connection which Jones had made with the Court stage in *The Masque of Blackness* and at Oxford strengthened with such rapidity that even before the departure for Italy he had established a dominant position as a designer at Whitehall. He constructed settings for such works as *Hymenaei* (1606), *The Lord Hay's Masque* (1607), *The Masque of Queens* (1609), *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610), *Tethys' Festival* (1610), *Oberon* (1611), *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (1611), *The Lord's Masque* (1613) and *The Masque of the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn* (1613). There were besides many smaller entertainments, each with its own

demands for the provision of costumes and settings. Often the masques contained elements of antimasque, chaotic or comical figures played by professional actors, such as the humours and affections in *Hymenaei*. As Jones assumed more and more of the responsibility for staging the whole performance he was brought increasingly into contact with these players, for whom he designed both scenes and costumes. It is likely also that his writ extended to rehearsing and directing their part in the show, in order to harmonize it with the visual transformations, the music and the dance by which the primary purposes of the work were achieved. *Prince Henry's Barriers* opened and closed with long speeches delivered by professionals, who were paid £15²⁴ and must have worked closely with the designer of the tomb, the cave and the sky from which they emerged on stage. By the following year, when *Oberon* was performed, Jones had been appointed Surveyor to the prince, and warrants dated in the weeks leading up to the production²⁵ imply that he was largely responsible for its integration of elements, among them the professional players who took the parts of satyrs and fays. Ben Jonson, who as author of the piece bore an equal responsibility for the details of its enactment, was Jones's most obvious link with the world of the London theatre; it was a relationship that grew in something like mutual respect and intimacy for a number of years only to fall into decline and finally to break up rancorously after the poor reception of *Chloridia* in 1631.²⁶ But for twenty-six years the two men worked together, Jones surviving the setback of the prince's death in 1612 to be granted the reversion of the King's Surveyorship in the following year; in 1615, after the return from Italy, he succeeded to the coveted post itself. As Surveyor, Jones's principal tasks were the administration of the Works, the maintenance of the royal palaces and the design of such alterations and occasional new building as were undertaken by the office. His concern for the masques was a subordinate but recurrent part of his duties, quite possibly the part that called forth the best of his affection. Yet even the succession of great shows, from *The Vision of Delight* early in 1617 to *Salmacida Spolia* in 1640, with all their problems of imaginative creativity as well as of logistics, does not sum up the total of the Surveyor's work for the drama in the period. Every year the professional companies, whether the King's Men, the Prince's or Queen Anne's, performed their plays at Court in auditoria sometimes prepared by the Works, and although the arrangements made for their accommodation in the halls of the various palaces were so routine that they have left little mark on the records the need to provide for them kept Jones in contact with the London stage. Even in the weeks when *The Masque of Blackness* was being prepared by the newly arrived 'great traveller' the rooms of Whitehall were often alive with the King's Men's entertainments: *Othello* in the old Elizabethan Banqueting House was followed by *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, probably in the hall or great chamber. At Christmas they presented *Measure for Measure* and *The Comedy of Errors*. A week before the Sunday staging of *Blackness* the king saw a play 'By the Queens Majesties plaiers', and on the night following the masque the King's Men acted *Henry V*. The next night they appeared in Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*, followed soon after, at

10 The theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb

Candlemas, by the companion piece, *Every Man in* Twice at Shrovetide they performed *The Merchant of Venice*, the second time by special request of the king. There were several other performances, including at least eight by the Prince's Men.²⁷ Similar seasons of plays were mounted at Whitehall almost every year until 1640.

Usually the visits to Court by the public players left nothing in the records beyond a mere entry in the warrant books authorizing the necessary payment, providing us with no information about the stage accommodations the public companies required. They were doubtless fairly simple, capable of being covered by the type of Works account entry that we find enrolled for 1621–2 at Whitehall: 'fitting the hall and greate Chamber for plays'.²⁸ Yet it would be unwise to assume too readily that scant records in the rolls always meant scant provisions in the halls. The Chamber accounts for October–December 1621²⁹ record that the great chamber on the queen's side and the hall were made ready for plays on six occasions, while still others were performed in the new Banqueting House, for which the Works accounts record in greater detail than was customary the construction of ranges of seating in the auditorium:

Ralphe Bryce Carpenter for frameinge and setting vpp xj^m baies of degrees on both sides of the banquetting house every bay conteyninge xvj^m foote longe, beinge twoe panes in every of them; the degrees belowe beinge seven rowes in heighte; and twoe boordes nayled vpon every brackett the degrees in the middle gallery beinge fower rowes in heigthe, and twoe boordes nailed vpon brackettes also with a raile belowe and another raile in the middle gallery beinge crosse laticed vnder the same; workinge frameinge & settinge vpp of vpriight postes wroughte with eighte cantes to beare the same worke . . .³⁰

The bays are 16ft between centres, so that the seating will have been ranged continuously along the two side walls for 5½ bays, or 88ft.³¹ Between the lower range of seven degrees and the cantilevered balcony which is a structural part of the building a 'middle gallery' of four degrees was erected on canted posts. These degrees, which could be dismantled for storage and re-use on future occasions, were probably prepared for the opening of the new house with *The Masque of Augurs* on Twelfth Night, but it seems likely that they would have been retained for the plays that were performed there in the ensuing weeks. The Works accounts make no mention of a stage, whether for the masque or the plays, though Jones's design for the former (O & S 115) shows an elaborate one with three entrances below and complex flights of steps leading down to the dancing floor. What stage provisions might have been made for the professional players we may only surmise. The same roll of accounts for 1621–2 records preparations for them at St James's in the usual minimal fashion: ' . . . makinge ready the Councell chamber with degrees and boordinge them for playes . . . ' It is a type of entry that could be repeated from almost any year in the reigns of James I and Charles I and it is unfortunately not of a kind to bring much enlightenment.

Whether Jones had anything directly to do with the majority of these performances by the visiting players from the London theatres is not known, but they must