

ON THE SITE OF THE GLOBE PLAYHOUSE OF SHAKESPEARE

FOR a long period there has been considerable uncertainty and diversity of opinion as to the exact site of the Globe Playhouse. The solution of the question may not be a matter of vast importance to anyone: but, in view of the fact that the Shakespeare Reading Society has erected a large bronze memorial to commemorate the site, and that the London County Council have published an official document which purports to settle the question, the matter assumes a certain importance which it would not otherwise have had.

During the centuries that have passed since the Globe was demolished in 1644 all the surrounding property has been pulled down, the ownerships of the sites have been transferred, and now such papers as remain concerning the transactions are too frequently neglected.

In this century new material has been found, including contemporary documents, from which data are available for the more exact determination of the site.

The students of our time, however, do not always read and understand these, as they were intended to be read and understood. In our search after truth it is necessary to bring together and compare the printed and manuscript testimonies, which are at the present time available, and to compare these with the long series of map views of the period. The truth is not beyond our reach if we are content to accept the evidence without prejudice.

We must begin with the contemporary documents, as these afford the most reliable evidence, and, in the absence of definite proof of error, they must be accepted in preference to later documents, when the two are not in accord.

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The question at issue is whether the Globe Playhouse stood to the north or south of a lane then known as Maiden or Maid Lane; but which today is known as Park Street, Southwark. Park Street for the most part runs east and west, roughly parallel with a narrow roadway known as Bankside on the shores of the Thames.

The land lying between Park Street on the south, and Bankside on the north is only about 180 feet deep at its eastern end, where it abuts upon Bank End, a road which used to be known as “Deadman’s Place,” and at its western end, close by Southwark Bridge, it is about 290 feet deep.

On the south side of Park Street lies the great Brewery of Messrs Barclay Perkins and Co. Ltd. It stands on the ground which formerly was a portion of the Lord Bishop of Winchester’s Park.

Did the Globe stand between Maiden Lane and Bankside or did it stand on any portion of the Brewery site? Ben Jonson in *An Execration of Vulcan* says :

.....The Globe, the glory of the Bank :
Which, though it were the fort of the whole parish,
Flank’d with a ditch, and forced out of a marish,
I saw with two poor chambers taken in,
And razed; ere thought could urge this might have been!
See the World’s ruins! nothing but the piles
Left, and wit since to cover it with tiles.

Now Ben Jonson was a precisian in language, and he knew what he was talking about. These words of the poet “the Globe, the glory of the Bank” would hardly be applicable, if the theatre stood some distance away to the south of Maiden Lane, and, some 400 or 500 feet away from the Bank¹, where he says it stood as “though it were the fort of the whole parish.”

Moreover this site south of Maiden Lane could only have been approached by a narrow passage way, and, as the chief patrons probably came from the north side of the river they would not appreciate having to

¹ See Note 5, p. 44.

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tramp down Deadman's Place with its great sewer in the centre, or along Maiden Lane, which was flanked by a ditch or open sewer on either side, or alternatively along a narrow passage way, before arriving at the theatre. Nor does this seem to convey the idea of a great object, seen from afar, "and gloriously seen" on the Bank.

It was not until Dr Charles William Wallace made the great discovery in the *Coram Rege Roll* (1454, 13 Jas. 1, Hil. m. 692) dated 1616, which in future will be here referred to as "The Osteler Document," that a contemporary statement, defining the site of the Globe, was brought forward. A full account of this deed, together with a translation of it, by Dr C. W. Wallace, appears in *The Times* of 2nd and 4th October, 1909, and I take the liberty of quoting freely from it, just extracting such facts as bear upon the subject without confining myself to a verbatim quotation.

Dr Wallace points out that this document has reference to family differences leading to a lawsuit. The complainant is Thomasina Osteler, a young widow of 19 years. She was the daughter of John Hemyngs, who had been a close friend of Shakespeare, and later, was one of the co-editors, with Henry Condell, of the famous 1623 folio of Shakespeare's Works.

For Thomasina to make out her case and establish her legal rights, her attorney found it necessary to recount from legal documents, then extant, the history of the shares she claimed in the Globe and Blackfriars Theatres. Although this case is directed against John Hemyngs, it is, in effect, against Shakespeare, the Burbages and the whole Company of Shareholders. Her father, Hemyngs, was included, as he was acting as the business manager and agent of the Company.

The case was probably settled out of Court for there is no judgment recorded.

The extract from the Osteler complaint, which I give in Dr Wallace's translation of the Law-Court Latin of the document, recounts the boundaries of the land, as set out in the original lease, which was granted by Nicholas Brend in 1598–9 to Cuthbert and Richard Burbage, William

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Shakespeare, John Hemyngs, Augustine Phillips, Thomas Pope and William Kemp.

That whereas one Nicholas Brend of West Moulsey in the County of Surrey, Esquire, by his indenture tripartite, bearing date the twenty-first day of February in the year of the reign of the Lady Elizabeth, recently Queen of England, the forty-first (1599), for considerations in the same indenture tripartite mentioned and expressed, did demise, grant, and to farm let to those certain men, Cuthbert Burbage and Richard Burbage, of London, gentlemen, to the forementioned William Shakespeare and to Augustine Phillips, and Thomas Pope of London, gentlemen, deceased, to the aforesaid John Hemyngs, and to William Kempe, recently of London, gentleman, deceased, all that parcel of ground just recently before enclosed and made into four separate garden plots recently in the tenure and occupation of Thomas Burt and Isbrand Morris, diers, and of Lactantius Roper, salter, citizen of London, containing in length from east to west two hundred and twenty feet of assize or thereabouts, lying and adjoining upon a way or lane there on one (i.e. south) side and abutting upon a piece of land called The Park upon the north and upon a garden then or recently in the tenure or occupation of one John Cornishe towards the west and upon another garden plot then or recently in the tenure or occupation of one John Knowles towards the east with all the houses, buildings, structures, ways, easements, commodities, and appurtenances thereunto belonging or in any manner pertaining: which said premises are situate, lying, and being within the parish of Saint Saviour in Southwark in the County of Surrey: And also all that parcel of land just recently before enclosed and made into three separate plots whereof two of the same (were) recently in tenure or occupation of John Roberts, carpenter, and another recently in the occupation of one Thomas Ditcher, citizen and merchant tailor, of London, situate, lying, and being in the parish aforesaid in the foresaid county of Surrey, containing in length from east to west by estimation one hundred and fifty-six feet of assize or thereabouts and in breadth from North to South one hundred feet of assize by estimation or thereabouts; lying and adjoining upon the other side of the way or lane aforesaid, and abutting upon a garden plot there then or recently just before in the occupation of William Sellers towards the east, and upon one other garden plot there then or recently just before in the tenure of John Burgram, sadler, towards the west, and upon a lane there, called Maiden Lane, towards the South; with all the houses, buildings, structures, ways, easements, commodities and appurtenances to the last recited premises or to any part or parcel thereof belonging or in any manner pertaining, together with free ingress, egress, and regress, and passage to and fro for

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Excerpt

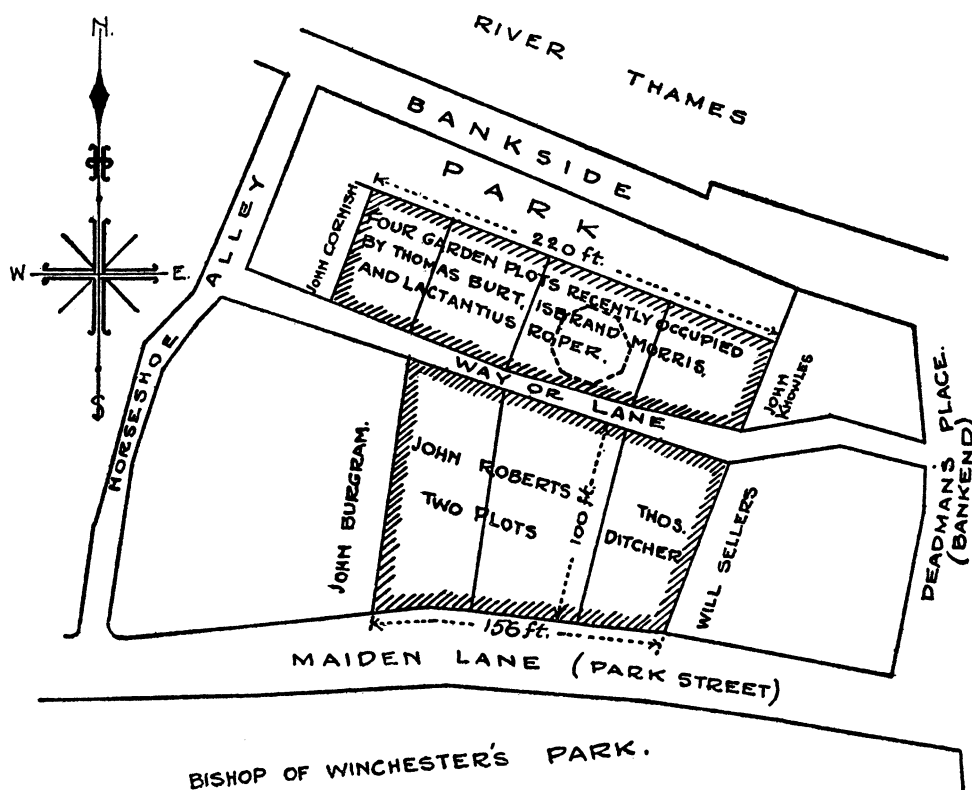
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the said Cuthbert Burbage and Richard Burbage and to the forementioned William Shakespeare, Augustine Phillips, Thomas Pope, John Hemyngs and William Kemp, their executors, administrators, and assigns, and to all and every other person or persons having occasion to come to them by or through the foresaid way or lane, lying and being between the premises aforesaid, mentioned to be demised as in aforesaid...upon which particular premises, or upon some part thereof, a certain playhouse, suitable for showing forth & acting of comedies and tragedies, did exist.

I have prepared a plan to agree with the particulars given in the Osteler Document, but it is not contended that the four garden plots on the north side of the Way or Lane, or the three garden plots on the south of it, are correctly placed on the plan.



PLAN A.

It is a curious fact that boundaries to parcels of land have a remarkable power of endurance. Thus the depth of the three plots on the south side

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of the Way or Lane is given as 100 feet. This distance coincides with the long straight boundary, running east and west, between the properties now fronting upon Bankside on the north, and those fronting on Park Street on the south. It therefore in all probability was the southern side of the Way or Lane.

The divisions of the garden plots generally conform to the dividing walls of existing properties; but in assuming the position of the three garden plots fronting on Maiden Lane I have been guided by the fact (as will appear later) that Brend sold land to Memprise having Deadman's Place as its eastern boundary and a frontage of 270 feet on the north side of Maiden Lane. If this represented the whole of Brend's property fronting upon the north side of Maiden Lane, the probability is that the western end of his land, was the western end of the three garden plots mentioned in the lease from Brend to Burbage.

The whole of this property, on some portion of which the Globe was built, is shown as lying to the north of Maiden Lane, for the land is stated in the deed as abutting upon a lane "there called Maiden Lane, towards the South." If this document is accurate, it is clear evidence that the Globe must have been on the north side of Maiden Lane. It will be observed that the only approach to the Theatre must have been by the Way or Lane, which is described, as dividing the two pieces of land contained in the lease, or, from Maiden Lane on the south side. There is no mention of an approach from the north, for this was occupied by a piece of land called "The Park." No approach could be made to the theatre either on the east or west, except by the Way or Lane, as the adjoining property was in the occupation of John Cornish and John Burgram on the west, and John Knowles and William Sellers on the east. This Way or Lane plays an important part in the history of the Globe, and it will be observed that it is the only approach to the four garden plots "recently occupied by Thomas Burt, Isbrand Morris and Lactantius Roper."

We have now a certain amount of local knowledge as to the position of the site of the Globe Playhouse; but this is by no means complete.

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We have certain measurements given to us ; but there is no measurement from any fixed point, which can be recognised today. No doubt at the time, with complete local information, it would have been possible to identify the site from the descriptions given. Fortunately, apart from the Osteler document, certain topographical details can be added.

Strype, in his edition of Stow's *Survey*, 1720, says :

Maiden Lane, a long straggling place with ditches on each side, the passage to the houses being built over little bridges, with little garden plots before them, especially on the North side which is best for houses and inhabitants.

This scrap of information is interesting, and, it becomes a matter of high importance, when it is realized that the occupiers or owners of the land fronting upon these sewers, or open ditches, were responsible for their proper maintenance. In this water-logged land which must have been repeatedly flooded by the Spring tides in the Thames it became necessary for Southwark to found a Sewers Commission.

In the *Report on Local Records* (1901, p. 273) compiled by the late Sir Laurence Gomme, Statistical Officer of the London County Council, it appears that the oldest Sewer Commission was The Surrey and Kent Commission of Sewers, instituted under the Act of Henry VIII in the year 1514–15. The earliest existing volume is dated Jan. 1568–9.

In *The Times*, 30th April, 1914, Dr Wallace points out that on the 14th Feb. 1605, the Sewer Commission made the following minute :

It is ordered that Burbage & Heminges and the other owners of the Playhouse called the Globe in Maid Lane shall.....pull up and take cleane out of the sewer the props and posts which stand under their bridge on the North side of Mayd Lane.

It would be difficult to imagine a better piece of cross evidence proving that the Globe Playhouse was on the north side of Maiden Lane.

The Osteler document tells us that the land on which the Globe was built abutted upon Maiden Lane towards the south. Strype tells us that there were two ditches, one on either side of Maiden Lane. As Maiden

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Lane ran east and west there was one ditch on the north side, and one on the south side of the lane.

And now by a Minute of the Sewers Commission we are told that the lessees, Burbage and Hemyngs and the other owners of the Playhouse called the Globe, are to carry out certain works *under their bridge on the north side of Maid Lane.*

This cumulative evidence coming from quite independent sources, is, in itself, conclusive on the main point at issue, as to whether the Globe was on the north or the south side of Maiden Lane. If further evidence is required the case of William Sellers might be quoted.

On the 5th Dec. 1595, that is four years before the lease was granted by Nicholas Brend to the brothers Burbage, Shakespeare and others, the Sewer Commissioners ordered

John Warden, and Willm. Sellers and all the land-holders or their tenants that holde anie landes, gardeins, ground or tenements abutting upon the common sewer leading from Sellers' gardein to the beare gardein, to cast, clense and scowre &c.

The Bear garden was on the north side of Maiden Lane, and, therefore, presumably Sellers was on the north side, otherwise his land would have drained into the sewer on the south side of Maiden Lane, and not into the sewer which drained the land on which the Bear garden stood. This evidence that Sellers was on the north side is confirmed by the fact that he is mentioned in the Osteler deed, as adjoining the piece of land granted in the lease. The garden of William Sellers lies to the east of the southern piece of land which was abutting upon Maiden Lane towards the south. Thus there are three documents showing that the site abutted on the north side of Maiden Lane, viz.

1. The Osteler transcript says so.
2. The Minute of the Sewers Commission, 14th Feb. 1605, requests the Globe lessees to remove the props and posts *under their bridge on the north side of Maid Lane.*
3. The Minute of the Sewers Commission, 5th Dec. 1595, shows that Sellers' garden was on the north side of the lane, because it was on the

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same side as the Bear Garden, and as, by the Osteler document, he adjoined the Globe site, both his garden and the Globe site must have been on the north side of Maiden Lane.

It now becomes necessary to produce evidence that there was some land known as “The Park” which formed the northern boundary of the piece of land, which is defined clearly in the Osteler complaint. Again we may turn to the evidence contained in the minutes of the Sewer Commissioners.

By reference to the rough plan on page 5 which is drawn to accord with the particulars given in the Osteler document, it will be seen that there are four garden plots abutting upon a piece of land called “The Park” on the north. The names of three of the original occupiers of the gardens are given, Thomas Burt, Isbrand Morris and Lactantius Roper. The only approach to these gardens was from the Way or Lane mentioned in the Osteler document, the back of the gardens would therefore be at the opposite ends of the plots where they abutted upon the piece of land called “The Park” on the north.

On 6th July, 1593, the Commissioners make the following entry :

We present Jasper Morris of London, dyer, to pull up his encroachment made att the back of his garden into the sewer between his garden and the parck.

On the same date the Commissioners

present Thomas Burt dyer to pull upp his encroachmt. made upon the back of his garden and the parck.

This evidence corroborates what we are told about the Park being on the north as mentioned in the Osteler document and it comes from an entirely independent source. In this case also there are three independent sources of information showing that the site abutted upon a piece of land called the Park on the north. The first being the Osteler document itself, and the other two being the extracts from the minutes of the Sewer Commissioners of 6th July, 1593. As there are very divergent views held in respect to this piece of land called “The Park” any evidence, however

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small, is worth recording. I therefore quote from a letter I contributed to *The Times* of 3rd Dec. 1921 on this subject.

A paper now at Dulwich College, but which formerly belonged to Edward Alleyn, and afterwards passed on to Malone is quoted in Collier's *Memoirs of Edward Alleyn*. The document is 'a brief noat taken out of the poores booke containing the names of all the inhabitants of the Liberty (the Clink) Wch are rated and assessed to a weekeley painmt. towards the relief of the poore as it stands now increased this 6th day of April 1609 Delivered up to Philip Henslowe Esquior, churchwarden, by Francis Carter, one of the overseers of the same Liberty.'

The list begins as follows:

'Phillip Henslowe Esquior assessed at weekely vid.

Ed. Alleyn assessed at weekely.....vid.

Then follows a list of names, with diminishing amounts as poor rates. The real interest, however, centres around the 28th and 29th names on the list.

The 28th stands as follows: 'Mr Stock for halfe the parke ii^d' and the 29th name 'Hughe Robbinson for halfe the parke ii^d.' This reference to a park, where two men are each assessed at 2d. per week for half the park, could hardly apply to the Lord Bishop of Winchester's park, some 50 or 60 acres, which was by far the greatest individual holding in the Liberty. The question now arises, if this poor rate of 4d. per week did not apply to the Bishop's park, then where is the park in the Liberty of the Clink, to which it could apply? A satisfactory answer to this question can, we think, be made now for the first time.

By reference to the Sacramental Token Books in Southwark Cathedral, the names of the inhabitants are given under the addresses from which the tokens were collected. In the Sacramental Token Books for Bankside in the year 1609 Hugh Robbinson's name appears under the sub-heading 'Fro the Parke.' As Hugh Robbinson appears to have lived on a piece of land known as the Park, Bankside, on which he paid 2d. per week as a poor rate, it is clear that there was a piece of land known as the Park on Bankside, and this park was, in all probability, the park which formed the northern boundary of the land leased by Brand to Burbage, Shakespeare and others. The deed or lease transcript of 1616 says that 'the land abutted upon a piece of land called the Park on the north...and on the lane there called Maiden Lane towards the South.' This reference to the Park in the Sacramental Token Books ceases in the year 1616 and in no case are there more than three names mentioned under the sub-heading 'Fro the Parke.' It seems unnecessary to labour the point further. These various cross references from distinct