

GLOBE THEATRE CONDUCTED TOUR

Wednesday 6th July 2022



Our much delayed visit to the Globe Theatre on Bankside, finally occurred on 6th July, just 2 years later than planned. However, it was well worth the wait. Our guide, an actor of course, brought the whole visit to life with his knowledge & anecdotes.

This is the third theatre built here. The first one burnt down on 29th June 1613, when a cannon fired during a performance of Henry VIII landed on the thick thatched roof. No one was hurt, but one man's breeches caught fire and were quickly doused with beer. Another theatre was built within a year, but over the centuries was lost.

Sam Wannamaker, an American actor and director was horrified to find only a small plaque marking the spot of the theatre. The original foundations had been found close to the river, and Sam decided to rebuild as close to the original site as possible. From excavations of the original site, it was worked out that the building (a wooden O as Shakespeare called it) had 20 sides. (A 20 sided shape is called an icosagon!) Sam began to make his dream become a reality.

Again, oak from Windsor Great Park was used in the construction. Lime plaster coated the walls and a thick thatched roof completed the building. This is the only thatched building in London. Thatch was banned after the great fire of London, and special permission had to be obtained.

The main auditorium is open to the elements, but part of the stage is shielded by a canopy, painted with the signs of the zodiac. The gallery seats are also roofed, but the area around the stage is open to the weather. This is where the poorer people stood for the plays. It was smelly and crowded, as no lavatories existed then. The higher up the galleries you sat, the more they cost. Even today, you can see a performance standing by the stage for £5!

Sadly, Sam died before the theatre was completed, but his daughter, Zoë, continued the dream. The theatre was opened in 1993 by Her Majesty the Queen. On one occasion, Dame Judi Dench, in her role as Queen Elizabeth 1st rode on to the stage and bowed to Queen Elizabeth 2nd sitting in the Royal Box.! That would have been amazing! Judy Dumbrill