

# History of the Elizabethan Theatre



- Interesting Facts and information about History of the Elizabethan Theatre
- Elizabethan Theatre History - the Inn-yards, Amphitheatres and Playhouses
- Elizabethan Audiences, Plays and Playwrights
- Actors, Theatre Companies and Troupes

*Picture of Queen Elizabeth I*

## History of the Elizabethan Theatre

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The History of the Elizabethan Theatre started with the Wandering minstrels who moved from one castle and town to to the next.

Any strangers were treated with suspicion during the Elizabethan era, and this also applied to wandering actors, especially when many horrific outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague were occurring. The reputations of Elizabethan actors were that of vagabonds and thieves.

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Travelling throughout the era was restricted and required a license. Regulations restricting actors soon followed and Licenses were granted to the nobles of England for the maintenance of troupes of players. Thus the Elizabethan Acting Troupes were formed and the History of the Elizabethan Theatre started.

**The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - the Inn-yards**

The travelling actors played to their audiences in the courtyards of taverns - called inn-yards. Temporary stages had to be erected and the actors moved around from one venue to the next. The biggest of the Inn-yards had a maximum capacity of 500 people. There were no purpose built theaters until 1576 when a theatrical entrepreneur called James Burbage (father of the actor, Richard Burbage) decided to capitalize on the growing popularity of plays.

James Burbage obtained a lease and permission to build 'The Theatre' in Shoreditch, London. The Lord Chamberlain's Men use it from 1594 to 1596 and thus begins of the History of the Elizabethan Theatre.

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - the Amphitheaters**

The 'Theatre' was built in a similar style to the Roman Coliseum, but on a smaller scale. The Elizabethan amphitheatre was designed to hold a capacity of up to 3000 people. Similar amphitheatres were later built to house blood sports, such as bear beating at the 'Bear Garden' and Bull Beating at the 'Bull Ring'. In 1577 Another open air amphitheatre called The Curtain opens in Finsbury Fields in Shoreditch, London followed by the Rose in 1587.

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - the Bubonic Plague**

During the Elizabethan era there were constant outbreaks of the deadly Bubonic Plague (The Black Death). The large audiences who were attracted to the massive theaters posed a real health hazard to the largely populated city of London and in 1593 Theatres were close due to the Bubonic Plague (The Black Death).

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - London's authorities ban plays in the City of London**

The major outbreak of the Bubonic Plague and the rowdy crowds attracted by the theaters were causing real problems in the City of London. Many Londoners were strict Protestants - Puritans in fact, who abhorred the theatres and many of the people they attracted. Objections to the theaters escalated from the Church and the City of London Officials. Respectable London citizens added even more objections about the rise in crime and the bawdy nature of some of the plays, fighting, drinking not to mention the risk of so many people and the spread of the Bubonic Plague. Finally, in 1596 London's authorities were unwilling to ignore the growing complaints any longer and the public presentation of plays and all theaters within the City limits of London were banned. All theaters located in the City were forced to move to the South side of the River Thames outside the City of London limits

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - The Globe Theatre**

In 1599 the Globe Theatre is opened on Bankside - to the South of London. William Shakespeare is a co-owner of the Globe and a prolific writer of plays. The Globe Theater is a huge success. Winter performances are staged in indoor theaters called Playhouses.

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - The Bubonic Plague strikes again.**

In 1603 the Bubonic Plague (The Black Death) again ravages London killing 33,000 people and all theatres are closed until the deadly outbreak subsides.

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - Fire at the Globe**

On June 29 1613 a huge fire broke out at the Globe Theatre. It was started by the firing of a cannon during one of the plays. In 1614 the Globe Theatre was rebuilt on original foundations but this time the roof was tiled, not thatched. William Shakespeare dies on April 25 1616

### **The History of the Elizabethan Theatre - The English Civil War and the Puritans**

In 1642 The English Civil War breaks out between the Parliamentarians (Puritans) and the Royalists and on September 2 1642 the Puritan Parliament issues an ordinance suppressing all stage plays. The Puritans demolish the Globe Theatre in 1644. In 1647 even stricter rules are passed by the Puritans restricting the staging of plays and in 1648 the Puritans order that all playhouses and theatres are to be pulled down, all players to be seized and whipped, and anyone caught attending a play to be fined five shillings. In 1649 The Civil War finally leads to the terrible execution of King Charles I by the Parliamentarians. The Elizabethan theater is halted until 1658 when Oliver Cromwell dies and the power of the Puritans starts to decline. In 1660 King Charles II is restored to the throne of England. The Restoration, and the demise in the power of the Puritans, sees the opening of the theatres once again.

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### **Elizabethan History of the Elizabethan Theatre**

Additional details, facts and information about the Elizabethan Theatre in the Elizabethan Theatre can be accessed via the Elizabethan Era Sitemap.

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