

SAA Seminar: REED at 50—Abstracts

Jeeyoung Choi, Edward Alleyn's Spatial Vision of the Fortune Playhouse

Abstract:

Existing records of the Fortune playhouse point to one figure who appears as the central locus of most, if not all, profitable operations on the playhouse property: Edward Alleyn. This may not be that surprising, considering that by 1600, when the first Fortune was built, Alleyn was not only a well-established actor, but also proving to be a savvy businessman much like his father-in-law Philip Henslowe. However, a closer examination of the Fortune's records—such as leases, lawsuits, census reports, and Alleyn's diary, among others—reveals that Alleyn carefully engineered and executed his vision of the Fortune complex as a “social space,” to use Henri Lefebvre's terminology, resulting in an organized operation of coexisting product and labor. Indeed, many of Alleyn's associates—theater players as well as non-theater professionals (for instance, textile workers like dyers and thread packers)—both worked and lived on the playhouse property, with Alleyn's spatial vision encompassing the Fortune's business operations (the playhouse, tenement leasing, textile enterprises, and so forth) in addition to its labor relations. Drawing from the spatial theory of Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, I argue that Alleyn envisioned and articulated the Fortune complex as a unified social space, composed of people that he brought together in pursuit of the same shared objectives.

Emily Crider, Space, Place, and People: The Fortune Complex's Natural and Built Environment

This paper, which is part of a larger project exploring the physical and social topography of the Fortune Playhouse in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, focuses on describing the natural and built environment of the playhouse itself. It does so using research drawn from Early Modern manuscripts on the Fortune estate, including leases, building contracts, rental agreements, and the diary of Edward Alleyn, as well as more recent archeological evidence such as that examined in Callan Davies's *What is a Playhouse? England at Play, 1520-1620* (2023). Identifying the locations, functions, and transformations of various facets of and adjacent to the property, such as tenements, gardens, outbuildings, pathways, and the taphouse that served playgoers and local residents alike, reveals the playhouse to have been a fundamentally dynamic social and economic space. The history of the Fortune estate and its surrounding properties underscores myriad ways in which the playhouse was an indelible aspect of daily life, a locus of social engagement and contributor to local commercial activity that fundamentally shaped—and was shaped by—the communities that lived, worked, and gathered there. Ultimately, this paper lays the groundwork for other questions this project strives to answer, particularly regarding reciprocity in the Fortune playhouse complex, the interrelationships between the place and the people who interacted with and occupied it.

F. Elizabeth Hart. “Nonsuch Palace as a Court-Based Playing Space, ca. 1556-1612”

This paper considers the late 16th-/early 17th-century functions of Nonsuch Palace, positing that Nonsuch constituted a court-based site of cultural work that may have included theater players and a playing space of historical significance. Built in the late reign of Henry VIII but demolished in the 1680s, Nonsuch stood for only 150 years and was well-enough situated off the Thames to be unusually remote compared to other royal residences. Its disappearance was so complete by the early 18th century that even its foundations were lost: Their rediscovery in 1959 revealed clues relating to the palace's unique decorative features and its network of Italianate gardens. Among other aspects of Nonsuch worthy of study was its separate banqueting house, an entertainment structure whose foundations suggest uses ranging from musical concerts to dramatic performances. This paper begins with a discussion of royal playing spaces in general, placing an emphasis on such spaces' flexibility and the possibility that more of them existed than were captured in court records. The ownership history of Nonsuch suggests that it may have served as a hybrid space both of household-based, private entertainments and court-based entertainments in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. The paper examines evidence of cultural—including theatrical—activity generated by a series of people whose relationships with Nonsuch determined its cultural significance: Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel, Thomas Cawarden, first Master of the Revels, John and Jane Lumley, Elizabeth I, and Prince Henry Stuart, the latter of whose Nonsuch-based court included two figures who are now inseparable from the history of early English art and theater, Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel, and Inigo Jones, architect and innovator of Stuart masque culture.

Robert Hornback, Notes toward Finding Will Kemp: Recovering Lost Stories of a Maligned Clown in Records, Repertory, and Data

No player of the Renaissance stage, I argue, has been so much misconstrued as the clown Will Kemp. A chronic pattern was set early on, as we learn in *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (1600). In this his lone prose pamphlet, Kemp repeatedly laments “the lyes ... writ of me” in the proliferation of “lying ballets and rumors” published by “the impudent generation of Ballad-makers” representing them as his works (i.e., titled as “Kemps ...”). Regrettably, a nearly comparable misconstruing has continued in a scholarly tradition that overlooks or misinterprets many details. Negative conjectural myths belied by evidence have become unquestioned fact—e.g., Kemp the “solo comedian” who couldn't play well with others, Kemp the unprofessional improviser “mucking his way through [a] play,” Kemp the banished nuisance to the Chamberlain's Men, Kemp as more difficult to work with than Armin, and, finally, Kemp as failing sans Shakespeare, evidenced partly via his burial as “Kemp a man.” This paper begins an overdue task of challenging the critical tradition's slanted view of this once-beloved clown. To do so, I draw upon records, comparative repertory study (where clowns have received little consideration across companies), and data pointing to lost stories of Kemp as the most collaborative clown of his age, Kemp the highly trained professional, and “Master Kemp” as the most influential master to boy-clown apprentices of the period.

William Ingram

For the SAA seminar “REED at Fifty”, my paper is imaginatively titled “REED at Fifty”. In it I offer an overview of the scholarly landscape in historical study as it looked fifty years ago, and consider the emergence of new ways of thinking about history since then, concurrent with the growth and development of REED during that period. I pay special attention to REED’s shift from print to digital, and speculate on the ways REED’s future will likely be increasingly shaped by that shift. I ruminate on the perils of raw data, and conclude with some musings on the current nature of scholarly presentation. The insights I offer are not new or original with me, but are (or should be) part of the culture of theatre history today.

David Kathman, *The Curtain and the King’s Head: The Theatrical Mann Family of Shoreditch*

Until recently, three of the only pieces of contemporary documentary evidence known about the Curtain playhouse were deeds of sale (dated 1567, 1572, and 1581) involving the Curtain estate, on part of which the playhouse stood. Two of the tenants listed in the 1581 deed, Richard Hickes and Henry Lanman, were defendants in a newly discovered lawsuit from 1579 which establishes that Robert Miles, the plaintiff in the suit, was the primary builder of the Curtain playhouse. Hickes, Lanman, and Miles were thus important figures in Elizabethan theater history, and I present new research about all three of them in my upcoming book about the earliest London playhouses. This paper, however, is about another tenant of the Curtain estate: Robert Mann, who was listed as a tenant in all three of the above-mentioned deeds. Although he had no direct connection to the Curtain playhouse, Mann was the patriarch of a theatrical family. A longtime Shoreditch resident, he owned the King’s Head inn, located adjacent to the southeast corner of the Curtain estate. After his death in 1583, his widow Jane Mann continued to run the King’s Head for more than 20 years and helped raise their grandchildren, three of whom married professional players. One of these players was Christopher Beeston, who was married to the Manns’ granddaughter Jane Sands; another was Christopher’s kinsman (possibly brother) Robert Beeston, who married Jane’s cousin Audrey Underhill. In 1605, after Jane Mann’s death, Christopher Beeston bought control of the King’s Head, possibly to provide access from Shoreditch High Street to the Curtain playhouse, which Beeston’s company, Queen Anne’s Men, was leasing.

Professor Siobhan Keenan, *Profiting from the Shakespearean Stage: The Case of Cuthbert Burbage*

Beyond the rich information afforded by Henslowe’s Diary, direct evidence about the money earned by early modern players, playwrights and theatre owners during the years in which the English professional stage first flourished is limited, although this has not prevented educated estimates of the income company and playhouse sharers might have enjoyed. While multiple stories of early modern actors and writers struggling with debt point to the financial precarity they sometimes faced, we know that at least some theatre owners and actor-sharers of leading acting companies such as the King’s Players became rich, their wealth often reflected in their ability to invest not only in their playhouses, but also in property purchases.

Inspired by REED’s commitment to establishing the context in which the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries thrived through fresh investigation of the archives, this paper explores what insights a newly discovered record relating to Cuthbert Burbage’s 1629 investment in a

Kentish property reveals about the wealth he had accrued over thirty years as co-owner of the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses.

Sally-Beth MacLean, 'Time is...Time was': Current Reflections on REED's *Proceedings of the First Colloquium*

A first colloquium for scholars interested in participating in Records of Early English Drama (REED), the recently launched humanities research project, was held at the University of Toronto from 31 August to 3 September 1978. Eight essays were published subsequently in the *Proceedings of the First Colloquium* in 1979 that provide a snapshot of work in the field at the time as well as expectations of what direction REED's collaborative approach to medieval and renaissance theatre history might take. As we celebrate our fifty year anniversary -- and plan for the second REED colloquium in September 2026 -- my intention is to revisit some of the assumptions and goals expressed in the *Proceedings* in light of what we have learned since the heady days of the project's launch.

Gerit Quealy, The Queen's Men's John Bentley: Early Career Fandom and Criminality in the Bridewell Records

Testimony in the 1577 Bridewell Petty Crime records seems to reveal the earliest recorded fan letter thus far. An AI inquiry initially asserted that 1906 was the first recorded fan letter, while a later assessment placed it as Bram Stoker's 1876 letter to Walt Whitman. Investigation into the circumstances and characters involved in the Bridewell depositions surrounding a 1577 inquest into criminality involving John Bentley, an actor and/or poet/writer, and others, has revealed some fascinating insights about his possible early career prior to being a member of the Queen's Men. The paper further explores whether the player and the poet are indeed the same John Bentley, as well as if the intended purpose of the fan letter was fulfilled.

Paul Whitfield White, The Fortune Playhouse District

Large commercial playhouses in early modern London obviously did not operate in isolation from their immediate urban surroundings: the residences, businesses, and civic and religious institutions that in a myriad of ways impacted them, and vice-versa. Those surroundings, as they applied to the Fortune Playhouse (1600-1649), is the focus of my paper, and they raise many questions worthy of attention. Was the presence of the Fortune close to one's residence central to defining a sense of locality? Did its proximity to your business or, say, your property rentals, generate income, a sense of pride, or hostility? Who were the important movers and shakers in the area? If we want to think in terms of a theater "district," where do we draw the boundaries? Are they always institutionally defined by religious and secular authorities, or could they be the imaginative constructs of individuals and groups? Part of the discussion will be specific localities that represent different kinds of relationships with theater professionals and playgoers, such as the Red Cross tavern, owned by a Fortune player and frequented by

colleagues, the Barbican mansion, occupied at different times by both theater adversaries (Lord Willough de Esbe) and patrons (Spanish ambassador Gondomar); and finally the notorious brothels of Pickt-Hatch, a five-minute walk north of the Fortune and mentioned in several plays and pamphlets of the period.

Emily Winerock, Feet Feats and Fisticuffs at Fêtes: Dance in the REED Collections

The REED project has transformed scholarship in English theatre history. Yet, because dance generates fewer printed records than other performing arts, the impact of the REED collections on early dance scholarship has been, arguably, even more transformative. Hundreds of references to dancing in church court records offer glimpses of how conflicts over dancing played out at the parochial level. Numerous payments to morris dancers in the late medieval and early modern periods show who supported them, and how that support shifted over time. Moreover, in aggregate, the dance records in the REED collection suggest that the concerns of ecclesiastical and secular authorities differed substantially from those who published sermons and treatises. Rather than railing against dancing as a “preparative to wantonness,” visitation articles and ecclesiastical presentments were mostly concerned with people dancing at the wrong time or in the wrong place, while quarter sessions records mostly feature dancers who were also violent, drunk, or disorderly. This paper provides an overview of the main types of dance records found in the REED collections, presenting two preliminary case studies built out from REED records, and concluding with some thoughts on how REED has and might continue to shape early dance scholarship.