

Shakespeare

A Penny for the Yard

Ben Crystal

In Shakespeare's time this area of London was not only home to actors and theatre-goers. Southwark was a rough, dangerous and fairly lawless part of the city.

It's now home to a more modern and rich London. But something of Shakespeare has been kept alive. Just down the road from the original foundations there is a recreation of Shakespeare's Globe, built in the mid 1990s.

Ben: *How similar is it to the one that was here 400 years ago?*

Dr Farah Karim-Cooper: *Well, in terms of the architectural features they were very similar, like the shape of the theatre, the fact that the stage thrusts out into the yard, the fact that there is a stage roof which they used to call the heavens. It has an upper stage balcony, musicians' gallery, the three doors where actors come in and exit, the trapdoor in the stage as well as the trapdoor in the roof, all of those things were features that were in Shakespeare's original theatre in 1599.*

The materials of the building would have inspired his work. Sometimes there's references in his plays to thatch and to the wooden dialogue of the actors' shoes on the stage. Those types of technologies, those

special effects in the theatres, would have inspired scenes where gods are being lowered from the heavens. Those types of things were written into Shakespeare's plays.

Ben: *What were the audience in Shakespeare's time like that came to see his plays here?*

Farah: *The audiences were wide-ranging. They came from all social classes. Because it only cost a penny to come into the yard and stand you would have had the working classes, you know, the butchers and the tailors, but also the higher up you go in the galleries the higher the class, and if you pay six pence, which is the most amount you could pay, you would sit in these beautifully painted gentlemen's rooms very comfortably.*

We have a wide range of audiences from all over the world now, because Shakespeare has such an extraordinary global appeal. It's the magic of his storytelling.

Shakespeare wrote 38 plays and over 150 poems, which are still enjoyed today.

And whilst we can get an understanding of what Shakespeare's life must have been like in London and how much the city inspired him, I believe his works only truly come alive when they are held in the heart, spoken out loud, wherever you are in the world.