



Fig. 1: Huggin Hill. The pilae in the large heated room, looking north.
Photo: Museum of London.

A tale of two sites

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WHEN I offered to try to provide the 'Highlights of the quarter's sites' in response to readers' requests, I did not foresee the intense media, public and political interest that has been shown in London's archaeology in the past few months. Several important sites have 'hit the headlines', either locally or nationally; in the space available I shall concentrate on two – Dominant House (Huggin Hill) in the City and 2-10 Southwark Bridge Road (the *Rose*) in Southwark (see Fig. 3).

Huggin Hill

First indications of Roman buildings in this area, on the north side of Upper Thames Street, came in 1845, when east-west walls were found in sewer trenches in

both Huggin Hill itself and Bread Street Hill to the west¹. In 1929 Gerald Dunning recorded a massive wall, 5ft (1.5m) thick running east-west for at least 36ft (11m), as well as other walls, at 10-12 Little Trinity Lane², east of Huggin Hill.

In 1964 a site to the west of Huggin Hill was excavated by Peter Marsden for the Guildhall Museum³. Started as a three-day excavation over the August Bank Holiday, it continued until at least October under the aegis of the Guildhall Museum and LAMAS, and contributed to the foundation of the City of London Archaeological Society. The earlier discoveries were revealed to be part of a very large

1. *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London, Vol. III. Roman London* Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) (1928) 123.
2. R. Merrifield *The Roman City of London* (1965), gazetteer no.

121, pp. 224-5.

3. P. R. V. Marsden 'Archaeological finds in the City of London, 1963-4' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 21 pt. 3 (1967) 194-202.

bath-house complex, thought at the time to be a public bath. The excavator commented

“The remains ... stand out as being exceptionally well preserved, and the rebuilding of the site has only slightly damaged them. It is very desirable that the bath building should be carefully excavated at some future date, and part of it might even be considered for permanent preservation.”⁴

The development of Fur Trade House, on the east side of Huggin Hill and south of the 1929 site, gave a further opportunity to examine part of ‘this enormous public building’⁵. It showed at least two main building phases, including the addition of a second *caldarium*, tentatively linked to Hadrian’s visit to London in AD 122 and his proscription of mixed bathing. It appeared to have been demolished in the mid 2nd century, to be succeeded by ‘rough stone buildings’.

Early in 1986 a planning application was submitted for the redevelopment of Dominant House (i.e. the 1964 site). The site was hurriedly scheduled as an Ancient Monument in June 1986, and provisional planning permission was granted a month later, subject to the scheduled monument being adequately protected and made accessible to the public. The scheduling recommended by *English Heritage* said that

4. *Ibid.*, 189.

5. P. R. V. Marsden ‘Excavations of Roman public baths’ *London*

the *caldarium* in the courtyard between Dominant House and Huggin Hill was very well preserved, with walls over 2m (6½ft) high, but that the bath-house remains under Dominant House itself had been seriously damaged in building operations. Trial work carried out by the DUA in 1988⁶ revealed that the monument was in very good condition and that the construction of Dominant House had caused very little damage. Nevertheless, in November 1988 the Secretary of State for the Environment (Nicholas Ridley), acting on the advice of *English Heritage*, granted the developers, the Hammerson Group, scheduled monument consent (i.e. permission to demolish the monument by the construction of an underground car park), imposing a six-month delay to allow for archaeological recording. Excavations by the DUA started on 3 January 1989, funded by the Hammerson Group to the tune of £475,000, and with a staff of 24 archaeologists, with the intention of finishing by the end of May. Media, public and political pressure following a press view of the remains on 12 April led to an announcement by Hammerson on 17 May that the new building had been redesigned (at a cost of £3m) to preserve the remains under a concrete raft, supported by piles away from the

Archaeol 1 no. 5 (1969) 108-110.

6. Not reported in *Excavation Round-up* 1988.

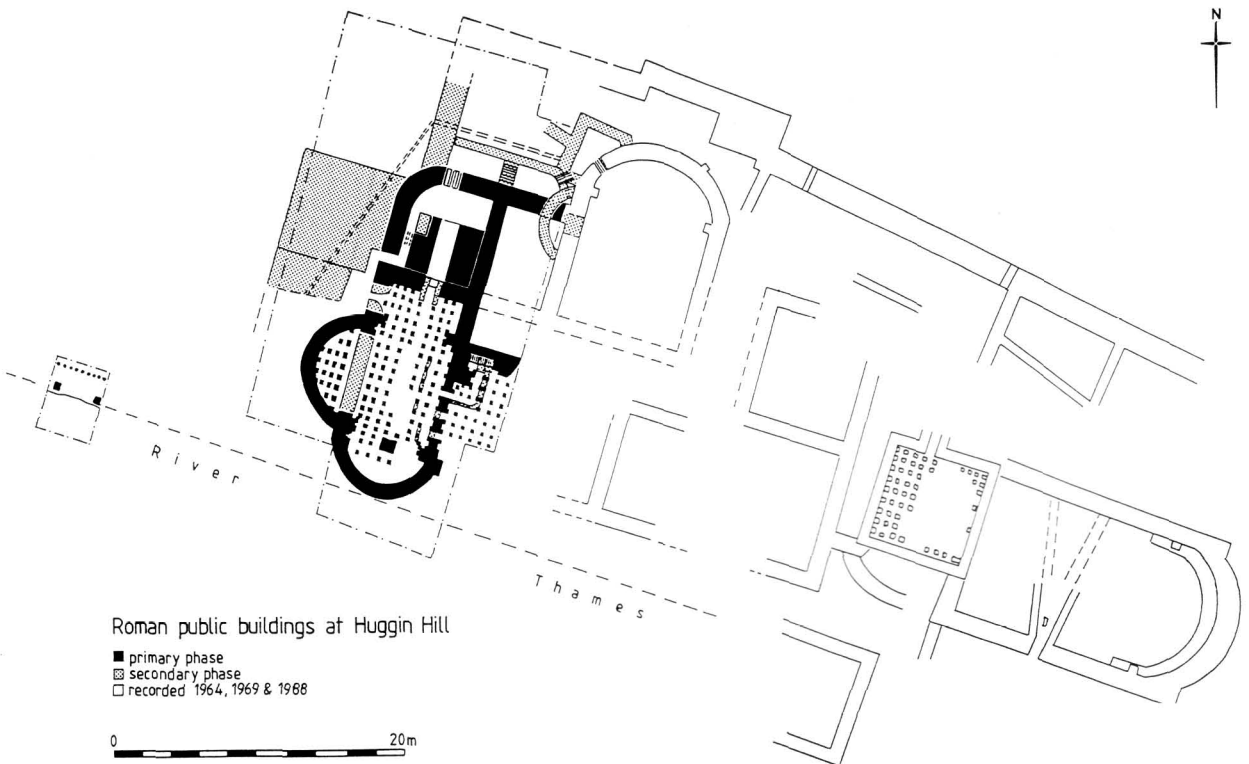


Fig. 2: Huggin Hill. Composite site plan from the 1964, 1969, 1988 and 1989 excavations.

monument itself. Backfilling the site with a special sand started on 30 May, after the walls and *pilae* had been wrapped in a man-made fibre, Terram. In the following sections we summarise the results of the various excavations and the campaign surrounding the site.

The excavations

The present site covers about 5000sq.ft. of a complex estimated at 40,000sq.ft, extending for 250ft (75m) along the former river frontage (now Upper Thames Street), see Fig. 2. The building was constructed in the late 1st century AD. It was terraced at two levels into the steeply-sloping hillside; the lower contained massive heated rooms and the upper several other rooms. The stone retaining walls are the largest surviving Roman walls discovered in London, and in places stand to over 3m (10ft) high.

The siting of the building allowed the use of natural springs in the hillside. Drains, culverts and water pipes collected clean spring water into storage tanks along the north side of the building. The water was then distributed to various parts of the building, including baths, pools and steam rooms. Other water pipes may have been to relieve problems of groundwater trapped to the north, which could have damaged the fabric of the building. Excess and waste water was channelled through the building to empty into the Thames.

The large heated room to the south of the terracing walls was built as a cruciform shape, at least 15m (50ft) north-south by 20m (65ft) east-west. It has two apsidal ends, one looking west and the other looking south over the Thames. The whole room was hypocausted and over 100 *pilae* survived to various heights across the room (Fig. 1). One small area of marble mosaic floor is still *in situ*. To the north of this room lay the furnace (*praefurnium*), constructed of tiles and scorched a dark red from constant high temperatures, and linked to the room by a large flue.

At some point in the 2nd century AD the building appears to have been enlarged. The large cruciform room was divided into a number of smaller areas, which would have been easier to heat. There were substantial rearrangements of the drains, service areas and furnaces.

The abandonment of the building in the 3rd century was followed by much robbing and salvaging of valuable materials such as marble and mosaics. No evidence of structural damage was found; the building may simply have outlasted its usefulness. Perhaps maintenance costs had become too great.

The function of the building remains uncertain. The

original interpretation as a public bath has been challenged by the idea that it may have been a palace, or other large public building, with a bath complex attached.

Occupation of the site continued through the late Roman period, but was of a very different character. A sequence of clay and timber buildings with clay and gravel floors was constructed within the still standing masonry walls. In one area these buildings were preceded by workshop areas with hearths and ovens, which were probably used for iron- and glass-making.

The campaign

The press view of 12 April was followed the next day by detailed reports in the quality dailies, *The Independent* in particular concentrating on the threat to the site ('Roman London find of the century faces destruction'), and reporting *English Heritage* as saying 'Had we realised the site was as impressive as it was, we may well have sought a different solution'. *The Independent* took up the running with an editorial (14 April) setting out the problems of excavating in the City, concluding that Hammerson should consider 'providing tourist access to the remains in the basement of the new building'; a second article (15 April) examined the legal background to the crisis.

Political support for preservation came from all major parties; early day motions were put down by Gerald Bowden (vice-chairman, Conservative Arts and Heritage Committee) and Tony Banks (Labour MP and former GLC councillor), and backing came also from Patrick Cormack (Conservative), Andrew Faulds (Labour) and Simon Hughes (SLD). This pressure culminated in an adjournment debate in the House of Commons on 5 May. There were two main issues – whether scheduled monument consent should be revoked, leaving *English Heritage* open to claims for compensation variously estimated at between £7m and £70m (roughly, its annual archaeology and total budgets), and how planning law could be modified to prevent a repetition. The reply by the Under-Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, made it clear that scheduled monument consent would not be revoked, and that the Government would rely on voluntary agreement to save the site⁷.

The debate was fully reported the next day, and a short lull followed, broken only by an article by Simon Jenkins, deputy chairman of *English Heritage*⁸. In the face of campaigns over this site and the *Rose* (see below), he argued that nothing had gone wrong, and no changes in the law were needed. He said that the Museum of London had called the remains found in 1964 'probably fragmentary and damaged' and 'not

7. *Hansard*, 5 May 1989.

8. 'Between pit and pendulum' *The Times* 12 May 1989.

worth displaying', and referred to the low display value of their 'shallow footings'.

Hammerson's decision to redesign their building was widely reported on 18 May. A cautionary note was struck by *The Independent*, pointing out that another development, by Kumagai Gumi at Thames Exchange, was about to destroy a large volume of archaeological deposits, including several Saxon ships. Andrew Selkirk, editor of *Current Archaeology*, made the suggestion that developers 'should be encouraged to take out archaeological insurance so that when spectacular discoveries are made they can be preserved.'⁹ Comments came from unexpected sources: the *Estates Times*¹⁰ claimed that the property industry was getting the blame for *English Heritage's* mistakes, while the *New Law Journal*¹¹ examined the legal framework in detail. The author concluded that a change of attitude was needed – by the public, by developers and by local and central government. A more positive planning policy was needed, the use of areas of archaeological importance should be extended, and it should be possible for scheduled monument consent to be revoked without the risk of bankrupting *English Heritage*.

The Rose Theatre

A major feature of the south bank in the late 16th century was the presence of four of London's first eight purpose-built playhouses, including the *Globe* and the less well-known *Rose*, actually the first to have been built. The size, shape and nature of these playhouses has been the subject of much debate, mostly conjectural. Contemporary information about their appearance is very limited and often conflicting; there is little evidence apart from unclear views in panorama of London, a 1596 sketch of the interior of the *Swan* and accounts relating to alterations to the *Rose* in 1592.

The *Rose* was built about 1587 by the impresario Philip Henslowe, at the southern end of an estate now bounded on the east by Southwark Bridge Road, on the south by Park Street and on the west by Rose Alley (Fig. 3). It was followed by the *Swan* (1595), the *Globe* (1599) and the *Hope* (1613). Works by leading playwrights such as Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker and John Webster were performed at the *Rose*, as well as most of Christopher Marlowe's plays. Edward Alleyn, the most famous actor of his day, later founder of Dulwich College, played the title roles in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta*. Two of William Shakespeare's plays were first presented here – *Henry*

VI in 1592 and *Titus Andronicus*, in which Shakespeare himself may have appeared. The last performance at the *Rose* was in 1603; it may have been demolished by about 1606.

In 1957 an office block, Southbridge House, was built on the site. It became redundant in 1987 when the Heron property group applied for planning permission to construct a new building on the site. They received permission, which included an archaeological condition, in February 1988. They also agreed to fund an archaeological evaluation of the site, on the understanding that significant finds would lead to larger-scale excavation. In October Heron's interest in the site was bought out by Imry Merchant Properties, who stood by the arrangement to fund the initial two-month evaluation but stated that no further time or money would be made available.

The Museum of London evaluation began on 19 December with an excavation in the south-western part of the site, while Southbridge House was demolished to the north and east. Following en-

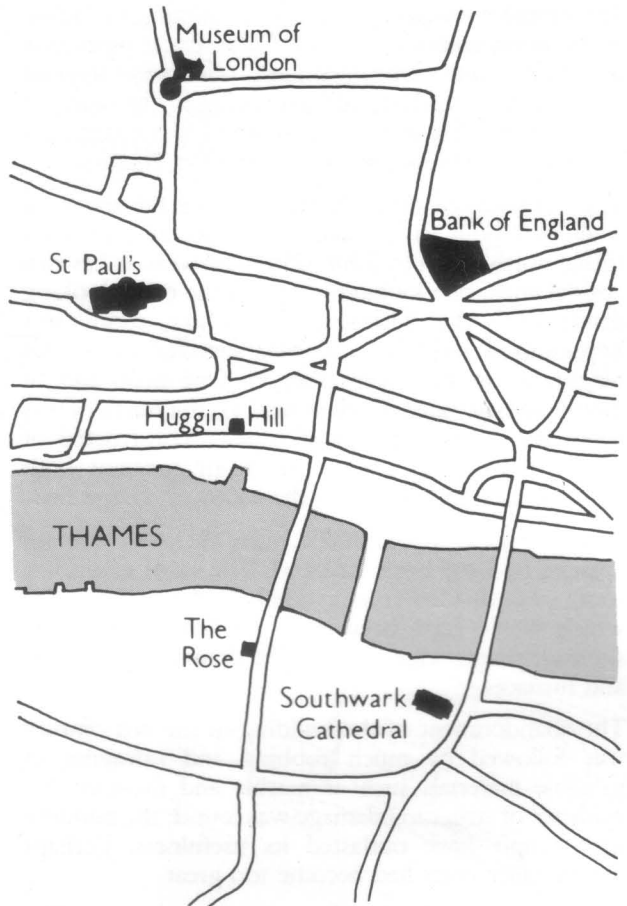


Fig. 3: map to show the locations of the Huggin Hill bath-house and the Rose Theatre sites.

9. Letter to the editor, *The Times* 18 May 1989.

10. Editorial, 19 May 1989.

11. Carolyn Shelbourne 'Burying our mistakes?—the "palace" at Huggin Hill' *New Law Journal* (19 May 1989) 676-8.



Fig. 4: the Rose Theatre site, from the south. The piles of Southbridge House can clearly be seen in the north and east of the site.
Photo: Andrew Fulgoni

largement of the original trench and the excavation of 17th to 20th century levels, angled chalk foundation walls of Tudor date were found in early February. Further work soon confirmed that the *Rose* had been found (Fig. 4). The response from the developers was to allow a further ten weeks on the site, and to state that the site would be preserved, but only after being buried and having the piles for the proposed office block driven through it.

The excavation

Evidence for two phases of construction was found (Fig. 5). In phase 1 parallel inner and outer walls formed a polygon with perhaps 12 or 14 sides; in phase 2 the shape of the theatre was changed by a northwards extension, the outer wall of which has been largely destroyed by later disturbance.

The theatre was small – the diameter of the inner yard

or pit and stage area was perhaps no more than 13m (43ft). Its inner and outer walls were 3.5m (11½ft) apart, giving the width of the galleries. An extensive organic layer may represent the remains of roof thatch, and demolition debris shows that the timber-framed buildings had lath-and-plaster walls. The superstructure rested on a trench-built foundation of brick and chalk, which in phase 1 was given extra stability by a series of closely-spaced chalk-built piles. A weathered strip discovered around the edge of the yard was the result of rainwater dripping from the eaves of the thatched roof above. The yard appears to have been floored with a layer of mortar on which the spectators could stand; the southern half of this floor was level, but the northern half sloped down towards the stage. The stage seems to have been between 5 and 6m (16 and 20ft) from front to back, and perhaps 11 to 13m (36 to 43ft) wide.

In phase 2 (perhaps the alterations documented in 1592) the design of the theatre was changed, possibly to accommodate a larger audience. The yard's area was increased, and it was refloored with a layer of cinder and hazelnut shells. The stage, while maintaining its size, was moved to the north by about 3m (10ft), and backed by the construction of a new internal wall.

In both phases, the theatre was smaller than expected. It is almost certainly the *Rose* that is referred to as 'this small circumference' in the prologue to *Fortunatus* by Thomas Dekker, which had its first performance here in 1599. If the theatre was of three stories (based on documentary comparison with other theatres of the

time), up to two thousand people could have packed in (Fig. 6). The stage does not seem to have projected as far into the yard as indicated by the drawing of the *Swan*, or by documentary evidence for the *Fortune*. Although it may have carried a large cast at times, every whisper, nuance and gesture performed on it would have been understood, the wooden superstructure adding to the resonance of the spoken word.

The campaign

The ten-week extension was a period of intense activity, both archaeological and political. *English Heritage* spent £30,000 on a roof, viewing platform and presentation material, and thousands visited the site. A cross-party alliance of nearly 50 MPs secured a debate on 9 May, only four days after the one on Huggin Hill. Simon Jenkins was far more sympathetic to the *Rose* than to Huggin Hill, recognising the site's unique and evocative nature, which 'has some claim to be at least one of the cradles of western culture.'¹² The acting profession took up the cause and Dame Peggy Ashcroft, Ian McKellen and many others were seen regularly at the site.

This period culminated in the all-night vigil of 14-15 May, which saw the lorries, carrying sand to backfill the site, turned away by actors, archaeologists and MPs. The next day the Government announced a 28-day halt to building work, to enable agreement to be reached. Imry Merchant were to be paid £1m compensation for the delay. The round-the-clock vigil continued. The developers proposed a scheme which

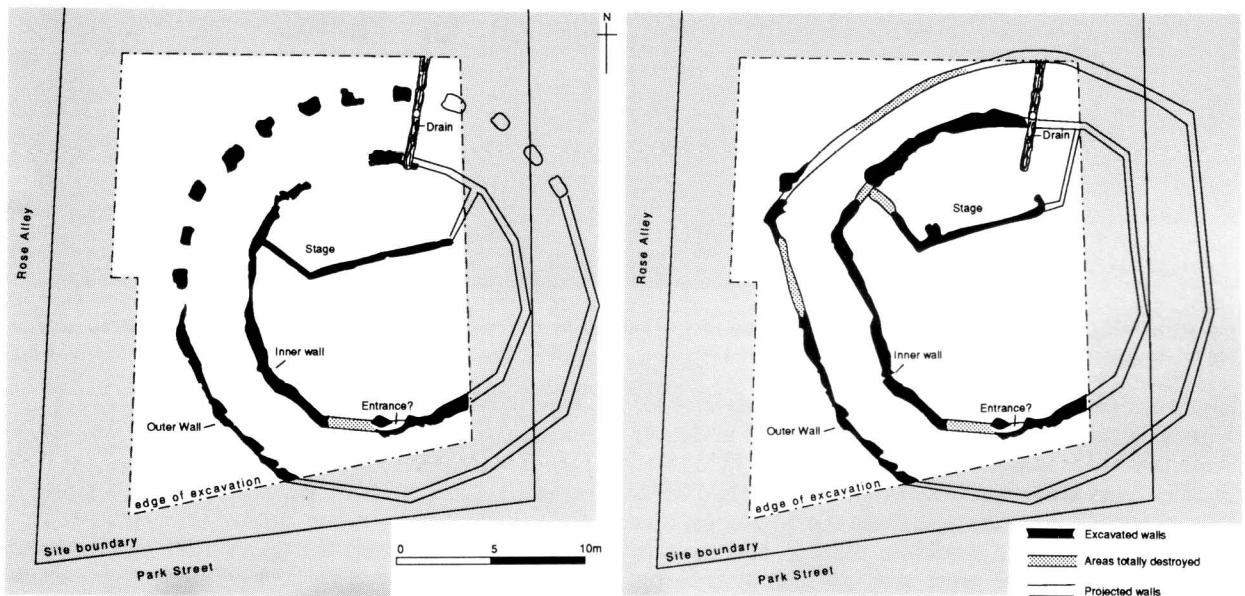


Fig. 5: plans of the Rose Theatre site. Left: phase 1; right: phase 2. Drawn by Alison Hawkins

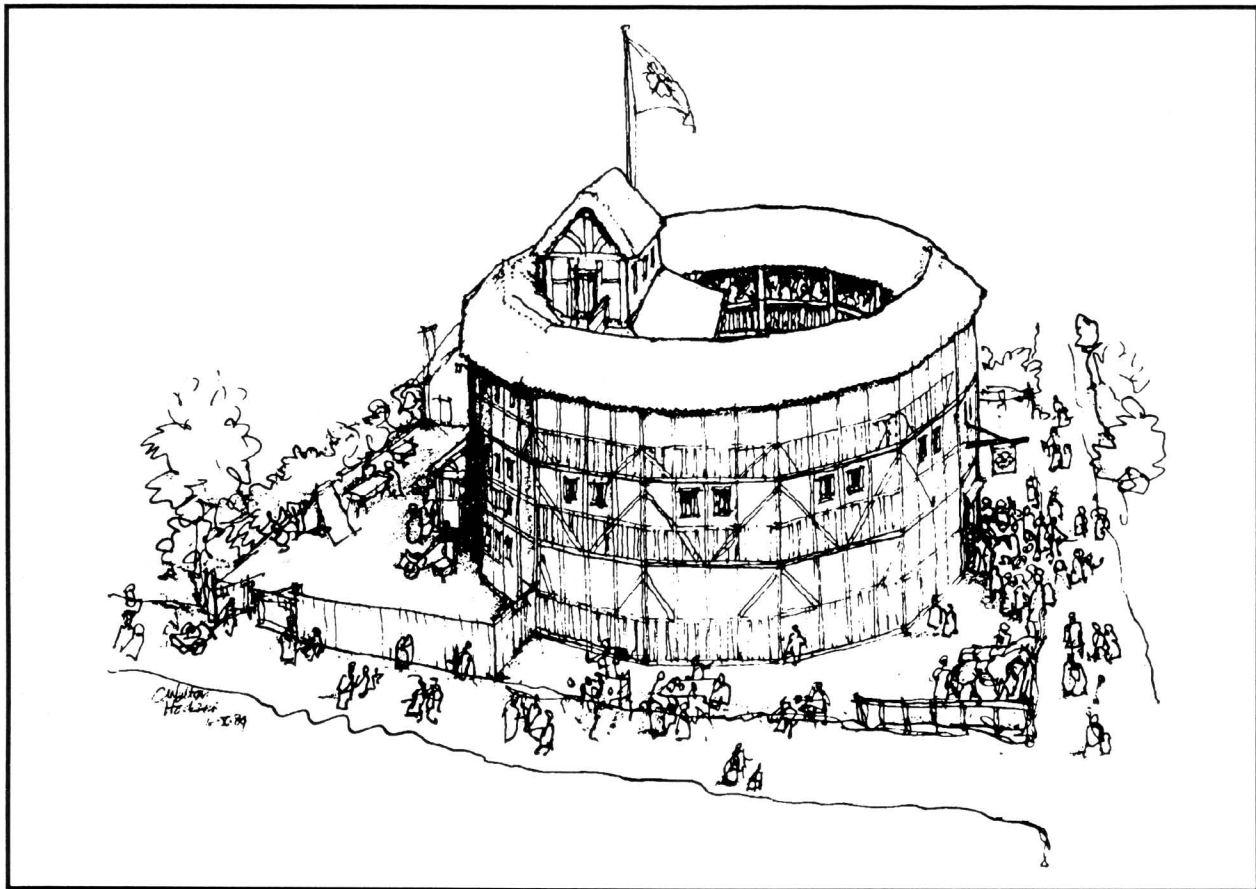


Fig. 6: Reconstruction of the Rose drawn by theatre historian C. Walter Hodges on the basis of information from the excavations.

would preserve the theatre in the basement of their building, and gained the support of *English Heritage*.

However, the campaigners, rejecting these proposals because they would have entailed considerable damage to the fabric of the *Rose*, set up a charity – the Rose Theatre Trust – with the aim of buying the site, if necessary, to ensure the proper preservation of the theatre. It was chaired by local MPs Simon Hughes and Gerald Bowden, with the actor James Fox as vice-chairman. It has organised a petition, signed by over 60,000 people, calling on parliament to ensure the preservation and display of the theatre. The campaigners also appealed to Nicholas Ridley to schedule the site as an Ancient Monument.

An unexpected twist to the story came on 9 June, almost at the end of the period for negotiation. *English Heritage* had asked the Museum of London to carry out the necessary archaeological work in advance of the construction of Imry Merchant's new building. The Museum of London stated they were only prepared to do so if all attempts to achieve a more

satisfactory solution had been exhausted. *English Heritage*, not prepared to delay any further, instructed its own Central Excavation Unit to carry out the necessary work.

On 15 June, Nicholas Ridley announced in the Commons that Imry Merchant had agreed to build their office block on stilts over the site, at an extra cost of £10m. The theatre would be preserved and displayed to the public, but not scheduled as 'there is now no threat to it'. The next day it was covered with Terram and wet sand, to protect it during building operations. This is not the end of the story, but publication schedules force us to stop at this point.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to members of staff of the Museum of London, who have provided the information on which this article is based, especially Sue Rivière (Huggin Hill) and Simon Blatherwick, Julian Bowsher and Hedley Swain (the *Rose*). The site plan (Fig. 5) was drawn by Alison Hawkins.