**Shakespeare's Globe Theatre**

The Globe Theatre was constructed in 1599, out of timber taken from the Theatre. It stood next to the Rose, on the south side of the Thames, and was the most elaborate and attractive theatre yet built. The Globe was designed and constructed for the Chamberlain's Men by Cuthbert Burbage, son of the Theatre's creator, James Burbage. The lease for the land on which the Globe stood was co-owned by Burbage and his brother Robert, and by a group of five actors -- Will Kempe, Augustine Phillips, John Heminge, Thomas Pope, and William Shakespeare. Much of Shakespeare’s wealth came from his holdings in the Globe.

The Globe was the primary home of Shakespeare's acting company beginning in late 1599, and it is a possibility that *As You Like It* was written especially for the occasion. On June 29, 1613, during a performance of *Henry VIII*, a misfired canon ball set the Globe’s thatched roof on fire and the whole theatre was consumed. Swift reconstruction did take place and the Globe reopened to the public within a year, with the addition of a tiled roof. The new Globe theatre lasted until 1644, at which time it was demolished, and housing was quickly built where it once stood. Recent attempts have been made to re-create the Globe, and replicas have been built in Tokyo and in London.

**The Globe Stage**

The stage had two primary parts: 1) The outer stage, which was a rectangular platform projecting into the courtyard, from the back wall. Above it was a thatched roof and hangings but no front or side curtains. 2) The inner stage was the recess between two projecting wings at the very back of the outer stage. This stage was used by actors who were in a scene but not directly involved in the immediate action of the play, and it was also used when a scene took place in an inner room.

Underneath the floors of the outer and inner stages was a large cellar called "hell", allowing for the dramatic appearance of ghosts. This cellar was probably as big as the two stages combined above it, and it was accessed by two or more trap-doors on the outer stage and one trap door (nicknamed "the grave trap") on the inner stage. Actors in "hell" would be encompassed by darkness, with the only light coming from tiny holes in the floor or from the tiring-house stairway at the very back of the cellar.

**The Tiring-House**

Rising from behind the stages was the tiring-house, the three story section of the playhouse that contained the dressing rooms, the prop room, the musician's gallery, and connecting passageways. The tiring-house was enclosed in curtains at all times so the less dramatic elements of play production would be hidden from the audience.
Two doors on either side of the tiring-house allowed the actors entrance onto the stage. Sometimes an actor would come through the “middle door”, which really referred to the main floor curtains of the tiring-house that led directly onto center stage.

The three levels of the tiring-house were each very different. The first level was, essentially, the inner stage when one was needed. Many times Shakespeare’s plays call for a scene within a scene, such as Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess as a backdrop to the main scene in *The Tempest* (V,i); or a scene in which a character or item needs to be dramatically revealed, as we find in *The Merchant of Venice* (II,vii), when Portia asks Nerissa to “draw aside the curtains” to show the caskets; or a scene that should take place in a small, confining space, such as the Capulet’s Tomb in *Romeo and Juliet* (V,iii). For scenes such as these, the actors would have pulled back the curtains on the outer stage to expose the tiring-house as the inner stage. Moreover, the plays often call for one character eavesdropping from behind a curtain or door. The tiring-house was used in this case as well, because at its very rear, even further back than the inner stage floor, was an tiny room hidden by a set of drapes. These floor length drapes or dyed cloth hangings were suspended from the ceiling, concealing the actor. The drapes of the first floor tiring-house would have hidden Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* (II,vi), when the Sheriff comes to the door of the tavern, and would have cloaked Polonius right before he is killed by Hamlet, in Act III, scene iv, just to name two situations.

The second level of the tiring-house contained a central balcony stage in the middle, undoubtedly used multiple times in the production of *Romeo and Juliet*, (II,ii) -- the most famous balcony scene in the canon; a small window-stage on each side of the balcony, directly above the side doors on the first floor, used when up to four characters had to be seen from a window; and a curtained inner room behind the balcony stage, that served the same purpose as the inner room on the first floor of the tiring-house.

The third level consisted of a central music gallery and two large lofts on either side of it, used as storage and dressing rooms. In rare instances the orchestra was seen by the audience, when select members would come down to the main stage to accompany a dancer or a chorus, but in most cases the musicians played in the third-floor curtained gallery, hidden from site. The lofts holding the props and instruments were always closed off from the public. In the Elizabethan theatre extraordinary amounts of money were spent on costumes and the Globe’s storage area would have been overflowing with beautiful clothing, not unlike the kind listed in Henslowe’s Diary, as he took inventory at the Rose. Unfortunately, the arcane spelling is difficult to read, but it is nonetheless interesting to peruse a portion of the list:

Item, j orenge taney satten dublet, layd thycke with gowld lace.
Item, j blew tafetie sewt.
Item, j payr of carnatyon satten Venesynos, layd with gold lace.
Item, j longe-shanckes sewte.
Item, ij Orlates sewtes, hates and gorgettes, and vij anteckes hedes.
Item, vj grene cottes for Roben Hoode, and iiiij knaves sewtes.
Item, ij black saye gownes, and ij cotton gownes, and j rede saye gowne.
Item, Cathemer sewte, j payer of cloth whitte stockens, iiiij Turckes hedes.
Item, j mawe gowne of calleco for the quene, j carnowll hatte.
Item, j red sewt of cloth for pyge, layed with whitt lace.

The Stage Cover

Over the three-story tiring-house was a superstructure composed of huts, resting on a protecting roof (also referred to as a stage-cover), held up by giant posts rising from the main platform. It would appear from drawings of the Bankside that every playhouse contemporaneous with the Globe had a superstructure of one or multiple huts, but the Globe’s huts, or "heavens", seem the most elaborate. In the floor of the superstructure were several trap-openings allowing props to hang down over the stage or actors to descend to the floor, suspended by wires concealed under their costumes. The cannon that was so often fired during battle and coronation scenes was located in the huts, and so too was the trumpeter who heralded the beginning of a performance.

A top the huts of the Globe and of every Bankside theatre stood the playhouse flagpole. When raised, the flag was a signal to people from miles around that a play would be staged that afternoon. J.C. Adams discusses the impact of the playhouse flags in his book *The Globe Theatre* and includes the following excerpt from the *Curtain-Drawer of the World*, written in 1612: "Each play-house advanceth his flagge in the aire, whither quickly at the waving thereof are summoned whole troops of men, women, and children" (379). The flag continued to wave until the end of each performance. No one knew exactly when they would see the flag again, for the Elizabethan theatre community lived in uncertain times and were at the mercy of harsh weather, plague, and puritanical government officials.

General Structure of Shakespeare's Theatres

Regarding the structure of the Elizabethan playhouses, it is important to note that, unlike our modern auditoriums with cloaked main stages, and seating limited to the front view, the Elizabethan playhouses were open to the public eye at every turn, and scenery could not be changed in between scenes because there was no curtain to drop.
It is no coincidence that in all of Shakespeare’s plays, the scene, no matter how
dramatic or climactic, ends on a denouement, with the actors walking off or being
carried off the stage. If the play required a change of place in the next scene, most
times the actors would not leave the stage at all, and it would be up to the audience
to imagine the change had occurred. If props were used, they were usually placed at
the beginning of the play, and oftentimes would become unnecessary as the
performance went on, but would remain on the stage regardless. As G. C. Moore
Smith mentions in the Warwick edition of Henry V, "properties either difficult to
move, like a well, or so small as to be unobtrusive, were habitually left on the
stage . . . whatever scenes intervened" (Addendum).

For very large objects that were vital in one scene but became an obstacle to the
actors on stage in the next scene, it is most likely that the action was halted for
their prompt removal. Due to the lack of props and scenery, the acting troupes relied
very heavily on costumes. Even though Elizabethan audiences were deprived of eye-
catching background scenes, they were never disappointed with the extravagant,
breathtaking clothes that were a certainty at every performance.

Above we saw Henslowe’s inventory of costumes that he stored in the Rose, and
certainly every theatrical company in Shakespeare’s day would have had a large and
costly wardrobe. In Robert Greene’s A Quip for an Upstart Courtier, written in 1592,
a player is dressed in a cloth gown "faced down before with grey coney, and laid thick
on the sleeves with lace, which he quaintly bore up to show his white taffeta hose and
black silk stockings. A huge ruff about his neck wrapped in his great head like a
wicker cage, a little hat with brims like the wings of a doublet, wherein he wore a
jewel of glass, as broad as a chancery seal."

article written by:
http://www.shakespeare-online.com/theatre/globe.html

References