

Wenceslas Hollars 'Long Birds Eye View of London 1647. Note the labels to the Globe and the Beere Bayting have been transposed.

The answer, he generously concedes, is more to do with being there at the right time than anything else. Many had tried it before and failed, as with the National Theatre. But not till the sixties did the docks and warehouses fall into disuse, with the growth of post-war containerisation at Tilbury. Together with bomb damage, great areas along the riverfront lay empty and silent. Wanamaker arrived on the scene in time to join in the heated debates about the future of the sites.

The biggest obstacle, he feels in retrospect, was not planning permission, but credibility. Would it be a noble memorial to a former British theatre tradition, or a cheap piece of Disneyland? The question lingered for a long time.

Sam Wanamaker's finest hour though was no doubt the now little-discussed Liverpool project in the mid-fifties. A dream of a theatre, which Harold Hobson called 'the most beautiful little theatre other than the Haymarket in London' was the Old Shakey, (The Shakespeare), a 150-year-old former music hall, which Wanamaker had fallen in love with on a visit to Liverpool. He was offered the chance to bring it back to life by a group of businessmen, to which he agreed on condition that he run it without interference. He pioneered foreign films there, an art gallery, a coffee bar and children's theatre, all under one roof. He staged plays that got round the Lord Chamberlain, like Arthur Miller's *View From The Bridge*.

It was a huge hit. 'Even Paul McCartney, then still a schoolboy, introduced himself to Sam' recalls Charlotte, his wife, 'saying his schoolmaster had told him about the theatre'. For McCartney and hundreds of other Scouse schoolchildren it was their first time inside a theatre – and they loved it. It was different, and fun. Wanamaker had run a summer festival on Broadway a few years earlier on a tight budget, working with people like Anthony Quinn, so he knew a fair bit about administering a season and theatre finances.

Enter Anna Deere Wyman, of the wealthy American tractor family. She and Wanamaker got on famously and she bought the 35-year lease of the theatre and

rented it back to him at a highly favourable figure. Their common interest was to make the venture a success. She wanted it named after her, but instead he ran a newspaper competition to find a new name and the pedestrian *New Shakespeare*, was finally chosen. After a time she and he fell out, just as the theatre had taken off, and a peculiar game ensued, with Deere Wyman raising her rental to ever higher and finally ludicrous heights. Several public appeals to meet these ridiculous figures were successful: there was widespread following by now for the theatre's activities, which ran throughout the day. But in the end Wanamaker realised he was being 'done' and closed the doors. They never re-opened. The theatre was sold to a furniture company as a warehouse and eventually it burned to the ground, a crowning irony for such an architectural gem.

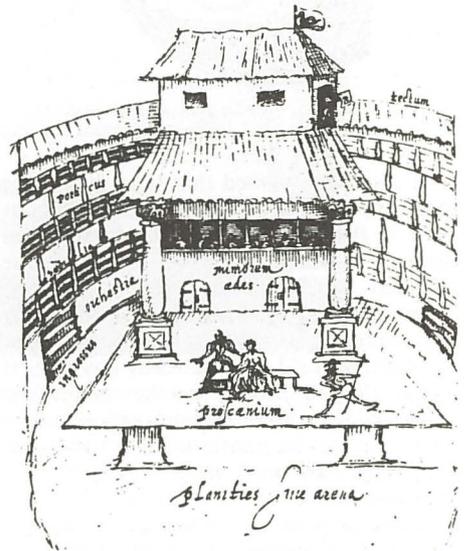
'Sam dealt purely with the theatre side, although the whole project was known as his' says Charlotte Wanamaker. 'There was a restaurant upstairs, run by a dreadful, snobbish, anti-provincialite, who catered for absurdly expensive and pretentious tastes, entirely out of keeping with the rest of the activities!'

In the early seventies, however, Wanamaker was at it again, this time on Bankside. A succession of summer seasons ran with a theatre rep season running under a canvas marquee, using an apron stage. Keith Michell, Caroline Seymour, Tony Richardson and Vanessa Redgrave all made their appearances. And elsewhere the Classic cinema people screened Shakespeare films in a warehouse; commissioned music was performed in Southwark Cathedral and a summer school was run by drama teacher, Diana Devlin. John Player even sponsored the second season; they were halcyon days.

Then the rain poured through the marquee roof, and a second structure went up. 'Sam wanted desperately to keep a presence on the site, because of the Globe project, always at the back of his mind' recalls Devlin. 'He had a huge desire to keep people coming to Bankside'.

Even in those days, though, she explains, 'his aim was to initiate a project and get so-

meone else to carry it on. He had other professional commitments to fulfil, as well, of course.' But that was assuming that 'other people' could get round his passionate involvement with each project. Folklore has attributed a charming saying to various people by now, although I can testify to its veracity, after humping a solid filing cabinet from his car into the Bear Garden premises after finishing our interview recently. 'If you work with Sam Wanamaker', it goes, 'you will be required to mix concrete to support castles in the air'. Far from being fanciful, it is so accurate as to fit a caricature of the man. But equally, he inspires all those who work with him. He is



Arend van Buchell's drawing of The Swan Playhouse

a do-er, like Bernard Miles. Diana Devlin explains: 'Some dismiss him as Oh, him! But when he returns to London to be told something is impossible for such and such reasons, he will make six phone calls and solve the problem'.

Wanamaker's legacy will prove greater than the man, some argue. As it happens, he wants no part in overseeing the artistic policy or running of *The Globe* when it opens. That will be someone else's problem, although he will doubtless retain a spirited interest in the goings-on. Ian McKellan started the fund-raising campaign with a charity performance on Broadway in April, and Barclays Bank have installed a man in the Bear Gardens office to co-ordinate the international fund-raising campaign. Philip Lewis, Wanamaker's new administrator oversees the day-to-day running and the full committee behind the project is chaired by Neville Labovitch. It comprises Sir Hugh Casson, Theo Crosby, a partner of Pentagram, the international design consultancy, David Kingsley, George Nicholson and Glyn Wickham.

The replica Cockpit Theatre (from the 17th century) inside the Bear Gardens is to be finished off this year with a small additional capital grant from the GLC 'for which we are just so bloody grateful' says Wanamaker. With heating round the year,