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**Collection Enhancement Report No. 11 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance
Department (August 2012)**

Salisbury Court

NB: Earlier, the ShaLT Collection Enhancement Reports have used the printed collections at the National Art Library (particularly the unique Dyce Collection) to highlight printed texts in terms of issues such as authorship and genre. However, bearing in mind that the key outreach goal of the AHRC funding for the project was to further public awareness about the actual theatre sites (The Theatre, Blackfriars, and so on) it seems highly appropriate for a series of reports to focus on the actual theatre spaces. Thus, this report highlights the Salisbury Court playhouse. Indeed, it is envisaged that the T&P Department at the V&A might be able to host a small exhibition of Dyce material in terms of the actual Shakespearean London Playhouses. With this in mind, this report picks-out printed work at the V&A that links to Salisbury Court. This topic should prove interesting to visitors to a potential exhibition because often the title page is the only evidence we have for the performance of a play at a certain location.

Salisbury Court was the only new, non-courtly theatre of the Caroline period. It was located by St. Bride's, and staged plays from 1629. Salisbury Court was an elite indoor venue like the Blackfriars and the Cockpit. Plays were staged at this indoor theatre in the City of Westminster from 1629 until 1642 and it was the last of the Shakespearean theatres to open. Veteran actor Richard Gunnell and deputy Master of the Revels William Blagrave built the Salisbury Court playhouse in 1629 with the idea of competing with the Blackfriars and Cockpit indoor theatres. For several years after 1635 the dramatist Richard Brome was its

resident writer, and the playhouse staged some of his more famous works, including *The Sparagus Garden*.

Salisbury Court opened not far from the Blackfriars. At various times it was home both to a company of youngsters (the Children of the Revels), and also to various adult companies, including Queen Henrietta Maria's Men in the later 1630s, after they left the services of Christopher Beeston. Like the Blackfriars and the Cockpit, this new indoor theatre, owned by Richard Gunnell the ex-Fortune player, and William Blagrave, Yeoman of the Revels, was established to cash in on the new and lucrative market of indoor theatre.

Salisbury Court was a considerable success, though its reputation was always slightly lower than that of the elite Blackfriars and also the Cockpit. A number of notable playwrights and their works were based there, including Richard Brome, who in 1635 secured a contract for the delivery of three plays a year for Henrietta Maria's company, including, amongst other texts, his *The Antipodes* of 1638.

Salisbury Court and the V&A Collection

The image below (courtesy of the V&A Museum) is taken from the collection's titlepage for *The Sparagus Garden*, as performed at Salisbury Court.

