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**Collection Enhancement Report No. 17 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance
Department (February 2013)**

The Swan

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 Swan. 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 the Swan. 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.

The Swan was the second of the Bankside theatres. It was located at Paris Garden, west of Blackfriars Bridge. It was in use from 1595 and possibly staged some of the plays of William Shakespeare. The Swan's location near Paris Garden stairs made it convenient for those crossing by river wherry from the City. It was opened by Francis Langley, probably due to the success of Philip Henslowe's Rose very nearby. It continued to stage plays until its closure in about 1628 though far less is known about the playhouse than the Rose or the Globe.

In November 1595 Francis Langley built the Swan playhouse south of the river, about 300 yards west of Philip Henslowe's Rose, near Paris Garden stairs. As the newest theatrical impresario to chance his arm, Langley perhaps realised that the loss of inn-house playing in

1594 (theatre was banned at the four inns in the City that year) left room for another permanent outdoor playhouse in the capital. However, other than in its first few years, it seems only to have staged plays occasionally. Langley's time at the Swan had been troublesome and he appears to have fallen into disagreement with his own players on several occasions. When Langley died in poverty in 1602 it appears that Hugh Browker owned and probably ran the playhouse, but the identities of the men who ran the Swan after 1606 have remained a mystery.

Later in the Jacobean period, in 1613, the Swan staged Thomas Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and it certainly continued to stage plays occasionally during the reign of James I. Yet surviving contemporary accounts also show that the playhouse was often in use for fencing exhibitions rather than for the performance of theatrical works.

The Swan and the V&A Collection

The image below (courtesy of the V&A Museum) is taken from the collection's titlepage for Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* a play performed at the Swan in 1613. If the V&A exhibit the titlepage in the future, it would certainly be worth pointing out this item is one of the very few surviving titlepages from the Swan and so is a special part of the Museum's collection.

A
 CHAST MAYD
 & N
 CHEAPE-SIDE.

A
 Pleasant conceited Comedy
 neuer before printed.

As it hath beene often acted at the
 Swan on the Banke-side, by the
 Lady ELIZABETH her
Servants.

By THOMAS MIDLTON Gent.

LONDON,
 Printed for Francis Constable dwelling at the
 signe of the Crane in Pauls
 Church-yard.
 1630.