The Fortune Theatre Contract

This contract is found in the papers of Philip Henslowe, Manager of the Admiral’s Men, kept at Dulwich College archive in London. It was made with Peter Street the Carpenter for a theatre to be built on Golding Lane in the parish of St Giles without Cripplegate in North London the year after the Globe Playhouse opened. It was to cost £440 and be built by July 1600. It went over budget by 18%, costing £520, according to Henslowe’s records. The Fortune Theatre appears to have opened at some point in November 1600. The surviving building contract is the most comprehensive written source of evidence about the spatial arrangement and materials of the first theatres built in England. NB The word ‘theatre’ was itself not a common term at this point, instead these buildings were known as playhouses.

The frame of the saide howse to be sett square and to conteine fflowerscore foote of lawfull assize everye waie square withoutt and fiftie five foote of like assize square everye waie within wth a good suer and stronge foundacõn of pyles brick lyme and sand bothe within & without to be wroughte one foote of assize att the leiste above the grounde And the saide fframe to conteine Three Stories in heighth The first or lower Storie to Conteine Twelve foote of lawfull assize in heighth The second Storie Eleaven foote of lawfull assize in heighth And the Third or upper Storie to conteine Nyne foote of lawfull assize in height all which Stories shall conteine Twelve foote and a halfe of lawfull assize in breadth throughouete besides a Juttey forwardes in either of the saide Twoe upper Stories of Tenne ynches of lawfull assize with fflower convenient divisions for gentlemens roomes and other sufficient and convenient divisions for Twoe pennie roomes wth necessarie Seates to be placed and sett Aswell in those roomes as throughheouete all the rest of the galleries of the saide howse and wth suchelike steares Conveyances & divisions without & within as are made & Contryved in and to the late erected Plaiehowsse On the Banck in the saide pishe of Ste Savio’s Called the Globe Wth a Stadge and Tyreinge howse to be made erected & settup wthin the saide fframe wth a shadowe or cover over the saide Stadge.... And wch Stadge shall conteine in length ffortie and Three foote of lawfull assize and in breadth to extende to the middle of the yarde of the saide howse The same Stadge to be paled in belowe wth good stronge and sufficyent newe oken bourdes And likewise the lower Storie of the saide fframe wth inside, and the same lower storie to be alsoe laide over and fenced wth stronge yron pykes And the saide Stadge to be in all other proportõns Contryved and fashioned like unto the Stadge of the saide Plaie howsse Called the Globe Wth convenient windowes and lightes glazed to the saide Tyreinge howse And the saide fframe Stadge and Stearecases to be covered wth Tyle and to have a sufficient gutter of lead to Carrie & convey the water frome the Coveringe of the saide Stadge to fall backwards And also all the saide fframe and the Stairecases thereof to be sufficiently enclosed whitout wth lathe lyme & haire and the gentlemens roomes and Twoe pennie roomes to be seeled wth lathe lyme & haire and all the fflowers of the saide Galleries Stories and Stadge to be bourded wth good & sufficyent newe deale bourdes of the whole thicknes wheare need shalbe and the saide howse and
other things beforementioned to be made & done To be in all other Contrivitions Conveyances
fashions things and things effected finished and done according to the manner and fashion of
the said house Called the Globe Saveinge only that all the princypall and maine postes of the
said fframe and Stadge forwarde shalbe square and wroughte palasterwise wth carved
proporcõns Called Satiers to be placed & sett on the Topp of every of the same postes.

8 January, 1600.