



A Midsummer Night's Dream

Shakespeare with an authentic twist

Shakespeare's Rose is Europe's first 'pop-up' Shakespearean theatre.

The project first saw life with a successful 2018 season in York.

This year the theatre is again at the Yorkshire city and has also popped-up in the majestic grounds of Oxfordshire's Blenheim Palace.

The two temporary theatres adopt a circular design and open roof similar to the theatres that stood on Bankside in Shakespeare's day.

A repertory troop of actors perform four Shakespeare play in each.

There is also a food and entertainment 'village'.

This could well be the start of a long an enduring way to enjoy the Bard in historic locations and in as authentic a way as possible.

www.shakespearesrosetheatre.com

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller



Romeo and Juliet



Richard III



Macbeth



The Bard with an Elizabethan ambience at Blenheim

By Ashley Gibbins

Those who would have been in the audience of a Shakespeare play when it was first staged, some four hundred years ago, would have been crammed into small theatres such as the Red Lion, the Rose and the Globe theatre's in the city of London.

At the front were the *groundlings*, those who were too poor to pay for a seat.

For a one penny entrance, the *groundling* could stand crammed and cramped and probably profusely sweating in the pit or 'yard' area just below the stage.

Within touching distance of the actors, this was raucous, ribald and seething rabble ready to laugh and cheer uproariously, but also more than willing jeer, heckle and cajole when they deemed the performance deserved it.

Surrounding the stage and pit, on three sides, would be the three levels of seating that provided a more comfortable experience for the wealthier Londoner.

All of the society would be concertined into a Shakespeare play.

Those behind the Shakespeare's Rose Theatre concept are looking to recreate a similar intimate and immersive Shakespearian experience.



An Elizabethan theatre

The two 'pop-up' theatre's that currently stand at York and at Blenheim are inspired by the London Rose Playhouse that was built in 1587 (12 years prior to The Globe).

The do, however, combine scaffolding, corrugated iron and timber with a 13-sided design similar to the 16th century Shakespearean theatre.

They can accommodate an audience of 900, with 560 seated on three tiered balconies around an open-roofed 'courtyard' for 340 *groundlings*.

More information

www.shakespearesrosetheatre.com





A Midsummer Night's Dream



The repertory approach to the programme offers real flexibility in deciding how which play or plays to see.

We saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Shakespeare's Rose in Blenheim Palace.

It is one of my favourite of the Bard's plays and one of the most accessible to all ages.

The marriage of Theseus, the Duke of Athens, to Hippolyta is the catalyst for Hermia, who loves Lysander, to defy her father's insistence that she marry Demetrius.

Hermia's best friend, Helena, is in love with Demetrius who does not reciprocate.

When the Duke rules that Hermia must marry Demetrius (or face death or life in a nunnery) she and Lysander decide to elope and flee into the forest, followed by Demetrius and Helena.

This is also where Peter Quince and his fellow players are looking to rehearse a play for the upcoming wedding of the Duke and his bride.

Also in the woods are Oberon and Titania - the king and queen of the fairies including Puck, Oberon's faithful sprite.

With the staging at the Rose theatre remaining largely the same wooden structure, creating the woodland scene, where much of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* takes place - and making us believe it - puts an additional onus on the actors.

Given the quality of the whole ensemble, it all works extremely well.

The intimate atmosphere created by the Rose and the proximity of the *groundlings* to the stage enables a real rapport between actors and audience.

An excellent production and a genuinely different theatrical experience.

It would have been good to have taken in, say *Macbeth*, to compare and contrast two productions with the same actors.

Outside the theatre, the 'Elizabethan village' offers a range of food and drink stalls with the chance of some pre-show entertainment.

If, like us, you opt to visit Shakespeare's Rose at Blenheim, rather than York, I would urge getting there as early as possible and taking a stroll up to the Column of Victory.

If you have a whole day at your disposal spend it in the Palace itself (see below).

The Shakespeare Rose season



During the 2019 season each theatre will rotate four of the Bard's plays.

At Blenheim Palace (to 7 September 2019) the theatre stands in the grounds of this magnificent property, with the chance to see :

- A Midsummer Night's Dream
- Macbeth
- Romeo and Juliet, and
- Richard III

In York (to 1 September 2019) the theatre sits beside the 13th century Clifford's Tower in the heart of York, with the chance to see :

- Hamlet
- Henry V
- The Tempest, and
- Twelfth Night



The Manor Country House Hotel

By Ann Mealor

I love visiting country house hotels – their charm, character and often ancient history never ceases to enthrall me.

We have been lucky enough to stay at quite a few and am always surprised by how many of these stately abodes we have tucked away in our picturesque English countryside.

The Manor, in the pretty village of Weston-on-the-Green, Oxfordshire is one such hideaway.

As we turned down the tree lined avenue to the mansion, decorative, pastel painted bicycles, baskets brimming with flowers stood against the stonewall entrance.

Immaculately cut verges and parkland to each side of us and tyres crunching comfortably on the gravel, we drove towards the castle-like front of the hotel, flag flying a-top, with great expectations. As soon as we stepped into the reception hall, we felt part of its history.

There stood a magnificent oak and stone carved fireplace in front of which were two, deep dimpled red leather chesterfield sofas.

The ceiling was criss-crossed with wooden beams with carvings at the intersections and patterned rugs part on the old wooden floors.

Antique *objets d'arts* hung on the walls (including a well loved rocking horse) alongside huge, gilt framed portraits of past owners and other gentry.



Bertie's Cocktail Bar, has the warm traditional feel of a London gentleman's club with green leather, wing backed chairs, Edwardian furniture, patterned sofas and a mahogany panelled bar.

Nooks and crannies

Cosy nooks and crannies for sharing gossip, reading or generally relaxing were plentiful.

Our room was large with beautiful views across the grounds and was furnished as I'd hoped, with antique furniture in keeping with the house.

The bed was large and comfortable, the bathroom modern and roomy and the sofa plump and squashy.

Fluffy, white towelling dressing gowns hung in the Victorian wardrobe and there was a selection of tea, coffee and biscuits.

As the weather was glorious, we decided to sit out and enjoy the scenery.

Whilst sipping a wine in the sun on the peaceful terrace overlooking the lawns and the vast amounts of topiary yew hedging, I read a bit about the history of The Manor which spans just over 900 years.

In existence since the medieval period, the Baron's Hall, which is now the impressive dining room, and the smaller breakfast room was the house's original chapel and the earliest parts of the building.

Dating from Tudor times

The main part of the present house dates from the 16th century and many of its Tudor features survive.

Two great land owning families of Norreys and Bertie owned Weston Manor for 358 years. In 1917 it was sold, and having passed through a number of hands was bought in 1983 by Mr and Mrs Dudley Osborn, who still own the property.

And like every great grande dame of a manor, it has its ghosts.

There is 'Mad Maude' a young nun who was burnt alive on the grounds 500 years ago for getting too 'romantic' with the monks when it was part of Osney Abbey.

There is also a phantom coach that drives through the yard at the back of the house and then vanishes.

As well as the ghost stories, children will love all the secret nooks and crannies created by the hedging and pathways in the 12 acres of grounds.

There are lots of places to relax with a glass of wine and escape the hustle and bustle of life.

If you are feeling active, there is a tennis court (racquets and balls provided), a swimming pool equipped with sun loungers, croquet and lots of local walks.

Dogs are welcome here too.

Dining at the Manor

Dinner takes place in the medieval Baron's Hall which is spectacular. It has an exceptionally high vaulted ceiling lit by a massive, circular cast iron candelabra.

A huge fireplace, a magnificent stained glass window and linen fold, Tudor oak-panelling complete the 'olde worlde' picture.

Just sitting in the room made us feel special.

We both enjoyed a starter of potted crayfish, pickled cucumber and dill which was rich, buttery and served with a light crisp bread.

For mains, I went for the sirloin steak with piping hot, chunky triple cooked chips and a light and frothy béarnaise sauce.

Ashley chose the Arbroath Smoky Pot – a tasty mix of hot smoked haddock, potatoes, and cream, topped with a breaded duck egg.

For dessert I chose the Chocolate Fondant with a white chocolate custard and raspberry sorbet.

On plunging my spoon into the spongy pudding, a warm river of chocolate sauce oozed out swirling nicely around my plate.

Ashley picked *The Manor Strawberries, Cookies and Cream* - a heady mix of prosecco and strawberry jelly, jam, parfait and a diplomat and chantilly cream.



It was a colourful sweet mix. We shared the two desserts between us and scraped our plates.

Breakfast each morning took place in the modern, light and airy Georgian room.

There was a good selection of pastries, fresh fruit salad, a cherry and berry compote, yoghurt, some delicious roasted almonds, cold meats, sliced cheese, cereal and juices.

The full English cooked breakfast I had was excellent as was Ashley's vegetarian version with a particular thumbs up for the veggie sausage!

The weather was beautiful during our stay so we could make the most of the gardens and the outdoor terrace – guests were even soaking up the sun around the pool.

However, in winter The Manor must be just as spectacular with roaring log fires and cosy corners for curling up in after a snow filled walk around the grounds.

I'm looking forward to it.

More information

www.themanorweston.com

Blenheim Palace



Stunning Blenheim so deserves its palace status

Visiting the Cotswolds gave us the chance to finally get to Blenheim Palace in Blenheim, Oxfordshire.

The English nation presented the land to John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, in recognition of his Battle of Blenheim victory in 1704 over French and Bavarian troops.

Construction work commenced in 1705 and took 17 years to complete.

Blenheim is an outstanding example of the work of John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, two of England's most notable architects of the times.

A naturalistic Versailles

The landscaped Park with its two lakes was created by Lancelot "Capability" Brown and is considered a *naturalistic Versailles*.

Blenheim Palace, which was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, is the only non-royal property in England able to claim the palace title.

It has remained the residence of the Dukes of Marlborough with the current incumbent being Charles Spencer-Churchill the 12th Duke.

The Palace, which was the absolute epitome of grandeur and opulence, also suffered the vagaries of mismanagement by certain of the previous Dukes.

By the end of the 19th Century the Palace was crumbling and facing the prospect of demolition.

But the 9th Duke of Marlborough then married American railroad heiress, Consuelo Vanderbilt who channelled huge sums into its restoration.



It was also the birthplace of Winston Churchill and we know his influence on the British nation.

Visiting Blenheim Palace today one cannot but be staggered by the wealth that must have been at the disposal of the first Duke for him to be able to build a house on this scale.

There is also the chance to tour through the rooms filled with collections of art, tapestry and antiques.

The Palace's extensive park and gardens were merit a visit on their own and there are five miles of public rights of way through the Great Park area of the grounds.



An annual events programme includes medieval jousting tournaments, classical and popular music concerts and a Christmas lights festival.

www.blenheimpalace.com

See also :

AllWays Traveller to Chipping Camden and the Cotswolds

<https://www.allwaystraveller.com/continents/europe/the-cotswolds-town-and-country-in-harmony>

A snapshot of Shakespeare's *Rose, Blenheim and York*



AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller is the consumer travel features 'arm' of the Alliance, providing independent travellers with views of the world from the professional travel journalists in the Alliance

www.allwaystraveller.com



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



Ann Meador is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.