

**Such Stuff podcast**  
**Season 3, Episode 2: Remembering Sam Wanamaker**

[Music plays]

**Imogen Greenberg:**

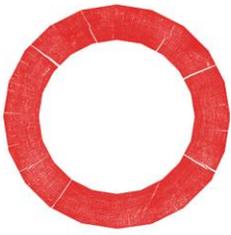
Hello, and welcome back to Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

Chicago, 1935, and a 15 year old boy is at the World Fair. In the British Pavilion he looks in awe at a pop up Globe, a replica of the famous theatre which once sat on London's southbank. His obsession with Shakespeare began. And perhaps, an idea too. A mad, ambitious but brilliant idea. Over 60 years later, that 15 year old boy's dream became a reality.

Sam Wanamaker was an American actor and director, and the visionary behind Shakespeare's Globe. He founded the Globe project in 1970, and worked tirelessly for decades against setbacks, funding struggles and court cases to build the Globe theatre we sit in today.

In the run up to the centenary of Sam's birth, we chat to our Director of Education Patrick Spottiswoode – who has been part of the Globe team since 1984 – about Sam's remarkable story.

**Patrick Spottiswoode:** I think the amazing thing is, when I look back, Sam saw a reconstruction of the Globe, it was the British Pavillion at the World Exhibition in Chicago. He was 15 years old and I think of all the 15 year olds who come into the Globe and you think, what are they going to do? You know? Because that sparked something in Sam, that was the seed he needed. So he saw this, he acted in some Shakespeare at the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival after he left college. He then became a celebrated actor, radio soap star, he moved to New York, he was

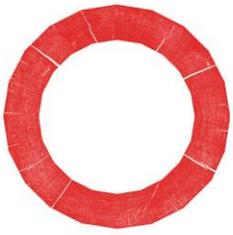


on Broadway, he was a bit of a noise and he came over here in 1949 to make a movie. He came over here, he stayed here for a bit, he came back in 51 I believe.

Then, because of the McCarthy witch hunt, because of Senator Joe McCarthy, who started creating a black list for authors, artists of all sorts, writers, thinking that they were basically communists and preventing them from getting employment and having them stand in front of a tribunal, Sam stayed in England. So he became a political refugee.

And its one of the horrible ironies of this project that it was only thanks to Senator Joe McCarthy and the blacklist and the witch hunt that we're here today. Because Sam would probably have gone back to the States and lived there and forged a career there. He stayed in London, he continued making films, making TV, directing, he was pioneering, he brought Brecht into this country for the first time. He opened an Arts Centre in Liverpool which was the first of its kind in Europe. He then acted opposite Paul Robeson in 1959 in Othello, he played Iago, which must have been... my parents saw it, I sadly was only 2, I missed it, but that must have been extraordinary... and we don't know when he sort of thought I must build a Globe, but in 1970 he set up a charity in order to build a Globe as close as possible to the original site here on Bankside. And that's when a lot of work started to happen. He invested more and more of his time, and sacrificed more and more of his career, to focus on the rebuilding of the Globe.

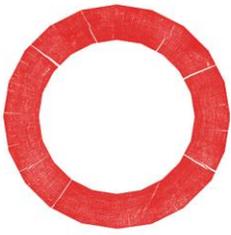
And eventually made an agreement with the local council, Southwark, and a property company to take this existing site and to split it up into some luxury apartments, which the property company would cream some money from, some state housing, which the council would benefit from, and we would get the Globe. And that was going swimmingly until about 1984 when there was a local council election and Southwark Council changed its political colour, and councillors objected to this idea of releasing



Southwark Council land to a property company for high class, quality homes and for tourism. There was not an interest in developing this area that I'm sitting on now, you know this area of Bankside was desolate, it was terrible, I mean the Bankside power station was just a ruin. But there was just this complete negativity towards the project. They reneged on the agreement between Southwark Council, the Globe and the property company and so for two years we just couldn't do a thing. We didn't have the site. It took the property company to take the council to court before the court announced in our favour and said the council had acted illegally. The property company made a lot of money out of it, we made just over £100,000 which didn't cover our costs. But what we benefited is that we got the whole site. I wouldn't be sitting in my office now, it would be a luxury apartment, you know, had it been the original agreement. So that was the thing. So it wasn't until 1986 that we won the case that we could really start again to focus on the building of the Globe.

[Sounds of machines and digging]

**PS:** Judy Dench broke ground and that was very exciting, 1986. And that was very exciting. But you know, we broke ground, we had a mechanical digger and she dug from the first... but there was no... I mean Sam said 'We've got to build tomorrow, it's gonna open in 2 years' and then 2 years passed... 'Well another two years'. You know, it kept on being delayed because we didn't have the money. And we lost a lot of money in the period over the court case. A lot of our major funders, serious funders dropped out because they said it's never going to get built. So we had to crank up the whole fundraising and development side again. And then Sam was hit by... several recessions hit the project. And I remember in 1991, we had no money, we had the site, we couldn't even employ a contractor because we were a debtor to the bank, you know, we couldn't pay the gas bill. And Theo Crosby was the architect who worked with Sam, we had a meeting at his place and basically I thought... that was Saturday morning, I thought I'm

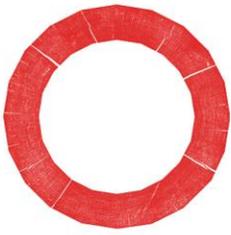


gonna be out of work Saturday afternoon. We're all going to be out of work, the whole place, the project is gonna crumble. We've been defeated. The recession has hit us. And Theo started the meeting by saying, I just want everyone to have a look at this, I've got a, this is my artist's impression of the footbridge we're going to need to get people across the Thames from St Paul's. And we looked at him as if he was bonkers, we said we can't even pay the gas bill. And he said, 'We can't get bogged down by the petty present, we have to think of the future'. And we were back.

[Archive Recording]

**Sam Wanamaker:** The fact is that a dream cannot be made into a reality, not a dream of this kind. It takes thousands of people to share that dream, to be inspired by it, to see it with heavy imagination, to envision what this could be. Not just this structure, not just this complex, but this whole area, how it is going to be transformed for the people of Southwark in the first instance. And let there be no mistake about it, it's the heritage of the people who live here in the first instance that this project is about and we shall never, never forget their commitment, their involvement, their heritage. But more than that, it is the heritage of the people of London, the people of Britain, the heritage of all the people's of the world. Shakespeare belongs to everyone, we know that. And this place will be the centre for the understanding of his works, for helping young people to get over the difficult barriers of language. Welcome. Watch us grow. We're going to be here and create and transform the most exciting new area of London and Britain. Thank you.

**PS:** I think one of the amazing things about Sam was his tenacity. I think there was a part of him that the more obstacles the better 'cause he just liked to say nothing is going to defeat me. The recession didn't, the reduction in Arts Council funding didn't, the only thing that defeated him in the end was cancer. That's something he couldn't defeat. So yes, he died in 1993, four years



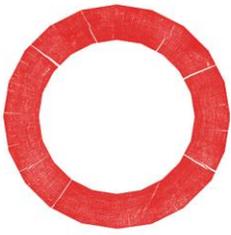
before the Globe opened. He... it was part of his chutzpah... I think this project is built on chutzpah, passion and inquiry, the spirit of inquiry, and Sam had all three of course. But he knew he would only see one play on the Globe site in his lifetime, in 93, he knew he was dying. So he had a temporary stage put up in between four of the bays, two either side... skeletal bays. And he knew he could see one show. He said I want The Merry Wives of Windsor but it must be played by 5 men in German. [Laughs] So we Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor as the only show he saw. And that was Sam saying look, you know, this is... Shakespeare now belongs to the world and this is an international organisation, it was a tremendous statement. But that was the only thing he saw.

I think that he could have seen the Globe built, I think he made the ultimate sacrifice and that is when he discovered he had cancer, I think he could have redirected all the money that we had into just not building a whole in the ground for the exhibition and the tour groups and the offices and everything underground, I think he could have just built up. But he said we're going to need that space underground as a money, revenue maker to help fund education and theatre above ground. And so I think it was to create... I think he sacrificed seeing the Globe in order to make the Globe sustainable and I think that was an ultimate sacrifice on his part.

### **[Archive Recording]**

SW:

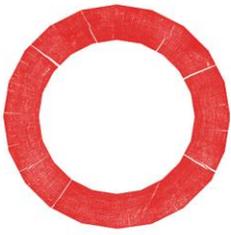
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,



Signifying nothing.

**PS:** Warren Mitchell was a great actor, like Sam, Jewish. At Sam's memorial in Southwark Cathedral, Warren gave a eulogy from the pulpit and said 'Sam, you've done well. A nice Jewish boy in Chicago and you got a plaque in the heathen Cathedral.' And it is that kind of American thing of log cabin to White House. You know, first generation Ukrainian immigrant Jew to changing the face of Shakespeare round the world and changing London and the landscape, it is extraordinary as a story. What was he like? Desperately difficult to work with. I could use expletive after expletive... but the most wonderfully inspiring, difficult, inspiring [laughs], painfully difficult but inspiring man. He just dedicated everything of his life to this. He was terribly demanding. He expected... I remember I had my first row with him when he said 'Patrick, the pavement outside, the gutter, it's filthy'. And I said 'And your point?' He said, 'Well clean it.' I said, 'Sam I'm not employed by the council'. He said 'We've gotta have pride in this place!' So I said 'I'm sorry' and he said 'Where's the broom?' And he did it, he swept the gutter. And a tour group walked by on a walking tour and this American lady turned around and said 'Isn't that Sam Wanamaker, the actor?' And she thought, gosh he's fallen on hard times. [Laughs] But as soon as he did that, I said 'Sam, give us the broom', you know. I mean really nothing was too demeaning for Sam. You did it because you believed in the cause, yeah. I saw him give talks when he was absolutely rock bottom exhausted, especially when he was going through the audience. But he could just electrify a crowd. I mean he could just... yeah. No group was too small, no one was... he just was the missionary. Everybody had to hear the word. So you couldn't fault him. His tenacity, his refusal to be bowed down by cynicism, by criticism, by opposition of all sorts, he felt by anti-semitism, certainly anti-Americanism. All these things he faced, but damn it he just carried on.

[Archival recording]



**Reporter:** Was it worth all of the struggle?

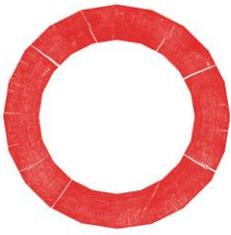
**SW:** Of, of course it was worth all the struggle. It's a great project, as everybody now seems to recognise and acknowledge. And in that respect it is a great moment.

**Reporter:** Is Sam Wanamaker going to be able to relax a little bit now?

**SW:** Oh indeed, I'm very relaxed, don't you see? [Laughs]. I have no nerves at all! No, no. I think that it is now being taken over by a lot of other people, wonderful people who are now almost as dedicated to the project as I am and will take it over from me, I'm quite confident of that.

[Archival recording]

**SW:** All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;  
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;



And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

**IG:** To mark the centenary of Sam's birth, Dr Diana Devlin will be giving the 2019 Sam Wanamaker Fellowship lecture on 13 June, where you can hear more extraordinary stories from Sam's life and work. Tickets are available online or through our box office.

Diana's biography of Sam will be published on the same day, and will be available in all good bookshops, including our own.

[Music plays]

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