



**SHAKESPEARE'S  
GLOBE**

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Welcome to this introduction to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by William Shakespeare. It has been directed by Elle While. These introductory notes were written by Nadine Beasley and Miranda Yates, and script edited by Louise Fryer.

### ***Shakespeare's Globe and the setting for The Merry Wives of Windsor***

The Globe Theatre is a faithful reconstruction of the open-air theatre built in 1599, where many of Shakespeare's greatest plays were first performed. It is situated across the river from St Paul's Cathedral – on the south bank of the Thames, about 170 metres from the site of the original and has been constructed using as many Elizabethan building methods as possible. Opened officially in 1997, today's Globe is a twenty-sided wooden structure made of oak and lime-plaster – with the first thatched roof permitted in London since the Great Fire in 1666.

The Chorus in *Henry V* describes the Globe as a hollow circle – the centre of the wooden 'O' is called the Yard, where there are about 600 standing, or Groundling, places. Other members of the audience sit on wooden

benches in one of the three galleries which run around the circular auditorium – the upper gallery being some ten metres above the yard.

The theatre is open to the elements and performances continue whatever the weather – even during a thunderstorm. Occasionally helicopters and aeroplanes fly overhead and the sound of boats from the nearby river can be heard in the background.

Thrusting out into the Yard is the large rectangular stage. This stands at shoulder height – so that the groundlings nearest to the stage can lean against it, and actors can stoop down to address members of the audience directly, face to face.

Towards the front of the stage are two huge pillars, one on either side. Each pillar has been created from a complete oak tree. Although made of wood these pillars are ingeniously painted to look like polished marble. The deep base of each is octagonal and the column above is topped with an ornately carved Corinthian capital, gilded with real gold. The pillars support an overhanging roof - called the 'heavens'. Its underside is divided into panels by gilded wooden ribs. Each panel is painted deep blue and decorated with stars, moons or signs of the zodiac.

This production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is set in the 1930's and the costumes reflect the period. The dark and natural tones of the wood panelled back wall create a neutral backdrop that enhances the traditional features of the globe and allows us to imagine we could be in a grand house, a pub or woodland.

The back wall of the stage is two stories high with a minstrel's gallery on the upper level. At stage level, on the far left and right, are doors that lead to an unseen back room called the Tiring House or backstage area, and in the centre a large set of wood panelled double doors. In the wall on either side of the double doors are what appear to be tall dressers, each has two

doors at the top that open like windows and are just big enough for a person to climb through, disappearing from view. Beneath these doors are three rows of two large drawers where props and other items are stored. There are steps leading up to the stage from the yard, at the front and on both sides, which are surrounded by scented flowers and plants.

The action of the play moves swiftly from place to place with little break in the dialogue and few changes on stage. There are very few props and just a few pieces of scenery, including two tall freestanding wooden arches, that the actors move about the space on casters creating doorways which characters occasionally pass through. Another interior room is created by a tall and sumptuous golden brocade curtain that falls down to hang centrally and has large floor cushions in a similar material placed on the surrounding floor.

There are 20 characters played by a multi-ethnic cast of six women and seven men, as well as five musicians who sit centrally in the gallery above within the frame of a huge gold ring, dressed in black dinner suits with white shirts and black bow ties. Several of the women play male roles in this gender fluid production.

**Sir John Falstaff**, an incorrigible reprobate, is in his 50's. He is tall and still relatively nimble, despite his portly protruding belly – evidence of his passion for eating and drinking. Falstaff has a ruddy complexion with sparkling mischievous blue eyes. His sandy hair is greying and collar length, and he has a full beard and moustache. Falstaff first arrives wearing a pair of dark tailored trousers and a green velvet jacket with dark red trim. Tucked into his collar is a large white napkin and there are a couple of gleaming medals pinned to his lapel.

He later smartens up wearing a black dinner suit with stiff white shirt and black bow tie.

Falstaff has a servant **Bardolph**, who also works at the Garter Inn when Falstaff is out of funds and cannot pay him. He is a young man in his twenties, who dashes around doing his masters' bidding with a slightly world weary air and stooped gait. He wears beige trousers tucked into black boots, grey shirt and waistcoat and a blue wool hip length jacket pleated at the back. He has a dark grey barrow boy cap covering his black wavy hair, the peak shadowing his careworn face.

**Robin** is Falstaff's page of dubious loyalties. Tall and muscularly built, he has a white three piece suit with a white shirt and grey tie. He has a bright red velvet trilby perched over sandy curls and a red scarf thrown casually around his neck.

**Pistol** is a grandiloquent, swaggering follower of Sir John Falstaff. In his late forties his tall lean figure sweeps across the space clad in a full length tan suede coat over black trousers tucked into black riding boots. A cream scarf swings loosely around his neck and his straggling shoulder length grey hair is covered with a brown felt bowler, a feather softly curling over the top. His piercing eyes stare out from his long chiselled features with a calm sardonic gaze.

**Nym**, in his twenties, is another follower of Falstaff. Slender and of medium height, he moves with a swift grace and slightly nervous energy. He is clad in dark brown breeches over long brown socks and brown leather boots. A matching wool jacket is worn over a white collarless shirt and brown waistcoat. His dark wavy hair is tucked under a brown cloth cap.

**Mistress Quickly** is Dr Caius's housekeeper, a buxom woman past the first flush of youth, with a bustling gait and a cheeky red lipped smile. She has a round high cheek-boned face and large dark calculatingly bright eyes. She has a dark blue silky dress with an asymmetrical frilled hem. This is covered by a slightly lighter blue hip length jacket, gathered at the back, with a silk belt that ties at the

front and falls in ribbons over her dress. Her black hair is coiled around the back of her head and secured by a broad band of blue silk tied at the side of her brow.

**Master George Page** is a stout man in his 50's, with neatly combed sandy reddish hair and a trimmed beard and moustache. He wears a tailored black suit with polished lace ups.

His wife, **Mistress Page** – is an attractive woman of middle age and slim build, she has a sharp featured face with high cheekbones and mischievous dark eyes. Her thick wavy dark hair is cut in a bob just below her ears. She wears an elegant green cocktail dress that finishes at the knee, the material patterned by a floral motif. Its fitted nature accentuates her slim figure, and at the hips there is an extra panier style section that adds width to the skirt. She wears the dress with a pair of flattering heels with a t-bar strap.

Their warm hearted daughter is **Anne Page**. Anne's natural charm and beauty is made all the more attractive by her very handsome dowry. She has a healthy complexion, large dark eyes and a broad smile. Her dress is made from a pale sea-green silk, and is a floor length gown with short sleeves that nips in at the waist with a full skirt that's slightly ruched at the hips.

**Master Frank Ford** is a slender man in his forties, his neat afro hair is short and he has a trimmed moustache. He dresses smartly in a dark brown suit . Ford listens with pursed lips and furrowed brow as events unfold, with the occasional burst of jealous rage, when he stiffens with anger.

His wife, **Mistress Alice Ford**, is in her thirties, has a relish for life and is a bit of a mischief maker. Plotting on the spot her dark eyes dart as she hatches a plan. Her brunette locks are cut in a fashionable short bob. She first wears an all in one silk jumpsuit in a pale cream with delicate abstract flowers in black and peach, the

trousers are wide legged and the top short sleeved, fastened around her petite waist by a thin black material belt. On her feet are sparkly high heels.

**John and Robert** are two servants who work for the Ford family. John is of medium height and stockily built. His black curly hair stands out wildly from his round cheerful features, his brows often furrowed with concentration. He moves with a heavy slightly purposeless tread. Robert, around the same height, is slender and nimble footed. His black hair is cropped short enhancing his bright brown eyes and a fine moustache tops his upper lip. They are both dressed in grey shirts, darker grey waistcoats and black trousers with long white aprons tied around their waists.

**Doctor Caius** is a short tempered French physician, eager for the hand of Anne Page. In his middle years, he is tall and slim with a smattering of white hair at the back of a bald pate. He has a white goatee beard and finely trimmed drooping moustache, and his deep furrowed grey eyes are hidden behind rimless steel spectacles. He is dapperly dressed in black breeches tucked into high black boots over which he has a double breasted bright blue velvet tail coat. The tails are gently pleated and swing as he struts, peacock-like, around the space. A steel rapier is strapped around his waist and he flourishes it at the slightest provocation.

**John Rugby** is Dr Caius' long suffering servant. Of medium height and slender build John moves with a nervous, watchful grace. He wears grey trousers and shirt with a long beige apron tied around his waist. His dark curly hair is bundled under a tweed barrow boy cap, tendrils leaking out and curling around the nape of his neck.

**Sir Hugh Evans** is a Welsh parson and the school master of Windsor. Of medium height and slim build, he is dressed in the clerical garb of the day. He has a black cassock, over which is draped a sleeveless black

velvet alb trimmed with gold, an embroidered cross on the back. His short black wavy hair curls around a stern featured face. His wide set eyes spark zealously and his movements are nimble, often jerky and accompanied by expressive hand gestures. A sword is sheathed around his waist, hidden by his garments, and he carries a bible.

**Justice Robert Shallow** is an older man, at odds with Falstaff and his followers. His once tall posture is now thick set and slightly hunched, and he walks with a heavy tread, his jowled features settling softly into a ponderous demeanour. He wears a dark grey 1930s style three-piece suit with a white shirt, and a white cravat nestles under his chin. He has pale blue eyes under bushy grey brows, and a white trim moustache covers his thin top lip. His receding white wavy hair curls around his sideburns and falls gently over a black velvet scarf thrown casually around his neck.

**Abraham Slender** is Robert Shallows' nephew, another suitor to Ann Page. As his name suggests he is a slim gentleman in his thirties, tall and of muscular build. He moves with confidence and an arrogant loping stride, a gentle swagger in his step. His auburn hair is close cropped, a few stray curls flopping across his forehead. Deep blue eyes shine in his square jawed face, his narrow upper lip feathered with a sandy moustache. He is nattily dressed in a pale grey suit with a blue shirt and coral and blue striped tie covered by a green waistcoat. He has black boots, a brown Trilby and a multi-coloured handkerchief spills over the top pocket of his jacket.

Peter Simple is Slender's servant, an eager and easily impressed youth. He is of medium height and sturdy build, with a halo of black curly hair surrounding his heart shaped face. He has a wide cheeky grin and sparkling deep brown eyes. He moves with bounding energy like an energetic puppy. He wears a uniform suit of Gold breeches and matching hip length jacket with grey puttees from ankle to knee and black shoes.

**Fenton**, is yet another suitor for the hand of Anne, initially admiring her for her father's wealth, having squandered his own. He is slim and elegantly attired in a cream three piece suit with a white shirt and silver grey tie. He has tan loafers and a dark grey trilby hat is perched at a jaunty angle over his close cropped black curly hair. His wide set deep brown eyes twinkle under heavy black brows and his oval face has a faint stubbled beard and the beginnings of a black moustache.

**The Garter Inn** boasts a flamboyant shapely Hostess who intercedes in the actions of the warring suitors. She energetically commands her domain, devising plans with mischief, a constant wide smile lighting up her large dark brown eyes. She is dressed in a long navy blue velvet gown that glitters with sequins and is covered in a small floral pattern of pink, white and pale blue flowers. It is cinched at the waist with a silver belt. Her unruly dark hair is kept in check under a bright pink turban tied at the side into a large bow, the ends of which drape down to her shoulder.

The Woodland Locals are a mixture of students of Parson Evans and local folk, who are persuaded to enact the roles of fairies in Windsor forest. Over their normal clothes they have draped capes and robes of multicoloured chiffon which float around them as they move. Many of them have elaborate headdresses in glittering gold material and they all wear gold coloured masks. The parson himself wears horns as his headdress and a furry tail dangles behind him, whilst an enormous golden codpiece adorns his front.



## A brief summary of the story

Falstaff arrives in Windsor short of money. He decides to court two wealthy married women, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. He asks his servants – Pistol and Nym - to deliver love letters to the women. When they refuse Falstaff sacks them and in revenge the men tell the women's husbands of Falstaff's plans. Page is unconcerned, but jealous Ford disguises himself as 'Master Brook' so that he can find out Falstaff's plans. 'Brook' says he is in love with Mistress Ford and offers to pay Falstaff to court her. Falstaff tells 'Brook' he has already arranged to meet Mistress Ford while her husband is out. Ford concludes that he is right to suspect his wife.

The women find that their love letters to be almost identical, and to get their revenge they plan to trick Falstaff by pretending to respond to his advances. Meanwhile, three different men are competing for the hand of Page's daughter, Anne. Her mother's choice is Doctor Caius, a French doctor, whereas the girl's father prefers Justice Shallow's nephew, Master Slender. Anne is in love with Master Fenton who has squandered his fortune on high-class living.

When Hugh Evans, a Welsh parson, tries to enlist the help of Caius's housekeeper, Mistress Quickly, in wooing Anne for Slender, Caius challenges Evans to a duel. The Hostess of the Garter Inn prevents this duel by directing each man to a different meeting place, causing much amusement for himself, Justice Shallow, Page and others. Evans and Caius decide to work together to be revenged on the Host.

Mistress Ford invites Falstaff to visit her but when her husband arrives home unexpectedly the women hide the fat Knight in a laundry basket full of dirty linen and have him thrown into the river. Undeterred he makes a second visit and the women trick him again, this time disguising him as the fat aunt of Mistress Ford's maid,

commonly known as the fat woman of Brentford. Ford ends up beating the 'old woman' whom he despises, and throwing her out of his house. Black and blue, Falstaff laments his bad luck.

Eventually the wives tell their husbands about the series of jokes they have played on Falstaff and together they devise one last trick to humiliate him. They invite him to dress as Herne the Hunter and join them for a celebration. They arrange to meet him by an old oak tree in Windsor Forest. Everyone arrives dressed in rustic disguise and Page tells Slender to steal Anne away during the revels and marry her. Mistress Page arranges with Doctor Caius to do the same. Children dressed as woodland fairies torment Falstaff and during the chaos Slender, Caius and Fenton steal away their brides-to-be and the rest of the characters reveal their true identities to Falstaff. Although he is embarrassed, Falstaff takes the joke surprisingly well. Slender appears and says he has been deceived – the 'girl' he took away to marry was not Anne but a young man. Caius arrives with similar news. When Fenton and Anne arrive and admit that they are now married, her parents accept the marriage and congratulate the young couple. The play ends with the traditional dance which often ends performances at the Globe.

## CAST AND PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Sir John Falstaff** is played by Pearce Quigley  
**Pistol**, and **Doctor Caius** are played by Richard Katz  
**Sir Hugh Evans** and **Nym** are played by Hedydd Dylan  
**George Page** is played by Forbes Mason  
**Mistress Page** is Sarah Finigan their daughter **Anne Page** is Boadicea Ricketts who also plays **John Rugby**  
**Frank Ford** is played by Jude Owusu his wife **Mistress Ford** is Bronny Hannah  
**Peter Simple**, **John** and the **Hostess of the Garter** are Anne Odeke  
**Mistress Quickly**, his housekeeper is Anita Reynolds  
**Robert Shallow Esquire JP** is Dickon Tyrrell  
**Abraham Slender**, and **Robin** are Joshua Lacey  
**Robert**, **Bardolph** and **Fenton** are Zach Wyatt  
**The Windsor Locals** are played by people from the local community in association with the following community groups, London Bubble Theatre, Clean Break and The Soldiers' Arts Academy.  
**The Musicians** are Ed Neuhauser, Dave Shulman, Fred Thomas, Tom Dennis and Lucy Landymore  
**The Composer** is Frank Moon  
**The Designer** was Charlie Cridlan  
And the play was **directed by** Elle While

The introductory notes were written Nadine Beasley and Miranda Yates, script edited by Louise Fryer, voiced by Jo Whitfield and Eleanor Margolies, produced by Aiwan Obinyan, and recorded and edited by Gary Giles for VocalEyes

An audio version of these notes can be found [here](#).

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