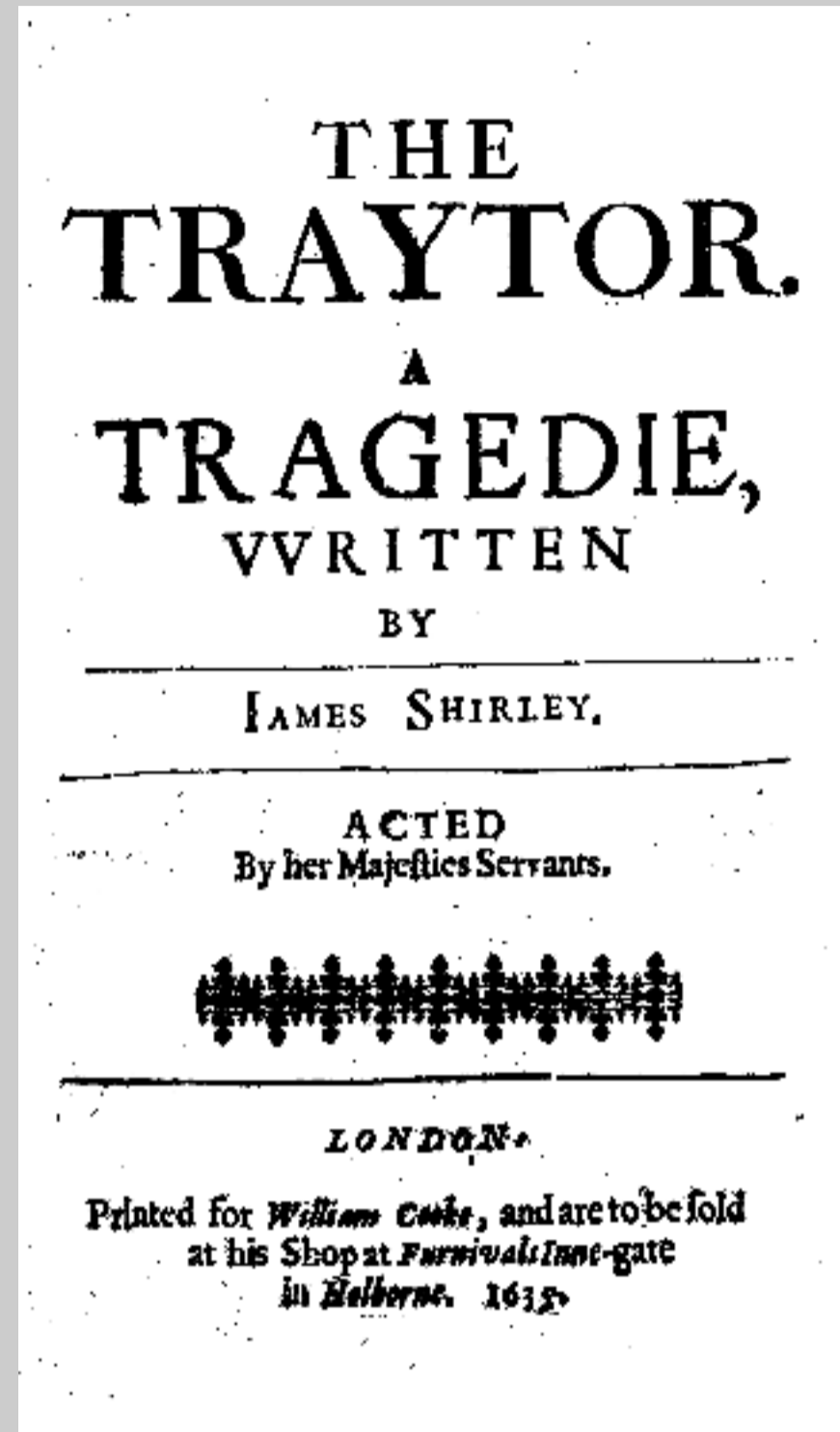


The Revival of James Shirley's plays in 1660s London.

Who is James Shirley?

James Shirley (left) was a popular dramatist who wrote in the 1630s under the reign of Charles I. Many of his plays were revived in the very different climate of 1660s Restoration London.



Historical Context.

When Civil War broke out in 1642, Parliament closed the theatres as a means of discouraging unrest. After the execution of Charles I in 1649 Cromwell, a puritan who perceived acting as duplicitous, ensured that the theatres stayed shut. No plays were performed in London until Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660. The theatre of the Restoration was radically different from its predecessor; it used moving scenery and employed actresses. Yet despite its mechanical innovations, the theatre of the 1660s relied upon the drama of older, canonical playwrights. Either because new plays were unavailable or because the old plays were more profitable, the acting companies continually revived the work of pre-Restoration dramatists like James Shirley.

Below: The Great Fire of London had a huge impact on Restoration theatre and claimed James Shirley's life.

Timeline.

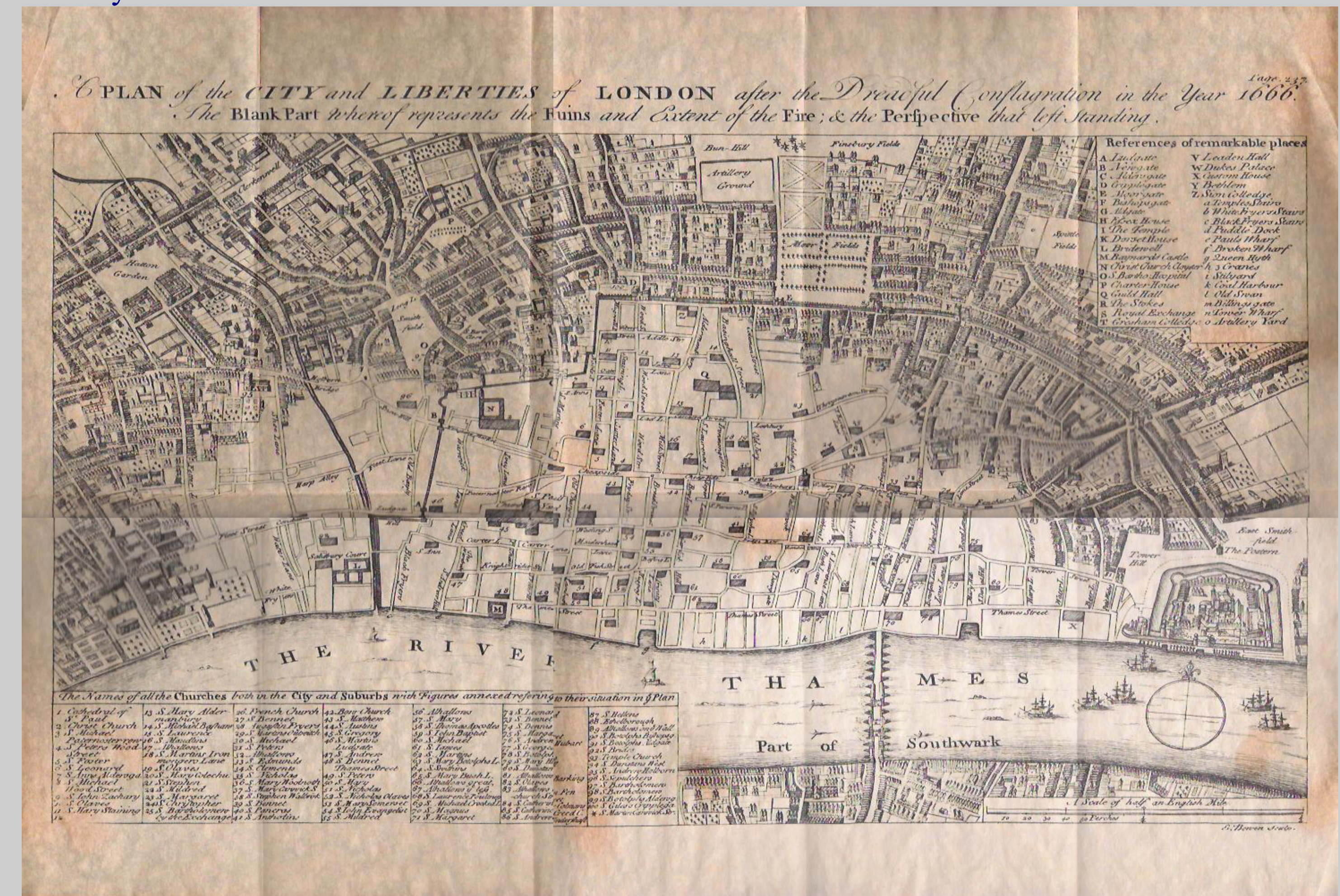
1642 - Civil War breaks out. The theatres are closed.

1649 - Parliament captures and executes Charles I. Cromwell rules as Lord Protector. Theatres remain closed.

1660 - Charles II is restored to the throne. The king re-opens the theatres. Revivals of Shirley's plays begin with a performance of *The Traitor*.

1674 - Revivals of Shirley's plays end.

Left: The title page from the 1635 publication of *The Traitor*, the most popular of Shirley's plays in the Restoration; records show that it was performed ten times in the 1660s.



Above-right: Just days after Charles II returned to the capital the theatres re-opened. Restoration actors were entitled to the legal status of His Majesty's servants.

Left: Cambridge University Library was the perfect place to research Shirley. Its extensive rare books collection included relevant texts unavailable elsewhere.

Research.

Researching Restoration dramatists is problematic because few theatrical documents remain from the seventeenth-century. Thankfully rigorous scholarship of extant materials, like Samuel Pepys's diary, has taken place over the last century. These previous studies enabled my research into the 1660s revivals of James Shirley's plays. My research shows that between 1660 and 1674 at least thirty-nine of Shirley's plays were performed in the popular playhouses of Restoration London. Many were attended by Charles II and three took place at his court. Individual productions would have differed greatly as they were performed by vastly different companies in a variety of theatres. I also produced an annotated bibliography of secondary criticism that should be a useful foundation for scholars studying the Shirley revivals in the Restoration.