

York Shakespeare Project Newsletter 2009-10

issue 6

We are very excited to announce that this summer's productions of *Henry IV* will be performed at...

The church of St Martin-cum-Gregory, Mickelgate

([for Google Street View, click here!](#))

Having been sworn to secrecy whilst negotiations were ongoing for fear of me "jinxing it", I'm now very excited to announce that negotiations have been successful, and that York Shakespeare Project will embark on its first production outside a traditional theatre since *As You Like It* in 2008.

A few interesting facts about St Martins, for those of you who don't know:

- 1 It is mentioned in the Domesday Book.
- 2 Much of the building is fourteenth and fifteenth century, but the brick tower dates from 1844.
- 3 It is no longer used as a church, and its planned future use is as a stained-glass museum.
- 4 It is dangerously close to York's oldest and most venerable revolving dance floor.

But what does all this mean for us? Well, it means we have a flexible, historic space in a brilliant location. The venue will be ours for the duration, and we may even be able to rehearse there in the weeks leading up to the production. Oh, and if we need to find a leery old man to play Falstaff at the last minute when our actor does his back in picking a pen up off the floor, we can nip across the road to Reflex.

Wait a second, I feel another Henry IV announcement about to explode out of me like Drop Dead Fred out of a music box...

Production Dates!

A related announcement which we have had to keep close to our chests is the production dates, which clearly depend partly on the venue. I can now reveal that the production will run from 29th July until the 15th August, 2010.

Performances will be Thursday-Sunday during this period (restricted by licensing) with two shows on Saturdays and Sundays.

It's going to be an exciting run; I can't wait!

And you can still get involved!

Auditions aren't over yet, and there's even an extra date for you. We've had two days of auditions so far, and here are the two remaining dates:

Sunday 16th May; 2:00pm - 6:00pm,
at St Luke's Church Hall, Burton Stone Lane.

Monday 17th May, 5:00pm - 9:00pm,
at Southlands Methodist Church,
Bishopthorpe Road, YO23 1NX.

And if that, the new colour scheme on the YSP web site and the proximity to York's most cultured watering holes (Reflex, The Artful Dodger, the Parish) don't make you want to get involved, maybe this picture special of the venue will:



To prove to you that it's a real place and not just a model, this picture includes Julia...



... And this one includes Julia, Sam and Jane.



This one doesn't include anyone. If you are thinking that a lack of people means it isn't part of St Martin's and is in fact a model or a part of St Paul's Cathedral, you are right.

I'm sure you'll agree that the books and noticeboards make for an excellent setting for one of Shakespeare's grandest history plays. You'll be excited to hear they're letting us borrow them to use as set!

Now, there are some parts we all know about...

In terms of characters, Henry IV has something in common with most Shakespeare plays: there are some characters I know about, and some I've never really heard of. Until I re-read the plays recently, when it struck me that one of the great things about these plays is that the great parts are numerous! I won't insult your intelligence by banging on about Hal (future Henry V), Hotspur (that gallant Geordie) or Falstaff (Shakespeare's best comic creation). But I thought I'd have a chat to Tom, and ask him to pick out some of the unsung great parts in the Henrys. Here's what he said about some of them:

King Henry IV - *the reigning King of England; vexed by the antics of his son; desperate to go off on a crusade to the Middle East; anxious about the stability of his position; alarmed at the internal strife within England – which is now erupting into an even larger civil war. King Henry has great scenes in both plays, and gives the plays a centre of power. For a man aged over 40.*

Mistress Quickly – *a brilliant comic part for a woman over 30. Hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern, a seedy dive in Eastcheap where Falstaff and his friends go to drink. Proud, headstrong, bawdy, shrill, wily, funny. Dim, perhaps, but with a good heart.*

Northumberland - *For a man over the age of 50. The senior Percy in the rebellion against King Henry. Like his son Hotspur, he initially apologizes to Henry for withholding prisoners from him but later joins the rebellion against the king. Ends up not fighting in the rebellion as he's feeling unwell. His family - and particularly his son's wife – later blame him for Hotspur's death. This part needs an experienced actor with gravitas and authority to portray a psychologically truthful and complex relationship with Hotspur. This is a play about fathers and sons: Henry and Hal, Falstaff and Hal (perhaps), and Northumberland and Hotspur.*

Edmund Mortimer - *For a man aged between 20 and 40. A brave warrior, and brother of Hotspur's wife, Lady Percy. At the beginning of the first play, Mortimer has been captured by the Welsh rebel Owen Glendower, and has*

converted to the rebel cause and married Glendower's daughter (the different linguistic capabilities of the couple lead to a very funny – and ultimately moving - scene). Mortimer has a strong claim to the throne through Richard II.

Lady Percy – a strong, witty young woman, married to Harry Percy (Hotspur), one of the key leaders in the rebellion against the King; she loves him but has her own opinions on his military plans. Her love is not blind, and her wit is always sharp. After her husband dies fighting Prince Hal (the King's son), Lady Percy controversially places the blame on her father-in-law, Lord Northumberland. Lady Percy gets several scenes and they are great: lively, funny, moving, truthful.

Well, after that I have to say I quite want to play Lady Percy. If anyone has a solution to how I might go about convincing Tom I'm the... uhh... woman he wants, email me at the usual address: info@yorkshakespeareproject.org.

And while I was talking to him...

J thought I'd do some of that good old Journalism (with a capital J) that I regularly force on you via email, and ask him a few other questions. Here they are. Oh, and I might as well include his answers, too:

Tom, what first made you want to be involved with York Shakespeare Project?

Because of the boldness and breadth of the YSP's vision to stage all of Shakespeare. I'm thrilled and grateful that the YSP kept searching with me until we found a performance venue that I was truly excited by. I've been inspired and excited by the quality of the actors and actresses that have auditioned for the project so far. But we need a large cast to make these plays work, so make sure you come along next week!

What in particular attracted you to the project of Henry IV?

The two parts of Henry IV are one of Shakespeare's most celebrated dramatic achievements. They're full of fantastic characters; funny, moving and challenging scenes; and rich, provocative ideas. Staging

them is a daring, thrilling, ambitious undertaking. We're hugely fortunate that we're doing them in a venue that's completely new not just to the YSP but to the whole theatre scene in York. For a whole month - including a good amount of rehearsal time - we're taking over a beautiful, decrepit, atmospheric medieval church in the heart of York. It has been disused for over 20 years; it is full of historical resonances and echoes; and it's an open, flexible space in which we can build, play, and create a unique theatrical world.

And finally, tell us a bit about your vision for the plays.

My approach to the plays is that we need to tell the stories really clearly. Neither the history or the language is straightforward, but audiences must be gripped by every moment. We need to find the vitality and truth, all the way through. We need to create strong, funny, truthful characters. The church gives us an open, rough, flexible playground: perfect for an ensemble-driven production. I want to stage the plays in modern dress but with specific historical echoes and resonances: somewhere between the medieval and the imagination.

Well, there we have it...

Lots of information about Henry IV. And it's making me excited!

I hope it's done the same for you, and that you're going to come along to the auditions on Sunday or Monday, or at least to the show in the summer! It promises to be a really good one!

Oh, almost forgot, there was a fourth picture of St Martin's. It may be the sort of haunting picture that would get Mulder excited, but I think you'll all agree: it's a sign.

