

Early Theatre

2021 Prize for Best Theatre History Essay in Volumes 22-23

Callan Davies

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‘Bowling Alleys and Playhouses in London, 1560-90’

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In ‘Bowling Alleys and Playhouses in London, 1560-90’, Callan Davies dives deeply into the London Metropolitan Archives, locating documents that reorient the scholarly conversation on built performative spaces and places in early modern London. Davies’s essay brings to light early modern understandings of such spaces, especially by examining the complexity of the term ‘alley’ to designate them. The essay’s attention to the ‘bowling alley’ is something of a teaser, as it goes on to discuss much more than places for bowling as a form of playing. The overlapping of ‘recreational discourses’ that Davies uncovers in the archive supports claims that illuminate the material and economic histories of early theatre as well as the microhistories of playing spaces such as the London Blackfriars. ‘Bowling Alleys and Playhouses in London’ demonstrates the important role that early modern ‘leisure ecologies’ occupied in the emergence of commercial Elizabethan theatre.