

1588-1589

DEATH OF COMIC ACTOR, TARLTON

1588: Richard Tarlton, the much loved comic actor, has died at his home in Holywell Street, Shoreditch. He was nursed in his last illness by Em Ball, a "woman of bad reputation". He will be buried in St Leonard's Churchyard.

He was the principal clown with the Queen's Men, and he was the favourite jester of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. Throughout his career he constantly infuriated playwrights because of his ad-libbing and tendency to put in his own comic "business" into a scene. This doubly annoyed the playwrights because Tarlton was a writer himself - he was the author of "The Seven Deadly Sins", an extremely popular comedy - and had been known to get very angry when an actor dared to change any of the words in the script of that play. He also delighted audiences with his famous "jigs" - comic dances which are generally given as an "after-piece" to performances of plays in the public theatres.

MARLOWE JAILED AS MAN DIES

1589: Christopher Marlowe, the 25 year old author of the highly successful "Tamburlaine" and this season's enormously popular "The Jew of Malta" has been jailed. Together with Thomas Watson, the Oxford educated translator and playwright, who has also been jailed, he is accused of causing the death of William Bradley, son of the landlord of the Bishop's Inn. The incident occurred during a street brawl in Hog Lane, Shoreditch. Marlowe and Watson have pleaded self-defence, and it is expected they will shortly be acquitted.

Leicester's Men taken over by Lord Strange



By permission of the Earl of Derby

A portrait of Ferdinando, Lord Strange

1588: The death of the Earl of Leicester threatened his acting company with closure (for without noble patronage they would be unable to continue). However, Ferdinando, Lord Strange - the son and heir of the Earl of Derby - has stepped in, and taken over. It is believed that Lord Strange saw Leicester's Men when they performed at his family's castle last year and he was so impressed with their acting skills that he had no hesitation in adopting the orphaned company of players.



British Library

A woodcut of the famous actor Richard Tarlton.

Marlowe's "Jew of Malta" is a hit

"The Jew of Malta" has been the hit play of the season, and the extra publicity and notoriety brought by the arrest of its author, Christopher Marlowe, seems to have increased interest at the box office. The leading role of Barrabas the Jew is acclaimed as a triumph for actor, Edward Alleyn.

"Martin Marprelate" Scandal - Bishops call for Censorship

1589: Following a series of pamphlets attacking the Bishops - a vitriolic campaign signed with the pseudonym "Martin Marprelate" - the Privy Council has expressed fears that if such attacks are allowed to continue they might encourage criticism of the Queen herself. Accordingly they have called for a complete ban on all stage plays and for censorship of all published and performed material.

Lord Strange's Men have defied this call by giving performances at the Cross Keys Inn. A compromise has now been offered, by which all plays will in future be submitted to a committee of three: Sir Edmund Tilney - the Master of the Revels, - the Lord Mayor of London, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Theatre managers have reluctantly agreed, but are angered that they will be required to pay a fee for each play submitted to the censorship committee.

Mudered Actor's Widow Re-Marries

1588: Rebecca Knell, widowed last year when her husband, John, was killed by fellow Queen's Men actor, John Towne, has re-married. Her new husband is John Hemminges, another actor in the company.