

KIT MARLOWE KILLED

Brilliant playwright stabbed to death in fight over tavern bill

Christopher Marlowe, England's greatest playwright to date, was killed on May 30th in a fight at Eleanor Bull's tavern in Deptford. He was 29 years old.

Involved in the fight - said to be over "the reckoning" (the bill) - were three other men: Robert Poley, Ingram Frizer and Nicholas Skeeres.

The Coroner's Inquest, two days later, acquitted Ingram Frizer and the others on the grounds of self defence. However, Frizer and Skeeres are known fraudsters, and Robert Poley is a known secret agent in the employ of Sir Thomas Walsingham, brother to the late Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State and Head of Espionage to Queen Elizabeth.

Marlowe himself was known to have worked as a secret agent and was, at the time of his death, already on bail and facing charges of blasphemy and of openly advocating homosexuality.

There are suspicions that this was no accidental manslaughter, and that it was a political assassination - a successful attempt to silence a political "asset" who was rapidly becoming a liability. Whatever the real story behind his brutal death, the world of theatre has lost its first truly great playwright. His "Tamburlaine", "Doctor Faustus" and "Edward II" are likely to live on and be performed as long as theatre itself survives.

Marlowe was a greater poet than a dramatist, and his use of blank verse

has changed the course of English drama. He liberated English drama from the remnants of the medieval play and the Tudor interlude, and his "Tamburlaine" was a truly great work which inaugurated a new and glorious age of drama.

Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, was born in Canterbury in 1564. His brilliant talents were recognised early, and he was awarded a scholarship to Cambridge University. At one point it seemed the University authorities would refuse him his Master's Degree since his attendance record was poor, but they were over-ruled by the Secretary of State who said that Marlowe had been away from University on official business for the Queen herself. It seems this "official" business included infiltrating a Catholic dissident group at Rheims University - and it also seems as if this service for his Queen may have contributed to his eventual "political" death.



The Master, Fellows and Scholars of Corpus Christi, Cambridge

Outbreak of Plague forces Companies to Tour Old Name for Derby's Men

An outbreak of plague led to the closure of all playhouses from February until early autumn - and even then, after a very brief re-opening, a new outbreak caused yet another closure. Licences were granted to the Earl of Sussex's Men and, jointly, to Edward Alleyn and Lord Strange's Men to tour their theatrical productions to any county, city or town which is more than seven miles away from London. This permission is only to exist for the duration of the London plague.

Philip Henslowe wrote to Edward Alleyn telling him he had abandoned the tour because of poor receipts and the actors were "all at home, and have been this four or five weeks, for they cannot save their charges with travel, as I hear, and were fain to pawn their apparel for their charge."

When the plague abated in late November, the Rose re-opened with a season from the Earl of Sussex's Men. The season included revivals of "The Jew of Malta", and an announcement for a new play by William Shakespeare - "Titus Andronicus" - to be premiered early next year.

Meantime the Lord Chamberlain's Men are playing the winter season at the Cross Keys Inn in Gracious (Gracechurch) Street.

The 4th Earl of Derby has died, and his son, Lord Strange, has succeeded to the title. Lord Strange's Men will henceforward be known as the Earl of Derby's Men. This revives a name last used nearly 30 years ago, when Derby's Men were a group of provincial touring actors. That earlier company never appeared in London and has long since been disbanded.