

1594-95 Season is most successful

Absence of plague and reduced competition have made the 1594/5 playing season the best for many years. The Admiral's Men - headed by actor, Edward Alleyn - played a nine month season from 15 June 1594 to March 1595, mounting 17 new plays and several revivals, including "The Jew of Malta" and "Doctor Faustus". The season ended, as required by law, for Lent.

Their competition this season has come from the Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The other established theatre companies have hit hard times, with the Queen's Men relegated entirely to provincial touring, and Lord Pembroke's Men having presently been forced out of business. They have had to pawn all their assets to cope with outstanding debts.

Competition is likely to hot up for the new season, since a new theatre, the Swan, is about to open and audiences will be offered a wider choice of plays to attend.

New Season Interrupted by Riots

The new theatre season, which opened on 23 April, was interrupted for two months between late June and late August. Civil disturbance resulted from a clash between fishwives and apprentices in Billingsgate, as a result of which the authorities closed down all public entertainments. Business was slow to re-establish itself once the ban was lifted, and the autumn proved disastrous for the Rose Theatre, which has seen much of its audience desert to the newly opened Swan Theatre. The Rose has reduced its output to three performances a week as an economy measure.

Some performances known to have been given between 1590 and 1595

1592c

Doctor Faustus
Edward II

1594c

Comedy of Errors
Richard III
Titus Andronicus

1595c

Richard II,
Romeo and Juliet
The Taming of the Shrew
Two Gentlemen of Verona

SWAN OPENS

London's Fourth Playhouse



A sketch of the interior of The Swan drawn in 1596 by John de Witt. He was a student from Utrecht in Holland, and was on a visit to London.

The newly reformed Lord Pembroke's Men have become the resident company at the Swan Theatre, which has just opened on the South Bank. The theatre has been built by Francis Langley, a moneylender and substantial businessman, who has strong influence at Court.

However, despite his connections, Langley has had to battle the authorities in order to get his theatre built. The Lord Mayor petitioned the Lord Treasurer last year, calling for the construction of the theatre to be prevented, on account of the evils arising therefrom.

The Swan is the fourth theatre to be built in London. It is situated on Bankside and is named after the swans on the Thames. It is constructed of wooden pillars with flint and mortar work between, and rests on a brick foundation. It has a large raised platform stage with three galleries running around the building.

The interior pillars have been painted in imitation of marble. It is claimed that the theatre can hold up to three thousand persons.