

# SHAKESPEARE IS DEAD

## Henslowe Dies

Philip Henslowe was neither an actor nor a dramatist, but he became one of the two most powerful men in the world of theatre. He headed a chain of theatres, starting with the Rose, and then adding the Fortune, the Hope and Whitefriars. With his son-in-law, the popular actor Edward Alleyn, he ran a business which dominated the theatrical scene. Due to his business acumen, he managed to hold around half England's actors in his debt, and therefore under his total control. His only rival was the equally powerful management of Richard Burbage. Burbage was an actor, and therefore much more in tune with his fellow workers than Henslowe. Henslowe was, above all, a businessman and was continually in dispute with his employees over financial and contractual matters. Philip Henslowe, who has died at the age of 66, began his career after marrying the rich widow of his employer. He began by speculating in the purchase of various plots of lands, but soon realised that a whole new profitable industry was arising - that of public theatre. He seized this opportunity with great business acumen, and, accordingly, will live on in history as one of the founders of British Theatre. Throughout his business career he has kept diaries and note-books scrupulously itemising all his transactions. These are likely to prove invaluable for future theatre historians.

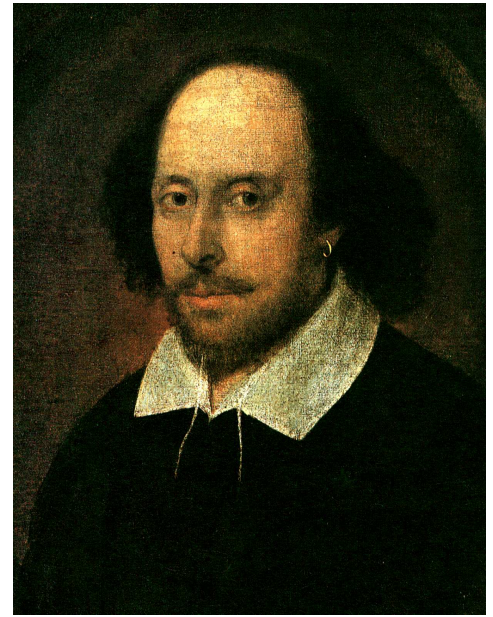
## Cockpit Theatre in Drury Lane

Christopher Beeston, formerly an actor with Henslowe, and recently the Manager of the Queen's Men at the Red Bull, has built a new covered theatre in Drury Lane. Built on the site of a former cock-pit, the new theatre is to be known as the Cockpit Theatre. It is about the same size and similar in style to the Blackfriars Theatre.

His writings for the tragic stage contain some of the most sublime poetry in the language and penetrate deeply into the human predicament. Had he never written anything but his comedies, his place in literature would have been assured. And, though his history plays are far from an accurate record, as a chronicler of the Spirit of England, its thoughts and its feelings, they are unsurpassed.

The true value of William Shakespeare's works will be decided by posterity. In his lifetime he has received much commercial success, but his literary value seems to have been under-rated and scant attention has been paid to preserving and recording his achievements.

Shakespeare has died at the age of 52 in his home town of Stratford on Avon, the place to which he retired five years ago to live the life of a wealthy country gentleman. Such is the immediacy of the theatre world that his death has caused little stir - he was, after all, a name from the past, with his achievements behind him. However, it will surely not be too many years before his position is revalued, and he will be seen to be, quite simply, the greatest writer of the English stage.



National Portrait Gallery

## Jonson Collects Works and a Royal Pension

Ben Jonson, the flamboyant and controversial playwright, has recently had popular successes with his plays "Volpone" (1606), "The Alchemist" (1610) and "Bartholomew Fair" (1614). So popular are his works, that he has published his "Collected Works" - the first known playwright to do so.

He is equally renowned for his Court masques with the architect and designer, Inigo Jones. These have so pleased the King that he has conferred a pension on Jonson, making him the first official Court Poet, or Laureate.

## Licensing Changes Means Four London Companies

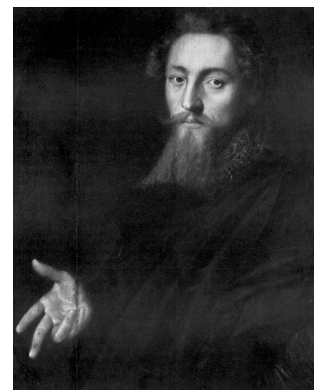
The Master of the Revels has announced new licensing restrictions on London's Theatre Companies. Just four companies will be permitted to continue. These are the King's Men at the Globe and Blackfriars; The Queen's Men at the newly opened Cockpit; Prince Charles' Men at the Red Bull; and Palsgrave's Men at the Fortune.

Companies which have disbanded or been absorbed into the new arrangements include Lady Elizabeth's Men who were resident at Henslowe's Hope Theatre under their leading actor, Nathan Field.

## And Francis Beaumont is Dead, aged 32

The year of 1616 seems to be a particularly cruel one, robbing British Theatre of its top names. The name of Francis Beaumont has always been partnered with that of John Fletcher - an association which lasted between 1608 and 1613 and which produced a series of successful plays, including the enormously popular "Maid's Tragedy" of 1611. Fletcher was the poet and romantic, Beaumont was the practical craftsman. So skilful was the young Beaumont that even seasoned playwrights like Ben Jonson used him as a play doctor to advise and revise scripts.

Francis Beaumont was a trained lawyer, an Oxford graduate and the son of a wealthy landowner. He wrote two plays on his own - "The Woman Hater" (1606) and "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" (1607) - before joining with Fletcher. The personal relationship between the two men was a subject of gossip - they apparently shared their lodgings, their bed, and even wore each other's clothes. They had "but one wench between them", whether as a housemaid or a joint mistress is not known, and it came as a great surprise when three years ago Beaumont suddenly announced he was getting married and moving to Kent to live the life of a country gentleman. He has died at the age of 32.



Lord Sackville/Courtauld Institute