

Theatres closed by Royal Death and Plague

Plague closures hit long-time companies

1625: After nearly fifty years the players who began as Lord Howard's Men have disbanded. Known as The Admiral's Men from 1585 - 1603, then as Prince Henry's Men, their most recent name has been Palsgrave's Men. The Phoenix Theatre players, Lady Elizabeth's Men, have also been forced out of business.

When the Plague ended, Christopher Beeston re-opened the Phoenix on December 1st, with a new company called Queen Henrietta's Men, under the patronage of Queen Henrietta Marie, wife of King Charles I. During the nine-month closure The Red Bull was renovated and partly rebuilt, and on re-opening was able to offer the public better facilities.

The Curtain, however, is unlikely to open again for plays, and will be used exclusively for displays of fighting.

Thomas Middleton dies

1627: From early romps like "A Mad World My Masters", Middleton's plays became more sombre ("A Chaste Maid in Cheapside") and finally portrayed a charnel-house of unparalleled horrors ("Women Beware Women"). His last great play, "A Game of Chess", was a popular success and the source of scandal just three years ago.

In his career he collaborated with Dekker, Drayton, Munday and Greene, and his works were performed by London's main theatres and by the Children's Companies. His best work, however, was probably in collaboration with William Rowley, particularly "The Changeling" (1622).

French Actresses Forced Offstage

1629: A visiting French Company performing at the Blackfriars Theatre introduced actresses into England for the first time. The audience was scandalised and starting pelting the ladies with fruit. The actresses made a hasty retreat and refused to appear for the remainder of their English season.

1625: King James died on Sunday 27th March, and immediately all theatres were closed as a mark of national mourning. The funeral took place on May 7th, for which fifteen players of King James's company and eight players of Prince Charles's company were granted black cloth for livery to enable them to take part in the funeral procession. King Charles I is known to be a patron of the drama, and his new wife, Queen Henrietta-Marie is a keen amateur performer. However, an order has prohibited the theatres from re-opening because of another outbreak of plague. The new King has granted a patent allowing his players to tour the provinces whilst the London theatres are closed.

Death of Edward Alleyn John Fletcher Dies of Plague



Dulwich Picture Gallery

1626: From humble beginnings as an innkeeper's son to a professional reputation as a tragic actor equalled only by Richard Burbage - "two such actors as no age must ever look to see the like" - Edward Alleyn's rise to fame was meteoric. He married his employer's stepdaughter and with his father-in-law, Philip Henslowe, made an enormous contribution to the development of Theatre. As Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus he became one of the best known actors of all time, but he was also a skilled business-man, becoming part-owner of both the Rose and the Fortune Theatres, as well as a partner in Henslowe's other enterprises, such as bear-baiting arenas and brothels. He made at least two attempts at retiring from the theatre, and succeeded by the time he was 40.

For the remainder of his life he devoted himself to charitable work, and in 1619 founded the College of God's Gift at Dulwich. He married three times, and each wife was wealthy. As well as his earnings from the theatre he had an income as Master of the Royal Bear Garden and Keeper of the King's Wild Beasts. He was said to be extremely careful with his money, and became the first pensioner in the charitable trust he set up to help the aged.



Plymouth City Museum

1625: With his former partner, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher was responsible for a spectacularly successful series of tragi-comedies, including "Philaster", "A Maid's Tragedy" and "A King and No King".

He wrote at least six plays in collaboration with Francis Beaumont. For one of these they are said to have been sharing out the writing of the scenes in a tavern when Fletcher was overheard to say "You manage the rest, and I'll undertake the killing of the King". Their conversation was reported and Fletcher was arrested. Allegedly it took the collective efforts of a number of his theatrical colleagues to persuade the authorities to let him go free.

After Beaumont's retirement in 1613 he collaborated with Shakespeare on "Two Noble Kinsmen", "Henry VIII" and "The History of Cardenio". He succeeded Shakespeare as the chief writer for the King's Men under Richard Burbage. His other collaborations were with Nathan Field, William Rowley and Philip Massinger.

In his own right, he was the sole author of several plays. His father was a vicar in Sussex and later became the Bishop of London.

Salisbury Court Theatre Opens

1628: The Salisbury Court is a "faire new playhouse" built as a replacement for the Whitefriars Theatre which previously stood on the same site - part of Dorset House. It has been built by Richard Gunnell and William Blagrove at a cost of £1000. It is a private theatre, and it will be used by the King's Revels.