

1631-1637

# "Notorious Whores" Row Erupts

## Thomas Dekker Dies, Age 60

1632: Famed for his own comedy "The Shoemaker's Holiday" and his countless collaborations with others, Thomas Dekker was a superb chronicler of London's low-life. His long association with Philip Henslowe's theatres entertained London's playgoers for many years, and his satirical "digs" at fellow playwrights and audience behaviour entertained his fellow writers. Despite writing some 44 plays - many of them in collaboration - he was constantly in debt, and spent almost eight years in a debtors' prison.

## George Chapman Dies at age of 75

1634: "Much travelled in the realms of gold", George Chapman's translation of Homer will doubtless give him immortality. It was his plays, however, which brought him the greatest success in his lifetime - and especially his violent tale of lust and murder, "Bussy d'Ambois" written in 1604.

## John Webster Dies, 57

1637: John Webster was "much possessed by death", and his two major revenge tragedies "The White Devil" and "The Duchess of Malfi" are destined to become classics of English Theatre. His chilling power on the subject of death is only equalled by Shakespeare. His fellow-playwrights frequently made fun of his painstakingly slow method of writing.

## First Irish Theatre opens in Dublin

1637: The first purpose-built theatre in Ireland has opened in Werburgh Street, Dublin. Similar in style to the major open-air theatres in London, it has a covered auditorium. It has been built by John Ogilby

1633: William Prynne, a staunch Puritan, has caused a furore with his book "Histriomastix - the Players' Scourge, or Actors' Tragedie". The book lists the immoralities of the stage throughout history and was inspired by the appearance of French actresses on the London stage four years ago. He claims all actresses are "notorious whores".

Unfortunately, Queen Henrietta Marie - wife of King Charles I - is in the middle of rehearsing for an amateur pastoral at Court. Prynne's opinions have been taken as a direct attack upon the Queen of England. He has been convicted of treachery and imprisoned. In addition he was placed on the pillory, had both his ears cut off, and the letters "S. L." (Seditious Libeller) branded on both cheeks.



Queen Henrietta-Marie as "Chloris" in Ben Jonson's court-masque.

## French Company in London

1635: The French actor-manager, Floridor, has brought his company to London, playing at the English Court as well as the Phoenix (Cockpit) Theatre in Drury Lane. The repertoire includes plays by Corneille and Scudery.

In the light of the protests last time a French company played in London, the public performances did not include any appearances by actresses.

## Salisbury Court Gets Resident Company

1637: A new company, Queen Henrietta's Men, will serve as resident players at the Salisbury Court Theatre. It will have no connection with the company previously known under the same name and Christopher Beeston - head of the earlier company - is not involved in any way.

## "Beeston's Boys" are First Drama Students

1637: Christopher Beeston, the 67 year old failed manager of the Phoenix (Cockpit) Theatre in Drury Lane, now wishes to pass on his 50 years of experience to a new generation of performers. Accordingly, he has recruited "Beeston's Boys" - a group of young men who wish to become actors - and intends to provide them with formal training.

## Plague Closes Theatres Again!

1636: Plague has broken out in London once again, and once again all theatres have been closed by official order. This has proved to be the last straw for Christopher Beeston's company of actors known as Queen Henrietta's Men. For the past eleven years they have been resident at the Phoenix Theatre, but this latest closure is the final straw, and the company has disbanded.

## "RARE" BEN JONSON DEAD

1637: The first "official" poet to the Royal Family, and a playwright second in reputation only to Shakespeare, Ben Jonson has died at the age of 65. Because of his fame he has been buried in Westminster Abbey. Since Chaucer was buried here in 1400 many writers have expressed the wish to be buried near his bones.

As bizarre in his death as in his life, there is a story going around that Ben Jonson bargained for a space that was only two feet square, and, accordingly, he has been buried in an upright position. It is also said that a wealthy patron, Jack Young, paid eighteenpence for an inscription "Orare Ben Jonson" (Pray for Ben Jonson) to be carved on his memorial stone. However, the stonemason misunderstood and the stone bears the legend "Rare Ben Jonson"