

1642-1649

Anonymous Plea for Out of Work Actors

1643: A pamphlet has been published entitled "The Actors' Remonstrance or Complaint for the Silencing of their Profession". The petition concludes with an appeal that the players be reinstated and promises that they will admit none but reputable females into the sixpenny rooms or boxes, permit only the best tobacco to be sold in the theatres, and avoid ribaldry.

Tim Reade arrested for "Private" Performance

1647: Tim Reade, the renowned dancer and comedian, formerly a popular attraction at the Salisbury Court Theatre with the King's Revels and the Queen's Men, has been arrested and charged with giving a public theatrical performance. All such performances are currently against the law. However, Reade is pleading that a "private" performance to an invited audience does not breach the regulations. He is unlikely to succeed in his case, since the prosecutors have produced evidence in the form of public advertising bills.

All theatres to be demolished

1648: Under a Draconian Ordinance of 9 February, all theatre buildings are to be demolished, and all theatrical entertainments of any kind are banned. Any actor found performing is to be arrested, and any member of the public caught attending a performance is subject to a substantial fine. The "no performance" rule extends to country festivals and dancing around maypoles. All the major theatres in London have been destroyed. The Red Bull, The Salisbury Court and the Phoenix (Cockpit) are currently still standing since they have been converted for other purposes and no longer count as theatres.

ALL THEATRES CLOSED AS CIVIL WAR ERUPTS

Actors enlist to fight on King's side

1642: As a result of the war raging between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians, a Parliamentary Ordinance has ordered all theatres to be closed. The ban is a total one and is intended to mobilise all manpower for the war effort. The Puritan Party are opposed to public plays on social, political and religious grounds - and it is felt this ban is more to do with public morals than with mobilising fighting forces.

Many actors have joined the army (on the side of the King, of course), but just as many are out of work and have drifted back to earlier, half-forgotten trades. A very small number are making plans to find ways to evade the ban.

Globe Theatre Pulled Down

1644: Closed by public order for the past two years, with England at civil war with itself, and with no end to the present troubles in sight - what else could he do? The ground landlord of the Globe Theatre, Sir Matthew Brand, has decided to demolish the building and put the site to a profitable use.

Thus ends a brilliant chapter in the history of English theatre. The Globe flourished for 43 years as the most glamorous of London's Theatres. Its actors and playwrights were the finest of the time. Led by Richard Burbage, a strong company premiered most of Shakespeare's works and many of his contemporary dramatists. The original building burnt to the ground in 1613 when its thatched roof caught fire, but was rapidly rebuilt the following year - this time with a tiled roof.

It is likely, in years to come, that the Globe will continue to have the strongest hold on the popular imagination as the building where it all began.

Soldiers destroy Theatres King Charles is executed

1649: A troop of soldiers raided and destroyed the Phoenix (Cockpit) Theatre in spite of claims that the performance was a private one and not in breach of the law. The audience were forced to pay heavy "on the spot" fines. The soldiers then raided the Salisbury Court Theatre and destroyed the interior.

1649: The execution of King Charles and the establishment of a "Commonwealth" under Oliver Cromwell has put an end to any hopes that theatres may be able to re-open in the foreseeable future. The Puritan regime is opposed on moral grounds to all theatrical entertainment.

Van Dyck's Triple Portrait of Charles I, dating from 1636



Royal Collection, St. James's Palace