

# Actors Imprisoned for Illegal "Drolls"

## Blackfriars Theatre site to be re-developed

1655: Originally converted for theatrical use 58 years ago and run for many years as a partner theatre to the Globe, the Blackfriars Theatre has been demolished. It has not been used as a theatre since the Order of 1642, and the site will now be redeveloped for commercial use.

## No Hope as theatre is Demolished

1656: It is forty years since the Hope last staged a theatre performance. It then became a bear-baiting arena, and has been unused since 1642. It has now finally been torn down.

## Soldiers raid secret Show

1652: Actors appearing in a secret and illegal performance at Gibbon's Tennis Courts were arrested when a troop of Commonwealth soldiers burst in.

1653: Robert Cox and his entire acting company were arrested and imprisoned after a raid on the Red Bull, where Cox was performing illegal "drolls". "Drolls" are farcical entertainments intermingled with rope-dancing and conjuring tricks. These entertainments have become very popular at taverns and country fairs over the past decade. They do not need an elaborate stage set-up, and can be quickly arranged (and just as quickly abandoned in the event of a lookout spotting Cromwell's troops in the area.)

## Inigo Jones dies, ignored and disgraced

1652: Inigo Jones, at the age of 77, has died in disgrace and poverty despite a career stretching back for nearly 50 years. During his lifetime he revolutionised the flourishing new era of stage design. He introduced painted flats with perspective, and introduced to England the proscenium arch as well as three-sided painted screens which revolve to produce instant scene changes. From his first production - Ben Jonson's "Masque of Blackness" in 1605 - Inigo Jones dominated royal entertainments. His success and influence bred great resentment amongst his rivals, but his closeness to the royalist cause meant he has been completely ignored over the past years.



*Sir William Davenant*

## Sir William Davenant permitted to stage "instructional" performance

1656: "The Siege of Rhodes made by a representative of the Art of Perspective in Scenes and the Story sung in Recitative Musick" is being publicly advertised as taking place in the home of Sir William Davenant. Sir William, who followed the heir apparent into exile, later returned to London and is now said to be on good terms with Oliver Cromwell. However, everyone is waiting to see if this "instructional" show will be regarded as a public performance and will lead to his arrest.

Sir William is no stranger to arrest. He spent a year in the Tower when Cromwell's forces intercepted his ship on its way to America. Sir William had been appointed Governor of Maryland by the exiled king.

In recent years Oliver Cromwell has shown more tolerance towards performances, and has allowed a number to be staged in Universities and educational establishments. It is felt this latest venture by Sir William Davenant has some form of unofficial approval otherwise it would be too foolhardy an undertaking.