

1660

England's first actresses get a great welcome

8 Dec 1660 : England's very first "actress", Moll Firth, was jailed after her one and only appearance 49 years ago. When a group of French actresses appeared 31 years ago, they were booed off the stage. But nowadays things are very different. Mrs Hughes and Mrs Rutter, appearing as Desdemona and Emilia, have become the first "legitimate" actresses of the English Theatre - and they were cheered to the rafters.

They appeared in Thomas Killigrew's production of "Othello", staged at the Tennis Court Theatre in De Vere Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. The title role was played by Charles Hart, who is reputed to be Shakespeare's grand-nephew. He is said to be the illegitimate son of William Hart, who was himself the son of Shakespeare's sister, Joan.

Davenant and Killigrew compete to run theatres

The Phoenix Theatre, which survived the wholesale demolition of playhouses eighteen years ago, re-opened its doors with a public performance to celebrate the Restoration of the Monarchy and the return of King Charles II. The production was staged by Thomas Killigrew. The Phoenix - originally known as the Cockpit Theatre - is managed by Rhodes, who has agreed a month joint tenancy with Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, both of whom have applied for Royal permission to open their own new theatres.

London's first official theatre season since the Commonwealth will open on October 8th.

KING'S RESTORATION - THEATRES OPEN AGAIN

Two Theatre Companies Obtain "Royal Patent" to Build Anew

Two theatre companies have been given permission to perform and to establish new premises. The old Puritan laws banning public performances have now been abolished. The two managers will be Thomas Killigrew who will control a company to be known as the King's Players, and Sir William Davenant, who will run the Duke's Men.

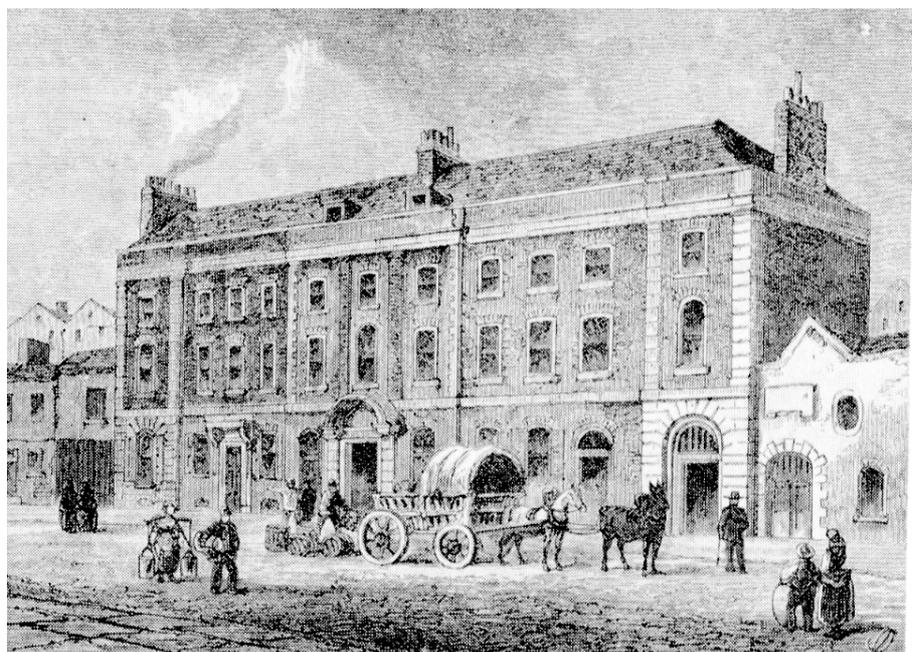
Davenant has secured the services of a young actor called Thomas Betterton, and intends to re-write and adapt Shakespeare's plays to make them more suitable for today's audiences. He had already obtained a Royal Patent in 1639 and had drawn up plans for a new theatre in Dorset Gardens, but this was all abandoned at the outbreak of the War. He intends to proceed with his Dorset Gardens Theatre even if it is twenty-one years later than planned. The Killigrew/Betterton partnership will temporarily house themselves in a theatre converted from the De Vere Street Tennis Courts while their own new theatre is built. Their plans involve a new theatre in Drury Lane.

Tennis Courts converted to provide theatre

The De Vere Street Tennis Courts have been rapidly converted into a theatre, following the repeal of the Puritan laws banning all performances. As a result, London now has two theatres: the Phoenix in Drury Lane and the converted tennis courts. Neither of these venues is ideal, and both are seen as temporary venues pending the construction of a new theatre in Bridges Street for the Thomas Killigrew company, and another new theatre in Dorset Gardens for the Sir William Davenant Company.

Killigrew's plans are well advanced and his new venue is likely to open next year. Davenant's venue, with grandiose plans and an enormous budget, is still a few years away. Accordingly, Sir William Davenant has decided to invest more money in the De Vere Street Tennis Courts and to build a "proper" theatre on the site, even though this Lincoln's Inn Fields site is a "stop-gap" until the money has been raised for Dorset Gardens.

The Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre is unlikely to be completed for another eighteen months since the building work will be scheduled so that performances can continue to be given throughout the construction period.



The only known drawing of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, which opened in 1662 on the re-developed De Vere Street Tennis Courts. The drawing is from a later date, probably a century later.