

1667-1670

## Death cheats Davenant of his Lifelong ambition

1668: The Poet Laureate, favourite of the King, and supposed illegitimate son of Shakespeare has died at the age of 62. Sir William Davenant has made a major contribution to the history of British Theatre but, sadly, death has cheated him of his greatest achievement.

Davenant and Thomas Killigrew are the only two people licensed by King Charles II to run the capital's theatres. Killigrew's Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, opened five years ago. Davenant's new theatre in Dorset Gardens is not yet finished. It is intended to out-do Drury Lane in every respect, and to be the crowning glory of Davenant's career. Sadly he has not lived to see its opening night.

## Betterton & Davenant, Jr Take over Duke's Men

1668: The Duke's Men - the company formerly managed by the late Sir William Davenant - is now controlled jointly by Sir William's son, and the popular actor, Thomas Betterton.

Sir William's role as Poet Laureate has been given to the poet and dramatist, John Dryden.

## When we talk of horses, don't think, - just look!

1668 : The Chorus in Shakespeare's "Henry V" asked that whenever horses were mentioned, the audience should imagine they were there on the stage. Now, seventy years later, Thomas Killigrew at Drury Lane has gone one better. Anxious to outdo the popularity of his rivals, he has staged a "realistic drama" called "Hide Park". There are real horses onstage - to the astonishment, joy and delight of all beholders. One critic, though, has commented on how singular it is that the public will pay to see something onstage they can see in the streets for gratis.

# "Pretty, Witty Nell" Gwynn Retires for Royal Role



National Portrait Gallery

1670: Though just 20 years old, Nell Gwynn has retired from the stage and is installed in lavish Pall Mall apartments as mistress to King Charles II. The King, along with most of the men in London, has been besotted by her ever since he saw her perform the Epilogue to Dryden's "Tyrannic Love". Her farewell appearance was in "The Conquest of Granada", playing the role of Almahide opposite her former lover, the leading actor, Charles Hart. "Pretty witty Nell" had not been seen for several months before her farewell performance. It is said that during this period she has given birth to a son - and is seeking the title of Duke of St Albans for the child, since his father is none other than the King himself.

## No tax on the King's "Pleasure"

1670: Attempts by Parliament to impose a tax on theatres failed after strong opposition from the Court Party. They argue that the actors were the King's servants, and part of his "pleasure". Sir John Coventry caused much merriment in the House when he asked whether His Majesty's pleasure was to be found among the actors or the actresses.