

1686-89

NELL GWYNN DIES, AGE 37

Wycherley released after seven years

1688: After seven years in jail for debt, William Wycherley has been released. A petition to King James II has succeeded in obtaining him a pardon and a return to royal favour. However, Wycherley is said to be extremely bitter and to have declared he will not write any more for the theatre.

King James abdicates after six week "war"

1688: The increasing political turmoil surrounding King James II and his Catholicism has culminated in the country being invaded - by invitation. A highly influential group of Tory and Whig nobles invited Prince William of Orange to lead his forces against the King. William landed on November 1st at Torbay in Devon, and by Christmas Eve King James had fled to exile in France. Prince William refuses to declare himself King by right of conquest and insists that he will rule jointly with his wife Mary only if Parliament decides the issue.

Dryden sacked as Poet Laureate

1688: John Dryden, author of nearly thirty plays, and an established favourite of King James II, has been dismissed from his post as Poet Laureate. He is felt to be too much identified with the old regime.

Death of Aphra Benn, first woman playwright

1689: Aphra Benn has died at the age of 49. The first woman dramatist to work professionally, her colourful life has been marked with a firmly independent spirit. Twelve years ago she had enormous success with her play "The Rover".



National Gallery

1687: "Let not poor Nelly starve" pleaded the dying King Charles II four years ago. And, indeed, his successor seems to have honoured that request. Nell Gwynn, former actress and mistress to the King, was in serious debt because of her extravagant parties and her wild lifestyle, but she was awarded a pension for herself and the two sons she bore the King - one of whom was elevated as the Duke of St Albans. She was famous for her wit. During the recent riots a hostile crowd attacked her carriage, believing it contained a (catholic) mistress of the present king. She emerged and shouted to them "Pray, good people, be civil. I am the Protestant whore!" and was accordingly cheered on her way.

She was also well known for her generosity. Legends abound of her good service to actors and actresses whenever they were in need or in hardship, and it is said she never forgot her humble beginnings. It is also said that the founding of Chelsea Hospital is due to her influence. She has died at the age of 37.

Change of King saves actor for second time!

1689: The incredible Scum Goodman has done it again! Facing the death penalty four years ago, the actor turned highwayman was pardoned because of his proclaimed support for the new King, James II. He has been sentenced to death for a second time, and has cheated the gallows because of a change of King - again for the second time. Allegedly he was involved in a plot to assassinate the present King William before his succession - part of a secret deal struck at the time of his original reprieve. He has gained his pardon by turning King's Evidence against the plotters. But, in a superb piece of double-dealing, it appears he has fled the country without naming names, and is now safely in France and in receipt of an annual pension of £500 a year in return for not giving them away.

Dorset Gardens Changes Name

1689: Over the past seven years business at the Dorset Gardens Theatre has gradually declined. Since both Royal Patents are held by Drury Lane, Dorset Gardens has been unable to stage plays, only operas and musical events.

In an attempt to revitalise itself, the theatre has re-named itself the Queen's Theatre - as a compliment to the new joint-monarch, Queen Mary. However, apart from the occasional opera, the future programme seems to consist of acrobatic and wild animal shows.