

# Actor murdered by jealous suitor

## Drury Lane Changes Hands

1690: The Theatre Royal Drury Lane has been hit by falling attendances and is going through very hard times. Charles Davenant has sold his interest in the company to a lawyer, Christopher Rich. - and has ended a twenty-five year Davenant connection with London's Royal Patent houses.

## Understudy pleases Queen

1693: A Royal Performance of "The Double Dealer" before Queen Mary was threatened by the illness of Edward Kynaston, who plays Lord Touchwood. His understudy, the young, ambitious Colley Cibber, stepped in at the last moment and was much admired by the Queen. By royal order, his salary has been raised from 15/- a week to £1. Queen Mary, an ardent playgoer, is so pleased by Congreve's work that she has appointed the playwright Licensor of Hackney Carriages - a sinecure worth £100 a year.

## Incompetent Laureate dies

1692: Thomas Shadwell has died at the age of 50, but is assured of a measure of immortality thanks to Dryden's merciless lampoon "MacFlecknoe". Shadwell succeeded to the title Poet Laureate - most unworthily according to critics - when Dryden was dismissed for political reasons. Shadwell enjoyed a modest success with his play "Bury Fair" three years ago.

## Theatre in Norwich

1692: A theatre called "The Angel" has opened in St. Peter of Mancroft, Norwich.

1692 : William Mountford, 32, was a noted comic actor especially acclaimed for playing Alexander to Mrs Bracegirdle's Starita. Mrs Bracegirdle had firmly rejected the advances of a Captain Hill, and the Captain, misled by the passion created on stage by the actor and actress, decided they must be having an affair in real life. Accordingly he decided to dispose of his rival. Enlisting the help of Lord Mohun, they both waylaid William Mountford. The Captain drew his sword and ran it through the actor's body. William Mountford died instantly. Captain Hill has fled the country to escape capture, and Lord Mohun has been sent to trial but acquitted for insufficient evidence.



*Mrs Bracegirdle*

## New Playwright has phenomenal hit

1693: 23 year old William Congreve has broken all records at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, with fourteen consecutive performances of his first play "The Old Bachelor". The all-star cast includes Thomas Betterton as Old Heartwell - the old bachelor of the title- with Mrs Bracegirdle and Mrs Barry. True to his policy of encouraging new talent, Thomas Betterton has given the role of Fondlewife to an unknown young actor from Dublin, Thomas Doggett - and Doggett has taken the audiences by storm. At one swoop, William Congreve has become the country's most successful playwright.

*Playwright, William Congreve*

## Congreve does it again!

1693: Nine months after his phenomenal hit with "The Old Bachelor", William Congreve is again the darling of Drury Lane with yet another new play - "The Double Dealer". This time the audience is not quite so ecstatic - the theme is too near home and the satire too direct - but everyone agrees it is a superb production with an excellent cast : Betterton, Doggett, Kynaston and Mesdames Bracegirdle and Barry.

The success of this new writer is surprising considering his background. He was born in Bardsey, near Leeds and was educated at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin. He came to London's Middle Temple to study law but gave up his studies last year when he published a novel called "Incognita, or Love and Duty Reconciled", and a translation of Juvenal's eleventh satire. He then wrote his first play, "The Old Bachelor", and gained immediate acclaim.



*National Portrait Gallery*