

Congreve quits after failure of new play

Death of Dryden, 69

1700: Poet, critic, satirist, and the outstanding dramatist of the Restoration stage, John Dryden has died at the age of 69. The author of nearly thirty plays and numerous Epilogues and Prologues, Dryden also adapted a number of Shakespeare's plays to suit contemporary tastes. One time Poet Laureate, until he fell out of favour with King James II, he courted controversy all his life. His contribution to English literature has been acknowledged by interring his body in Westminster Abbey in Chaucer's grave.

New theatres in Bath, London and Aberdeen

1705: New theatres have opened in London and in the fashionable provincial spa town of Bath. The London Theatre is designed by Sir John Vanbrugh and financed by 30 subscribers, each donating 100 guineas. The new theatre is to be called the "Queen's Theatre" in honour of England's new monarch. It has been built for Thomas Betterton's company to replace the small and old-fashioned Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre which has been their home ever since the split with Drury Lane. The building is very ornate, but already has been criticised for its poor acoustics. It is also situated in the Haymarket, off the beaten track and an unsavoury part of the town. It opened on April 9th under the joint management of Vanbrugh and Congreve.

Theatres in the provincial towns of England are still a great rarity. Touring companies of actors still depend on inns, Town Halls and other makeshift venues. However, a Bath businessman, John Power, has built a new theatre in the spa town of Bath. It has cost £1,300 - a sum raised by subscription.

At the same time there are reports of a new theatre opening in Aberdeen. It is called Scott's Theatre.

1700: William Congreve has had four major successes in the past seven years. His three comedies - "The Old Bachelor", "The Double Dealer" and "Love for Love" - and his tragedy "The Mourning Bride" have been enormously popular with audiences. However, his latest play "The Way of the World" has had a very cold reception. Congreve has announced that he will write no more for the theatre.

Playwright laments loss of the "age of pleasure" Queen Anne's Coronation

1702: Playwright John Dennis has written a lament for the end of the age known as the Restoration. He says the rakes and wits have died young or turned respectable, and healthy cynicism has been replaced with vulgar sentimentality. The educated and leisured audiences of the Restoration are no more, he laments, "For that was an Age of Pleasure and not of Business"

1702: King William III died, aged 51, following a fall from his horse whilst riding in Richmond Park. His horse tripped over a molehill - and his Jacobite opponents immediately started drinking toasts to the mole. William of Orange was never a popular king and showed little interest in theatre. His successor, his sister in law and the second daughter of James II, becomes Queen Anne. Her coronation on April 23rd, was marked with a series of special celebration performances.

Command Performance in Spa-Town brings success to Anne Oldfield

1703: Royal Consort, Prince George of Denmark, travelled to Bath to take the waters for his increasingly serious respiratory problems. Queen Anne moved the royal court to the spa-town for the summer and commanded Christopher Rich's Drury Lane company to give a performance there. The chosen play, "Sir Courtly Nice" featured Mrs Anne Oldfield in the role of Leonora. Mrs Oldfield has been a member of the Drury Lane company for the past four years, but has made little impact and has occasionally been criticised for her lack of talent. However, in this play she was a great success and much praised by the Royal couple.

Mrs Oldfield enchants all London

1704: Hard on the heels of last year's success in Bath, Mrs Oldfield, back in London, has appeared as Lady Betty Modish in Colley Cibber's "The Careless Husband" and has broken all attendance records at the Theatre Royal. She is now the undisputed leading lady of the London stage, and has been nicknamed "Queen Anne of Drury Lane".

Ban on audience masks

1704: Queen Anne has banned the wearing of masks by members of theatre audiences. Theatres have become a hunting ground for those bent on promiscuity. The middle gallery has become notorious for its genteel courtesans who wear masks and carry on their business incognito.

