

QUEEN'S DEATH CLOSES THEATRES FOR SIX WEEKS

New King Changes Patent

1714: King George I has amended the Royal Patent granted to the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and required the appointment of Sir Richard Steele to the existing Board of Three which runs the theatre. Sir Richard Steele is a staunch supporter of the Hanoverians and the proprietor of the "Tatler" magazine. This is seen as a political appointment and part of a plan to ensure that the King's supporters are represented on all national bodies in readiness for an expected invasion by the Pretender.

"Gay Lothario" dies of drink

1714: George Powell has died at the age of 46 after a career of drink, brawling, forgotten lines and grand debauchery. He was frequently drunk onstage and during one performance made such violent love to his leading lady that Vanbrugh feared for the actress concerned. However, since his triumphant creation of the role of Lothario in Nicholas Rowe's play "The Fair Penitent", he has always been a great favourite with the public.

Lovesick Laureate

1715: Author of "The Ambitious Stepmother" and "The Fair Penitent" and a sound scholar, as witnessed by his edition of Shakespeare's plays, Nicholas Rowe has been appointed Poet Laureate. His plays have introduced a moral tone and a patriotism long lacking in contemporary theatre. His current successes are the historical plays "Jane Shore" and "Lady Jane Grey". He is 40 years old, and is known in the theatre world for his obsessive love for actress, Anne Bracegirdle. She has always been completely unresponsive to him and has been living openly with rival playwright, William Congreve. In spite of this, Nicholas Rowe continually and publicly declares his unrequited love.

1714, August 1st : The death of Queen Anne led to an immediate order for all theatres and public entertainments to close for royal mourning. The period of closure, initially announced as six weeks, was much longer than usual and is a source of worry to theatres. However, the Government is anticipating civil unrest over the succession of the Elector of Hanover as King George I - and is concerned that supporters of James Stuart, the Pretender to the Throne may try and incite another civil war. Accordingly, the decision to close theatres for such a long period is more to do with preventing large crowds gathering in public than it is to do with royal mourning.

Christopher Rich plays his final scene

1714: The deposed theatre manager, Christopher Rich, made a comeback after five years in the wilderness, by petitioning the new King for permission to re-open the disused Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. He is claiming this as compensation for his unfair dismissal from Drury Lane. His application was accompanied by a statement of his completely loyal and unswerving support for the Hanoverian monarch. Despite opposition from the theatre world, which pointed out that Christopher Rich was guilty of fraud and embezzlement and that his original dismissal by the Lord Chamberlain was perfectly justified, King George granted the application and Christopher Rich immediately set about renovating Lincoln's Inn Fields. However, before the renovations were complete. Rich, who is thought to be around 60 years old, suddenly died. His son, John Rich, now takes over the renovated theatre which is planned to re-open on December 18th with a production of "The Recruiting Officer".

Embittered William Wycherley is dead

76 year old playwright dies
11 days after new marriage

1716: William Wycherley died just eleven days after marrying a young bride. This marriage was undertaken to deprive his nephew of an inheritance. Although he had written no plays for the past 36 years, he was one of the great writers of the Restoration period. His comedies, which included "The Country Wife" and "The Plain Dealer" were coarse and sometimes indecent, but so strongly did he attack the vices of that age, that he was felt to be a moralist at heart. He fell out of favour with King Charles II after he contracted a secret marriage with the widowed Countess of Drogheda, and later spent seven years in a debtors' prison. After his release he was embittered and wrote no more.



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