

Another Theatre in the Haymarket

1720, 29th December: A new theatre, the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, has opened with a performance by French comedians. The theatre is managed by a former carpenter called John Potter. He built the theatre much earlier in the year but failed to get a Licence to open following opposition from the Patent Theatres. Following some amateur performances, Potter finally obtained the patronage of the Duke of Montague, and has been allowed to give public performances.

The theatre is built on the site of an old inn called "The King's Head". The total cost, inclusive of decorations, fittings, scenery and wardrobe is £1,500. It is situated across the road from its much grander and more ornate rival which opened as the Queen's Theatre in 1705 and is now known as the King's Theatre.

James Quin on Murder Charge

1718: 25 year old James Quin has been acquitted of murder following a trial at the Old Bailey. He was accused of killing a fellow-actor following an onstage dispute during a revival of Addison's "Cato" at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. The role of Decius was played by an actor called Williams, and that of Cato by Quin. Throughout the performance Williams insisted on addressing Quin as "Keeto", which Quin immediately corrected as "Kayto". Since the name occurred ten times in the opening scene, the audience was reduced to inextinguishable laughter.

After the performance Williams lay in wait for Quin and attacked him with his sword. Quin claimed he was forced to defend himself, and here was a man slain, and all for the mispronunciation of a vowel. Quin was freed from censure, but the Judge laid the catastrophe rather to the fashion of wearing swords than to the drawing of those with evil purpose.

"Pantomime" is a hit for John Rich

1717, February : All London is flocking to see the new "pantomime" at Lincoln's Inn Fields. "Harlequin Executed, or the Farmer Disappointed" is a great success for the theatre manager, John Rich, who also plays the title role under his stage name, Lun. Jealous detractors are claiming Rich has stolen the idea of his pantomimes from last year's series of "Italian Night Scenes" which were created by dancing master, John Weaver, as after-pieces to the plays at Drury Lane. John Rich did introduce "A new Italian Mimic Scene between Scaramouche and Harlequin" on Boxing Day last year, but this new re-written version is much more "English" in style. They are also claiming Rich could not have written the work since he is illiterate (an untrue claim, though his spelling and grammar are said to be lacking in true education).

However, such entertainments have been shown in London and the provinces in the recent past, presented by visiting French companies of actors and comedians. These "Italian" mimes have been very popular at English country fairs and inn-yards for the past ten years or so, and have been French adaptations of a popular Italian entertainment. The especial success of John Rich is clearly due to his own performance as Harlequin - an original gift for mime and an instinct and intuition for what will make the general public laugh. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and Drury Lane has announced that next month it will be performing Weaver's "The Loves of Mars and Venus - after the manner of the Antient Pantomimes". John Rich has announced an April production of "The Cheats" in which his Harlequin will appear in a contemporary London setting, using contemporary and local references, thus establishing a particular style for this new kind of show - the pantomime.



Woman writer has 3rd Hit Royal Job for Handel

1718: Susannah Centlivre gave up acting twelve years ago - because she was very tall and masculine looking and was only suitable for male roles. Married three times - lastly in 1706 to Queen Anne's cook - her early plays were published under the name of Mrs Carroll. In the past nine years she has had three great successes with "The Busie Body" (1709), "The Wonder - A Woman Keeps a Secret" (1714) and this year's comedy of manners, "A Bold Stroke for a Wife" which is a roaring success for Anne Oldfield and her portrayal of Violante.

1720: The efforts of the King's Theatre (formerly called the Queen's) to establish a home for English and Italian opera in their Haymarket venue have been rewarded with royal patronage. The German born composer Handel - who has now taken naturalisation papers and is an official Englishman - has been authorised to form a Royal Academy of Music and to create a company of Italian opera singers.