

1729-1730

# Mrs Oldfield, Britain's favourite actress, dies at the age of 47

## Goodman's Fields Opens

1729 : Despite fierce opposition from local churches and residents, Thomas Odell has succeeded in opening a new theatre in Goodman's Fields. The opponents fear their daughters and servants will be contaminated by the close proximity of the theatre, which is in a converted shop in Leman Street, Whitechapel.

## New Theatre opens in Bristol

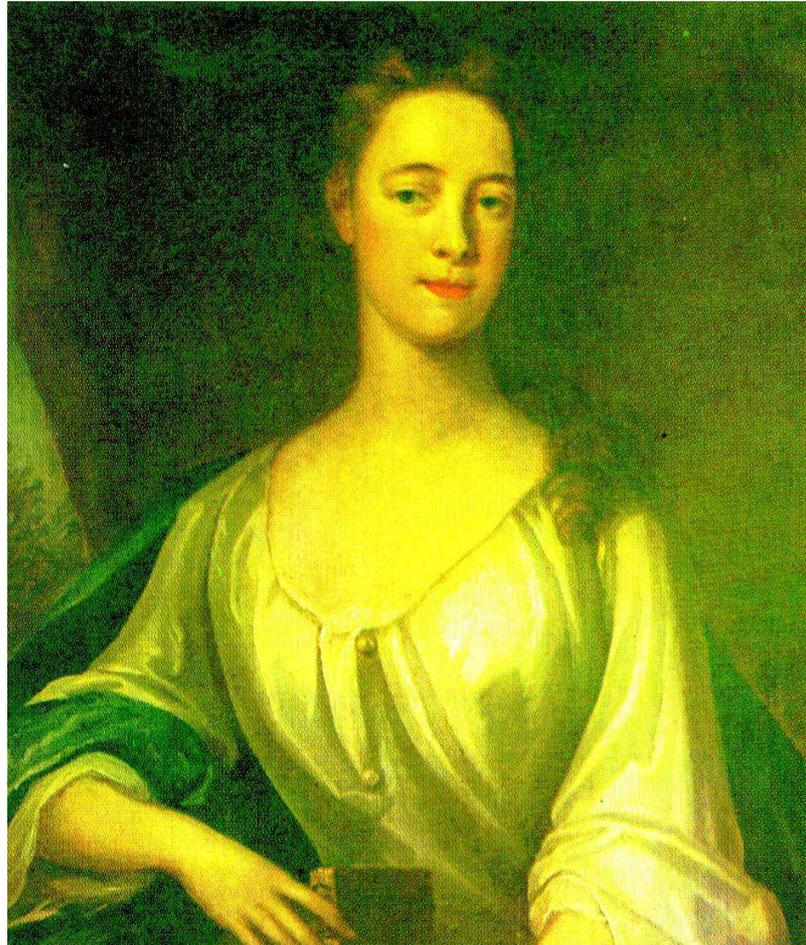
1729: The Bath Players have widened their touring circuit by performing venues by establishing a permanent theatre at Jacob's Wells in Bristol. The new theatre has been built by John Hippisley in the face of much Puritan opposition. The theatre will provide a regular home for the Spring tour of the Bath players, and for the rest of the year will receive mixed touring companies from London.

## Haymarket's Huge Success

1729: The Little Theatre in the Haymarket has struggled for the past nine years, forced to present everything except plays. Operas, burlesques, tumblers, acrobats and amateur shows have been the staple fare. Now it has had a great success with a thirty-night run of "Hurlothrumbo, or the Supernatural" - and has attracted much opposition from the two Patent Theatres, already riled by competition from the new Goodman's Fields Theatre.

## Cibber Appointed Laureate

1730: The surprising and controversial appointment of Drury Lane Theatre manager, Colley Cibber, to the position of Poet Laureate has crowned his career and infuriated his enemies.



1729: Anne Oldfield, the most famous actress on the English stage, has died at the age of 47. She withdrew from the stage two years ago because of ill health, but attempted a comeback a few months ago, only to find her performance severely marred by the cruel wasting disease which has seized her. She was adored by the public for comic performances in the plays of Colley Cibber and William Congreve, and was noted for her beautiful diction. Voltaire claimed she was the only English actress he could understand without difficulty.

She was working as barmaid at the Mitre Tavern when first discovered by playwright George Farquhar. She became his mistress (and later mistress to others including the Duke of Marlborough), and through him gained an introduction to Sir John Vanbrugh, who created a role for her at Drury Lane in 1699. Her rise to fame was immediate, and she soon acquired the name "Queen Anne of Drury Lane". Her only serious rival, Mrs Bracegirdle, is said to have announced her own retirement from the stage since she recognised the greater talents of Anne Oldfield.

Her body lay in state at the Jerusalem Chapel of Westminster, and hundreds of mourners filed past to pay their last respects. She will become the first actress to be buried in Westminster Abbey, but there will be no commemorative headstone since Mrs Oldfield was the mother of two illegitimate children.

## Congreve killed in Highway Accident

1729: William Congreve, the greatest writer of the age, has died from injuries received when his coach overturned on the highway whilst he was travelling to Bath. Congreve, aged 59, had written nothing for the theatre since his last play "The Way of the World" was a failure at Lincoln's Inn Fields 29 years ago. However, since that time, revivals of that play have proved it to be one of the most popular of the age, and his other plays "The Old Bachelor", "The Double Dealer" and "Love for Love" are similarly now part of the national repertoire. He is to be buried at Westminster Abbey.