

Public bewildered and confused as eleven days are "stolen"

"The London Cuckolds" - 70 years' tradition ends

1752: Since 1681 both Royal Patent Theatres have always given a performance of Edward Ravenscroft's farce "The London Cuckolds" on Lord Mayor's Day - November 9th. David Garrick abandoned this tradition at Drury Lane last year, and now Covent Garden has followed suit - thus ending a curious 70 year old practice.

Goodman's Fields closes forever

1751: For the past nine years Goodman's Fields Theatre has struggled to stay open as a circus and performance venue for acrobats, juggler and ropewalkers. It has finally closed. The present building, the second on the Ayliffe Street site, opened just eighteen years ago, and was a magnificent theatre, designed by the same architect as the Covent Garden Theatre. The theatre was severely affected by the 1737 Licensing Act, and was forced to all manner of subterfuges to stay open. David Garrick made his sensational debut at Goodman's Fields ten years ago - the last time this theatre presented a full season of plays. It is likely to be used as a warehouse.

New theatre in Birmingham

1751: Former London actor, Richard Yates, has opened a new theatre in King Street, Birmingham in spite of much opposition from the Church. It has quickly established itself and is going from strength to strength. The prices are 3/-, 2/- and 1/-.

More new theatres

1754: Manchester has acquired its first theatre, built in King Street and another new theatre has opened in the market town of Beverley, Yorkshire. A new theatre has opened in Glasgow, but there is already considerable religious opposition to it.

1752: The public simply cannot understand it. They went to bed on the night of September 2nd, and when they awoke the following morning, it was September 14th. The day of the week had not changed, so what had happened to the eleven missing days?

There was something of an outcry nine months ago, when the year changed from 1751 to 1752 on January 1st rather than on Lady Day, March 25th as it always has done. But that outcry was nothing compared to the current outrage and demand "Give us back our eleven stolen days!"

Britain's calendar was fixed by Julius Caesar almost 1800 years ago. But Caesar got it slightly wrong. The rest of the civilised world sorted this out nearly two hundred years ago by accepting the Gregorian or New Style calendar. Only Britain and Russia refused to change (as did Turkey, but only because they were using a Mohammedan calendar of their own). Consequently, the rest of the world changed the year on January 1st, while Britain stuck to March 25th, and the rest of the world had a date which, by now, is eleven days ahead of Britain.

Lord Chesterfield introduced an Act of Parliament "for regulating the commencement of the year and for correcting the Calendar now in use" simply because our increased business with Europe was creating enormous confusion over dates, and anyone with business abroad was already using a double-dating system on all correspondence. The Calendar Act was passed with an overwhelming majority in the House, but it was not really understood by the general public.

Generally the theatre world has welcomed the changes. More and more foreign theatre companies are visiting England, and English theatre companies are venturing abroad more frequently. It has been a very complicated business ensuring that each group clearly understands the dates on which they will be performing in each other's country - and there have been some serious misunderstandings. However, to ensure there is no rioting at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, the standing guard of troops which are on duty at every performance have been doubled as a precaution.

Actress, Lavinia Fenton, is Duchess of Bolton

1751: Lavinia Fenton was just twenty years old when she became the most famous actress in London - thanks to her portrayal of Polly in "The Beggar's Opera".

Manager John Rich and the author John Gay were particularly displeased when she refused any further employment with them.

They were planning to extend the run of "The Beggar's Opera" when Lavinia Fenton announced she was retiring from the stage to become mistress to the Duke of Bolton.

She spent the next 23 years in a kind of wealthy and discreet obscurity. Now, at last, she has married her lover and, as the Duchess of Bolton, has become the first actress to marry her way into the aristocracy.

It is said that her elevation to the aristocracy has turned her into a demanding, unpleasant and obnoxious personality, much disliked by her servants. She is also being ignored by many aristocratic ladies, who feel she is not a true aristocrat, but an upstart.

