

1777-1780

DAVID GARRICK DIES, AGED 62

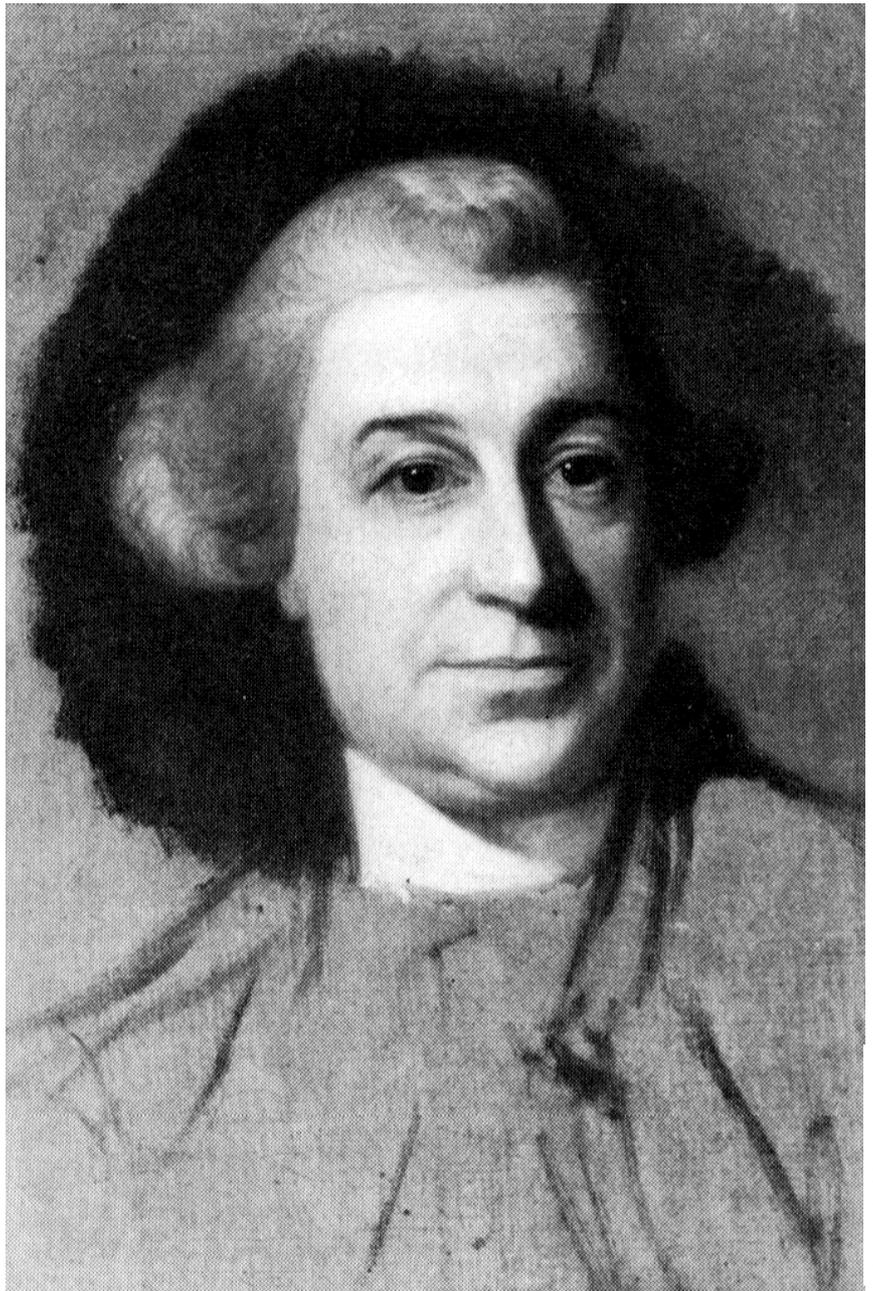
1779 : Just two years after his retirement, David Garrick has died at the age of 62. His death has caused widespread sadness, and brought forward many tributes. Dr Samuel Johnson said "I am disappointed by that stroke of death which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure". King George III once described him as "a great fidget, who could never stand still" and Pope said of him: "On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting.

"Twas only that when he was off he was acting"

During his career his fiery temper, vanity and snobbishness, as well as his enormous success brought him many enemies in the theatre world - especially the malicious rival actor-manager, Samuel Foote. But his place in the affection of the general public was quite unassailable. His funeral was held at Westminster Abbey, and he was buried in Poet's Corner. As the coffin reached the Abbey the unbroken line of mourning coaches stretched back into the Strand, with those following on foot stretching back an even greater distance. It is said that London has never seen such a funeral procession - not even for Royalty.

Barry, "Most Handsome" of all actors, is dead

1777: Spranger Barry, the "handsome as a god" actor whose Romeo is acclaimed as the best ever, has died after a long and wasting illness. His final years were made happier by a second marriage - after 18 years as a widower - and by a recovery in his financial fortunes after he lost everything in an ill-fated Dublin theatre venture. As well as his Romeo, he was much praised for his Othello, and was generally felt to be Garrick's only serious rival. His last stage appearance at Covent Garden a year ago shocked the audience since the once incredibly handsome actor was clearly much changed through illness.



The Garrick Club

The last portrait of David Garrick, painted shortly before his death

School for Scandal is a great success

1777: Sheridan has written a new play for his Drury Lane theatre, and its premiere on 8 May was one of the most successful ever seen at the Theatre Royal. He tailored the play's characters around the specific talents of the Drury Lane company and the results "glitter like a polished jewel". The bedazzled and excited audience cheered it again and again. The initial run was for twenty successive nights, and it is continuing in the repertory for three nights every week. The play is called "The School for Scandal".

"Royal" Honour for New theatres in Wales, Bristol's Theatre Scotland and Ireland

1778: Bristol's 11 year old King Street Theatre was been awarded the Royal Patent, thus "legitimising" it for the presentation of plays rather than musicals and operettas. The theatre is currently undergoing a major renovation and is managed by John Palmer, Junior, who also runs the Theatre at Bath.

1780: The South Wales seaport of Swansea has acquired a magnificent new Theatre in the town's Goat Street. At the other end of the country, two new venues have opened in Aberdeen—a new building, and a second venue in a converted coach house. These join several new venues opened in the past few years: Birmingham's Concert Booth and Opera House which opened in 1778 and burnt down just three months later; a Theatre Royal in Waterford, Ireland; and a new theatre in Boston, Lincolnshire.

Meantime Glasgow's only theatre has burnt down and been demolished.