

Mrs Siddons is "Greatest Lady Macbeth"

Death of Kitty Clive, 74

1785: A great comedienne who longed throughout her career to play serious roles, Kitty Clive was enormously popular with the general public. She retired from the stage in 1769 following innumerable rows with David Garrick - though they somehow managed to retain their friendship. Since then the once pert and pretty performer, now "full blown and florid" has hosted famous parties at her retirement home, Clive's -Den. She has died at the age of 74.

Composer Arne dies, 77

1787 : Dr Thomas Arne, the leading theatrical composer of the age, has died at the age of 77. He composed incidental music for seven Shakespeare plays and wrote for operas and masques. He is likely to be best remembered for his song "Rule, Britannia".

Birmingham's new Theatre

1787 : Birmingham has acquired a new theatre to rival the 33 year old King Street venue. It is called the Amphitheatre and is situated in Livery Street. It holds 2,000 people in boxes, pit and gallery, but possesses only three dressing rooms. Between 1740 and the early 1760s Birmingham supported four theatres - in Moor Street, King Street, New Street and Smallbrook Street, though the latter two had very short lives. The King Street Theatre had no rivals till 1778, when a new Opera House opened in Moseley Road - but it burnt down just three months later. It is felt that a town the size of Birmingham should be able to provide enough audience for two theatres.

Four more theatres

Other new theatres have recently opened in Halesworth (1785) and this year in Margate, Newcastle under Lyne and Penzance.

"Completely new approach to role"

1785, 2nd February: Sarah Siddon's performance as Lady Macbeth is being acclaimed as the greatest Lady Macbeth ever. It is said to surpass even Hannah Pritchard, whose performance opposite Garrick last seen 18 years ago has always been said to be unsurpassable. Mrs Siddons has introduced some new ideas to the portrayal - particularly the business of seeming to wash her hands in the Sleepwalking scene - and her completely new approach to the role is said to be profoundly exciting. She is now held up as the greatest living actress, and is said by many to be the greatest actress ever.

Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth



Alec Clunes

East End "Royalty" challenges monopoly

1787 : John Palmer, well known for his association with Drury Lane and the Haymarket and for roles like Falstaff, Toby Belch and Captain Absolute, has built a new theatre in Wellclose Square, close to the Ratcliffe Highway in the East End of London. He has called it the "Royalty" and claims that it has room for over 2,500 people. Sheridan has nicknamed him "Plausible Jack", and he is known to be an inveterate liar, so no one believes his statement that he has permission from "high up in the royal family" for his new venture. The opening production, with a fine company, and with a 14 year old boy called Braham singing between the acts of the play, was felt to be a straight play and not a concert. Accordingly the Patentees summonsed him, but "Plausible Jack" managed to persuade the authorities that the main attraction of his theatre is the music and singing and he is therefore not in breach of the law.

Mrs Bellamy's Memoirs a sensational best seller

1785 : Mrs Anne Bellamy, hounded by creditors and very much out of favour with her fellow professionals for her temperamental outbursts, her unreliability and her marriages, both legal and bigamous, has earned a great deal of money and obtained much personal revenge with the publication of her memoirs- a six volume "Apology" for her life. It has caused much scandal, and has been a sensational best seller. She was always said to have brought more youthful charm than ability to her performances, especially as Garrick's Juliet, and it is claimed she once eloped with a lover in the middle of a performance.



Alec Clunes

George Anne Bellamy in the role of the Comic Muse