

1793-1795

THIRD DRURY LANE THEATRE OPENS

Theatres close for dead King Louis

1793, 21 January: News arrived in London of the execution of King Louis XVI in the revolutionary upheavals in France. All the theatres in London closed for the night as a sign of mourning and respect.

Barrymore - the "great amateur" dies, age 24

1793 : Richard Barry, the Earl of Barrymore, has died at the age of 24. Over the past few years he has become known as the Great Amateur because of his love for theatre. He built private theatres in his country house at Wargrave, Berkshire, and at his town house in Savile Row. He frequently engaged top professional artists to appear alongside himself and his friends in various amateur productions.

New Lyceum Theatre will gain by Astley's disaster

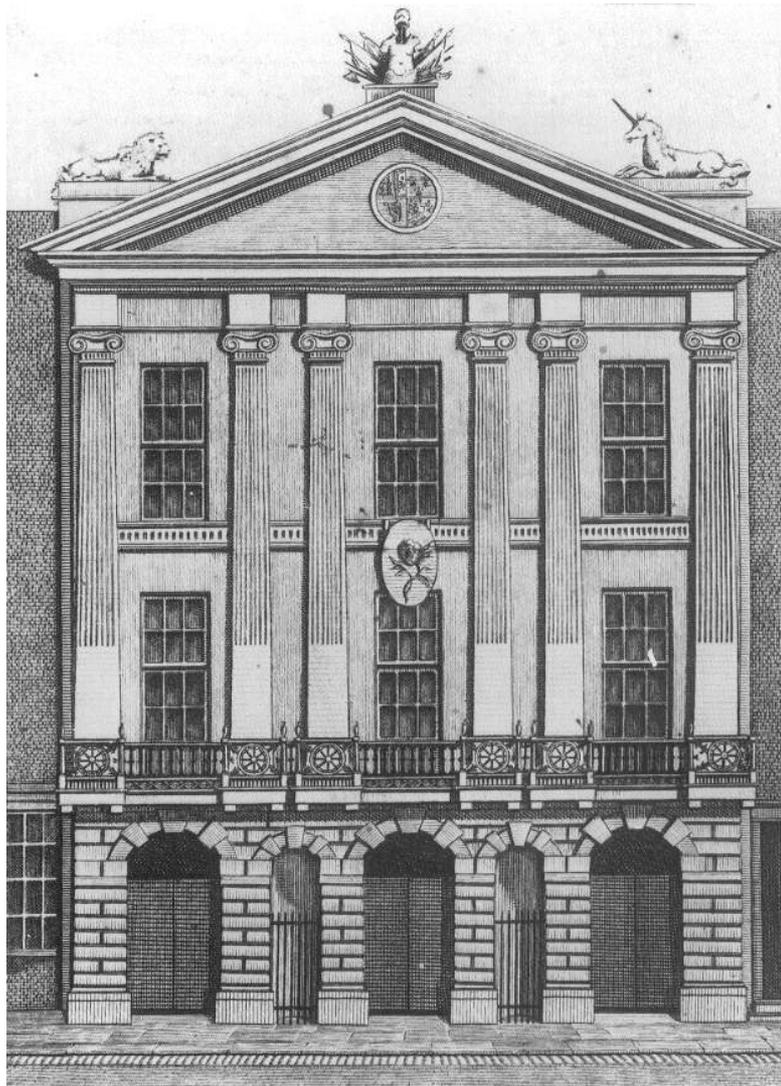
1794 : The 22 year old Exhibition Hall and Concert Venue in the Strand has been converted into a small "Lyceum" theatre. Because it is unable to get a licence, it is being used mainly for circus entertainments.

At the same time Astley's Amphitheatre in Westminster Bridge Road - enormously popular for its circus and equestrian shows - has burnt down just ten years after its major renovation. Whilst it is being rebuilt, the Astley company will move into the Lyceum.

The Pantheon in London's Oxford Street has been rebuilt following its recent fire, as has Birmingham's New Street Theatre. Elsewhere outside London, new theatres have opened in Wisbech, Deal, Aberdeen and Cheltenham.

Robert Baddeley's Will

1794 : Actor, Robert Baddeley, has died, aged 62. He has left his cottage at Moulsey to the Theatrical Fund, so they can select four impoverished actors to live in it, and the sum of £100 to be invested and the interest used to provide wine and a Twelfth Night cake every year for the Drury Lane company.



From a print by N. Smith, dated 1794

1794: £70,000 over budget, a year later than planned, and after a whole series of expensive legal wrangles, the new Theatre Royal, Drury Lane has opened. It is the third building on this site. The latest theatre is 320 feet long by 155 feet wide, with its main entrance in Russell Street. It has a colonnade crowned with a statue of Apollo and so many rows of windows that it is said to look more like an army barracks than a theatre.

One great novelty is a fire-resisting curtain made of iron which will be lowered to separate the auditorium from the stage in the event of fire. The opening performance on 21st April was Shakespeare's "Macbeth", with a cast dominated by the Kemble family: the Thane (John Philip Kemble), Lady Macbeth (his sister, Sarah Siddons) , and Malcolm (Charles Kemble, their 17 year old younger brother).

15 KILLED , HUNDREDS INJURED AT OVERCROWDED HAYMARKET

1794, 3 February : Fifteen people were trampled to death and hundreds were injured in a major overcrowding accident at the Haymarket Theatre during a Royal Command performance in the presence of King George III and Queen Caroline. The Haymarket was hosting its first ever royal command performance and had attracted a huge crowd, all anxious to obtain tickets. As more and more people without tickets forced their way past the box office and into the auditorium, a troop of guards, fearing for the safety of His Majesty, fixed their bayonets and started to move amongst the crowd. Panic ensued as people running from the auditorium collided with people pressing to get in.