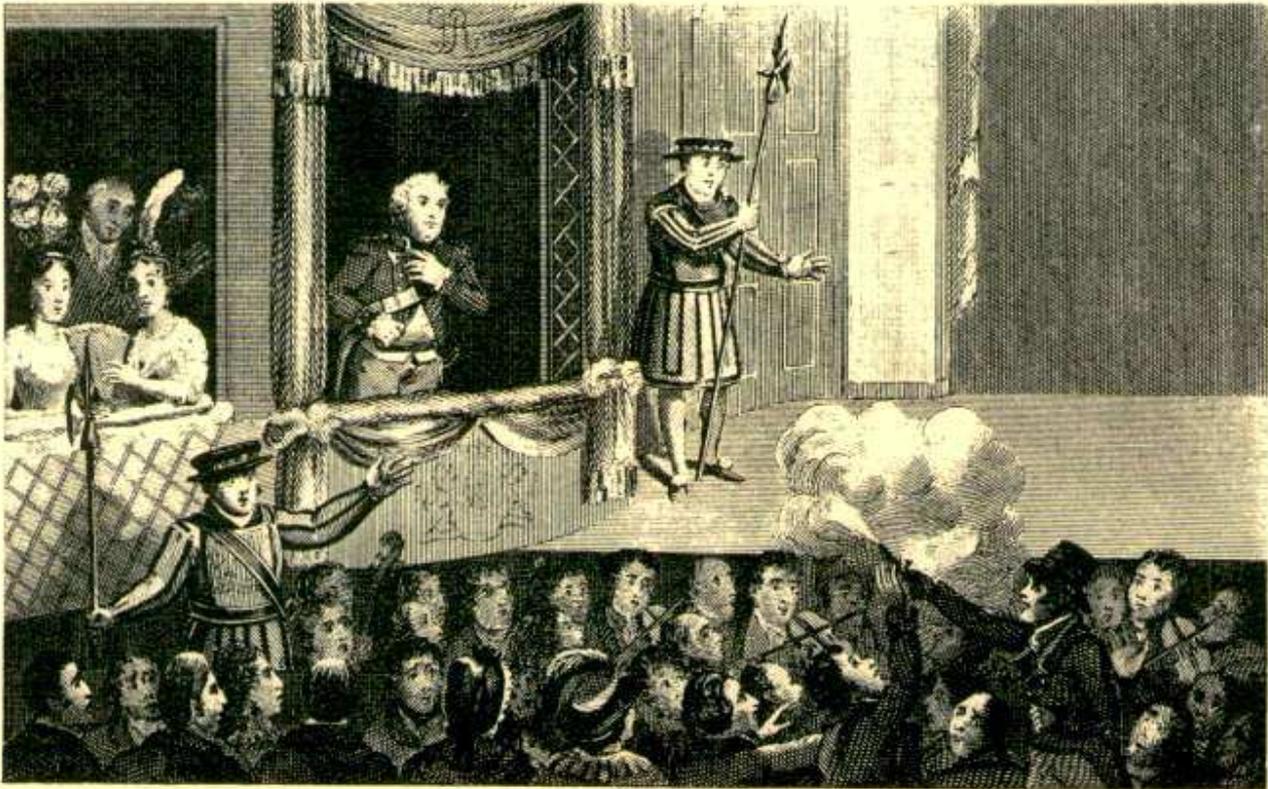


1800

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON KING AT DRURY LANE THEATRE



Attempted Assassination of King George 3rd at Drury Lane, May 15, 1800

Best-selling contemporary engraving of the attempt on the King's life

British Theatre at the dawn of a new century

1800: As the nation enters a new century, it is clear that British Theatre has emerged as a powerful new commercial industry. London currently has twelve buildings devoted exclusively to plays and other staged entertainments. In the rest of the country there are at least 83 full-time theatres, without counting the large number of premises used on an occasional and seasonal basis by touring and "fit-up" companies. A century ago London had four theatres, with approximately ten in the provinces.

"Mrs Grundy" is born

1800: Thomas Morton's play "Speed the Plough" at Covent Garden has had a great success, especially because of a character who never actually appears. "Mrs Grundy" remains firmly offstage. Frequent references to her depict her as the embodiment of British respectability. She has immediately become a catchphrase.

Popular King stays on to watch the performance after gunman arrested

15th May: As King George III entered the Royal Box at Drury Lane Theatre for a royal command performance of "She Would and She Wouldn't", he was acclaimed by the packed house. He stood in the box, bowing to the public, when a pistol shot rang out from the very front of the pit. The bullet missed His Majesty - but only just - sending a shower of plaster around his head. There was a scuffle in the pit, and a man leapt over the orchestra rail where he was seized by some musicians and locked in the music room whilst the authorities were called. The King decided to remain in his box, and ordered the performance to proceed as planned. There were loud cheers at this decision, prompted by relief that the King seemed unconcerned. It was even said that later in the performance, the King was seen to be asleep in his box during one of the quieter moments of the play.

This is the second assassination attempt on King George III. Fourteen years ago whilst alighting from his horse for a reception at Kew, a woman called Margaret Nicholson attempted to stab him. As the guards seized her, the King cried out "The poor creature is mad! Do not hurt her! She has not hurt me!" The King himself is very popular with his subjects, who support his actions in the War with General Napoleon Bonaparte of France, and in setting up a Union with Ireland, thus creating the United Kingdom. This popularity does not extend towards the Prince of Wales, who is an extremely unpopular figure.

Would-be Regicide is judged insane

James Hadfield, a discharged soldier and would-be regicide, accused of attempting to kill the King at Drury Lane appeared before the judge, Lord Kenyon. His Lordship soon stopped the trial and announced this was clearly a case of insanity. He ordered Hadfield to be returned to Newgate Prison and to be taken thence to Bedlam.