

1848-1849

False Alarm kills 65 in Theatre Panic

1849 : A false alarm of fire caused a disastrous panic in which at least 65 people died in the crush towards the exit doors. The tragedy took place in Glasgow's Theatre Royal. This theatre was known as the Dunlop Street Theatre until twenty years ago. When the original Theatre Royal in Queen Street burnt down, the Dunlop Street venue took over the name. The authorities have ordered an enquiry into this accident.

Bunn Bankrupt Again

1848 : For five years Alfred Bunn at Drury Lane has struggled to find a success to match "The Bohemian Girl". Wallace's "Maritana" failed, so did Benedict's "Bride of Venice". In desperation he imported the Cirque National de Paris. When that, too failed, he had one last desperate attempt - a French company presenting "serial" plays. These plays require the audience to attend two nights running, just to see how the story ends. The attempt was a disaster. The audience rioted, claiming Bunn was trying to get them to pay twice to see the one play. Finally, for the second time, Bunn has been declared bankrupt.

Lincoln's Inn Fields Finally Demolished

1848: This famous piece of theatrical history has not been used for performances for nearly a century. It has been a barracks, an auction room and a china warehouse since then. Now it has finally been pulled down.

Cock-Fighting Ban

1849 : For over 300 years one of the most popular gambling sports in the country, cock-fighting has finally been banned.

MACREADY BLAMED AS BROADWAY'S ANTI-BRITISH RIOT KILLS TWENTY-TWO

1849 : On May 10th the English actor, William Charles Macready, in the eighth month of his New York season at the Astor Place Opera House, was performing "Macbeth". A riot erupted. 22 people were killed and 36 wounded by shots fired by the militia.

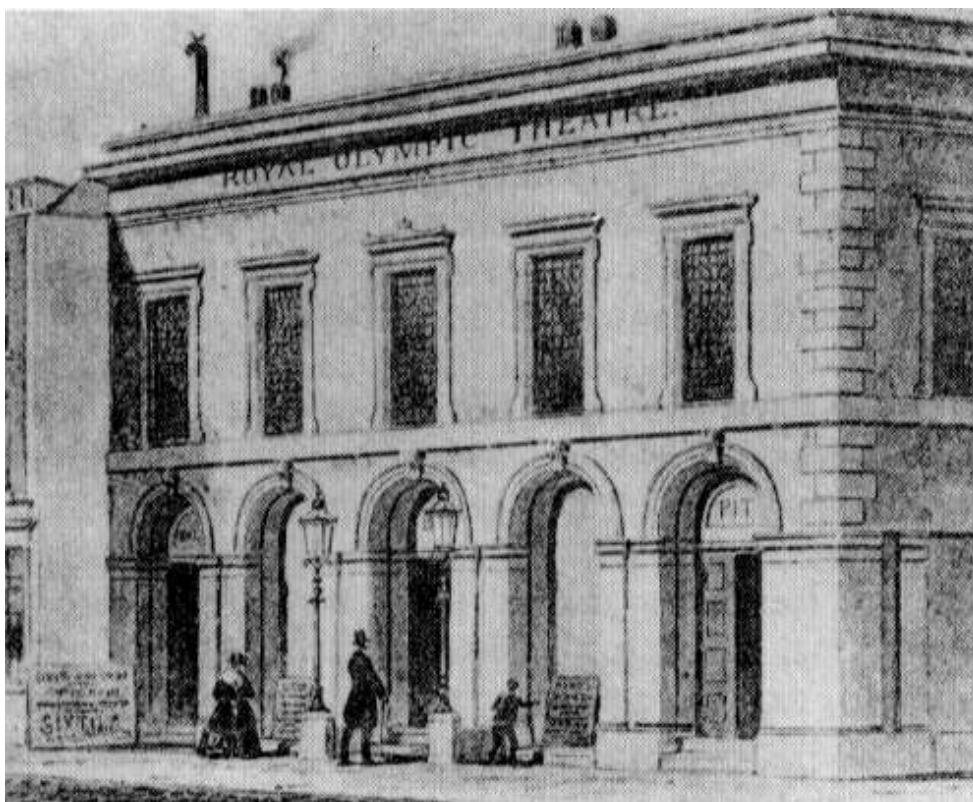
On the same night Edwin Forrest, America's leading actor, was also playing Macbeth, at the nearby Broadway Theatre. Rivalry between these two actors rose to a height four years ago when Forrest performed in London. He was poorly received and blamed this on Macready's machinations. Many people believe Edwin Forrest engineered this current riot as revenge on Macready, and, indeed, he has been ostracised by some of the leading players in America. However, most of the American audiences look on Forrest as their champion against the arrogant claims of English theatrical superiority, and the leading New York newspapers are blaming Macready for this disastrous loss of life.

The New York management, anticipating trouble, maintained strict order inside the theatre during the performance. Outside an angry mob assembled and soon overcame the riot police who were on duty. The authorities immediately called in 60 mounted militiamen, and then a troop of infantry with fixed bayonets. The Riot Act was read twice and the mob was ordered to disperse. When the crowd refused and started attacking the soldiers with stones, the order was given to fire.

Macready himself slipped out of the theatre and was immediately taken to Boston, and then returned to London. He has declared he will never again perform in America.

Suspicion of insurance fraud as the Olympic burns and is rebuilt

1849 : The 31 year old Olympic Theatre (which replaced the 1805 building) has burnt to the ground. It has led a precarious existence since Madame Vestris left ten years ago, and last year was taken over by Walter Watts, a clerk in the Globe Insurance Company. Watts has been running it on the firm's money ever since. The building burnt so rapidly that many suspect Watts himself set fire to it as part of an insurance fraud. The theatre was rebuilt and opened in December with "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"



The Olympic Theatre, rebuilt in 1849, and using the name "Royal" on its frontage, seemingly without permission.