

1850-1851

MACREADY'S FAREWELL PERFORMANCE

50 years of Theatre growth

1851 : The first half of the 19th Century has seen great growth in the number of theatres. It is estimated that London now has some 58 theatres (excluding music halls) and there are at least 134 major provincial theatres (excluding temporary venues in smaller towns).

Olympic Manager arrested for fraud

1850 : Walter Watts, the Globe Insurance Company clerk, managing the Olympic Theatre for the past two years, has been arrested for "defalcations and forgery". He was suspected of incendiarism and insurance fraud when the theatre burnt down last year, but no proof was found. However, the Globe Insurance Company is now able to prove that Mr Watts has fraudulently converted their clients' money to subsidise his theatre.

Olympic issues a "programme"

1850: Up till now the only way to discover which actor is playing which role has been to read the large playbills stuck on the walls or the posts around the building. These "posters" are printed daily. The Olympic Theatre has started printing small versions of the posters - quarto-sized, printed on one side and folded. These are issued free of charge to the audiences. So now, for the first time, the evening's "programme" can be read from the comfort of your seat.

"Old Mo" goes "respectable"

1851 : The Old Mogul Tavern in Drury Lane has been a place of entertainment since Elizabethan days. Four years ago the "Old Mo" built a 500-seater annexe called The Mogul Saloon, to be used for music and song suppers. So successful has this been that the saloon has been re-decorated, re-seated and given a new name - The Middlesex Music Hall.

1851, 26th February : Macready announced his farewell performance would be in the role of Macbeth at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, thus bringing to an end a career which has lasted 41 years. He is only 58 years old, and is at the peak of his powers. He is almost universally regarded as the greatest tragic actor the age, and he is much admired for the many reforms he has made in theatre practice - particularly for insisting on prolonged and thorough rehearsal - and in restoring the integrity and accuracy of classic plays, especially those of Shakespeare. He is an intensely emotional performer who gets totally immersed in his roles. It is said that on one occasion whilst playing Macbeth in Manchester he was waiting in the wings for his dresser to bring him the bowl of stage blood he needed to smear on his hands. As the time for his entrance became imminent and the blood did not appear, he strode up to a bystander in the wings, punched him in the nose, and spread the blood over his hands. (After the performance he apologised to the man and gave him £5 by way of compensation).

Macready is also famous for his fits of temper, for his notorious "Macready pauses" in the middle of speeches, and for his exaggerated gestures. It is said that he sometime rehearsed with his hands tied behind his back to try and cure his tendency to gesticulate too much. His retirement has come as a great surprise to everyone.



Macready in the role of Macbeth

Theatre Museum

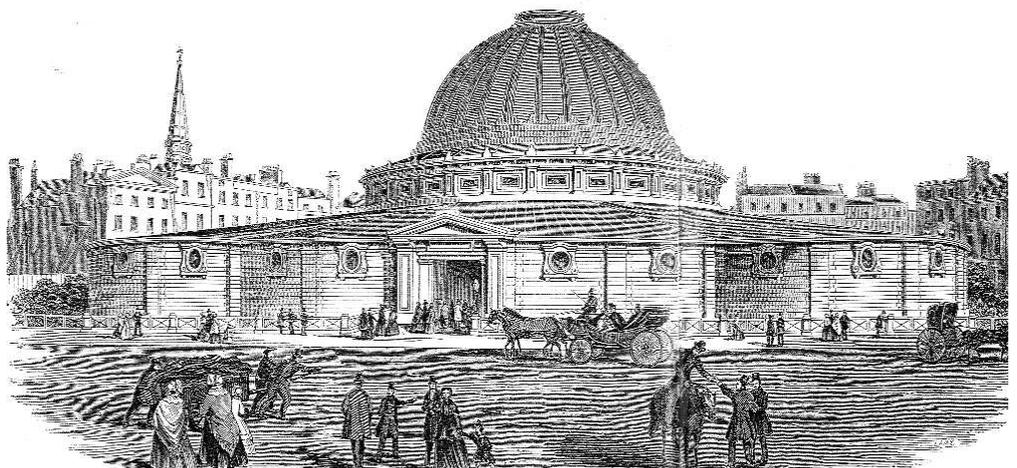
Great Exhibition fills London's Theatres

1851 : "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations" has been the brainchild of Prince Albert, Consort to the Queen. Despite much opposition, he and his committee have succeeded in commissioning a brilliant "Crystal Palace" from the architect Joseph Paxton, and in attracting over six million visitors to the exhibition which ran from May 1st to October 15th. The whole event has made a great profit, and there are plans to use this sum for a Victoria and Albert Museum in Kensington.

Theatre managers throughout London were delighted to extend their seasons and to put on extra performances to cater for the enormous number of visitors to the capital. It is estimated that 80% of the season's audiences comprised foreigners and holiday excursionists from the country. 1851 will go down in the annals as the most successful London theatre season to date.

London celebrates with a temporary Dome

1851: A hundred men worked round the clock to complete the Great Globe in Leicester Square in time to capture the many tourists visiting London for the Great Exhibition. The Globe will present lectures, exhibitions, a moving diorama and a reconstruction of a gold-mine. It is intended to be a temporary structure, and to remain in place for ten years, after which its designer, James Wyld MP, must demolish the building and return the site to its owners in a decent condition.



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