

1862-1864

Samuel Phelps ends 18 years at Sadler's Wells

1862 : Samuel Phelps has announced he is retiring from the management of Sadler's Wells after eighteen years. During his tenure he has gathered together an excellent company, and with fine and imaginative productions, particularly of Shakespeare, he has done much to raise the standards of British Theatre and redeem it from the doldrums of the past twenty years. His productions have become famous for their scenic beauty and good taste since he has refused to pander to current tastes for spectacle for its own sake. During his period at the Wells he has produced all of Shakespeare's plays (except four), including several unproduced for very many years. His production of "Pericles" was the first since Restoration times.

Phelps appeared in most of his productions, and was considered a superb Lear, Othello, and Macbeth. His rather cold personality made him unsuitable for some of the lovers' roles he played, but he was praised for his comic roles, especially Bottom. Prior to his career at the Wells he originally worked as a journalist and an amateur performer. He turned professional, working the York circuit, where his reputation as a tragedian brought him to the attention of Macready, and led to engagements at the Haymarket and Covent Garden. When the Patent Monopoly was abolished in 1843 Phelps took over Sadler's Wells and through his conscientious hard work and dedication in the face of much opposition, he created a top quality company and repertoire of consistently high standard.

He is now 58 years old and has decided to give up management, though he still intends to work as an actor.



The Garrick Club

Samuel Phelps as Wolsey in "Henry VIII"

Charles Kean in America

1864 : Charles Kean retired from management at the Princess's Theatre five years ago, but is now undertaking an American tour with his wife, Ellen Tree. He is combining performances with lectures, and is said to be earning a large sum of money.



African Roscius is an Englishman

1863 : Ira Aldridge, the 59 year old American Negro actor, has become a naturalised Englishman. He first came to England with Edmund Kean, and, billed as the African Roscius, he made his debut as Othello at the Royalty Theatre in 1826. Since then he has been acclaimed as Lear and Macbeth, and a series of other non-Shakespeare roles. He has been enormously successful in Great Britain and in Europe, and has married an English woman. He is said to be a very wealthy man, and is felt to be one of the very best actors of these times.

Greenwich's new Theatre

1864 : The derelict Theatre Royal, Deptford, has been replaced with the Carlton Theatre, designed by Sefton Parry.

Left: a cartoon of Charles Kean as theatre manager, sitting under a portrait of himself in the role of Hamlet

The "Met", Edgware Road heads list of new halls

1864 : The two year old Turnham's Green Concert Hall has been converted into the Metropolitan Music Hall, with a seating capacity of 4,000. It has thus become the largest of the outer London music halls .

The music hall explosion has continued over the past three years, with another fifty or so venues opening in London.

Provincial music halls have also opened in Glasgow, Birmingham, Blackpool, Leeds and Swansea.

Sam Collin's New Music Hall

1863, 4 November : Sam Collins has opened a music hall in Islington, and he is the star of his own theatre. He has become enormously popular for his repertoire of Irish comic songs, though he is himself a Londoner.