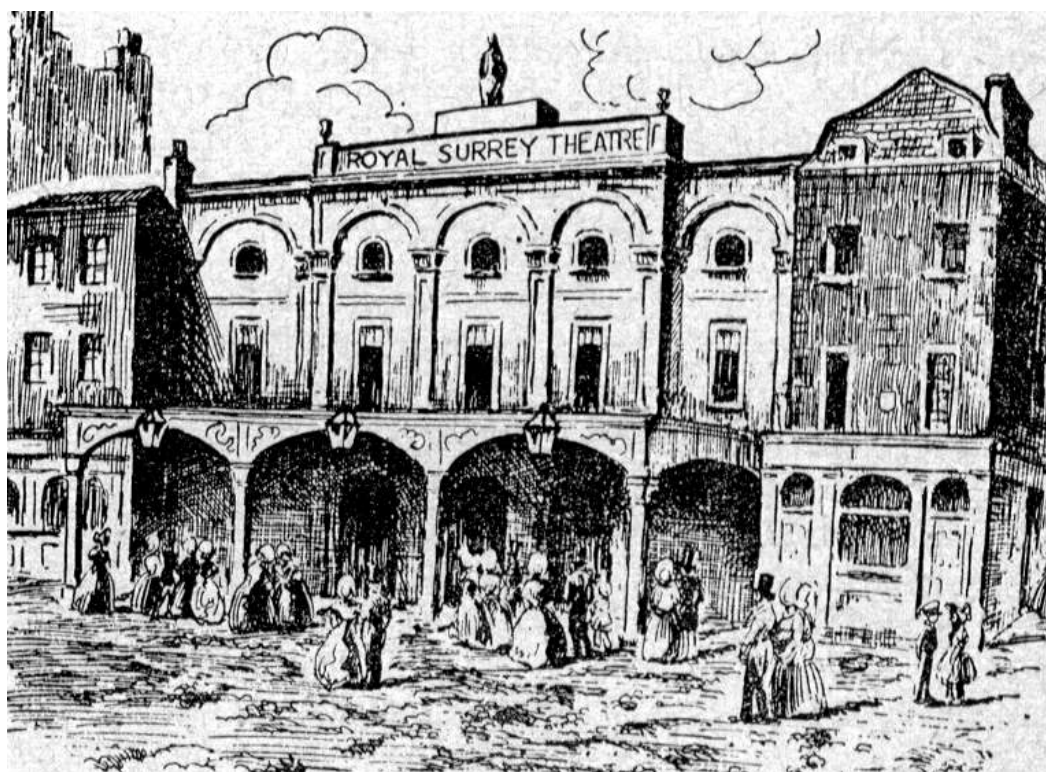


1865-1866

Surrey Theatre rebuilt after fire



1865 : Since Robert Elliston converted the old Royal Circus into a theatre in 1809, and Charles Dibdin took it over and renamed it the Surrey in 1816, this has been a troubled venue. It had a period of glory in the 1830's when "Black Eyed Susan" became the most successful and longest running play in London, but since then it has become known as a rough and tumble house for broad and vulgar melodramas. The theatre was completely destroyed by fire earlier this year, and has been immediately rebuilt. There were plans to enhance the theatre and make it more attractive to a better class of audience, but the management has chosen to resume its "blood and thunder" policy through a desire not to take any risks in alienating its existing loyal, though rough, audience.

The "Dust Hole" is rebuilt & renamed

1865 : The Theatre in Tottenham Street has had many different names in the 58 years since it was converted from the old King's Concert Rooms. It opened as the New, then became the Regency, the West London, and the Fitzroy before finally becoming known to everyone as "The Dust Hole". Renovated by the actress, Marie Wilton, the theatre has reopened with yet another name - the Prince of Wales Royal Theatre. Marie Wilton is the joint manager with the writer H.J. Byron. The company's leading man is the popular actor, Squire Bancroft.

Pantomime is Lifeline for Provincial Survival

1866 : The Select Committee has been informed by more than one provincial theatre proprietor that the annual Christmas pantomime is not merely popular, it is absolutely essential for a profitable season. Pantomime regularly saves many a struggling provincial theatre manager from bankruptcy.

Theatres finish earlier because of the railways

1866 : The Select Committee enquiring into Theatres was told that most London theatres now try to finish in time for people coming up to town to "go back by the 11 o'clock train". Starting with Euston Station (1837), railway termini have been built at Paddington (1838), London Bridge (1844), Waterloo (1848) and King's Cross (1852). St Pancras is about to open and Liverpool Street is being planned. The growth of railway transport has transformed the theatre scene. The population of London has grown from under a million at the beginning of the century to 3 million in 1851. Future prospects for the theatre have never been better as more and more people from outside the London area are provided with easy and regular transport into the city centre..

Select Committee on Theatres hears Fire Chief urge improved safety rules

1866 : Captain Shaw of the London Fire Brigade has listed fifty fires which have broken out in London Theatres since 1830. Six have resulted in the total destruction of the buildings: Astleys (1841), Garrick (1846), Olympic (1849), Pavilion and Covent Garden (1856) and the Surrey (1865). The situation is just as bad in the provinces. The intense heat generated by gaslight means that all the wood in the buildings becomes extremely dry as the years go by, and eventually the theatre is a tinder-box just waiting for the spark to set off an inferno. He has called for the use of more iron in the buildings, and for a regular damping down of all wooden surfaces as a means of reducing the risks.

"Over the Water" and "Under the Arches"

1865 : . The Gatti Brothers have converted their restaurant in Westminster Bridge Road into a Music Hall. They are planning to open a second Hall under the arches of Charing Cross Station next year - so they refer to this one as Gatti's Over the Water, and the other as Gatti's Under the Arches.

Nearly 900 employed in Drury Lane Panto

1865 : The total staff employed for "Little King Pipkin" at Drury Lane is just under 900, with 48 seamstresses and wardrobe staff, 45 dressers, 17 gasmen, 200 child performers, and 60 dancers in the ballet.