

New Theatre in Long Acre

1867 : The St. Martin's Hall in Long Acre has been reconstructed as a theatre by Alfred Wigram and Henry Labouchere.

Named the "Queen's Theatre, Long Acre", it opened on October 24th with an adaptation of Charles Reade's novel "White Lies". It is well equipped and, next to Drury Lane, it has the largest stage of all London theatres.

Marie marries Leading Man

1867 : Marie Wilton, manageress of the Prince of Wales Theatre in Tottenham Street, has married her leading actor, Squire Bancroft, and they have announced their joint management of the theatre. They plan to make a number of changes and create a new kind of theatre - more genteel, more in tune with the tastes of today's society. They intend to raise economic status of actors by offering higher salaries than their rivals, and they will provide all the costumes for their actors - something previously unknown in the profession. The Bancrofts are also instituting revolutionary changes in scenic and lighting design.

Down at the Old Bull and Bush

1867 : Six music halls and eleven public house music halls have been licensed in London this year.

Amongst them is a public house in Hampstead called "The Bull and Bush".

Creole Lady dances first London Can-Can

1867 : The new French "can can" dance was first performed in London last year, danced by a group of men. W.S. Gilbert's pantomime at the Lyceum this year is causing much comment by having the dance performed by a woman. She is the Creole dancer, Finnete - the former mistress of the painter, James McNeill Whistler.

HER MAJESTY'S BURNS IN LESS THAN AN HOUR

1867 , 6 December : The fire broke out at 11pm and within twenty minutes the flames had attacked the roof. By midnight the roof had collapsed, and the entire theatre, along with much of the surrounding property was completely destroyed. This is the second time this theatre has been completely destroyed by fire. The first building was called the "Queen's", after the newly crowned Queen Anne, and was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh for Thomas Betterton. It opened in 1705. It burnt to the ground in 1789 - by which time it had changed its name to the "King's" and had gained a reputation as a home for musicals and operas. The replacement building opened in March 1791, designed by Michael Novosielki, and was such a spectacular theatre that it was claimed to be the best of its kind anywhere in the world. Over the past 78 years Her Majesty's has undergone several refurbishments and re-modellings, and through much of this period has been the most fashionable of all London's venues. An intention to rebuild the theatre has already been announced.

Charles Dickens' Theatre Successes

Charles Dickens, the 55 year old author generally felt to be the world's best known writer, has taken to the stage. For the past nine years he has been giving a series of dramatised public readings of "scenes" from his novels. These have been enormously popular—so much so, that he has been invited to tour America with his "one-man show".

Although he began as a playwright, and had a small success with "The Strange Gentleman" in 1836, he has written no more for the stage. Most of his works have been dramatised by other hands (bringing no financial reward to Dickens himself). His characters and stories are amongst the most dramatic created this century, and the author himself is a keen supporter of theatre. Yet he has avoided writing for theatre. It seems that Dickens, like most authors today, regards the stage as old-fashioned, and considers the novel to be the modern means of story-telling.



Charles Dickens giving a public reading (from the painting by Alfred Bryan)



New York Public Library

Ira Aldridge dies on Polish Tour

1867 : Ira Aldridge has died at the age of 60 whilst on a tour of Poland. A naturalised Englishman, Aldridge was universally regarded as one of the greatest actors of the age, and was the only black actor to have achieved such prominence in British theatre. He was especially known for his Othello, but he played a wide range of Shakespearean roles with great success.

He was a particular favourite on the Continent, where he would perform his role in English alongside local actors performing in their native language. He was acclaimed for his Lear in Russia, and was much honoured in Germany where he became the best known English actor of the age.