

## Grecian sold to Sally Army

1884 : The premises containing the Eagle Music Hall and the Grecian Theatre have been sold to General William Booth and will be converted into a Salvation Army centre.

## Theatre Royal, Stratford East

1884 Built for William Charles Dillon to the designs of James George Buckle, the Theatre Royal opened in Stratford, East London, on 17 December with a performance of "Richelieu". The opening night audience was a rowdy one and had to be reprimanded from the stage by the Manager. The venue has also been criticised for its unauthorised use of the name "Royal" in its title

## Touring Circuits now world-wide

1883 : Eveleyn Ballantyne writing in the April "Theatre" magazine says "theatrical life of the present day might be described as a round of glorified strolling. The "circuits" of Bristol, Norwich and York of the last century are now replaced by those of the United States, South Africa, India and Australia, and a modern actor thinks as little of a season in Melbourne or New York as his grandfather did of a week's starring in Edinburgh"

## Empire opens in Leicester Square

1884: The new Empire Theatre in Leicester Square stands on the site of the Royal London Panorama, which opened in 1809 as a concert and exhibition hall. The old concert hall was converted into the Pandora Theatre two years ago, but that company rapidly went bankrupt. The premises have now been enlarged to include a "promenade" at the rear of the auditorium and have re-opened as the Empire .

This means that the two main variety houses of Central London - the Alhambra and the Empire - now make up two sides of the square, and Leicester Square has established itself as the entertainment heart of London..

## Death of the Pantomime King, "Byron of Burlesque", age 50

1884 : Henry James Byron has died at the age of 50. He was the son of the British Consul to Haiti and a medical and legal student, when a pantomime burlesque he had written as a hobby was accepted by Marie Wilton for production at the Strand. He immediately gave up his studies and turned to writing for theatre.

His first pantomime "Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp: or, the Genie of the Ring" introduced the character of Widow Twankey - the first time she appeared under that name. His "Cinderella: or The Lover, the Lackey and the Little Glass Slipper" (1860) introduced for the first time the character of Buttons, and created the Ugly Sisters in the form which has now become traditional.

His pantomimes were noted for their dreadful but highly inventive puns.

He also wrote a series of plays, including the long running farce "Our Boys" (1875). The success of this latter play helped him recoup the losses he incurred from his disastrous experience as a theatre manager. He took over control of three separate venues in Liverpool, but in 1868 he was declared bankrupt.

## Prince's Theatre in Coventry Street

1884: Edgar Bruce took over the Prince of Wales Theatre in Tottenham Street when the Bancrofts moved to the Haymarket. He was only able to run it for two years before the building was condemned and forced to close. However, in those two years he made enough money to build his own theatre, in Coventry Street. He wants to call it the Prince of Wales after his previous theatre, but until the eventual fate of the condemned Tottenham Street venue is finalised, he has to settle for the name The Prince's.

## Death of Champagne Charlie, the "Lion Comique"

1884: George Leybourne, the celebrated music hall performer has died at the age of 42. He first sang his song "Champagne Charlie" at the Canterbury Music Hall in 1867 and was described as "a lion of a comic". That phrase, "lion comique" is now frequently used to describe the star comic attraction of music hall entertainment.

Leybourne's stage persona was a moustached and monocled man about town, extravagantly dressed with a fur collar, who drank nothing but champagne. Although he was originally a mechanic from the Midlands, Leybourne adopted his stage character in real life, and was notorious for living the part offstage. He spent all his money on champagne, clothes and a carriage and four. His popularity and his health declined, and by the end of his career he was managing and acting as chairman for smaller halls.

