

1895

Managers to Boycott Songs

1895 : The newly formed Theatrical Managers Association has decided to make use of its collective power and has decided to enforce a boycott. No Manager will agree to pay any fee whatsoever for the performance of popular songs in pantomime. For some time music publishers have been trying to impose a performance fee whenever a song is sung in public. Theatre managers have refused, claiming that the performance of the song increases its popularity and leads to the sale of extra copies of the published music.

The row has come to a head over the song "At Trinity Church I met my Doom". The publishers have demanded a fee of 2 guineas royalty for the use of this song in this year's pantomimes. All Managers have been urged to refuse to use this song - or indeed any song for which payment is demanded.

140 year old Duty Ended

1895: Queen Victoria has stood down the nightly guard at Drury Lane which began after rioting 140 years ago. A troop of soldiers has been on duty at every performance since November, 1755. This tradition, now entirely ceremonial, is felt to be inappropriate with today's better behaved audiences.

Macabre coincidence as body is found in Thames

1895: During the run of Pinero's "The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith" at the Garrick Theatre, a woman's body was recovered from the Thames. The police discovered her name was Mrs Ebbsmith, and in her pocket were two used halves of tickets for the play.

OSCAR WILDE IS JAILED

"Earnest" and "Ideal Husband" close as sales collapse

1895 : The 41 year old Irish playwright, Oscar Wilde, has been sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour having been found guilty of having a homosexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas.

Wilde, who is married with two sons, had been openly flaunting his bi-sexuality, and for some time had been in a relationship with the 24 year old Alfred, son of the Marquis of Queensbury.

The Marquis, strongly objecting to the relationship, left a notice on the wall of a London club, to "Oscar Wilde, posing as a sodomite". Although his spelling was wrong, his intention was clear. Oscar Wilde decided to sue the Marquis for libel.

Wilde handled his libel case badly, failing to understand that the Judge was not amused by his flippancy and celebrated wit, and the vast majority of people in this country regard homosexuality as an abomination. He lost his libel case.

This meant he was now liable to immediate arrest on charges of homosexual activity. He was unofficially tipped off that he would be arrested the following evening, with the arrest timed after the boat train had left for France.

The inference was obvious: he was being urged to flee the country (much in the way that playwright Isaac Bickerstaffe did in 1772). Whatever his reasons, Oscar Wilde decided not to go into exile and was subsequently arrested, tried and imprisoned at Reading Gaol.

1895 : Two theatre managers, Herbert Beerbohm Tree and George Alexander, have been faced with serious difficulties over their current productions, "An Ideal Husband" and "The Importance of Being Earnest". Both plays have been enormous successes with the original runs extended, but both have suffered an instantaneous loss of business following the jailing of Oscar Wilde, the author of both pieces.

"An Ideal Husband" tried to continue by removing the author's name off the posters, but to no avail. Both plays were closed down, and it is said that no work by Mr Wilde will ever again be played in public.



ARISE, SIR HENRY !

First ever actor to receive a knighthood

1895 : Henry Irving, Manager of the Lyceum, President of the Actors' Association, President of the Theatrical Managers' Association, and the most respected and best-known of all British actors, has been knighted. He said: "This is a great honour bestowed not upon me personally, but upon the theatrical profession as a whole, for this is the first time that an actor has been knighted."

Irving's work at the Lyceum has raised the status of British Theatre to great heights, and his tours of America have established him as the best known and most praised of actors.

