

# THEATRES TO BE TAXED

## No After Eight Sweets

1916: The Government's Early Closing Order bans the sale of goods after 8pm. This means that sweets, chocolates and tobacco cannot be sold in theatres after 8pm - effectively the entire performance time.

Theatre Managers led a deputation to the Home Secretary to protest about the consequent loss of profits. He refused to alter the ruling, and asked what the public would say if they knew the Home Secretary at such a critical hour in our history had been occupied for an hour and a half on such a trivial object.

The Managers claimed this was not trivial, and represented a serious threat to profits. If he would not change his mind, would he be prepared to delay it until the end of the pantomime season? Again the Home Secretary refused.

## The War leads to a shortage of actors

1916: Since the introduction of compulsory military service, many theatres are having difficulty finding actors for their productions. Some theatres have been campaigning for actors and entertainers to be made exempt from service - but the Home Secretary had indicated he will not consider such an idea.

## Yes to Musicians' Union

1916: After many years of refusing to recognise the Amalgamated Musicians Union, theatres have agreed to negotiate a contract of minimum terms. Managers now recognise unions in all branches of the industry.

## St. Martin's opens

1916: Despite the War, a new theatre has opened in London's West Street. The St. Martin's Theatre, seating 550, has opened with C.B. Cochran's "Houp-La".

In the provinces no new theatres have opened, and eight have closed—in Banbury, Burnley, Cork, Goole, Manchester, New Brighton, Paisley and Wakefield.

1916: The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr McKenna, has announced the introduction of an Amusements Tax, and has placed an Emergency Bill before Parliament for the immediate introduction of this tax. The suggested tax levels are: one penny on tickets priced threepence to eleven pence; twopence on shilling tickets; threepence on one-and-sixpenny tickets and a scale rising to sixpence on ten-and-sixpenny tickets.

The Chancellor refused a request for a meeting with Theatre Managers and stated that he will give advice on how to collect the new taxes, but will not consider any arguments against them. The Theatrical Management Association discussed a campaign against the new charges, but decided that since the tax had been imposed as a necessity to raise money for fighting the European War, any such campaign might be construed as a lack of patriotism. Mr. J.F. Elliston said that theatre was a dying industry and this tax was likely to be the final nail in the coffin. To make matters worse, he said, the Picture Palace Proprietors have indicated they will absorb the tax and NOT pass it on to the public in increased prices. With an estimated 750 million tickets sold each year for moving pictures, an extra penny on the tickets would produce £3,250,000 from the cinemas alone.

## Three Tenors called up - but are trenches wide enough?

1916: The three leading tenors of Sir Thomas Beecham's Opera Company have all received their call-up papers for compulsory military service. They are Maurice d'Oisly, aged 30, Frederick Blamey, aged 29, and Frank Mullins, aged 30. While their ages qualify them for conscription, their weights may cause a problem. Mr d'Oisley weighs 17 stone, Mr Blamey is 18 stone, and Mr Mullins is a real heavyweight, at 20 stone. All three have been granted temporary exemption pending further investigation. Sir Thomas himself has wondered if the present size of trenches along the British lines can accommodate their bulk.

## Frank Benson knighted in Royal Box

1916: Frank Benson's season at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane was the highlight of the nation's Shakespeare Tercentenary Celebrations. He began his career at the Lyceum under Henry Irving in 1882 and the following year formed his own company which has toured Shakespeare productions all over the country ever since. His productions are held in such high regard that the 58 year old actor was a natural choice to lead the nation in its homage to William Shakespeare on the 300th anniversary of his death.

King George V attended a special matinee to mark the Celebrations and then staged his own piece of theatre with a surprise announcement that Frank Benson was to be honoured with a Knighthood. Further, the knighthood was to be conferred on him there and then. Mr Benson was summoned to the Royal Box during the interval of the performance and, in the presence of the delighted audience, was dubbed Sir Frank Benson. There was a last minute hitch when the King discovered there was no sword available, but one was borrowed from the props room for the occasion.



Frank Benson in the role of Hamlet