

Daily Power Cuts affect all Theatres

Sir Tyrone Guthrie

1971 : Sir Tyrone Guthrie has died at the age of 71. In his early career he was Director of the Scottish National Players and the Cambridge Festival, and produced many successful Shakespeare plays at the Old Vic during the 30s. From 1939-45 he was Administrator of the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells, and during 1950-51 he was director of the Old Vic. His work was frequently seen at the Edinburgh Festival and abroad, and in 1963 he founded the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, USA. He was knighted in 1961 for services to the theatre, and has been an enormous influence on the direction of plays.

Bromley Burns

1971 : The New Theatre, Bromley, was damaged in an overnight fire. No one was injured, but the theatre has been completely destroyed.

New Casting Restrictions

1971 : The Theatrical Management Association and Equity have announced a "Casting Agreement" to restrict the number of newcomers into an already overcrowded profession. Each theatre manager will employ no more than two newcomers (defined as "non-Equity Members") in each year. These employees will then be accepted for Union membership. This new arrangement will not apply to chorus or to stage management. It is hoped this will provide more work for existing Equity members and reduce the number of newcomers. It will be subject to annual review.

Britain goes "Decimal"

1971 : The first few days of decimalisation caused problems at box offices throughout the country. The difficulties were not so much with theatre staff, who have all undergone extensive training, but more with the general public, who are finding the change from pounds, shillings and pence to pounds and new pennies somewhat confusing.

1972 : In a crisis lasting 20 days, the Government imposed 9 hours a day electricity cuts on all industries, and imposed a staggered working week where factories and shops could only open for three days a week. The measures were imposed to save fuel as a result of the miners' pay dispute.

In general, the power cuts were scheduled through the daytimes, with power being restored at 6pm on three evenings a week and at 9pm on the other three days. There were no cuts on Sundays. Since the 6pm/9pm restoration was staggered to alternate days, theatres were forced to re-schedule performances to fit in with the time that electrical power would be available.

Many shows would begin with battery operated lights and end normally, or reverse the procedure on alternate nights in order to keep theatres open during this difficult period.

Harry Hanson of the Court Players Dies

1972 : The death of Harry Hanson at the age of 77 represents the end of an era for theatre. He was the last of the "circuit" managers in weekly repertory theatre. Weekly reps have now almost disappeared. In 1932 South African born Harry Hanson formed the "Harry Hanson Court Players" at Hastings. Its success led directly to the formation of further companies at Leeds, Sheffield, Peterborough, Penge, Nottingham, Richmond, Stockton, Chester, Bradford and Swansea. He went into partnership with George Black and established the Court Players as the leading force in the weekly rep movement.

In the course of his career he provided employment for hundreds of actors and stage managers and provided a lifeline for many provincial theatres threatened with closure. He would try to "stagger" his various seasons so that he could personally make an opening and closing night speech at each venue. At one time he attempted to disguise his baldness with a wig. The story is frequently told of his entry to make the last night speech for his production of "Rebecca" (the name of a character who never appears in the play). As he descended the staircase in his new wig, a member of the audience loudly called out "My God! It's Rebecca!"

Jesus Christ Superstar Picketed

1972 : The first night of the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" was delayed by an extensive picket outside the theatre. Many religious organisations are calling for the laws of blasphemy to be invoked against the production, which is a "sung-through rock opera" depicting the Crucifixion and the Last Days of Christ. It is felt that rock music is an inappropriate medium for such a subject.

"Jesus Christ Superstar" opened in New York last year, and began its life as a "concept album". The enormous success of the LP records led to it being turned into a stage show.



Paul Nicholas as "Jesus Christ, Superstar"