

Poll Tax Riots force audiences into refuge

No money - so RSC closes for 4 months

1990: The Royal Shakespeare Company announced that it is to close both the Barbican and the Pit Theatres for four months - from November 1990 to March 1991 - because it has run out of money. The RSC has an accumulated deficit of £4.7 million.

Death of John Dexter

1990: John Dexter has died at the age of 65. After a career as an actor on stage and television, he became a director in 1957. He directed 15 plays for the Royal Court Theatre and then became an Associate Director of the National Theatre from 1963 - 1966. One of his greatest successes, Peter Shaffer's "Equus", won him the 1974 Tony Award on Broadway.

From 1974 - 1981 he was Director of the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, and had directed operas in London, Paris and Hamburg. He was known to be an authoritarian, intellectual and demanding director who found it difficult to fit into the "team" approach which marked his period at the National Theatre.

Theatres in the 80s

1990: During the 1980s London lost seven performance venues. The most lamented of these was the glorious Art-Deco Savoy Theatre, destroyed by fire at the end of 1989. Immediate plans for rebuilding were announced. Amongst the other losses were the Mayfair, the Roundhouse and the St. George's Theatre.

Four new venues opened, including the Barbican and the re-opened Hackney Empire.

In the regions, 77 new theatres opened and only nine closed. Amongst the losses were the Ipswich Hippodrome, the Oxford Playhouse and the Floral Hall, Scarborough. New theatres included the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the rebuilt Sheffield Lyceum, and the renovated and restored Grand Opera House in York.

1990: On Saturday 31st March some 300,000 people gathered in Trafalgar Square to protest against the introduction of a "Community Charge" - commonly decried as a poll tax. A breakaway section of the protestors began rioting, fighting in the streets, attacking police and settings cars and buildings on fire. As the riot progressed along St Martin's Lane it co-incided with the end of matinee performances at the Duke of York's and the Albery Theatres. Audiences as well as passers-by were forced to take refuge in the theatres until the protestors had moved on. The rioters moved into Soho and sporadic outbursts continued up to midnight, causing fear among many theatregoers arriving or leaving for performances. No one in the theatre world could ever remember such scenes in the West End.

Tragic AIDS death of Ian Charleson

1990: A leading player of his generation, with credits at the RSC and the National Theatre as well as acclaim for his performance as Eric Liddell in the Oscar-winning film "Chariots of Fire", Ian Charleson has died at the of 40. He is the latest in a tragic list of homosexual performers killed by Aids - a list that includes Rock Hudson and Liberace. Unlike them, Ian Charleson wanted the world to know the cause of his death, in the hope of removing the stigma associated with Aids.

He will be remembered both for his last roles at the National Theatre - Brick in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and his powerfully moving Hamlet, played during his terminal illness - and for his courage and dignity in publicising the cause of his death.

Joseph & Rocky tours run for years

1990: There has been a spectacular revival in the success of touring productions during the past decade. By the early 1980s falling attendances and the expenses of touring provincial theatres seemed to herald the end of the touring show. However, the position is now reversed. There have been two touring productions which have run throughout this period - Bill Kenwright's production of "Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" has clocked up a non-stop nine year tour, and the Kenneth More/Theatre Royal Hanley production of "The Rocky Horror Show" has achieved a seven year run. These two shows have regularly attracted sold out houses up and down the country and both have only been withdrawn because of planned West End revivals. This is the first time that commercial tours have achieved such long runs, and indicates that the weekly touring circuit has now been revitalised and is stronger than ever.



The Kenneth More Theatre production of "The Rocky Horror Show" on tour