

THE LOST THEATRES OF WINCHESTER, 1620-1861

By PAUL RANGER

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1. THE MARKET HOUSE THEATRE

Prologue

ONE rarely thinks of Winchester in these days as a hub of theatrical entertainment and yet, for about a hundred years, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the city was able to boast of several playhouses at which regular companies of professional actors appeared. Some of the great names of the theatre have been written on bills in the city – Edmund Kean, his son Charles, T. P. Cooke the nautical actor, Charles Kemble, Tate Wilkinson, and the composer of the march of the Royal Marines, Henry Russell. Little remains of the structure of the theatres. A beam of one is preserved in the City Museum and part of the facade of another can still be seen in Jewry Street once one knows where to look for it. Memoirs, managerial puffs, scraps of criticism, a few poems and letters, documents, – these still exist and from them a picture of Winchester's theatrical past can be pieced together.

Of course the story begins long before the eighteenth century with liturgical drama. As early as the tenth century, on Easter mornings three monks playing the holy women

and a fourth the angel, represented the visit to the sepulchre and the announcement by the angel of the Resurrection.

There are stage directions describing the way in which the women creep to the sepulchre; the angel is suddenly discovered; instructions for special vocal effects are given; an empty grave cloth is used as a symbol of Christ Risen; costumes are carefully described and finally the audience joyfully participates by singing with the actors the 'Te Deum'.¹

Gradually drama was ousted from Church buildings. The west front sometimes served as a suitable back drop, and at other times wheeled platforms were erected at stations in the city such as the Butter Cross or market square where people were likely to gather. Cycles of plays began to take place well after Easter when the weather was warmer. Corpus Christi, a moveable festival which often occurred at the beginning of June, was one such opportunity. Reference exists to a fourteenth century Corpus Christi procession in Winchester, and plays may have been acted in conjunction with this.²

Proc. Hants. Field Club Archaeol. Soc. 31, 1976, 65-108.

With the Reformation came the complete secularisation of the drama. Wandering troupes of actors now divorced from the Church fell on hard times. Tudor legislation listed players with palmists, fencers, minstrels and rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars and imposed the same penalties on them.³ If caught and over fourteen years of age they were to be apprehended and tried and if they were found guilty the punishment was to be whipped and to have the gristle of their ears burnt through with a hot iron. A second offence after an interval of sixty days would merit treatment as a felon. There was however a way of escape within the law – to be taken into the service of a large household, whether it was of ‘any baron of this realm’ or ‘any other honourable personage of greater degree’. Queen Elizabeth herself sheltered a company of players under this provision. Such a company would receive a licence from its patron to go into the provinces. This would then be shown to the Mayor of the town within which performances were to take place; a private rehearsal would be held at which the Mayor would judge the suitability of the offering, and if this was satisfactory then public performances could be given in a suitable building and financed by the Corporation funds. Records exist of plays acted in the Winchester Guildhall and in the yards of the George Inn and the Chequers. During the reign of Queen Mary the royal company performed in the Common Hall of the Castle and received 18d. The musicians who accompanied them received 8d. This was presumably a short recital given at a banquet. Queen Elizabeth’s players paid several visits to the city in 1589, 1590, 1591, 1599 and 1600 and received 20 shillings payment on each occasion. The Lord High Admiral’s players received the same amount in 1590, but others were not so well recompensed. The Earl of Sussex’ players received 10 shillings (1593); the Countess of Derby’s players 6/8d. and the players of a ‘nobleman in parts of the north’ had to remain contented with 5 shillings. As in London the performances usually took place in daylight during the afternoon. When

however, in Jacobean times, the theatre was roofed, the habit of occasional evening performances spread to the provinces. In 1604 a fellow was paid four pence when he carried a link in front of the Mayor as he set out from his house to the George Inn to see the play.⁴

Winchester presumably punished its erring vagabonds and unlicensed performers as vigorously as any other town. The city paid three pence for cord with which to deal with a single vagabond in 1556, whilst there is an entry in the account books in 1604: ‘one pennyworth of whipcord to whip vagabonds’. This may well have been for an actor as he pursued his comfortless calling.

The Market-House

The market area of the city lay to the north of the Cathedral Close. The names of the Market Inn and Market Street still indicate its whereabouts. In 1620 a Meat Market Hall was re-erected on the site of the present City Museum.⁵ It consisted, on the ground floor, of about nine butchers’ stalls, confined quarters for keeping pigs and cows, and later, sheep, and the facilities for slaughtering these. A stairway led to an upper floor at the east end of the building. This was a single room measuring approximately 55 feet from west to east and 25 feet from north to south. When it first became used as a playhouse is unknown but certainly by 1690 actors were in the habit of hiring the hall (usually at a fee of £1 although in 1709 and 1711 for only ten shillings) and then charging admission to an audience. It must have been a highly unsuitable and squalid place, smelling of animals and carnage, and disturbed not only by the beasts but also by the shouts of vendors and the cries of vagrants undergoing a public whipping at the post outside in the Square. This, however, served as Winchester’s first permanent theatre. In its early days there was possibly only a rough platform and some benches. Refinements were added after the

Restoration in 1660, for theatrical performances, other than opera and oratorio, were forbidden during the Cromwellian period. In Lincoln's Inn Fields an indoor tennis court, similar in shape to the Winchester Theatre but larger, served as the first Theatre Royal under the patronage of Charles II. The protected alley from which the spectators watched the game was turned into a row of boxes and a corresponding section was built on the opposite side. At first Winchester appears to have had boxes only at the back of the auditorium, for it was not until 1774 that side ones were built in the hope that they would keep the theatre warmer.

'Messers Davies and Collins, proprietors of the Theatre present their most humble respects to the Nobility, Gentry and the Public in general of the city and neighbourhood of Winchester and beg leave to inform them, that they have spared no trouble or expense to render the Theatre warm and commodious; and they have been given to understand, that the addition of sideboxes would be agreeable to many Ladies and Gentlemen, as well as to contribute to the warmth of the house, they have allotted part of the pit for that purpose, which they hope will meet with general approbation'.⁵

The stage would tend to jut out, an inheritance from the Elizabethan playhouse, bringing the actor as near as possible to the audiences for the quality of the candles situated at the edge of the platform was poor. Behind the proscenium or acting area was a curtain, tattered no doubt, but by tradition invariably green. This revealed a scene at the rear of the stage complete with several pairs of side pieces. Unfortunately these rarely matched the backcloth. Side wings depicting a woodland glade would lead the eye to a scene representing a castle interior. A faded painting would serve to indicate many locations, in practice. There was a magic about this, for in the gloom one's imagination supplied the blotches of paint with meaning. An idea of the scenes can be gained from those designed for miniature toy theatres.

Quite often these were an artist's reproduction from memory of the setting of a popular play that he would have seen at Covent Garden or Drury Lane.⁷

Winchester was not unique in having a Market House Theatre. York had a similarly situated theatre which stood in the old Thursday Market, now St. Sampson's Square. Unlike Winchester's, the York building was described in Francis Drake's guidebook as 'a beautiful and useful structure'.

If actors expected their lot to improve under Charles II who was a known patron of the arts they were disappointed. Only two theatres in London received a patent; other playhouses had to forestall the Licensing Act of 1737 which made acting in the provinces illegal by disguising the nature of their entertainments. A popular ruse was to hold a 'concert' at which the main dramatic piece was advertised as a theatrical interlude which would be presented without extra charge. As late as 1774 an advertisement appeared:

'At the Theatre at the Market-House in Winchester on Monday the 9th of May will be presented a Concert of Music - Between the several parts of the concert will be presented gratis, a celebrated Comedy call'd *The Jealous Wife*. By Desire, a Hornpipe by Mr. Comerford. To which will be added an Opera call'd *The Capricious Lovers: or Country Courtship*'⁸

Wandering bands of actors came fairly regularly to this city. Here, as in other towns, house whilst the respectable of the merchant the young and the wealthy enjoyed the play-classes shunned it. In 1715 an ordinance was presented to the magistrates:

'We humbly make it our request to the Bench that the actors of the play at the Market House may be ordered to leave this City and act no more; for we conceive by their so long continuing here it will prove very prejudicial and corruptive to the youth, servants and other inhabitants of the said city'.

The petition was quickly endorsed:

'This day ordered and unanimously agreed

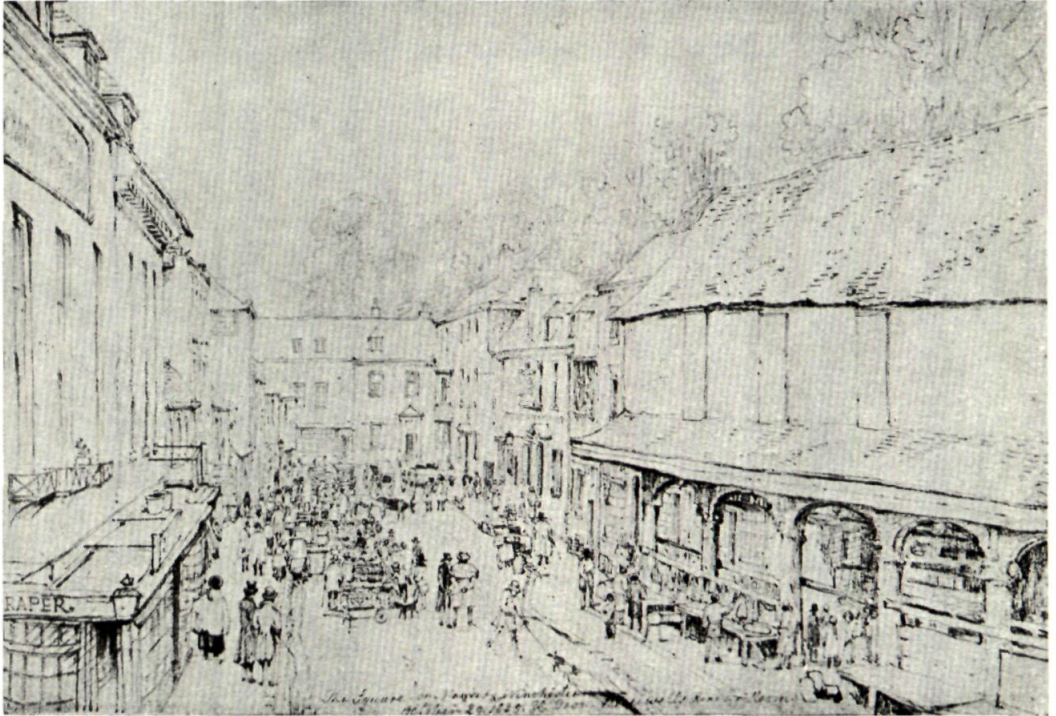


Plate 1. A drawing of the Square showing the Market House.
The City Museum, Winchester.

by the Mayor and Aldermen then assembled in the Council House that whereas complaint had been made of disorders committed by the players acting Interludes within this City, and that it tends to the corruption of youth, and that some of the young Scholars of the School of the College of St. Mary's have laid out of the College on this occasion. That the said Players be forthwith commanded and forbidden not to act or play any more Comedies or Tragedies within this City, and that they and every of them do forthwith depart out of the city, upon peril of the Law'.⁹

They went; and with them went the 'rope dancers', the 'Music man' and an 'auctioneer man'.

An Act of Parliament in 1737 intensified penalties against actors. If they played without authority a fine of £50 was levied: non-payment led to imprisonment with hard

labour for up to six months. If the prosecution was prompted by an informer then he gained half the fine: the rest of it was given to the poor of the parish. The administration of the act however was in the hands of local Justices who tended to favour the actors' cause, sometimes stipulating before granting a licence that the takings at one of the performances should be given to a charitable cause.¹⁰ In spite of difficulties actors continued to arrive; companies based on Portsmouth and Southampton came in 1740 and in 1748 a Mr. Yates brought his players from London.

Conditions below stairs had, by 1762, become unsatisfactory and the market-house was leased to the four town sergeants on condition that they spent eighty pounds on making the stalls good, putting in a pump and laying a Purbeck floor.¹¹ Improvements did not remove the incongruity of the little theatre

situated above the slaughter house. It struck the Revd. Thomas Warton, a clergyman, said to be 'remarkable for elegance of diction and justness of observation'. Warton's brother, Joseph, was headmaster of Winchester College and during one of his stays at the College Thomas obviously went to the theatre. Amused by the situation of the building he wrote a prologue to Otway's tragedy, *The Orphan*, a popular favourite with eighteenth century theatre-goers. The heroine of this is Monimia, a young lady, madly loved by twins, who drinks poison when the two brothers kill themselves in despair:

Who'er our stage examines, must excuse
The wondrous shifts of the dramatic Muse;
Then kindly listen, while the Prologue
rambles

From wit to beef, from Shakespeare to the
Shambles!

Divided only by one flight of stairs,
The monarch swaggers and the Butcher
swears!

Quick the transition when the curtain drops
From meek Monimia's moans to mutton
chops!

While for Lothario's loss Lavinia cries,
Old Women scold, and Dealers d -- n your
eyes!

Here Juliet listens to the gentle lark,
There in harsh chorus hungry bull-dogs
bark.

Cleavers and scymitars give blow for blow,
And heroes bleed above and sheep below!
While tragic thunders shake the pit and
box,

Rebellows to the roar the staggering ox.
Cow-horns and trumpets mix their martial
tones,

Kidneys and kings, mouthing and marrow
bones.

Suet and sighs, blank verse and blood
abound,

And form a tragi-comedy around.
With weeping lovers, dying calves complain,
Confusion reigns -- chaos is come again!
Hither your Steelyards, Butcher, bring, to
weigh

The pound of flesh Antonio's bond must
pay!

Hither your knives, ye Christians, clad in
blue,

Bring to be whetted by the ruthless Jew!
Hard is our lot, who, seldom doom'd to eat,
Cast a sheep's eye on this forbidden meat --
Gaze on sirloins, which, ah! We cannot
carve,

And in the midst of legs of mutton -- starve!
But would you to our house in crowds
repair,

Ye generous Captains, and ye blooming Fair,
The fate of Tantalus we should not fear,
Nor pine for a repast that is so near.
Monarchs no more would supperless remain,
Nor pregnant Queens for cutlets long in
vain.¹²

Warton became not only Professor of Poetry at Oxford, but in 1785 he was created Poet Laureate, admittedly an office somewhat in the doldrums at that period. Yet it is not as a distinguished person that we can picture him visiting the theatre but as a fat, untidy fellow, who had a penchant for attending public executions, joining the College school-boys in making culinary experiments, and drinking ale with his social inferiors. No wonder the Winchester playhouse appealed to him.

The Salisbury Comedians

A certain Samuel Johnson appears on the scene in the early 1760s. Little is known of of him beyond the fact that he was accused of being 'fond of low humour' and ironically described as a 'very modest man'. In 1763 he arranged to have the Town Hall fitted up as a temporary theatre and two years later he similarly used Mr. Boucher's Assembly Rooms. Until 1770 he gradually built up a circuit of theatres, turning a malthouse into one in Chichester, converting a silk-mill in Southampton and an inn at Salisbury into others.¹³ That city became the headquarters of the Company which would then tour the productions around the circuit playing a

regular season at a fixed time each year. Races were held annually on Worthy Down at St. Swithun-tide during June and July and so the opening of the Winchester Theatre tended to coincide with these in order to catch the influx of summer visitors.

By 1766 the players were known as the Salisbury Company of Comedians. Much can be learnt about the members of the company from a scurrilous pamphlet published in 1768: *Candour, an Enquiry into the real Merits of the Salisbury Comedians*. Johnson is lampooned in it:

He who in playing, only strove to play,
And who in saying, only strove to say,
He, who, for anything we know, might be
A man of fortune and of Quality:
Whose Quality, for ought we know, is small,
And he, God bless him, of no worth at all:

Then follows a description of an up-and-coming member of the company, Thomas Collins:

Next Collins comes – I know him by his
Strut –
A hero quite, the scene at Lilliput.
See how he grinds his Teeth and strikes his
Head,
And on his Toes, he scorns the Earth to
tread;
Such monstrous Action never can be just,
Too oft repeated, it must give Disgust.
In Comedy, his nat'ral Road to Fame.
So free, so easy, Censure cannot blame;
In Scenes where Passions quick on Passions
rise,
I see thee, Collins, see thee with Surprise:
The nice Transitions, I with Joy survey,
And, charm'd, the Debt to Merit gladly pay.

Mrs. Collins is praised for her playing in comedies of manners; tragic parts were not her forte however:

In those gay scenes, where Reason is scarce
known,
Where Pleasure, modish Pleasure, rules
alone;
Where, quite absorb'd in Folly, we may see
The Picture of our modern Quality,

Collins unrival'd stands – But, fond of
Fame,
Soaring to Tragedy, she smiles with Shame:
No moving accents from that Tongue we
hear,
Which melt the Soul, and claims the pitying
Tear,
That fine Variety, which diff'rent Parts
Conveys, at diff'rent Times, to feeling
Hearts,
From her we feel not; she is still the same
In ev'ry Thing she plays, but in the Name.
Mrs. Johnson, mentioned just before the
end of the poem fares considerably better:
Next, Mrs. Johnson see – if I condemn,
May I n'er see true Modesty again:
O! 'tis a Flower indeed, so seldom found,
So very seldom on theatric Ground,
That it deserves our utmost fostering Care
To cherish, to protect, and keep it there.¹⁴

The general tone of criticism was not welcomed by the Company and in a very short time there was a blast of repartee which was so successfully put down by the *Candour* authors that, beyond the title, no copy is known:

'An Epistle to the Author of Candour –
– In a raging Vein,
Ev'n to the Dregs and Squeezings of the
Brain,
Some strain the last dull droppings of their
sense,
And Rime with all the Rage of Impotence'.

In 1769 Collins joined Johnson as a partner of the theatre circuit and to the opinions of the author of 'Candour' can be added those of John Brownsmith, no doubt prejudiced, who was prompter to the Company a few years later. Brownsmith was not so much concerned with Collins' ability as an actor as with his dealings in his managerial capacity. In a mock recipe, 'to make a Brace of Managers' he lampoons the careful business spirit of Collins and his future partner James Davies: 'Take on one part, pride, impertinence, absence of mind, and self-interest; of each equal parts, and ram them all into a small Mor-tal.

On the other part, take of sullen disposition, ignorance, meanness of spirit, and ingratitude, a large quantity; stuff them into a thin Car-case . . . borrow what you can upon them, and lay them by on the shelf of a Pawn-broker, till the interest by far exceeds the principal; then take 'em down, Fry them together with a faggot bought of a Gingerbread-baker, and they will soon be fit for use.'¹⁵

In spite of Collins' defects the Company gained in popularity. There was a highly successful three months' season at the Market House Theatre in the year of the partnership. At benefit nights the overflow of the audience often sat on the stage and so crowded was the theatre in 1769 that the side scenes had to be removed to accommodate all the patrons.¹⁶ Although this was inconvenient conditions in London were sometimes worse, when in order to cram a house to capacity a temporary stand was erected in front of the backcloth so that as the curtain rose the audience in the auditorium was confronted by another audience on the stage, leaving a severely restricted acting area between the two.¹⁷ Normally at the Winchester Theatre no one was allowed behind the scenes, again an advance on current London practice. There were however exceptions to this rule. The Duchess of Chandos was one of the theatre's patrons. Her visits usually prompted a full house and a note appeared in the newspaper:

' . . . notwithstanding the concourse of ladies and gentlemen on the stage and behind the scenes (which generally destroys all order and regularity) the performance on both evenings was received with the greatest applause'.¹⁸

The actors' art is written on the wind and so little of an actor's personality survives that it is worth mentioning that three of the players cut their names with a diamond on one of the window panes of the theatre:

'Giles Barrett, 1770; Robert Stannard, 1770; Samuel Stebbing, 1770; comediones at Winchester'.

This pane of glass was still in the possession of a Winchester glazier at the beginning of the present century.¹⁹ The trio do not seem to have been longstanding members of the company. They are not mentioned in *Candour*. All that is known of them is that Stebbing and his wife were acting in Salisbury by the Christmas of that year. Johnson also disappeared in this year; – retirement, illness or death? One can only conjecture.

By 1772 Collins had taken a partner, James Davies, a man who had studied acting under James Rich of Covent Garden but who himself had never played on the London stage.²⁰ When in later years Davies' daughter Henrietta married Thomas Collins' son, usually referred to as Tom to distinguish him from his father, the management of the theatre became very much a family affair. Each had his province in the playhouse. Collins, as little men often are, was a character with zest and flair; he managed the actors and looked after the publicity. Many of the reports of plays that appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, glowing commendations, were written by Collins and earned him the title 'Puff-Master General'. Davies, a more prosaic but business-like character looked after the wardrobe, the library of scripts and the candles, – an expensive commodity in any theatre. The respective wives of the management lived a working life too. If Mrs. Collins reduced all parts to the same rendering Mrs. Davies was an extremely versatile woman. She appeared in a one act comedy *The Actress of All Work or My Country Cousin* as five characters: – Maria, a provincial actress; Bridgett, a country girl; Flourish, a stylish London actress; Lounge, a fop; and Mademoiselle Josephine, an opera singer from Paris. The sketch required lightning changes of voice, make-up and costume. As well as her artistry Mrs. Davies displayed considerable fortitude. During the early part of an evening she played Madge in *Love in a Village*, left the stage, and gave birth to her daughter, Henrietta. Poverty was a reality that did not allow work to cease whatever

one's position or condition in the theatrical hierarchy.²¹

By 1774 the Company was well established in Winchester and could count on the patronage of the 'Nobility, Gentry and the Public in general of the city and neighbourhood'. Gentry did patronise the unsavoury little building. The Duchess of Chandos, Lord Kingsale, the inhabitants of the Close, and of course, the Militia sitting in the boxes installed early in that year had all paid two guineas for season tickets that would admit them on eighteen nights. A similar subscription ticket for the pit was £1. 4 shillings. Single tickets were normally a shilling for the gallery; two shillings for the pit and two and sixpence for a box. They could be obtained either from the Box Keeper, usually an elderly and none too agile member of the company – at this time a Mr. Richard Pirce who died four years later, or from the places where members of the company lodged. The *George*, the *Chequers* and the *White Hart* are mentioned in advertisements as well as Mr. Greenhill's shop, Mr. Haskol's Toy Shop, and 'Mr. Baker's the breeches-maker opposite the Bridewell'. The coffee-houses in the city also sold tickets. Performances took place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; the doors, on those days, were opened at five o'clock and the curtain rose at six. Bills assured the

patrons that every effort would be made to end the performance by or before ten o'clock and that no performance would exceed half-past ten. This routine was maintained with little variation until the close of the season ten years later.²²

At the end of July 1784 costumes and scenes were packed for the last time at the Market House Theatre; for a new and more convenient building was being constructed in Jewry Street and would welcome the players in the following year.

For some time it had been the policy of Collins and Davies to obtain theatres in a group of key towns and use them as stopping places on a circuit: Salisbury, Chichester, Winchester and Southampton were the regular stopping places by 1784. Portsmouth was later added to this list. The second phase of the Company's development consisted of erecting purpose built theatres in these towns scrapping the make-shift halls. This was about to happen in Winchester.

For a while the room above the Meat Market was used as a storehouse. Eventually the market closed, the gas was laid on, and the building was transformed into the Mechanics' Institute. The dramatic tradition was continued here sporadically in the form of amateur theatricals. That, however, is another story.²³

2. THE TEMPORARY THEATRE

In order to look at the second of the Winchester Theatres, this time a temporary affair, we must retrace our steps to the time of the Seven Years War waged by France, Austria and Russia against Frederick the Great of Prussia who was assisted by troops and subsidies from England. By 1760 eight regiments had pitched in the neighbourhood of Winchester at the ready in case of a French invasion. We have already noticed that the

militia were great supporters of the Market House Theatre and the managers of the Bath Theatre Company, Keasbury and Griffiths, decided that the numbers justified building a temporary theatre near to the encampment.¹ This lasted for three years. It consisted of a pit, a low stage, and a number of boxes.² That the Bath Company should come to Winchester is a sign of the town's importance as a theatrical centre, for John Bernard, who

For the Benefit of Messrs. DIDIER and BRADFORD.

By a Company of COMEDIANS, at the *Market-House* in *Winchester*,

On *Monday* Evening, the 14th of *APRIL*,

Will be perform'd a new COMEDY, (never acted here) call'd,

AMPHITRYON:

OR, THE

TWO SOSIAS.

Written by Mr. *Dryden*, and alter'd by Mr. *Garrick*.

Amphitryon, by Mr. DIDIER.

Jupiter, by Mr. BISSE.

Mercury, by Mr. CLARKE.

Phœbus, by Mr. BROWNE.

Gripus, by Mr. BOWMAN.

Tranio, by Mr. BRADFORD.

Sofia, by Mr. LINNETT.

Alcmena, by Mrs. BISSE.

Night, by Mrs. BROWNE.

Bromia, by Mrs. SMITH.

Phœdra, by Mrs. BLANCHARD.

With Singing between the Acts, by Mr. *Adams*, and Mrs. *Browne*.

Particularly a Song in the Character of a *Recruiting Serjeant*,

by Mr. ADAMS.

And a favourite Song call'd, a *Cock* and a *Bull*, by Mrs. BROWNE.

With a PROLOGUE in the Character of a *Country Boy*, by

Mr. BRADFORD. AND an EPILOGUE in the Character

of a *Fine Gentleman*, by Mr. DIDIER.

To which will be added a *Farce*, call'd,

The What d'ye call it.

To begin exactly at Seven o'Clock.

TICKETS to be had at Mr. *Haskell's* Toy-shop, of *J. Ayres*, Bookseller,
and at *Soden's* Coffee-house.

Boxes 2s. 6d. Pit 2s. Gall. 1s.

acted in the company for a while and was eventually Secretary of the Beef Steak Club in London, wrote:

'... for many years the very name of Bath was a guarantee for a man's good taste in his profession; whilst on the score of genius, it is acknowledged to have contributed more largely to the metropolitan boards, than Dublin and York put together'.³

One of the actors of the Bath Company was Tate Wilkinson, who has luckily left in his memoirs a brief but vivid picture of life at the temporary theatre. Tate was the son of a clergyman who was transported for solemnising several marriages without first publishing the banns. As a child the boy was given to piety until his sudden conversion to the theatre after being taken to Covent Garden by the box keeper. Wilkinson started to give impersonations of well-known stage personalities and when Mrs. Garrick saw his imitation of Peg Woffington, with whom she was not on cordial terms, she persuaded her husband to introduce the lad to the theatre manager at Maidstone. At the age of twenty-one Tate came with the Bath Company to Winchester and 'found it to a high degree agreeable and the weather added to make it delightful'.⁴

The Duke of York was one of the theatre patrons. He had previously seen Wilkinson perform in, and wanted him to act the main part in, *The Minor*, a libellous satire by Samuel Foote on Whitfield and the early Methodists. The Duke suggested that Wilkinson should play the same part in the provinces that Foote had played in London. In some ways Wilkinson resembled Foote, especially in his ability to mimic. Foote compiled a programme of impersonations, including some of Woodward, Mrs. Woffington and Garrick. This was given at a small non-patent theatre in London, the Haymarket, under the title of 'Tea at 6.30'. Dr. Johnson was unimpressed by Foote's abilities: 'His imitations are not like... He goes out of himself without going into any other people'. The manuscript of

The Minor was sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury with a request that His Grace should delete any offending passages. That gentleman returned it untouched visualising Foote's desire to advertise the play 'corrected and prepared for the press by His Grace the Archbishop'.⁵

On August 13th 1760 only two months after its London opening the play was given at Winchester and Tate recorded its success:

'It brought a great house, and obtained uncommon applause, which was increased by the attention and distinguished marks of approbation bestowed by His Royal Highness. I was honoured with his thanks by Colonel Pitt; and when I with Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Keasbury lighted His Highness out of the box, he said to me - "Very well indeed, Wilkinson! I shall command it again". It was acted four or five times to great houses'.⁶

After this Wilkinson was allowed several days' holiday in order to go to London and study Foote's method of acting in *The Minor*.

Another lively diversion presented in the same year was *Alexander the Great* in which Wilkinson played the name part. This was a spectacular production that suffered a mishap. It is vividly described in *The Theatric Tourist*:

'... some olive leaves that were used for decoration, twisted and interwoven with little bits of wax, caught fire from the lights. The flames continuing to blaze, occasioned an intolerable stench, and a universal cry of fire, which was succeeded by a general panic; but none received so terrible a shock as the departed Clytus, who, at that time, lay *dead* before the audience. As by Galvanic impulse, he instantly revived, and, in his haste, o'erthrew the son of the immortal Ammon, who measured his extended length on that dread spot where he had slain his General. However, as soon as the cause was ascertained, all was restored to order, and the redoubted Clytus quietly returned, and (hard and uncommon lot) for the *second* time gave up the ghost'.⁷

The Earl of Effingham, extremely corpulent, was in the audience and when the alarm was given sprang over the side of his box onto a bench in the middle of the pit. To the credit of the theatre carpenter it withstood his weight. After the fracas, as Lord Effingham regained his seat, the army rose and saluted him. A return gesture was made by His Lordship.

Wilkinson was most impressed by the attitude of the Winchester audience, — claiming it was the best behaved that he had encountered:

'I do not remember when anything went accidentally wrong on the stage, a single instance of sneering or ill nature. It was, from the beginning of the season until the ending, a continual scene of the most perfect good breeding that could be conceived or practiced; and they were always ready to assist and relieve the performers when embarrassed and never by loud talking and affected contempt or rudeness, disturbed the theatre or distressed the actor'.

The company appeared to have acquitted themselves creditably as well. Food was expensive because of the war, and to a certain extent scarce, yet the actors left the city debt free at the end of the twelve week season.⁸

The following year Wilkinson returned to Winchester for a season with a Mr. Lee managing his company from Portsmouth. Lee had been a member of the Bath Company but after a dispute with Palmer, the proprietor, he had left; his wife remained in it though. Whereas Keasbury's company had spared neither pains nor expense in the presentation of plays Lee's was poverty-stricken. He himself supplemented the finances by giving lessons in acting. The decrease in number at the encampment was a further difficulty to contend with. *The Minor* was repeated for the first week, then followed *The Fair Penitent*, *Jane Shore*, *The Way to Keep Him*, *The Provoked Wife*, and

the six week season ended with *Romeo and Juliet* in which Wilkinson played Romeo and Lee, Mercutio.⁹ One of the visiting actors at this time was Guiseppe Grimaldi, father of the famous 'Old Joe' of Sadler's Wells Theatre. Grimaldi was a man of many parts: dancing master at Drury Lane, star comedian, and inventor of a dentifrice powder. In the previous year whilst touring in Liverpool he had advertised that he was able '... to draw teeth and stumps without giving the least uneasiness in the operation'. Whether he combined his dentistry with acting in Winchester is not known.¹⁰

The war ended in 1763. The regiments departed and the temporary theatre was dismantled. After a while Tate Wilkinson found his way to the London stage where he made the usual number of enemies amongst whom was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, offended at Wilkinson's offer of impersonating him. *The Minor* achieved a simultaneous run at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane with Wilkinson at the first and Foote at the other. The houses however were not full. More successful was a performance of *Alexander the Great*, this time with Foote in the name part and Wilkinson imitating yet again Peg Woffington under the guise of Roxana. The success of the performance can be judged by the remarks of a member of the audience:

'... the house was electrified; his enemies were overpowered, and Peg herself set the seal to his talents, by beating her fan to pieces on the beading of the boxes'.¹¹

It must be admitted however that Tate Wilkinson was a man of limited ability as an actor. When he played Shakespearean tragic roles they tended to be impersonations of Garrick whom he admired, and Churchill in his damning couplet summed up many an opinion of the young man who early in his career had visited Winchester:

'With not a single comic power endued
The first a mere mere mimic's mimic
stood'.¹²

3. THE NEW THEATRE

'I suppose Mr. Dyson told you that we are going to have a playhouse in Winchester; the Blade is so indefatigable in the pursuit, that I believe he will bring it to bear; there are one and twenty subscribers already and there are only four and twenty required; it is not of much consequence to me; if I like any amusement it is a play, but my avocations in a different way are so many that I shall have little leisure or money for anything of that kind'.¹

So in 1785 Sarah Williams wrote from her house in Kingsgate Street to her husband, the Revd. Philip Williams, who had the previous year, been made chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons. He was a local man, at one time both Rector of Compton and Bursar of Winchester College and therefore, unlike ourselves, he was easily able to identify the various characters to whom Sarah had given pseudonyms in her letter. The *Hampshire Chronicle* was optimistic about the increased patronage that the new building would bring:

'Our new theatre is in great forwardness, and will be the most complete, for its size, of anyone in the kingdom. The zeal of the inhabitants to promote national amusements in the city, leads to hope it may induce the numerous and respectable families in the neighbourhood to visit us more frequent'.²

The new building was situated in Jewry Street. An end section of it still stands at No. 40 with an original window surmounted by the Royal Arms. Opposite was the Gaol after which the street was sometimes called. A solicitor, John Downes, lived almost next door to this. He put up a great opposition to the new building and managed to gather a small coterie of people around himself who pledged to inform against the players if they acted.³ The effigy of the unfortunate man was burnt by members of the opposing faction who composed a ballad which was sung in the city streets. Harsh words must have been hastily

spoken by many Wintonians for Mrs. Williams wrote a little later to her husband:

'Mrs. Courtney I am hurt to say has behaved in a shocking manner; has made use of the most abusive language, such as would have been beneath a Billingsgate Fish Woman . . .'⁴

Citizens looking at the outside of the theatre prophesied that the place was so slightly built that it would tumble down. Others said, with good reason, that it was sure to be damp.⁵ A surprise awaited those who braved the doors on Monday, May 30th 1785:

' . . . It is not only an elegant and commodious theatre within, but it has also a grand and uniform appearance without, and is a real ornament to the city. The avenues to the Pit, and staircases and passages to the boxes and gallery are peculiarly well adapted; and indeed our theatre has an advantage over most others in the country, in being built purposely for it, and of course the plan is much more complete and regular, than any building can be, which was not at first intended as a theatre. The front of the stage is a grand arch, supported by two noble pillars of the Ionic order, nearly 14 feet high, most beautifully gilt and ornamented; in the centre is a bust of Shakespeare, over which is the following motto: "*Omne tulit punctum miscuit Utile Dulce*" and on either side are the arms of the city and county. The pillars that support the green boxes and gallery are superbly painted after the manner of those at the Parthenon: the ceiling is painted in imitation of a blue sky, with some well-fancied clouds; in the centre of the ceiling is a ventilator and at the four corners Thalia and Melpomene, as the Comic and Tragic muses, Apollo as an emblem of the Opera, or Music, and Pero as the representative of Pantomime; the panel next the ceiling is decorated with festoons of flowers, and the whole house is finished in a style of elegance which does great credit to the taste and judgement of Mr. Cave, by whom the whole of

the ornaments are designed and executed. The theatre being made thus complete the managers have not been backward in preparing new scenes, dresses, etc., and we may venture to affirm that those who may honour the performance with their attendance, will not fail of entertainment and accommodation equal to any theatre out of the metropolis'.⁶

The architects and builders were Kernot and Dowling, a local firm of coal merchants, maltsters and builders, and the decorator was William Cave a local artist, whose talents were diversified. His stained glass window of the Transfiguration in the 'Romish Chapel' was commented on favourably as was his restoration of the painted glass in the College Chapel.⁷ He did some lettering in the Church of St. Swithun upon Kingsgate, painted landscapes and murals, a number of scene cloths for the theatre, and some transparencies for various celebrations.⁸ Unexpectedly Mrs. Williams approved the building: '... the house is very neat, and by far too capacious for the company; but the players appear to a much greater advantage than in the other wretched hovel'.⁹

Capacious it may have been, but it did not match up to the proud claim of Collins that it was built 'on the plan of the Covent Garden house'.¹⁰ He presumably meant that the house was much the same as the older *Theatre Royal* in London although very much smaller. This is of interest to theatre historians as three years earlier the interior of Covent Garden had been reshaped by John Inigo Richards. The Winchester Theatre is therefore one of the earliest of the 'new-fashioned' theatres, built on a rectangular plan.

The *Theatre Royal* at Covent Garden had been originally built in 1731 by Edward Shepherd with a fan-shaped auditorium: to allow sound to expand the walls canted away from the stage at an angle of 97 degrees. This meant that spectators in the side boxes sat facing away from the stage, and had to adopt awkward postures in order to see. In 1782 this auditorium had been gutted to make way for the new design of John Richards, who was

the principal scene painter at Covent Garden. It was this design which gave the Winchester Theatre its shape. The main alterations were the parallel side walls, parallel side boxes, new 'enclosed' or 'basket boxes' at the rear of the house, and a cut-back stage which then left room for seventeen benches on the pit floor. The spacing between the benches was cramped – only 1 foot 9 inches was allowed for both seat and void.¹¹ An etching of the Covent Garden Theatre by Thomas Rowlandson in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows the newly shaped theatre in use.¹² Scaled down in one's imagination, this can give a rough impression of a crowded house in the New Theatre, Winchester.

Winchester Theatre had been paid for by subscriptions raised amongst the 'Nobility and Gentry of the city and neighbourhood'. Its total cost was £1,000.¹³ Collins was the first manager and within a few years he had bought up the shares and became the sole proprietor.¹⁴

Ten years before the opening of the New Theatre, Sheridan's Comedy 'The Rivals' had received its first production at Covent Garden. Collins had chosen it in 1777 as the opening play for his New Theatre at Salisbury and 'with entire new scenery and decorations' it graced the Winchester stage on the opening night. A comic opera, *The Agreeable Surprise*, was added and between the two pieces James Davies spoke the prologue:

When first Lunardi soared in Air Balloon
From this vile planet Envoy to the Moon,
Lost in the glare, while worlds around him
blaz'd

Our new knight-errant quiver'd as he gaz'd—
And, as in rarest elements he rose,
Felt at his poor, cramp'd heart convulsive
throes:

So I, the dupe of Fortune's queerest
gambols,
Launch'd from the greasy precincts of the
shambles,

Leaving a gross, dense atmosphere behind,
Feel quite asthmatic in this air refin'd . . .¹⁶

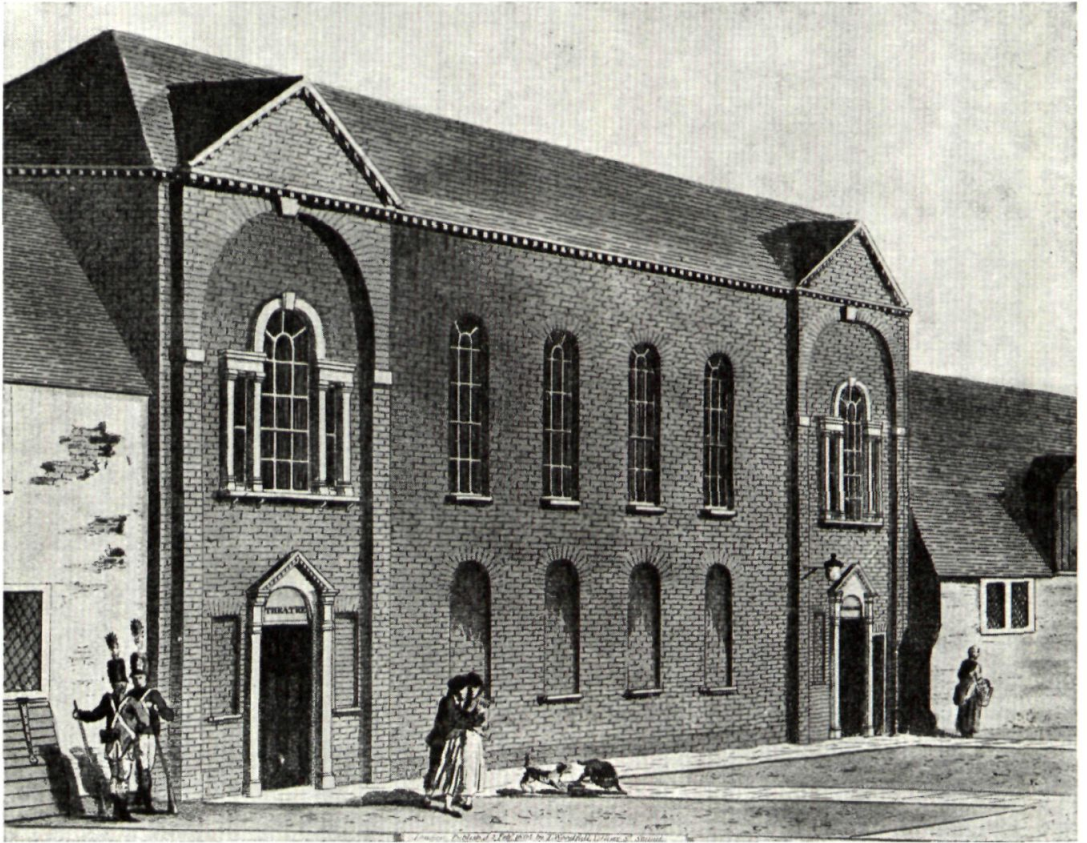


Plate 3. The New Theatre, Winchester, 1805.
The City Library, Winchester.

Two highly successful years passed and then there was a disruption to the ordered life that Collins had levelled for himself. One of the Aldermen of Salisbury, John Maton, brought a case against Collins and Davies. They were charged with illicitly performing in the theatre at Salisbury a play *He wou'd be a Soldier*. In this Collins had played the part of Caleb and Davies that of Colonel Talbot. On July 30th Mr. Justice Bullen found the defendants guilty and each was fined £50. Half of this fine was placed in a charity fund to help the poor in the Parish of St. Thomas, Salisbury. It was a curious case as Maton knew that as a common informer he would be unable to recover the costs of the case.¹⁷ Why had he, then, brought it?

Under the Licensing restrictions Collins and Davies had technically broken the law, although of course they had done so with impunity for the previous twenty years. About ten years earlier several of the Comedians had left the theatre in an inebriated condition and on the way back to their lodgings had broken the lamp in front of the house of the Member of Parliament for Salisbury, a man named Thomas Hussey. It is possible that Hussey invited Maton to bring the charge against Collins and Davies.¹⁸ A writer in the *Hampshire Chronicle* at the time claimed that a private quarrel lay at the root of the business.¹⁹ The following year, the Earl of Radnor, another Salisbury man, who, with his wife, had bespoken many a performance,

sponsored a bill in the House of Lords which was subsequently passed. This gave Justices of the Peace of every county powers at either the general or the quarter sessions to grant Licences for the performance in provincial theatres of 'Tragedies, Comedies, Plays, Operas, Interludes or Farces' that had been submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for examination.²⁰ The *Hampshire Chronicle* hopefully stated:

'... as the bill will place the *Sons of Thespis* on a respectable footing, the neighbouring towns and cities that have Theatres, may expect to have dramatic entertainments legally represented, and conducted with propriety, regularity and decorum'.²¹

Thus helped, the rest of the Winchester Theatre's first decade would seem to have been one of steady routine. But the seasons of 1795 and 1796 saw an interesting innovation. Any serious attempt at regular theatrical criticism was usually reserved for the London stage. The *Hampshire Chronicle* had been fortunate however to engage the services of a writer who had a genuine interest in the performance of plays rather than the following of fashions, and so we have an early example of provincial theatrical criticism. There was a balanced mixture of praise and stricture. Writing of the popular entertainment *Inkle and Yarico* he said:

'The audience seemed to regret the absence of Mr. Tyler, their favourite Inkle, who is now safely arrived on the North American Shore; that Inkle should be dressed in a sailor's jacket was a vast absurdity, while his man was sprucely habited with his hair powdered. Miss Davies's action in *Yarico* was very impressive. . . . Our old friends Davies and Collins were warmly received and displayed their usual excellence'.²² Some lapses were severely dealt with: 'We cannot compliment Mrs. Seymour on her success in either of the parts she played; her forte seems to be sentimental comedy'.²³

The costumes received comment on occasion: 'Mrs. Richland, as *Flora*, played very well but looked much handsomer in her

cottage dress than as lady of the manor'.²⁴

At times the state of the decor brought forth a rebuke: 'On the absurdity of the gaudy scene, which was given for the inside of a farmhouse we shall not dwell, as we understand an entire new set of scenes are getting ready for the ensuing summer'.²⁵ When these appeared they were commended: 'Two or three new scenes have been exhibited this week, which do credit to the pencil of Mr. Cave'.²⁶

Criticism was a pleasant change from the 'puffs' written by the manager, or the mere recounting of a play's narrative thread that so often appeared. The writer himself did not escape censure though and he was forced to remark: 'If, in a talk so new as that of giving a regular and free report of the business of our theatre, any of the gentry etc. should think our remarks at any time uncandid - let them tear themselves from eternal and never-ending card parties, go to the theatre, and judge for themselves'.²⁷

In another issue the actors had to be placated: 'We will venture to affirm that no gentleman will ever become a *worse* actor by a slight attention to the hints we throw out, which are always meant to improve, not to offend or to exasperate . . .'.²⁸

Trouble blew up over a group of the livelier actors who obviously tried to take matters into their own hands: 'The Printer trusts the Sir Fretfull's of the company, who were "put in last week's paper", will not entertain the idea that he had been induced to give a more favourable account this week, in consequence of a harmless threat or two; ever anxious to praise, where praise is due, he shall attend to the favours of his theatrical correspondent with that punctuality which they always deserve'.²⁹

In 1797 a lack of punctuality was criticised.³⁰ Although an hour to start was advertised it was rarely kept. This, it was claimed deterred many people from attending the theatre. The manager was in a dilemma, for the fullness of the house at starting time depended very much on the hour at which the last race was

run and rather than play to a sparse audience the actors held fire until people had travelled from Worthy Down.

Collins would obviously not want the greater part of the audience arriving at half time when they would be admitted, as was customary in most theatres, for half-price. As a partial solution to this problem he hired various military bands to play.³¹ The space in the theatre was so restricted that when the little orchestra was full the remainder of the instrumentalists sat on the pit benches. In the 1850s when finances would not run to a military band the Winchester Amateur Brass Band conducted by Alfred Conduit would maintain the tradition.³²

At times the audience was more diverting than the Company. In 1799 in the interval after a spectacular entertainment *Blue Beard or Female Curiosity* two women in the gallery, full to overflowing because of the excellent reports of the presentation that had spread from Salisbury, began to quarrel and eventually to fight over their places. The cry 'A fight! A fight!' was mistakenly interpreted as 'A fire!' by those sitting at the back of the gallery. Confusion ensued. Some ladies fainted. More nimble males jumped from the gallery into the pit, and numbers of people ran out into Jewry Street. However when order was restored it was discovered that the only casualties were 'a number of bonnets and hats'. The following week 'proper persons' were placed in the gallery to prevent any other disturbance.³³

When winter performances were held the management usually advertised that fires had been lit in order to thoroughly air the house. In summer the heat was more difficult to dispel than the cold had been. In an attempt to make the house more comfortable some alterations took place in 1800. Ventilators were installed and it was claimed that 'every part of the house is now perfectly cool'. A new form of patent lamp was introduced on the stage which replaced some of the candles. These, Collins said, gave 'additional lustre to the scenery'.³⁴

Thomas Collins, to all appearances prosperous and successful as a theatre manager suffered a sad old age. James Davies died in 1797 ending a long and successful partnership and Collins became sole proprietor of the circuit of theatres. For ten years he suffered from a cancer of the face and, although he continued to work as an administrator until a few months before his death, his work on the stage had ended. In 1806 came the double blow of the death of his son, who had progressed from the circuit to the London stage: where he was highly regarded, and of his daughter-in-law. The following year, at the age of 63, after a successful managerial career of thirty-eight years, the veteran of the company died at his home in Southampton. The tribute to him in the *Hampshire Chronicle* is more than a conventional plaudit:

'In him the theatrical world have lost a friend – to his performers he was kind and humane, many of whom he had supported under long illness – in his dealings, scrupulously honest'.³⁵

Although he was survived by a remaining son, Samuel Collins, the management of the theatre was in the hands of his daughter and her husband, Henry Kelly, and the leading man of the company, Maxfield.

Decline

The work of the Company went quietly on yet the condition of the theatre began to decline and by 1818 Charles Ball wrote:

'Immediately opposite the Gaol is a small building, erected about 1790, for a Theatre, and possessing all the requisite qualifications for a place of public amusement but two, namely, cleanliness and convenience. The performers, generally speaking, are of a respectable cast, and are occasionally assisted in their endeavours "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature", by one or other of the more celebrated votaries of Thespis from the metropolis'.³⁶

Shortly afterwards a local writer, Frederica Close, described the state of the interior of

the theatre: 'This theatre consists of one row of boxes, pit, gallery, and what are termed slips. If the managers would go to the expense of having this place fitted up as they have done the one in the neighbouring town (Southampton), and remove some of the draughts by having baize doors erected, we have not the least doubt but that they would soon be recompensed for it; for many admirers of the Drama are now debarred the pleasure they would otherwise enjoy owing to the very miserable state of the theatre, and the fear they entertain of taking cold. Therefore when the season is over, before they recommence, we hope they will comply with the wishes of their friends in this particular'.³⁷

By 1823 the management felt it ought to deal with the dilapidations and a 'puff' was inserted in the local newspaper:

'The interior of our theatre is now undergoing considerable repair, preparatory to the commencement of the dramatic campaign. The intended decorations, both before and behind the curtain, are confided to an artist of taste and ability and will form a magnificent improvement in the general appearance of the house'.³⁸

During the 1820s the houses at the theatre, given fine weather, were decent and numbers of London actors were hired for single or seasonal performances. The Race Weeks must have been eagerly anticipated during the long winter months. 'Winchester is at present', one correspondent wrote on an October day, 'so extremely dull in itself any amusement is welcome'.³⁹ The following July however the note has changed: 'Winchester has never been so lively since its decline and fall. The Races, the Military, the Waxworks and the Theatre. What an age is this'.⁴⁰ With the Races and the Theatre July also brought the Race-Week Balls with the excitements of the cock fights which were held at the hotels.

From 1832 onwards though there were frequent complaints of the hard times that were hitting the theatre not only in the provinces but also in London. There was no

season during the Races Week of that year: 'The management of our Theatre, very prudently alarmed at the badness of the times, do not intend to make a season this year; but to prove their respect for their friends in Winchester, propose to open the theatre once a week, by which means they will be enabled to supply a constant succession of talent, novelty and amusement, and to introduce to a Winchester audience every performer of merit they can engage'.⁴¹

In the summers of 1834, 1835 and 1836 there was an improvement in the numbers of people attending but in 1837 an advertisement appeared in the *Hampshire Advertiser* announcing that the Southampton and Winchester Theatres were for sale.⁴² This was later amended and the theatres were let by tender.⁴³ William Shalders became manager of the Winchester house to which he added Southampton and Portsmouth. Winchester he reopened with a flourish in 1838. He himself not only redecorated the interior 'in a style of splendour' but also repainted much of the scenery. Gas lighting was fitted, a commodity which was not always welcomed by the actors who had difficulty in projecting over the hissing that the burning jets made. A new company was gathered together from London, Bath and Bristol supplemented by an addition hitherto unknown in Winchester, a regular corps de ballet 'from Paris, Naples and Italian Opera, London'.⁴⁴ In the past the theatre had made do with Monsieur Michel and the pupils of his dancing academy in Southampton. Several spectacular presentations were introduced under the patronage of the Mayor and the houses in July were well attended. A winter season in Southampton and Winchester was a disaster though and on April 9th 1839 Shalders was declared to be insolvent. He stayed on at the theatre; in fact in October and November there were several benefit performances for himself and his wife.⁴⁵

The theatres at Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester were up for sale in 1840.⁴⁶ Shalders seems to have bridged the interim

until 1842. In an attempt to drum up support he engaged a Mr. Elton, a tragic actor who had made his name in London and Dublin, to perform in a Shakespeare season during the summer of 1841.⁴⁷ The decoration of the theatre that Shalders undertook seems to have been of short duration for when a Mr. Barker, lessee of the English Opera House, took the Winchester Theatre on a lease for three years he advertised that the house was undergoing a thorough repair and that the internal decorations would 'be executed in the most splendid style'.⁴⁸ W. J. A. Abington was chosen to be manager, a gentleman who had a penchant not only for staging Shakespeare but also for playing the lead in his own productions. His Shylock was satisfactory, but a bald Hamlet of over fifty was gently censured by the newspaper critic as an inappropriate representation of 'That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth'.⁴⁹

He must have been a person of unusual qualities. Few theatre managers of that period boasted a Master's degree in Arts of Oxford University and a Fellowship of the Society of Arts. The following year he became sole lessee of the Winchester Theatre leaving a Mr. Mude to be Acting Manager. A company was gathered together from Drury Lane, Exeter, Liverpool, Worcester and Salisbury complete with musicians and singers. One feels that Abington is reaching towards the theatrically uninvolved members of middle-class respectability in his advertisements: 'The Lessee trusts that these endeavours on his part to restore the taste for a species of amusement which becomes morally instructive when properly conducted will be met by a corresponding patronage on the part of the public, as no expense will be spared to render it a place of agreeable and fashionable entertainment'.⁵⁰

The works selected for performance bear out the high moral purpose of his enterprise: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*; and the operas, *La Sonnambula*, *Fra Diabolo*, and *Artaxerxes*. The policy worked for the first season, but in 1844 there were the usual

reports of poor houses: 'Mr. Abington has suffered a relapse and we can only regret he has not met with the support his company and himself have so well merited'.⁵¹

The management fell to Mr. W. Parker in 1845. In 1850 the theatre was let to a Mr. George Owen, and the next year Mr. C. Plunkett became lessee. The following year the gaol was moved from opposite the theatre to the Romsey Road. The local wags commented on the inconvenient distance separating the two establishments.⁵² The next lessee, Edwin Holmes, fared no better than his predecessors. He took over in 1853, the year that a fund was instituted for repairing and widening Jewry St. One of the performances at the theatre was a benefit on behalf of that fund.⁵³ Almost before the season had begun the following year, a sad announcement appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle*: 'The Theatre, a place of amusement, closed last evening, after a brief, and, it is regretted, a very unsuccessful season. Mr. Holmes has spared no expense to render it attractive; his company has not only been very talented, but exceeding respectable – both on and off the stage they have been a credit to him – and it is equally satisfactory to know that, however bad the business might be, their salaries have always been fully and regularly paid'.⁵⁴

The succession of visiting artists, Vladislav the Great Mechanical Exhibition of the War in the Crimea, Monsieur Deserais' Dogs and Monkeys, Henry Russell the entertainer, the Military Amateurs, Signor Lorenzo Pyroranni the Italian Salamander, these all highlight the fact that the Winchester Theatre was no longer a home for an established circuit company. A note in Woodward's *History of Winchester* sums up the general impression that the theatre made on the public: 'In Jury St., opposite the Museum, stands the Theatre; a little and rather dilapidated building, which was built in 1785 and is now in the hands of a company whose headquarters are Southampton and who seldom visit Winchester, leaving their house for the occasional use of amateur performers, who are generally to be

found amongst the officers of the garrison'.

There was one further lessee from 1858, W. E. Mills, who hoped that by presenting some well-known artists at the theatre he would establish an audience. The Drury Lane Opera and Vaudeville Company arrived for two nights: 'bad houses'. The Chorus and Orchestra from Her Majesty's Theatre were billed to appear in *La Traviata* in which Mlle. Piccolini was to sing the part of Violetta Valery, 'an eminent vocalist alone sufficient to attract a crowded house'. Mlle. Piccolomini could not face a depleted Winchester audience and it was announced that due to her fatigue the company would be unable to appear. 'At any rate', noted a correspondent, 'they did not fail to appear at Southampton on the following evening where they were well patronised'.⁵⁵ Charles Kean and his wife appeared in *The Gamester*: 'house not half full'. The sad story ended when J. W. Gordon brought his Music Hall Company from Southampton on May 6th 1861. Again the

house was poor. That was the Winchester Theatre's final night.

In August a public auction was held at the Dolphin Hotel in Southampton. Together with a stonemason's yard and a cottage at the rear the Winchester Theatre was sold to a Mr. H. Whitrow. An anonymous writer in 1897 reminiscently jotted down: 'Sixty years ago Winchester boasted of a theatre, a rather modest building in Jewry-Street. The taste for the drama was not very elevated, and the standard of the performances got lower and lower, and eventually the theatre was converted into the business premises occupied by Messrs. Frampton'.⁵⁶ Frampton was a builder's merchant who used his son's design for altering much of the existing theatre. A small section of the original facade, complete with Georgian window, remains however – a reminder of the flair, success, and string of disappointments that form the story of the Winchester Theatre.⁵⁷

4. THE ACTORS AND THEIR PARTS

'Our Stage, unlike the modest Stage of yore,
Is the great public Shop for Rogue and Whore:

Trust not thy Daughter there – for, ten to one,

Some Lord may see her, and – the Girl's undone:

Trust not thy Son – for, in this virtuous Place,

(When strong Temptation stares him in the Face

Dress'd, and trick'd out, with ev'ry Female Art,

T'ensnare the Sense, and captivate the Heart)

His young Blood beating high with Love's Alarms,

He'll fall a Victim to some Harlot's Charms'.¹

In spite of the dangers to the eighteenth

and nineteenth century would-be actor or actress there was a great fascination in the ephemeral world of the stage. A partial reason for this can be seen in Allardyce Nicoll's aphorism: 'the eighteenth century was an age, not of the author, but of the actor'.² Dramatic text existed as the ground bass to a set of highly personal improvisations, and so long as the audience was pleased all was well. This fickle pleasure of the audience served as a mirror to reflect the fashions of the stage. Robert Jephson summed up the interests of the various parts of the house:

'This beauteous circle, friends to polish and verse,

Admires soft sentiments in language terse;

While the stern Pit, all ornament disdains,

And loves deep pathos, and sublimer strains.
The middle order, free from critick pride,
Take genuine nature for their faithful guide . . .

While those above them, honest souls!
delight in
Processions, bustle, trumpets, drums and
fighting'.³

One needed to be a person of stamina to be a regular theatre-goer. Either the house was crowded and the heat rose to the point of suffocation or else one shivered in a spirit of bleak loneliness. The few who had gathered at the Winchester Theatre to see Reynolds' play *Speculation* were delighted with the first words that Mrs. Richards as Celia spoke after the curtain rose: 'Nobody being here . . .'. At other times however the overcrowding must have caused the greatest discomfort. In 1790 another play of Reynolds', *The Dramatist*, was performed and it finished with M. P. Andrew's epilogue. No doubt those who had passed an evening amongst the seething benches of the pit enjoyed the humour of it:

'What an overflowing House, methinks I see!

Here, Box-keeper, are these my places? No!
Madam Van Bulk has taken all that row;
Then I'll go back – You can't! – You can,
she fibs,

Keep down your Elbows or you'll break my
Ribs;

Zounds, how you squeeze! of what do you
think one made is?

Is this your Wig? No! It's that there Lady's.
Then the Side Boxes, what delightful Rows!
Peers, Poets, Nabobs, Jews and Prentice
Beaux'.⁴

A mental as well as physical resilience was needed to withstand the sheer length of the programme. A typical evening is Mr. and Mrs. Deveulle's benefit night in 1785. This began with Dryden's *All for Love*, a rewriting of Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*. At the end of the play there was a song by Miss Sharrock. This was followed by Master Deveulle speaking a prologue, *The Picture of a Playhouse*. The child also took part in a comic sketch called *The Times* and appeared as William the Waiter in an interlude, *The Air Balloon*. Next came a dramatic romance, *Cymon*, in which Mr. Wordsworth from the

Theatre Royal at Bath played the title role. The evening finished with an address to the audience by the Deveulle child. A footnote to the advertisement assured the patrons: 'Those Ladies and Gentlemen who intend honouring Mr. Deveulle with their company, may be assured that the greatest attention has been paid to the above pieces, and that the whole, notwithstanding the variety of entertainments, will positively be over by half past ten'.⁵

The items between the plays were usually a strange collection of activities that might attract the curious rather than those with a taste for drama. In 1795, for example, a Mr. Richer from Sadler's Wells was hired to dance on a tight rope. This was a great success, and when he went with the company to Portsmouth he made several brief return visits to Winchester. However he seems to have over-reached himself in declaring he would perform the impossible: 'Mr. Richer, who promised to play a great variety of manoeuvres this last night in fact did less than we have seen him do any of his last evenings. So much for promises and so much for rope dancing'.⁶ Another novelty was the New-Market Jockey Dance performed by Mr. Powell in boots and spurs in 1782; three years later he taught it to his son 'not six years old' who similarly danced it after a performance of *King Richard III*. Young Master Powell in this played the Duke of York and his sister Prince Edward. Father played the part of King Richard.⁷ Mr. Moritz from London balanced an egg 'which may be examined by the Company, and broken afterwards for satisfaction', on top of a straw. He then went on to balance 'a musket and bayonet fixed' on his forehead and finished with a 'wonderful balance of a Heavy Table . . . dancing at the same time'. This was sandwiched in between a comedy *Laugh When You Can* and a musical entertainment called *The Farmer*. Innumerable 'characteristic pas de deux', songs and recitations were tame by comparison.

The main item for the evening was varied.

It could consist of one of the many pot-boilers that are now no longer performed; Mrs. Inchbald's humanitarian comedies were much enjoyed in the eighteenth century, whilst in the nineteenth century Boucicault comedies regularly graced the boards and Winchester as much as any other town enjoyed a nautical melodrama. Plays by Sheridan were extremely popular for a hundred years; and, however mutilated he may have been, Shakespeare was regularly acted in the three theatres of the city. A note in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, reviewing a production of *Richard III*, pointed out a consequence of provincial Shakespeare: 'The acting of Shakespeare's plays is often attended with some inconvenience to provincial companies, from the great number of characters they contain, and the consequent difficulty of filling them respectably. The inconvenience was in some measure felt: upon this occasion . . .'⁸

Sometimes, in the transmutations of his plays, Shakespeare's name seemed to have been forgotten. A note in the newspaper in 1785 warned patrons: '. . . on Friday, by particular desire, Dryden's comedy of *The Tempest*, with entertainments'.⁹ This was a version by Sir William D'Avenant, rumoured to have been either the god-son or the natural son of William Shakespeare, and presented by Dryden in terms acceptable to audiences whose tastes had changed as the seventeenth century progressed. *The Merchant of Venice* had been similarly treated by Lord Lansdown and refurbished as *The Jew of Venice*. Charles Macklin restored the original text and played Shylock at the London patent houses as an effective and real character rather than as comic relief to the match making. Pope, in his well known couplet, summed up the general approbation:

'This is the Jew
That Shakespeare drew'.¹⁰

It is pertinent then to turn to Macklin to see how he viewed the Shylock of John Palmer who came to Winchester from the King's Theatre, London, in 1791 to give several performances; 'Mr. Palmer played the charac-

ter of Shylock in one style. In this scene there was a sameness, in that scene a sameness, and in every scene a sameness . . . He did not look the character, nor laugh the character, nor speak the character of Shakespeare's Jew. Indeed he did not hit the part nor the part hit him'.¹¹

Three years later the performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was contrasted with Richard Cumberland's sentimental play *The Jew*. The prologue of the play outlined Cumberland's intention:

If to your candour we appeal this night
For a poor client, for a luckless Wight,
Whom Bard ne'er favour'd, whose sad fate
has been

Never to share in one applauding scene,
In souls like your's there should be found
a place

For every victim of unjust disgrace.

Sheva, the central character was presented as a peacemaker and example of concord. The writer of *Theatrical Remarks* in the *Hampshire Chronicle* did not give his opinion of the performances. He merely stated: 'The novelties of our theatre this season are *The Jew* and *Hartford Bridge*. Of *The Jew* we must remark that those who pretend to be judges of mankind seem to give more credit to Shakespeare's Shylock than to Cumberland's Sheva. Shakespeare drew his characters from human nature, Cumberland from imagination'.¹²

Cumberland's play indeed was a novelty. Its first performance had been given at Covent Garden in the May of 1794. Seven months later it appeared in Winchester. An opportunity for a careful comparison of the two Semitic characters occurred the following year when both plays were presented in the same week:

'Monday. Shakespeare's excellent play of *The Merchant of Venice* was presented this evening. Mr. Collins successfully sustained the arduous and difficult part of the Jew; and Mr. Maxfield maintained all the respectability of the merchant and the firmness of the man. We wish we could say anything in

favour of the gentleman who made his first appearance here in Bassanio. The female parts were extremely well supported; and Mrs. Richards, a new actress of whom we omitted to speak last week, seems likely to become a useful person in the present state of the company.

Friday. This evening we had the comedy of *The Jew*. Though Cumberland's Jew is a very amiable character, yet, contrasted with Shakespeare's, which was represented on Monday, we must call the former the production of art, the latter of nature. It was highly honourable to the feelings of the author, however, to endeavour to place a Jew in a respectable point of view; but we cannot reckon this one of Cumberland's best productions. The characters were well-sustained without exception. Mr. Stanwix never appeared to so much advantage as in the rash and impetuous Charles Ratcliffe, – and we are happy to seize the opportunity of calling this gentleman at least an improving actor'.¹³ The last adjective is a quiet joke, in the Sheridan tradition, at the expense of one of Cumberland's 'thinking actors'.

Fifty years later William Abington, the manager who had unsuccessfully played the part of Hamlet, more happily essayed Shylock. That evening *The Merchant of Venice* was coupled with a farce, *Captain Stevens* and some dances served as an interlude. The offerings were 'greatly applauded by a respectable audience': 'The admirers of the legitimate drama in this city were on Thursday evening highly gratified by the performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. Mr. Abington, the enterprising manager, having undertaken the arduous task of personating Shylock, which he accomplished with considerable ability, and in a style entirely divested of mannerism. The various conflicting and malignant passions which agitate the breast of the unrelenting Hebrew – his deadly spirit of revenge and savage fierceness, were expressively portrayed in voice and gesture, and the audience, by frequent plaudits paid a willing tribute to the dramatic genius of the

actor. Miss Cooke, who made her debut before a Winchester audience as Portia, appears to be an actress of some promise, and met a very favourable reception. The subordinate characters of the play were exceedingly well sustained by the other performers, especially those of the garrulous Old Gobbo, and his sapient offspring Lancelot. On this point the manager has shown a judicious discernment which is not frequently displayed: he appears to consider them (and rightly too) as adjuncts essentially necessary to uphold and keep alive the feeling of general interest which it is the main object to create'.¹⁴

The part of Shylock is a compound of humanity and villainy. This is realised in a larger scale in the person of *Richard III* which was presented in Winchester in both Georgian and Victorian times. In the eighteenth century it was advertised as a 'historick play' but by the nineteenth century interest had shifted to the spectacular and it was subtitled *The Battle of Bosworth Field*. The theatre manager, Edwin Holmes, played Richard; girls were still playing the parts of Edward and Richard, this time Holmes' daughter, 'her first appearance', as the Duke of York. Sixty years after Powell's *Richard* there was still a person of the same name in the company. He was prompter and also played the part of Catesby. One speculates on the possibility of his being the boy who had danced 'in boots and spurs'.¹⁵

King Lear, cast in a similar heroic mould, but on such dimensions that at times it was considered a play impossible to act, was given a number of performances. Nahum Tate's text seems to have been used for most of these. Tate, author of the Christmas hymn 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night', restructured much of the play. The Fool was omitted, the part of Edmund the Bastard was expanded with Machiavellian addresses to the audience and the tragic ending was replaced by the reign of Cordelia and the happy dotage of her father. The performance of 1796 was one of the last of Thomas Collins' Shakespearean roles: 'The

part of Lear is very difficult to personate with any chance of success. Mr. Collins, however, gained a pretty good share of applause from the audience; indeed the very great pleasure he is always seen with in a variety of parts in comedy, will always secure him the indulgence at least of the public in whatever part he may undertake. Mrs. Simpson exerted herself very successfully in Cordelia. Mr. Kelly played Edgar extremely well; and Stanwix gave the bastard Edmund with fire and spirit'.¹⁶

Mr. Elton's visit in 1841 was ostensibly to present Winchester with a Shakespeare Season; this however was tempered by other plays. The C & D troops of the North Hants Yeomanry Cavalry 'desired' *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* in which Elton played Sir Giles Overreach. He also appeared as Rollo in *Pizarro*, but in which of the many versions then acted is not made clear. His main Shakespearean roles were Shylock, at which the house was 'not so well attended as usual', and Hamlet. This play led to a piece of critical writing in the *Hampshire Chronicle*:

'On Wednesday evening this gentleman appeared as Hamlet and sustained that arduous character throughout with a varied expression of vigorous feeling, which evinced an accurate conception of Shakespeare's delightful imagery, and reminded us forcibly of the acting of by-gone days when Kemble and the elder Kean shared in the zenith of their histrionic fame. In his delivery of the well-known soliloquy, Mr. Elton displayed the most touching pathos, divested of mannerism; and in the second scene of the third act, wherein Rosencrantz and Guildenstern endeavour to coax from Hamlet the cause of his disorder, Mr. Elton's sarcastic expression of countenance was in keeping with the bitter tone of contempt in which he offered the passage - "What do you think that I am easier to be played on than a pipe Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, You cannot play me". Mr. Norman deserves great credit for his excellent delineation of Polonius. He retained throughout the

impeturbable gravity generally assumed by antiquated courtiers when in the presence of royalty, and from his "modest inclination of body" it was to be inferred that he "could never stand erect in the presence of a great man". Mr. Shalders, snr. should never give up the ghost - his performance of the character was altogether excellent. In describing his untimely death to Hamlet he was impressive, solemn, and sententious; his deportment was, in fact, quite befitting a mysterious denizen of the nether regions permitted to visit this world on a night. Miss Shalders, as Ophelia, looked the character prettily, and occasionally exhibited scintillations of genius, which give fair promise of future excellence . . .'¹⁷

It is to be hoped that this critic fared more fortunately than W. H. Jacobs, one of the critics of the *Hampshire Advertiser*. In old age Alderman Jacobs published some of his reminiscences of the Winchester Theatre: 'I went one night to write a notice of *Hamlet*. When the ghost of Hamlet's father came on he had to pass beneath a property tree, the branches of which were too low for him. He bobbed his head. I noted the fact and stated that it was an unusual thing for a spiritual being to do'.¹⁸ Jacob's free entry to the theatre was stopped at once.

One play, 'written in Imitation of Shakespeare's Style' that achieved great success was *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* by Nicholas Rowe. This play was useful to the provincial theatres as it gave the more impressive women of the company an opportunity to shine in a title role. The theme is that of a maiden who sacrifices all for her lover. Starving and destitute, fine moments to play, she is rescued by her husband. One of the earliest recorded performances of this play at Winchester was in 1794, eighty years after it was written. Yet from that date, when a Mrs. Simpson from Bath played the part, the play was regularly repeated until the theatre's closure.

R. B. Sheridan was co-partner with Shakespeare as a theatrical standby. Two years after its first production at Covent Garden *The*

Rivals was presented at the Market House Theatre, and remained so firm a favourite that it was chosen for the opening night of the New Theatre. Each of Sheridan's comedies was performed in Winchester as soon as the text became available. *The School for Scandal* enjoyed a total of 150 performances at Drury Lane in 1777 and '78, – an eighteenth century record. A year later Collins advertised that he had obtained 'a true copy of the original manuscript'. This could be an expensive and difficult business. Tate Wilkinson, whom we have already met at the Temporary Theatre, tried to buy, unsuccessfully, a copy of *The Duenna* from Harris, the manager of Covent Garden. Not to be thwarted '... I locked myself up in my room, set down first the jokes I remembered, then I laid a book of the songs before me, and with magazines kept the regulation of the scenes, and by the help of a numerous collect of obsolete Spanish plays I produced an excellent opera; I may say excellent – and an unprecedented compliment; for whenever Mr. Younger, or any other country manager wanted a copy of *The Duenna*, Mr. Harris told them they might play Mr. Wilkinson's'.¹⁹

As with *The Rivals*, *The Duenna*, from 1783, received many performances in Winchester. A laudatory 'puff' appeared in *The Hampshire Chronicle* as Collins and his wife prepared to appear in the play on their benefit night: 'The celebrated Comic Opera of *The Duenna* is a musical production which abounds with such a variety of beautiful songs, duets etc., and in every theatre in the Kingdoms is spoke of in such a strain of panegyric as must ever insure it universal applause. The propriety with which every character is filled, will add greatly to the performance, particularly the parts of Louisa, Don Carlos and Clara, which must give an opportunity for the display of the very powerful talents of Mrs. Ward and Miss Sharrock; and on the whole, perhaps it is not possible for *The Duenna* to be better performed out of London than it will be on Monday evening'.²⁰

The previous year *The Critic* had been presented. This had a passing popularity. One suspects the spectacular effect of the processions, the moving ships and the explosion of the Spanish Armada in the last scene contributed towards the enthusiasm with which the play was at first received.

18th century comedies

Apart from Shakespeare and Sheridan a bewildering variety of plays and entertainments were presented and a few of these will have to stand as representatives of the many. *The Recruiting Sergeant* represents two trends that found favour in the eighteenth century: a fondness for both light operas and the sight of a woman in breeches. Libretto was by Isaac Bickerstaffe and music by Charles Dibdin. Mrs. Ward played the Sergeant and any fears that would-be patrons might have felt were dispelled by the *Hampshire Chronicle* in 1784: 'When dressed in breeches she is perfectly at ease; her attitudes and deportment were so just, so graceful, and so happily conformable to the variety of the character, as to justify pronouncing it an inimitable piece of acting, and gave her an indisputable claim to the general applause which resounded from every part of the house...'.²¹

Farquhar had set the fashion with *The Recruiting Officer*. Similar plays multiplied. One called *The Camp* and attributed to Sheridan was performed in 1779. This is interesting as a new scene is advertised: The Grand Camp at Coxheath. William Cave the scene painter possibly saw the design by de Louthembourg for this which was shown in London for sixty nights. His own would likely have been a fashionable copy painted from memory.²²

In imitation of the 'little eyases' some plans had been made in London in the second half of the eighteenth century to form a theatrical company composed of children.²³ These ideas came to nothing; yet when James Davies, Collins' partner, presented the eight children of his family in Garrick's *Miss in Her Teens*,

a play full of sparkling, artificial dialogue, the audience was reminded of the attempt. The result, referred to as 'the Lilliputian Theatre' was obviously appreciated. '... the parents of these children must have taken indefatigable pains in training their little offspring to such an undertaking, and happy are we to say that their labour was not lost, as the house was well-filled with an audience truly respectable. The part of Captain Flash was performed by a little boy that could not exceed two feet seven inches, and whose manly collection and theatrical deportment would have been worthy of imitation by many of our modern actors'.²⁴

However the Davies family did not always please. For their benefit in 1780 they presented Hugh Kelly's comedy *A Word to the Wise*, a play devolving around parental authority, and the farce *Deuce is in Him*. Of this Sarah Williams wrote to her husband at Westminster: 'We went last night to one of the very worst of all sentimental comedies, by the name of *A Word to the Wise* or *All for the Best*, a play of Kelly's that was hissed off the London stage; I could not have sat the entertainment out; but for an interlude called *True Blue* which, though it was completely vulgar, yet there was such a loyal song in it, of Brittania's ruling the main, etc., that it made my heart glad; and amply atoned for the insipidity of the play; we were very hot and I wished a hundred times for a cool walk with you up Benefit Lane'.²⁵

In fairness it must be stated that the play was condemned not for any demerits of its own but because of its author's suspected political opinions. *True Blue*, in part a picture of low life in Billingsgate, was accompanied by a 'transparency view of the fleet at Spithead'. These transparencies, usually nautical in character, were very popular and prepared the audience for the spectacles that were to come later. The death of Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 was an opportunity for a more elaborate piece of artistry: 'An Occasional Address will be spoken by Mr. Kelly to the memory of the ever-to-be

lamented Nelson; at the end of which will be exhibited (for this night only) a most super transparency, painted expressly for the purpose by Mr. Young, Artist, of Southampton, representing the great Nelson expiring in the Arms of Victory; with Brittania pointing out his name and Deeds, - borne by the Wings of Time and the trumpet of Fame to Immortality; with a view of His Majesty's ship Victory, which bears Nelson's Flag, pouring his irresistible thunder on the Enemy's Fleet which appears sinking, burning, and striking under the superiority of the British Fleet'.²⁶

Collins decided to donate the profits of one night to a fund set up to relieve the widows and orphans of men killed at Trafalgar. Fortunately the house was well attended.

The spectacular reached its zenith in a production of *Blue Beard* or *Female Curiosity* by George Colman the Younger filched from a Parisian success *Barbe-Bleue* which in turn was taken from the Cardenio tale in *Don Quixote*. When the play appeared in Southampton it ran for twenty-two nights in one season, a sign of success in the provinces. The advertisement whetted the appetite for some of the sights to come: 'The Oriental Procession of Blue Beard. The View of a Turkish Village and an extensive mountainous tract of country beyond it. After some time the Sun rises in a beautiful and transparent Manner...'.²⁷

As well as portrait figures which changed their positions, turning from 'devices of love' to 'subjects of horror and death' there were sinking doors, transformation scenes, and exciting action: 'Fatima (the heroine) struggles with Abomelique, who attempts to kill her; and, in the struggle, snatches the Dagger from the pedestal of the Skeleton. The Skeleton rises on his feet, lifts his arm which holds the Dart, and keeps it suspended... Selim and Abomelique fight with Scimitars. During the Combat, enter Irene and Shacabae. After a hand contest, Selim overthrows Abomelique at the foot of the Skeleton. The Skeleton instantly plunges the Dart, which he held suspended, into the

Breast of Abomelique, and sinks with him beneath the earth. A volume of Flame arises, and the earth closes'.²⁸

Mr. Jeboult, a Salisbury painter, successfully produced *Blue Beard's Castle*, *The Corridor*, and *The Blue Chamber*. The greatest complication however was the royal elephant on which Abomelique enters in the first act of the play to the sound of distant music. Jeboult managed to contrive an enormous mechanical creature which not only did duty at Southampton and Winchester but was also shipped to the Isle of Wight. This, combined with the incidental Dances of Miss Mills and Mrs. Allen in appropriate Turkish costume 'delighted the spectators'.²⁹

One further play may represent the personal interest of playwrights in the provincial theatre. *Ion* was written in 1835 by Thomas Noon Talfourd, Sergeant-at-Law and Member of Parliament for Reading, a friend of Charles Dickens and Macready the actor. Talfourd wrote the play with one eye on Addison's *Cato*; it is classical in theme but composed in ill-managed blank verse. However, two months after the London premiere the play was staged for the benefit of Mr. Cathcart in Winchester, where it was presumably successfully received, for in 1853 Talfourd, by then a Judge, visited Winchester and presented the City Museum with an autographed copy of the play. One wonders whether the merits of the play or the distinction of the author were the more readily remembered.³⁰

The Actors

Little is known of the members of the circuit company who visited Winchester beyond the plays in which they performed and the few opinions that were printed. For the most part the actors lived a hard life. Little wealth was amassed and it was rare for a provincial actor to leave a will. Either disaster or good fortune would bring a person temporarily to the forefront. At the beginning of this chapter we looked at the programme that the Deveulle family presented on its benefit night. On a Sunday evening, three

years after that performance, Deveulle went with a friend to Droxford and on the way back to Salisbury the cart in which they were riding overturned knocking the actor insensible. His companion, who was very drunk, was thrown clear of the cart and remained in a stupor for over an hour. When he was able to gather his wits he found Deveulle trapped under the shafts of the carriage, by that time dead. The body was brought back to the city and buried in the Close. Through thick and thin the company had established a tradition of clinging together. A benefit performance for Mrs. Deveulle and her children was held in Salisbury and the theatre was 'most brilliantly crowded'. The members of the company gave their services without payment and various citizens sent practical gifts to help the widow.³¹

For a while fate dealt a little more kindly with Tom Collins the son of the manager, but sorrow and death quickly caught up with him. Young Collins was a spirited actor very popular with the Winchester audiences. He often received a commendatory remark from the newspaper critic: '*Hartford Bridge* gained all the applause the actors or managers could wish, and indeed too much can hardly be said of the excellent performance of Sheridan and Young Collins in that piece'. Again: 'The musical farce of *Netley Abbey* followed, in which the most striking scene is a description of a sea-fight which was excellently given by Mr. Collins, junior'. Both pieces, incidentally, were operettas by William Pearce who used locations in the vicinity of Portsmouth for several of his works. Tom Collins in 1795 married Henrietta Davies, the daughter of the elder Collins' partner. She had made her name as a singer with the company as well as at festival oratorios. They had a child in 1797 but he died at their home in Southampton when only a few months old. R. B. Sheridan who had seen Tom act in Winchester engaged him to play at Drury Lane from 1802. The contract was for three years at a salary of £4 a week for the first year, rising by £1 a week each year. He was so successful that this was raised to £6, £7, and

£8 and before the end of the term he was re-engaged at a salary of £10, £12, and £14 per week. A reporter in the *Hampshire Chronicle* proudly described his first night: 'On Saturday evening Mr. T. Collins (late of our Theatre) made his first appearance at Drury Lane, in the character of Jabal, in the comedy of *The Jew* and acquitted himself in a manner fully sufficient to support the pre-possession raised in his favour by those who had witnessed his success in the country . . . The best way of conveying an idea of a stranger who comes out on the London boards is to mention a well-known actor who he resembles. In the present instance this method is impracticable. Mr. Collins has something of Bannister, something of Wathen, something of Fawcett, something of Knight, and something of the much regretted Edwin, but he is very different from all of them. His manner is original and singular. The grand requisite for such acting is vivacity, and this Mr. C. possesses to an uncommon degree. He seems to have a wonderful flow of animal spirits, and fully to feel in himself the different sensations which it is his business to excite in others'.³²

Tom returned to the Southern circuit as a regular summer visitor, but his wife stayed in London. Her health was poor and she died at the age of about thirty at Brompton in 1805. Two months later Tom himself died. He is the only member of our theatre whose portrait survives. In it he is posing as Master Slender; it is by de Wilde.³³

A Mr. Floyer, who was at the Winchester Theatre for over thirty years, obtained lasting fame from a pen portrait of himself by Charles Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby*. The character of Mr. Folair who rehearsed *The Savage and the Maiden* with the Infant Phenomenon on the stage of the old Ports-

mouth Theatre was modelled on Floyer. His shabbiness and humour are clearly picked out by the novelist: 'Mr. Folair's head was usually decorated by a very round hat, unusually high in the crown, and curled up quite tight in the brims. On the present occasion he wore it very much on one side, with the back part forward in consequence of it being the least rusty; round his neck he wore a flaming red worsted comforter, where one of the straggling ends peeped out beneath his threadbare Newmarket coat, which was very tight and buttoned all the way up. He carried in his hand one very dirty glove, and a cheap dress cane with a glass handle; in short his whole appearance was unusually dashing, and demonstrated a far more scrupulous attention to his toilet, than he was in the habit of bestowing upon it'.

Floyer was the leading comedian of the company and a singer. As he himself would have chosen the plays presented on his benefit nights a look at the titles of some of these will convey the range of his taste: *My Grandmother*, an entertainment; *The Will*, a comedy; *The Young Hussar*, a drama 'interspersed with music'; *The Battle of Hexham*, an entertainment; *The Free Knights*, a grand spectacle; *The Castle of Andalusia*, an opera; *The Castle of Olival*, a dramatic romance; *Hamlet Travestie*, a burlesque tragedy; *Don Giovanni*, a spectacle; *Inkle and Yarico*, a drama; *The London Hermit*, a comedy . . . the list continues over the years until 1838.³⁴ This is an amazing record of stability in a highly mobile profession and it says much for the spirit of community that was first kindled in the cramped conditions of the Market House and was fostered over the years until the New Theatre, presumptuously termed in its latter days the Theatre Royal, gradually fell into decline.

5. VISITORS TO WINCHESTER

There were a number of inns in the vicinity of Covent Garden which in the eighteenth century were used as houses of call by the Managers of provincial theatres. It is most likely that Collins and his successors visited these when at the end of the season they hired actors to come to Winchester for the summer recess. A manager would have to enquire about the parts that an actor habitually played and also the number of lines that he could nightly commit to memory. For convenience these were divided into 'lengths' and there were forty-two lines to a length. An actor for his part often asked for his 'charges', – cash to pay for his journey to the provincial theatre. One guinea was normally given for every hundred miles the actor would have to travel.¹

A number of interesting visitors from Covent Garden and Drury Lane joined the circuit company for short seasons. Winchester had received players from the Bath and Bristol companies in the early days of the New Theatre but in 1792 one of the first of a number of celebrated actors arrived. This was John Quick of Covent Garden. Quick was once described as 'one of the last of the Garrick school'. Certainly, if fortune serves as a guide, he was a man of ability leaving £10,000 at his death. Before the age of eighteen he had played Hamlet, Romeo and Richard III. Later he was the original Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer* and Acres in *The Rivals*. In Winchester his talents seemed somewhat wasted when he appeared in the title role of *Barnaby Rattle*, a pot-boiler adapted anonymously from one of Betterton's comedies.²

Sarah Smith was employed by Covent Garden in 1805 for an 'enormous salary' on a three year contract. In fact she received £18 a week for her first season. This rose by £1 a week for the second and third seasons as was customary. Collins engaged her at the end of her first season in London 'at considerable

expense'. He already knew this seventeen year old girl as her widowed mother had earlier joined the Salisbury company and Sarah herself had played Edward in *Every One Has His Fault*. Her mother remarried and became a prolific child-bearer and Sarah, although for a while wanting to give up the stage, had to support the family. She was below the height usually expected of tragic heroines yet she had a meteoric career progressing from Salisbury to Lancaster, to York, where she worked with Tate Wilkinson, to Birmingham, Bath and finally to London. A disappointment awaited her here in spite of her salary: 'Miss Smith was mortified to find that all the first rate characters in tragedy were then in the hands of a more able representative, Mrs. Siddons, and that when she did perform, it was only as a substitute for that great actress'.³

This possibly explains her readiness to come to Winchester for she played the title role in *Jane Shore* ('no person can be admitted behind the Scenes'); Lady Randolph in *Douglas* ('Nothing under full price'); Zaphira in *Barbarosa* and Catherine in *Catherine and Petruccio*. The comedy part had to be chosen with care for '... her countenance is well calculated to express the violent passions of the mind; but in the delineation of tenderness and sympathy she is very deficient'.⁴

Another actress with limited dramatic abilities, but who was remarkably pretty and accomplished at singing, was Maria Foote. Her father claimed to be a relative of the famous mimic Samuel Foote who was encountered in Section Two. In 1815 at the age of eighteen she enjoyed an intrigue with Colonel Berkeley; there were two children but no marriage as a result of this. Later 'Pea Green Hayes' proposed to her, withdrew, and in a subsequent breach of promise suit was ordered to pay £3,000 damages. She came to Winchester in 1826 after a Bath audience had taken a dislike to her haughty manner and

THE CELEBRATED
Miss FOOTE.

Theatre, Winchester.

The Managers of the Theatre, ever anxious to contribute to the amusement of their Patrons and Friends, the Ladies and Gentlemen of Winchester and its Vicinity, respectfully announce the Engagement of that fascinating, attractive, and celebrated Actress, Miss FOOTE, (for ONE NIGHT ONLY) who will make her Appearance on Saturday Evening.

On SATURDAY EVENING NEXT, SEPT. 16, 1826,

Will be presented Mrs. Cowley's elegant and favourite Comedy of The

Belle's Stratagem.

The Part of LETITIA HARDY by

MISS FOOTE,

In which Character she will introduce the popular Song of

"Where are you going, my pretty Maid?"

Doricourt, - - - - - Mr KELLY

Old Hardy, Mr FLOYER | Courtall, Mr WARWICK | Flutter, Mr SHALDERS

Mountebank, Mr HOLLINGSWORTH | Saville, Mr LOCKWOOD

Villars, Mr HEATHCOTE | Dick, Mr ATTWOOD | Servant, Mr PIERCY

Sir George Touchwood, Mr MAXFIELD

Lady Frances Touchwood, Miss POOLE | Miss Ogle, Miss DRAKE

Miss Willis, Mrs LOCKWOOD | Mrs Racket, Mrs SHALDERS

In Act 3, A MASQUERADE.

To conclude with (not acted here these three years) the Musical Entertainment called

**A ROLAND
 For an Oliver**

Sir Mark Chase, Mr HOLLINGSWORTH | Mr Selborne, Mr WARWICK

Alfred Highflyer, - Mr SHALDERS

Fixture, Mr FLOYER | Gamekeeper (with a Song), Mr LOCKWOOD

Mrs Selborne, Mrs LOCKWOOD | Mrs Fixture, Miss DRAKE

Maria Darlington, MISS FOOTE,

In which she will Sing her Original

WALTZING SONG.

Places for the Boxes and Tickets to be had of Mr Bracewell, Library, in the Square. Tickets may also be had at Jacob and Johnson's, High Street.

N.B. It is particularly requested that Tickets will be taken for the Number of Places wanted, otherwise they cannot be positively secured.

* * * TO BEGIN PRECISELY AT SEVEN O'CLOCK.

caused a disturbance in the theatre. Here she played in Mrs. Hannah Cowley's comedy of manners, *The Belle's Stratagem*. There was a return visit the following year when unfavourable comment was made on her performance of Maggy in *The Highland Reel*, a comic romance by John O'Keeffe:

'The elegant Miss Foote appeared at our Theatre on Saturday and Monday evenings last, to overflowing houses. On Saturday she played Rosalind in Shakespeare's Comedy of *As You Like It*, and a most chaste and correct performance it was. On Monday she personated Olivia, in Mrs. Cowley's *Bold Stroke for a Husband*, with equal excellence. On the former occasion she was well supported, but on Monday there was a flatness in the pieces, and the performance (especially in the entertainment), which somewhat clouded her very marked exertions, and induced her to exceed, in some degree, that limit of good taste, beyond which the female spirit should not wander. The passions will often be pleased with that which the cooler judgement cannot approve'.⁵

Whatever her excesses on that night Judge Talfourd, another Winchester link, commended highly her singing of 'Where are you going to, my pretty maid?' One feels that it was needless to ask Maria such a question. Throughout her theatrical career marriage seems to have been uppermost in her mind. Her wedding to the fourth Earl of Harrington took place in 1831. There were no more stage appearances after that.

Edmund Kean, possibly the most famous of Winchester's theatrical visitors, made three appearances in the city. The first was in 1819 for two nights when he starred in *Othello* and *Richard III* playing the name part in each. Kean was a little man, redeeming his lack of inches by his flamboyance both on and off the stage. A Mrs. Trench who saw his Richard claimed that Kean reminded her, in his resemblance to a caged lion, of Bonaparte: '... he delighted me in *Richard III* ... he showed me that Richard possesses a mine of humour and pleasantry with all the grace

of high breeding grafted on to strong and brilliant intellect. He gave probability to the drama by throwing this favourable light in the character, particularly in the scene with Lady Anne'.

Appearing in the same programme as Kean were the Harlequin and Clown of Drury Lane. They were joined by members of the company in a pantomime 'performed in a style not unworthy of the boards of a Metropolitan Theatre'.⁶

Kean fell violently in love with Charlotte Cox, the wife of a London Alderman. He wrote her a series of letters which, once discovered, were described as 'fiery, fluent, and filthy'. A court case followed in which the Alderman was awarded £800 damages. Public censure was heavy. A writer in *The Times* fulminated categorically that Kean had 'advanced many steps in profligacy beyond the most profligate of his sisters and brethren of the stage. It is of little consequence whether the character of King Richard or Othello be well or ill acted; but it is of importance that public feeling be not outraged'.⁷ Public feeling was outraged, though, and there were anti-Kean riots at Drury Lane. Kean made a tour of Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh. At each city he was hounded by demonstrators. In August he came to Winchester where his visit appears to have passed without incident. The next month he left for the United States and the riots caught up with him again.

Half dead from alcohol poisoning, surrounded by creditors, nursed by Miss Tidswell, plagued by a mistress, he made one further appearance here as Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. The part in its heyday Judge Talfourd says 'sent Lord Byron into hysterics and made Mrs. Glover tremble'.⁸ The heyday was over however – so much so that the management felt they must cajole the audience: '... at no period of Mr. Kean's professional exertions have his talents shone forth with more undiminished vigour, discrimination and success than in the very recent engagements in the metropolitan theatres. The managers

THEATRE, WINCHESTER.

THE Public are most respectfully informed that on Wednesday Evening Mr Mathews performed "His Trip to America," instead of "His Youthful Days," as advertised in the Bills of the Day. And this Evening, FRIDAY, he will have the Honour of delivering "His Youthful Days," and performing "Monsieur Morbleu."

Positively the **LAST NIGHT** of
Mr. MATHEWS'S

PERFORMANCE IN WINCHESTER.

On Friday Evening next, July 14, 1826,

Mr. MATHEWS

WILL BE FOUND

AT HOME!!!

And deliver his LECTURE on Character, Manners, and Peculiarities, under the Title of THE

Youthful Days
OF
MR. MATHEWS.

PART I.

From *Nothing* to the age of *an Hour and a Quarter*—First, the Infant, &c.—Parentage and Childhood—from *One to Ten*—"Then the School-boy with shining Morning Face"—Preparatory Seminary—Merchant Tailors' School—Public Speeches—Latin, Greek, and English.

Song—**SCHOOL ORATORS.**

From *Ten to Fifteen*—Bound Apprentice—Wilkes, Chamberlain of London—Dramatic Maria of Master Charles Mathews—First Attempt as an Actor in Public—Fencing—Interview with Macklin—The Veteran's Opinion of the Qualifications of a Tragedian—Elopement from Home—Fat Traveller—Ab Llewellyn—Ab Lloyd, Esq.—Mineral Waters—Stratford-upon-Avon—Shakespeare's Tomb.

Song—**MARKET DAY.**

Welsh Lecture on English Drunkenness—Suett, the Consulian—Letter of Recommendation—Lollipop and Mr Smith.

Song—**LOCO-MOTIVE WAITER.**

PART II.

Arrival in Dublin—Careful Carman—Ingenious Porter—First Appearance in Dublin—Dickie Suett's Letter—Hibernian Friends.

Song—**AN IRISH RUBBER OF WHIST.**

Dublin Company—O'Flanagan—George Augustus Pleyel, or the Line of Beauty—Mr Trombone—Daniel O'Rourke's Dream—How to drive a Fig—Leaves Ireland—Engaged at Liverpool.

Song—**THE NIGHT COACH.**

Mr Mathews engaged for the York Company—Interview with Tate Wilkinson—The Wandering Patentee—Tate's Antipathies—Rats—Mr Memble—The Old Scotch Lady's little Anecdote—Engaged for London.

Song—**MEMORANDUM BOOK.**

To which will be added, the Entertainment (never acted here) of

Monsieur Tonson.

Monsieur Morbleu, Mr. MATHEWS

Tom King, Mr SHALDERS | Useful, Mr MAXFIELD | Jack Ardourley, Mr WARWICK
Mr Thompson, Mr HEATHCOTE | Rusty, Mr HOLLINGSWORTH | Fip, Mr GERRISH
Nap, Mr WINGROVE | Want'em, Mr PIERCY | Snap, Mr COBURN
George, Mr WHITE | Trap, Mr SEALE
Madame Bellegarde, - - Mrs WINGROVE | Mrs Thompson, - - Mrs JEFFRESON
Adolphine De Courcy, Mrs SHALDERS

To begin as soon as Domum is over.

No Half Price can be taken.—Tickets for the Boxes to be had, and Places taken, of Mr Bracewell, in the Square.

[Jacot and Johnson, Printers, County Newspaper Office, Winchester.

Plate 5. Playbill of the New Theatre.
Hampshire Chronicle.

therefore confidently anticipate that they have provided a real and rich treat for their patrons and respectfully solicit that support to their effects . . .⁹

There is no report of the performance. He died three years later.

His son Charles played Hamlet for one night here in 1835. This was a part his father had attempted unsuccessfully. Charles' reading was based on study and reasoning rather than presenting Shakespeare in 'flashes of lightning'.¹⁰ His voice, free from alcohol, escaped the harshness and sudden tricks characteristic of his father's. Even more important, thought Gladstone, was the fact that he 'endeavoured to dissociate the noble pursuits of the drama from elements that could be thought to partake of moral and social contamination'. He returned in 1838 to act in *The Iron Chest*. In this he played the villain, Sir Edward Mortimer, head-keeper of the New Forest, a role said to have been Kean's favourite, but not particularly appreciated by his audiences. His last appearance in the city was in 1840 after a taxing tour of America. The National Theatre at New York in which he was playing burnt down, he suffered badly from a throat infection and a counterweight fell from the flies and narrowly missed him, killing a stagehand at his side. The performance in Winchester of *A Lady of Lyons* luckily passed without mishap.¹¹

'Our Theatre was crowded to excess on Wednesday and Friday last (July 12th and 14th, 1826) to witness the extensive comical and musical powers of the celebrated Mathews. His *Trip to America* and *Youthful Days* replete with wit and humour, raised universal mirth; nor was he less "at home" in the admirable delineation of Marbleu in *Monsieur Tonson*, a character peculiarly adapted to his genius'.¹² The 'celebrated Mathews' was Charles Mathews, so slim that, although less than six foot, he appeared to be a maypole. 'He's too tall for low comedy' quipped Tate Wilkinson. The audience certainly appreciated this visit. The city had 'not

known so numerous and so good-tempered an audience for many years'.

Child Actors

From the time of the example of playing Romeo and Hamlet on the professional stage at the age of 11 set by Master Betty in 1802 numbers of child actors mushroomed. Two of them visited Winchester, both, co-incidentally, in the same year, 1826. The first was George Grossmith from Reading who at the age of eight was making a Hampshire tour. After his Winchester appearance he went on to the Town Hall at Basingstoke and to Mr. Ritson's school-room at Alresford. He, it was advertised, would act scenes from *Hamlet*, *Pizarro*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III* amongst other plays. The newspaper acclaimed the performance of the child: 'The performances of Master Grossmith are fashioned after those of Mathews—they commence with an introductory address; a journey in a stage coach; a laughable piece entitled *Pecks of Trouble*; and scenes from Shakespeare's plays, interspersed with comic songs the whole of which is given in a style that proves the possession of mental powers far beyond his years . . .'¹³

At an even earlier age, seven, Master Burke combined musical talents with the dramatic. He was the son of a Belfast doctor and appeared in Dublin at the age of five. His Winchester programme was made up of *The Review* in which he acted Looney McTrotter the Irish boor and then the name part in *Bombastes Furioso*. Between the pieces he played a concerto on the violin after which he led the band in Rossini's overture to *Tancredi*. The audience apparently 'testified its complete gratification'. Members of the company, of course, played supporting characters; Shalders and Floyer, both of whom have been previously mentioned, were especially commended.¹⁴

Although Charles Kemble, the brother of John Philip Kemble, 'clumsy, especially about the ankles', retired from the stage in 1836 he gave a series of readings from Shakespeare at

Willis's Rooms in the West End in 1844 and '45. These were repeated in the provinces and 1845 saw the actor, very much beset by deafness, in Winchester, the subject of the last presentation of William Abington.

T. P. Cooke was a visitor who, one would have thought, would have drawn a crowded house. He had played the part of William in Jerrold's highly popular melodrama *Black-Eyed Susan* for over a hundred nights at the Adelphi Theatre until he was engaged by the Covent Garden management to continue the role there. Unfortunately at Winchester in 1830 whilst the boxes were crowded the pit and gallery were poorly attended. Cooke was an interesting person who had a passion for the sea, rather than the stage, which led him to the battle of Cape St. Vincent. He played Nelson at Astley's Amphitheatre after the battle of Trafalgar. In place of a pit at Astley's there was a circus ring and the presentations usually included galloping stampedes in spectacular action. The audience became highly impatient of the legitimate stage dialogue and the cry was taken up: 'Cut the cackle, and come to the horses!' Accompanying the nautical melodrama was a performance of the farce *Monsieur Tonson* in which Cooke played Marbleu the part that Mathews had given several years before. This necessitated singing a French duet with Madame Bellegarde.

Henry Russell, the actor and song writer, gave a number of recitals at the Winchester Theatre in the last few years before its closure and he generally drew a full house. 'His songs will live for ever', proclaimed Jerrold's *Shilling Magazine*, and some of them still are sung or played by military bands: Cheer Boys, Cheer!; A Life on the Ocean Waves; The Ivy Green; Woodman Spare that Tree; the list could be extended to over eight hundred titles. In his youth he had been a pupil of Rossini and on his return to England he appeared at the Surrey Theatre. Before his first visit to Winchester in 1846 he had toured the United States and Canada where he used his facility for song writing in an anti

slavery campaign. Alderman Stopher in his manuscript notes on the streets of Winchester recorded that he had heard Russell sing his popular songs at the theatre. He was the character who had remained in his memory over the years.¹⁵

In addition to the actors and singers who appeared in the city a number of curious travelling entertainments found their way here. Some were of dubious merit, but they obviously formed a point of conversation in a city where attractions were few and far between. *The Phantasmagoria* which was presented at Windsor to the Royal Family, and shown to the Emperor of Germany arrived in 1802. This was a series of optical illusions which in the course of the evening disclosed 'the artifices by which pretended Magicians and Exorcists have imposed upon the credulous and superstitious'. A wide range of apparitions were promised: 'the Prince of Wales; Duke of York; Louis XVI which changes to a Skeleton; Lord Nelson; Sir Ralph Abercrombie; Paswan Oglon the Turkish Rebel; Shakespeare; Kemble as Octavian in *The Mountaineers*; Mrs. Jordan; Martha Grey and Old Smoker of Brighton; the Bleeding Nun from *The Monk*; the Ghost Scene in *Hamlet*; Macbeth and the Witches; the Witch of Endor, etc., to conclude with the Striking Likeness of His Majesty and God Save the King'.¹⁶

A similar series of transparencies and projections came twenty years later, 'The Theatre of Arts', which, it was claimed, had been shown in London and Paris. This would appear to have been less sensational than the forerunner. Amongst other pieces there were 'the superb representation of His Majesty landing in Scotland; the village of Tivoli; the Island of St. Helena; the City of Rome; to conclude with a Storm at Sea'.¹⁷

Another evening in 1805 was devoted to *Fire and Water*. This had received over one hundred performances at the Lyceum Theatre in the Strand - a theatre that later in the century Irving was to make famous. The

advertisements assured patrons that the pyro-technics would be without smoke or gun-powder – ‘so perfectly innocent that they may be exhibited in the most superb Drawing-room without sustaining it the smallest injury’. Jets of water formed into a number of ‘devices’: ‘... the Prince of Wales feathers, most correct; Globes, Umbrellas, etc., etc., and the ascending and descending of a Ball by a small jet of water, is esteemed by the admirers of the Fine Arts to have the most pleasing and astonishing effect’.¹⁸

Astronomy lectures were popular especially when they were illustrated by an orrery, a machine named after the Earl of Orrery, which represented in the movements of its parts the phases of the planets in their orbits. Mr. Walker, junior, came in 1800 with his version of a transparent orrery or eidouranion. This, it was advertised, had been used at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket. Later Mr. Lloyd arrived with an orrery ‘of astounding magnitude and magnificence’. Even when the theatre had declined, Mr. Popham’s astronomy lectures would attract ‘a numerous and highly respectable audience’.¹⁹

A late, and unsuccessful, visitor to arrive was Signor Lorenzo Pyroranni the Italian Salamander or Fire King. He promised to ‘enter a blazing fire and walk calmly and breathe freely in the midst of flames sufficient to consume any other man’. A performance was advertised for a Monday evening and a ‘fashionable morning performance on Tuesday at 3 o’clock’. This however did not materialise, for on the first night ‘the professor, clothed in a prepared dress, merely presented himself in the centre of some burning jets of gas on which spirits of wine were sprinkled. He apologised for the bad burning of the gas, was much hissed, and then slunk out of the building, followed by a number of the audience and other persons at his heels from whose no doubt intended trouncing he narrowly escaped and took shelter in a public house’.²⁰

At sixpence a seat in the pit there was no doubt that the audience intended to take matters into its own hands. That, however occurred in 1859, a time at which the theatre was almost at the extent of its slow decay.

6. PRACTICAL MATTERS IN THE THEATRE

There are many humdrum practical matters which must be attended to in any theatre. These have remained constant over the years – paying the actors, meeting the expenses, admitting the audience, rehearsing the play, changing the scenes, looking after the stocks . . . all familiar problems to any administrator. As such matters are so ordinary there is little particular material that is available. There are, for example, no account books extant for our theatre but practices in the provinces at theatres were similar and so an idea of the management of the Winchester house can be given. At the time of the Temporary Theatre and the Market House Theatre members of the company did not receive a regular salary. Instead a sharing

system was adopted. A list of the expenses would be made at the end of each performance – heating and candles were the chief – and these were deducted from the receipts. Actors were generally responsible for their own period costumes, a heavy expense, although a certain amount of pooling took place. One must remember, too, that it was not until the 1750s that Shakespeare was acted in other than contemporary dress. Once the expenses were deducted from the receipts the remainder was parcelled out amongst the actors in equal shares. By custom the manager took five shares, one for acting, and the other four, which were known as ‘dead shares’, to defray such costs as the properties, the scenery and the running repairs that the theatre

needed.¹ A stock debt had arisen when Collins bought up the shares of the New Theatre, and this had to be dissolved with the dead shares. The number was raised from three, one below the normal, to five, a change that did not remain uncensured by some members of the company.

The share system was supplemented by 'benefit nights'. Each member of the company had an agreed number of such nights, usually one a season with a second as a reward for success. On this he would hope to make a profit and he would also be at the centre of the attraction. The gentleman who wrote the *Theatrical Remarks* in the *Hampshire Chronicle* outlined, in 1794, the purpose of these nights: 'The objects of benefits is to help out a small salary and to give an opportunity to certain performers to show themselves before the public in a light they think most advantageous to themselves. Mr. Collins, junior, was very judicious in his choice of *The Children in the Wood* for his benefit on Monday last, in which, as in many other pieces, he shews great judgement and discrimination of character; but the lovers of music certainly expected more from Miss Davies than *Lullaby*.'²

We have seen, in the case of the Deveulles, that families rather than individuals tended to present, and profit from, the benefit. A normal arrangement would consist of the beneficiary paying an agreed sum as charges for the use of the theatre and to defray such expenses as the salaries of the other actors, the box-keeper, the band, and any stage staff as well as the cost of printing newspaper advertisements and bills. In order to save on the latter costs the beneficiary often got his wife to write the bills by hand and examples have been found of bills used several times with patches obliterating former dates and places. George Parker wrote disgustedly in 1781 of 'a Winchester manager (who) exhorted 2 guineas on each person's benefit and in addition charged some of the stock debt on the benefit'.³ This was presumably Collins. Sometimes a 'clear benefit' occurred at which

all the charges were paid by the management. These, however, were rare. Normally at benefits there was no half-price after nine o'clock. A speech of gratitude was made at the performance by the beneficiary and often a notice would be placed in the local newspaper, especially, as here, when the managers had profited.

'Messers Collins and Davies, managers of this Theatre present their most dutiful Respects to the ladies and gentlemen of Winchester and its Environs; and the Season being now closed, beg Leave to return their most sincere and grateful thanks for the favours so obligingly conferred on them and their company. At the same time Mr. Davies returns his acknowledgements, in particular, to those friends who did him the kindness to appear at his benefit, as does Mr. Collins; favours of which they will always hold a due recollection'.⁴

Small details were carefully attended to by the person selecting his benefit night and an almanac could prove to be a useful investment: 'Monday being a moon-light night, will no doubt induce many people in the vicinity of Winchester to attend the Theatre'.

Mr. Clarkton and Mrs. Richland staging a production of *King Lear* and asking such a favourite as Collins to play the lead, still seem to have struck unlucky: '... we fear from the thinness of the house little benefit was derived from the receipts of the evening'.

Others, fearful that the receipts would not cover the charges, refuse their due benefit night.

Sometimes the profits of the evening were for a cause other than the actors. Magistrates would stipulate as a condition of granting a licence that once in the season a benefit performance must be given for the poor of one of the city parishes. This happened here several times at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the relevant information would appear in the local papers. The performances to benefit the widows and orphans of the Battle of Trafalgar and the benefit for the Widow Deveulle have already been noted.

In the early 1800s the County Hospital received a number of benefits and in 1858 a fund for the establishment of a Winchester Dramatic College received £15 after a performance of *His Last Legs* – ‘a handsome sum’ the *Hampshire Chronicle* reported.⁵

Local Patronage

Local magnates or a body would bespeak a play. They selected it, paid a subsidy, and bought a number of the tickets which they distributed to their friends. Plays in our theatre were performed ‘by desire of’ a wide range of aristocratic families: Sir Henry Rivers; R. Meyler, Esq., M.P.; Lady Francis Wright Wilson; H. P. Delme, Esq., High Sheriff; Sir William Heathcote, Bart.; Paulet St. John Mildmay, Esq., Steward of the Races. The last gentleman was unlucky in having his pocket picked when he attended a performance he had bespoken. The Mayor of Winchester sometimes acted as patron. A play would also receive support from a group of people such as the Gentlemen of the College; the Masons of the Lodge; Winton House Seminary for Young Ladies; or the Officers of the 67th Regiment. By the middle of the nineteenth century the greater number of performances were ‘by desire of the officers of the garrison’.⁶ When the sharing system stopped the benefit system still continued.

The custom of paying a salary began with the hire of London stars. These would receive a guaranteed sum instead of a share; they might also be given a stipulated number of benefit evenings. Gradually the salary system extended to the regular members of the company. The exact date of this is not known. As early as 1773 Collins engaged a Thomas Robson to become a member of the company: ‘Sir,

In reply to yours of the 2nd inst. the most advantageous terms it is our power to offer you is One Guinea per week certain, a single benefit at Salisbury and Winchester, paying only the incidental expenses of the night, as Music, Servants, etc. (which will not be above £4. 4). We shall open at Sarum about the

26th or 27th of this month, shall be there till the middle of Jan. and the remainder of the winter at Winchester, three and twenty miles only distant. – If these terms are acceptable, let me know, and I will send you a list of parts.

I remain,

Sir, Your very humble servant,

THO. COLLINS.’

Southton

For a while there was an awkward mixture; the company was sometimes on salary and sometimes sharing. Collins and Davies were accused by a disgruntled actor, John Brown-smith, of putting the company on shares in towns where little success was to be expected but on salary when financial expectations appeared remunerative.⁸ By the 1820s all the actors were receiving between £1. 1/- and £1. 10/- a week. This was above the average wage of provincial actors.

Prices of Admission

The prices of admission to the Theatre remained remarkably constant. The New Theatre continued with a slight rise on the prices that were customary in the Market House Theatre: Boxes 3/-; Pit 2/-; Gallery 1/-. With the visit of a celebrity the price might rise. When Master Grossmith performed with the company sixpence was added to the price of a box seat. The Upper Boxes constructed in the nineteenth century, were priced at 2/6d a seat and 3/6d was regularly charged for the first tier of boxes. The half price at ‘about nine o’clock’ was: Boxes 2/-; Upper Boxes 1/6d; Pit 1/-; Gallery 6d. The charges were reduced and children admitted at half price for certain solo performances, such as that given by J. M. Buck the illusionist in 1845. At times a little extra was made by not allowing a half price after nine o’clock. This happened when thirty-six Viennese dancers performed in 1845. When the partitions of the first tier of boxes were removed and the Dress Circle was formed in 1851 the price of a seat became 4/-, although Edwin

Holmes lowered the prices for most presentations when he became lessee to: Dress Circle 3/-; Upper Boxes 2/-; Pit 1/-; and Gallery 6d. James Winston in 1805 reported that the takings given a full house would amount to £60 and that the expenses were normally £16.⁹

The numbers of places from which bookings could be made decreased. Though seats for the pit and gallery could be obtained from shops and members of the company it had always been necessary to obtain places for the boxes at the theatre, even, as the note below shows, in the Market House days:

'Places for Boxes to be taken of Mr. Pirce at the Theatre from Two to Four - Those Ladies and Gentlemen who take places (to prevent mistakes), are requested to take the same number of tickets'.¹⁰

In the early nineteenth century when Collins' son was Box Keeper the places for the boxes had to be obtained from his lodgings in the Square. By Holmes' day for greater convenience the places for the Dress Circle could be booked at 'Mr. Conduit's Musical Repository' in the High Street. Tickets for all other seats were bought immediately prior to the performance from the 'Cashier and Money Box Taker: Mrs. Holmes'. Unlike some of her predecessors she was not required to take parts on stage as well, a somewhat rushed procedure.

Rehearsals

Let us turn from financial matters to the stage itself. Rehearsals, the management of the scenery and the tasks of the stage staff are practical matters relating to the daily routine connected with the presentation of plays. Established London actors who came to perform in a play would have their own method of performing a part and in what skimmed rehearsals there were the local actors would quickly adapt themselves to the business and movements of the star. Little was as rigidly set as it is today and for much of a performance one relied instinctively on the niceties of technique. No doubt the presence of a Cooke or Kean inspired the company

in rehearsal; when such a person was absent the company became ill-disciplined. John Brownsmith, who was prompter to the Salisbury Comedians wrote a list of recommendations for the orderly conduct of rehearsals:

'... In the first place I am to suppose there is (not a nominal but) a real Prompter, whose sole office is to attend to, and regulate the business of the stage.

Imprimis. He should begin the Rehearsal punctually at Ten o'clock and proceed regularly through the piece, reading for such as should be absent, without respect to persons.

II. Any Performer that should be absent from his *first* scene, should be liable to a *small* forfeit, which should increase in proportion thro' the whole play, for which I would have a heavy fine laid.

III. If any performer should thro' *real* indisposition be rendered incapable of attending a Rehearsal, he should be obliged to send notice thereof to the Prompter before the Rehearsal begins, or be deem'd liable to the forfeit that he may have incurred during the course of his reading the part.

IV. No person should be permitted to *stand on the stage* at Rehearsal, but such as were immediately concerned in the scene then in action, or to talk within hearing, so as to disturb the Performers, on pain of a forfeit.

V: If any person shall absent himself from a Rehearsal, who might be appointed to *wait* in any piece, I would have for that neglect as great a fine levied, as if they had anything to say . . . for non-assistance in scenes of distress, is *distressing* indeed! . . .

N.B. Of all things I would recommend *good* humour and *civility* at Rehearsal . . .'¹¹

There are hints in the *Hampshire Chronicle* of a lack of adequate rehearsal at times:

'On Tuesday the house was thinly attended; the pieces were not given out in the order expressed in the bills, and were curtailed, and passed through in a very slovenly manner. Priscilla's ballad in *The Romp* was totally spoilt by the omission of the second verse',¹²

Stages

The stages of all three theatres have been destroyed so it is impossible to examine them for any remains of the machinery used for various scenic devices. In the eighteenth century the stage was divided into two areas separated by the proscenium arch and curtain. The front area, nearest to the audience, was used for acting, and the rear area for the scenery. Entry to the front of the stage was usually made, not through the scenes, but from the proscenium doors on either side of the stage. The upstage area consisted of a number of double flats which ran in grooves. A complete scene would be painted over two shutters. When a change of location was needed the flats were pulled apart by the scene-shifters and another scene would be found prepared behind. Similarly if the first scene were to be repeated the scene-shifters pushed the two shutters into view and together again.¹³ Leigh Hunt in his essays mentioned this 'alteration of scene, so badly managed at the theatre, where you see two men running violently towards each other, with half a castle or a garden in their grasp'. Shepherd's Theatre Royal at Covent Garden, to which reference was made in Chapter 3, had provision for five sets of flats. It is no longer possible to tell how many there were in Winchester. As few as two sets of grooves would be workable. In addition to the main scene painted on flats there were usually movable side wings. Announcements in the bills that there will be '. . . two new scenes by Mr. Cave' refer to such groove and flat scenes.

This system of decor was far from fool-proof. At best the edges of the scenes, handled by the shifters, became covered in finger marks, and for this reason the stage hands came to wear white gloves. At worst halves of two entirely different scenes might meet. Possibly similar accidents merited the rebuke that Collins and Davies 'should certainly see

that those in the scenic department attend more to their business; the carelessness of this evening was unpardonable'.¹⁴ Backstage was, of course, a murky place as well as cramped and mistakes could easily occur. At the given point for the scene change either the stage-manager, or in a small company such as the Winchester one, the prompter, would blow a short blast on a whistle. There was no concealment of the scene-change, – the curtain remained raised and the actors, if required in the following location, would remain on stage. In the nineteenth century a rideau was often introduced and canvas drop cloths were substituted for the flats. A gauze was used in conjunction with varying forms of eidoscope to produce the transparencies and apparitions that we encountered in an earlier chapter.

Lighting the theatre was a problem. In the eighteenth century a large sconce normally hung from the roof of the auditorium which remained lit during the performance. Even when gas was introduced the audience were as brightly illuminated as the players. Brackets for candles were sometimes fixed to the sides of the proscenium arch. There were tallow footlights at the front of the stage and candles were placed above the proscenium arch fitted to a batten. Rings of candles were often hung over the stage itself and lit immediately before the performances. A candle-snuffer was required to look after all of these. This was a despised task undertaken by a menial who would be hired by the prompter, an important person, for as well as having oversight of the rehearsals he also engaged the backstage servants.

Once a successful routine was established few changes needed to take place in order to keep abreast of the times, and the Winchester Theatre, we have already seen, because of the long service of a nucleus within the company, tended to be somewhat conservative.

EPILOGUE

The Market House Theatre, the Temporary Theatre, the New Theatre . . . Winchester's three professional theatres are milestones in a continuous story. Three years after the New Theatre was sold Wildman arrived with his portable theatre. Four annual seasons were held. Later, in 1876, another, the Excelsior Portable Theatre, arrived for one season only.¹ Touring companies continued to visit the city presenting plays, after 1884, at the Guildhall. Frank Benson, known familiarly as 'Pa' with his 'Shakespearean and Old English Comedy Company' was a visitor to Winchester. The traditional prices were maintained and tickets were still to be had at Mr. Conduits' in the High St.² A new Theatre Royal was built in Jewry Street at the beginning of the First World War. Variety performances were given there, but in 1918 only three years after the opening the building was converted into a cinema.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the Editor of the *Hampshire Chronicle*, Mrs. M. Woodhouse, and her staff for kindly allowing me to search the files and to quote from them in this work and for allowing playbills in the collection of that newspaper to be used as illustrations; and the Editor of the *Salisbury Journal*, Mr. W. Sanders for kindly allowing me to refer to the files.

I should also like to thank the following for their help: Mrs. Stevens, the Reference Librarian of the City Library, Winchester; Mr. J. Blackiston, the Fellows' Librarian, and Mr. P. Gwynn, the Archivist of Winchester College; Mr. R. Perkins and Miss P. Godfrey, Librarians of King Alfred's College, Winchester; Mrs. E. Foster, Librarian of the British Drama League; Mr. F. P. Richardson,

Amateur drama, which has always flourished in the city – a history of that has yet to be written – took over from the professional theatre for many years. Even whilst the Winchester Theatre was still standing the amateurs of the garrison found a home there. With the conversion of St. Peter Chesil Church into an intimate theatre for the Winchester Dramatic Society in 1964 the amateurs had come home for a second time.

It was not until the John Stripe Theatre opened in 1969 that there was a building in Winchester which could comfortably house professional companies, and it was appropriate that one of the first to arrive should have been from Salisbury, the original home of Mr. Collins' Comedians who played in Winchester so often. A tradition, established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had caught up with time and found a place in the twentieth century.

Librarian of the Law Society; Miss D. Mason, the Folger Shakespeare Librarian, Washington; Mr. A. Whittaker, the City Archivist, and Miss M. E. Cash, the County Archivist; Mr. M. Biddle and Mr. D. Keene of the Winchester Research Unit; Mr. F. Cottrill, Curator of the Winchester City Museums; Mr. G. Nash, Director of the Theatre Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Miss D. Moore, Miss S. Rosenfeld and Mr. J. Reading of the Society for Theatre Research; Mr. E. Jones-Evans; Dr. A. Hare; Dr. R. Southern; The Viscountess Galway, and Mrs. Jervois.

I am greatly indebted to Mrs. B. Carpenter Turner for her encouragement and advice.

Plates 1, 2 and 3 were photographed by Mr. B. Austwick, and Plates 4 and 5 are by courtesy of the *Hampshire Chronicle*.

PROCEEDINGS FOR THE YEAR 1974

NOTES

SECTION 1.

1. Described in the *Concordia Regularis* of Bishop Aethelwold. A translation is given in *A Source Book in Theatrical History*. A. M. Nagler. London 1959.
2. The personnel of the procession and the torches they carry are listed on a scrap of parchment. Winchester Record Office. Shelf 30 Box 1. 1400.
3. eg Statute Books, 1572. 14 Eliza c5.
4. The information in this paragraph is taken from cuttings in the *Winchester Scrapbooks*. Winchester City Library, Reference Library. A useful article is from the *Hampshire Observer*, 24th December, 1920, by A. Cecil Piper who was the City Librarian of that period. *English Dramatic Companies* by John Tucker Murray has helped to establish dates.
5. There is a pen and wash drawing of this hall in the Winchester City Museum. In reconstructing a verbal description of the Market Hall I have used this drawing, Godson's map of Winchester, the investigations of Derek Keene of the Winchester Research Unit and several cuttings from the *Winchester Scrapbooks*. Some of these are by W. H. Jacobs, born 1830, who was a correspondent for the *Hampshire Advertiser* and eventually became an Alderman and Mayor of the City of Winchester.
6. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 28th February, 1774.
7. Sybil Rosenfeld gives a clear notion of fit-ups such as the Market Hall Theatre in the first chapter of her book *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces, 1660-1765*. London 1939.
8. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 14th May, 1774.
9. Winchester Record Office. Ordinance, City Archives, 6th May, 1715.
10. Statute Books, 1737. 10 George 11, C28.
11. *Winchester Scrapbooks*.
12. *The Poetical Works of Goldsmith, Collins and T. Warton*, edited by the Revd. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh & London 1854. This edition contains an essay on Warton by the editor.
13. *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*. A. Hare. London 1958.
14. *Candour, An Enquiry into the real merits of the Salisbury Comedians*, anon. London 1768.
15. *The Contrast*. J. Brownsmith. London 1776.
16. *The Salisbury Journal*. 24th April, 1769.
17. A number of secondary descriptions of this are extant. A useful example is in *The Benefit System in the British Theatre*. St. V. Troubridge. London 1967.
18. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 14th July, 1797.
19. *Winchester Scrapbooks. A few notes on the Mechanics Institute Building*. W. H. Jacobs.
20. *The Wandering Patentee*. T. Wilkinson. London 1795.
21. *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
22. Information gathered from playbills in the collections of the Winchester City Library and Jacob and Johnson.
23. A builder's note attached to the lease of the 'upstairs room in the Market House'. 1837. Winchester Records Office.

SECTION 2.

1. *The Theatric Tourist*. J. Winston. London 1805.
2. *Memoirs of his own Life*. T. Wilkinson. London 1790.
3. *Retrospections of the Stage*. J. Bernard. London 1830.
4. *Memoirs of his own Life*.
5. *Memoirs of his own Life and The Dictionary of National Biography*. London 1889 ed.
6. *Memoirs of his own Life*.
7. *The Theatric Tourist*.
8. *Memoirs of his own Life*.
9. *Memoirs of his own Life; The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
10. *Memoirs*. J. Grimaldi, ed. Charles Dickens. London 1838. Contains an essay on Guiseppe Grimaldi by Dickens.
11. *Memoirs of his own Life*.
12. *Dictionary of National Biography*.

SECTION 3.

1. Letters of Sarah Williams to the Revd. Philip Williams. Winchester College. M. PW. 57.
2. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 13th December, 1784.
3. *A History of Winchester*. B. B. Woodward. Winchester 1859.
4. Letters of Sarah Williams. M. PW. 76.
5. Letters of Sarah Williams. M. PW. 75.
6. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 23rd May, 1785.
7. *The Hampshire Directory*. 1799. Hampshire County Record Office.
8. *A notable family of artists: the Cavos of Winchester*. B. Carpenter Turner. Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club. Vol 22.
9. Letters of Sarah Williams. M. PW. 79.
10. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 23rd May, 1785.

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11. *A Survey of London*. Greater London Council. Vol 35. 1970.
12. *Covent Garden Theatre*. Thomas Rowlandson. Enthoven Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
13. *The Theatrical Tourist*.
14. *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*. A. Hare.
15. *Retrospections of the Stage*. J. Barnard.
16. The rest of the prologue is given in *Hampshire Chronicle*. 13th June, 1785.
17. *Salisbury Journal*. 30th July, 1787. Assizes 22. 4. Public Record Office. London. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 16th June, 1788. Notes for *The Theatrical Tourist*.
18. *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
19. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 16th June 1788.
20. Statute Books. 28 George III. c. 30.
21. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 16th June 1788.
22. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 14th November, 1795.
23. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 14th November, 1795.
24. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 5th December, 1795.
25. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 5th December, 1795.
26. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 18th June, 1796.
27. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 5th December, 1795.
28. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 16th July, 1796.
29. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 16th July, 1796.
30. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 22nd July, 1797.
31. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 18th August, 1800.
32. Poster in the Winchester City Library, Reference Library.
33. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 22nd July, 1799.
34. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 7th July, 1800.
35. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 7th December, 1807; *The Salisbury Journal*. 7th December, 1807; *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
36. *An Historical Account of Winchester with Descriptive Walks*. Charles Ball. Winchester 1818.
37. *The Drama or The Theatrical Pocket Magazine*. Frederica Close. London 1822.
38. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 2nd June, 1823.
39. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 14th October, 1824.
40. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 21st July, 1825.
41. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 21st July, 1832.
42. *Hampshire Advertiser*. 25th February, 1837.
43. *Hampshire Advertiser*. 10th April, 1837.
44. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 9th July, 1838 and 30th July, 1838.
45. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 8th February, 1839 and 15th April, 1839. Public Record Office. Book of Petitions. B.6.55.
46. *Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
47. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 31st May, 1841 and 6th June 1841.
48. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 1st August, 1842.
49. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 3rd October, 1842.
50. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 19th June, 1843.
51. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 9th November, 1844.
52. *The History of Winchester*.
53. Poster in the Winchester City Library, Reference Library.
54. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 13th May, 1854.
55. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 17th September, 1859.
56. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 24th August, 1861. *The Salisbury Journal*. 24th August, 1861. *Winchester Scrapbooks*. Winchester City Library, Reference Library.
57. 40 and 41 Jewry Street, Winchester.

SECTION 4.

1. *Candour. An Enquiry into the real merits of the Salisbury Comedians*.
2. *A History of English Drama. 1660-1900*. Allardyce Nicoll. Cambridge 1962.
3. *The Count of Narbonne*. Robert Jephson.
4. *The Dramatist*. Frederick Reynolds.
5. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 1st August, 1785.
6. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 5th December, 1795.
7. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 1st July, 1782.
8. *Winchester Scrapbooks*. Winchester City Library. Reference Library.
9. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 1st August, 1785.
10. Cited in *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*. J. Russell Brown. London 1966.
11. *Representative Actors*. W. Clarke Russell. London 1883.
12. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 1st December, 1794.
13. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 21st November, 1795.
14. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 26th September, 1842.
15. Poster in the Winchester City Library, Reference Library.

16. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 30th July, 1796.
17. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 31st May, 1841.
18. *Winchester Scrapbooks*.
19. *Memoirs of his own Life*.
20. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 21st July, 1783.
21. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 21st July, 1784.
22. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 5th July, 1779.
23. *A History of English Drama*. 1660-1900.
24. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 22nd May, 1786.
25. Letters of Sarah Williams. M. PW. 29.
26. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 2nd December, 1805.
27. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 15th July, 1799.
28. *Blue Beard*. George Colman.
29. *The Salisbury Journal*. 22nd July, 1799.
30. *The Theatre Royal, Winchester*. E. Jones-Evans in *The Hampshire County Magazine*. Vol 6, No. 9.
31. *The Salisbury Journal*. 4th August, 1788.
32. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 11th October, 1802.
33. *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
34. The list is compiled from advertisements in the *Hampshire Chronicle* and posters in the collection of Jacob and Johnson.

SECTION 5.

1. *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces*. 1660-1765. S. Rosenfeld.
2. Except where additional information is given the biographic details of actors are based on information in:
The Dictionary of National Biography.
Representative Actors.
Our Actors and Actresses. C. Pascoe. London 1880.
3. *Authentic Memoirs of the Green Room*. J. Roach. London 1814.
4. *Authentic Memoirs of the Green Room*.
5. *Hampshire Telegraph*. 24th September, 1827.
6. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 30th July, 1819.
7. *The Times*. 18th January, 1825.
8. *A Century of Great Actors*. Cecil Armstrong. London 1912.
9. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 15th October, 1832.
10. Coleridge remarked that seeing Edmund Kean act was like reading Shakespeare by 'flashes of lightning'.
11. *A Century of Great Actors*.
Peter Davey's notebooks. Enthoven Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
12. *Hampshire Telegraph*. 17th July, 1826.
13. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 2nd October, 1826.
Hampshire Telegraph. 2nd October, 1826.
14. *Hampshire Telegraph*. 13th November, 1826.
15. *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Eric Blom. London 1954.
16. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 30th August, 1802.
17. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 24th April, 1826.
18. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 20th May, 1805.
19. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 22nd September, 1800.
20. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 19th November, 1859.

SECTION 6.

1. *The Benefit System in the British Theatre*.
Much of the background information in this chapter is taken from Troubridge. The following have also proved useful:
The Georgian Theatre in Wessex.
Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces. 1660-1765.
2. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 1st December, 1794.
3. *A view of Society and Manners*. G. Parker. London 1781.
4. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 8th August, 1791.
5. Peter Davey's notebook. Enthoven Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
6. The list of persons who sponsored performances is taken from the following:
Hampshire Chronicle; *The Salisbury Journal*; playbills in Winchester City Library, Reference Library; playbills in the collection of Jacob and Johnson.
7. Quoted in *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex*.
8. *The Contrast*.
9. *The Theatrical Tourist*.
10. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 28th February, 1774.
11. *The Contrast*.
12. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 6th July, 1795.
13. *The Georgian Playhouse*. R. Southern. London 1948.
14. *Hampshire Chronicle*. 23rd July, 1796.

THE LOST THEATRES OF WINCHESTER, 1620-1861

THE EPILOGUE

1. Peter Davey in his notebook briefly lists the 'fit-ups' that visited Winchester after the closing of the theatre in Jewry Street.
2. Playbills in the collection of the Winchester City Library, Reference Library.

APPENDIX: SOURCES

1. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Public Record Office, London

Book of Petitions B/6/55

Entry relating to the bankruptcy of Wm. Shalders the Elder.

City Record Office, Winchester

Corpus Christi Procession c. 1400: Shelf 30, Box 1

8th Ordinance Book: 6th May, 1715

Pavement Commissioners' Proceedings 3/225

Leases: Market House - ground floor

Upstairs room in Market House

Miscellaneous

Peter Davey: *Old Country Theatres*; 36 volumes. Glanville Enthoven Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Peter Davey was manager of the Royal County Theatre, Kingston-upon-Thames, New Cross Empire and Portsmouth Theatres Ltd. during the early years of this century. He made extensive, and sometimes inaccurate, notes on the provincial theatres. One volume is devoted to those of Winchester.

Thomas Stopher: *The Streets of Winchester*. City Library, Winchester.

Alderman Stopher listed selected buildings of interest in Winchester. His notebook is illustrated with postcards.

Sarah Williams: *Letters to The Revd. Philip Williams*. Winchester College.

A series of letters from Sarah Williams to her husband when he was Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

2. NEWSPAPERS

Hampshire Chronicle. Jacob and Johnson, Winchester.

The advertisements and reports form an invaluable groundwork for a history of the Winchester Theatre.

First issue, 1772.

A microfilm of the sequence is at the City Library, Winchester.

Salisbury and Winchester Journal. Salisbury Times & Journal Co. Ltd., Salisbury.

Hampshire Telegraph. The News Centre, Hilsa, Portsmouth.

3. CONTEMPORARY BOOKS

Biography and Memoirs

Brownsmith, J: *The Contrast*, or *The New Mode of Management*. (1776)

The author was a member of Collins' company prior to the New Theatre Days.

Bernard, J: *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830)

Bernard began his career playing in a wandering troupe of three in which he 'put Shakespeare on the rack, to the delight of the red-headed bumpkins of Hampshire.

Clarke Russell, W: *Representative Actors* (1883)

Grimaldi, J: *Memoirs*; edited by Charles Dickens (1838)

Dickens gives a biographical account of the life of Grimaldi's father, Guiseppe, who performed at the Temporary Theatre.

Mathews, Mrs. A: *Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian* (1838)

Parker, G: *A View of Society and Manners* (1781)

Pascoe, C: *Our Actors and Actresses* (1880)

Rede, L. T: *The Road to the Stage* (1827)

This lists the salaries paid in provincial theatres.

Roach, J: *Authentic Memoirs of the Green Room* (1812)

Wilkinson, T: *Memoirs of His Own Life* (1790)

This contains a full account of Wilkinson's seasons at the Temporary Theatre.

Guidebooks

Ball, C: *A Historical Account of Winchester with Descriptive Walks* (1818)

Hampshire Directory (1799)

Winston, J: *The Theatrical Tourist* (1805)

A guide to many of the provincial theatres. A section is devoted to Winchester. A number of plates were issued in conjunction with the publication, among them an illustration of the exterior of the Winchester Theatre.

Woodward, B. B: *History of Hampshire* (1859)

Playbills

There are collections in:

City Library, Winchester. County Records Office, Winchester.

Several bills have recently been discovered used as wrappers around wills.

Jacob and Johnson.

This firm printed the bills for the Winchester Theatre.

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Miscellaneous

- Aethelwold: *Concordia Regularis*. MS. in British Museum.
Candour – *An Enquiry into the Merits of the Salisbury Comedians* (1755)
Dickens, C: *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839)
The Drama or Theatrical Pocket Magazine (1825)
Warton, T: *Poems on Various Subjects* (1791)

4. SECONDARY WORKS

- Armstrong, C. F: *A Century of Great Actors* (1912)
Dictionary of National Biography
Greater London Council: *Survey of London*, Vol 35 (1970)
This contains a well illustrated chapter on the Covent Garden Theatre, on which design the Winchester New Theatre was based.
Grove, G: *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1960)
Hare, A: *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex* (1958)
A full account of the theatres at which the Salisbury Company of Comedians played is to be found here.
Loewenberg, A: *The Theatre of the British Isles* (1950)
An annotated bibliography with a short section on Winchester.
Nicoll, J. A. R: *A History of English Drama. 1660–1900*, 6 vols (1959)
The sixth volume is a useful catalogue of all plays known to have been produced or printed between the years 1660 and 1900.
Rosenfeld, S: *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660–1765* (1939)
Southern, R: *The Georgian Playhouse* (1948)
The Seven Ages of Theatre (1962)
Troubridge, St. V: *The Benefit System in the British Theatre* (1967)
Victoria History of the Counties of England: Hampshire & The Isle of Wight, 5 vols and index (1900–1914)

5. ARTICLES AND NOTES IN MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS

Winchester Scrapbooks

Scrapbooks compiled by the Librarians of the City Library, Winchester. There are cuttings relating to the theatres of Winchester from the following newspapers:

Hampshire Chronicle, *Hampshire Telegraph*, *Hampshire Advertiser*, the *Southern Evening Echo*, and the *Daily Telegraph*.

Hampshire County Magazine

Jones-Evans, E: *The Theatre Royal, Winchester* (Vol 6 No. 9)

Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club

Carpenter Turner, B: *A notable family of Artists: The Caves of Winchester* (Vol 22)

Theatre Notebook

Highfill, P. H. Jnr: *Folger Library Manuscripts relating to the Theatrical Tourist* (Vol 20)

Times Literary Supplement

Jaggard, Wm: *Shakespeare's Country Stage* (12th June, 1919)

Author: Paul Ranger, 38 Coombe Hill Crescent, Thame, Oxon.