

## = Actor Rebellion of 1733 =

The Actor Rebellion of 1733 was an event that took place at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane in London , England when the actors who worked there , disapproving of the changes in the management , attempted to seize control . Before the rebellion , the theatre was controlled by the managers Theophilus Cibber , John Ellys , and John Highmore . When Theophilus lost his share and was denied a bid to run the theatre , he , along with other actors , attempted to take over the theatre by controlling the lease . When the shareholders found out , they refused to admit the actors to the building and the theatre was closed for several months . The fight spilled over to the contemporary newspapers , which generally sided with the managers .

The Theatre Royal reopened on 24 September 1733 with a new company of actors , though they were less experienced and talented than the old crew . The majority of old actors moved to the Little Theatre , Haymarket , though a few remained loyal . Henry Fielding sided with the managers and produced several plays to aid the Theatre Royal , though this caused a backlash when the rebelling actors finally won the dispute . By the end of 1733 , the rebellious actors managed to seize legal control of the theatre 's property and Highmore , the sole manager of the Theatre Royal at the time , lost all legal abilities to stop them . By February 1734 , he sold his shares to Charles Fleetwood who then made an agreement with the actors that secured their return .

## = = Background = =

The Theatre Royal , Drury Lane was run by the holders of one of the two official licenses , or letters patent , established by Charles II in 1660 . It was operated by Christopher Rich from 1693 until 1714 . He was replaced after his death by three actors , Colley Cibber , Thomas Doggett , and Robert Wilks . After Doggett died , Barton Booth took over his share . In 1730 , a notice in the Daily Journal stated that a patent would be issued to Booth , Cibber , and Wilks authorising the official government license to run the Theatre Royal . After bureaucratic delays , the official patent was given to the three managers only in 1732 that was to last for 21 years . On 13 July 1732 , Booth , in poor health , decided to sell half of his share to Highmore , a fellow actor and a socialite . On 27 September , Wilks died and his share was inherited by his widow , who then authorised Ellys , a painter , to serve in her place . In reaction to the changing partners , Colley Cibber rented his share to his son Theophilus , an actor .

The new management group had two members , Highmore and Ellys , who were incompetent and Theophilus Cibber was known to be both arrogant and volatile . By the end of 1732 , there were problems with the management of the theatre , which resulted in the failure of Charles Johnson 's *Caelia* : or , *The Perjured Lover* on 4 December . The 8 March 1733 *Grub @-@ Street Journal* seized on the event and used the failure to criticise the theatre 's management : " how insufficient the present managers of Drury @-@ lane playhouse are to discharge their trust , as directors of our public entertainments . " The newspaper was not the only group concerned and many plays were soon cancelled .

Matters were complicated by mass illnesses spreading across London ; the epidemic , probably flu , reduced the number of actors able to work and many plays were cancelled . Even Henry Fielding 's play *The Miser* , which was to open early January , was postponed because of the poor health of its cast members , including Theophilus . The *Miser* was eventually staged in mid February and was successful , but another of his plays , *Deborah* : or , *a Wife for You All* , lasted only one night on 6 April 1733 . Regardless of the problems plaguing the season , it was positive for Fielding while it lasted , with six of his plays being produced on stage along with Thomas Arne 's *The Opera of Operas* , Fielding 's *Tom Thumb* set to music .

## = = Management changes = =

Highmore and Ellys , both gentlemen and not actors , insisted on actively participating in every day @-@ to @-@ day decisions regarding scheduling , choice of plays , expenses , actors ' behaviour .

Their management style clashed with Theophilus , when he recovered and returned in February . They denied his play *The Harlot 's Progress* instead putting a play by Ellys . The fighting between the managers coincided with poor attendance from both the epidemic in London and other theatres attracting audiences with popular operatic performances . Theophilus 's play *The Mock @-@ Officer* failed , which caused Highmore and Ellys to turn further against him . However , his 31 March 1733 *The Harlot 's Progress* , based on William Hogarth 's painting of the same name , proved to be very successful and embarrassed the two other managers .

While Theophilus Cibber was disputing with Highmore and Ellys , Aaron Hill became interested in partnering at the Theatre Royal . Hill was earlier a partner at the theatre until he was removed during a previous actor riot that took place in June 1710 . On 22 March 1733 , Hill , in a letter to Benjamin Victor , a dramatist who had arranged the sale of Booth 's shares to Highmore , criticised the fact that he was kept from buying into the theatre 's management and attacked Theophilus . He offered 900 pounds for three years for Booth 's shares and 1800 pounds for Mary Wilks 's shares . Negotiations continued until May when they were dropped . Hester Booth , widow of Barton Booth , sold her remaining shares to Henry Giffard , the manager of Goodman 's Fields Theatre , just few days after her husband died on 10 May .

By this time , many of the partners , including Wilks , Ellys , and Colley Cibber , no longer wanted to be a part of the theatre and sought to sell their shares . When Colley sought to rent out his share to his son for 300 pounds a year , Highmore approached Colley in order to buy . News of Colley 's selling of the shares to Highmore first appeared in the *Daily Post* of 27 March 1733 . The sale price was around 3000 guineas and 3500 pounds . Theophilus was upset that his father sold the share to Highmore instead of continuing to rent it out to himself . The share , as Theophilus believed , was his " Birthright " .

= = Rebellion = =

Theophilus first tried to work with Highmore and asked to run the operations of the theatre . However , he was turned down , which provoked him to stir the actors into a rebellion . Many of the actors were upset about the management changes and theatre 's operations . Highmore did not have experience in theatre , refused to listen to actors ' ideas , and cut their salaries in half . Theophilus was known as a successful manager and a good actor . The rebellious actors ' plan was to take over the lease and then deny the use of the building to the shareholders , who did not own the complex that they set their stage in . The actors would then use their control over the building to negotiate renting of the patent so they could control how the theatre was run .

When the actors tried to rent the building , the remaining shareholders found out about it . They responded by refusing admittance to the actors . The building was shut down and no plays were performed . According to the *Daily Post* of 29 May 1733 :

the Occasion we are inform 'd was , that at Midnight on Saturday last several Persons arm 'd took Possession of the same , by Direction from some of the Patentees , and lock 'd up and barricado 'd all the Doors and Entrances thereunto , against the whole Company of his Majesty 's Comedians , as also against Mr. Cibber , jun. notwithstanding he had paid to one of the Patentees several Hundred Pounds for one third Part of the Patent , Cloaths , Scenes , & c. and all Rights and Privileges thereunto annexed , for a certain Term not yet expired .

The actors petitioned Charles FitzRoy , 2nd Duke of Grafton , the Lord Chamberlain , and requested that he settle the dispute , but he refused to involve himself in the matter . By early June , the actors had control of the theatre through the lease , but the management refused to leave . The actors tried to file for the management to be legally removed from the property , but the court system was slow to respond .

The management continued to cause problems for various actors , including Benjamin Griffin . Griffin was fired from the theatre on 4 June 1733 . He responded in the *Daily Post* on 11 June 1733 with a history of the events since he first started in 1721 until his removal . He accused the management of bad treatment and wrote :

I could give the Publick a great many Instances of the Gentlemen 's Mismanagement and of Injuries

done to the Company this Season in their Direction . But when I affirm that they have no Experience , no Knowledge , no Capacity , For Gathering together , Forming , Entertaining , Governing , Privileging , and Keeping a Company of Comedians ... more than the being able to purchase the Patent [ ... ] it is a Truth that if any one does not now believe , I am positive that they will in a very little Time be thoroughly convinced of .

= = Contemporary response = =

Many of the local newspapers were quick to respond to the rebellion . An article in The Craftsman dated 2 June 1733 described the actors as " malecontent Players " who were busy in mutiny . On 7 June , the Grub @-@ Street Journal stated , in an article by Musaeus , that Theophilus was selfish . Another article in the Grub @-@ Street Journal , by Philo Dramaticus , attacked the management for not understanding how theatres are supposed to work . The managers were the first to state their defence and argued that everything they did was correct and that the actors had no reason to complain , especially over the treatment that they received .

The actors responded later in June with A Letter from Theophilus Cibber , Comedian , To John Highmore , Esq . Within the response , Theophilus Cibber emphasised the inability of the management to effectively run the theatre , claimed that they were acting like tyrants , and alleged that they unjustly refused the offer by the actors to rent out the patent . This did not calm the dispute ; instead , the Grub @-@ Street Journal of 14 June 1733 printed parts of John Vanbrugh 's Aesop , a play that criticised the actor rebellion that took place in 1695 . On 26 June , the Grub @-@ Street Journal in an article by Musaeus claimed that many of the problems that the actors complained about were caused by previous managers , who were also actors , and not by the current management that was composed of outsiders . Additionally , Musaeus claimed that actors in general were unfit to run the theatre .

A pamphlet titled An Impartial State of the Present Dispute Between the Patent and Players was published during the late summer that attacked the actors . It claimed that " all Men of Sense and Integrity seem to be entirely convinced that the Patentees of the Theatre @-@ Royal in Drury @-@ Lane , have had great Injustice done them by the late Attempt of Part of their own Company to defraud them of their Property " . The actors responded in an article published in the Daily Journal of 26 September . Also during the summer , Edward Phillips produced The Stage @-@ Mutineers , a play that started on 27 July and ran for twelve nights . The play made fun of actors , writers , and the management as a whole . Even though it was attacked in the Grub @-@ Street Journal of 9 August , theatre historian Robert Hume described the play as " harmless stuff " . Regardless , Fielding was personally mocked as Crambo , one of the characters within the play , and was offended by the portrayal .

= = Reopening = =

The Theatre Royal reopened on 24 September 1733 with a new company of actors . The majority of the rebellious actors joined the Little Theatre in Haymarket and started producing plays on 26 September . Although the Theatre Royal had replacement actors of a lesser talent and a few loyal experienced members , Henry Fielding joined the management 's side of the dispute . Of the 15 loyal actors that stayed with the Theatre Royal , only a few , including Kitty Clive , Christiana Horton , William Mullart , and Charles Stoppelaar , were of note . Reportedly , Highmore was losing 50 ? 60 pounds a week . Victor , in his account of the time , wrote :

In this maimed Condition the Business of Course went lamely on ; for a very middling Company of Players could be expected to bring but thin losing Audiences , especially while Party prevailed , and those very Plays were acted much better in the Haymarket . The unavoidable and melancholy Consequence of this Proceeding was , that there was a Ballance every Saturday Morning in the Office against the Manager , of Fifty or Sixty Pounds ; and his Pride , as well as his Honour , were too nearly concerned not to prudence the Deficiency every Week with the utmost Exactness .

In such conditions , Giffard sold his shares and turned over full control of the theatre to Highmore .

Hill was brought in to work with the actors at Drury Lane by Autumn 1733 , but the theatre was still declining by the end of the year .

In order to aid the theatre , Fielding revised his *The Author 's Farce* and *The Intriguing Chambermaid* . Fielding 's *The Miser* was also put on 27 October 1733 with the King , the Queen , and many noble families in attendance . After this , Fielding produced *The Universal Gallant : or , The Different Husbands* , which didn 't run until February 1735 . 20th @-@ century theatre scholar Charles Woods believed that Fielding joined with the management of the Theatre Royal because they were " people whose legitimate investments were being jeopardized " . Fielding later attacked Theophilus in a revised version of his *The Author 's Farce* which ran on 15 January 1734 . This caused a backlash upon him after the rebelling actors finally won in the dispute , and it was harder for him to stage plays .

Theophilus , through his father , applied to the Lord Chamberlain during the summer asking to have a new license issued , but he was refused . Following this , he applied to Charles Lee , the Master of the Revels , and received a license to perform theatrical shows in return for payment even though the license had no legal authority . This brought about criticism against Lee in the *Daily Post* dated 29 September 1733 over issuing the licence and called it just a ploy by the actors . On 30 October , the management of the Theatre Royal sent a letter to veteran actor John Mills and other rebels threatening further legal action regarding their unlicensed theatre . After Theophilus responded with a claim that he was acting within the law , the management and John Rich , manager of the Theatre Royal , Covent Garden , demanded the courts to shut down the unlicensed theatres . A 5 November hearing set a date for a trial , but the case fell apart before it was ever heard over the technical wording of a law that conflicted with the original request by the licensed theatre managers .

A trial , in which the rebellious actors sued the management at the King 's Bench over the management 's occupation of the building that the actors controlled the lease , was held on 12 November . The judgment under Chief Justice Philip Yorke was in favour of the actors , and they were to be granted control of the theatre building in March 1734 . Highmore , in response , asked for a charge against John Harper , one of the rebellious actors , for being a vagrant , and Harper was sent to Bridewell Palace prison . This provoked a negative reaction by the public , and the action was attacked in the *Daily Post* of 16 November . Eventually , a writ of habeas corpus was issued on 20 November and he was released without a case tried against him . Having no other recourse , Highmore began to negotiate the sale of the theatre license . Charles Fleetwood purchased both Highmore and Wilks 's portions of the license on 24 January 1734 . On 2 February , the *Daily Courant* announced that Fleetwood asked for the rebellious actors to return . An agreement was reached for higher wages and promotion of Theophilus to a deputy manager of the theatre . The actors took control of the Theatre Royal on 8 March 1734 , marking the end of the rebellion .