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978-1-107-49709-2 - The Cambridge History of British Theatre: Volume 3: Since 1895

Edited by Baz Kershaw

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
BRITISH THEATRE

*

VOLUME 3

Since 1895

This volume explores the rich and complex histories of English, Scottish and Welsh theatres in the 'long' twentieth century since 1895. Twenty-three original essays by leading historians and critics investigate the major aspects of theatrical performance, ranging from the great actor-managers to humble seaside entertainers, from between-wars West End women playwrights to the roots of professional theatre in Wales and Scotland, and from the challenges of alternative theatres to the economics of theatre under Thatcher. Detailed surveys of key theatre practices and traditions across this whole period are combined with case studies of influential productions, critical years placed in historical perspective and evaluations of theatre at the turn of the millennium. The collection presents an exciting evolution in the scholarly study of modern British theatre history, skilfully demonstrating how performance variously became a critical litmus test of the great aesthetic, cultural, social, political and economic upheavals in the age of extremes.

BAZ KERSHAW is Chair of Drama at the Department of Drama, University of Bristol. He is the author of *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (1992) and *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (1999), and has published in many journals including *Theatre Journal*, *New Theatre Quarterly* and *The Drama Review*.

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General Editor

PETER THOMSON, *University of Exeter*

The Cambridge History of British Theatre provides a uniquely authoritative account of the turbulent and often troublesome public life of performance in Britain. Whilst making full use of new research in a subject that is at the centre of current concern, the essays are designed for the general reader as well as for the specialist. Each volume is fully illustrated. Together, they offer a comprehensive and comprehensible history of theatre, of which plays are a part but by no means the whole.

The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 1: Origins to 1660

EDITED BY JANE MILLING AND PETER THOMSON

The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 2: 1660 to 1895

EDITED BY JOSEPH DONOHUE

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107497092

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First published 2004

First paperback edition 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by T.J. International Ltd, Padstow

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN - 3 Volume set 978-0-521-82790-4 Hardback

ISBN - 3 Volume set 978-1-107-49711-5 Paperback

ISBN - Volume I 978-0-521-65040-3 Hardback

ISBN - Volume I 978-1-107-49707-8 Paperback

ISBN - Volume II 978-0-521-65068-7 Hardback

ISBN - Volume II 978-1-107-49708-5 Paperback

ISBN - Volume III 978-0-521-65132-5 Hardback

ISBN - Volume III 978-1-107-49709-2 Paperback

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General preface

It is not the aim of the three-volume *Cambridge History of British Theatre* to construct theatrical history as a seamless narrative, not least because such seamlessness would be a distortion of the stop/start/try-again, often opportunistic, truth. Chronology has guided, but not bullied, us. The editorial privilege has been to assemble a team of international scholars able to speak with authority on their assigned (or sometimes chosen) topics. The binding subject is theatre, to which drama is a major, but not the only, contributor.

Each of the volumes includes some essays which are broad surveys, some which treat specific themes or episodes, some which are socio-theatrical ‘snapshots’ of single years and some which offer case studies of particular performance events. There is, of course, an underlying assertion: that a nation’s theatre is necessarily and importantly expressive of, even when resistant to, the values that predominate at the time, but the choice of what to emphasise and what, however regretfully, to omit has rested with the volume’s editor or editors. The aim has been to provide a comprehensive ‘history’ that makes no vain pretence to all-inclusiveness. The character of the volumes is the character of their contributors, and those contributors have been more often asked to use a searchlight than a floodlight in order to illuminate the past.

It is in the nature of ‘histories’ to be superseded. These volumes, though, may hope to stand as a millennial record of scholarship on a cultural enterprise – the British theatre – whose uniqueness is still valued. They are addressed to a readership that ranges from students to sheer enthusiasts. A ‘history’ is not the place for scholars to talk in secret to other scholars. If we have ever erred in that direction, it has been without the sanction of Victoria Cooper, who has shepherded these volumes through to publication with the generosity that is well known to all the authors who have worked with her.

Peter Thomson

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Acknowledgements

Collaborative scholarly projects are often like flocks of migrating birds: they know where they want to get to – a ‘new history’, say – and they have a keen sense of the best route to get there, but many unpredictable factors will determine the nature and length of the journey. The flight of these particular essays to the bookshops has been especially perturbed by a key paradox in the writing of history, but especially recent history: when the history-bird cannot see the wood for the trees, a resort to the avian equivalent to ‘slash and burn’ will not improve its view, nor its progress. So first and foremost I must thank all the contributors to this volume, who have been unusually understanding of, and sensitive to, the difficulties of a complicated task; as well as being fabulously patient with our slow advance through the thickets and brambles, they have engaged wholeheartedly and often imaginatively with my, sometimes no doubt unreasonable, editorial demands. It would usually be invidious to single out any one of them, but the structure of the book allows me to thank Dennis Kennedy especially for his unerring guidance and sustaining good humour. Thanks too must go to the editors of the other volumes; we were never strictly a ‘team’, but thanks to Peter Thomson’s trust, great good sense and impressively speedy editorial support it never felt like we were working alone. Closer to home, thanks are due to colleagues in the Department of Drama at Bristol, but especially to Janet Thumim for nimbly shifting resources to support the project, and to my remarkable postdoctoral research associates, Angela Piccini and Caroline Rye, who have been what every embattled academic editor must long for: brilliantly supple, strong, cool and supportive, especially as this project flew through the apex of its demand on my time. Special thanks must also go to my doctoral research student, Dafydd James, who assiduously helped to compile the chronology and bibliography right on schedule. The staff of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection were specially helpful in the search for illustrations, so thanks particularly to the keeper, Jo Elsworth, and to Louise Matter and Frances Carlyon, for

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978-1-107-49709-2 - The Cambridge History of British Theatre: Volume 3: Since 1895

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their speedy and spot on support. Also, thank goodness, yet again I have been personally and professionally sustained beyond all reasonable measure to get my part of this whole thing done by Dr Gill Hadley, and by Eleanor and Logan. Without them it probably would not even have grown its feathers, let alone flapped its wings, and so attracted the interest and support of a significant number of the practising theatre artists who are named in these pages: many thanks to those for helping to source images and, much more importantly, for the high creativity that we have been privileged to write about. And, finally, we all have been incredibly fortunate that our commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press is Vicki Cooper: to have enough courage to trust us to complete the outward migration is one thing, as she must have known she could assemble a fit production team at the Press, but to have the vision to imagine how it might actually wing its way back into the public domain with much more than it started out with, thanks to everyone who contributed, is quite something else. To slightly paraphrase Samuel Butler, this was surely a case of the long-distance, high-flying flock being the egg's idea for getting more eggs.

Baz Kershaw
September 2003

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	Theatrical events	Political and social events
1895	Henry Irving is first actor to be knighted Elizabethan Stage Society founded by William Poel Oscar Wilde's trial; <i>An Ideal Husband</i> and <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> performed in London	
1896	Jarry's <i>Ubu Roi</i> performed in Paris Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> performed in London Wilson Barrett's <i>The Sign of the Cross</i> performed in London	Lumière brothers bring Cinématographe to London
1897	Beerbohm Tree opens Her Majesty's Theatre J. M. Barrie, <i>The Little Minister</i>	
1898	New Century Theatre Company founded The Independent Theatre Company collapses Wyndham's Theatre opens Moscow Art Theatre founded Brecht born	
1899	The Stage Society founded Irish Literary Theatre founded by Yeats/Gregory	South African (Boer) War begins
1900	Craig directs <i>Dido and Aeneas</i> , Purcell Opera Society	Méliès makes <i>Jeanne d'Arc</i> (film)

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	Max Beerbohm directs <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Wilde dies in Paris	
1901	Apollo Theatre opens	Queen Victoria dies Accession of Edward VII
1902	Barrett, <i>The Christian King</i> Barrie, <i>The Admirable Crichton</i>	Education Act South African War ends
1903	New Theatre opens	Women's Social and Political Union founded by Emmeline Pankhurst First powered flight by Wright brothers
1904	Barker–Vedrenne seasons start at Royal Court Abbey Theatre founded by Miss Horniman RADA founded by Herbert Beerbohm Tree Barker–Archer publish National Theatre scheme Chekhov dies	
1905	Aldwych Theatre opens Tree establishes annual Shakespeare festival Barker, <i>The Voyage Inheritance</i> Irving dies on tour; Ibsen dies	
1906	Variety Artistes' Federation established Samuel Beckett born	
1907	Lena Ashwell takes over Kingsway Theatre Riots at the Abbey Theatre Barker's <i>Waste</i> refused licence Elizabeth Robins, <i>Votes for Women</i>	
1908	The Society of West End Theatre founded Actresses' Franchise League founded	Henry Ford produces first Model T car

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	Craig's first publication of <i>The Mask</i> (to 1929)	
	Hamilton's <i>Diana of Dobson's</i> at the Kingsway	
	Horniman creates Manchester Repertory Company	
1909	Glasgow Repertory Theatre founded with British première of <i>The Seagull</i> Elizabeth Barker, <i>Chains</i>	Parliamentary inquiry into censorship Kinematograph Act
1910	Diaghilev's Ballets Russes visits London Reinhardt's productions of <i>Sumurun</i> (Coliseum) and <i>The Miracle</i> (Olympia exhibition hall)	King Edward dies Accession of George V
1911	Stage Society forms Repertory Theatre Association Liverpool Repertory Theatre started Pioneer Players founded by Edith Craig	Prison Reform Bill
1912	First Royal Command Performance of Variety Githa Sowerby, <i>Rutherford and Sons</i> Stanley Houghton, <i>Hindle Wakes</i> Reinhardt's <i>Oedipus Rex</i> (Covent Garden)	
1913	Jackson founds Birmingham Repertory Theatre Actresses' Franchise League founds first Women's Theatre Company Shaw's <i>Androcles and the Lion</i> at St James'	
1914	Old Vic starts producing all Shakespeare's plays (to 1923)	World War One starts

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	Glasgow Repertory Theatre closes	
	Shaw, <i>Pygmalion</i>	
1915	Barker's final Court Theatre season	
	Harold Brighouse, <i>Hobson's Choice</i>	
1916	Oscar Asche's <i>Chu Chin Chow</i> opens at His Majesty's Theatre (to 1921)	Easter Uprising in Dublin Introduction of Entertainment Tax
1917	Beerbohm Tree dies	Russian Revolution
1918	Nigel Playfair opens Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith	World War One ends General Election – Lloyd George forms coalition government Women granted vote
1919	William Bridges-Adams directs Shakespeare Memorial Theatre British Drama League founded	
1920	Scottish National Players Committee founded Shaw, <i>Heartbreak House</i>	Irish Civil War
1921	Shaw, <i>Back to Methuselah</i>	The dole (unemployment pay) started
1922	Scottish National Theatre Society founded	Irish Free State established Conservatives win General Election
1923	Oxford Repertory Theatre formed Terence Gray founds Cambridge Festival Theatre Sybil Thorndike in Shaw's <i>St Joan</i> Marie Stopes, <i>Our Ostriches</i> Death of Sarah Bernhardt	Conservatives hold power in General Election – Baldwin Prime Minister
1924	Edith Evans's Millamant at Lyric, Hammersmith Barry Jackson's modern-dress <i>Hamlet</i>	First Labour government elected Ramsey MacDonald Prime Minister Conservatives regain power
1925	Peter Godfrey/Molly Veness open Gate Theatre	

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1926	Workers' Theatre Movement founded Theatre Managers' Association founded Shakespeare Memorial Theatre burns down Shaw receives Nobel prize for literature Shaw, <i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i>	General Strike BBC Royal Charter
1927	Arts Theatre Club opens	BBC formed
1928	Brecht sees Eliot's <i>Sweeney Agonistes</i> in London Moscow Art Theatre visits London Fortune and Piccadilly Theatres built League of Welsh Drama established R. C. Sherriff, <i>Journey's End</i>	Full emancipation for women
1929	Harcourt Williams directs Old Vic Company Jackson founds Malvern Festival Piscator publishes <i>The Political Theatre</i> Sean O'Casey, <i>The Silver Tassie</i> Noel Coward, <i>Bitter Sweet</i>	First talking films marketed Great Depression and Wall Street Crash General Election, Labour minority government, MacDonald Prime Minister
1930	British Actors' Equity formed League of Welsh Drama collapses	
1931	Lilian Baylis opens the new Sadler's Wells Compagnie des Quinze visits London First English performance of Wilde's <i>Salome</i> Coward, <i>Cavalcade</i>	Depression in Britain 2.5 million unemployed General Election, coalition national government under MacDonald
1932	Rupert Doone's Group Theatre founded Joan Littlewood's Theatre of	First National Workers' Movement conference Hunger marches in London

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978-1-107-49709-2 - The Cambridge History of British Theatre: Volume 3: Since 1895

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	Action founded	
	New Shakespeare Memorial	
	Theatre opens	
	Lady Gregory dies	
1933	Guthrie's first season directing Old Vic Company Regent's Park Open Air Theatre opens Kurt Jooss's dance theatre visits London Left Theatre founded Curtain Theatre (Glasgow) founded	Hitler becomes German Chancellor Reichstag burns
1935	Theatre of Action becomes Theatre Union First Ivor Novello musical at Drury Lane Gielgud, Olivier, Ashcroft and Edith Evans in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> at New Theatre	Baldwin replaces MacDonald as Prime Minister Left Book Club founded
1936	London Unity Theatre founded Guthrie reappointed to Old Vic Company Novello, <i>Careless Rapture</i>	Accession of George VI Spanish Civil War begins Television introduced on BBC services Saunders Lewis's arson at Penyberth
1937	Left Theatre collapses Olivier, Richardson join Old Vic	Chamberlain replaces Baldwin as Prime Minister
1938	Auden and Isherwood, <i>On the Frontier</i>	Republic of Ireland Munich Crisis
1939	Group Theatre closes ENSA established MSU Players founded by Molly Urquhart Yeats dies	Spanish Civil War ends Germany invades Poland World War Two begins
1940	CEMA established Scottish National Players collapses	Battle of Britain and the Blitz Churchill replaces Chamberlain as Prime Minister

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1941	Old Vic Theatre bombed CEMA tour Old Vic Company (to 1944) John Stewart opens Park Theatre in Glasgow Glasgow Unity Theatre founded	BBC television service discontinued Germany invades Soviet Union
1943	Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow founded CEMA invests in Theatre Royal, Bristol	Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet
1944	Urquhart's MSU collapses Conference of Repertory Theatres (CORT) founded	
1945	Theatre Workshop founded Old Vic Company at New Theatre Glasgow Citizens' move to Gorbals Peter Brook directs <i>King John</i> at Birmingham Rep J. B. Priestley, <i>An Inspector Calls</i>	World War Two ends Labour win general election – 146 majority, Clement Atlee is Prime Minister Welfare State legislation begins Arts Council of Great Britain founded
1946	Bristol Old Vic founded London Young Vic founded Jackson directs Shakespeare Memorial Theatre First university drama department, Bristol	BBC television service resumed
1947	London Old Vic Theatre reopens Joint Council of National Theatre/Old Vic formed Ena Lamont Stewart, <i>Men Should Weep</i> J. B. Priestley, <i>The Linden Tree</i> Granville Barker dies	First Edinburgh Festival
1948	British Theatre Conference Society for Theatre Research founded	National Health Service started

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	Saunders Lewis's <i>Blodeuwedd</i> first performed	
	Christopher Fry, <i>The Lady's Not for Burning</i>	
1949	Olivier and Richardson fired from Old Vic	National Theatre Act
	Berliner Ensemble founded by Brecht and Wiegel	
	Brecht's <i>A Short Organum for the Theatre</i>	
	T. S. Eliot, <i>The Cocktail Party</i>	
1950	Old Vic Theatre reopens	General Election, Labour majority 5
	RSAMD opens in Glasgow	
	Rose Bruford College opens in Edinburgh	
	Anouilh, <i>Ring Round the Moon</i> (trans. Fry)	
	Shaw dies	
1951	Pitlochry Festival starts (summer only)	General Election, Conservative majority 17 – Churchill Prime Minister
	Derby Playhouse opens	Festival of Britain
	Olivier and Leigh in <i>Anthony and Cleopatra</i>	
	Ivor Novello dies	
1952	Arts Council awards first playwright's bursary	Accession of Elizabeth II
	George Gershwin, <i>Porgy and Bess</i>	
	<i>The Mousetrap</i> opens	
1953	Theatre Workshop at Stratford East	Coronation Elizabeth II
	The Gateway established in Edinburgh	
	Terence Rattigan, <i>The Sleeping Prince</i>	
1954	Kenneth Tynan joins the <i>Observer</i>	Food rationing ends
	John Whiting, <i>Marching Song</i>	Commercial Television Act
	Dylan Thomas, <i>Under Milk Wood</i> (broadcast)	First hydrogen bomb exploded

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1955	National Student Drama Festival established Theatre Workshop, Brecht's <i>Mother Courage</i> Arts Theatre, Beckett's <i>Waiting for Godot</i>	General Election, Conservative majority 60 – Anthony Eden Prime Minister Commercial television introduced
1956	Berliner Ensemble visits London (Palace Theatre); Brecht dies Jacques Lecoq school opens in Paris George Devine founds ESC at Royal Court National Youth Theatre founded John Osborne, <i>Look Back in Anger</i>	Russia invades Hungary
1957	Olivier in Osborne's <i>The Entertainer</i>	Suez Crisis, Anthony Eden resigns, Harold Macmillan becomes Prime Minister Wolfenden Report on homosexuality
1958	Belgrade Theatre, Coventry opens Moscow Art Theatre at Sadler's Wells Theatre Festival of Scottish Repertory Theatre Ann Jellicoe, <i>The Sport of My Mad Mother</i> Harold Pinter, <i>The Birthday Party</i>	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament – first Aldermaston march European Common Market starts
1959	Nottingham Playhouse opens John Arden, <i>Sergeant Musgrave's Dance</i> Penguin launches New Dramatists series	Conservatives win General Election with 100 majority
1960	Peter Hall directs new Royal Shakespeare Company Pinter, <i>The Caretaker</i> First professorship of drama, Bristol	

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1961	Arnold Wesker starts Centre 42 RSC leases Aldwych Theatre Beckett's <i>Happy Days</i> at Royal Court Martin Esslin's <i>The Theatre of the Absurd</i>	US invades Cuba Major nuclear disarmament demonstrations
1962	Chichester Festival Theatre opens, Olivier directs National Theatre formed at Old Vic, Olivier directs Victoria Theatre (in-the-round) opens at Stoke on Trent Welsh Theatre Company established Saunders Lewis's, <i>Tynged yr Iaith</i> lecture	Cuban Missile Crisis Commonwealth Immigration Act
1963	Jim Haynes opens Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Nottingham Playhouse opens RSC, <i>The War of the Roses</i> (Hall/Barton) Theatre Workshop, <i>Oh What a Lovely War</i> First NT production, <i>Hamlet</i> at Old Vic	Macmillan resigns as Prime Minister – Douglas-Home takes over President Kennedy assassinated
1964	First world theatre season at Aldwych Edinburgh Civic Theatre Trust created Peter Brook, Theatre of Cruelty / <i>Marat Sade</i> Sean O'Casey dies	General Election, Labour majority 4 – Harold Wilson Prime Minister
1965	First TIE team, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry People Show and CAST founded Edward Bond's <i>Saved</i> prosecuted Trevor Nunn joins RSC	Abolition of Capital Punishment Jenny Lee first Minister of the Arts Vietnam War begins

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	Close Theatre Club established in Glasgow	
1966	Nunn directs <i>Revenger's Tragedy</i> at RSC Gwenlyn Parry, <i>Saer Doliau</i> Joe Orton, <i>Loot</i> Edward Gordon Craig dies	General Election, Labour majority 97 Abortion legalised Sexual Offences Bill legalises homosexuality
1967	Octogan Theatre, Bolton opens Stoppard's <i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern</i> at Old Vic Peter Nichols, <i>A Day in the Death of Joe Egg</i> Alan Ayckbourn, <i>Relatively Speaking</i> Joe Orton murdered	Entertainment Tax abolished
1968	<i>Hair</i> and <i>Oh! Calcutta</i> in West End Jim Haynes founds Drury Lane Arts Lab John Fox founds Welfare State Red Ladder Stage Company founded Living Theatre's <i>Paradise Now!</i> in London	Lord Chamberlain's censorship abolished Russia invades Czechoslovakia Worldwide student protests
1969	Conference of Drama Schools founded Traverse Theatre moves to Grassmarket, Glasgow Royal Court <i>Come Together</i> festival Peter Nichols, <i>The National Health</i>	British troops in Northern Ireland Bloody Sunday US moon landing
1970	Young Vic Theatre opens Peter Brook leaves to work in Paris Trevor Griffiths, <i>Occupations</i> Olivier created Life Peer	General Election, Conservative majority 31 – Edward Heath Prime Minister Women's Liberation Group founded Gay Liberation Front founded
1971	Trevor Nunn director of RSC Birmingham Repertory Theatre rebuilt	

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	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield opens	
	General Will Theatre Company founded	
	David Storey, <i>The Changing Room</i>	
1972	Arden and D'Arcy picket RSC	Direct rule of Northern Ireland begins
	Bush Theatre opens	First miners' strike
	Portable Theatre, <i>England's Ireland</i>	Over 1 million unemployed
	<i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> in West End	
1973	Peter Hall director of NT	Britain joins EEC
	Women's Theatre Festival at Almost Free	Fuel shortages force three-day working week
	Richard Eyre director of Nottingham Playhouse	
	7:84 (Scotland) founded by John McGrath	
	Peter Shaffer, <i>Equus</i>	
1974	Other Place opens at RSC Stratford	General Election, Labour wins hung parliament – Harold Wilson Prime Minister
	Max Stafford-Clark founds Joint Stock	Miners' strike
	Women's Theatre Group founded	General Election, Labour majority 3
	Independent Theatre Council established	
	Tom Stoppard, <i>Travesties</i>	
1975	Riverside Studios opens	Margaret Thatcher leads Conservatives
	Gay Sweatshop founded	Fall of Saigon
	National Council of Drama training launched	
	Theatre Writers' Group forms	
	Alan Ayckbourn, <i>Bedroom Farce</i>	
1976	NT moves into South Bank complex	James Callaghan Prime Minister
	Monstrous Regiment founded	Association for Business Sponsorship of Arts founded
	Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, opens	Economic crisis