

12 March 1794, is worth quoting in some detail, with small amendments of spelling and punctuation: 'Drury Lane Theatre was last night opened, having been rebuilt in [blank] months, an expedition which became necessary in order that the public might not be deprived of their Amusement any more of the present Season than possibly could be helped, and on which Account it is opened without the Completion of several Buildings which with it form one great and complete plan, standing foremost in the Rank of Public Buildings in the Metropolis, and with the Aid of the Bill now in Parliament,* the Avenues surrounding it will at once add to its magnificence, and the convenience and safety of the public—the more so, from the footway being covered over with a colonnade of the Grecian Ionic order, affording shelter and convenience below, and forming a Terrace before the Theatre above—intended to be secured by ornamental ironwork and lighted by a number of lamps, also forming part of an elegant design. The Plan includes an Area upwards 300 feet in length and about 155 feet in breadth, and the Building is in height from the Substructure to the Roof, 108 feet.

'The outside of the Building, which surrounds the Theatre, is faced with Portland stone, and will be finished with a balustrade. The Theatre which rises above is intended to be faced with stone, or a cement equal to it, and is also finished with a balustrade. Through the Roof rises a Turret, including a large Ventilator and a Staircase leading on to the Roof. The Turret takes something of the form of the Octagon Tower of Andronicus Cyrrhestes [i.e., Tower of the Winds] at Athens, and is nearly as large, and on the summit is placed a figure of Apollo, about 10 feet high. From the Terrace on the Roof is by far the finest bird's eye view of London and the River Thames that can be seen from any other place.

'The accommodations for the Stage are upon a larger scale than in any other Theatre in Europe: the opening for the Scenery is 43 feet wide and 38 feet high, after which the painter and Mechanist have a large space in which they may exert their abilities, 83 feet wide, 92 feet long, and 108 feet high. The scenery may be changed or disposed of either by raising it out of sight, or lowering the whole of it, or drawing it off sideways. The Machinery is executed upon the newest and most

HENRY HOLLAND'S THEATRE OF 1791-4

Before attempting a descriptive account of the new theatre, Holland's own account,²⁸ sent to Sheridan at about the time of the first opening on

* This refers to an abortive petition which Sheridan presented to the House of Commons on 4 March 1794 for the purpose of obtaining power to form a new street, to be called Woburn Street, on the south side of the theatre.²⁹

approved principles, contrived to be worked by Machinery placed either above or below the stage, thereby preventing the Necessity of having a number of Scene Shifters in the Way of the Performances.

'The Scenes are and must be of course all new, a work that will require some time to bring to perfection, and more especially as the Season of the Year required an Orchestra on the stage for the Oratorios. This has been done by an introduction of Gothic Architecture very well suited to Sacred Music, and forming a striking Contrast to the decoration of the Amphitheatre.

'In the roof of the Theatre is contained, besides the barrel loft, ample Room for the Scene painters, and four very large reservoirs of Water, distributed from them all over the House, intended to extinguish fire. At the same time great precaution has been taken to prevent such a misfortune by the most ample use of all the inventions and contrivances which ingenuity could suggest, and an Iron Curtain is contrived which would completely separate the Audience from the Stage, where accidents by fire usually commence in Theatres.

'The Audience part of the Theatre is formed nearly on a semicircular plan containing a pit, eight boxes on each side of the pit, two rows of Boxes above them, on which level the two galleries open—commanding a full view of the whole stage—on each side of the galleries are two more rows of boxes, rising to a cove so contrived as to form the Ceiling into a complete circle. The proscenium, or that part of the stage contained between the Curtain and the Orchestra, is fitted up with boxes but without any stage door or the usual Addition of large Columns. The boxes are furnished with chairs in the front row, and benches behind covered with blue Velvet.

'The Corridors which surround the Boxes and give communication to them are spacious, having in the Angles of the Theatre, Staircases of communication, and at the West End of the Theatre is a very large semicircular Room, open by an Arch to the Corridors, having fireplaces in it and bar rooms for furnishing the company with Refreshments. There are also large saloons on the north and south sides of the Theatre, as also two handsome square Rooms, one of them intended as an Antichamber for the use of His Majesty, and the other for the Prince of Wales. These Rooms are fitted up in the modern taste with large hand-

some pannels, chimneypieces, large glasses, and are susceptible of a great deal of decoration which is intended to be introduced as soon as they can be obtained from the Artists who are engaged for that purpose.

'The Decorations of the Theatre are in a Style entirely new, intended to have a richness of Effect and a simplicity that should gratify the Eye without interfering with any decorations that may appear upon the stage, and by forming an agreeable contrast to them render the whole more striking. Accordingly, the Ceiling of the Theatre is painted in compartments of one Colour only. In the same style of painting the galleries are decorated, the fronts and insides of the boxes have for the Ground a clear blue colour, richly ornamented in Chiaro oscuro. The Boxes are supported by silver columns of antique forms, to which columns are attached cut glass lustres by silver brackets. The whole of the Audience part is lighted with very handsome glass lustres, particularly the galleries. In the centre pannels in front of the Boxes are introduced paintings by Rebecca from antique subjects, and more decorations and paintings seem intended to be added when opportunities may offer. Besides the silver Columns which support the Boxes and have a very rich effect, there are four principal square but small pillars which support the Ceiling, decorated with looking glass and with other rich ornaments.

'The sound-board or Ceiling of the proscenium is painted in compartments, and in front of the Proscenium, facing the Audience, are introduced the Royal Arms with Trophies and other grand, magnificent and suitable accompaniments.

'The Entrances to the Theatre must, while the Bill in Parliament is pending, fall short of the intended conveniences. From Russell street there is a box Entrance into a large Hall decorated with Columns, also a private Entrance for His Majesty, and an entrance which leads to the gallery staircases. On the other side of the Theatre, next Marquis Court, the same Entrances are repeated, but till the new street intended to be called Woburn street is opened, the Approach to them can only be for foot passengers in Chairs; as a Chair door the Box Entrance on that side is more complete than to any public Building in London. There are two other Entrances to the Theatre, also incomplete—the one next Bridges street for the pit and Boxes,

and the one next Drury Lane to the stage. In these two streets, when the Buildings are completed, will be the handsomest and most decorated fronts. Besides the Ionic portico, always a certain ornament, these fronts of stone will be decorated with pilasters, basso-relievos, trophies, rich iron-work, and other analogous ornaments. . . .²⁸