

PICTORIAL MATERIAL ON THE BRIDGES STREET AND DRURY LANE THEATRES

CONSIDERING their importance in the history of the English theatre, we know remarkably little about the architectural features of the two Restoration playhouses which Thomas Killigrew and his King's Company built on the plot of ground where the modern Drury Lane now stands. In 1913 Hamilton Bell published reproductions of some designs by Sir Christopher Wren, two of which he felt might have some connection with these buildings, and of these the section view of a "Play House" has been frequently reprinted. The frontispiece to Perrin's *Ariane* (1674) shows the stage of Drury Lane, and we have two pictures from near the turn of the century depicting Joe Haines (or Haynes) mounted on an ass on the Drury Lane fore-stage. Other than these five prints, however, pictorial material on these important playhouses has been wanting. Therefore it may be worth considering more carefully what we already have and reporting on several new discoveries.

One of the drawings among the Wren papers at All Souls' College, Oxford, is an unlabelled, undated, and incomplete sketch of a theatre with some startlingly unusual features (Figure 1). Instead of the typical 17th-century auditorium arrangement of boxes and galleries forming a U around a pit, this plan, as Bell describes it, has the pit benches "arranged in concentric semi-circles and those in the boxes in segments of circles all struck from the same center." Bell has an elaborate description of this theatre which bears quoting at length.

In the middle of the house is a square space, probably a royal box or dais as provided in Inigo Jones' plans for the Court Masque at Whitehall. The most

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interesting parts of this drawing are the faintly pencilled suggestions for the section and the elevation of the proscenium arch. [See Figure 2 where these lines have been darkened for clarity.] This is enormously deep and flaring and would seem to provide for three tiers of four boxes each, on the apron. The arch itself is flattened and segmental. The apron is level, but the stage behind the proscenium line has a distinct rake from front to back and is strangely raised a little above the apron. [Not really so strange; Serlio had done this sort of thing a century earlier.]

The pit slopes up from the front to the beginning of what in those days was called the boxes, though there is no indication of anything above these, where the pitch to the back of the house becomes much steeper. There is a division or railing indicated, cutting off the four last rows of seats from those in front of this amphitheatrical arrangement. [Bell fails to note another railing behind the seventh row.] Above these again the section indicates a gallery, only one so far as I can see, rising at the same steep angle to the back wall of the building, over the passage or foyer at the rear of the boxes. It is served by two staircases, one on each side of the house. Over the center of the Salle is indicated either a hanging canopy, above the royal state, though it would seem too high for that, or a corona of lights, or else some sort of central skylight shaft; this is not impossible as we know that there was such a contrivance in the first Drury Lane [i.e. Bridges Street] theatre, the King's house as Mr. Pepys calls it, from his complaints of the rain and hail beating down from it into the pit. [Pepys' entries on 1 June 1664 and 1 May 1668.]¹

What Bell took to be boxes at apron level I would identify as proscenium doors, but four or five are indicated on each side! Bell suggests no dimensions, but assuming that the benches are about 12" deep at the least, the plan scales *c.*90' by *c.*40' with a proscenium opening *c.*20' by *c.*20'. The lines on the plan that clearly divide the rear section of four benches into five boxes are fainter and fragmented as they converge toward the stage; Wren may or may not have intended partitions in the front two-thirds of the house. The two parallel lines bracketing the "royal state" almost suggest a center aisle, but since the bench lines continue between them, perhaps the parallel lines should be interpreted as partitions. It should be observed that access to the rear boxes is not provided, and the front two-thirds of the house seems to be served only by very narrow side aisles. I take the suspended object to be definitely a candelabra, hung, I would guess, from the peak of the roof. Finally, there are some faint lines in the plan on each side of the apron that Bell does not mention and which I am unable to interpret. Could these be stairs up from the cellar to the pit, or perhaps spaces for musicians?

The drawing is too incomplete to permit much conjecture about its relationship to the Bridges Street playhouse which Wren supposedly designed, but some contemporary evidence which bears on the matter

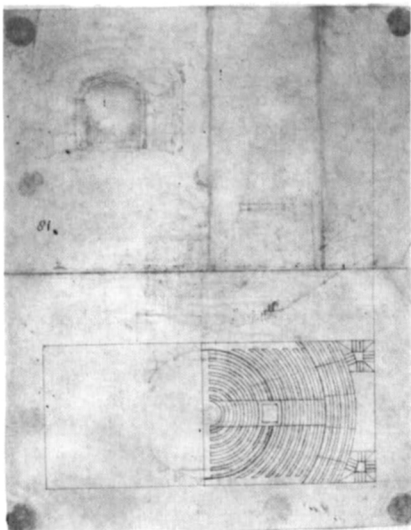


Figure 1 Plan “81” among the papers of Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls’ College, Oxford; possibly a preliminary sketch for the Bridges Street theatre built in 1663. Courtesy of the Library of All Souls’ College, Oxford.

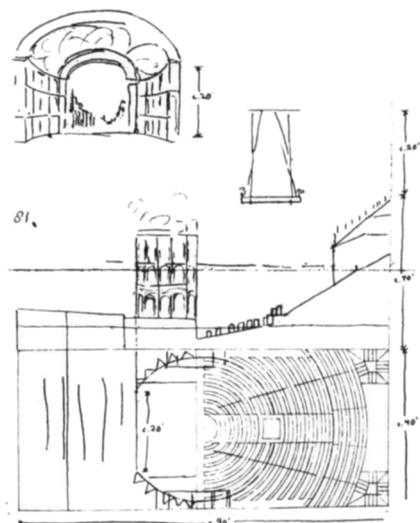


Figure 2 The same Wren drawing as in Plate 1 with the faint pencil lines darkened for sake of clarity.

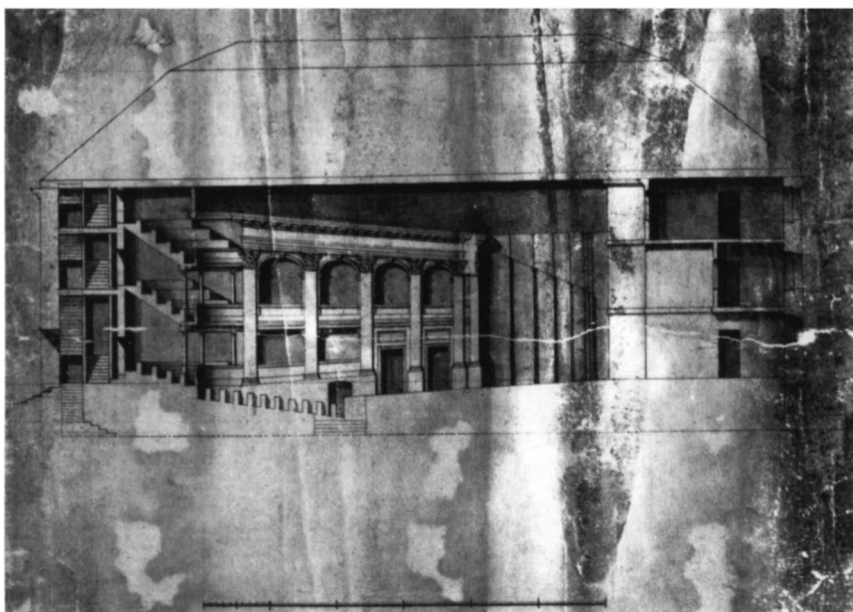


Figure 3 A section view of a “Play House” by Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls’ College, Oxford; possibly a preliminary sketch for either the Bridges Street or the Drury Lane theatre. Courtesy of the Library of All Souls’ College, Oxford.

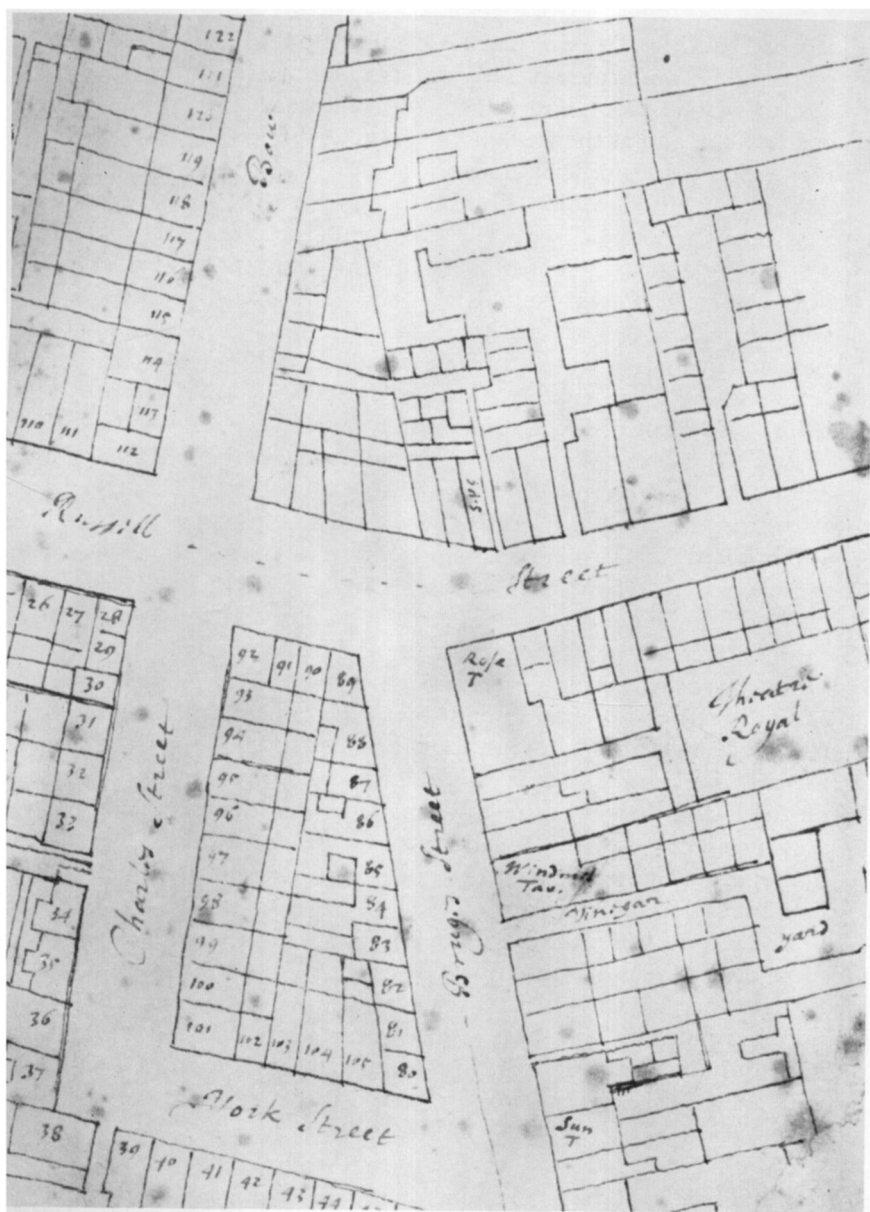


Figure 4 Part of a MS map of the Covent Garden area in the British Museum set of Pennant's *London* (vol. VI, Plate 33). The original is undated, but probably c.1660's. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

is worth noting. The original lease from the Earl of Bedford to Killigrew and his syndicate specified that the plot measured “in length from east to west 112 foot, and in breadth from north to south at the east end 59 foot, and at the west end 58 foot.”² Wren’s plan shows a building, without exterior walls, measuring c.90’ by c.40’, which would nicely fit the plot; there would still be breadth enough in the plot to permit side boxes to be added to the plan, and contemporary descriptions of the Bridges Street house make it clear that the theatre had such boxes. Some of Pepys’ comments when he first saw the interior on 6 February 1663 are also pertinent. He noted “the narrowness of the passages in and out of the pit,” “the distance from the stage to the boxes, which I am confident cannot hear,” and “the musique being below, and most of it sounding under the very stage.” The side aisles are indeed narrow (just over 2’), the boxes under the gallery are about 50’ from the front of the stage (probably about 15’ further than Pepys was used to at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and Vere Street), and the Wren plan has an open semicircle in front of the stage where the musicians might have been placed. The description of Bridges Street by Lorenzo Magalotti when he saw a production on 25 April 1669 calls the house “nearly of a circular form,” but “surrounded, in the inside, by boxes separated from each other.”³ Wren’s use of a circle as the basis for his seating and forestage arrangement is obvious (he must have read his Vitruvius), but the side boxes, as previously noted, are not in evidence. These resemblances, then, plus Pepys’ comments on the cupola, may be enough to make us consider whether the Wren sketch might have some connection with the Bridges Street playhouse; I think it might be a very early sketch from which Wren’s final plans developed.

The second Wren drawing, the familiar section view, is a more complete design, yet still unfinished. It could possibly relate to either the Bridges Street or the Drury Lane playhouse, but it cannot be certainly assigned to either one. Since it has been analyzed elsewhere, it need only be noted here and reproduced for purposes of comparison with some of the new pictorial material to be discussed below (Figure 3).⁴

Two maps that were probably drawn while Bridges Street was still standing show us both the plot of ground Killigrew leased and the general size of the building he built on it. The first (Figure 4) (undated but probably made sometime between 1663 and 1672 in view of the labels on various buildings near the playhouse) is in the British Museum set of Pennant’s *London*. Property lines are somewhat roughly

drawn, but the plot of ground for the “Theatre Royal,” the open space in front of the building, and the long, narrow passageway connecting it with Bridges Street are clearly laid out. Unfortunately, the area directly behind the playhouse runs off the map. A clearer plan can be seen in *A Mapp or Description of the parish at St. Paul Covent Garden* drawn by John Lacy (presumably not Lacy the actor) in 1673 and now in the possession of the Duke of Bedford (Figure 5). The theatre burned to the ground on 25 February 1672. Therefore this survey was very likely made just before the catastrophe. From the map’s scale we find that the passageway to Bridges Street, between the plots owned by Long and Outin, measured 10’ by 81’, the width being just wide enough to accommodate the carriages that would have brought patrons to the playhouse yard. The theatre plot, including the yard in front, measures 112’ along the north side, about a foot less along the south, 58’ along the west, and 59’ along the east; the yard in front of the building scales 58’ by 10’. Behind the theatre is an area measuring about 85’ along the north side, 90’ along the south, and between 58’ and 59’ along the east and west—with a piece about 20’ by 20’ possibly marked for omission in the southeast corner. On this plot Killigrew probably built his 28’ by 58’ scene house at the back of the Drury Lane theatre in 1674 (Figure 6).⁵

Seventeenth- and 18th-century cartographers often depicted buildings that had been destroyed long before the date of the map, and this, fortunately, seems to be the case with the Bridges Street theatre. Morgan and Ogilby’s *London* of 1681–82 has a side view of the playhouse superimposed on the plot of ground the building occupied (Figure 7). The view shows the cupola or glass dome Pepys mentioned (1 June 1664 and 1 May 1668), windows along the side which he also mentioned (12 June 1663), what may be three dormer windows in the roof, and some vertical and horizontal lines that might represent pilasters. There is clearly a walkway in front of the building and what may be a grass strip along the north side of the property. The narrow passage numbered 299 on the map is Playhouse Yard behind the playhouse and leads to Drury Lane.

The revised version of Stow’s *Survey of London* (1720) shows a similar but less detailed side view; five pilasters are visible but, remarkably, no windows are shown. The roof seems hipped; there are hints of possible dormer windows; and I believe I see what might be a scene-house addition at the back of the building—though supposedly this first Theatre Royal had no such feature (Figure 8).

Another late map, George Foster’s *London and Westminster* of

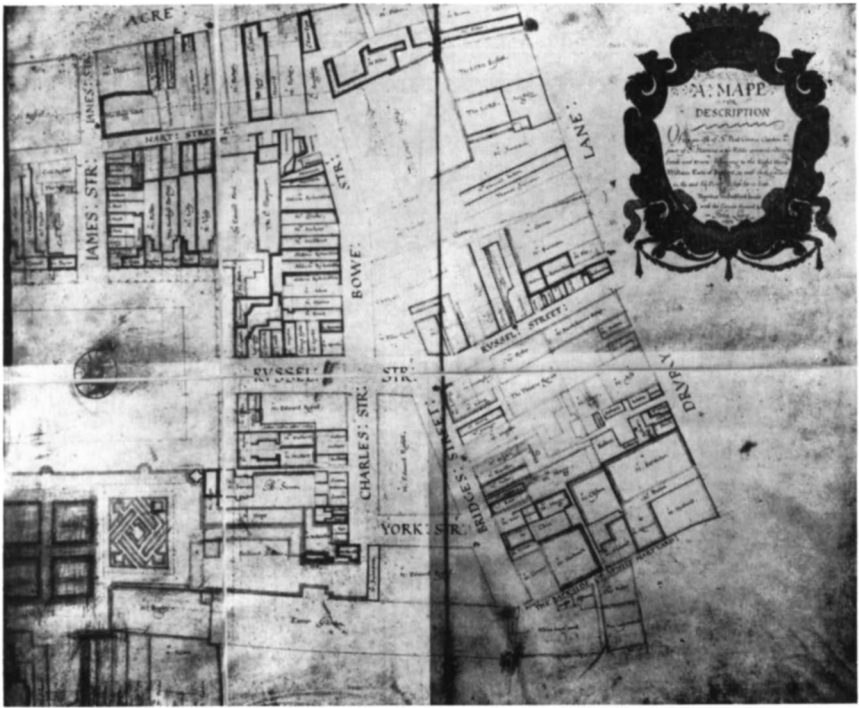


Figure 5 From *A Mappe or Description of the parish of St Paul Covent Garden* by John Lacy (1673) from a 1939 photo reproduction of the Duke of Bedford's original; British Museum Maps 3495 (130). This shows the east half of the map. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

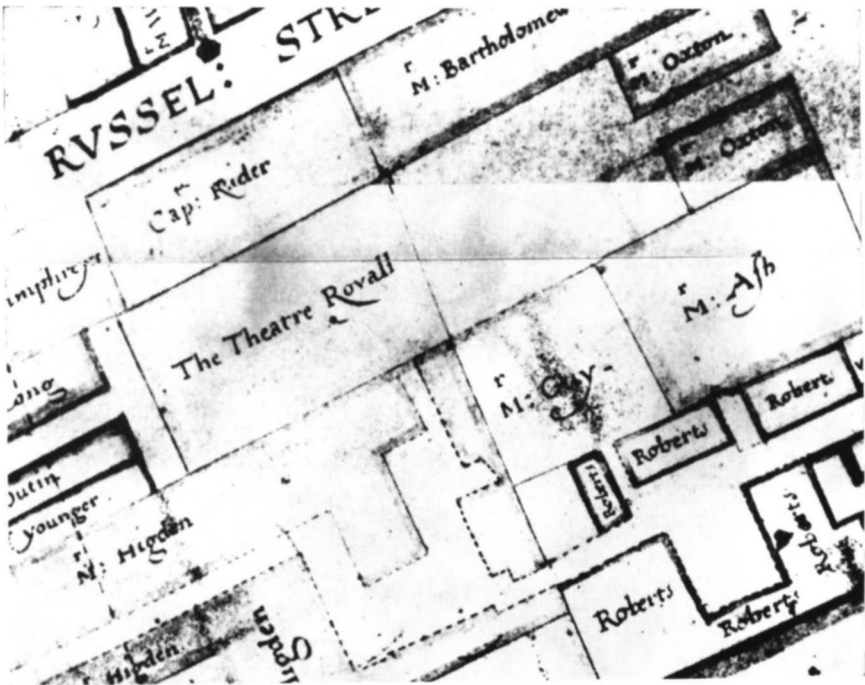


Figure 6 A closeup of the area around the Bridges Street theatre, from the Lacy map shown in Plate 5. The joints between the sections of the original have been spliced out in the photographic process. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

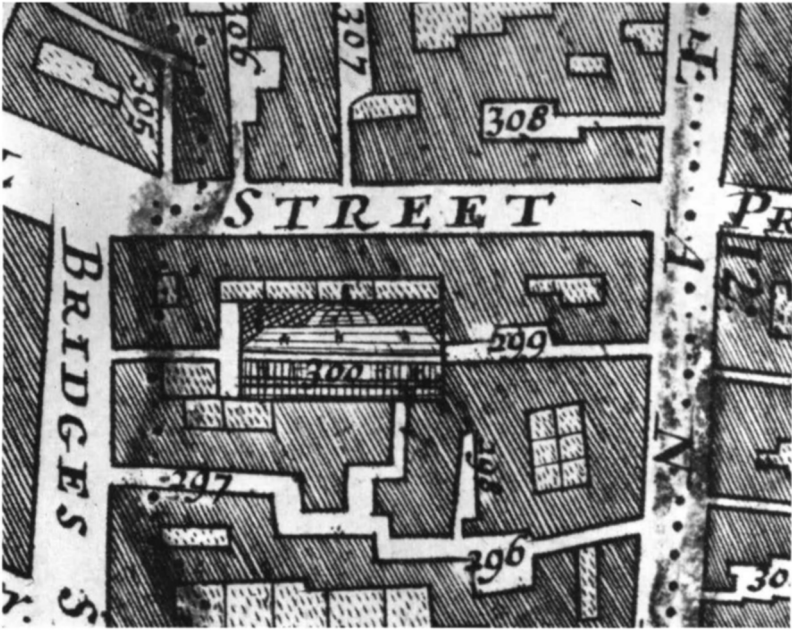


Figure 7 From Morgan and Ogilby's *London* (1681-82); British Museum Crace Portfolio II, 58 (10). No. 300 is the Bridges Street playhouse, though the building was destroyed by fire in 1672. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 8 From John Stryke's revision of John Stow's *Survey of London* (1720), II, B4, p. 108: "A Mapp of the Parishes of St. Clements Danes, St. Mary Savoy;" British Museum copy. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 9 From George Foster's *A New and Exact Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1738); British Museum Maps K 20.33. No. 25 is the Bridges Street playhouse, still shown 66 years after it was destroyed. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

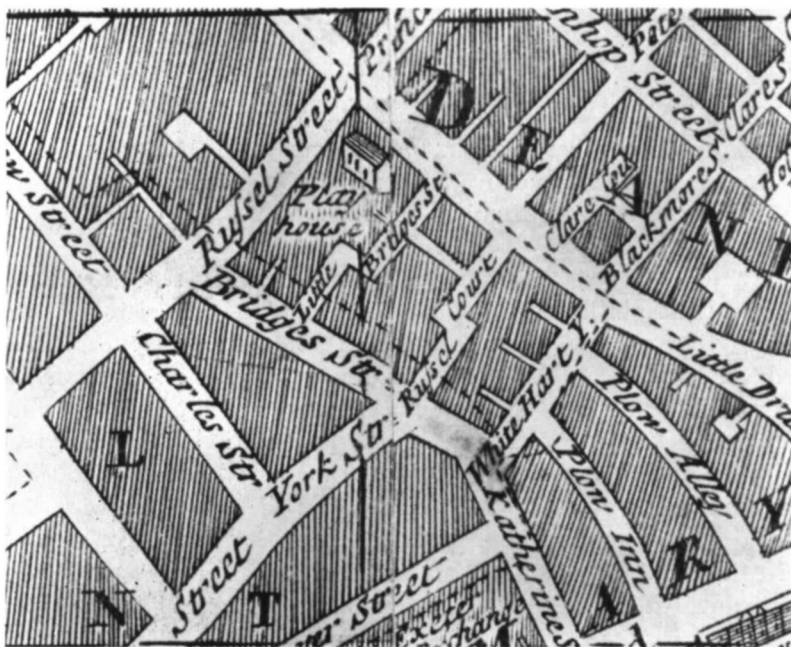


Figure 10 From Overton's *London* (1720); British Museum Maps 3480 (42). The Drury Lane theatre is, presumably, the building sketched in just above the word "Play/house." The joints between the sections of the original have been spliced out in the photographic process. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

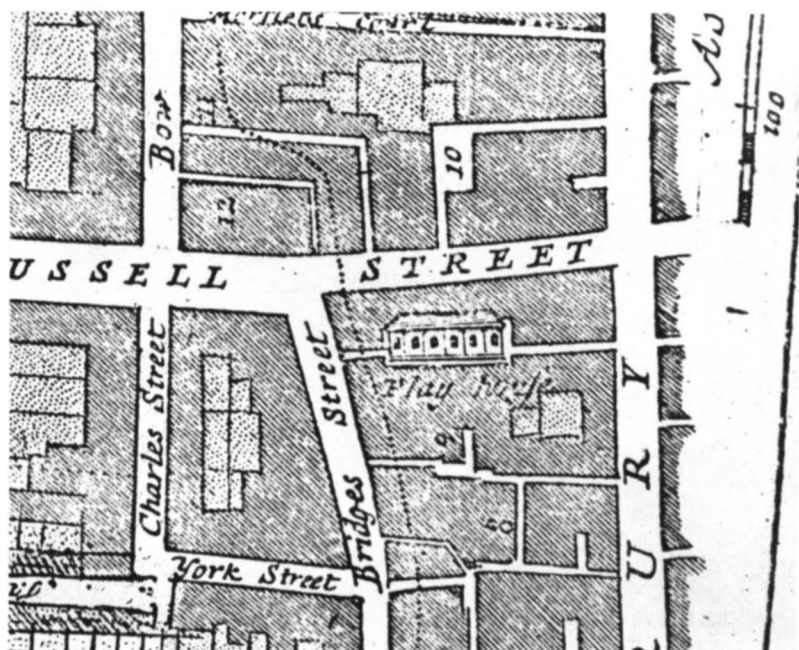


Figure 11 From John Stryce's revision of John Stow's *Survey of London* (1720), II, B6, p. 27: "A Mapp of the Parish of St. Pauls Covent Garden;" British Museum copy. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

1738, shows the same domed building (Figure 9). Many more pilasters are shown; there appears to be a doorway (to the pit?) in the center of the side wall, and two large windows are indicated on each side of the door. The roof shape differs from both the two previous prints and the Wren section.

The late dates of these three maps might suggest that they show the Drury Lane playhouse, built in 1674 to replace the destroyed Bridges Street theatre, but I believe the next prints make it clear that the domed structure is the earlier of the two buildings. Overton's *London* of 1720 shows a "Playhouse" crudely sketched and with no dome (Figure 10). Two more maps from the 1720 edition of Stow's *Survey of London* give us variant side views of a domeless theatre. Though they are similar in overall shape, one (Figure 11) shows six windows divided by pilasters, while the other (Figure 12) shows five with semi-circular heads and possibly an arcade at the front of the building.⁶ Less detailed but still helpful is Lea and Glynne's *London* of 1706; no side view is offered, but the sketch suggests walkways on all four sides of the theatre (Figure 13). William Lyborn's *A Map of the Parish of St. Paul Covent Garden* from a survey made in 1686 gives us the clearest picture, but since what we have is Thomas Beck's 1851 enlargement "from the Original Survey," the evidence may not be completely trustworthy (Figures 14 and 15). The building scales approximately 112' long by 50' high, roughly corresponding with the Wren section view which shows a playhouse 114' by about 57'. Six tall windows are shown, separated by pilasters, and the roof, while not matching that in the Wren drawing, is similar to the one shown in several of the other prints. No scene house is discernible on any of the above views of Drury Lane; perhaps the cartographers omitted it because they wished to show only the main building and not an appendage, or perhaps the scene house was not actually attached to the theatre.

These, then, are all the exterior views we seem to have of Drury Lane; three contemporary prints give us some idea of the building's interior. The frontispiece to Perrin's *Ariane* (1674) shows the proscenium arch and stage of the theatre, and Bell feels that the architectural features shown are similar enough to those in the Wren section to suggest a relationship (Figure 16). As Bell notes:

It shows us a square pilaster based on the apron on either side of the stage opening, of the same type as those in Sir Christopher's section, but fluted, which his are not, and without plinths, which his have. These are drawn in a sufficiently correct perspective, but the strip of cornice which connects them has no visible thickness and might easily represent a canvas valence such as

is not unusual even in theatres of the present day, to mask the top of the scenes.⁷

The top of the proscenium arch would presumably be a horizontal beam resting on the two side pilasters, just off the top of the drawing. Though this print supposedly shows the Drury Lane stage, there is no suggestion of proscenium doors (which the theatre certainly had) and the forestage, though curved, does not seem to extend as far forward as it should. It looks, in fact, more Continental than English, and since the picture was drawn to depict a scene from a French opera done in French at Drury Lane, perhaps the artist was not English and gave his rendering a French look.

The only other interior views of Drury Lane show actor Joe Haines (or Haynes) astride an ass on the forestage, delivering an epilogue. One of these pictures (Figure 17) was published as an illustration to Thomas Browne's *Works* in 1702 and shows Haines, presumably in July 1696, speaking the epilogue to Scott's *The Unhappy Kindness*. Cibber tells us that in 1696 Drury Lane was altered. The alterations consisted of replacing the two lower (downstage?) proscenium doors with stage boxes and of straightening the curved stage front. In Figure 17 Haines is shown well down on a straightened, spike-edged forestage with two stage-boxes to his left. Clearly the print dates from after the alteration.

But some problems with the print remain. For one thing, where is the remaining left stage door? Presumably it is out of sight, upstage of Haines. However, the space in the print occupied by the two stage-boxes would accommodate the upper and lower doors that existed before the alterations in 1696. (Indeed, this is where those doors are located in Wren's section drawing.) One would expect, therefore, this drawing of the altered stage to show one stage box and one door instead of two doors. Cibber's description, at first, seems unable to clarify the confusion. Cibber says that before the 1696 reconstruction "... the former, lower Doors of Entrance for the Actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) Pilasters; in the Place of which Doors, now the two Stage-Boxes are fixt [one on each side of the stage, or two?]. ... Where the Doors of Entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional Side-Wings, in front to a full Set of Scenes. ..." ⁸ Can we assume from Cibber's somewhat ambiguous terminology that he was referring throughout to just one side of the stage and that his term "lower Doors of Entrance" means what it does in promptbooks of the time that use LD and UD to indicate lower and upper proscenium doors? If he meant one lower entrance door on each

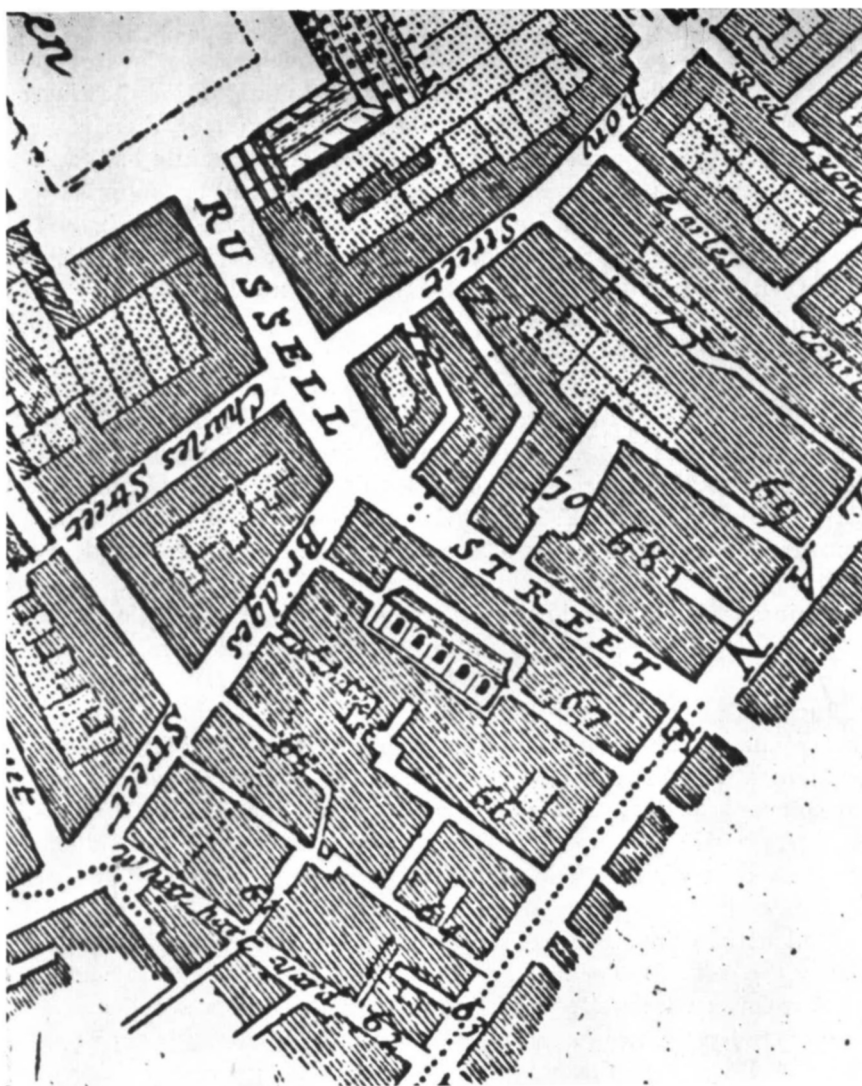


Figure 12 From John Strype's revision of John Stow's *Survey of London* (1720), II, B6, p. 67: "A Mapp of the Parish of St Martins in the Fields;" British Museum copy. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

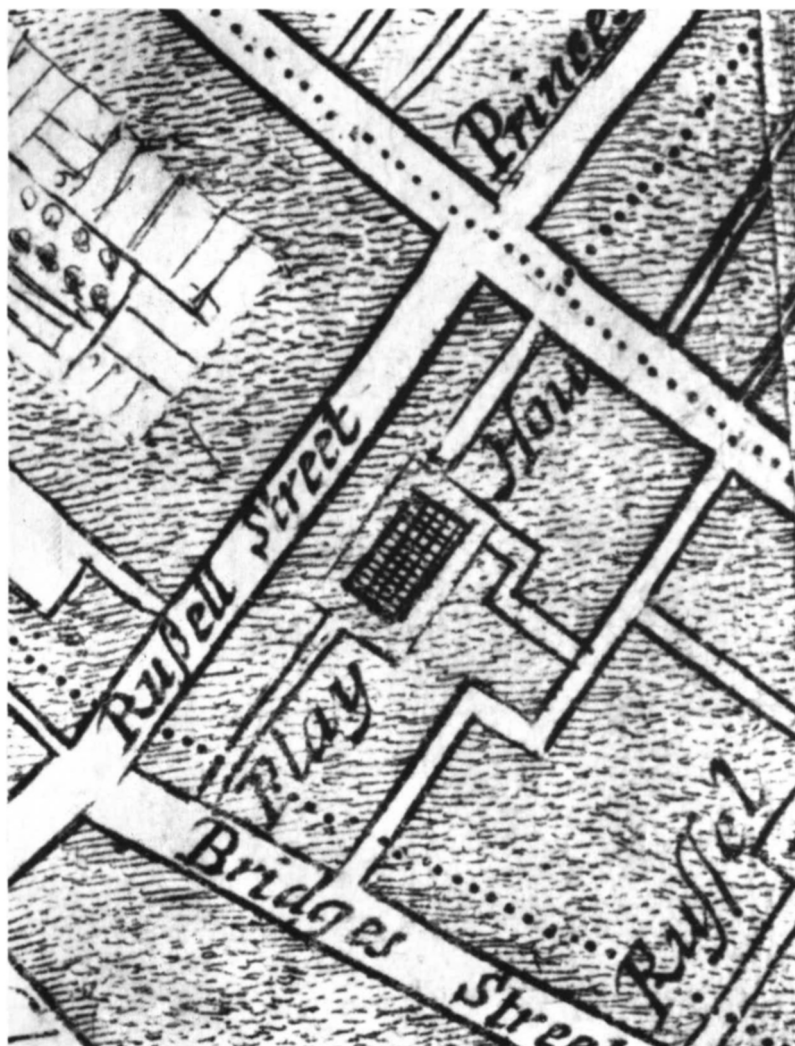


Figure 13 From Lea and Glynne's *London* (1706); British Museum Maps K 20.31a. The Drury Lane theatre would be the heavily cross-hatched rectangle within the plot of ground bracketed by the words "Play" and "Hou." Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

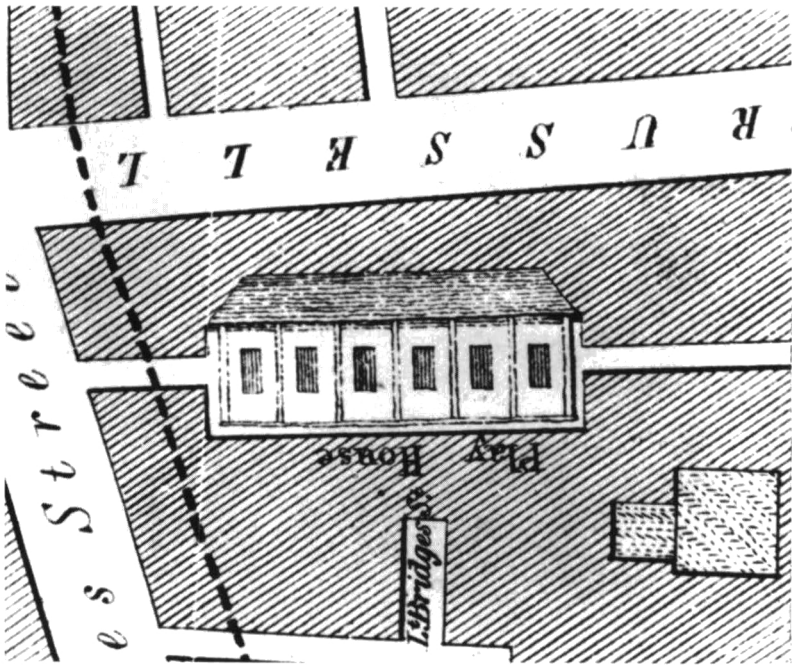


Figure 15 A closeup of Plate 14, showing the Drury Lane theatre. The joint between the sections of the original has been spliced out in the photographic process.
Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

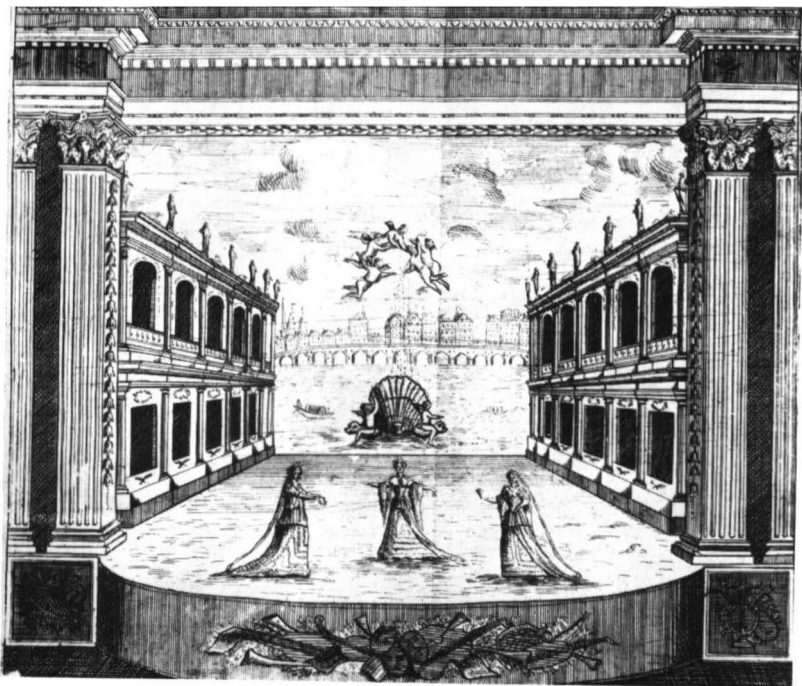


Figure 16 The frontispiece to Perrin's *Ariane* (1674), showing the stage of the Drury Lane theatre; Yale University Library copy. The original is a fold-out.

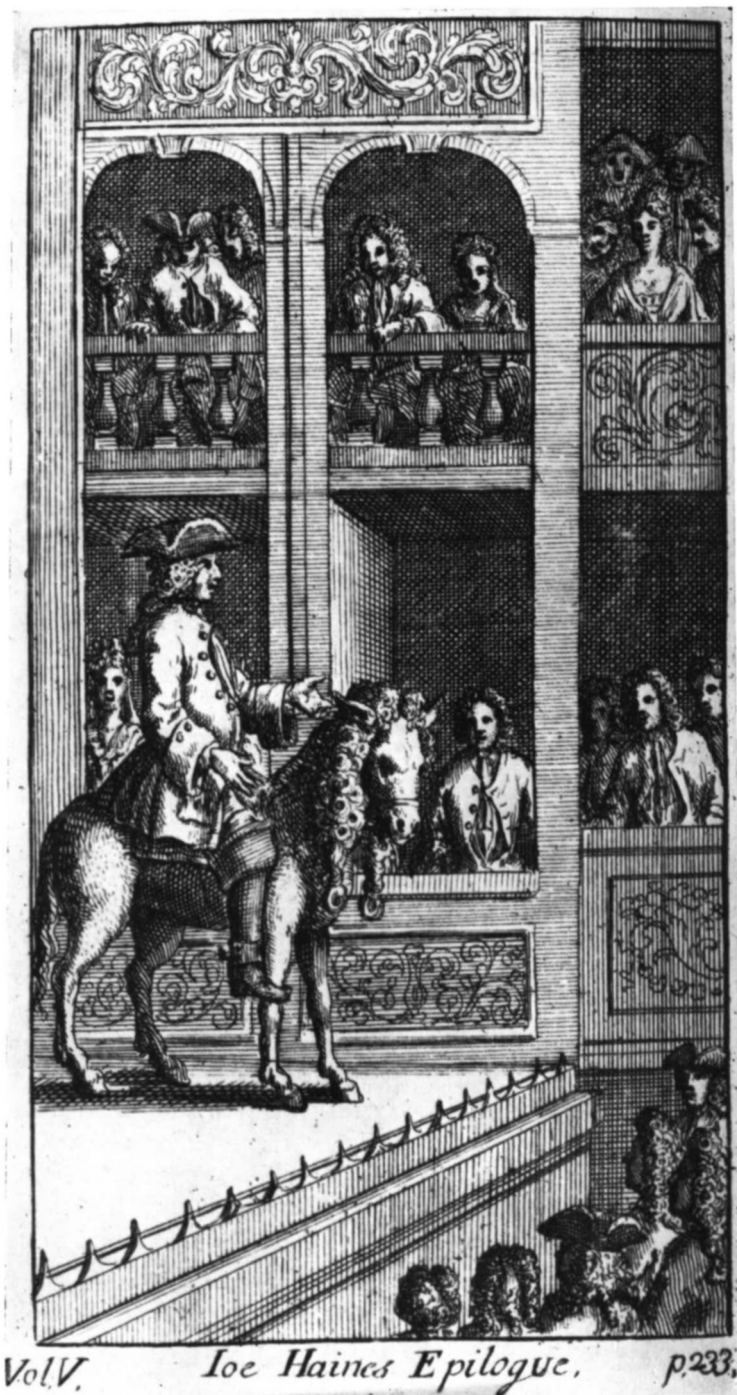


Figure 17 Joe Haines (or Haynes) speaking the Epilogue to Scott's *The Unhappy Kindness* at Drury Lane c.July 1696, from Thomas Brown's *Works*, vol. V, facing p. 233 (1702); British Museum copy. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

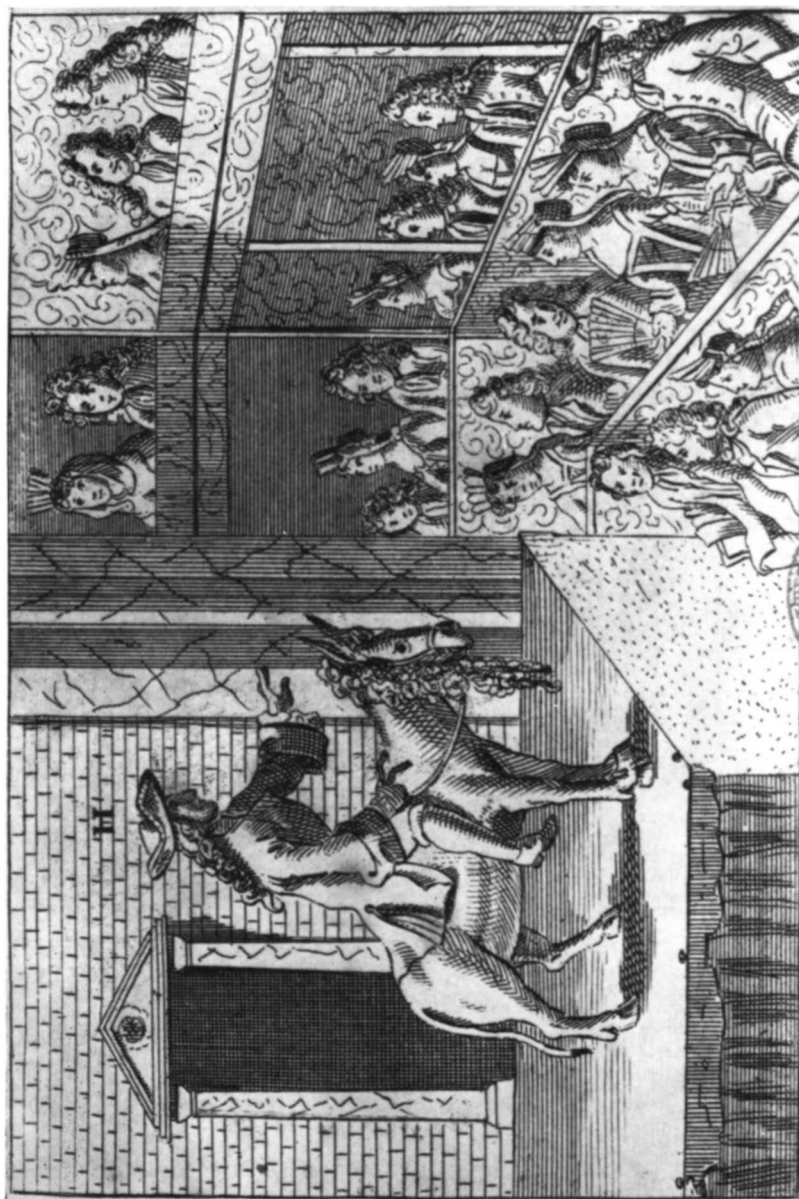


Figure 18 Joe Haines (or Haynes) speaking a Prologue or Epilogue at Drury Lane; the frontispiece to Haines' *A Fatal Mistake* (1692); British Museum copy. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

side of the stage, each between a pair of pilasters and each replaced by one stage box on each side of the stage, then the picture of Haines is incorrect in showing two boxes. I think Cibber and the print are probably in agreement, that by lower doors he simply meant proscenium doors as opposed to wing entrances, and that he meant two boxes on each side replacing two doors on each side. Note that the new doors were placed behind the proscenium wall where the first set of wings once stood; I would guess that probably the main curtain was also changed and rehung upstage of these new doors. I take it that there had been on each side of the stage two pilasters framing a pair of proscenium doors; these doors were removed, a new pilaster added on each side, and two stage boxes thus created, just as the print shows. Had the artist who portrayed Haines given us a wider picture, I believe we would see the new stage left entrance door just behind Haines.⁹

The second picture of Haines delivering an Epilogue on an ass is much more crudely rendered and even more difficult to interpret. It was printed in 1692 as a frontispiece for Haines' *A Fatal Mistake* and should show the Drury Lane forestage before the alterations Cibber described, but it doesn't (Figure 18). What it does show is most peculiar indeed: a platform stage jutting into the auditorium with a curtain tacked to its front. Behind Haines appears something which looks like a proscenium door in a brick wall where the main curtain should be. He is facing an apparently subdivided pit in front of a row of boxes, and a gallery—all very oddly arranged. There is no pit door, no curved stage front, only one proscenium door, and no second tier of boxes. It would be too easy to pass this picture off as the work of an incompetent artist; he was obviously unskilled in perspective, and his proportions are often ludicrous, but let us assume that he was probably trying to draw what he had seen and that his results were considered accurate enough to warrant publication. What, then, could he have intended?

One possible interpretation of the print, though it may at first seem extravagant, makes a kind of sense: if one covers up each half of the picture in turn, two different but related views of the theatre appear. The vertical line which almost splits the picture encourages this approach to the problem. If the right half is covered, Haines is seen facing the pit (as in the previous print); a stage left proscenium door is to his left, and just downstage of it something which might be taken for a pilaster, forming the proscenium arch. A second entrance door is missing, however, and the area at the lower left corner of the

picture still looks like a drape attached by tacks and not a cut-away view of the stage platform. This apparent drape might be a cut-away, however, if what appear to be tacks are taken as tenterhooks holding down a floor cloth; note that there are two "tacks" just in front of Haines, to his left and to his right. If the left half of the print is covered one sees, not the pit and boxes near the stage, but the back corner of the house as one might view it sitting in the center of the pit and looking over his right shoulder. The railing that apparently separates two sections of the pit seems very strange, but Wren showed just such a split in his plan "81" (Figure 1). If the pit was split, one would suppose the rear section contained more than one row, but since the artist has shown only one row in the boxes and one in the gallery too, perhaps this peculiarity can be laid to his desire to simplify.

I am not at all sure this interpretation is even close to correct, but I find the print even more baffling if viewed as a whole, and I am impressed with the fact that the artist, though clearly unskilled in many ways, took the pains to show, for example, the decorative pattern on the front of the railings and behind the spectators. He was trying to picture Haines and his audience, and perhaps that is just what he did, but in a composite sketch.

These few figures, then, are all the pieces of pictorial evidence I have been able to find for the Bridges Street and Drury Lane playhouses; they present some difficult problems in interpretation which probably cannot be solved until further material is discovered, but they bring us at least a few steps closer to a knowledge of what these important theatres looked like.

NOTES

¹ Hamilton Bell, "Contributions to the History of the English Playhouse," *The Architectural Record*, XXXIII (1913), 366–367.

² Quoted in Percy Fitzgerald, *A New History of the English Stage* (London, 1882), I, 82n, from the original lease dated 20 December 1661.

³ Lorenzo Magalotti, *Travels of Cosimo the Third, Grand Duke of Tuscany, through England* [1669] (London, 1821), p. 190.

⁴ See Richard Leacroft, "Wren's Drury Lane," *Architectural Review*, CX (July, 1951), 43–46; Edward Langhans, "Wren's Restoration Playhouse," *Theatre Notebook*, XVIII (Spring, 1964), 91–100; and Bell, pp. 367–368.

⁵ Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1928), p. 255.

⁶ Montague Summers, *The Restoration Theatre* (New York, 1934), p. 276, cites but does not reproduce the view shown on Plate 11. Despite the lack of clarity in the picture, Summers deduced that the windows were of "clear-paned glass." He did not cite the two other views from the *Stow Survey* (Figures 8 and 12).

⁷ Bell, p. 368.

⁸ *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, edited by Robert W. Lowe (London, 1889), II, 85.

⁹ Since Cibber's description is so marvellously ambiguous, perhaps an alternate interpretation should be offered. Let us suppose that by "lower Doors" Cibber *did* mean, as the promptbooks apparently mean, just the furthest downstage proscenium doors on each side of the stage. If so, then the upper pair of doors were left in place, the lower pair were replaced by two boxes on each side of the stage—with new pilasters dividing them, for Cibber implies such additions—and a new pair of doors was installed upstage of the proscenium wall. This would yield two doors and two boxes on each side and satisfy the LD and UD references in early 18th-century promptbooks, but it would be difficult to reconcile this interpretation with Cibber's comment that the stage was cut back about four feet.