


Richard Brinsley Sheridan

The Right Honourable Richard Brinsley Sheridan	
	
Treasurer of the Navy	
In office 1806–1807	
Prime Minister	Lord Grenville
Preceded by	George Canning
Succeeded by	George Rose
Born	October 30, 1751Dublin, Ireland
Died	July 7, 1816 (aged 64)14 Savile Row, London, England
Political party	Whig
Profession	Statesman, playwright

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (30 October 1751 – 7 July 1816) was an Irish-born playwright and poet and long-term owner of the London Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. For thirty-two years he was also a Whig Member of the British House of Commons for Stafford (1780–1806), Westminster (1806–1807) and Ilchester (1807–1812). Such was the esteem he was held in by his contemporaries when he died that he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Life

R. B. Sheridan was born in 1751 in Dublin, Ireland, where his family had a house on then-fashionable Dorset Street. The family moved permanently to England in 1758 when he was age seven.^[1] He was a pupil at Harrow School outside London from 1762 to 1768. His mother, Frances Sheridan, was a playwright and novelist. She had two plays produced in London in the early 1760s, though she is best known for her novel *The Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph* (1761). His father, Thomas Sheridan, was for a while an actor-manager at the Theatre Royal, Dublin but, following his move to England in 1758, he gave up acting and wrote a number of books concerning education and, especially, the standardisation of the English language in education.

In 1772 Richard Sheridan fought a famous duel against Captain Thomas Mathews. Mathews had written a newspaper article defaming the character of Elizabeth Linley, the woman Sheridan intended to marry, and honour dictated that a duel must be fought. A first duel was fought in London where they agreed to fight in Hyde park, but finding it too crowded they went to the Castle Tavern in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. Far from its romantic image, the duel was short and bloodless. Mathews lost his sword and, according to Sheridan, was forced to 'beg for his life' and sign a retraction of the article. The apology was made public and Mathews, infuriated by the publicity

the duel had received, refused to accept his defeat as final and challenged Sheridan to another duel. Sheridan was not obliged to accept this challenge, but would have become a social pariah if he had not. The second duel, fought in August 1772 at Kingsdown near Bath, was a much more ferocious affair. This time both men broke their swords but carried on fighting in a 'desperate struggle for life and honour'. Both were wounded, Sheridan dangerously, being 'borne from the field with a portion of his antagonist's weapon sticking through an ear, his breast-bone touched, his whole body covered with wounds and blood, and his face nearly beaten to jelly with the hilt of Mathews' sword'. Fortunately his remarkable constitution pulled him through, and eight days after this bloody affair the Bath Chronicle was able to announce that he was out of danger. Mathews escaped in a post chaise.

Playwright



Sheridan by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

In 1773, Richard Sheridan at age 21 married Elizabeth Ann Linley and set up house in London on a lavish scale with little money and no immediate prospects of any — other than his wife's dowry. The young couple entered the fashionable world and apparently held up their end in entertaining. When Sheridan settled in London, he began writing for the stage. Less than two years later, in 1775, his first play, *The Rivals*, was produced at London's Covent Garden Theatre. It was a failure on its first night. Sheridan cast a more capable actor for the role of the comic Irishman for its second performance, and it was a smash which immediately established the young playwright's reputation and the favour of fashionable London. It has gone on to become a standard of English literature.

Shortly after the success of *The Rivals*, Sheridan and his father-in-law Thomas Linley, a successful composer, produced the opera, *The Duenna*. This piece was accorded such a warm reception that it played for seventy-five performances.

In 1776, Sheridan, his father-in-law, and one other partner, bought a half interest in the Drury Lane theatre and, two years later, bought out the other half. Sheridan was the manager of the theatre for many years, and later became sole owner with no managerial role.

His most famous play *The School for Scandal* (Drury Lane, 8 May 1777) is considered one of the greatest comedies of manners in English. It was followed by *The Critic* (1779), an updating of the satirical Restoration play *The Rehearsal*, which received a memorable revival (performed with *Oedipus* in a single evening) starring Laurence Olivier as Mr Puff, opening at the New Theatre on 18 October 1945 as part of an Old Vic Theatre Company season.

Having quickly made his name and fortune, in 1776 Sheridan bought David Garrick's share in the Drury Lane patent, and in 1778 the remaining share. His later plays were all produced there ^[2]. On 24 February 1809 (despite the much vaunted fire safety precautions of 1794) the theatre burned down. On being encountered drinking a glass of wine in the street while watching the fire, Sheridan was famously reported to have said: "A man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside." ^[3]

Member of Parliament



In *Uncorking Old Sherry* (1805), James Gillray caricatured Sheridan as a bottle of sherry, uncorked by Pitt and bursting out with puns, invective, and fibs.



Physical Air, —or— Britannia recover'd from a Trance;—also, the Patriotic Courage of Sherry Andrew; & a peep thro' the Fog (1803) by James Gillray, showing Sheridan as a Silenus-like and ragged Harlequin defending Henry Addington and Lord Hawkesbury on the Dover coast from the advancing French rowboats filled with French soldiers, lead by Napoleon. Sheridan says: "Let 'em come! damn'me!!!—Where are the French Buggabo's? Single handed I'd beat forty of 'em!!! dam'me I'd pay 'em like Renter Shares, sconce off their half Crowns!!!—mulct them out of their Benefits, &c, come Drury Lane Slang over em!."

In 1780, Sheridan entered Parliament as the ally of Charles James Fox on the side of the American Colonials in the political debate of that year. He is said to have paid the burgesses of Stafford five guineas apiece for the honour of representing them. As a consequence, his first speech in Parliament had to be a defence against the charge of bribery.

In 1793 during the debates on the Aliens Act designed to prevent French Revolutionary spies and saboteurs from flooding into the country, Edmund Burke made a speech in which he claimed there were thousands of French agents in Britain ready to use weapons against the authorities. To dramatically emphasise his point he threw down a knife onto the floor of the House of Commons. Sheridan is said to have shouted out "Where's the fork?", which led to much of the house collapsing in laughter.^[4]

During the invasion scare of 1803 Sheridan penned an *Address to the People*:

THEY, by a strange Frenzy driven, fight for Power, for Plunder, and extended Rule—WE, for our Country, our Altars, and our Homes.—THEY follow an ADVENTURER, whom they fear—and obey a Power which they *hate*—WE serve a *Monarch* whom we love—a God whom we adore...They call on us to barter all of Good we have inherited and proved, for the desperate Chance of Something better which they *promise*.—Be our plain Answer this: The Throne WE honour is the PEOPLE'S CHOICE—the Laws we reverence are our brave Fathers' Legacy—the Faith we follow teaches us to live in bonds of Charity with all Mankind, and die with Hope of Bliss beyond the Grave. Tell your *Invaders* this; and tell them too, we seek no Change; and, least of all, such Change as *they* would bring us.^[5]

He held the posts of Receiver-General of the Duchy of Cornwall (1804–1807) and Treasurer of the Navy (1806–1807).

When he failed to be re-elected to Parliament in 1812, after 32 years, his creditors closed in on him and his last years were harassed by debt and disappointment. On hearing of his debts, the American Congress offered Sheridan £20,000 in recognition of his efforts to prevent the American War of Independence. The offer was refused.

In December 1815 he became ill, largely confined to bed. Sheridan died in poverty, and was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey; his funeral was attended by dukes, earls, lords, viscounts, the

Lord Mayor of London, and other notables.

Family

He and his wife had two children: Thomas Sheridan, who married Caroline Henrietta Callender, daughter of Col. James Callander Campbell, of Craigforth, Stirling, and was the father of the 4th Baroness of Dufferin and Claneboye, Caroline Sheridan and the 12th Duchess of Somerset; and Edith Marcia Caroline Sheridan (d. 9 April 1876), m. 30 June 1864 to John Francis Thynne, of Haynes Park (17 June 1830 – 30 January 1910, Justice of Peace, of the Marquesses of Bath, and had issue.

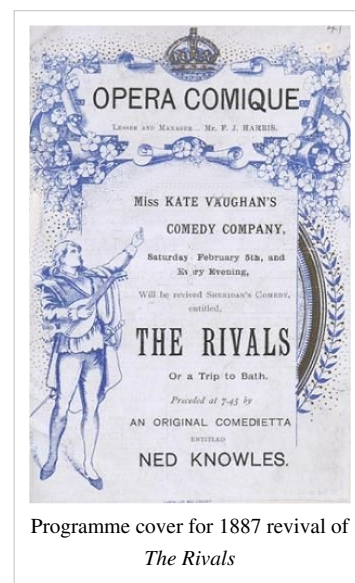
Works

- *The Rivals* (first acted 17 January 1775)
- *St Patrick's Day* (first acted 2 May 1775)
- *The Duenna* (first acted 21 November 1775)
- *A Trip to Scarborough* (first acted 24 February 1777)
- *The School for Scandal* (first acted 8 May 1777)
- *The Camp* (first acted 15 October 1778)
- *The Critic* (first acted 30 October 1779)
- *The Glorious First of June* (first acted 2 July 1794)
- *Pizarro* (first acted 24 May 1799; with incidental music by Jan Ladislav Dussek)

He also wrote a selection of poems, and political speeches for his time in parliament.

Adaptations and Cultural References

- In *The Duchess* (2008) film, a biography of Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, *The School for Scandal* is performed.
- In the *Yes, Prime Minister* episode 'The Patron of the Arts', two of Sheridan's plays are named as ones the prime minister could not see: 'The Rivals', "there were too many cabinet ministers after his job", and 'The School for Scandal', "well, not after the education secretary had been found in bed with a married primary school headmistress". Later, the same prime minister being asked to name a famous English playwright other than Shakespeare says "Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw" and is told, "they were all Irish"
- In the *Blackadder III* episode 'Amy and Amiability', Blackadder, dressed in a black mask and cape, is asked if he intends to become a highwayman and replies sarcastically "No, I'm auditioning for the part of Arnold the Bat in Sheridan's new comedy."
- The very first sentence of Jules Verne's "Around the World in Eighty Days" is "*Mr. Phileas Fogg lived, in 1872, at No. 7, Saville Row, Burlington Gardens, the house in which Sheridan died in 1814*" (s:Around the World in Eighty Days/I) - which includes two factual mistakes: Sheridan actually lived in No. 14^[6] and died in 1816. Evidently, Verne assumed as a matter of course that a French readership more than half a century later would know who Sheridan was and would need no further explanation.




Programme cover for 1887 revival of *The Rivals*

Notes

- [1] Sources: (<http://www.jamesboswell.info/biography/thomas-sheridan-actor-and-teacher-elocution>), ([http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/s/Sheridan,T\(b1719\)/life.htm](http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/s/Sheridan,T(b1719)/life.htm)), (<http://www.ocotilloroad.com/geneal/sheridan1.html#THOM2>)
- [2] The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, edited by Phyllis Hartnoll, OUP (1951)
- [3] The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, OUP (1999)
- [4] Arnold-Baker p.393
- [5] Frank J. Klingberg and Sigurd B. Hustvedt (eds.), *The Warning Drum. The British Home Front Faces Napoleon. Broad­sides of 1803* (University of California Press, 1944), pp. 93-94.
- [6] <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41494>

References

-  "Sheridan, Richard Brinsley". *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1885–1900 . London: Smith, Elder & Co.
- Richard Brinsley Sheridan (<http://www.theatrehistory.com/irish/sheridan001.html>) Retrieved March 2, 2008
- Frank J. Klingberg and Sigurd B. Hustvedt (eds.), *The Warning Drum. The British Home Front Faces Napoleon. Broad­sides of 1803* (University of California Press, 1944).
- Arnold-Baker, Charles. *The Companion to British History*. Longcross Press, 1996.

External links

- Information about Sheridan's life and works, with a comprehensive bibliography, at rbsheridan.co.uk (<http://www.rbsheridan.co.uk>).
 - Works by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (<http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Richard+Brinsley+Sheridan>) at Project Gutenberg
 - Full text of Thomas Moore's *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honorable Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, Vol. 1 (<http://www.gutenberg.net/etext/6741>), Vol. 2 (<http://www.gutenberg.net/etext/7775>)
 - Portraits of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (<http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/person.asp?LinkID=mp04094>) at the National Portrait Gallery, London
-

Article Sources and Contributors

Richard Brinsley Sheridan *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=406863940> *Contributors:* 123456abcdef123, ABF, Adam sk, AdjustShift, Advance, AlbertSM, Aldebaran69, Ardfern, Arniep, Ashot Gabrielyan, AySz88, Birutorul, Bjf, Bjmullan, BoBo, Britannicus, Brograve, Broux, BrownHairedGirl, CS-7, Cardigras, Ceoil, Charles Matthews, Chicheley, Choess, Connor Craig I.Q 131, Courcelles, Craigy144, D6, Daibhid C, DavidCane, DavidFarmbrough, Daytrivia, Deb, Dgarq, Dr Almost, Dunnettreader, Dyknowsore, Eloquence, Erik Kennedy, Eubulides, Fawcett5, Filiocht, Firsfron, Flapdragon, Fuzheado, Gh, Gold heart, Gondooley, Good Olfactory, Historybuff2283, Hohenloh, Inter, JB82, JackofOz, JamesMLane, Java13690, Jdforrester, Jean-no, John K, John Thaxter, Johnny Ghost, Johnwcowan, Joseph Solis in Australia, Jsteph, Kbdank71, Kbthompson, Kenilworth Terrace, Koavf, Krsmith, Kscally, Leandrod, LibLord, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Emsworth, LordFoppington, Lradrama, Magnus Manske, Mahlum, Mauls, Mayumashu, Mermaid from the Baltic Sea, Michaelhendry, MissAlyx, Mtiedemann, Natalie West, Neddyseagoon, Nenya, Nickforster, NoahElhardt, Nunh-huh, Ocohen, Old Moonraker, Opera hat, PBS-AWB, Paul A. Pete Eyles, Politicaljunkie23, Rbh00, Rbraunwa, Rmhermen, Rothorpe, Ruzulo, SDC, Sannse, Scrivener-uki, Seanwal111111, Showtime2009, Smerus, Someguy1221, Ssilvers, Tarquin, Thegauravsethi, Thf1977, Tony1, Troutsneeze, Tweedly-dee, UtherSRG, Wikidude1, Woohookitty, Ww2censor, Xn4, Youngamerican, Zoe, Zoso Jade, Александр, 91 anonymous edits

Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors

file:Richard Brinsley Sheridan.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Richard_Brinsley_Sheridan.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Karl Anton Hickel

File:Richard Sheridan.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Richard_Sheridan.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* sir Joshua Reynolds

Image:Uncorking-Old-Sherry-Gillray.jpeg *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Uncorking-Old-Sherry-Gillray.jpeg> *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Anne97432, Eubulides, Infrogmation, Man vyi, Ottawa Rima, 2 anonymous edits

Image:Britannia recover'd from a trance.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Britannia_recover'd_from_a_trance.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* AndreasPraefcke, Churchh, Infrogmation, Ingolfson, Man vyi, Mu, Petrusbarbygere

File:Opera-comique-1887.jpg *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Opera-comique-1887.jpg> *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Tim riley

File:Wikisource-logo.svg *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Wikisource-logo.svg> *License:* logo *Contributors:* Nicholas Moreau

License

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>