

Owen Nares (1888-43)

Stage and Screen Idol & Actor Manager

Few people today are aware that Reading produced the country's leading matinee idol of his time. For so Owen Nares was, for most of the 1920s, although '*matinee idol*' was a term that he profoundly disliked. Had he lived on after the War his name would still be on the lips of the nation; pre-war, it was so well known that it even entered into cockney rhyming slang (Owen Nares = "chairs").



His reputation was high, even when at School, with performances on Speech Day, and, notably at Reading's County Theatre as the lead in "*Ion*" written by another OR commemorated by an OR who has long had a commemorative plaque in Big School – Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd.

Arnold Bennett's "*Milestones*" was the artistic and popular stage success of 1912 – Owen Nares never looked back.

He also made numerous films including 25 of the silent variety, in which he was usually the male lead. During this time he continued to star on the West End stage almost without pause. He turned down a Hollywood career in favour of touring his own company as an Actor Manager together with his wife, Marie Pollini. This perhaps gave him his greatest career satisfaction.

Owen Nares was born in Maiden Erlegh and grew up in Sonning. His father was a founder member of many of Reading's Societies and Institutions and a keen sportsman and Owen had been at this School, a considerable athlete and very fine cricketer.

In 1943, while visiting the birthplace of the actress Sarah Siddons, he had a fatal heart attack in the same room where Siddons had been born. He was 55 years old.