



THE OLD VIC

A CHRONOLOGY

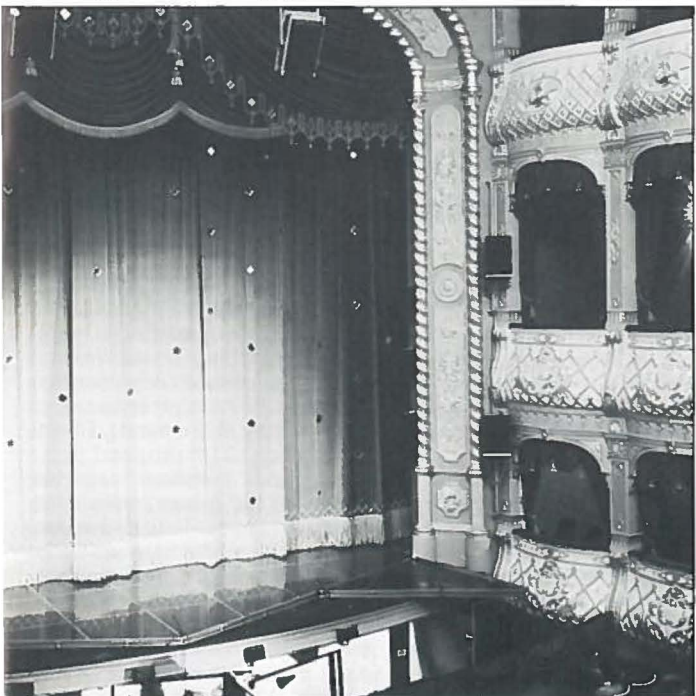
1817 Waterloo Bridge opened.
 1818 Theatre opens as THE ROYAL COBURG. Architect: Rudolf Cabanel. Seating approx. 4,000.
 1822 Stage curtain made of 66 pieces of mirror installed – the “Looking Glass Curtain” quickly became one of the sights of London.
 1831 Edmund Keen appears as Othello and Richard III.
 1833 Theatre re-decorated and re-named THE VICTORIA. Soon becomes known as The Old Vic, noted for extravagant melodrama.
 1834 Theatre re-named THE ROYAL VICTORIA.
 1834 Paganini’s farewell concert.
 1847 Pickford’s bid for the theatre as a parcels’ office.
 1858 False alarm in the gallery (top tier of 3) causes a stampede in gallery – 16 killed and many injured.
 1869 Auditorium completely re-built, with 2 tiers. Architect: J.T. Robinson. Seating reduced to 2,800.
 1870 Theatre sinks to lowest level of melodrama, with audiences even rougher than the shows. Frequent accidents, disreputable audience, danger of footpads to gentry crossing Waterloo Bridge.
 1871 Theatre sold again. Re-opens as THE ROYAL VICTORIA PALACE THEATRE, and fails again.
 1874 Sold again. Re-opens as THE NEW VICTORIA THEATRE. Everybody continued to call it The Old Vic. Goes into further decline.
 1880 Leased to Emma Cons, social reformer: re-opens as THE ROYAL VICTORIA COFFEE MUSIC-

HALL, run on temperance lines, giving lectures and concerts.
 1888 Lack of bar profits forces Emma Cons to form a charity and raise money. Freehold is bought by the charity and vested in The Charity Commissioners.
 1894 Further financial difficulties – Samuel Morley, a wealthy textile manufacturer from Leicester, makes a substantial donation and founds Morley College (for working-class adult education) at the rear of The Old Vic.
 1898 Emma Cons’ niece, Lilian Baylis, joins and assists with management: “New, moving pictures” are introduced.
 1900 First opera – The Bohemian Girl (in English).
 1905 Symphony concerts were started.
 1912 Emma Cons dies: Lilian Baylis takes over.
 1914 Rosina Filippi’s “People’s Theatre” attempted a season of Shakespeare.
 1914 The Old Vic Shakespeare Company formed under direction of Ben Greet.
 1915-25 All Shakespeare’s plays of the First Folio performed for the first time in any theatre. (Producers: Ben Greet, G.R. Foss, Robert Atkins)
 1921 LCC demands alterations to building and removal of Morley College.
 1925-26 Re-building and alteration (Architect: Frank Matcham).
 1925-36 Drama produced by Andrew Leigh, Harcourt Williams and Henry Cass.
 1931 First ballet performed with

Anton Dolin. Sadler’s Wells opened by The Old Vic under Lilian Baylis’ management.
 1931-36 Shakespeare, opera and ballet all alternate between The Old Vic and Sadler’s Wells.
 1936 Opera and Ballet transferred permanently to Sadler’s Wells.
 1937 Lilian Baylis dies: Tyrone Guthrie appointed administrator.
 1939 Theatre closed at outbreak of war.
 1941 Theatre hit by bombs.
 1947-50 Temporary repairs carried out: foundation of The Old Vic School and The Young Vic.
 1950 Renovations and re-opening. Present chandelier made. New proscenium designed and built for Michel Saint-Denis.
 1950-53 Seasons directed by George Devine, Glen Byam Shaw, Michel Saint-Denis and Hugh Hunt.
 1953-58 First Folio of Shakespeare produced under Michael Benthall’s direction.
 1958 H.M. The Queen opens the Old Vic Annexe, built by the Governors, financed by overseas tours, to house workshops, wardrobe and paint frame.
 1958-63 Seasons directed by Tyrone Guthrie and Michael Elliott.
 1963 The Old Vic Company is disbanded: The National Theatre takes a lease. Arts Council promises to use best endeavours to secure future of Old Vic when National Theatre leave. Laurence Olivier appointed director. Extensive alterations, including removal of boxes and building new proscenium arches by Sean Kenny.
 1976 National Theatre moves to

new home on South Bank, having rejected plan for Old Vic to be their permanent, conventional, proscenium arch theatre.
 1976-77 Governors of The Old Vic appoint James Verner to manage the theatre with visiting companies.
 1977-78 Guest seasons of Prospect Productions at The Old Vic under direction of Toby Robertson.
 1979-81 Prospect designated “The Old Vic Company”, under the direction of first Toby Robertson, then Timothy West.
 1981 Arts Council withdraws subsidy from Prospect without warning, and the company goes into liquidation.
 1981-82 Governors take short lets of the theatre and seek a permanent future policy.
 1982 Without subsidy, Governors obliged to sell the freehold to discharge debts accumulated from past five years: after 94 years The Old Vic returns to private ownership when they sell it to the highest bidder, Ed Mirvish of Toronto, who announces a plan to restore its interior to the design of Robinson of 1871.
 1983 After £2m facelift, The Old Vic reopens on 31st October on time and within budget.

In the 165 years of its existence, The Old Vic has been a producing drama theatre for 60 years (one-third of its life so far) and its occupants have been subsidised by public funds for a total of 35 years (one-fifth of its life).



Far Left: The Old Vic by night showing the external lighting, which throws a curtain of light upwards to emphasise the architectural features.

Centre: The auditorium of the Old Vic showing the proscenium arch and boxes, which have been reinstated to the style of 1871, and the house curtain, which has 63 pieces of mirror sewn on to it.

Left: The refurbished auditorium of The Old Vic which holds 1077 people. The fibrous plasterwork around the front of the circles and on the ceiling are based on late 19th century drawings.