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This is the first book to chronicle fully the history of London's Old Vic Theatre. After Drury Lane, Covent Garden and the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, the Old Vic is London's oldest theatre, with a continuous history since 1818. Drawing on important archives both here (notably the Royal Victoria Hall's) and in the United States, George Rowell sheds new light on the management, audience, productions and players. In particular he offers fresh information on its early years, when such famous figures as Edmund Kean and William Charles Macready appeared there, and Paganini gave his farewell concert.

Over 175 years the Old Vic has served many purposes and many publics. It welcomed the young Princess Victoria on one of her first visits to the theatre. It has been the home of spectacle, 'blood-and-thunder' melodrama and Variety. Subsequently it was used as a temperance hall and housed a working-men's college. The Theatre was the first permanent home of opera in English, as well as British Ballet. Above all it was the birthplace of the world-famous Old Vic Company and saw the first appearances of Britain's National Theatre Company, directed by Laurence Olivier. Among the actors to perform at the Old Vic were Ralph Richardson, Charles Laughton, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.

The book contains numerous illustrations from the early years of the Theatre and of important productions. It includes a chronology of plays produced at the Theatre by the Old Vic, National and other companies. It will be of interest to students and scholars of theatre and social history as well as to theatregoers.

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*The Old Vic Theatre:
A History*

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xii Acknowledgements

for the Old Vic Archives, and personally guarded them from weather and souvenir-hunters. I have no doubt their preservation was entirely due to him.'

George Evans died on 26 July 1979, trying to save a stack of scenery from falling. I am sad that I cannot thank him in person.