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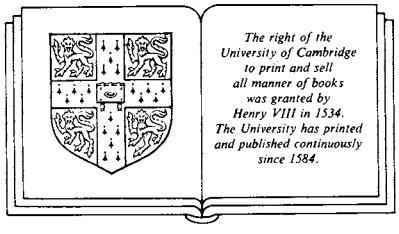

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For Don Rowan

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Preface

In 1973 the four hundredth anniversary of Inigo Jones's birth was celebrated by a comprehensive exhibition of his work held within the expressive walls of the Banqueting House in Whitehall. The firm architecture, the energetic craftsmanship, the incisive learning, all the qualities of the man's work were generously displayed. The catalogue of the show, *The King's Arcadia*, remains essential reading for anyone interested in the whole range of Jones's canon, including his work for the theatre and the Court masque.

The quatercentenary also saw the publication of Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong's monumental study of the masque designs, *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court*. It was a book to catch the imagination, its exhaustive scholarship quickening interest in the study of Jones's scenic art and laying the groundwork for many new discoveries and interpretations, the chief of which have been published in a distinguished series of articles by John Peacock.

Two further volumes placed the architectural and theoretical drawings before the public. John Harris's *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects: Inigo Jones and John Webb* appeared in 1972 and seven years later was joined by the *Catalogue of Drawings by Inigo Jones, John Webb and Isaac de Caus in the Collection at Worcester College, Oxford*, in which Harris was accompanied as co-editor by A. A. Tait.

Both Jones and his junior associate, John Webb, designed scenery for masques at Court, but their main concern was with architecture. Accordingly they were commissioned from time to time to erect stages and auditoria suitable for the acting of plays, and among their extant drawings are plans, elevations and sections of many theatres, most equipped with scenery, most constructed at Court, and yet nearly all intended for the drama rather than the more specialized requirements of the masque. Some of these drawings were published by Orgel and Strong, others by Harris and Tait; the rest have appeared scattered in books and periodicals over many years. They deserve to be considered as a coherent group, for they are the fruit of Jones's study, of his long experience and deft collaboration with Webb, himself the sole author of several of the schemes. As architecture the drawings belong to a single class, each project representing a new assault on the ancient challenge offered by the theatre's need to bring the performer and the audience profitably together; as theatre history they form by far the richest vein of evidence about English playhouses of the seventeenth century, a period from which only the sparsest graphic documents have survived to illustrate the development of the stage.

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I have attempted therefore to assemble all the drawings left by Jones and Webb that show the architecture of the houses they built or fitted out for the drama proper. The masque scenes represent a category of work somewhat removed from the ordinary concerns of the stage and lie beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless it will often be necessary to refer to them, and I have adopted the convention of using the numbers assigned to them by Orgel and Strong (O & S). The main emphasis lies however on the plans and other architectural drawings by which the theatres are known to us; when the scene designs contribute towards an understanding of the buildings for which they were intended I have of course included them, but they are not the subject of the book. That remains the theatres themselves, their fabric and the traditions of their design.

Parts of chapters 2 and 3 have appeared in somewhat different form in *Shakespeare Survey 30* and *35*, and part of chapter 6 in *The British Library Journal*; I am pleased to have received the permission of their editors to reprint the material here. Much of the research was undertaken with the aid of grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Alberta Fund for the Advancement of Scholarship. I am grateful to these institutions, but owe an equally important and more personal debt to those whose conversation has made the writing of this book so deep a pleasure: John Harris, Sir Roy Strong, John Newman, Gordon Higgott, Richard Hosley (who rashly volunteered to read the typescript) and – at Cambridge University Press – Sarah Stanton. It was my wife, however, who helped most of all.

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A note on terminology

Many of the theatres described in this book derive from the plan and section printed by Sebastiano Serlio in his *Secondo libro di perspettiva* (Paris, 1545). Because the parts of the Renaissance stage and auditorium are not quite the equivalent of modern structures I have adopted a terminology that corresponds to Serlio's. Thus in his plan (plate 3) we find a level *orchestra* labelled E. In Jacobean and Caroline Court theatres a similar area was often used as a *dancing floor*. Between it and the raised stage was a floor-level passage (D), called the *piazza della scena* by Serlio in his later editions and more simply the *piazza* by at least one English designer. I have adopted the shorter form. Beyond the *piazza* is the raised and level *forestage* (C), shown by Serlio with a reticulated surface which distinguishes it from the foreshortened and raked stage proper (B). The latter, being flanked by wings and closed off with a *backscene*, I have called the *scenic stage*. In most designs by Jones and Webb the boundary between the *forestage* and the *scenic stage* is marked by a *frontispiece* or *scenic border*, a feature not found in Serlio. Occasionally an analogous division occurs also in the non-scenic playhouses, as in plate 16, where the stage proper is embraced by the tiring-house front (or *frons scenae*) much as a raked *scenic stage* is enclosed by its scenery. Here the platform is level and continuous with the broad *forestage*, the division between the two being marked only by the return surfaces of the *frons*.

In many of the seventeenth-century scenic theatres the *backscene* was constructed as a pair or pairs of *backshutters* which could be withdrawn to show the *scenes of relieve*, usually a set of profiled flats set up before a *backcloth* (see, for a detailed example, plate 23). Sometimes this back part of the scene was built in two storeys, with an *upper stage* above the *scenes of relieve*; this too was usually fitted at the front with shutters which could be withdrawn to reveal an *upper scene*, often of deities (plate 22). Above the whole was constructed a wooden grid called a *roof*, from which were suspended the *cloud borders* (plate 27).

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