

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-34837-9 - Theatre in the Victorian Age  
Michael R. Booth  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*Theatre in the Victorian Age*

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-34837-9 - Theatre in the Victorian Age  
Michael R. Booth  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*Theatre in the Victorian Age*

MICHAEL R. BOOTH



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-34837-9 - Theatre in the Victorian Age  
Michael R. Booth  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1991

First published 1991  
Reprinted 1995

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

Booth, Michael R. (Michael Richard), 1931–  
Theatre in the Victorian age.  
1. England. Theatre, history  
1. Title  
792.0942

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Booth, Michael R.  
Theatre in the Victorian Age / Michael R. Booth.  
p. cm.  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 0-521-34351-8 (hard). – ISBN 0-521-34837-4 (pbk.)  
1. Theater -- Great Britain -- Historical -- 19th century. 2. English drama --  
19th century -- History and criticism. 1. Title.  
PN2594.B58 1991  
792'.0941'09034-dc20 90-21003 CIP

ISBN 0 521 34837 4 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 1999

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-34837-9 - Theatre in the Victorian Age  
Michael R. Booth  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

To George Rowell

In Friendship

## Contents

---

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Chronology</i>	xv
<b>1 Theatre and society</b>	<b>I</b>
Audiences and social class (2) – Population growth and new theatres (3) – Audience composition (6) – The music hall (11) – Railways (14) – Provincial theatres (16) – Touring companies (18) – Religious attitudes to theatre (21)	
<b>2 Management</b>	<b>27</b>
Managerial responsibilities (28) – Motivation and capital investment (31) – Company organisation and expenses (33) – Revenue and pricing policy (38) – Macready (41) – Vestris (44) – Phelps (46) – Charles Kean (47) – Calvert and Saker (49) – Wilton and Bancroft (52) – Irving (54) – Dominance of the actor-manager (55)	
<b>3 Playhouse and production</b>	<b>58</b>
The auditorium (58) – Sanitation (66) – Safety and fire protection (67) – The stage and stage machinery (70) – Scene-painting (80) – Lighting and scenic effect (82) – Sound effects (93) – Technical rehearsals (94) – Pictorialism and archaeology (95) – Realism (96)	
<b>4 The actor</b>	<b>99</b>
Going on stage (99) – Workload (102) – Rehearsals (104) – Touring company employment (109) – The West End actor (111) – Actresses (112) – Costume and makeup (114) – Wages (117) – Pictorialisation and elevation (120) – Vocal delivery and music (121) – Acting space (124) – The point (125) – The stock	

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-34837-9 - Theatre in the Victorian Age  
 Michael R. Booth  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

x	<i>Contents</i>	
	company and lines of business (125) – Melodramatic acting (129) – Transvestism and duration (130) – Realism, refinement and the domestic (131) – Approaches to acting (133) – Psychology (137)	
5	<b>Dramatists and the drama</b>	141
	Income and copyright (142) – Censorship and audience taste (145) – Tragedy (148) – Knowles (149) – Melodrama (150) – Middle-class prejudice (162) – Class hatred (163) – Business crime (164) – Boucicault (167) – Ibsen (169) – Jones and Pinero (174) – Shaw and Wilde (176) – Comedy (178) – Robertson (182) – Byron (184) – Gilbert (185) – 1890s comedy (187) – Farce (189) – Planché and extravaganza (194) – Burlesque (196) – Pantomime (198)	
	<i>Sources</i>	203
	<i>Index</i>	210

## *Illustrations*

---

1	‘Pit, Boxes and Gallery’: the Surrey Theatre, 1836. Print by George Cruikshank. By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	page 8
2	‘The Pit, Sadler’s Wells,’ 1850. Drawing by Charles Green. By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	8
3	The English Fleet at Southampton. Charles Calvert’s <i>Henry V</i> , Prince’s Theatre, Manchester, 1872. Design by Thomas Grieve. By courtesy of the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon.	50
4	Henry V returning in triumph to London. Charles Calvert’s <i>Henry V</i> , Prince’s Theatre, Manchester. Design by Walter Hann. By courtesy of the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon.	51
5	Auditorium of the Surrey Theatre, 1849. <i>Illustrated London News</i> . By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	60
6	Auditorium of the new Surrey Theatre, 1866, during a pantomime. <i>Illustrated London News</i> . By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	61
7	The gallery at a Drury Lane pantomime, 1893. <i>Illustrated London News</i> . By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	65
8	The audience of the Britannia Theatre at a benefit performance, 1901. By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	69

xii	<i>Illustrations</i>	
9	The gridiron, Tyne Theatre, Newcastle, showing drum and shaft mechanism. By courtesy of the Museum of London.	72
10	The upper stage left fly gallery, Tyne Theatre, Newcastle, showing the flying lines. By courtesy of the Museum of London.	73
11	The mezzanine, Tyne Theatre, Newcastle, showing sloat and bridge winches. By courtesy of the Museum of London.	76
12	'Lifting a Fairy', 1893. <i>Strand Magazine</i> .	77
13	Spectacle and archaeology: the Pyrrhic Dance in the banquet scene, <i>The Winter's Tale</i> , Princess's Theatre, 1856. By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.	97
14	A melodrama rehearsal, c. 1880. Jerome, <i>On the Stage and Off</i> .	108
15	Charles Kean as Richard III, Drury Lane, 1838. Twopence coloured print. By courtesy of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.	122
16	Macready as Henry V, 1830. <i>The Dramatic Magazine</i> .	135
17	The heroic actor: Lewis Waller as Henry V, Lyceum Theatre, 1900. By courtesy of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.	136
18	Caricature of Irving as Mathias in <i>The Bells</i> . Watercolour by F. D. Marshall. By courtesy of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.	138
19	The reprieve: <i>Hands Across the Sea</i> , 1888. Touring poster.	158
20–22	The audience reacting. <i>Mr Punch at the Play</i> .	170–72
23	The hero in excelsis. <i>At Duty's Call</i> , 1898. Touring poster.	174
24	Nellie Reed of the Flying Grigolatis: <i>Blue Beard</i> , Drury Lane, 1901. <i>The Playgoer</i> .	201



## *Preface*

---

---

The purpose of this book is to provide the interested reader with a survey of the English drama and theatre within, approximately, the dates of Queen Victoria's reign, 1837–1901. To do this adequately it is necessary to look at the social background as well as the major fields of specifically theatrical endeavour – management, stage and auditorium design, production, acting and the job of the actor. No survey can be comprehensive enough or sufficiently detailed to include everything that should be said on the subject. For instance, nobody, perhaps, would wish the chapter on the drama longer, but it is not nearly long enough to be all-inclusive. However, all surveys face difficulties of selection. The topic of Victorian drama and theatre is a large one and I can only hope that what is offered here provides sufficient information and a reasonable number of insights to enable a reader at least to find his or her way into a complex and quite fascinating era in the history of theatre. More than a few competent historians and critics who have written before me will also be of help; some of their contributions are listed in a bibliographical commentary at the end of the book.

I would like to thank several colleagues for their expert advice on ticklish points in the manuscript or research assistance rendered: Alan Hughes, Barry Yzereef, Victor Emeljanow, and David Wilmore, whose patience and kindness in showing me, in every detail, the restored stage machinery at the Tyne Theatre, Newcastle, was invaluable in the research for chapter 3. I would also like to thank Christopher Robinson of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, Marian Pringle of the Shakespeare Centre Library and Cathrine Haill and the staff of the Theatre Museum in London for helping in the search for illustrations. Completing this book would

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-34837-9 - Theatre in the Victorian Age  
Michael R. Booth  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

xiv     *Preface*

have been impossible without the generous aid of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the continued support, both in terms of sabbatical leave and research grants, of the University of Victoria. Since I am quite possibly the last theatre historian in the world to do my research and writing by pen, I am deeply grateful to my wife Judy for her skill in making sense of my handwriting (no easy task) and producing an impeccable typescript.

Michael R. Booth  
University of Victoria

## Chronology

<i>Date</i>	<i>Theatrical</i>	<i>Social and historical</i>
1831	Vestris management of Olympic.	
1832	Select Committee on Dramatic Literature.	First parliamentary Reform Acts.
1833	Dramatic Copyright Act. Dramatic Authors' Society founded.	Abolition of slavery.
1834		Houses of Parliament destroyed by fire.
1835	Charles Mathews appears at Olympic.	
1837	Macready management of Covent Garden.	Death of William IV, accession of Queen Victoria. Euston Station opened.
1838		Proclamation of the People's Charter. National Gallery opened. Coronation of Queen Victoria. Paddington Station opened.
1839	Vestris–Mathews management of Covent Garden. Webster management of Haymarket. First theatrical use of limelight.	Chartist disturbances. Gold discovered in Australia. First Afghan War.
1840		Marriage of Victoria to Prince Albert. Institution of the penny post.
1841	Macready management of Drury Lane. Rachel appears at Her Majesty's.	Birth of the Prince of Wales (Edward VII).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Theatrical</i>	<i>Social and historical</i>
1842		Presentation of Chartist petition to Parliament. Massacre of British troops and British capture of the Khyber Pass.
1843	Theatre Regulation Act. Virginia Minstrels visit England. Macready leaves Drury Lane.	Thames Tunnel opened.
1844	Phelps management of Sadler's Wells. Webster management of Adelphi.	First electric telegraph line, Washington–Baltimore.
1845		Irish famine.
1846	Ethiopian Serenaders and Buckley Serenaders visit England.	Corn Laws repealed.
1847	Covent Garden opened as an opera house.	
1848	First theatrical use of electric carbon-arc. First proposal for a national theatre. Windsor Castle Command performances.	Revolution in Europe. Escape of Louis-Philippe of France to England. Chartist disturbances and final petition to Parliament. Waterloo Station opened. Gold discovered in California.
1850	Charles Kean management of Princess's.	
1851		Great Exhibition in London.
1852	Canterbury Hall opened in Lambeth, first purpose-built music hall.	Death of the Duke of Wellington. King's Cross Station opened.
1853	Buckstone management of Haymarket.	
1854		Crimean War. Crystal Palace opened.
1855	<i>Henry VIII</i> runs 100 nights at the Princess's.	Metropolitan Board of Works established.

- 1856 Covent Garden destroyed by fire. Henry Irving appears in Sunderland. Ellen Terry appears at the Princess's as a child actress.
- 1857 Christy Minstrels visit England. Adelaide Ristori appears in London.
- 1858 New Covent Garden Opera opened. Swanborough management of the Strand.
- 1859 Charles Kean leaves Princess's.
- 1860 Victoria Station opened.
- 1861 Fechter plays Hamlet at the Princess's.
- 1862 Phelps leaves Sadler's Wells.
- 1863 *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* begins a run of 407 nights at the Olympic.
- 1864 Charing Cross Station opened.
- 1865 Marie Wilton management of Prince of Wales's.
- 1866 Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations.
- 1867 Standard Theatre reopened under John Douglass management.
- 1868 Gaiety opened under Hollingshead management. Parliamentary Reform Act (England). Dominion of Canada established. Parliamentary Reform Act (Scotland). St Pancras Station opened.
- 1869 Suez Canal opened.
- End of Crimean War.
- South Kensington Museum (Victoria and Albert in 1909) opened. British Museum Reading Room opened. Indian Mutiny and relief of Lucknow.

Date	Theatrical	Social and historical
1870		Franco-Prussian War, defeat of the French and abdication of Napoleon III.
1871	Irving joins the Lyceum, appears in <i>The Bells</i> . First Gilbert and Sullivan opera, <i>Thespis</i> , at the Gaiety.	Paris Commune. Stanley meets Livingstone at Lake Tanganyika.
1874	Irving plays Hamlet at the Lyceum.	
1875	Tomasso Salvini plays Othello at Drury Lane. <i>Our Boys</i> begins a run of 1,366 performances at the Vaudeville.	
1876		Queen Victoria proclaimed Empress of India.
1878	Irving management of Lyceum.	Second Afghan War.
1879	Sarah Bernhardt appears at the Gaiety with the Comédie Française. Harris management of Drury Lane. Hare-Kendal management of St James's.	Tay Bridge disaster.
1880	Bancroft management of the Haymarket and first 'picture-frame' stage.	First Boer War.
1881	D'Oyly Carte opens fully electrified Savoy Theatre with <i>Patience</i> . Meininger Company appears at Drury Lane.	First telephone exchanges in London and the provinces. Natural History Museum opened.
1882		British military expedition to Egypt and occupation of Cairo.
1883	Benson Company formed. Alhambra music hall reopened.	Royal College of Music opened.

- |      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 1884 |   | Savoy Hotel opened.  |
| 1885 | Music Hall Artists' Association formed. Bancrofts leave Haymarket.  | Capture of Khartoum by the Mahdi and death of General Gordon. Burmese War. Parliamentary Redistribution Act. |
| 1886 |   | Colonial Exhibition in London.   |
| 1887 | Empire Theatre of Varieties opened.   | Queen Victoria's Jubilee. International Copyright Act.   |
| 1889 | Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> in London.  | London County Council established.   |
| 1890 | Alexander management of St James's.   |  |
| 1891 | Actors' Association formed. Independent Theatre Society founded by J. T. Grein; produces Ibsen's <i>Ghosts</i> . English Opera House (Palace Theatre) opened. | American Copyright Act.  |
| 1892 | <i>Charley's Aunt</i> begins run of 1,492 performances at the Royalty. Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment.                              |  |
| 1893 | Mrs Patrick Campbell plays Mrs Tanqueray at the St James's.   |  |
| 1894 | Elizabethan Stage Society founded by William Poel. Elconora Duse appears in London.   | Manchester Ship Canal opened.  |
| 1895 | Irving knighted.  |  |
| 1896 | Last Gilbert and Sullivan opera, <i>The Grand Duke</i> , at the Savoy. Arthur Collins management of Drury Lane.   |  |

<i>Date</i>	<i>Theatrical</i>	<i>Social and historical</i>
1897	Bancroft knighted. Beerbohm Tree management of Her Majesty's.	Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.
1899	Irving management of Lyceum taken over by Lyceum Theatre Company. Stage Society founded.	Second Boer War.
1900	First production by Edward Gordon Craig, Purcell's <i>Dido and Aeneas</i> , at the Hampstead Conservatoire.	Relief of Ladysmith. Boxer Rebellion in China. Commonwealth of Australia established.
1901		Death of Queen Victoria, accession of Edward VII. Building of new Harrod's department store begins.