

**A CELEBRATED OLD
PLAYHOUSE; THE HISTORY
OF RICHMOND THEATRE IN
SURREY, FROM 1765 TO 1884**

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A celebrated old playhouse; the history of Richmond theatre in Surrey, from 1765 to 1884 by
Frederick Bingham

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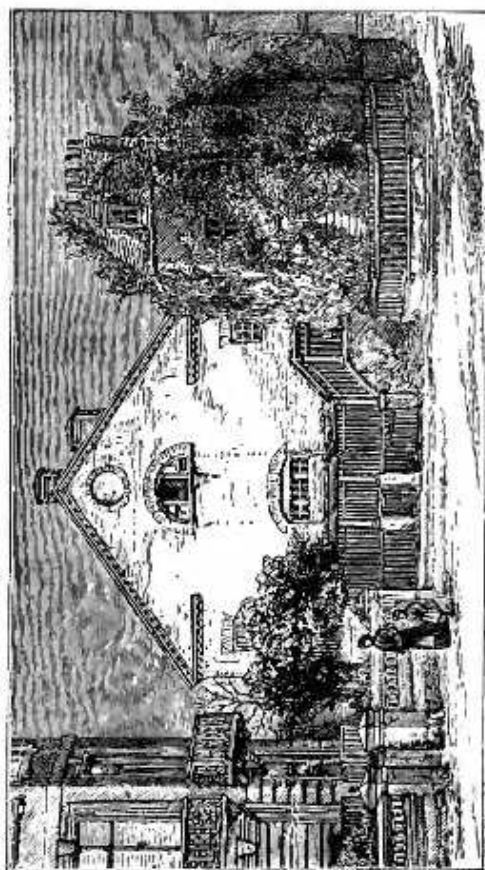
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FREDERICK BINGHAM

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OF RICHMOND THEATRE IN
SURREY, FROM 1765 TO 1884**

A CELEBRATED
OLD PLAYHOUSE.



EXTERIOR OF THEATRE AND EDMUND KEAN'S HOUSE.

675D

P R E F A C E .

NEARLY two years have passed away since Richmond Theatre was demolished, and when one reflects on its remarkable career, and the many brilliant memories which the bare mention of its name revives, it seems somewhat strange that a complete history of the building should not long since have been written. In presenting this little work to the public, the Compiler, whilst admitting its many imperfections, respectfully hopes that it may still be found worthy of preservation as a *souvenir* of a place of amusement with which the names of so many famous men and women are identified.

It is a fitting opportunity here to make a grateful acknowledgment of the kind way in which much important information was given by Mrs. W. Siduey, Mr. Henry Crisp, and several other ladies and gentlemen. Mr. Crisp's fine collection of old play-bills, proved especially serviceable.

The four illustrations are from sketches taken shortly before the razing of the Theatre, and may, with confidence, be accepted as being exceedingly faithful ones.

RICHMOND, SURREY,
September, 1886.

PN 2596
R 52R 5
1886
MAIN

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A CELEBRATED OLD PLAYHOUSE.

AT the beginning of the second half of the last century the demand for a new theatre in Richmond had become well-nigh imperative; and considering what a favourite place of resort the village was, and that not only Royalty itself, but large numbers also of the nobility and gentry were resident there or in the vicinity, it was only natural that such should have been the case. The old theatre on the Hill, opened by Penkethman in 1719, was fast falling into decay, and such performances as were given there at irregular intervals, were, according to a record of the period, quite unworthy of the "polite and brilliant" audiences which assembled. A remedy for this unsatisfactory state of things was at length forthcoming through the enterprise of one Love, a London actor of note and particularly celebrated for his impersonation of Sir John Falstaff. The real name of this gentleman was James Dance, and from a memoir of him published in a magazine of the year 1772, it appears that he was the son of a wealthy city architect, had been educated at Westminster School and Cambridge University, and that "with the assistance of his uncle he built a theatre at Richmond for which he afterwards got a patent."

It was on Saturday, June 15th, 1765, that the doors of this building (designated as "The New Theatre on Richmond Green"), were "by authority" thrown open for the admission of a gratified public. The event is duly recorded in the *St. James' Chronicle* of the 18th day of the month and year just mentioned

under the heading of "Intelligence Extraordinary" and the programme consisted of the comic opera, "Love in a Village" (a very happy title, for *Love* indeed *was* in a village), a farce, dancing, and the delivery, by the manager, of a prologue written for the occasion by David Garrick, as follows:—

The ship now launched with necessaries stored,
Rigged, manned, well built, and a rich freight on board,
All ready, tight and trim from head to poop,
And by commission made a *Royal Sloop*,
May Heaven from tempests, rocks, and privateers
Preserve the *Richmond*, give her boys three cheers.

(*Three huzzas behind.*)

Queen *Mab*, our *Shakespeare* says, and I believe him,
In sleep haunts each vain mortal to deceive him;
As in her hazel nut she lightly trips,
By turns o'er eyes, ears, fingers, nose, and lips,
Each quicken'd sense such sweet enchantment seizes,
We hear, see, smell, taste, touch—whate'er she pleases.
Look round this house, and various proof you'll see,
Strong glaring proofs that *Mab* has been with me.
She caught me napping, knew where I was vain,
And tickled every fibre of my brain;
Deep in my musing (deep as I was able)
Methought I saw her driving tow'rds my table,
She whisked her chariot o'er my books and shelves
And at my standish stopp'd her tiny elves:
What are you scribbling there?—quick, let me see!
Poh!—leave this nonsense and along with me!
I grinning bow'd—*Bright star of Lilliput,*
Shall I not crowd you in your hazel hut?
She smil'd and showing me a large-siz'd hamper,
Get into this, my friend, and then we'll scamper;
I for this frolic wanting quick digestion,
Sent to my tongue, post haste, another question;
But crack she went, before that I could ask it,
She in her stage,—I, *Falstaff*, in the basket,
She wav'd her hand, then burst in fits of laughter,
To see me rowling, bounding, tumbling after;
And I laugh'd too.—Could you of laughing fail
To see a minnow towing of a whale?