

THE VIC



— WELLS

ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1923

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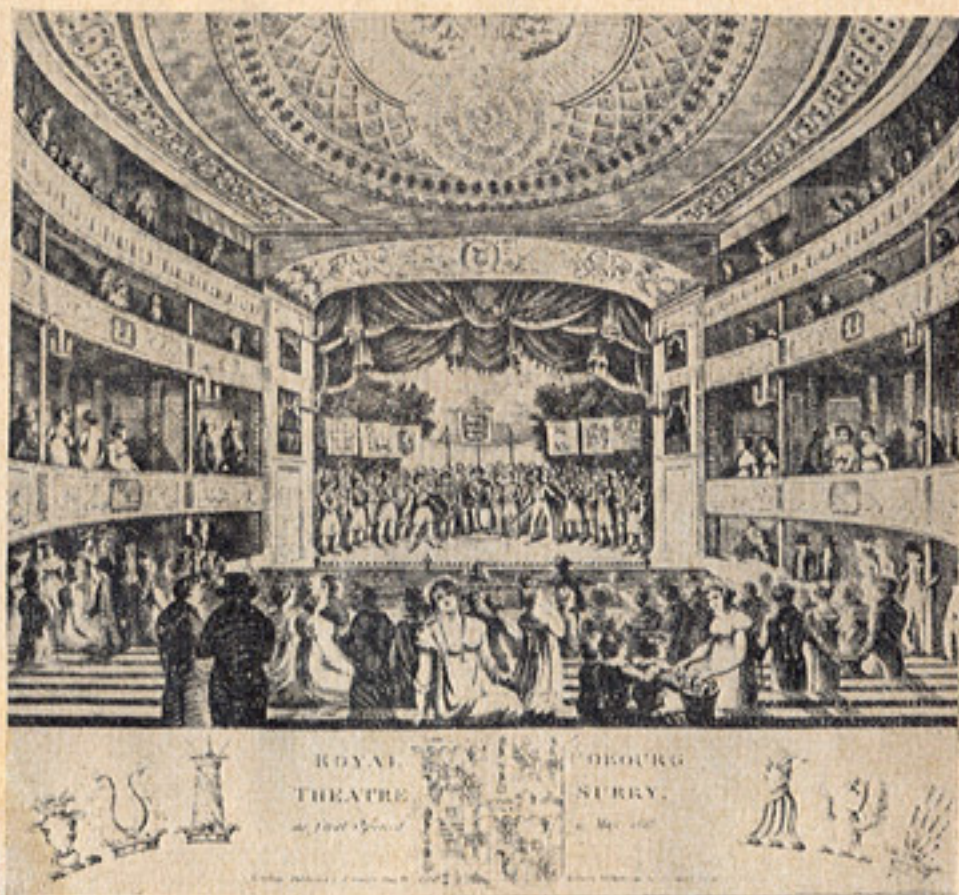
No. 49

JANUARY, 1951

COURT CIRCULAR

Buckingham Palace, Dec. 6th, 1950

The King and Queen, accompanied by the Princess Margaret, this evening honoured with their presence a performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Old Vic Theatre.



OLD VIC RE-OPENED
Tuesday, 14th November, 1950

This block is used by the courtesy and generosity of Reginald Mander

PROLOGUE

*Spoken by Dame Edith Evans
on the occasion of the re-opening of the Old Vic,
November 14th, 1950*

London, be glad! Your Shakespeare's home again
After his sojourn in St. Martin's Lane.
Ten years ago, when he forsook our stage,
Two *Tempests* rumbled in competing rage.
Small need had Shakespeare of a thunder-sheet
While Hitler roll'd the roof into the street,
Left many a tall shrine level with the kerb
To crumble under flowering willow-herb;
But here, still undismay'd, tho' rafters fell,
A lingering vital spirit seem'd to dwell,
The unbroken force of one who long before
Braved other storms, withstood another war,
And heedless of the latest load from Krupp
Cried, What's an air-raid when my curtain's up!
No, William cannot have it all his way,
Nor Crispin Crispian. This is Lilian's day.
From war-time wreck, refresh'd with paint and brick,
Rises no Phoenix, but the fabled Vic,
The new Vic, yet the same Vic as of old,
Resplendent in her plush and native gold.
This night revokes the ten-year curtain-fall,
This first night, *Twelfth Night*, happiest night of all!
Now Londoners on pilgrimage once more
May cross the Thames and make the southern shore,
Happy to find, as they were wont to do,
Illyria next stop after Waterloo.
Will's at the table-head. His guests are met;
Lilian attends to see her banquet set
With bubbling mirth that brims the flowing bowl,
And music, food of love, that feeds the soul.
Tho' much was lost, these treasures yet remain.
Dear friends, dear Poet, welcome home again.

CHRISTOPHER HASSALL.

CURTAIN FALL SPEECH

*by Hugh Hunt—Old Vic Theatre
14th November, 1950*

And so, after years of hope and months of anxiety and planning, the Old Vic has come home.

But the years of our exile must not be forgotten—the war-time visits to the little places of England and Wales which won us so many friends; the illustrious period at the New Theatre; the tours

to the Commonwealth, the United States of America and the Continent, have added an important chapter to the history of our organisation. To-night we start a new chapter.

We have returned to our own South Bank—Shakespeare's South Bank—not just as the poor relations of the West-End, but as the equal partners in the development of the National Theatre, and as the pioneers of a new and glorious future for this warm-hearted part of London.

On behalf of the Governors and the staff of this great Company, I thank you for your welcome home. We have put the old ship back in commission: may God bless the Old Vic and all who sail in her.

RED LETTER DAY

Harcourt Williams

Tuesday, November the fourteenth, nineteen hundred and fifty, the Old Vic re-opens its doors. As some of us step across the threshold what memories flood about us like the tides of neighbouring Father Thames. We think of Clarkie at that crowded little window, we recall the austere seating and the homely audience seen in half tones, through a mist, and, at a later time, the seats all gone, and dilapidated "Properties" and dusty scenery piled high towards the damaged dripping ceiling.

Today the admirably lighted auditorium, so little changed, perhaps a trifle more red plushy than in the days of coffee cups and orange peel, gives us the same rare atmosphere. The proscenium and stage improved with tactful ingenuity makes a complete whole. Here is one of the most attractive playhouses in the Kingdom.

As I pass along the soft carpeted corridors shadows speed before me and flit shyly out of sight. Some have suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange, some wear coronals of pearl, and others long burnished tresses bound up with eglantine. One in particular hovers uncertainly about the Box like a homing swallow, a little bewildered until it looks towards the packed "house" with an appraising eye; and then it fades, as a burst of applause greets Dame Edith Evans stepping out to speak the prologue.

The new glowing curtain of red velvet rises and the play begins. A red letter day indeed, a red letter Twelfth Night.

Well, I shall have to rewrite the last paragraph of my Old Vic Saga, there's no remedy: but when I thought that the powers that be had no urgent desire to re-open this building, which has become so historic, circumstances were different. I was not prophet enough to foresee the coming changes.

For *Twelfth Night* itself, what a first-rate production of Shakespeare's comedy, finely acted in Roger Furse's discreet and

workmanlike set. Why all this fuss about Olivia and Orsino living in the market place? The set is based on the Globe stage of Elizabeth's day. Doors right and left, two long entrances, and the balcony over the inner stage. I should like to watch a critic produce the last ten minutes of *Twelfth Night* without the aid of that balcony. All that is needed is a touch of the faculty for which Chorus pleads in *Henry V*;—"On your imaginary forces work."

I have reached the age when I can have extra tea and eat bananas and critics no longer awe me. I would say with Jaques, "give me leave to speak my mind." It is time the Press woke up to the fact that something other than stars and long runs, something more noteworthy and valuable, is going on in our theatre than some of their staff seem to be aware of—though they write with a goose quill, no matter. Here is a performance comparable to the fine work done recently at Stratford-upon-Avon. Such work brings integrity and dignity to our British Drama in the same degree as did the Lyceum in Irving's day. It is work of which we Shakespeare lovers may be proud.

The final curtain falls and the Old Vic audience once more thunders its approval. That other shade, that Box-haunting martlet doth approve. Robed in graduate gown of moonbeam gossamer it sighs contentedly as it glides over the stage, and out of the portal. It turns down the Waterloo Road in the direction of Stockwell Park . . . two small dogs bark sharply. . . . Big Ben strikes the hour.

14th NOVEMBER, 1950

A voice seemed to say :

"I won't have this first night crowd spoiling my new carpet! Only come here to be looked at. Put down the druggets! No drugget? Then put down newspapers. . . . Yes, it's all very pretty, I suppose. I'm sure they'll go to sleep in those stalls. They kept awake sitting on hard benches; besides they could always shove along and make room for another one in a full house.

New curtain too! Never been so nice as the old curtain that pulled up at the sides. We used to take three or four curtains after each scene, let alone acts. And why they want all these search lights, I don't know. We got on quite well with gas battens and footlights. Ellen Terry used to love the flickering gas light.

Of course Warby and Russell would have electric light. Nice mess they made of it too. Robert never used all this electric light—said his actors wouldn't stand it. Then Wally came along and spoilt all the scenery—at least, he painted it differently, so that he had to go on with it. We managed perfectly well with the old flats in the grids on each side of the stage. A stage-hand standing by each grid to shove one flat on and the other off, while the gas

was turned down to a black-out, and old Jimmy in the flies dropped a fresh back-cloth. Much quicker. Except when he got tight and started singing at the top of his voice during *Romeo and Juliet*. I had to climb up the iron ladder to shut him up. Of course, I made a mistake sending him down the ladder first. Then my petticoats wouldn't have got round his head when I followed him and he got stuck half-way down.

I'm sure I don't see how they're going to keep an eye on the show without a stage-box where you can be getting on with the typing. And where's the gas-ring? How can I cook my sausages? And what about the size pot?

There—the show's on again. About time too: Oh! and there's dear Edith. Oh dear! Did she halt a second? Thinking of me—bless her.

Yes, of course, it's all very nice indeed. I'm sure God's done the best he could. But I daresay it's my fault for asking so much of him. But it is beautiful, isn't it?"

W. W.

THE OPENING OF THE ROYAL COBURG THEATRE

R. P. Mander

One hundred and thirty years ago The Royal Coburg Theatre, which for many years now has been familiarly known as the 'Old Vic', first opened its doors. Its erection was due to a combination of circumstances. Waterloo Bridge had just been opened and it was hoped that this would help to develop the area on the Surrey side. The bridge was built by a private company to whom the erection of this new theatre was of the greatest interest as, if it were successful, it would create additional traffic over the bridge and thus bring in extra tolls. Also the tenants of the nearby Surrey Theatre being unable to secure a renewal of their lease at an economic figure, were looking for another playhouse in the immediate neighbourhood. Taking a long view the scheme for the new theatre was ill-advised. The actual site forming as it did, part of the Lambeth Marshes, necessitated the bringing of a large quantity of stones from the recently demolished Savoy Palace in the Strand to ensure adequate foundations. The prevalence of thieves and pickpockets in the neighbourhood made it necessary for the management to provide escorts with flares for patrons to and fro the bridge. It must have been hoped to secure a large part of the audience from over the water or from outlying districts for, after considering the changed values of money, the charges for admission were high and beyond the means of most of the people living in close proximity to the theatre. Boxes cost 4/- or 3/-, Pit 2/-, and Gallery 1/-. In those early days no theatres had stalls, the whole of the floor of the house being pit. Stalls were

first instituted at the Coburg in June 1831 during the memorable performances given by Edmund Kean, when the price was fixed at four shillings. It was announced that for the convenience of patrons a coach would call at the theatre every week day at 10.45 p.m., when the final curtain fell, to convey those who wished, to Deptford and Greenwich. The first public performance took place on Whit-Monday evening, May 11th, 1818, doors being opened at 5.30 p.m., the entertainment commencing an hour later. There had been a dress rehearsal and house warming on the previous Saturday night, May the ninth. This resulted, eventually, in a very curious coincidence, for on that day many years later was born Miss Lilian Baylis who above all others put the playhouse on the theatrical map. The tickets for this pre-view were issued free, up to the capacity of the house, on application to the Box Office. The first programme presented at the Coburg was of a miscellaneous character. Firstly Mr. Munro gave an appropriate address which was followed by a melodrama called 'Trial by Battle' or 'Heaven Defend the Right.' This was followed by what was described as a grand Asiatic ballet called 'Alzora and Nerina' or the 'Fairy Gift.' The whole was concluded with a new and splendid Harlequinade called 'Midnight Revelry.' The actual appearance of the auditorium of the theatre can be visualised from the contemporary print illustrated. From it a very good idea can be obtained of the beauty of the famous central lustre chandelier, which was used to illuminate the building. An account of the theatre written in 1826 stated that at that period the theatre was illuminated by gas made on the premises. In the recent reconstruction of the stage a partial return has been made to what was at one time a universal theatrical custom and entrances have been provided from either side of the platform in front of the curtain. Originally, as can be seen from the print, these were exactly similar to street doors and in most cases had handles and knockers, and boxes above. It will be noticed also that despite many restorations the auditorium has retained its horseshoe shape, although the top two galleries have been merged.

The curtain was embellished with a view of Claremont, the country seat of the Coburgs. Princess Charlotte of Saxe-Coburg, after whom the theatre was named, was, until her untimely death, the direct heir to the throne, being the only child of the Prince Regent. If she had lived she would have been Queen of England and also Queen of Belgium, for her husband subsequently became King of that country. The proscenium arch was originally decorated with a female figure holding a tablet on which was a view of the exterior of the theatre. Subsequently this figure was removed and the Royal Arms surmounted with a crown on a red cushion substituted. Round these embellishments hung four small flags, one, the American, being of very great interest. When it

was placed in position the American Union consisted of only thirteen states and in consequence the flag had only thirteen stars. These flags fell down just before the commencement of the last world war but if still in existence should be replaced. The extensive stage was thirty-two feet wide and ninety feet deep and had an area of 3,008 square feet. There was a gradual slope from the back wall to the pit and the stage was better equipped than most of the minor theatres. A full house, if all paid, yielded £325, but this amount was seldom if ever achieved, for there was a very lavish distribution of playbills for display, each of which carried a double free pass. It has been estimated that three thousand six hundred people were admitted free to the old Coburg every week. All the accounts of the old building speak of the famous glass curtain but this was only set up in 1822. It was 32 feet in breadth and 36 feet high and consisted of 63 plates of looking glass. It was set in a massive gilt carved frame and weighed five tons. This last circumstance was the cause of its being dismantled. When not in use it had to be raised into the roof and this, it was thought, would cause an unnecessary strain on the fabric of the building. Before the restoration in 1925 several portions of the curtain were used as mirrors in the circle. There was also another quaint feature of the theatre, the "Grand Marine Saloon" which was probably situated where is now the main foyer and box office. The room was designed and painted by Serres. On one wall Neptune was represented in a superb coach, drawn by sea-horses, guided by water gods and attended by boys on dolphins. The opposite side showed the bombardment of Algiers in August 1816 and the portraits of the Prince of Saxe-Coburg and his wife Princess Charlotte. In the Enthoven Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum is a drawing of this Saloon. The excellent design of the theatre was the work of Rudolph Cabanal, a native of Aix-le-Chapelle, who was also responsible for the stages at Drury Lane and the Surrey Theatres.

The original foundation stone, now unfortunately rather badly damaged, can still be seen on the Waterloo Road side of the building. This was placed in position on September 14th, 1816, by Alderman Goodbehere, acting as proxy for the Saxe-Coburgs.

OLD PROGRAMMES, 1939-1944

It is very probable that Members of the Vic-Wells Association and their friends were evacuated during the war and they may have seen the Old Vic Drama Companies at Burnley, Liverpool, Bristol, Cambridge, York and many other places. If this is so and if any of these people have retained their programmes, would they be kind enough either to lend or give them to the under-mentioned so that the castes may be included in the Association

records for the period 1939-1950, to complete which a great effort is now being made.

We should also be pleased to be given a copy of the Birthday Programme (23rd April), 1940.

R. P. Mander, 58 Kewferry Road, Northwood, Middlesex.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

"The Is and the Might be"

Enthusiastic as has been the "Welcome Home" that Londoners have given to the Old Vic, now that we are settled in again in Waterloo Road, it is clear that the Vic-Wells Association must, in a new world which has changed so much since we had to leave our old home, set about gathering together a much larger body of lovers of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells, in order that the torch of enthusiasm may be kept for ever burning brightly.

The Executive Committee have given much thought to the problem—how to proceed from "the is" to the "might be," and how to increase the Association's membership to 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000! The Chairman at any rate, has reached the conclusion that there is no magic formula with which to solve our problem. It is a matter of the simplest arithmetic that $1 + 1 = 2 + 1 = 3$ and so on. If each member of the Association will bring in but one new member—hey presto, our membership will be doubled.

Let everyone convince but one friend of the privileges that membership brings with it, the gay meetings, the intimate talks from theatrical celebrities, the Birthday Party, the Twelfth Night Revels, the back-stage Rambles, the junketings to Bristol and to Stratford-upon-Avon, above all, the association and the making of friendships with those who speak the same language, who love the world of the theatre, the opera and the ballet.

Young men—and not so young men—seek an opportunity to bring the girl friend to an Association function to which it is possible to invite guests. Young women—and not so young women—bring along that attractive man, who said when you met, "We must meet again." Watch this magazine for announcements. Seize the next opportunity and bring 'em along. Introduce them to us, we will see that they enjoy themselves. Very soon you will be passing a membership form into their willing hands, the appetite for making new members will grow, and thus you will be a powerful instrument in bringing to the Vic-Wells Association the 5,000 membership which, in our new world, we really need.

L. L'ESTRANGE MALONE.

BRISTOL REPLIES

To a Rash Editor

No tales of Will? London, for shame, for shame!
We have connections too with Shakespeare's name.
We cannot claim his rent was in arrear,
Or that he brawled, or got his bastards, here,
But records say—'tis plain on view for all—
His Company played thrice at our Guildhall;
We have a Shakespeare Inn (although its date
Admittedly is some score years too late);
And I could doubtless find a handful more
By digging deep in archivistic store.

But that on which depends his lasting praise
Is not the myths and legends, but the plays.
When Shakespeare in the theatre's your need,
Here may we claim a leading place indeed:
Well may his lovers name us in their prayers,
For we have given you his greatest players.
We gave you Siddons, Quick, the Edwins, Cherry,
Elliston, Irving, Kate and Ellen Terry,
Poor sad "Perdita" lived her girlhood here,
Even Macready loved this city dear.
You live by us; so think, ere you deride,
What could you take, if we did not provide?

And above all the past, look at you now!
Half your new Company here took their bow.
They first in Bristol gained our keen applause
Ere, safe in our hearts, they laid siege to yours.
And, hardest spared of all, we gave to you
Our first and most beloved Director, Hugh.
No-one like him has, since that woeful day,
So wrung our hearts, so snatched our breath away;
With new delights so stabbed our souls awake,
With new and old jokes caused our ribs to ache,
So satisfied the wide range of our need—
A golden age in retrospect indeed!
In Shakespeare above all supreme he reigned—
And it is Bristol's treasure you have gained.
Voracious Londoners, for once be still:
Mock not at us: you steal our tales of Will.

K. B.

BRISTOL OLD VIC THEATRE CLUB

At very short notice, the Bristol Old Vic Theatre Club paid a visit to London to see *Twelfth Night* on Saturday, 18th November. A few Members of the Vic-Wells Association met them for a brief chat. We were sorry we had so little time together.

We look forward to meeting them at the Old Vic on Saturday, 10th February, when they will be at the evening performance of *Henry V*.

DON CARLOS

Notes from Mr. Norman Tucker

In the coming production of *Don Carlos* we are welcoming two newcomers to Sadler's Wells—Joan Hammond and George Devine. Joan Hammond will sing guest performances of the opera in January and later again in the Festival of Britain season. She has long wanted to play the part of Elisabeth and regards it as the finest Verdi role she has ever undertaken. George Devine, well-known to all as a Director and Producer of the Old Vic Company, is making his first appearance as an opera producer.

The other artists are all members of the Company. James Johnston will sing the title role, one of the longest tenor parts in Verdi. Frederick Sharp will sing Rodrigo and the two bass parts will be sung by Stanley Clarkson (Philip II of Spain) and Hervey Alan (Grand Inquisitor). The only other woman's part, Princess Eboli, originally sung by Edith Coates, will be sung by Amy Shuard.

The translation of the version used at Sadler's Wells in 1937 was made by Sumner Austin, and I am indebted to him for his kindness in allowing me to use his translation as a basis for the new version

LECTURE

The Finsbury Library Service, jointly with the Vic-Wells Association, have pleasure in announcing a Lecture-recital on

HUGH THE DROVER

on Thursday, 8th February, at the Finsbury Town Hall, Rosebery Avenue (almost opposite Sadler's Wells), at 7.30 p.m. Doors open to Members of the Vic-Wells Association at 6.30 p.m.

Lecturer:

JAMES ROBERTSON

Co-Director of Opera and Conductor, Sadler's Wells Opera.

Singers:

Joyce Gartside, Olwen Price, James McKenna

PLAY READING GROUP

The next meetings for play-reading will be on Sundays, 14th January, 11th February and 11th March (second Sunday in the month) at the Finsbury Public Library, Skinner Street, E.C.1 (two minutes' walk from Sadler's Wells). Doors open at 5.30 p.m. for reading to begin at 6 p.m.

All members are welcomed to these meetings, at which a charge of about one shilling is made to cover the cost of the hire of the room and the hire of books. We generally bring our own "baked meats" and have an American supper. Tea is provided.

GRAMOPHONE CLUB

Tues., 23rd Jan.	Operatic Contrasts (Mr. John Donaldson, Staff Producer at Sadler's Wells)
Wed., 14th Feb.	Music and Shakespeare (Mr. W. Lindley Wilson)
Wed., 7th Mar.	Gilbert and Sullivan (Mr. H. F. Hall)
Thurs., 29th Mar.	Orchestral Programme (Mr. Malcolm Young)
Wed., 18th April	Schubert Lieder (Miss L. J. Tipper)
Thurs., 10th May	Request Night

Membership: 5/- per annum to members of the Vic-Wells Association; 7/6 per annum to non-members; any separate Recital 1/- per Recital

Subscriptions to the Club should be sent to Mr. Howard.

All meetings will be held at 7 p.m. at the East Holborn Library, 34-36 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.2.

SET IT DOWN

Mon., 22nd	Jan.	Revival <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Old Vic.
Tues., 23rd	Jan.	Gramophone Recital.
Tues., 30th	Jan.	First night, <i>Henry V</i> , Old Vic.
Thurs., 1st	Feb.	Vic-Wells Costume Ball.
Thurs., 8th	Feb.	Lecture by James Robertson on <i>Hugh the Drover</i> , at Finsbury Town Hall.
Sat., 10th	Feb.	Bristol Old Vic Theatre Club visit to Old Vic; <i>Henry V</i> .
Sun., 11th	Feb.	Play-reading.
Wed., 14th	Feb.	Gramophone Recital.
Wed., 7th	Mar.	Gramophone Recital.
Sun., 11th	Mar.	Play-reading.
Tues., 13th	Mar.	First night, <i>Electra</i> and <i>The Wedding</i> , Old Vic.

VIC-WELLS COSTUME BALL

Lyceum Theatre, Thursday, 1st February, 1951
9 p.m. - 3 a.m.

The time for our Annual Revel is almost here again, and we would remind Associates that they are again entitled to one ticket only at the reduced price of one guinea instead of the full price of 25s. We would urge you to make early application and please quote your Association Number and enclose a stamped addressed envelope. Applications should be sent to the Hon. Dance Organisers, Sadler's Wells Theatre, Rosebery Avenue, E.C.1, and not to the Box Offices at the Old Vic or Sadler's Wells.

We feel that this year, which has seen the re-opening of the Old Vic, gives us a rather special reason for celebration.

We do hope that as many of you as possible will make up parties for the Dance and exercise your ingenuity to produce beautiful and amusing costumes.

If any of you who are coming would like to help during the evening by acting as Programme Sellers we shall be most grateful to receive your offers.

Tickets are already selling very rapidly, so make up your parties and apply for your tickets as soon as you can.

We wish you all a very jolly evening.

The Hon. Dance Organisers.

THE WELLS ROOM

By courtesy of the Management, we are allowed to use the Wells Room for reading and for discussion in small groups at any time when the theatre is open, provided we do not in any way interfere with the general regulations of the theatre.

Birth: On 30th September to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Yudkin (Stage Manager. Sadler's Wells Ballet), a daughter, Judy.

SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Subscriptions, 10/- per annum, should be sent to Mr. Howard.

Please give Association number on all correspondence and when using the Library. A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE SHOULD BE SENT WITH ANY LETTER REQUIRING AN ANSWER.

Cheques and Postal Orders should be drawn in favour of the Vic-Wells Association and crossed "& Co."

Hon. Secretary:

Miss M. L. Rankin, 9 Trinity Rise, Tulse Hill, S.W.2

Hon. Treasurer:

Mr. J. C. Howard, 6 Windmill Rd., Wandsworth Common, S.W.18