

## PREFACE

Shakespeare's plays have been performed in Australia since 1800. The first recorded performance, *Henry the Fourth*, was staged in Sydney on 8 April of that year. As if to mark the completion of a circle, Allan Wilkie staged *Henry IV Part I* at Hobart's Theatre Royal on 11 January 1930 - the twenty-seventh (and last) play by Shakespeare he was to produce in Australia. Although Shakespeare was - and is - staged on a reasonably regular basis, Wilkie's work throughout the 1920s marked the first serious attempt to establish a permanent Shakespearean company in Australia, all the more remarkable because it was an independent venture which for many years received no financial assistance, and was in open competition for audiences with the popular offerings of commercial theatre firms.

Wilkie's main contribution to Shakespeare production lay in the fact that, virtually single-handed, he introduced the plays of Shakespeare to an entire generation of Australian theatre-goers, and in the process made a significant contribution to establishing a tradition of classical acting in Australia. Yet although Wilkie's name and work were familiar in the 1920s, memory of his achievement has since faded. This thesis attempts to trace Wilkie's career in Australia, comparing his productions of Shakespeare's plays with other contemporary offerings, and suggesting that, in many instances, other producers were content to follow his lead. It is hoped that the survey of Shakespeare production for the years 1900-30 which is here presented will add to the history of Shakespeare stage production of that period in Australia, a topic which has received to date only passing attention.

In the preparation of this thesis I have made extensive use of Allan Wilkie's unpublished memoirs entitled "All the World my Stage: The Reminiscences of a Shakespearean Actor-Manager in Five Continents". This MS proved a valuable source of information on Wilkie's upbringing and the early years of his career in the theatre, though its main emphasis is anecdotal. He is more likely to describe local scenery, meals eaten and people met than to give any clear picture of his own career, and in fact he makes no mention of his production methods, his reasons for selecting particular plays, details of his own performances or those of his wife, or even (with a few exceptions) the members of his company. Few dates are provided, and occasionally his memory is at fault, both with dates and with other information. I have indicated errors and omissions where they relate to this thesis.

Perhaps the greatest value of the MS was that it has served to enlighten me on the quality of the man himself. He was certainly, as Ngaio Marsh kindly describes him in her preface to the MS, "an unrepentant traditionalist" as far as the theatre was concerned, with strong biases - for example - against Shakespeare in modern dress and for Henry Irving as the last great actor of the English stage. The MS also reveals that his main preoccupations were travel, his financial position and the state of the theatre.

In addition to the MS, the most important sources of information on Wilkie to which I have had access have been

threefold. Professor Arthur Colby Sprague, whose suggestion it was that a study of Allan Wilkie should be written, very generously supplied me with the correspondence he had received from Wilkie during the years 1945-69. This view of Wilkie in his later years was of particular interest in fleshing out the man, and also provided many titbits of information on Wilkie's production methods and his recollections of his early years in the theatre. In addition, Professor Sprague supplied notes of discussions he had held with Wilkie, which contain further reminiscences of the actor's theatrical background and career. Mr Douglas Wilkie (Allan Wilkie's son) and Miss Irene Webb (who acted in Wilkie's company, 1923-24), both of Melbourne, kindly agreed to be interviewed, and supplied me with many valuable memories and insights into the personality and working methods of Allan Wilkie. I am extremely grateful for the assistance given by Professor Sprague, Miss Webb and Mr Wilkie, without whose contributions this thesis would have been poorer.

Much of the information on productions has been obtained from newspaper reviews, and while the accuracy of these is not always to be trusted, there is a sufficiently strong consensus of opinion on Wilkie's acting ability and production methods to provide a reasonably clear picture over the years of Wilkie's career in Australia. Newspapers, journals and other serial publications (as listed in Appendix C), were consulted in the following institutions: the Library of New South Wales (Mitchell

Library); the Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania; the Archives Office, State Library of Tasmania; the State Library of Victoria (LaTrobe Library); and the Hocken Library, University of Otago.

The style sheet followed throughout this dissertation is that of the Department of English, University of Tasmania, in its 1980 edition. One divergence from that style sheet is in recording page-numbers of journals: since many of the pages quoted are from daily or weekly papers, possible confusion in reading their dates and adjacent page-numbers has been avoided by prefixing the page-numbers with "p." or "pp.".

In conclusion, I should like to express my sincere thanks to my personal supervisor, Professor E.A.M. Colman, whose suggestions and criticisms at every stage in the preparation of this thesis were extremely helpful.