Acknowledgements

This book has its origins in a project on the cultural politics of English pantomime. As part of the project, three major conferences were held, each of which broadened focus from the pantomime specifically to popular theatre more generally. The first conference focused on sensory histories of nineteenth-century theatre. Our theme of ‘the “sister arts” in the nineteenth-century theatre’ brought together historians of popular culture and theatre historians with performance studies scholars, musicologists, art historians, dance scholars and textile historians. The object was to promote cross-disciplinary discussion on sensory histories of nineteenth-century theatre. The third conference, on ‘race, nation and empire on the Victorian stage’, similarly sought dialogue across disciplines and firmly located the theatre as a site within which images and ideologies of nineteenth-century imperial culture were transmitted, received and mediated. The second conference – held in Lancaster in July 2011, and from which this volume emanates – worked with the title ‘Politics, Performance and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Britain’.

This collection, however, is much more than a series of conference proceedings. We have met several times since July 2011 to share extended papers, discuss ideas and debate the crossovers and correspondences in our research. We aimed to generate an engaged and continuing cross-disciplinary conversation between different types of historians: scholars of the nineteenth-century theatre and historians of nineteenth-century politics. We challenged each discipline to take on the other’s frames of reference. It is our hope that this has been brought to bear in this collection of essays and that the essays provoke further discussion.

We thank our contributors for taking the plunge into unfamiliar territories and travelling with us so generously, particularly Sos Eltis, who responded heroically to a late editorial decision to incorporate an essay specifically on

suffrage performance. We also thank our postgraduate students working on the pantomime project, Claire Robinson and Ellen Couchman Crook. Our gratitude goes to all our speakers and participants at the three conferences we ran as part of this project, with special thanks to the presiding genii, David Mayer, John MacKenzie, Jim Davis and Tracy C. Davis. With such generous and wise colleagues, our annual meetings in Lancaster and Birmingham were occasions of wonderful fellowship, as well as scholarship; the geniality and fun of pantomime was always present, although it was hot July (even in Lancaster) rather than snowy December.

The project has interested many colleagues in other fields: Cathy Haill and Kate Dorney at the Victoria and Albert Museum have been supporters; Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, whose invitation to Peter and Kate to participate in a theatre panel at the North American Victorian Studies Association inspired some fruitful statistical research; and Rohan McWilliam, a historian whose generous interdisciplinarity has been hugely helpful.

We were awarded a major research grant from the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Without this funding, the project could not have happened in the mode of generous scholarship that we hope we achieved. The editors extend their gratitude to Emma Brennan and her team at Manchester University Press in general and to Fiona Little, the copy-editor, in particular. During the project, the editors have worked in four institutions, principally the Universities of Lancaster and Birmingham, and Manchester and Exeter latterly. In each place, colleagues have been supportive and generous. Kate Newey wishes to thank her Birmingham colleagues, in particular Russell Jackson, whose enthusiasm for the curiosities of arcane research is inspiring, and her new Exeter colleagues, who have welcomed a northerner into the West Country. Peter Yeandle wishes to thank Marcus Risdell and Anne Witchard, for their personal interest in and assistance with this project.

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