

## DAME NINETTE De VALOIS

1898-2001

Ninette de Valois was born Edris Stannus in County Wicklow, Ireland. Passionately interested in dancing from her childhood, she became a ballerina in England and danced with Diaghilev's famous Ballets Russes, changing her name to the one by which she was known for the rest of her life, because successful dancers at the time were expected to be Continental rather than Irish. She never became the great prima ballerina that she dreamed of being but, after retirement as a dancer, she went on to become the one person most responsible for the great achievements of British ballet in the twentieth century. In 1928, Lilian Baylis, the legendary manager of the Sadler's Wells and Old Vic theatres engaged Ninette de Valois as director of a ballet company at Sadler's Wells. Over the years de Valois turned it into one of the world's most famous companies and it eventually became the Royal Ballet. Under her direction the company attracted the greatest dancers and choreographers of the day, from Margot Fonteyn and Sir Frederick Ashton to Antoinette Sibley and Kenneth MacMillan. She was also responsible for founding the establishment which became the Royal Ballet School. 'Classical ballet will never die', Ninette de Valois said once and she did more than anyone to ensure that it thrived in Britain.

Ninette lived at 14 The Terrace, Barnes between 1962 and 1982