

## SWAN SONG



In 1979 trendy critics and snotty-nosed punks hated **Led Zeppelin**. But the band's two monster shows at Knebworth in August of that year showed who the real kings of rock still were. In a *Rock Candy Mag* exclusive, Zeppelin expert *Dave Lewis* (left) unravels the fascinating story behind these two seminal gigs – the last the original band would play in the UK – in intricate detail...

**IN LATE MAY OF 1974** rock promoter Freddy Bannister thought he'd pulled off a sizeable coup when he proudly announced that he'd secured Led Zeppelin as bill toppers for a one-day event to be staged within the grounds of Knebworth House, a stately home near Stevenage in England. Bannister had previously promoted Zeppelin at the 1970 Bath Festival. Four years later he was well aware that they were now the hottest ticket going. Riding on the back of a hugely successful US tour the previous year, Zep's worldwide popularity had reached new heights. Their sixth album, 'Physical Graffiti' – set to be a double – was eagerly anticipated, as was their much-talked-about

forthcoming feature film *The Song Remains The Same*.

As it turned out, work on those two projects would prevent Led Zeppelin from performing live anywhere in 1974, including the prospective Knebworth show. Much to Bannister's disappointment Zeppelin manager Peter Grant decided against Zep headlining the gig. Grant claimed that no confirming documents were ever signed, and Bannister went ahead with his plan without Zep onboard. On 20 July, a bill that included The Allman Brothers Band headlining over The Doobie Brothers, Van Morrison, Tim Buckley, The Sensational Alex Harvey Band, and The Mahavishnu Orchestra performed the first one-day festival

at Knebworth – an event that would go on to become a traditional date on the British rock calendar.

Five years later Freddy Bannister finally got his men. The now well-established Knebworth Festival proved to be an offer that Grant and Zep couldn't refuse, not least because they needed to stage a major comeback. The band hadn't performed in the UK since 1975, or anywhere else since 1977. And half a decade on from that initial Knebworth offer it was a very different Led Zeppelin that geared up for live performance in the summer of 1979.

After completing the final night of a triumphant five-show stint at London's Earls Court Arena in May 1975,

Zep's next plan had been to return to the US for a series of major outdoor appearances. But a serious car crash on the Greek island of Rhodes that involved Robert Plant and his wife Maureen in August 1975 curtailed all those plans. With Plant recovering from multiple injuries to his ankle and elbow, the band used the singer's recuperation period – where he even spent time in a wheelchair – to record their next album, 'Presence', at Munich's Musicland Studios.

When Plant had finally recovered enough to start performing live again, in April 1977 Zeppelin embarked on a massive, 44-date US tour over three legs. Unfortunately there was more trouble and tragedy