Friends Purchases
The Friends have recently purchased for the Theatre Collection a set of stage manager’s weekly diaries for the Palace Theatre Bath (see pages 4-5 for more information on this fascinating archive), and have agreed to fund the purchase of a wireless laptop and wireless system to assist cataloguing and location of items in the strong rooms.

Recent Friends Events
Steven Gregory’s lecture and demonstration, entitled A Terrible Wardrobe Mind, was held on 13 October 2004 in the Wickham Theatre. This informative and entertaining lecture was very well-supported by many Friends, Drama Department staff and students, Bristol Old Vic Theatre School students, and members of the public. In a dramatic grand finale Steven demonstrated how, with very little time or money, a Friend of the Theatre Collection could be transformed into a drama queen!

On 9 December 2004 the Friends supported Bristol University Drama Department’s production of Messalina. The performance was staged in a candle-lit Jacobean playhouse constructed in the Wickham Theatre. The performance was preceded by an extremely interesting and informative public lecture given by Prof. Martin White about the background to his reconstruction-based research and the Inigo Jones playhouse in particular. At the end of the evening the audience carried away with them an insight into the atmosphere of a Jacobean playhouse together with the authentic whiff of tallow candles ...

The Friends first outing of 2005 was a backstage tour of Bristol Theatre Royal, kindly given by Andrew Stocker. Andrew treated Friends to a behind the scenes tour, which included a chance to see the set of Alice in Wonderland.

Due to essential building work being carried out in the Theatre Collection no events are planned for the summer period.

DATA PROTECTION
If you have received this newsletter your contact details are held on our database. If you would like to stop receiving information from us please contact us as below.

The Keeper, University of Bristol Theatre Collection, Department of Drama, Cantocks Close, Bristol BS8 1UP
Tel: 0117 3315086 Email: theatre-collection@bristol.ac.uk
Website: www.bristol.ac.uk/theatrecollection

New President of the Friends of the Theatre Collection

Stephanie Cole
Teaching Theatre: Unlocking the potential of the Professor Wickham Bequest

Through the generous support of the University of Bristol Annual Fund, the Theatre Collection has obtained funding for Teaching Theatre: Unlocking the Potential of the Professor Wickham Bequest project. In 2004 the Theatre Collection was honoured to receive the Professor Wickham bequest, comprising of his personal library, archive and a small collection of theatrical artwork. Professor Wickham’s library was recognised as the country’s most important Early Modern Drama library in private ownership. His archive reflects his international standing as a scholar and writer and reflects a lifetime of research. It also documents his pioneering development of Drama as an academic subject, and the establishment of the UK’s first Drama Department at University of Bristol. It reflects Professor Wickham’s work as a practitioner; for example, directing Pinter’s first full-length play *The Birthday Party* in San Francisco in the 1950’s and having a key role in the reconstruction of the Globe Theatre in London. The archive contains a substantial collection of papers, research documentation, visual and other material totaling approximately 15,000 items.

The grant will fund the recruitment of specialist staff to catalogue the archive and library collection and carry out preventative conservation work. It will make the bequest an internationally accessible resource, with all users able to search the catalogues via the internet. Additionally, all visitors to the Theatre Collection will be able to consult the library and archive in person.

Amanda Goode has been appointed as the Theatre Collection’s project archivist to catalogue the Wickham archive. She will also be working in collaboration with Rosemary Wells, a specially appointed librarian who will be based in Arts and Social Sciences library, to catalogue the Wickham library for the Theatre Collection.

Particular thanks are due to the Wickham family and executors for enabling the smooth transfer of the archive and library to the Theatre Collection and to the Annual Fund for funding the project. For further information about the Annual Fund contact Rosie Dale on 0117 928 8993 or see http://www.bris.ac.uk/alumni/howtogive/af.pdf

Friends News

President Stephanie Cole
We are extremely pleased to announce that the actress Stephanie Cole is the new president of the Friends of the Theatre Collection - the position having sadly been vacant since the death of Virginia, Marchioness of Bath in September 2003. Stephanie has been a keen supporter of the Theatre Collection since her first visit in 2002. She has also given her personal archive to the Theatre Collection and both she and her late husband, actor Peter Birrel, have been interviewed for the Friends Oral History Project. Stephanie has already made it very clear that she intends to be a very active president!

Friends AGM
The Friends held their AGM on 8 November 2004 in the luxurious surroundings of the Drama Department’s Brandt cinema. During the meeting the twenty-six attendees elected two new members onto the Friends Council - Kerry Hollins and Paul Madine. Paul has taken over the role of Treasurer, so some of you may have already come into contact with him! The meeting also saw the election of Sarah Cuthill as an Honorary Friend in recognition of her contribution to the Theatre Collection. Many will remember Sarah during her time as Keeper of the Theatre Collection from 1998 to 2001, and as Assistant Keeper from 1993 to 1998.

During the course of the evening over £80 was raised by the sale of discounted Friends Christmas cards.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the evening such a success.

Derek Balmer’s photograph of Richard Pascoe as Hamlet in the Bristol Old Vic production directed by Val May at the Bristol Theatre Royal in Spring 1965. (ref. BOV/P/000244/96)
Other Theatre Collection News

Emeritus Professor George and Nancy Rowell
The Friends were saddened to hear that Nancy Rowell, wife of the late George Rowell and honorary Friend of the Theatre Collection, died in December 2004. Professor Rowell, along with Professors Wickham and Brandt, was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the University of Bristol's Drama Department as a renowned centre of excellence for research and teaching. Professor Rowell's library and archive has been most generously donated to the Theatre Collection by family member, Mrs Rosemary McIntyre, in memory of George and Nancy Rowell. Both the library and archive reflect George Rowell's research interest in Victorian theatre and plays, as well as the work of W.S. Guilbert. The archive also contains his plays and adaptations including *Sixty Thousand Nights* and *Engaged!*

Temporary Closure of the Theatre Collection
The Theatre Collection will be closed from 23 May – 30 September 2005 to allow for essential building works to take place. These works will ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). They will result in easier access to the Theatre Collection and throughout the rest of the Drama Department. During the building works the library and archive strong rooms will be closed, and we will therefore be unable to accept enquiries or visitors. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

New Member of Staff
Amanda Goode has joined us as project cataloguer for the Teaching Theatre: Unlocking the Potential of the Professor Wickham Bequest. Amanda will be with us until December 2005. She is a qualified archivist with 20 years experience cataloging archive collections.

The Berta Freistadt Archive
Laura Mansfield, a student volunteer, writes about the Berta Freistadt archive:

Berta Freistadt's involvement in the theatre, particularly women’s theatre and the performing arts from the 1950's to the 1990's, is documented in her personal archive of scripts, scrapbooks, correspondence and photographs, now held at the Theatre Collection.

Freistadt was working during the 1960s–1980s writing plays centered around the social concerns of the era, focusing upon issues of sexuality and women’s rights. Starting work in repertory theatre Freistadt developed her skills to focus upon a socio-political bias in theatre writing. Working with youth groups in east London she built on her initial training to utilise her skills as a theatre writer in the wider audience of youth culture and feminist rights. Her works, notably *The Baby Factory* and the intriguingly titled *The Life and Death of Laura Normill* highlight, through dry humour and witty irony, the social prejudice women faced in their chosen rebellion against a domestic role.

The Berta Freistadt archive is a rich resource of documentation reflecting the development of Freistadt's theatre career; holding memorabilia from play scripts and performance notes to correspondence from colleagues and interested parties nationwide.

The archive not only documents Freistadt's professional career but simultaneously, due to the political and feminist line she took with her work can been seen as a testament to the feminist movement as a whole, presenting a collection of posters, programmes, and paraphernalia associated with cutting edge women's theatre and performance.

The development of women's theatre, and the progression of Freistadt's avant-garde took on concerns facing not only women's cultural and intellectual freedom but touched upon issues of women's sexual freedom and empowerment, a highly controversial and sensitive issue. The develop-
ment of her work in this manner reflects the development and popularity of women’s theatre groups as a whole, where the medium of performance became an open arena in which controversial and hidden cultures came to the fore, for example the London gay and lesbian scene took a firm hold on 1980s devise theatre projects with companies such as Gay Sweatshop and Women in Entertainment holding critical status and opinion. Freistadt herself was active in lesbian theatre during the 1980s, and her archive captures the expansive and popular genre of gay theatre during that period. The feminist movement was about finding a voice through the oppressive male state. That voice inevitably led to open comment on female sexuality and the cultural acceptance of whatever form that sexual nature took.

The archive is a unique resource that presents an entire moment of theatre and women’s history through the work of one individual. We are in a unique position to hold the Freistadt archive, donated to the Theatre Collection due to Berta Freistadt’s own belief in the importance of trying to capture the ephemeral nature of theatre and preserve its social, cultural and historical.

When Berta gave her archive to the Theatre Collection she included with it a financial donation towards the cost of its care and cataloguing. This donation funded Laura Mansfield to catalogue the collection and make it accessible to everyone.

**Bingo! A New Accession**

The Friends have generously purchased for the Theatre Collection a set of stage manager’s weekly diaries for The Palace in Bath. The diaries, which cover the period 1919 to 1931, are a rich source of information for anyone studying the history of variety and revue. They contain weekly listings of the acts that appeared on the stage of The Palace together with the stage manager’s sometimes rather forthright comments on their performances and general behaviour!

The national changes in public taste that occurred after the First World War are reflected in the changing weekly acts that appeared at The Palace. Variety acts were still being booked, but were gradually being replaced by the slick new musical revues, which the public preferred because they provided a constant stream of high-quality entertainment, and the stage manager preferred because they came as a package and didn’t require him to book new ‘turns’ every week.

Initially, the variety halls also included on their bills the newly popular ‘moving pictures’, although they too were to speed up the demise of ‘live’ entertainment. The Palace’s programme usually ended with the ‘Palace Bioscope’ showing the latest news and events, and the stage manager often noted in his diaries that he had a “picture” ready in case an act didn’t turn up or was too ill to go on.

**The Palace – now the Gala Bingo Hall. Photo Theatre Collection**

During the period covered by the diaries The Palace offering a wide variety of shows, including Petite Nina and her motor-cycling sea lions, P.T. Selbit’s demonstration of “sawing thro’ a woman while she is held by four members of the audience” (with the added incentive to “Bring your own Saw!”), and Eric C Peacock the one-armed motor-cyclist. Famous names also appeared on the bill, including Fred Karno, Robb Wilton, Chesney Allen and Bud Flanagan.

Changing attitudes to public entertainment are also reflected by the changing uses of The Palace premises since it first opened its doors in 1886. In the space of just over one hundred years the building has been a music hall, a theatre, a ballroom, a pub and cinema, and today it is used as a bingo hall! [Information obtained from The Theatres Trust website www.theatrestrust].

As yet, we have been unable to discover who wrote the diaries. The two most likely candidates are Mr L.A. Laing, the stage manager, or Mr C.S. Wallace, the assistant manager. The only clue in the diaries is a note at the beginning of the first diary in which the author states that he was demobilised and arrived home on 1 February 1919, but did not take up his duty until the following week.

If you have any further information about the history of The Palace please contact the Theatre Collection.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

The Theatre Collection will be closed 23 May - 30 September 2005