New Accessions

Recent highlights include:

- John Vickers Archive (donated by Norma Campbell Vickers and Sarah Vickers)
- Medieval Players Archive (donated by Pamela King and Meg Twycross)
- Handbag belonging to Vivien Leigh (donated by Mary Ison)
- Staunton Facsimile of The Complete Works of Shakespeare (purchased)
- Paule Vézelay Archive Items (donated by Sally Jarman)
- Gog Theatre Company Archive (donated by Sue Palmer, Co-director of Gog Theatre Company)

Forthcoming Events

Friends Events:
- Friends of the Theatre Collection Public Lecture
  ‘Medievalism and Early English Drama: how the Victorians helped us to get it right’
  Tuesday 17th March, 5.30pm
  In the Wickham Theatre, University of Bristol Drama Department
  Free Admission

WICKHAM LECTURE
In conjunction with the Society for Theatre Research
‘Pyramus, you begin’:
Directing Shakespeare
Gregory Doran
Monday 27th April 2009, 5.30pm
In the Wickham Theatre, University of Bristol Drama Department
Free Admission

Volunteer Sessions:
- Wednesday 8th April
  10am - 12.30pm
- Wednesday 13th May
  2 - 4.30pm
- Wednesday 24th June
  10am - 12.30pm

JOHN VICKERS ARCHIVE
The Theatre Collection is delighted to have recently been donated the John Vickers photographic archive.

This comprehensive collection documents Vickers’ career from the 1930s to his death in 1976. It comprises film and glass plate negatives, prints, books, correspondence and ephemera.

John Vickers began his career in the 1930s working as assistant to Angus McBean, himself a famous theatre photographer. From 1939 until his death he ran his own studio, with well-known photographer Mario Testino as his assistant from the 1970s.

Vickers was a prominent theatre photographer, working for many London theatres including, most famously, the Old Vic in the 1940s and 1950s. He photographed over 1,000 productions and his portraits of actors (such as Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier), writers and musicians gained him a high reputation.
The Theatre Collection’s Museum Accreditation application has been submitted to the MLA (Museums Libraries and Archives Council), along with all the relevant policies, procedures and official documentation. We now await the results of the application from the MLA.

The MLA’s Accreditation Scheme has taken over from Registration for museums. The Theatre Collection became a fully Registered museum in 2001. As a registered museum the Theatre Collection 1) has achieved approved standards of museum management, collection care and public services; 2) is a suitable home for collections which are part of our heritage; 3) is worthy to receive support from public sources.

When this new process was initiated, we were invited to apply for Accreditation, along with other museums who were also Registered. This scheme sets nationally agreed standards for museums in the UK and supports museums in identifying opportunities for further improvement and development. Having this award demonstrates a museum’s commitment to managing collections effectively for the enjoyment of all.

This has been a long and hard process but it has enabled us to ensure that all our policies and procedures are up to date and in-line with current professional standards. It also shows that we are committed to meeting national standards for museums.

Goodbye to Anna
We say goodbye and thank you to Anna Fineman, who joined the Theatre Collection as a Volunteer in 2007 and then as a full-time member of staff from May - December 2008 to bridge the gap between Rachel leaving and the new Keeper starting. She has done a sterling job of keeping things running smoothly. Anna is now working at the Royal Ballet School Museum in London, helping to set up a new gallery space. We wish her all the best with her future career.

Hello to Heather
Welcome to Heather Romaine, who joins the Theatre Collection team as the new Keeper: Theatre Archives. She previously worked at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, and more recently at the Somerset Record Office. Heather is joint editor for the Society of Archivist’s magazine, ARC; a Registered Member of the Society of Archivists; and Chair of the Archives in Museums Subject Specialist Network (AiM SSN). She also has a strong interest in the theatre.

Change of Job Titles
Our job titles have changed as follows:

Jo Elsworth
Director
Heather Romaine
Keeper: Theatre Archives
Bex Carrington
Keeper: Live Art Archives

Also...
Grateful thanks go to Sarah Cuthill, consultant archivist and previous Keeper who has been an amazing help in ensuring that the Accreditation application was completed and that all the relevant paperwork was up to date.

Hello to Caroline Symington, Jess Dunton, Rob Thumpston, Nick Triggs and Tracey Jenkins, our newest regular Theatre Collection Volunteers who are helping out with a range of work in order to give them experience of the museum and archive professions.
When money was being raised to fund the building of a theatre in King Street (later known as the Theatre Royal) in 1766, funds were sought from prominent local businessmen to fund the venture. Fifty subscribers each gave £50 towards the cost of the project. As a reward for their generosity, they were each given a silver token which entitled the proprietor 'to the sight of every performance to be exhibited in this house'. A promise still upheld today. The Theatre Collection holds 2 of the silver tokens, No. 2 and 42, and the TC Friends have No 22, kept at the TC. During the current redevelopment project of the Theatre Royal complex, Bristol Old Vic have minted (from the original design) another 50 silver tokens (numbered 51-100) to acknowledge substantial contributors.

Although the Theatre Collection holds over 150,000 Theatre Programmes, we do welcome further donations. They provide essential information about who, what where and when. We ask that donors deliver them to us if at all possible, and are happy for us to weed out duplicates we already hold. These are then passed on to a specialist dealer and the money received is reinvested into the Theatre Collection. This practice is in line with the Museums Association Code of Ethics.

Please note we do not collect programmes relating to opera or ballet, unless the performance took place at the Theatre Royal or Bristol Hippodrome, or it has some particular relevance to our archive collections. We only collect Amateur Theatre programmes for Bristol and its environs.

The University is marking its Centenary year with a Campaign to raise £100m in six key areas: £15m for social responsibility; £15m for medicine and health; £15m to support student talent; £19.5m for emerging science; £28m for buildings and a general endowment and £7.5m for culture.

The £7.5m allocated to culture includes a £1.5m fundraising target for the Theatre Collection/Drama Research Centre project. The Centenary Campaign was officially launched in London by Bristol graduate Will Hutton and in Bristol by Stephanie Cole, honorary graduate and President of the Friends of the Theatre Collection.

Further news on the progress of the Campaign will feature in the next newsletter.

For more information see http://www.bris.ac.uk/centenarycampaign/

Gregory Doran
Photo courtesy of RSC/Ellie Kurtztz

This year's lecture will be given by Gregory Doran, Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Gregory was a student of Drama and English at Bristol University in the late 70s and later studied at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. His most recent production is Hamlet with David Tennant.

In association with the Society for Theatre Research

Monday 27th April 2009, 5.30pm

In the Wickham Theatre, University of Bristol Drama Department

Free Admission

'Pyramus, you begin': Directing Shakespeare
This is a comprehensive and substantial collection covering both the performing and business aspects of the company. The material in the collection relating to performance includes: posters; programmes; press-cuttings and reviews; correspondence, including with critics, fan (and hate) mail; video of performances and workshops; and tour logs. On the business side, there are: account books and other financial papers; Arts Council applications; and the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

This collection will form an invaluable resource for the Worldwide Universities Network supported project 2MP - Medieval Plays in Modern Performance: an International Archive project.

Many thanks go to Professor Pam King, Director of the University of Bristol Centre for Medieval Studies and Meg Twycross, for their help in acquiring this collection.

The Medieval Players Archive has just been donated to the Theatre Collection.

The Medieval Players were a professional touring company throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. They toured the country and abroad performing plays.

Their artistic policy realised an eclectic style which drew on research into medieval principles of production, including juggling, fire-eating, dancing and music.
In July 2008, the Theatre Collection was pleased to host a summer school day for Visually Impaired Adults.

Entitled ‘The Perfect Musical’ – the journey from Pygmalion to My Fair Lady, the day was split into two sessions, one focussing on theatre costumes, with a talk from an external expert, and the other on viewing interesting and tactile objects from the Theatre Collection, which included a cannonball counterweight, a wooden cudgel used by Fagin in ‘Oliver’, a Bristol Theatre Royal silver token, and a jewel encrusted dagger from ‘Richard III’.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day.

As part of the University of Bristol’s centenary celebrations, a virtual exhibition is being launched which showcases the amazing breadth and depth of the collections held by the university.

This covers all collections, including the Theatre Collection, Special Collections, Archaeology & Anthropology, Anatomy, Veterinary, Geology and Botanic Gardens. Each collection will offer up its treasures, along with a number of pieces of public art which can be found around the university.

There will be 99 items showcased online which, along with the centenary art work will make up the 100 items in our Cabinet of Curiosities.

There will be more information in the next newsletter, which will give details about what items have been selected and how to access the site which is due to go live in the Spring.

In May 2008, the Theatre Collection purchased the Howard Staunton Facsimile of the Complete Works of Shakespeare. This was published in 1886 “according to the True Original Copies” of the first folio, itself published in 1623.

This beautiful volume measures 410mm x 280mm x 70mm. It is leather bound with its original covering and binding. It is in good condition and accessible for researchers by appointment.

The volume is a photolithographic reproduction of all Shakespeare’s plays, ordered as per the original three volume series published by Staunton – into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. It was printed by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Bleunt and is dedicated to William, Earl of Pembroke and Philip, Earl of Montgomery.

There are number of poetical dedications to Shakespeare, from his contemporaries including Ben Johnson, Hugh Holland; and others.

There is also a list of principal actors, which includes Shakespeare himself, alongside Richard Burbage, William Kempt, Richard Cowly, William Ostler and John Underwood.

Did you know ..........?

The Theatre Collection holds a large amount of framed art work. These are diverse in subject. From portraits of actors (in character or not), to the theatres themselves. It is not possible to display all the artwork that we hold, but interested researchers can ask to view specific items in our Reading Room and they are often loaned to other museums.
The University of Bristol has preserved a collection of unique videos documenting over twenty years of performance art in the UK. The videos were filmed at the National Review of Live Art, an annual festival of performance, installation and video art that has been running since the late 1970s. They document the work of major British and international artists such as Bobby Baker, Franko B, Forced Entertainment and Stelarc. Taken together, the collection offers a representative selection of some of the most challenging and beautiful work in performance of recent decades.

Amongst the collection’s highlights are a rare live installation about AIDS and discriminatory legislation by the film-maker Derek Jarman, early work by the respected DV8 Physical Theatre company, and extensive documentation of the global art collective Black Market International’s extraordinary large-scale transformations of spaces. Bristol-based artists are well represented, too, with work by Kira O’Reilly, Deer Park, Bodies in Flight, and The Special Guests featured in the collection.

Videotape is a fragile medium, and the collection was in danger of being lost to a combination of wear, physical degradation and increasing obsolescence. Because of this, an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project, entitled “Capturing the Past, Preserving the Future”, was initiated by Professor Barry Smith. The innovative project, led by Dr Barry Parsons, involved transferring the entire archive to high-quality digital format using a combination of reconditioned video players and state-of-the-art capture equipment. The videos are part of the Live Art Archives, acquired by the Theatre Collection in 2006. The digitised collection is available to view by appointment.

The Theatre Collection is in the midst of planning the exhibition programme for the next year. The plan is for a rolling programme to be introduced, with three exhibitions per academic year. These will be displayed in the foyer of the Theatre Collection, accompanied by framed artwork.

With the generous support of the Friends of the Theatre Collection we are also hoping to purchase another display-case, with a flat (horizontal) surface, for displaying books and flat items. This will extend the amount and type of items that we can display.

The next planned exhibition is to be about the Tree family, specifically Herbert Beerbohm Tree, to coincide with the centenary of his being awarded a knighthood.
Friends of the Theatre Collection Public Lecture

‘Medievalism and Early English Drama: how the Victorians helped us to get it right’

Tuesday 17th March, 5.30pm

Presented by Alexandra Johnston, Professor (Emeritus) of English at the University of Toronto.

The enthusiasm of the Victorians for all things medieval and the insatiable needs of the Oxford English Dictionary built on historical principles sparked an interest in the less well known literature of the late medieval period in England. Major cultural figures such as Mathew Arnold joined the pilgrims travelling on the new fangled railways to the obscure Bavarian village of Oberammergau to witness what they believed to be a genuine survival of medieval piety in dramatic form. The talk will bring these two distinct threads in the story of Victorian Medievalism together and show how building on their partial understanding of the past, scholars are creating a new understanding of drama in late medieval and early modern English society.

Loans Out

Recently material has been loaned for exhibitions in the UK and abroad. The British Library used material for their Golden Generation exhibition, including gloves worn by Laurence Olivier in The Entertainer, and the set model and set designs for Look Back in Anger. The FilmMuseum in Dusseldorf used material from the Theatre Collection for its exhibition entitled ‘Sonderausstellung Peter Ustinov’ – Peter Ustinov Special Exhibition. The material loaned includes posters, prompt books, production papers and letters.

Live Art Archives News

NRLA 2009
11th -15th February

After its official launch in Bristol, the newly digitised NRLA Video Archive was presented to the NRLA community at this year’s event in Glasgow by members of the Theatre Collection team. The interactive viewing station developed through the digitisation project was also available on site, and we were pleased to note that it generated a lot of interest throughout the festival. The tapes of this year’s performance footage have now arrived in the Live Art Archives and will soon be available for viewing. Please contact Bex for more information.

Congratulations

Nikki Milican, Artistic Director of New Moves International and the National Review of Live Art, and Industrial Professor at the Drama Dept has been awarded an OBE for services to Performance Art.

Live Art Archives News

Did you know we hold The Grey Suit Videos?

Grey Suit is a seminal magazine on VHS cassette featuring poets, performers, musicians, film-makers and video artists. As well as sights and sounds, readings, opinions and innovative uses of text are presented. There are 12 issues of Grey Suit, which run from Spring 1993 to Winter 1995 and The Arts Council England Live Art and Performance Archive (ACELAP) is one of the very few places to hold all 12 issues of the video series.

For further information and to view the contents list for each video, please see the ACELAP Archive webpages, http://www.bris.ac.uk/theatrecollection/liveart/liveart_ACELP.html
Volunteer News

“Thank you” lunch

Volunteers are a valuable asset to the Theatre Collection and we enormously appreciate the amount of time and effort they devote to helping us on a wide variety of projects. To show our appreciation, the Theatre Collection were pleased to invite all our volunteers to a buffet lunch on Thursday 18th September 2008 as a BIG thank you for all their hard work.

Everyone agreed that the event was very successful, with lots of discussion, and lovely food. Hopefully it will become an annual feature.

Photos courtesy of Anna Fineman

Volunteer News

Current Volunteer Projects:
We currently have Volunteers working on a number of specific projects, such as BOV programme sorting and listing; sorting and re-boxing of the John Vickers Archive and various tasks for the Live Art Archives.

Do let us know if you’d like to get involved.................

Volunteer Sessions

Why not come along and help out in the Theatre Collection while meeting other Friends?

The next practical work sessions are on:

Wednesday 8th April 10am - 12.30pm
Wednesday 13th May 2 - 4.30pm
Wednesday 24th June 10am - 12.30pm

Booking is essential.

Tea and cake are provided. Phone Jo on 0117 33 15086 for more details.

Volunteer News

Friends News

Friends’ Subscriptions

The annual subscriptions paid by Friends are the principal source of income to the Friends’ Association. This income allows us to contribute to the work of the Theatre Collection by contributing towards the costs of new acquisitions or to purchase equipment, such as the museum-quality display case.

It is a good time to remind Friends who wish to support the Collection that subscriptions became due in January. Many people pay each year by bankers order, but, if you do not, please complete the new membership form, and send it with a cheque for £10 (or more, if you wish) to The Treasurer, c/o the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

If you are a UK taxpayer, then please also consider signing the Gift Aid section so that we may claim the tax you have paid from the Treasury. If you have joined the Friends or renewed your membership since September, then you need not renew until January 2010. The Membership renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you for your continued support.

Paul Madine, Friends Treasurer

Have we got your correct contact information?

It is obviously very important to us to have the correct details for all our Theatre Collection Friends and other contacts on the Theatre Collection database. We are particularly keen to ensure that we hold as many current email addresses for people as possible as this may help us to disseminate pertinent information about the Theatre Collection and events more efficiently.

Please do let us know if your details are incorrect, or you have an email address which we could use to contact you.

Thank you.

Friends News