New Accessions

Recent highlights include:

- Suspect Culture Archive [donated by Suspect Culture]
- Julia Trevelyan Oman (additions) [donated by Sir Roy Strong]
- Richard Digby Day (additions) [donated by Richard Digby Day]
- David Walker Design Archive (additions)
- Live Art Development Agency Artists’ Files [donated by LADA]
- Ernest Thesiger watercolour [purchased]

Forthcoming Events

Volunteer Sessions:
Programme Sorting in the Theatre Collection
- Wednesday 4th November 2pm—4pm
- Wednesday 25th November 10.30am—12.30pm

Phone Jo, Bex or Heather on 0117 33 15086 or email theatre-collection@bristol.ac.uk

Tea and biscuits provided!

GODFREY’S GHOST
Nicolas Ridley
Thursday 19th November 5.30pm
Wickham Theatre
University of Bristol
Drama Department
ADMISSION FREE!

Theatre Collection Mailing

Please note: if you have received this newsletter by mail it means that your name and address are stored on the Theatre Collection contacts database. These details may be used by the Theatre Collection, and also more widely by the University of Bristol. Should you wish your details to be removed from the database, please contact us.

The Director, University of Bristol Theatre Collection,
Department of Drama, Cantocks Close, Bristol BS8 1UP
Tel: 0117 33 15086 Email: theatre-collection@bristol.ac.uk
Website: www.bristol.ac.uk/theatrecollection

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

An Accredited Museum

In April 2009, the Theatre Collection was awarded full Accredited Museum status by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council. MLA’s Accreditation Scheme sets nationally agreed standards for museums in the UK. There are currently over 1800 museums participating in the scheme, demonstrating their commitment to managing collections effectively for the enjoyment of all communities. There are approximately 100 University based museums with two, the Theatre Collection and Geology Museum at Bristol University.

As an Accredited Museum the Theatre Collection is open to all, and regularly receives visitors from home and abroad. It has a regular programme of small public exhibitions. The current display Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree: A Centenary Celebration focuses on the year of his knighthood, 1909. The display runs until November when it will be replaced by the forthcoming The Life and Work of Arnold Ridley.

Special thanks go to Sarah Cuthill and Anna Fineman who, alongside the current Theatre Collection staff spent long hours compiling the Accreditation application.
The Theatre Collection strikes a pose!

This autumn sees the premiere of a unique film by Terry Flaxton, a creative research fellow in the Drama Dept. Shot in ultra-high resolution in Royal Fort Gardens and featuring staff from across the University, the film was made on 20 May 2009 (Charter Day) to mark the 100th anniversary of the University receiving its royal charter which granted it university status. The film reflects the diversity of the University today. Staff and volunteers from the Theatre Collection were filmed for 1 minute, standing still, looking at the camera, and each holding a ‘prop’ from the archives. The finished work has its formal premiere on a very large screen and will then be displayed at various locations throughout the University and, potentially, at other venues in the UK and overseas. Read more about the project at http://www.bris.ac.uk/centenary/look/art/portraits.html.

Library News

A reminder that the list of current journals that the Theatre Collection currently subscribe to and hold is available on our website. Our newest subscription, to tie in with the acquisition of the Medieval Players Archive, is Medieval English Theatre and we hold the back copies of this from 1985 onwards.

New Procedures

It is vital that we keep a record of people using the Theatre Collection. Therefore, from October 2009, the Theatre Collection will be introducing a new system where all external researchers (including those only using the library) will be asked to complete a researcher’s form. A visitor’s pass will then be issued and must be produced when signing in each day.

Centenary Campaign

The Theatre Collection was pleased to host an Open Day for alumni on Saturday 4th July 2009 as part of the University Centenary Celebrations.

Several alumni were from the Drama Department, including a lady who was in the first ever intake of students in 1947.

A number of tours of the Collection were held throughout the day, each preceded by an informative talk on the history of the Theatre Collection and it’s holdings, together with an interactive ‘walk through time’ where objects from the archives from 1572 to 2009 were available for people to examine.

Hoefnagel map of London, 1572

Centenary Campaign

Welcome to our new Volunteer Tim Bishop, a student who has been helping in the Theatre Collection.

Throughout the summer our volunteer team have made great progress sorting, amalgamating and re-boxing our London Theatre programme collections. Due to the hard work and diligence of two longstanding volunteers, Maureen Brown and Caroline Symington, we have almost completed work on the RSC and BOV programme collections too. We are very grateful for the hard work of all our volunteers.

Staff News

Did you know?

NRLA Viewing Station

The National Review of Live Art Viewing Station, holding footage of the festival from 1986 to 2006, is currently set up in the Theatre Collection Reading Room. Those with an interest in Live Art are welcome to view the records along with related archive material.
This cannon ball counter-weight was one of several used at the Theatre Royal, Bristol. The hole in the middle allowed a rope to pass through and so make a ‘row of beads’ of cannon balls. A knot tied in the end secured all. The total weight was easily adjusted by adding or removing weights.

The weights were used as balances on the drums and shafts used in performance and five of them balanced the main tabs or house curtain. The balance was so good there were no brakes in the system! One big pull in either direction was all that was needed to open or close the curtains and on prominent opening nights after about six curtain calls, exhaustion would set in and a change of personnel was needed!

David Walker (1934-2008)

The Theatre Collection has recently taken receipt of the final instalment of material to complete the David Walker design archive. David, who sadly recently died aged 74, donated much of his design archive during his lifetime but wished for the Theatre Collection to hold the remaining material too. He was one of the most sought-after costume designers in post-war British theatre and worked with some of the great directors, singers and dancers at the world’s leading companies as well as being involved with celebrated stage productions at the National Theatre.

Medieval Players Update

Since May I’ve been fortunate enough to work with the Medieval Players archive, reviewing the records prior to cataloguing and dealing with issues of preservation. These processes provide a fascinating opportunity to take an intimate look into the life of a theatre company. The archive contains nearly 1,000 production images, detailed show reports, tour operations and much debate about artistic policy and funding.

One can clearly see the evolution of a performance style, the increase in sophistication of techniques and get a real sense of the huge variety of skills possessed by these performers. Of particular note are the extraordinary masks and puppets used in several performances.

Perhaps oddly for touring theatre in this period, the programmes are particularly interesting: well designed with high production values, discursive, and filled with detailed information and ideas on the plays and performance methods.

The papers offer an insider’s look at a kind of publicly funded touring theatre that has all but vanished. A theatre company playing to venues as diverse as, “a Nissen Hut in the Outer Hebrides and a football pitch in the Australian Outback”. This world of a small tightly knit band of players - and its incredibly diverse (and vocal) audiences - is captured in great detail here within a remarkable archive.

Nick Triggs, Medieval Players Cataloguer, Theatre Collection
New Archives

The Gallery
First Nighters' Archive

This archive, donated in September 2008, gives an insight into the workings (minutes and correspondence) and business (dinners and interviews) of the club. We are delighted to hold this archive which is available to researchers in the Theatre Collection Reading Room, alongside our other collections.

The Gallery First Nighters’ Club was founded in 1896, and membership was for those who queued for their place in the theatre galleries for first night performances. This was not an uncommon sight at the time of the Club’s inception, – and they were not shy in giving their opinion of the play!

The club was established so that like-minded individuals (ie. enthusiastic theatre goers) could have a place to get together and discuss the live theatre which they loved.

The Club held four Annual and Special dinners each year. The latter were an opportunity to honour celebrities such as Ellen Terry, John Gielgud and Sybil Thorndike amongst many others. Such menus and interviews with guests of honour can be found in the archive.

Did You Know ……?

The Theatre Collection website is regularly updated and holds a wealth of information on the history and content of our collections. Details of current and past projects are available, together with information on how to become a Friend and any events that take place.

Check it out at www.bristol.ac.uk/theatrecollection

Any questions …?

The Theatre Collection dealt with 244 research enquiries from January to the end of June 2009.

Subjects included: Desmond Tripp, Arnold Ridley (including his role in the Archers), Spain in British Theatre, numerous enquiries relating to Bristol Old Vic productions, Eric Jones-Evans, Lilian Baylis and the London Old Vic, John Vickers archive (reproduction requests), continuing family history requests and on the Live Art side, enquiries about Franko B and many requests by artists for copies of recordings of their performances from this year’s NRLA festival which took place in February this year.

We also had 741 visitors in the Reading Room during the same period.

Researchers are encouraged to use our online search facility: www.bristol.ac.uk/theatrecollection.

Theatre Collection Opening Hours

Monday
12.00pm - 4.45pm
Tuesday to Friday
9.30 am - 4.45 pm
(Please note our Annual Closure Period)

We are closed at weekends and on Bank Holidays and University closure days. We close for 2 weeks in early September and may very occasionally close for other reasons - please phone us on 0117 33 15086 or check our website for any forthcoming closure dates.

In order to make the most of your visit to the Theatre Collection archives, it is advisable to make an appointment with us, either by phone (0117 33 15086) or email (theatre-collection@bristol.ac.uk). We can then discuss your requirements and retrieve any archival material requested in time for your arrival.

We look forward to seeing you soon!
The Theatre Collection recently led an exciting project in celebration of the centenary of the University of Bristol. In partnership with museums, collections and archives across the University, and Information Services, an online exhibition entitled the Cabinet of Curiosities has been created. The Cabinet showcases one hundred objects from across the University’s wonderful and diverse collections.

Highlights of the Cabinet include the signed white gloves worn by Laurence Olivier in the original production of The Entertainer; the skeleton of Daniel, the first gorilla to be successfully raised in captivity in Great Britain; a giant seed from the Coco de Mer palm tree; and Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s sketchbooks.

The exhibition gets its name from early incarnations of what we now call museums. Initially created in the sixteenth century by wealthy aristocrats, cabinets of curiosities were rooms crammed full of collected specimens of natural history, artworks, antiquities and other historical artefacts. They were both sources of inspiration and wonder, and important resources for academic research.

Explore the Cabinet of Curiosities to discover something new about the Theatre Collection and the collections of the University of Bristol: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/centenary/look/cabinet/


After completing a list of my theatre programmes from 1951-1990, I realise what a variety of interests a study of old programmes can afford, including the careers of dramatists, actors and designers, fashions that came and went. I then compared the current productions in London’s West End with my list for 1951-1990.

At present, musicals dominate the scene although few are ‘new’. In drama, veteran plays and revivals also dominate with The Mousetrap at St. Martins in its fifty-seventh year. There also seems to be a fashion for plays adapted from novels, John Buchan’s The Thirty-nine Steps for example.

The present ‘taste of the town’ no longer seems to be for revue, or for farce, which was popular then, such as Hotel Paradiso in 1956. Perhaps this is the influence of television and radio shows.

I cannot help but be struck by the lack of variety in the present London scene compared to what was on offer in Cambridge and London theatres of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

The theatre of today enjoys a remarkable freedom of expression, but what has this freedom brought us? Some great art has been created in extremely repressive conditions - perhaps it is as well to be aware of some rules in order to break them?

Anne Hancock, 2009
Friend of the Theatre Collection

A full version of this article, together with the programmes, can be viewed in the Reading Room. The article is also available on our website, www.bristol.ac.uk/theatrecollection
Primary Sources magazine

There were 8 issues of PS Primary Sources produced between 1979 and 1981 and Roger Ely - one of the editors has kindly donated a set to the Live Art Archives.

In due course, we hope to scan the magazine and make it available online. We are currently looking for Volunteers who would be willing to undertake the scanning, and also complete the scanning of Performance magazine in the Theatre Collection. If you are interested, please contact Bex on 0117 33 15186, or email liveart-archives@bristol.ac.uk

Live Art Archives News

New Archives

The Suspect Culture Archive

Suspect Culture is one of Scotland’s leading theatre companies, working collaboratively to bring a fresh and distinctive approach to new work.

It was founded at Bristol University in the early 1990s by Graham Eatough, David Greig and Nick Powell. Their idea was to develop a style that would combine the best traditions of British and European theatre, working with text but giving equal weight to visual and musical elements. This has remained a core approach within the company ever since.

Soon after its founding the company moved to Scotland, where it quickly became established as a significant new company on the Scottish scene and today the company is based at Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in Glasgow.

TC Exhibition News

Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree: A Centenary Celebration
Thursday 13th August 2009

The Theatre Collection held a research event to celebrate the centenary of Tree’s knighthood by:

• exploring the Tree archive through workshops and a display of material from the collection
• talks given by Dr Catherine Hindson, Lecture in Performance Studies, Anthony Meredith and Susana Cory-Wright.

Tree Exhibition

Alongside this day, the new exhibition which has just been mounted in the foyer of the Theatre Collection is also based on Tree’s 1909 knighthood year, looking at the productions from that year such as Pinkie and the Fairies, False Gods and, Beethoven as well as the knighthood itself, with letters of congratulations from such diverse people as the Salvation Army, the Charles St. Post Office and John Martin Harvey.

Tree was born in Kensington in 1852 and became a professional actor after 10 years as an amateur. Soon afterwards he became the manager of the Comedy Theatre in London and then the Haymarket.

He is best remembered for his Shakespearean productions and portrayals of characters such as Lear, Falstaff and Hamlet. It was his production of Trilby that eventually allowed him to build his own theatre and in 1897 Her Majesty’s opened, as he became one of the most successful actor-managers.

Tree received his knighthood in July 1909, for services to British Theatre.
From a Scrapbook to a Festival!
Paul Robeson
Bristol Old Vic
Friday 5th June 2009

As regular researcher in the Theatre Collection, Anna Farthing (Drama 1987) was delighted to discover material on Paul Robeson in the scrapbooks of the first International Student Drama Festival hosted in Bristol in 1959.

Anna already wanted to bring Liverpool based Tayo Aluko’s show ‘Call Mr Robeson’ to Bristol and the discovery of the scrapbooks led to a whole new strand of creative activity, the result of which was the ‘Recalling Robeson in Bristol’ festival of events taking place in the city from 18th May to 6th June 2009.

Archive Material from the Theatre Collection was reproduced for display at Bristol Theatre Royal.

Study Day
Saturday March 7 2009
Coordinated by Dr Catherine Hindson, Lecturer in Performance Studies, University of Bristol.

The Theatre Collection hosted a very successful study day for the Theatre and Performance Research Association’s Historiography Working Group in early March.

The day brought together key researchers from around the country currently working on performance and theatre history, with visitors travelling from London, Warwick, Exeter and Nottingham. The morning was spent touring the Theatre Collection and exploring a wide-ranging selection of highlights from the archives, which prompted an afternoon of interesting discussion surrounding archives, evidence and memory in relation to current, and future, research projects.

New Material for RLAP

The Theatre Collection works closely with a number of organisations to share and promote knowledge, experience and resources and to maintain important links which frequently lead to new deposits into the archives.

For the Live Art Archives, one of the most important of these organisations is the Live Art Development Agency in London which has an extensive and comprehensive selection of study materials, but does not have any official archive or museum status. Unfortunately, they also have less space than they would like and therefore recently approached the Theatre Collection with a proposal to transfer their ‘artist’s files’ to the Live Art Archives for research access and safekeeping.

The material in the files has been collected over a number of years and comprises flyers, brochures, CVs, project information, publications and documentation of artists’ work and practice in a wide variety of formats. After writing to the artists to seek their permissions - which the vast majority gladly gave - it has now been incorporated into RLAP (the Record of Live Art Practice), and we were delighted to find that there is very little duplication of content, hence it makes a valuable and significant contribution to the holdings of the collection and increases its research potential.

For information on the holdings of RLAP and/or to arrange an appointment to view any material in the Live Art Archives, please contact Bex on 0117 33 15186, or email liveart-archives@bristol.ac.uk

To arrange a visit to the Live Art Development Agency, please phone 020 7033 0275, or email info@thisisLiveArt.co.uk. Information on the agency’s resources can be found on their website at www.thisisLiveArt.co.uk
**Volunteer News**

**Ella Gosling**, a pupil from St. Katherine’s School, undertook her **Work Experience** at the Theatre Collection from 13-15th July. During the three days with us she was able to get a flavour of both archival procedures and working in a busy office environment.

Tasks undertaken included numbering and sorting programmes, working alongside our established volunteers, sorting and re-shelving books in the library, research for our next exhibition, and data input of our environmental monitoring, creating graphs from the statistics.

**Caroline Symington** has been working hard sorting and listing the Bristol Theatre Royal programmes for both the Bristol Old Vic Archive and our own programme collection. A fairly mammoth task, it is very much appreciated!

In the Live Art Archives, **Tracey Jenkin** has continued her sterling job sorting the RLAP Archive and incorporating the recently acquired Live Art Development Agency artists’ files, and **Matt Lord** has been busy continuing the scanning of Performance magazine in preparation for a future project to move the material online.

As always, we wish all our Volunteers a big **THANK YOU!**

**Volunteer Sessions**

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

**PROGRAMME SORTING**

After the success of the Summer 2008 and 2009 sorting, the Theatre Collection would be very grateful for further help in the next stage of the programme sorting process. No experience is necessary and anyone is welcome to drop in, but if you could let us know in advance when you might be available it would be helpful.

Phone Jo, Bex or Heather on 0117 33 15086 or email theatre-collection@bristol.ac.uk

**Friends News**

**Public Lecture**

Organised by the Friends of the Theatre Collection

Thursday 19th November, 5.30pm

Wickham Theatre
Bristol University Drama Dept
Free admission

Nicolas Ridley invites the Friends of the Theatre Collection and their guests to hear him talk about his father, Arnold Ridley, and how he came to write a book about him.

To celebrate the publication of his new book, the Theatre Collection is delighted that Nicolas Ridley has written us a short piece for the newsletter:

**GODFREY’S GHOST FROM FATHER TO SON**

“My father, Arnold Ridley, died 25 years ago but my son can see his grandfather whenever he chooses. He knows, of course, that while his grandfather was Private Godfrey, Godfrey was not his grandfather. But a well-drawn television character appears so complete that the actor and the man can sometimes be confused. There are worse ways to be remembered. Fumbling, deferential, innocently-willing, the oldest member of the Dad’s Army platoon, Godfrey was always a favourite. But the part came towards the end of a long career and an extraordinary life during which my father knew wealth and poverty, fame and obscurity, family happiness and the horrors of war. When writing about him, I wanted to rescue him from age and frailty and to paint a true portrait of a remarkable man for my son and for others, too, including — as I came to realise — for myself.”

Nicolas Ridley, August 2009