

Castle, Denmark, London News Agency Photos, 1937.
OVP/39/2/6

42. Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier arriving in New York,
Pan American Airways, undated.
London Old Vic Collection

43. Three photographs of Vivien Leigh in her Chelsea home,
Keystone Press Agency, September 1946.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

44. Vivien Leigh holiday photograph, unknown photographer,
circa 1960.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

*Cover Illustration: Henry Irving as Dr Primrose in
Olivia, date unknown.
Charles Pears (1873-1958)
TCP/C/000030*

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Theatre Collection



THE SECRET LIFE OF OBJECTS

Autumn/Winter 2013

The Secret Life of Objects

In this exhibition we have selected some of the most intriguing items in the Theatre Collection and discovered what we can of their 'life story'.

Although these stories are not always apparent from their present appearance, through researching their past they can often provide fascinating information about people and places we know well, or reveal their own history of use and re-use, often being employed for purposes surprisingly different from those intended.

Objects can gain additional interest for a wide range of reasons. Here we have approached them via three themes, represented in the three cases of the exhibition:

Case 1: Place

Case 2: Changing Uses

Case 3: People

1925.

Includes photograph of Thomas Hardy and Gwen Ffragçon-Davies holding script, possibly the one now in the Theatre Collection.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

36. Cover of The Sketch magazine featuring Gwen Ffragçon-Davies as Tess, 16th September 1925.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

37. Photograph of performance at Max Gate, Hardy's home, December 1925.

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38. Vivien Leigh's Handbag.

This evening handbag belonged to Vivien Leigh, whose cigarette caused the burn. Upon her death it was bequeathed to her then secretary and was donated to the Theatre Collection in 2008. The Theatre Collection holds a large number of items relating to Vivien Leigh, which together help to document her life and career. As well as recording her professional performances, many of the items relate to her private life. Items such as the photograph of her arrival in New York with her then husband, Laurence Olivier, on a London Old Vic tour of the US, demonstrate how the private and personal were often blurred in Leigh's life.

TCO/M/000016

39. Portrait of Vivien Leigh by John Vickers, undated.

John Vickers Collection

40. Letter from Vivien Leigh to Eric Johns, 6th December 1949.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

41. Vivien Leigh preparing for role of Ophelia at Elsinor

'Philip Ridgeway', who produced the play at the Barnes Theatre, London, in September 1925. The production was so popular that it was soon moved to the much larger Garrick Theatre. Hardy was unable to come to London to see the production, so the cast travelled to Dorset and performed the play in Hardy's home, Max Gate, in December 1925. The cast included Gwen Ffragcon-Davies as Tess, and she assisted with revisions to the script in consultation with Hardy. A photograph shows her and Hardy looking together at a copy of the script, possibly the copy held by the Theatre Collection. Some of the annotations appear to be in Hardy's handwriting, including the note 'omitted on Dorchester stage'. The history of the play can be traced through documents found in the Mander & Mitchenson Reference Box collection.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

31. Programme for first performance of Hardy's adaptation of *Tess* by The Hardy Players, Dorchester Corn Exchange, 26th November 1924.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

32. Press cutting relating to first amateur performance, Dorchester, Illustrated London News, 6th December 1924.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

[Item 33 is on the wall to the right of the case]

33. Poster for first professional performance, Barnes Theatre, London, September 1925.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

34. Flyer for professional performance, Barnes Theatre, London, September 1925.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

35. Press cuttings relating to first professional performance,

Case 1: Place

As well as their intrinsic value, objects can be interesting because they reveal the history of places that are familiar to us. Sometimes they show us a hidden history of places we think we know, revealing how different they once were. In this display case, we look at some items from the Theatre Collection that shed light on the history of some of Bristol's theatres.

Prince's Theatre, Park Row, Bristol

The Prince's Theatre was located on Park Row, not far from the Theatre Collection. Opening in 1867, it soon became one of the most renowned pantomime houses in the country. However, the theatre did not survive the Second World War. Bristol was the fifth most heavily bombed city in Britain, and on Sunday 24th November 1940, the Prince's Theatre was completely destroyed by an air-raid.

1. Ticket stub, 23th November 1940, for the penultimate performance at the Prince's Theatre, Bristol before it was destroyed in an air-raid on Sunday, 24th November 1940.
TCM/000006

2. Programme - *The Body Was Well Nourished* at The Prince's Theatre, Bristol, 12th November 1940.
Note the instructions in the event of an air-raid.
PR/002987

3. Photograph of Prince's Theatre, Bristol, showing bomb damage, from unidentified American magazine article on bomb damage to British cities, undated.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

Theatre Royal, Bristol

What is now popularly known as the Bristol Old Vic or the Theatre Royal, Bristol, was one of the first theatres to be built in the city. Its construction was funded by a group of fifty subscribers who were each rewarded with a silver ticket once the theatre was completed. These entitled the bearer to free access to all shows. The silver tickets reveal that when it was constructed the theatre was known as King Street Bristol Theatre. This was because at the time it was not licensed, meaning that it was not legally permitted to stage dramatic works. As a result, early performances were described as concerts 'with a specimen of rhetorick'. The theatre operated 'illegally' for twelve years before obtaining a licence by Act of Parliament in 1778, enabling it to become the Theatre Royal, Bristol. The paper token 'taking' a box for the season in this display case shows the theatre using its new name soon after obtaining its licence.

The theatre is now frequently referred to as Bristol Old Vic. This is because when the company was first established at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, it was derived from the London Old Vic Company. The London Old Vic Company had taken its name from the London Old Vic theatre, formally known as the Royal Victoria Hall and Coffee House.

4. Silver ticket, verso, granting 'free entry to the sight of every performance to be exhibited in this house'. Engraved 'No. 2'.
30th May 1766
TCO/M/000001/1

5. Silver ticket, engraved 'King Street Bristol Theatre
May 30 1766'
TCO/M/000001/3

6. Act for licensing a theatre within the city of Bristol [Theatre

something for him. The resulting play, *The Entertainer*, starred Olivier as down-at-heel music hall artist Archie Rice. These gloves were worn by Olivier during his performance and subsequently autographed and given to his wardrobe mistress. They were donated to the Theatre Collection in 1984.
TCO/C/000001

25. Set design for *The Entertainer* by Alan Tagg, 1957.
TCD/S/000276

26. Plays and Players, May 1957, featuring Laurence Olivier as Archie Rice.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

27. Press cuttings relating to *The Entertainer*, April 1957.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

28. Photograph of Laurence Olivier as Archie Rice, P A Reuter Photos Ltd, 1957.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

29. Programme for the first performance of *The Entertainer*, Royal Court Theatre, 10th April 1957.
2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

30. Tess annotated typescript playscript.

In 1895, Thomas Hardy was requested to adapt his novel *Tess of the Durbervilles* for the stage. The resulting play was not performed until a local amateur company, The Hardy Players, staged the play at the Corn Exchange, Dorchester in November 1924. This copy of the playscript is from the Mander & Mitchenson Collection and relates to the first professional production at the Barnes Theatre in 1925. It is inscribed in what appears to be Thomas Hardy's handwriting with his name and address, Max Gate. It is also stamped

Case 3: People

In this display case we explore items from the Theatre Collection that have significance because of the people who owned them, and the stories they can tell about their lives.

19. Ivor Novello mask, 1936.

This mask was worn by Ivor Novello as the rejuvenated Lord George Hell in *The Happy Hypocrite* by Max Beerbohm, His Majesty's Theatre, April 1936. It was made by Angus McBean, who was then working as a mask-maker and photographer. It was during this production that Novello requested McBean take close-up portraits of the cast members for the production. When these received widespread attention in the press, McBean's career as a theatre photographer was launched.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

20. Production photograph of *The Happy Hypocrite*, Stage Photo Co. Ltd, 1936.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

21. Programme for *The Happy Hypocrite*, His Majesty's Theatre, 6th May 1936.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

22. Portrait photograph of Ivor Novello and Vivien Leigh, *The Happy Hypocrite* by Angus McBean, 1936.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

23. Self portrait photograph of Angus McBean, undated.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

24. Laurence Olivier's Gloves.

It is widely thought that, after seeing *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, Laurence Olivier requested that Osborne write

Royal, Bristol], 1778.

TCM/000004/2

7. Token for use of a box at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, 1786.

TCW/C/000156/2

8. 'Canonball' counterweight.

This was used to balance house curtains and tabs at the Theatre Royal, Bristol. Suspended from a steel rope, it came into use at some point after circa 1820 and was certainly in use between 1959 and 1962. Popular myth says it was a cannonball that came from a Bristol ship, but its construction shows that this was not the case.

TCO/M/000015

9. Fragment of looking-glass curtain.

A mirrored curtain installed in the London Old Vic Theatre, then called the Coburg Theatre, as a spectacular feature in 1821. It reputedly weighed five tons and only lasted one season.

OV/M/000236

[Item 10 is on the wall by the staircase]

10. *Theatrical Reflection, or, a Peep at the Looking-glass Curtain at the Royal Coburg Theatre 1822.*

Print showing the looking-glass curtain with a juggler on the stage and the audience and auditorium reflected in the curtain.

TCP/T/000101

Case 2: Changing Uses

Sometimes it is the changes that an object has been through in its lifetime that make it interesting. Here we look at some items from the Collection that ended up being used for very

different purposes than originally intended.

11. *Satan's Fiery Darts Quenched*, Reverend Joseph Hall, 1647.

This religious tract was published in 1647 and this copy is one of only a handful surviving in the UK. It has been annotated by a number of different hands throughout the centuries with the thoughts and responses of the reader to the text. During the nineteenth century it was decorated to look like a bible, and was used as a prop by Lady Benson in the role of Ophelia. Lady Benson was a member of Sir Frank Benson's Company, in which she played almost all the female leads in Shakespeare's plays in every major theatre in the UK. The book was given by Lady Benson's daughter to Nora Nicholson, who in turn gave it to the Mander & Mitchenson Collection in 1953, where it was kept as a prop, described as a bible. It is only when the book is opened that its secret history is revealed.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

12. Photograph of Lady Benson in the role of Ophelia, April 1902.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

13. Henry Irving's Pistols.

This pair of flintlock pistols was manufactured by Dempsey, a famous Dublin manufacturer of firearms, circa 1780-1800. Although they began life as working pistols and may once have been used as intended, each pistol now bears the inscription 'Only an actor'. The lid of the pistols' case is engraved with the words 'Henry Irving, Lyceum Theatre, London', revealing that they were owned by Irving, who used them as props onstage in the role of Dr. Primrose in *Olivia*. They were presented to the Irving Family from the archives of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and subsequently donated to the Theatre Collection in 2006.

2006/0076 – Irving Family Archive

[Items 14 and 15 are on the wall above the case]

14. Illustrations of *Olivia*, including the scene where Irving's character, Dr. Primrose, is involved in a duel.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

15. Ink drawing of Irving as Dr. Primrose, Charles Pears, undated.

TCP/C/000030

16. Programme for *Olivia*, 22nd July 1885.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

17. Kings Theatre Fan, 1787.

This fan began life as an ephemeral item, intended to be used and discarded by its owner. On the fan there is an illustration showing the locations of the boxes in the theatre and the names of the people who had taken them for the season. The fan would have been useful only for the season of its manufacture, and served a social purpose. It is now an important document in its own right as it sheds light on the relationship between boxes and the forestage in theatres of a similar date, such as the Theatre Royal, Bristol.

2011/0008 – Mander & Mitchenson Collection

18. Ken Dodd's Tickling Stick, 2000.

This item was destined to be an everyday feather duster before its status was raised through its use by Ken Dodd as his 'tickling stick', an important prop in his stage act. It was given to Terry Hallet, a renowned local historian, following a performance at the Memorial Theatre, Frome on 27th July 2000.

2010/0028 – Terry Hallet Collection