

All The World's A Stage!

Costume designs and scripts are not the first things that leap to mind when thinking about business records, but as theatres are employers and provide a service to customers, they certainly qualify. Since 1985 Manuscripts and Special Collections has been acquiring books and archives relating to theatrical works and performance history in the East Midlands.

The largest theatre collection was deposited by the local independent touring company New Perspectives Theatre Company. The archive spans the period from the company's beginnings in the 1970s up to 2005. It includes administrative records, financial records, and production files, and is remarkably complete. The production files are particularly interesting, and include photographs, reviews and publicity materials. Plays aimed at schoolchildren are often accompanied by teaching packs, and some performances with a heavy musical slant include cassettes of the songs and music. Their emphasis on developing regional writing talent means many of the plays are original. Their early works had strong social and educational themes and reveal what the issues of the day were, both locally and nationally.

The New Perspectives Theatre Collection is just one of many relating to the stage. Between January and May 2014, the Weston Gallery at Lakeside Arts Centre (on main campus) is hosting 'Chekhoviana: Marketing a Foreign Classic to British Audiences', an exhibition of theatre ephemera in our collections relating to performances of Anton Chekhov's works in Britain.

Business archives held at The University of Nottingham include the local heritage of lace-making and textiles, and an excellent collection of water and drainage related records. More information about our business collections, as well as resources explaining how to understand and use historical financial and business records, can be found on Manuscripts and Special Collections' website: www.nottingham.ac.uk/mss.

Clipping from the 'Evening Telegraph' about the founding of the New Perspectives Theatre; 1973

This brief news article focuses on the group of teachers who founded the theatre company, and their initial performances. The play referred to, 'Oluwale', is a dramatization of the true story of homeless Nigerian immigrant David Oluwale who died as a result of police brutality. Two policemen received prison sentences for assaulting him.

It was one of their earliest plays and illustrates the type of subject matter that inspired New Perspectives. Initially established as a Theatre-in-Education company, their works were intentionally thought-provoking and educational, ranging from plays for young children about road safety, to plays for adults about issues as diverse as nuclear war and unemployment in the local community. (Ref NPT 2/1)

Teachers quit classroom for acting troupe



Above are two of the troupe making a point: below the five ex-teachers who formed the Perspectives (from left): Dave Johnston, Colin Hicks, Richard Pinner, Christopher Vine and Carol Leader. (Photo: F583 and F579).



A GROUP of five young teachers who didn't take to being called "sir" or "miss" went into voluntary exile from the classroom last month.

And the teaching profession's loss is Peterborough's gain... for the four men and one girl have formed an acting troupe called the Perspectives which is now based at the Key Theatre.

Their aim is to break down barriers in school curriculums which label Henry VIII as history, the rainfall in Kuala Lumpur as geography, and everything going on in the world today as current events.

They will put on a show, researched and written by themselves, for any school in the county which invites them to go along.

And already after just a month of operating in the area, they've staged dozens of performances in and around Peterborough.

"We're very much against the idea of being a kind of 'school treat'," said pretty 23-year-old Carol Leader. "We take sheaves of notes with us on how teachers can fol-

by Julie Thompson

low up ideas we present to the children in our shows.

"And we're happy to co-operate with teachers by presenting a subject of their choice dramatically, so the children learn, but aren't conscious of having facts drummed into their heads.

"We've already agreed to co-ordinate with films and leaflets at Walton School, in a three-day illustration of drugs abuse... and also to help with a Christmas party at an infants' school."

The Perspectives



Christopher Vine and Carol Leader prove that acting can be a giggle. (Photo: F581).

banded together when they were all at a post-graduate teacher's course at a college in Yorkshire.

They were all interested in drama as more than just entertainment the audience claps at and forgets as soon as the curtain goes down... and in teaching as much more than relating long strings of facts to a bored and captive audience.

Last month they

presented a show called Oluwale, about the coloured tramp of that name whose body was found in a river in Leeds a few years ago.

The secondary school-children who saw the disturbing story of the hounding of Oluwale by two policemen who have since been convicted, were asked to discuss the case afterwards.

Costume and set sketches for the production 'The Drawer Boy'; 2002

Unfortunately most of the set and costume designs haven't survived for this collection, but those that do reveal how messages are conveyed to the audience through colour and design. In 'The Drawer Boy', two old farmers living on an isolated farm in Canada are visited by an actor researching what life is like on a farm. The show was also taken to Canada. (Ref NPT 2/100/6)



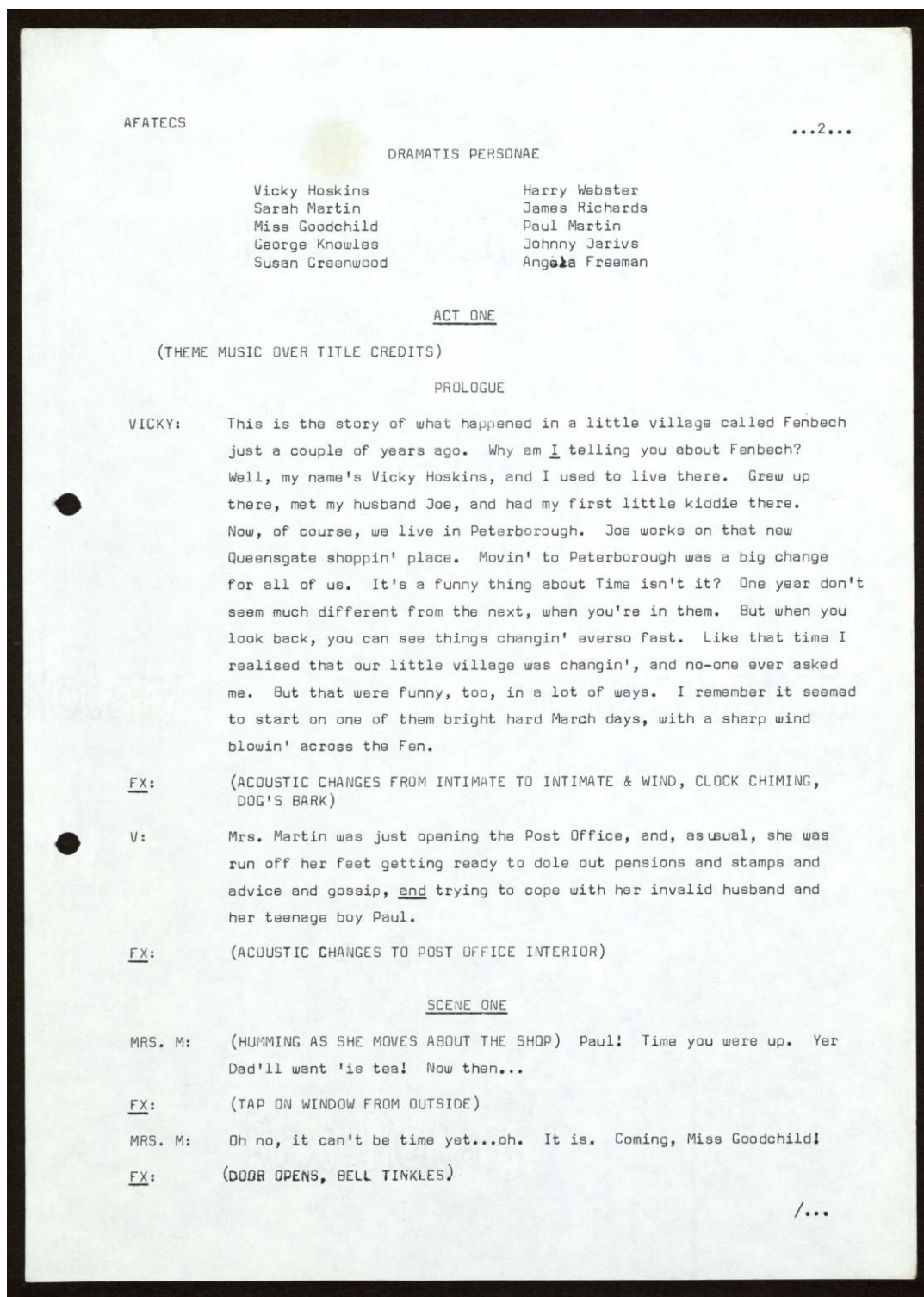
Poster advertising 'Alice: The Queen of Hearts' Revenge'; 1993

Not all the performances had a social message! This poster is from the Christmas family pantomime of 'Alice: The Queen of Hearts' Revenge', based on Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". The collection has a large number of posters and other publicity materials produced for the plays. (Ref NPT 2/69/7)



Script for the radio adaption of 'As Far as the Eye Can See'; 1981

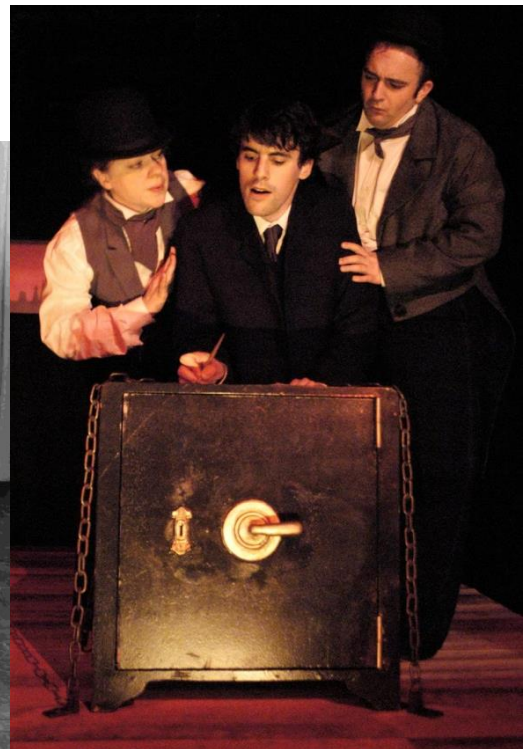
Scripts are fundamental to a performance archive, and in the absence of any recordings of the plays, often the only way to discover what the performance was like. Scripts survive for a significant number of the performances, and, where they include drafts and revisions, show the creative processes involved in developing a production. 'As Far as the Eye Can See' examined life in the Fens and the changes that had taken place. (Ref NPT 2/28/1)



Photograph from the production of 'The Devil's Only Sleeping'; 1990

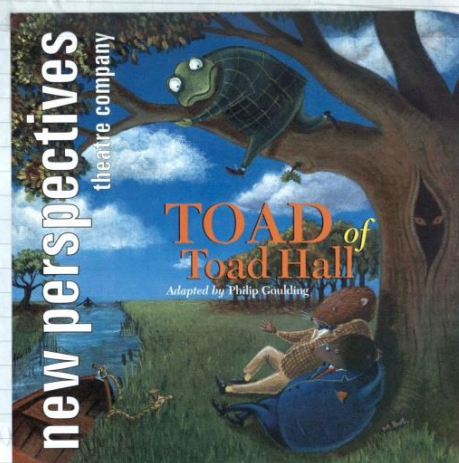
Photograph from the production of 'The Ghost Downstairs'; 2005

The production files contain hundreds of photographs of sets, actors during rehearsals, formal publicity images, sources of inspiration, and activities at community workshops. This selection includes a publicity image from 'The Devil's Only Sleeping' about a man struggling to re-integrate into society after being released from prison for a murder he claims he didn't commit (NPT 2/57/5) and a photograph probably taken during the dress rehearsal for 'The Ghost Downstairs', in which a man signs up for the riches of the world in exchange for seven years off the end of his life, but does not anticipate the little ghost that comes to haunt him. (Ref NPT 2/109/7)



Comments book from the production 'Toad of Toad Hall'; 1999-2000

Kenneth Grahame's children's novel 'The Wind in the Willows' was adapted for a children's show that toured schools and community centres over winter 1999/2000. Comments books do not survive for performances much before this date, although there are some blank forms that indicate feedback was sought. Instead, audience reactions can be gauged from other documents, such as letters, newspaper clippings, and numbers of repeat bookings. (Ref NPT 2/89/8)



JAT 22 JAN

DEEPING ST JAMES CP SCHOOL

COMMENTS PLEASE

Excellent ^{catches}
 Very good Steven Atkinson
 Brilliant - all of them ^{then Cooper}
 Wonderful ^{J. Hunter (Lincoln)}
 Absolutely superb ^{J. Chappell, (Benny)}
 Best we've seen

An excellent performance, good old Toad!
 All the characters were extremely good. Perfect op. to
 play different parts. ^{W. S.S.C.}

Toad was funny and mole was silly and it
 was fantastic. Martha Walker (6)

An excellent evening - music was good, very
 clever changes of character! Jennie Walker (Hud)

The best I've seen Edward Walker (10)
 Brilliant Tom Elane