

The Extraordinary Wonders Found in the Stacks.

by Nikki Pearson

When I agreed to become a volunteer for the Everything to Everybody Project, I really did not know what to expect. I knew that there were many items in the archives that had not been recorded in the electronic index and the plan was to capture details, so that anyone interested would be able to access the index online and see what was held in the collection. As someone who has recently completed some academic research, I know how frustrating it is knowing that there is a collection of documents, but not being able to access enough information to establish how useful they might be to one's particular field of research. I hoped that I might be able to do something to help open up this extensive collection of Shakespeare related material to researchers, students and anyone with an interest in Shakespeare and/or Theatre from all over the world.

Most of the work I have been doing has been focused on Programmes. These are the booklets and flyers that are made available to audiences at theatrical performances. The collection has several shelves of Programmes in its archive, some dating back to the 1930s. There are Programmes from across the globe in many different languages. There are, of course, dramatic performances from all the plays, but also included are adaptations such as ballet, opera, puppetry and, somewhat surprisingly, pantomime.



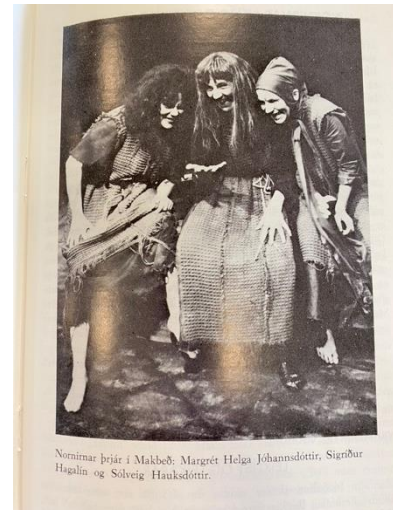
The good news is previous custodians of the collection have done a pretty good job of organising the Programmes so they are filed by play title and language, although this can sometimes throw up a query for the senior archivist. When you have a Scottish theatre company performing Verdi's opera 'Otello' in Vienna with a Programme in German but the performance in Italian, you may stop and wonder exactly where it should go.



1. A German production of Twelfth Night from the 1970s

Once satisfied the Programme is in the right place, the next challenge is to record information that will help researchers in the future. The great thing about a database is that providing the information is in there, then a search for a key word will find the entry, so what do we record? The play name is a given as is the date, but what else might someone be looking for? Future explorers of the collection might be looking for themes like modern dress productions, or works by a particular company or director, or maybe early plays where current well-known actors were beginning their

careers as ‘spear carriers’ in ‘Julius Caesar’. It would be fantastic to capture everything including the names of all the actors and people who worked on the show, but we need to consider the best use of time and resources. Currently we just capture the basic information, but fortunately data-capture volunteers can use their judgement to populate an additional box with information that looks interesting or important. Hopefully the project legacy may enable more work to enhance the level of data captured in the future.



Norrmar þriar í Makbét: Margrét Helga Jóhannsdóttir, Sigríður Huglín og Sólveig Hauksdóttir.

I’m often asked what I do as a volunteer and I worry that ‘entering data into a spreadsheet’ might sound a little dull. However, it is far from it, as every box brought up from the archive contains surprises. From rare early performances to interesting adaptations, there is a plethora of Shakespeare theatrical history to explore.

3. *The Weird Sisters* from a 1977 Icelandic production of *Macbeth*

In addition, there is also a wonderful world of social history, as programme advertising opens up the life of theatre goers through the ages. The sight of advertisements for cigarettes and alcoholic beverages seen out of place in this modern world, but were commonplace in the 1960s and 70s. And who

would have thought that theatre audiences suffered so much with sore feet that one programme has various preparations for corns and bunions advertised across four pages. A few hours spent with boxes from the ‘stacks’ of the archive is an incredibly interesting experience. You just never know what you are going to find next!



2. Advertising in an early Hamburg Theatre Programme.

EVERYTHING
TO EVERYBODY

Using Birmingham's forgotten past to inspire our future:
Unlocking the world's first great people's Shakespeare Library for all

