A history of the British Theatre Association and Library

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A History of the
British Theatre Association
and Library

by

Carol Seagrove, B.A.

A Masters Dissertation, submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the
Master of Arts degree of the
Loughborough University of Technology

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A history of the British Theatre Association and Library, from its foundation, as the British Drama League, in 1919 to its closure in 1990. The organisation's principal activities are outlined and the establishment and development of the Library described. Also discussed are the peak years of B.D.L's popularity in the 1940s and the years of decline from the 1950's onwards including an in depth examination of the Association's last decade focusing on its continued financial difficulties and final unsuccessful struggle for survival.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I would like to thank Claire Hudson, Librarian at the Theatre Museum for allowing me unrestricted access to the B.T.A. Archive. Her help and the friendly assistance of her staff was greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank my brother Paul and his wife Anne who allowed me to use their home as a base while I was carrying out my research.

My final thanks are reserved for my supervisor, Diana Dixon, for her support and encouragement while I was writing this dissertation.
The aim of this dissertation is to trace the history of the British Theatre Association and Library from its foundation as the British Drama League in 1919 to its eventual closure in 1990. While the work of the B.T.A. may be unknown to the general public, within the amateur and professional theatre the organisation was highly regarded for its extensive play library and unique information service.

Initially I had intended to concentrate solely on the development of the library, but as my research progressed it became clear that the progress of the library could not be discussed without reference to issues affecting the organisation as a whole. These factors include the rise of the amateur dramatic movement after World War one, the emergence of television as a major form of entertainment in the 1960s and the reduction of government subsidies for the arts in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the Library was an important part of the B.T.A.'s work and therefore its activities and fortunes are the focus of this dissertation.

Personal curiosity was the principal reason for choosing this topic. Between January and July 1990 I was employed by the B.T.A. as a Cataloguer/Indexer. During this period the Association was going through its final crisis, but as a relatively new and junior member of staff I was unaware of the background to this crisis. Once the B.T.A. had closed down reports on the fate of its collection were almost nonexistent and I often wondered where it had gone. It was not until January of this year that I finally discovered that the B.T.A. and its archives had been taken over by the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. This discovery provoked a personal desire to find out more about the organisation which had once been my employer. As so little has been written about theatre collections I hope that others will find the B.T.A. a worthy and hopefully absorbing subject for a research project.

Although much of the early history of the B.D.L/B.T.A. is contained within its two anniversary booklets, 25 years of the British Drama League and The British Drama League 1919-1959, the archive held at...
the Theatre Museum revealed additional information for this period not previously published. Indeed these archives, backed up by press reports, provided nearly all of the research material used to document the later years of the B.D.L./B.T.A’s existence. It is with thanks to the foresight of the B.T.A.’s long serving Librarian Enid Foster that these records were retained when the collection was transferred to its current home. Had these archives not been preserved many interesting details relating to the Association’s history would have been lost forever.
CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

Although the British Drama League forged links with the professional theatre, the main body of its work was with and for the amateur theatre movement. Historically amateurs were at the forefront of the development of theatre in Britain. The origins of drama in this country, as in Greece, developed from religious worship and evolved from a human desire for entertainment and enlightenment. In the Middle-Ages, when theatre in Britain really began, it was not performed by professionals, but by the clergy who incorporated drama into the Christian Mass. This liturgical drama was later followed by the Mystery and Guild plays, which were again performed by amateurs, in this case members of trade guilds. Artisans toured towns and villages performing on the upper level of two storey wagons, the bottom level of the wagon being used as a dressing room. This dominance by amateurs continued right up until the sixteenth century when professional playwrights and acting companies became established and supplanted the role of the amateur in the subsequent development of British theatre.

The rebirth of amateur theatre occurred in Queen Victoria's reign when the performing or reading of plays became a popular leisure pastime among the upper and middle classes. Performance was not confined to the drawing room, but halls were hired and the public admitted. The great author Charles Dickens was himself an enthusiastic amateur and undertook several tours with companies comprising of both amateur and professional actors. Meanwhile wholly amateur groups of like-minded individuals got together to form their own amateur dramatic societies, such as the Manchester Athenaeum Dramatic Society, founded in 1847, which was set up with the aim "to cultivate a taste for standard dramatic literature and poetry and to be a source of mutual improvement to its members" (1). Not all societies had such serious objectives and while the standard of some amateur performances were good, others were very poor and lacking in theatrical value, though they entertained their audiences nonetheless.
At the beginning of the twentieth century there were a great many amateur clubs in existence in cities, towns and villages across the country. Some were independent, while others were attached to the church or women's institutes, educational institutions and working men's clubs. However, there was no unifying national body specifically representing amateur theatre. This was a situation that was to change following a play-reading at a YMCA hut in Crayford, Kent one November evening in 1918 attended by Geoffrey Whitworth a thirty-five year old publisher at the firm of Chatto and Windus.

An Oxford graduate, Whitworth was unable to serve in the military during World War One due to a long-term spinal condition. Instead he continued to work at Chatto and assisted with the war effort by signing up as a Special Constable. A life-long theatre lover, who also wrote plays, Whitworth was active alongside figures such as George Bernard Shaw, William Archer and Harley Granville Barker in the movement to found a national theatre. In addition to this he also gave illustrated lectures on his favourite subject for the Workers Educational Association which why he happened to be in Crayford.

Having given his lecture, 'A Bird's-Eye View of the History of the Stage' to the munitions workers, Whitworth was invited to stay on in the hall to listen to a play reading by the Crayford Reading Circle. Although the players were reading straight from the text, wore no costume, and simply sat in a semi-circle on chairs, they quickly had the full attention of all those in the room. Whitworth too was moved by the performance taking place in front of him:

...as I sat and watched and listened, I felt that I was understanding the fundamental quality of dramatic art in a way that I had never understood it before. Here was the art of the theatre reduced to the simplest terms, yet in this very reduction triumphant. (2)

What also impressed Whitworth was that the performance had been undertaken by the community for themselves, satisfying both the needs of the players and those of their audience.
Recognizing the value of what he had seen Whitworth wondered whether it would be possible to achieve the same spirit of community across the country through the creation of a British Drama League. Seeking informed opinion, he questioned a number of friends involved in the theatre about the matter. Among those whose advice he sought was Elsie Fogerty, an actress who had founded the Central School of Speech Acting and Dramatic Art in 1906 and was to provide much support for the fledgling League during its development. Others consulted included the famous pre-war actress and advocate of the national theatre campaign, Lena Ashwell, Norman Wilkinson the stage and costume designer and Edith Craig, daughter of Ellen Terry and director of the Pioneer Players. Between these people Whitworth found that there was a general agreement that, "the time was ripe for a concerted effort, not only to encourage amateur play-readings, but to focus a revival in all aspects of the art of the stage" (3).

The First World War had had a profound effect on the state of commercial theatre, particularly in the West End of London. Many of the old influential actor-managers had now died or retired, rents had risen and no new theatres had been built during the war years. These factors combined with a desire by those serving in the forces for escapist entertainment and the continued growth of the cinema meant that most theatre managements became extremely cautious about their choice of plays and their productions. It was hoped that this trend could be counteracted by revitalising the theatre through the amateur movement.

At a private meeting in early 1919 the formation of the British Drama League was decided with the broad aim of "the encouragement of the art of the theatre, both for its own sake and as a means of intelligent recreation among all classes of the community (4)". The cost of getting the organisation up and running was estimated at £5,000 a year. Lord Howard de Walden (the League's first President) and Robert Mond (the first Treasurer) provided the bulk of an initial capital of £400 which enabled the League to rent half of a one room office in Southampton Street, Covent Garden, engage a secretary and send out a prospectus. It was also at this stage that Geoffrey
Whitworth, realising the realising the commitment that the League would require if it were to be launched successfully, came to an agreement with Chatto that he would work for the League half time.

At this stage the League approached Harley Granville-Barker to become their Chairman. Barker, then forty one, had had a distinguished career as an actor, director and playwright. He had also been an actor-director with the Stage Society which pioneered the work of contemporary British and foreign dramatists against the trend of commercial theatre at that time. With this background, in addition to his own interest in the foundation of a national theatre which he shared with Geoffrey Whitworth and the League, Barker was a natural choice for the Chair, a position he agreed to accept.

British Drama League was publicly launched on 22nd June, 1919 at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket receiving wide publicity. Encouraged by the interest received, the League then went on to hold its first theatre conference at Stratford-upon-Avon in the August of that same year. Timed to coincide with the Shakespearian season, jointly promoted by the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and the National Theatre Committee, the two week long assembly was attended by over 150 people. Delegates were invited from various societies interested in the condition of the theatre at that time and included professional actors, producers and managers as well as educationalists and social workers. During its course further discussion and debate confirmed the B.D.L.'s objectives: to promote and assist theatre in general; to push for the creation of a national theatre policy; the establishment of a faculty of theatre in the country's universities and colleges.

Prior to this conference the League had already produced the first number of Drama magazine, which for its for its initial six issues was published by Chatto and Windus as a quarterly. Edited by Geoffrey Whitworth until his retirement in 1948, Drama was to be issued free to members and offered on sale to non-members at two shillings a copy. In the first issue Whitworth wrote that Drama:
Besides acting as the official organ of the League, *Drama* aspires to provide a high-class theatrical magazine of interest to the general public. The aims of the League are so wide that there should be no antagonism between these two aspects of our periodical...We hope that *Drama* may be the means of putting every member of the League in touch with the best thought about things pertaining to the theatre. (5)

True to its original aims *Drama* was to include contributions from many leading writers on the theatre including Gilbert Murray, Gordon Craig, T.S. Eliot and George Bernard Shaw. Its regular content featured articles on amateur dramatics and their performance with instructive commentary as well as some reviews of plays and books on the theatre. In addition to this certain issues each year were devoted to events in the amateur dramatic calendar. For example the February issue was a double number filled with reports on the activities of village and county drama societies throughout the country. Similarly the May issue was devoted to the Community Theatre Festival and provided a list of all the clubs and societies who had taken part, together with the titles of the plays they had performed and the names of their authors. Special numbers such as these served to provide a useful record of trends in the amateur movement and helped to keep interest in the festival alive.

After the B.D.L. took over the publication of the magazine itself in 1920, *Drama* was issued ten times a year until 1939 when the Second World War broke out. During this difficult period *Drama* continued to be published at first on a monthly basis and then as an irregular bulletin. While the size of the issues was sometimes reduced to as little as four pages the B.D.L. still managed to produce thirty nine numbers of *Drama* over the course of the War. However, from 1946 onwards, although its size was restored, the magazine reverted to a quarterly and was to be published regularly for the next forty three years.

Whitworth had began to enlist support for the B.D.L from a number of well known names from the theatrical world. Committees and sub-committees were formed to deal with various areas of the League's work. These committees included, among others, one for 'Community
Theatre', another for 'Workshop's, another for 'Foreign Drama' and one for 'Education'. The B.D.L. perceived the need to educate people in the arts of the theatre as a major concern and this became the main focus of their second year of operation. At the beginning of 1920 the League held a meeting at University College, London in connection with the Annual Conference of Educational Associations. After more discussion a strong delegation from the B.D.L. met with the President of the Board of Education H.A.L. Fisher. The meeting was successful as it secured these remarks from the Minister:

> It would be consonant with the English political tradition that any step which the Government might take in the way of helping theatre should be in aid of schemes initiated by local enterprise and assisted by local contributions. (6)

The significance of Fisher's words lay in the fact that this was the first time that a serving Cabinet Minister had publicly acknowledged that the status of drama in this country might receive some support from state grants.

Over the course of the next few years the Education Committee of the B.D.L was very active in its campaigning. In 1921 a step was made towards the acceptance of drama as a bone fide subject for serious study when the League's Chairman, Harley Granville-Barker accepted a post on the staff of Liverpool University. Although drama was being taught in North American universities and colleges British academics were loath to risk their academic reputations by introducing a subject which had a dubious moral reputation. While Drama schools such as The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art were already well established they were primarily training schools for actors and were not part of the mainstream education system. However in 1921 things were to change when a Diploma in Dramatic Art was introduced by the Senate of London University helping to give drama a new respectability. Nevertheless another twenty-six years were to pass before Bristol University opened the first British University Drama department.
The provision of drama training was not considered to be wholly a government responsibility. In 1927 the B.D.L set up its own training department. The first of its enterprises was a nine day school for amateur producers held at Kings College for Women in Campden Hill, London attended by eighty students. Among those lecturing were Nugent Monck, founder of the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich and Nigel Playfair the actor, producer and manager. Like many of the professionals who were to support B.D.L activities Monck and Playfair had already had a long association with the amateur theatre and were keen to see it achieve a high standard.

Initially all training courses were conducted off-site, but when the League took up residence in Fitzroy Square it was able to provide its own training rooms and small theatre and practice studio. By the early 1960s the training department was very well established and courses often had waiting lists. Training was offered on both a full-time and evening basis of varying length ranging from a one-year Director's Course to weekend workshops in Stage Combat, Basic Stage Make-up and Singing for Actors. While most training was devised for the amateur there were some special courses for those intending to embark upon a professional career, such as a twelve-week full-time directors course run in conjunction with City University and the Central School of Art and Design. The annual full-time courses for producers and instructors in amateur drama were recognised by the Drama Board as providing a suitable standard of preparation for their examinations.

The League wasn't only interested in drama education at adult level. Having established connections with the Education board through its campaigning for drama instruction in colleges and universities, it was approached for advice on the place of drama in the school curriculum. However, it wasn't until 1934 that the B.D.L set up its own Junior Drama Committee. The aim of this committee was to promote drama among young people and so representatives from children's organisations such as the Boy Scouts Association, the Girl Guide's Association, the National Association of Boys Clubs were sought and became involved in the venture. Junior drama clubs were given special membership rates and training courses were set up for them.
around the country. In 1952 a series of Christmas lectures on theatre for young people was instigated by Mrs Whitworth and held in London. The popularity of these events led to them being repeated the following year and extended to the cities of Newcastle and Leeds. In 1955 it was decided to set up a Junior Drama League for children between the ages of twelve and seventeen. One of the reasons for setting up this organisation was that the League felt that many young people were leaving school with an enthusiasm for drama, but couldn't always find an opportunity to develop this interest. A clubroom and library were provided at the B.D.L's London headquarters and workshop activities arranged to coincide with the school holidays. Many of the activities were initiated by Junior Committee members themselves with an emphasis on training in practical theatre skills. Some of those who started out as members in the Junior Drama League went on to professional careers in the theatre and include among them the Oscar winning actor Jeremy Irons.

Although they had achieved a high profile, by the end of 1920 the membership of the B.D.L in numbered only 454. Of these 400 were individuals and the remaining 54 clubs and societies. Faced with a financial crisis the League arranged its first fund-raising event, a ball at the Savoy Hotel in January 1921. Luckily it was a success and the League's funds benefited from a profit of £500 which put them on a surer financial footing.

Extra publicity was secured in 1924 when the League took part in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, organising a section devoted to the theatre. The display featured a first folio and quarto of Shakespeare's plays, historical costumes and prints as well models of stage designs made especially for the exhibition. Also on show was a model of a design for a national theatre. This was the winner of an architectural competition partly organised by the B.D.L. demonstrating their keenness to see the theatre built. While these efforts were appreciated by the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee they could not proceed because although they had enough money to build a theatre they could not afford a central London site and the Government were unwilling to provide any
assistance at this stage. In fact although a foundation stone was laid on the Southbank by Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother) in 1951 building work on the troubled project was delayed for twenty years and it was 1976 before the theatre finally opened.

By 1927 many more were aware of the League's activities and membership had risen to just over 2,000. Now there were nearly as many associate societies as there were individual members. That year saw the launch of the inaugural National Festival of Community Drama. That first year 107 amateur societies took part in this festival for one act-plays in performance which was divided into three stages spread over a period of four months. Stage one consisted of local or county festivals organised by the regional committees of the B.D.L or affiliated groups. From these events selected companies would be invited to take part in the second stage of the competition which took the form of four area finals presided over by the B.D.L. The English company judged best at this level of the competition was awarded the John Maude Trophy. However, the apex of festival was the British Finals, first held at the New Theatre (now the Albery) in the West End. The overall winners of the Howard de Walden Cup in the inaugural year were the Welwyn Garden City Theatre Society who went on to America and to win the highest prize at the New York Little Theatre Tournament.

The enthusiasm generated by the event led to the National Festival of Community Drama being held on an annual basis. Although competitive in nature the real aim of the Festival was:

To provide for amateurs an opportunity for measuring the standard of their work and learning how to improve it; of seeing the work of other amateurs and hearing the constructive criticism of an experienced judge; of playing in new and differing conditions; ...of increasing their knowledge of the theatre, and of gaining wider recognition of their efforts. (7)

Nevertheless, despite its good intentions the running of the festival was not always smooth and there were some criticisms. For the purpose of the competition England was divided into three areas and Scotland and Wales accounted for one division each. Unfortunately
these divisions were not all equal in size, one of the problems being that the number of Welsh entrants was generally very small while the number of those entering one or two of the English divisions was disproportionately large. This meant that it was more difficult for a society from one of the larger areas to reach the British Final. Another problem was that not all stages are the same size. Companies who had won their initial heat on a small stage might find their setting dwarfed by the larger stages of the theatres holding the Area and British Finals. Despite these quibbles the Festival was able to keep running and grew in popularity over the years until by 1959 it was attracting over 1,000 entrants.
REFERENCES


(5) BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, ref 3, p. 31.

(6) BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, ref 3, p. 3.

(7) BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, ref 3, p. 29
CHAPTER TWO

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBRARY

Within the first ten years of its existence the British Drama League had established itself as an extremely active organisation working on behalf of the theatre in Britain. Much time and energy had been spent in trying to secure a place for drama in education, setting up the National Festival of Community Drama, running its own training courses and magazine as well as promoting the cause of a national theatre. However, another part of the League was developing that was to form the heart of the organisation over the coming years - the Library.

The foundation of a theatre library had been among the original aims of the B.D.L. Its first manifesto issued in 1919 stated that it intended to offer an information bureau and a lending library of plays and books connected with the stage. The League began to accumulate books from its beginning, purchasing plays asked for by members out of the general funds and making them available for circulation, although there was nowhere to keep them in the Southampton Street office. This problem of space was raised in the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee on 8th December 1919 by the Foreign Drama Committee who "very much regrets having no central office where their papers and publications can be housed" (1). It was then suggested that the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust be approached with a view to securing help towards establishing a library. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust had been set up and endowed with the sum of ten million dollars by the former steel magnate, Andrew Carnegie in 1913. The purpose of the trust was for "the improvement of the well-being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland" (2). Carnegie had already financed 295 municipal libraries in the British Isles and the League were hopeful of securing a grant, based on the fact that were seeking to bring an understanding and enjoyment of drama to people of all classes across the community.
However, before applying to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust the B.D.L. decided to wait until it felt it could justify a grant. In 1921 the League moved from its half room in Southampton Street to slightly larger premises consisting of two rooms at 10 King Street, also in Covent Garden. Members had already began to make donations of books and plays and it was during April of that year that the League received a substantial offer from Miss Annie Horniman, formerly of the Gaiety Theatre Manchester. The gift consisted of the entire collection of actor's sets and annotated prompt copies of the plays produced at the Gaiety during her thirteen years of ownership. This was a significant gift in terms of both size and importance as the Gaiety had produced over 200 plays, of which half had been premiere's of new work and included amongst them Sir James Barrie's own prompt copy of his play 'The Twelve Pound Look' and complete orchestrations for Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Knight of the Burning Pestle' and Rostand's 'Fantasticks'.

The arrival of this major donation meant that the League's collection of books and plays had increased significantly and the second of its two room office effectively became 'the library.' Never an organisation to rest on its laurels during these early years, the B.D.L. soon set to make the Library work for them. It was little more than a month after receiving Miss Horniman's collection of books they decided to put the donation into practical use. At a meeting of the Executive Committee it was agreed that the sets of plays could be hired by members at a charge of five shillings for the first six weeks with an additional charge of five shillings for any period over that six weeks (3). Later, as a result of requests from members, a special hire rate of two shillings and sixpence a week was introduced to accommodate those who only wanted play sets for a single reading.

In 1922 the Education Settlements Association proposed to give the League the sum of £30 to be spent on enlarging the library. This organisation had already given the League £20 the previous year, under certain conditions, some of which had been used to buy some much needed books on costume. Of this new sum £20 was to be spent on the purchase of books while the remaining was put towards the preparation of a catalogue of the plays in the library which was to be
undertaken by Geoffrey Whitworth. Once the plays had been catalogued it was agreed that, if possible, the list should appear in Drama making it available to all members. This task meant increased demands on the already understaffed League so Whitworth engaged the services of an extra secretary at a salary of £75 per year. Although she was not qualified as such this new secretary, Mary Dalston became the League's first Librarian not only taking care of the general running of the library and hiring of sets, but also compiling the handlist of plays that was published in 1925 under the title of The Player's Guide.

A steady increase in membership and subsequent use of the library service meant that in 1924 the B.D.L. felt able to justify an application to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust for a grant to purchase more books. This initial application was successful and resulted in a grant of £200 which enabled the Library to increase its stock so that by the end of the year it was held approximately 3,000 volumes. Books were now threatening to take over 10 King Street and it was becoming obvious that the League could not continue to function properly under these conditions. In addition to this, now that the library was expanding so rapidly it needed to be professionally organised. It therefore proposed that they should look for larger premises and that the monies received from the hire of play sets be put towards the salary of a fully qualified Librarian.

The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, impressed with the work of the League, had already agreed to grant the Library £750 a year for three years, later extended to four. In addition to this the Trust was also to provide another £500 which enabled the League to move to 8 Adelphi Terrace in early Spring 1925. Adelphi Terrace had been the building where Thomas Hardy had trained as an architect and the exact room where he studied with its views across the Thames was given to the Library. On March, 24th Lord Eustace Percy of the Board of Education officially opened the new headquarters and library at a special luncheon at the Hotel Cecil. The League had already appointed Miss Violet Clayton to the position of Librarian following the resignation of her predecessor Mary Dalston and a Library Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. F.S. Boas to
supervise its activities. However, shortly before they had settled into the new premises, the Library was to receive perhaps its most valuable bequest, the collection of the great dramatist and critic William Archer.

William Archer, born in Perth, Australia in 1856 had been educated at Edinburgh University and called to the Bar in 1883. Although he had trained as a barrister he achieved fame as a noted theatre critic and as the first English translator of the plays of the Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen. Archer and Harley Granville Barker, President of the B.D.L. had worked together on a national theatre scheme, published in 1907, and this cause was very dear to their hearts. When Archer died in December 1924 the National Theatre was no nearer to becoming a reality than it had been seventeen years before. The owner of a collection of dramatic literature, amounting to some 1,500 volumes Archer left instructions in his will that this collection should be entrusted to a suitable theatrical library or institution on the understanding that it should become the property of the National Theatre if it was established within a certain timescale. It was decided that the B.D.L. should receive the books, playbills and theatre programmes and according to the terms of the Deed of Gift that the collection should be called and known as "The William Archer Collection."

As would be expected, given William Archer's association with Ibsen, the collection was particularly strong in Scandinavian dramatic literature. Other important works included Genest's ten volume historical work Some account of the English stage from the Restoration in 1660-1830, published in 1832. Many of these works were annotated in Archer's own hand and others contained the autographs of leading dramatists such as Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde. Also included were a set of theatre programmes dating from 1877 to 1924, press cuttings books and other correspondence and memorabilia. While the bulk of the League's book stock consisted of plays the Archer Collection was to form the basis of a second reference section, though not all of these items were readily accessible to members owing to their rarity and value.
Once the Archer Collection had been received by the League Library the next task that needed to be undertaken was to reorganise the expanded collection of critical works and impose a classification system on them. The problem facing Violet Clayton, common with many other librarians of special collections, was finding a system that would be suitable for a specialist theatre library. Seeking assistance on the matter, knowing that there were many collections devoted to the theatre in America, Miss Clayton wrote to the Reference Librarian at the New York Public Library. In his reply H.M. Lindenberg mentioned the Library of Congress system as being used by many university libraries. However, he stated that the books in the New York Public Library Circulation Department were "classified entirely by the decimal system" but that they had a "large and important collection relating to drama and in theatre and these, like all the books in our Reference Department, are classified according to our own system" (4).

A disadvantage of the major systems of classification was that they were designed for use in general, or academic libraries rather than the specialist library. The theatre and the performing arts do not receive main class status in Dewey and Library of Congress, but are generally found within 'The Arts' and 'Literature' and 'Language and Literature' respectively. Given the need for specialist libraries to allow for a depth of description in their classification these particular systems fail to provide what is needed because their classes are too broad.

The solution that the B.D.L. chose was to follow the example of the New York Public Library Reference Department and devise its own decimal system based on Dewey. Instead of the ten major classes used by Dewey the B.D.L. substituted ten of its own:

0 General Works
1 Dramatic Theory - Playwriting
2 The Theatre
3 Acting
4 Pantomime - Harlequinade - Variety Entertainments
5 Music
6 Ballet - Dance
Within these major classes are a series of sub divisions (see Appendix A) which create more specific subject areas according to the needs of the Library. An additional section for biographies was added, not classified according to the decimal scheme, but placed at the end of the run in alphabetical order according to subject. The Plays, which formed the majority of the collection had their own simple system of classification being filed on the shelves in author order.

It is not quite clear when the card index and the cataloguing system used by the B.D.L came into being, but it is reasonable to assume that it began to develop around this period of time. At its close in 1990 at least twenty-five separate indexes were in operation use. The complexity of the system evolved through the early decision to provide a comprehensive information service as well as a library. The books and plays, as well as newspaper and journal articles had to be catalogued in a such a way that any information required would be easily accessible and as comprehensive as possible.

Plays were catalogued to provide specific practical information. The master card in this instance was the Author Index card and contained the name of the author, followed by title, publisher, date and height. Also included on this card would be a brief indication of the character of the play (eg. comedy, tragedy etc.); the number of acts; a cast breakdown according to the numbers players and their sex; a description of the location or setting for each scene; the name of the agent if known and finally the location of play in the library (Reference, Lending or Sets). Among the other index cards produced for plays were the Types Index card. This index listed plays by their principle themes or subject such as: anti-nuclear, environmental, religious. A further useful index was arranged in author order according to dramatic form under headings Such as: duologues; monologues; sketches; women only casts and so on.
The reason for providing such an in depth indexing system was based on the needs of the members. Many amateur societies would contact the League and ask, for example, if they could suggest a one act play for women, or if the Library knew of a large cast religious play with only two scenes. While an on the spot answer could not be guaranteed it was possible to extract this type of information reasonably quickly given the resources created.

The other major library index related to the information extracted from newspaper cuttings and journals were the Comprehensive and Subject indices. Articles were indexed under one or more of the three main types of heading contained within the two indices and were: personality, production and subject alphabetically, letter by letter. If more than one entry exists for an entry these were then arranged chronologically.

Personality entries consisted of straightforward biographical information filed by surname and could be found in both the Subject and Comprehensive indices. For example biographical information was filed in the Subject Index and obituary notices in the Comprehensive Index. Where possible the first card of an entry for a personality in the Subject Index would contain details of date of birth and death (if applicable), profession and any titles or honours held. This information would sometimes be taken from theatre programmes and was cut out and pasted onto the card. Next followed a journal or newspaper reference consisting of title of the Journal, the date and page number followed by a brief abstract ranging from one or two words to several lines. References for information contained in the Press-cuttings books would be preceded by the letters PC and the page number would refer to where the article or could be found in that particular volume.

Initial practice with dealing with Production entries was to divide them into categories such as advance notices, reviews, production dates and photographs/pictorial material. However, perhaps due to the fact that this practice was extremely time consuming and information was often duplicated on several cards it was consistently adhered to. The result of this was that the only obvious order maintained was a
chronological one. Production entries would be filed according to play title and would contain date(s) of the production, the names of the principle cast members, director, producer, stage and costume designers and the name of the theatre. This information would be followed by the source of the information and an abstract as with Personalities entries.

Like Personalities entries, Subject entries could be found in both the Comprehensive and the Subject Indices. Within the Comprehensive index would be filed information on a particular genre in drama, usually relating to a performance or production. An example of this latter would be the heading Anti-nuclear plays, the entry card(s) containing an abstract followed by a source reference. Meanwhile the Subject index would contain entries on theatre companies such as The Royal Shakespeare Company and other organisations connected to the theatre and performing arts such as The Arts Council of Great Britain. In addition to this the Subject Index also included information related to specific aspects of the theatre under headings such as 'Benevolent Funds', 'Education' and 'Grants'.

Although this indexing system was used for over sixty years there was a lack of clear distinction between the Subject and Comprehensive Indices. Why the decision was made to divide biographies and obituaries between the two indices is not obvious. Furthermore there was no attempt at correlation which meant that although a personality might appear on the cast list of a production in the Comprehensive Index they might not have an entry in the Personalities section of the Subject Index. Nevertheless, despite the sometimes confusing nature of the B.D.L's indexing system, it provided access to material not covered by any other source before and was the backbone of the Library's reference service.

By 1930 the Library had grown to over 12,000 volumes, excluding the Archer Collection. The handlist prepared in 1925 no longer adequately represented the wealth of material now owned and available for use by members. It had been decided to compile a new complete catalogue in 1928 and work had begun on the task that same year by the Librarian. Although the League wished to publish the
catalogue this enterprise, like so many others, rested on the availability of sufficient funds. Fortunately the size of the membership, like the size of the Library had increased considerably since the opening of Adelphi Terrace. Overall the number of volumes issued had risen from 6,669 between 1924-25 to 21,520 by the end of 1927 (5). The number of affiliated societies now made up half the membership and they were making good use of the sets hiring service and so contributing to an increased Library revenue. This, along with the continued support of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust who continued to renew their grants to the League enabled the work on the publication to be completed. Published by Victor Gollancz the new catalogue entitled, *The Player's Library and Bibliography of the Theatre*, finally appeared in 1930 and was later joined by a supplement in 1934.

The B.D.L's Library was beginning to establish a fine collection and at that time no equivalent bibliography existed. However, the content of *The Player's Library and Bibliography of the Theatre* was not intended to be seen as a cannon of plays and this was made clear in Geoffrey Whitworth's introduction:

> The plays in the library have been chosen from a practical rather than an academic point of view. The imposition of a standard of taste is not the purpose of this library. Good plays and bad plays jostle one another on the shelves, with the natural result that the inclusion of a play in the Catalogue implies no recommendation on the part of the Drama League. (6)

The role of the publication was to provide those interested in the theatre with an informative and functional guide to the B.D.L. collection. While it could be used by professionals and amateurs for selecting plays to perform or read it was also of use to those caring out research in the theatre.

Like the Library the book was divided into two parts, plays and critical works. While the critical works By far the larger part of the collection, plays featured first in the bound volume. Arranged alphabetically by author the bibliographic information on plays corresponded to that held on the Author Index cards. The second
section 'books on the theatre' was arranged according to the decimal classification system used by the Library, and within that by alphabetical order according to author. This sequence was followed by a title index to the plays and a further index of names including cross references that further facilitated its use. The need for and usefulness of such a volume on the theatre, can be measured by the fact that the *Player's Library and Bibliography* soon sold out its print run.

Although its beginnings had been fairly humble, within its first decade the B.D.L. Library had become one of the most significant theatre collections in existence in this country. Its establishment was helped significantly by the donations made by Annie Horniman and William Archer who between them had provided the League with the foundations for a play lending service and a reference library respectively. Without these generous gifts and the support of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust it is doubtful whether the League would have been able to amass such a valuable collection due to its poor financial position. Nevertheless, the existence of a Library, along with the establishment of the Community Drama Festival was undoubtedly beneficial to the League in attracting membership as this had reached over 3000 by the end of the 1920s. Despite the economic depression that was beginning to bite in Great Britain the continued future of the B.D.L. seemed to be assured.
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CHAPTER THREE
FITZROY SQUARE 1935-1959

Until 1935 the B.D.L. remained at Adelphi Terrace its work continuing apace. In 1931 the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich and St. Andrews University, Scotland were the locations for two summer schools for amateur producers organised by the League. The following year the Village Drama Society, founded in 1918 was incorporated within the B.D.L. bringing with it a large collection of costumes that were made available for hire by members. Other activities during this period included participation in a campaign calling for the abolition of the Tax on live entertainment and the setting up of branches of the League in Australia and New Zealand. There was also a change of personnel in the library in 1933 when Violet Kent resigned being replaced as Librarian by Miss Mary Coates.

In 1932 Lord Esher became the second Chairman of the League Council, following the retirement of Harley Granville-Barker. On his departure Granville-Barker gave the Library a large selection of nineteenth century plays from his own collection. This gift was later followed by a donation made by Lady Playfair, widow of Sir Nigel Playfair, of books belonging to her husband. Between 1918 - 1932 Playfair had held the lease of the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith where he had presented many successful revivals of Restoration and eighteenth century drama. Naturally this period of British theatre was well represented within Playfair's personal library and the League was fortunate to receive copies of early editions of a number of eighteenth century plays.

By the middle of the decade the number of volumes held had risen from 6,000, at the opening of 8 Adelphi Terrace, to nearly 30,000 (1). The Library shelves, once modestly stocked were now full to capacity and beyond. In addition to this the expansion of the B.D.L's other activities meant that the limited office space available within the building was also proving inadequate. For the organisation to run efficiently it would have to move again. What the League needed was
a permanent residence of sufficient size to accommodate the rapidly
growing library and provide room for expansion. Up until this time
the B.D.L. had rented its premises but the decision was now made to
attempt to buy a property. Although membership was healthy the
League had very little capital and so financial assistance was sought
to fund the purchase of a suitable building. Through a combination of
contributions from members and generous donations from the Pilgrim
Trust and the dependable Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, the B.D.L.
was able to purchase the freehold on a Georgian 'Town-house',
number 9 Fitzroy Square, W1.

On the afternoon of 28th June, 1935 nine Fitzroy Square was
officially opened by Lord Cromer, the Lord Chamberlain. The
League's previous premises had all been in the heart of 'theatreland' in
Covent Garden but now its headquarters were in an area known as
'Fitzrovia' bordered by Euston Road to the North, Oxford Street to the
South and Tottenham Court Road to the East. Although the river view
was lost, the new building was very central and accessible to League
members by bus, train and Underground. It also offered the additional
facilities of a costume store, a book shop and a restaurant as well as
larger Library reading rooms.

The purchase of Fitzroy Square provided the League with a
permanent home and an acknowledgement of its position as an
important national dramatic organisation. During the four years
leading up to World War II the B.D.L. continued to promote 'theatre
for all'. In 1936, in conjunction with the National Theatre Appeal
Committee, the League mounted an exhibition of the theatre at the
Kensington department store Derry and Toms. That same year they
issued a set of twelve gramophone records which containing samples
of twenty four regional dialects. Primarily intended for use by actors
and stage-producers the records were also of great interest to students
of linguistics. Read by natives of the specific region, each sample
contained the same short monologue using the complete phonetic
alphabet, followed by examples of poetry and prose of the area
concerned. A set of these records were presented to King George V
by the B.D.L. shortly before he died and marked the League's first
contact with the Royal family.
On the outbreak of war, in early September 1939 the League immediately cancelled its annual conference and closed the offices of Fitzroy Square. Professional theatre had continued during World War One, but this time around very few theatres remained open and the number of productions taking place fell dramatically. Likewise the future of amateur drama at this period was uncertain. The period between the wars had been boom years for amateur drama with a massive rise in interest and founding of clubs and societies. However, the departure of men and women for war service meant that sustaining societies would be difficult and many ceased activities for the duration. Meanwhile at the B.D.L almost a third of the staff of twenty nine a third left at once to play their part in the war effort.

However, the closure of the League premises was not to last very long. By the end of the month the doors were open again and business was to continue with the assistance of its remaining staff members. Geoffrey Whitworth travelled the country speaking to League representative's and considering what could be done by the organisation. While it would not be possible to hold the annual Festival of Community Drama during wartime other League activities could be maintained, albeit on a smaller scale. Drama was re-christened Wartime Drama, with the first of the new format, minus advertisements issued in October of 1939. In addition to this drama training continued with Easter and summer schools taking place throughout the war.

There was a general recognition that entertainment and leisure activities were as important during wartime as they were in peacetime. The entire population, whether overseas fighting or supporting the war effort at home were under a great deal of stress that needed some form of release. Just prior to the outbreak of the war an organisation was formed to provide entertainment for the British and allied armed forces and those carrying out war work. The Entertainments National Service Association, more commonly known as E.N.S.A. operated from the Drury Lane Theatre and was financed by the Navy Army and Air Force Institute (N.A.A.F.I.). Throughout the duration of the war E.N.S.A. was responsible for putting on plays.
and concerts at factories, camps and hostels in Great Britain as well as at the battle-fronts of the world.

While E.N.S.A. enjoyed a high profile the B.D.L. was also to play a part in entertaining the forces. Present at the B.D.L.'s 1940 Stratford Conference was Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Reginald Kennedy-Cox, welfare officer of the Southern Command. In an address given to the Conference Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy-Cox stated that:

...entertaining the troops during the winter months would be difficult. If indifferent shows were provided the men would fall back on the cinema. Not that the cinema was to be despised; it was our great standby. But plays too were needed - plays of action and colour. If the news went round that a good show was available the men would turn up and enjoy it thoroughly. The soldiers would also appreciate the chance to act themselves. (2)

This was an endorsement of the value of drama by the Army which was backed up by the presentation to the League of a cheque for 150 from the Director-General of Welfare at the War Office. The Army wanted to produce its own amateur theatricals and looked to the B.D.L. for their support in this endeavour in the provision of costumes and play sets.

The early years of the war saw a drop in League membership from 3,737 to 2,053 (3). This was only to be expected as many amateur dramatic societies were no longer active. However, by 1942 the League had accepted 230 new affiliations (4). Of these many were drama groups set up by munitions workers, the armed forces, the Auxiliary Fire Service and Air Raid Precautions units. The War Office and the Army Welfare Department were continuing to encourage amateur dramatics amongst the Services and had arranged special reduced rate subscriptions to the League Library for military units. This led to an increased demand on the Sets Lending Service which was now sending out 10,000 sets of plays a year, some to forces drama groups as far afield as Iceland (5). Indeed some sets were even sent out to sea as the Royal Navy put its own plays performed by members of ship's company. As well as play texts these military units required help with other items required for staging a
performance. In 1940, for example, a large consignment of costumes and stage make-up was despatched to the British Expeditionary Force serving in France. Had this shipment been intercepted the reaction of the enemy as they opened the parcels would have been very interesting to watch.

The B.D.L. reached its twenty-fifth birthday during the latter stages of the war. At the end of November 1944, 743 drama groups within H.M. Forces were affiliated to the League (6). Although providing support for the entertainment of the Services had constituted much of the organisation's work during the war other concerns were not neglected. Under Geoffrey Whitworth's direction the B.D.L. had always been a campaigning body and this continued even in wartime. In 1942 a special committee of the League drew up plans for a Civic Theatre scheme which they presented to the Prime Minister, the President of the Board of Education and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (later to become the Arts Council of Great Britain). The aim of this scheme was to bring non-commercial theatre to the provinces with the aid of state subsidy. It was proposed that new theatres should be built or existing playhouses rented to be managed by charitable trusts which would initially receive financial backing from the local authority. The repertoire of these theatres should consist of classical plays, contemporary plays and translations and local playwrights should also be supported. In addition to this, rather than operating a 'short-run' programme these theatres should follow the repertory system whereby the programme would change at least twice a week but successful plays would be retained in the permanent repertory.

The continuance of the war meant that the Civic Theatre Scheme did not make any immediate progress. However in 1948 it was the subject of discussion at the British Theatre conference which led to the insertion of Clause 132 of the Local Government Act. This clause gave local authorities the right to impose a levy of up to sixpence in the pound for the provision of entertainment. Although many local authority owned theatres have been built in the last forty years the original aims of the B.D.L. have not been realised comprehensively. Nevertheless the repertory system is operating in town and cities
across Britain and by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre.

1948 was also a landmark year for the B.D.L for other reasons. After nearly thirty years at the helm Geoffrey Whitworth had decided to retire. His departure came at a time when membership of the League stood at an all time high of 7,437 and most of the B.D.L. activities were firmly established (7). Although the scheme for a national theatre had yet to become concrete, it was hoped that building would begin in the not to distant future. Having seem the League achieve nearly all of its original objectives, Whitworth felt able to leave its fortunes in the hands of his successor E. Martin Browne.

Also in that year the freehold of the adjoining house, number ten Fitzroy Square became available and the League decided to purchase it. As before the rapid growth of the Library was now causing severe congestion and the new space was badly needed. While the bottom half of the new house was not available for immediate use, as a tenant was still in occupation, the League was able to connect the top two floors with number nine. This not only created extra space for the Library, but provided the Training Department with a costume and properties workshop and a rehearsal room. Meanwhile, parts of the old building were refurbished and a members lounge was created.

Dorothy Coates who had served as Librarian for thirteen years left the League in 1947. The new Librarian who had been appointed by the Library Committee did not stay long and was soon replaced by Mary Garnham who had been Assistant Librarian since 1925. The Library service was increasingly busy. For example, in the period 1948-49 20,730 sets, 34,405 single plays and 2,287 critical books were issued to members (8). While its extensive use showed the value of the collection the books were beginning to suffer. The Library staff spent hours attempting to repair and restore play texts that had been defaced by annotation and misuse by the societies that had borrowed them. As well as the difficulty of maintaining serviceable sets of plays, the Library was faced with the problem of being unable to replace texts that were beyond repair, because they had gone out of print or were American editions not easily obtained. Though some need for
replacement is to be expected in any library the fact that a lot of the B.D.L.'s collection was being used for rehearsals meant that their shelf-life dropped considerably. In the period 1952-53, for example just over a third of the Library's expenditure on stock went on replacement copies, which meant that they were constantly in the position of being able to purchase stock to develop the collection (9).

In 1950 a new edition of the Player's Library and Bibliography of the Theatre was published, this time by Faber and Faber. It was twenty years since the last one had been produced and the need for a new edition had been realised for some time, but was prevented from going ahead by the outbreak of the war. Retailing at a price of thirty shillings, this single volume was over a thousand pages long and listed approximately 70,000 volumes (10). As before, it was divided into two sections and adopted the format of the previous edition, including the helpful cross referencing within the index. By 1956 and the publication of the Third Supplement over 4,000 copies had been sold, mainly to libraries in the United Kingdom and abroad, the U.S. A. in particular (11).

Meanwhile building work went ahead to enlarge the Reference Library and create a quiet reading room. Although B.D.L. membership was still dominated by amateurs in 1953 British Actors Equity became affiliated to the League. Professional actors now began to make considerable use of the Library both for play-reading and research.

As well as the connection with Equity, 1953 was the year that Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother agreed to become the League's patron. During the war she had made a visit to Fitzroy Square and had been shown around the library and had watched a rehearsal by a group of youth club leaders. The Royal Family had often indulged in amateur dramatics themselves and the Queen Mother was keen to support the League in its work, visiting several times over the coming years.

The Library collection was continuing to grow at a considerable rate. Although the League had to purchase new books from its own funds it continued to receive many valuable donations. In 1950 Mr Horace
Collins presented the Library with 144 bound volumes of mainly 19th century Plays. These texts had formerly belonged to his late brother, Arthur, who had run the Drury Lane Theatre. The gift was greatly appreciated as many of the plays had been out of print for some time and had not been staged since the last century. In 1956 another notable donation came from the poet, playwright and publisher T. S. Eliot, who gave a rare collection of drawings illustrating fifty masks used in the Japanese Noh plays. The Library had also received important works from the AllRussian Theatrical Society, Moscow who donated a volume of illustrations and documents relating to the Moscow Art Theatre between 1898-1938 and another of photographs of current Russian theatrical productions. This generosity by members and indeed non-members, greatly enhanced the value and depth of the collection and made the B.D.L. library one of the greatest theatre collections in the world.

However, all was not well. While the early years of the 1950s were as active as ever for the League, its finances were far from secure. In 1952 the B.D.L. became an incorporated company and the cost of making this move, particularly the legal fees, had been more than originally estimated. There was also a drop in the League's income which led it to have to dip into their cash reserves in order to make the mortgage repayments. In addition to this essential building work needed to be carried out on both buildings, causing an additional drain on its financial resources.

It was identified that the cost of the service the members received was in excess of the amount that they contributed towards it. The subscription rate had been one guinea in 1919, but had only been raised by a half over the intervening twenty years (12). Meanwhile the wages of B.D.L. staff were minimal and some were having to leave because they could no longer survive on the money they were paid. E. Martin Browne recognised that something would have to be done and increased the subscription rate to two guineas. This action allowed all salaries except his own to be raised and enabled the League to start up a small pension fund. However, the raising of subscriptions could not solve all the League's financial problems as costs were continuing to rise.
The latter half of the 1950's turned into crisis years. Membership which had stood at 7,000 at the end of the 1940's had dropped to 5,383 in 1958 (13). This was naturally some cause for concern, but the League's continued financial troubles were the biggest worry. Despite raising subscription rates and the continued success of the Training Department, the League still wasn't making enough money to cover its expenditure. The Director of the B.D.L., E. Martin Browne, decided that he should leave. He had spent much time away from his post directing theatre productions and felt that the League needed a permanent administrator so Peter Carpenter took over the position for the next three years. He was followed on his resignation by Walter Lucas, who was to remain as Director until 1980.

The financial situation was effecting the running of the League, particularly in the Library where five of the staff of thirteen left in 1957 because of poor salaries. The report of the Librarian in the Annual Report for 1957-58 records a period of "severe economies which had reduced staff to a minimum and the buying of books by fifty per cent" (14). The drop in Library personnel meant that those remaining were under a great deal of pressure. At that time the Library was divided into five sections: Reference, set bookings, despatch of sets, single copies and bookshop and all were very busy. The reduction in the number of assistants meant that essential routine work could not be carried out, such as the annual stock-taking of sets and this led to damaged or incomplete sets being sent out to members.

As they had done before, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust came to the League's assistance with extra funding. This, in addition to the re-channeling of some of the B.D.L.'s resources allowed them to employ extra staff and increase the Library's book allocation. Elsewhere within the League some reorganisation took place and this coupled with a slight increase in membership gave them more financial stability as they celebrated their fortieth anniversary.
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CHAPTER FOUR

FITZROY SQUARE 1960 - 1983

The 1950s gave way to the 1960s and the business of the League continued much as it had done before though this time with a background of permanent money problems. In the Library there was a gradual decrease in the number of books, sets and single copies issued. Although amateur dramatics remained popular there was a decline in public support for performances. Television ownership or rental was gradually increasing and now people could watch professional entertainment in the comfort of their own homes they were less inclined to pay to see a performance by their neighbours in the local village hall. Furthermore, as George Taylor writes in his book History of the Amateur Theatre:

...young people brought up on films and television freely admitted that the plays performed did not interest them. Even a production of 'Billy Liar'did not bring them in and kept away many regular older attenders. They were disgusted with the language and shocked by the behaviour of the younger generation in the play and completely failed to notice the implied criticism of them. (1)

The effect this has had on the amateur movement of the last three decades has been a drop the number of societies and those that survive tend to stick to popularist theatre that is unlikely to offend.

Elsewhere the future of the professional theatre was looking brighter. In 1960 Peter Hall took over at Stratford, creating the Royal Shakespeare Company and establishing a London venue for their work at the Aldwych Theatre. Shortly afterwards, under the leadership of Laurence Olivier, the newly inaugurated National Theatre company was installed at the Old Vic until its own theatre was built. Although the National had taken a long time to arrive, within a short period at the beginning of the decade Britain had suddenly gained two state subsidised national theatre companies which came to represent the best in British theatre.
Both the R.S.C. and the National Theatre became members of the B.D.L. using its services to borrow books and plays and for research purposes. The Information Service had become an important part of the League's work and its use was increasing while that of the Library lending service was gradually declining. At this time not all queries were directed to the Library as the Training Department dealt with queries related to the technical side of theatre and the Administrator was able to assist with the problems of overseas members and would also try to provide answers to questions on legal matters. However, if the knowledge of the League's senior staff failed them, a solution could generally be provided by consulting books held within the library or one or more of its indexes.

As well as providing assistance to amateur and professional drama companies, the Information Service was also used by the B.B.C. and the ITV companies seeking advice relating to productions they were about to undertake. Although, as I have already mentioned, television was partly responsible for the decline in amateur dramatics it introduced many people to serious drama through presentations such as 'Armchair Theatre', the 'Wednesday Play' and 'Playhouse'. This was in keeping with the original aims of the B.D.L which held that drama was for 'everybody' and so the League was happy to work with the television companies.

By 1966 the B.D.L. had been in residence at Fitzroy Square for thirty one years and the headquarters were once more in a poor state of repair. However with the aid of a donation of £12,500 which came from the Pilgrim Trust and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the annual subsidy of £4,160 from the Department of Education and Science both buildings were refurbished and converted into the British Theatre Centre. This new British Theatre Centre now housed not only the B.D.L, but also the Association of British Theatre Technicians, the Theatre Advisory Council and the Council of Repertory Theatres. In addition to this, it also acted as a forwarding address for the National Association of Drama Advisers and Peggy White, a member of the B.D.L.'s staff, operated the National Council of Theatre for Young People from the building.
The Centre was officially opened by Jennie Lee, Minister for the Arts under Harold Wilson's Labour Government, in July 1967. The creation of the Theatre Centre brought together a group of organisations in order to provide a complete theatre service under one roof. The advantage of establishing such a centre at Fitzroy Square was that it not only helped to enhance the League's position, but also brought in much needed additional income through the rents charged to the other organisations. As had been the case ten years before this extra money enabled the B.D.L. to approach its next major anniversary in a slightly safer financial position.

Increasingly the League's work was with the Professional theatre. Fringe theatre companies comprising professional actors were now touring the country or establishing themselves in small venues. In many ways they were performing a role that had previously belonged to the amateur movement, which was by now well past its heyday of the early post-war years. The name the British Drama League was associated primarily with the amateur movement and it no longer seemed appropriate for an organisation that was now equally involved in professional theatre. In November 1972 the League officially changed its name giving itself the broader title of the British Theatre Association.

Meanwhile Mary Garnham, the Librarian, had retired in 1967 after over forty years service with the League. In order for the Library to provide the service for which it was noted, it required someone with an in-depth knowledge of the theatre and an understanding of the library's unique indexing procedure. Enid Foster, who had joined the library staff in the 1940s, was the obvious successor to the post. Fiercely committed to the League and protective of its library, she was to stay with the organisation right until the very end, gaining the M.B.E. in the Birthday Honours List of 1990.

After the Librarian had slipped easily into her new position procedure was to continue much as it had before. The Library's policy was to purchase one reference copy and usually two loan copies copy of every new play published in the United Kingdom and by Samuel French in New York. Over the years many charitable organisations
and some businesses had contributed towards the book fund. However, the price of books was continuing to rise and in order for the Library to carry out its policy, it required more assistance. Samuel French already donated one copy of each of their plays to the B.D.L and so the Library Committee decided that Mrs Foster should appeal to other publishers for donations of each new play or book on the theatre appearing in their lists. Of the forty seven publishers approached in early 1971 twenty five agreed to comply with the Librarian's request, others offered additional discount and only five refused outright (2). Although this agreement was to lapse in the course of time, the three major publishers of plays in this country, Samuel French, Faber and Methuen steadily supplied complimentary copies of their texts.

Over the years the Library had had considerable problems caused by a lack of space. Between 1978 - 79 this situation was severely acerbated by the fact that number. 10 Fitzroy Square had be sold owing to the departure of its tenants with the subsequent loss in rent revenue. In order to prepare for the sale it was necessary to move the remaining library stock from number 10 and find a home for it at number 9. The predicament of the Library was not made any easier by the discovery of rising damp in the basement of the old building. The basement housed the Association's strong room and contained valuable documents including parts of the Library's collection that were not generally available to members. As the papers were no longer safe they too had to be moved and placed under lock and key in the reference library.

Among the documents transferred was a set of correspondence, containing over 800 letters between William Archer and Sir Gilbert Murray the distinguished classical scholar, poet, philosopher and playwright. Covering a period of more than thirty years the letters were a vivid chronicle of the friendship between the two men which began in 1895 and they included many references to famous theatrical names of the period. Approximately half the correspondence was typewritten the other half in the author's own handwriting. The B.D.L. had taken possession of Murray's letters to Archer following the latter's death in 1924 as they formed part of his bequest. In 1955, two
years before his own death, Murray gave his half of the correspondence to the B.D.L and thus provided them with a complete collection.

Maintaining security in the Library was difficult. Not only was the Library understaffed, but the layout of the reading rooms and overcrowded state of the shelves made it extremely awkward for the assistants to keep a vigilant eye on the collection at all times. It wasn't until the annual stock-take in late August 1978 that they discovered that the Archer-Murray letters had gone missing, presumed stolen. The police were informed and the B.T.A. set about their own investigation. However, progress was slow and so in October, with the letters still at large Jane Hackworth-Young, then Walter Lucas's assistant, sent out a circular describing the missing items to bookdealers and others trading in manuscripts and related items. Two months passed before she received a telephone call followed by a letter from a Mr John Wilson of Witney, Oxfordshire, a dealer in autographs. In his letter he wrote:

I am not certain of the present location of the letters, but they have been offered to a contact of mine who in turn has sent me a description with a view to my finding a purchaser, but I am sure that if you can make out a reasonable case for this correspondence being your property it will be possible to recover it without any great difficulty.(3)

Although this letter sounded helpful, it later transpired that Mr Wilson was actually trying to sell the letters himself. No records could be found that give exact details of what was happening at this time, but it appears that the B.T.A. were unable to make satisfactory contact with the dealer. However, sometime in the Spring of 1979 Wilson turned up at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, with the Archer-Murray correspondence which he offered them for sale. Unfortunately for him the staff of the Bodleian were suspicious of his ownership. They had within their records two pieces of evidence that indicated that the letters belonged to the B.T.A.

It appears at this stage the Bodleian decided to retain the letters and Enid Foster, accompanied by Detective Sergeant Bunnett of the Art
Squad, travelled to Oxford in June to examine the correspondence. Once at the Bodleian a large sample of Archer-Murray letters were checked against records held by the B.T.A and found to be compatible. However, this was not the end of the story as the Metropolitan Police took the letters into their possession pending their investigation.

The fate of Mr. Wilson is not recorded in the B.T.A. archive, but in July 1980 Mrs Foster received a letter from a Mr Robert Healy in Massachusetts saying that a John Wilson had attempted to sell the Archer-Murray correspondence in America for approximately $7,000 (4).

It was not until October 1980, nearly eighteen months after they had been recovered, that the Archer-Murray letters were finally released to the B.T.A. Part of this delay was caused by a conflicting claim of ownership. This was finally resolved after the other party relinquished its claim and thus a legal battle was avoided. The B.T.A. was in no financial position to fight a court case and luckily this important correspondence was returned at no cost to them. However, partly as a result of this major theft the Library collection was subsequently insured for £100,000.

Generally the period from the late 1970s onwards was not a happy one for the B.T.A. While the Department of Education and Science increased its grant to £11,000 from April 1980 and the British Council awarded them £2,664, the Arts Council reduced its guarantee from £14,000 to £10,000 (5). The Arts Council grant was specifically related to the services provided by the B.T.A.'s reference and lending libraries. When the remaining organisations withdrew from the British Theatre Centre enterprise the B.T.A no longer qualified for the additional subsidy that their presence attracted.

Crisis was looming once more. Membership was still declining, and had reached a low of approximately 2,154 around this time (6). The B.T.A. was not making enough money to meet its expenses and could ill afford to lose £4,000. Action needed to be taken and the Association decided to review its own operations and role.
As part of this initiative the B.T.A. approached the Arts Council to make a special assessment of their needs in 1980/81. This evaluation was undertaken by the Arts Council's Drama Advisory Panel who visited Fitzroy Square and scrutinised the areas of the Association's work related to its subsidy. Basically this meant all the services operated by the Library as the Arts Council had no financial connection with the B.T.A.'s training courses nor its reception of overseas visitors.

The final revised report was issued at the end of October 1981 (7). It was divided into two parts, the first part looking at the individual elements that comprised the library service and the second part a summary of the Panel's recommendations. Much of the criticism was negative highlighting among other things the poor state of much of the bookstock, the "haphazard and idiosyncratic" cataloguing system and the low number of Lending Library issues. Few areas of the Library escaped unscathed. For example, the Reference collection was not considered unique as similar stock was held within the public library system and the collections of the British Library and the Theatre Museum. In addition to this it was felt that B.T.A. members and the theatrical world used the Information Service to answer any queries even though information sources were available elsewhere. Furthermore, much of the stock held was deemed "not relevant to the answering of enquiries". This suggested therefore that the Information Service was not truly dependent on the Library, but on its experienced staff.

Of all the Library's services only the collection of single play texts was deemed worthy of public subsidy as it was considered "the valuable core of the B.T.A Library holding." However, the provision of such a subsidy would be dependent on public admittance to the collection and assurance of the provision of proper maintenance. At that time the Library was only open to members and maintenance was only possible when there was adequate staffing and sufficient funds, therefore not a regular practice.

The Panel's other recommendations were not connected to the awarding of any further grants, but the effective running of the library
as a whole. Under the heading 'Cataloguing', a survey of all the stock and catalogues was proposed in order to determine the volume of their use and to provide a comparison with other theatrical collections within the London area. The Panel also suggested that should the B.T.A. want to continue with its Information Service "it should have the support of a quick reference section supported by appropriate indexes and other retrieval devices, separate from the library catalogue" (8). After this recommendation came another proposal which would potentially see the cessation of one of the Library's longest established services. The Play Sets service was currently operating at a loss and only accounted for 7% of the total number of sets borrowed in the U.K. It was considered that as the remaining 93% of play sets loaned came from public libraries this service should be discontinued by the B.T.A. and, if they were in agreement, the play set collection could be dispersed.

Although the Report had been damning of the Library services, to their credit the B.T.A. were prepared to act on the advice they were given. The top priority involved the reorganisation of the lending library, including making it available to the public, in order to secure the Arts Council Subsidy. In their recommendations the Drama Advisory Panel had said:

The aim should be to produce from the stocks of the existing reference and lending libraries and if necessary by supplementation from other sources a definitive collection of play texts, printed and manuscript. It should be in duplicate to allow a lending facility with suitable safeguards. (9)

The Library's own play collection was already extensive, but in compliance with the Arts Council's request Clifford Williams, the B.T.A.'s Chairman, met with Alexander Schouvaloff, Head of the Theatre Museum. As a result of this meeting Williams was of the belief that Schouvaloff "would be happy to consider depositing his play texts in the proposed library" (10).

In April 1982 the B.T.A. set the out its own proposals for "The Establishment of a Public Play Library" to the Drama Advisory Panel (11). This document basically followed the recommendations made in
the Drama Advisory Panel Report and set out the type of stock the new library would contain and its administrative policies (see Appendix B). The public would be allowed to read plays within the library without charge, but they would not be permitted to borrow books. The Reference Library and the Information Service were to remain for the exclusive use of members. Subsequent meetings were arranged at the Arts Council where a budget was circulated which showed that the B.T.A. would need an additional £72,550 to run the new library and its other services (12). It was hoped that the Arts Council would increase its grant aid and that other subsidies would not fall. However, even if this did happen it was believed that the B.T.A. would still have to seek additional assistance from the private sector.

In September of 1982 a letter was sent to the Association's membership advising them on the proposed changes to Library Services (13). This not only included the announcement of the setting up of the British Theatre Play Library (the name chosen for the new play library), but the intended discontinuation of the Play Sets Lending Service. The outrage incited by the latter proposal was enormous. Hundreds of members, chiefly dramatic societies, wrote to the B.T.A. voicing their dissatisfaction. Although the public library system did contain many sets in the opinion of the B.T.A.'s membership the service provided was unsatisfactory or inadequate. Many members threatened to leave the B.T.A announcing that they would not be renewing their subscriptions. The B.T.A. was placed in a difficult position, torn between the recommendations of the Arts Council and the wishes of their own membership. It was therefore decided to reinstate the Play Sets Lending Service at an additional charge, but reduce the stock holdings. Frequently used sets were retained while those not currently needed were transferred to Westfield College, University of London, for use by students.

Meanwhile the plans went ahead for the opening of the British Theatre Play Library. Plays were transferred from the Reference Library to the Lending Library and all the lending copies of critical works were moved into the canteen space to be shelved behind shutters. Lack of space was becoming a problem once more. Also the
state of the physical structure of the building had not improved. Having solved its damp problem Number 9 Fitzroy Square was now suffering from serious dry-rot due to the neglect of its neighbouring property, number 8. In addition to this the financial state of the Association had not improved. While the National Heritage Fund had kindly donated £12,500 this was specifically intended for the rebinding of the William Archer Collection and could not be used for other purposes. Nevertheless the B.T.A. had to press on with their proposals to secure their Arts Council grant. And so it came to be that the British Theatre Play Library was opened to the public in April 1983 on the centenary of Geoffrey Whitworth's birth.
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CHAPTER FIVE

REGENT'S COLLEGE AND THE FIGHT FOR FINANCING

The early years of the B.D.L. had been exciting and challenging as the dynamic new organisation established its place within the British theatrical scene. Fifty years on the B.T.A was battling to secure its foundations which were being chipped away by falling membership and the drop in its state subsidies. Even as the B.T.A. was putting its new proposals to the Arts Council, it admitted in a letter to John Faulkner that both the Department of Education and Science and the British Council were intending to discontinue their grants (1). Furthermore this letter also revealed that the B.T.A were considering arrangements "to wind up or function in a radically altered fashion" if they failed to gain support for the new play library (2).

On a more positive note, 1984 saw a £5,000 award from the Television Fund on behalf of fifteen independent television companies, £2,500 from the Royal Victoria Hall Foundation toward the setting up of the British Theatre Play Library and a grant from the British Library for further rebinding of the Archer Collection. This rebinding operation had begun the year before and was being carried out by prisoners at the bindery workshop at Wormwood Scrubs to a very high standard. In addition to this the National Operatic and Dramatic Association had donated its entire stock of plays, some 3,000 volumes, to the Library. This was a welcome gift as many of the texts received were used to replace marked copies held within the Play Library. However, in the words of Jane Hackworth-Young (the then Director of the B.T.A), "the financial position of the B.T.A. was horrendous" (3). The Association therefore had little alternative but to attempt to capitalise on its one remaining asset and so the decision was made to put the Fitzroy Square building on the market.

The sense of permanence the B.D.L. had enjoyed during its heyday had now all but evaporated. Property prices had risen increasingly during the previous decade and once number nine had been sold and the Association's debts cleared it was doubtful whether it would be able to afford to buy comparable premises in central London. During
the course of the next two years, while the B.T.A. waited for a buyer for Fitzroy Square, the search began to find a suitable building to house the Library and their training activities. A couple of options that were considered during the early days of this search included the British Library premises in Bayswater and the Carriage Hall, Covent Garden. Unfortunately although the Science Library was being transferred to Chancery Lane, the British Library could not guarantee to vacate the Bayswater building before 1994. Similarly, the plan to purchase the Carriage Hall fell through also as the property developers were worried about the B.T.A.'s financial background. This was not surprising as at this time the Association was nursing a £100,000 overdraft (4).

The B.T.A. were already aware that it could not rely on the support of public subsidy for their continuance. The strategy of the Thatcher government was to reduce inflation by decreasing the supply of money to both private and public sectors of the economy including the arts. As an organisation dependent on the government for its income, the Arts Council was subject to that government's policies. Over the course of the next decade the rate of increase of its grant was reduced and clients, such as the B.T.A., were encouraged to seek support from the private sector by attracting sponsorship, for example. In an attempt to secure this type of support an open day was held in October 1984 to give potential sponsors and other theatrical organisations an insight into the Association's work. This was followed a year later by the launch of a covenant scheme whereby interested parties were asked to make regular payments to the B.T.A. who, as a registered charity, would then be able to reclaim the income tax deducted from such payments. It was hoped that this scheme would net the Association at least £20,000 a year.

In early 1986 the B.T.A. finally received the blow that they were dreading when the Arts Council announced that they would not be renewing their grant for the coming financial year. To make matters worse the dissolution of the GLC also meant that the B.T.A would lose another £8,7500, followed by the further loss of £10,000 per annum on the withdrawal of the Department of Education and Science grant for 1987-88. These decisions could easily have spelt the end of
the B.T.A and the threatened closure of the Libraries received much coverage in the national press. However the B.T.A. had long had support in high places and questions were raised in the House of Lords as a result of which Greater London Arts and the London Boroughs Scheme agreed to honour the lost GLC grant (5). Furthermore Jane Hackworth-Young, Lord Bessborough and Lord Nugent paid a successful visit to Sir Keith Joseph, Minister for Education, who agreed to reinstate the B.T.A.'s grant to £13,500 and guaranteed it for a further three years

While the B.T.A. was struggling to find money to ensure its long-term survival, the search continued for new headquarters. The Mander and Mitchenson Collection of theatrical memorabilia was moving to Beckenham Place and it was proposed that the two organisations share the premises. While Beckenham could offer ample space, the building would cost almost One million pounds to restore, the whole amount the B.T.A were expecting Fitzroy Square to raise. In addition to this although Beckenham Place was only just inside Kent there was a belief that a "shop front" in central London was desirable. However, while the move to Beckenham Place was still being considered another possible location emerged. A former site of Bedford College Regent's College in Regent's Park was now owned by the American Rockford College of Illinois and their science block was no longer in use. Although, this building had no internal staircase or toilet facilities and less overall space, it offered the advantage of being able to house the libraries on only two floors with room for their expansion. The College were also prepared to offer the B.T.A a fifteen year lease at £45,000 p.a. for the first five years with an initial annual service charge of £32,000 (6). Despite some fears that this seemed expensive the offer was accepted. No suitable freehold property was available and as the Association's overdraft had now reached £140,000 there was a pressing need to make a decision before resources were exhausted.

It was planned that the B.T.A. would finally vacate Fitzroy Square in August 1986 and reopen at Regent's College on October 1st. The proposed move would not only be an massive task in organisation, but also very expensive. It was estimated that it would cost £4,500 in
removal charges and £50,000 to reshelve the Library (7). Also the Association was badly in need of new equipment such as microfiche readers, magazine racks, index cabinets and step ladders. Since the B.T.A. did not have this sort of money to spare they sought sponsorship for the project by sending out a shopping list of items required to possible donors which raised just under £19,000. In addition to this sum large donations towards the move were made by the Strauss Charitable Trust and the Royal Victoria Hall Foundation who gave £10,000 and £1,500 respectively (8).

Nevertheless although such money was gratefully received it was generally felt within the Association that the government should be offering arts institutions more support. In an article published in the *Hampstead and Highgate Gazette* in 1987 Jane Hackworth-Young voiced her frustration at the fact that more and more of the Arts Council’s clients were under threat yet nothing was being done. As she said "How much more has to go before people really do stand up and shout?" (9). In an earlier interview at the time of the move Ms Hackworth-Young was reported to have said that "The British Theatre Association will collapse within the next three years unless the Government steps in with financial backing" (10). At the time the B.T.A. had only £300,000 left from the £802,000 realised through the sale of number nine Fitzroy Square to Pilkington Plc. Relocation costs of moving to Regent’s College and the Association’s outstanding debts had consumed the bulk of this capital.

Moving the B.T.A. libraries had not been an easy task. Just as they were beginning to organise the packing and setting up of the collection in its new site, Enid Foster became dangerously ill with pneumonia followed by pleurisy. Two members of library staff had already left and the new Assistant Librarian/Personnel Assistant could not face the task confronting her and quickly resigned. Until this post could be filled there was only one official member of library staff remaining, the elderly Miss Tracey. Consequently Anthony Cornish, the B.T.A.’s Deputy Chairman had to stand-in for the Librarian and coordinate the removal. However, in the best theatrical tradition groups of members volunteered to help out at weekends and
miraculously everything was ready before the B.T.A. was due to vacate Fitzroy Square.

It had already become apparent that Mrs Foster was overburdened and so the B.T.A. brought in Susan McCarty as part-time Library Manager. They had also managed to recruit another Library Assistant and an Assistant Librarian for the Reference Library. When the new building was officially opened by the Queen Mother in early 1987 the Libraries now had a full complement of staff. Although many library practices were to essentially stay the same, the move had allowed for the rearrangement of the periodicals stock which had formerly been spread throughout the building, but now could be contained in one area. The move had also provided an opportunity to clear out the Library's surplus stock and it was decided that the B.T.A. would hold a bookfair to dispose of it and bring in extra funds. Various famous names from the theatre and film, such as Sir John Gielgud, Anthony Hopkins, Glenda Jackson and Sir Peter Hall, had been approached by the Association and had agreed to sign books and other memorabilia to be put up for auction at the fair. Despite the fact that the weather was not as kind as it might have been the event held outside Fitzroy Square on a Thursday afternoon in August 1986 was a success. Actors Juliet Stevenson, Brenda Blethyn and Bernard Breslaw helped out with the auction, many duplicate plays were sold and the book sale eventually realised a profit of £2,000.

For some time the B.T.A. had been considering the question of computerisation. The issue had originally been raised back in March 1984 when the organisation was attempting to create a comprehensive play library. A general study of the Association's business was carried out and it was decided that the first priority was the computerisation of its administrative records, such as membership and Drama. However, the major task of putting the Library's records on to computer was very much in the minds of the organisation. Initially it was hoped that they could begin by creating a list of the sets available for hire which could then be marketed and sold. The computerisation of the Library's catalogues and indexes was potentially a far more difficult task owing to their size and complexity and would require time and very careful planning.
Although the B.T.A. could not be sure that it had a future it was not ready to admit defeat. Therefore, plans to create a database of the Library's records developed over the next three or four years. Elsewhere the Theatre Museum in Munich had created a computer system for its theatrical records called TANDEM and been in touch with the Theatre Museum in London to discuss links between the two organisations. This was brought to the attention of Jane Hackworth-Young who contacted the programmes director, Dr. Heusman, who came over from Germany to visit the B.T.A. and look over its catalogues in the summer of 1984. The result of this meeting was an agreement for the B.T.A to supply TANDEM with details of all new plays published in the United Kingdom. The idea was that once the Association had purchased a computer these records would be available for immediate transference onto the system. This arrangement was to continue until early 1988 when staff shortages B.T.A. could no longer afford to spend the considerable time required for the accurate processing of bibliographic data.

The Library's own computerisation initiative continued right through the upheaval of the move to Regent's College. In June 1986 Geoffrey Ashton, Library Committee member and former Librarian at the Garrick Club, volunteered to undertake the computerisation of the Author/Title Index. He was already involved with a comparison study between the stock of the Garrick and the B.T.A. which was intended to fill in any gaps in the B.T.A.'s collection and was not proposing to charge for this extra work. However, it was hoped that the Association would be able to raise some money to pay him, possibly through the sale of the catalogues once they had been completed. Liaison was also established with the British Library which already held its theatre collection records on computer. While the British Library's catalogue was detailed, many of the individual plays within collections had not been indexed. As the B.T.A always indexed each play within a collection or anthology it therefore held records that were of use to this national library. In a mutually agreed arrangement it was proposed that the B.T.A. would have access to print-outs of some of the British Library's records in exchange for those produced by the Association to complete both their catalogues (11).
In October of 1986 the B.T.A. received a donation from the John Lewis Partnership for £10,000 towards the computerisation of the Play Library (12). The company had a long association with the B.T.A having presented the B.D.L. with a library table and a set of chairs in the early 1950s and later refurbishing them free of charge. The receipt of this latest gift meant that the expenses already incurred by the programme could be met and the project could continue. A visit was made to the British Library to see its BLAISE system in operation, but it was decided that it did not meet the B.T.A.'s needs. The type of system the B.T.A. required was one that could incorporate all the information available from the manual Index, but they continued to look at existing systems used by other theatre collections hoping that they could be adapted.

By the early summer of 1987 the computerisation project was well under way. A member of staff, Padma Kalraiya, had been employed to assist with the programme and was preparing specifications that would eventually be passed on to the computer firms invited to tender for the B.T.A.'s contract. According to a schedule found in the Association's archives, it was hoped that a tender would have been accepted by November of that year and the actual computerisation would begin in April 1988 (13). Nine companies were sent copies of Padma's specification which resulted in six tenders being received for the job. Of these the choice was initially whittled down to three and finally two.

The task facing any company prepared to take on the B.T.A.'s Library computerisation was a daunting one. Any system would have to have the ability to search nineteen different ways according to the specifications produced. The requirement for such options was based on the varied nature of information enquiries received by the B.T.A. It was necessary for any system to be able to call up details of any production of any play, to provide information on any subject field connected with the theatre as well as provide a detailed catalogue containing all the information available on the card system. The desire to get computerisation underway was increasing due to the insecure state of the card system itself. The index cards were not on rods, but loose in the drawers heightening the risk of loss. Additionally, the
card catalogue was the only comprehensive record of the Library's holdings, if anything happened to any of the indexes, years of work would be lost.

However, the final decision over who should receive the tender was never made. Jane Hackworth-Young resigned as Director in late 1987 followed by Padma Kalraiya in early 1988 after producing the fourth version of her specification. By June of that year the Library Manager, Susan McCarty, had also resigned. The loss of these members of staff might have had some effect on the computerisation programme, but the real problem was the estimated costs of implementing such a system, approximately £100,000, which realistically the B.T.A. could not afford when they were still trying to stabilise their finances.

The pursuit of sponsorship embarked upon by the B.T.A. had not been an outstanding success. The covenant scheme launched in 1985 had only brought in an income of £3,000 p.a for its first four years (14). Events such as the gala performance of the Musical 'South Pacific' backed by Fujitsu Europe and a the Sunday Times sponsored lecture series both made profits, but more money was needed. The problem that the B.T.A. had was that its work was as a back-up resource for the theatre. In the race for sponsorship it was therefore always going to be at a disadvantage when competing with theatre companies.

Unlike those companies the B.T.A. could not offer to emblazon the name of its sponsor in lights outside theatres, across programmes or in advertisements in the national press for months at a time. As a library and training organisation the B.T.A. did not have a high enough profile and consequently could not provide the publicity or glamour that attracted major sponsorship deals. Yet its future without this support was virtually nonexistant.
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CHAPTER SIX

CRISIS, HOPE AND CLOSURE

1988 was a significant year for the B.T.A. Its public subsidy now stood at just £26,000 a year while its running costs were over ten times that amount (1). The prospect of receiving additional public funding appeared unlikely and as a result one of the largest theatre libraries in the world was in danger of closure. In a report undertaken by Ian Gibb of the Office of Arts and Libraries it was suggested that a working party should be formed by the B.T.A., the British Library, and the Victoria and Albert Museum to investigate library provision for theatre research throughout the country and to consider the ways in which the B.T.A.'s collection could be preserved (2). It had now become apparent that the B.T.A. was almost certain to fold, but it was hoped that the Library would not have to be dispersed.

In December, despite pleas to reconsider, the Department of Education and Science declared that they would not be continuing with their grant to the Association after March, 31st 1989 (3). The end of the seventy-year old institution seemed only months away. Members were informed of the situation and the B.T.A. began winding down its business in an attempt to avoid insolvency. The news quickly made the national press. Between January and April 1989 the plight of the B.T.A was reported on by virtually all of the broadsheet newspapers. The general tone of these articles was one of outrage at the impending closure and criticism of the Government and Arts Council. An example of this is the editorial written by John Whitley, in the Sunday Times, :

If any single affair could be taken to symbolise the shambles the nation has got itself into over deciding which assets to keep and which to shed, it is the row about the British Theatre Association and its library. At risk is an incontestably valuable collection of volumes, organised by the ingenuity of its staff into the sort of information service other libraries and other countries can only dream about... [Richard] Luce should make it clear that he is only intervening in the B.T.A. rescue as a final resort to save the Council from the consequences of its own feebleness...(4)
Further support for the B.T.A was voiced in the letters pages of *The Times* and *Guardian* by drama lecturers, MPs and other interested individuals. In an article published in the *Times Educational Supplement* a spokesman for the National Theatre affirmed "All our major facts are checked through the B.T.A. Library...There is absolutely nobody else who can provide that kind of service" (5). Support was also given in person by members of the theatrical profession who delivered a lobbied Downing Street and Parliament. Among these were the playwright Harold Pinter and the actors Ian McKellan, Billie Whitelaw and Timothy West who joined the shadow arts minister Mark Fisher at the House of Commons to launch a campaign to save the Association and its library in early February. Questions were raised in both the Lords and the Commons, but to no avail. Despite stating that he "recognised the importance of the British Theatre Association Library" Arts Minister Richard Luce still refused to give money to the organisation (6).

Meanwhile talks were going on with the Victoria and Albert Museum with a view to that organisation taking over the running of the B.T.A. Library. The Theatre Museum, a branch of the V & A, had opened its doors in Covent Garden in 1986 and boasted a fine theatrical archive of its own. However, the V & A, like the British Library and other government aided museums was now expected to generate more of its own income. Already faced with cut backs within their own institutions there was no prospect of either the V & A or the British Library being able to assume the responsibility for the B.T.A's collection without extra funds being made available.

As February gave way to March the dissolution of the B.T.A. appeared imminent. Having had to discount the V & A and the British Library as possible homes for the collection the remaining option appeared to be a transference of the library to the Central School of Speech and Drama. Central School had been founded by one of the B.D.L.'s earliest supporters, Elsie Fogerty and furthermore had the space to take in the collection. However, if the B.T.A. did take up residence at the Swiss Cottage site it would no longer be able to
operate as a membership organisation as Central School was an educational institution accountable to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

Then almost at the last minute, while the Central School proposal was still being discussed, Robert and Janet Holmes a Court stepped in with an offer to save the B.T.A. Holmes a Court was an Australian millionaire and entrepreneur who had lost an estimated £500 million in the share crash of 1987, forcing the sale of his company the Bell Group (7). Nevertheless he still had other business interests, principally the Stoll Moss group of theatres and the London Coliseum which he took over in the early 1980s. By 1989 Holmes a Court owned twelve West End Theatres, managed through his private company Heytesbury (UK) Ltd. Through these interests Holmes a Court was a major figure in the London theatre scene.

On March 8th Sally Meades (the B.T.A.'s Director) met with Michael Harvey Phillips of Heytesbury Holdings who revealed Robert Holmes a Court's interest in the B.T.A. Five days later Sally Meades and Clifford Williams (the B.T.A.'s Chairman) attended another meeting, this time in the presence of Robert and Janet Holmes a Court who put forward their proposals for the future of the B.T.A. The offer, as understood by the B.T.A's Executive Committee and was that Mr. Holmes a Court would house the B.T.A at the old Stoll Moss headquarters in Cranbourn Mansions for two years after which the Association would be able to move into purpose built premises in Drury Lane. Accommodation would be free and the Library underwritten, but the B.T.A Executive would be required to supply budgets which would enable it to "run in a realistic fashion" (8).

At the time Holmes a Court's offer seemed miraculous. It was suggested in the press that the Queen Mother, the B.T.A.'s patron, worked behind the scenes to secure a rescue package, but this remains a matter for speculation (9). The B.T.A's plight had been brought to Holmes a Court's attention by one of Heytesbury's directors Lord Boyd-Carpenter after the matter was raised in the House of Lords. The tycoon never explained the reasons for his act of philanthropy himself, though a close source told the Sunday Times:
Mr and Mrs Holmes a Court have told friends that they could not stand by while the most important surviving source of theatre documentation was in jeopardy. There are certain things Mrs Thatcher's government seems determined not to fund and that was why he decided to step in. (10)

However, the future of the B.T.A. was not totally assured as it had to prove to Mr Holmes a Court that it was a viable organisation. Therefore, once it had moved into Cranbourn Mansions, the Association would offer a scaled down service while it rebuilt and consolidated its position. While Drama would continue to be published and the library services maintained, drama training would have to be curtailed. In the event ten members of staff lost their jobs and only Enid Foster and Ron Haddon, (the administrator) were retained to keep business ticking over while the new premises were set up.

The move from Regents College to Cranbourn Mansions, just off Leicester Square, was completed by the end of May 1989. Despite the fact that his department had refused to save the B.T.A. Richard Luce agreed to provide the £25,000 required for its removal to new premises. Although this was graciously received it could not be said to exonerate the government from its previous action. After the B.T.A had settled its debts it had just enough money to carry it through until the end of July when it would become dependent on the Holmes a Court Foundation. A budget was drawn up by the Association to cover the next eight months and agreed by Heytesbury

Situated over an amusement arcade with the Warner West End cinema on one side and the Hippodrome nightclub on the other Cranbourn Mansions was just yards from Shaftesbury Avenue. Dating from the Victorian or Edwardian, period the building was on four floors complete with a elderly cage style lift and impressive views of the city from its small roof terrace. The interior of Cranbourn Mansions had undergone little structural alteration and consisted of a warren of offices of various sizes. The B.T.A. would occupy three floors, but at the time of its removal from Regent’s College the management of Stoll Moss were still in residence. Until the B.T.A could settle in
properly space was found to store the collection while the shelving was temporarily housed at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

Over the summer months Enid Foster continued with the press cutting work and indexing in order to keep this service up-to-date. In the early days of the B.D.L. only the Times had been clipped, but now the Association was clipping all five daily broadsheet newspapers and the Sunday Times and Observer. As well as performing this task Mrs Foster also had to oversee the unpacking and arrangement of the library in its new premises with little experienced help. In fact when the library did re-open there were few funds available for the appointment of staff. Through much of the period spent at Cranbourn Mansions the Reference Library was run by Mrs Foster and two non-professional assistants and the Lending library was staffed by two young resting actors. Additional voluntary help in the library was provided by two veteran thespians, George and Wilmott, who shelved books and occasionally covered the desk duty in the Lending Library over the lunch period. The sets lending service, by now a much smaller operation was dealt with by one of the Reference Assistants and usually only took an hour or so each morning.

The B.T.A. was officially open to members again from 31st October, 1989. Although the play Library had previously been open to the general public the decision to axe the Association's grant meant that this concession was no longer made. The old individual membership of rate of £25 was retained, but it was decided to introduce fee for research undertaken by library staff. Although it had initially been hoped that the Association would be able to resume drama training on a small scale by running two twelve week courses for directors these had to be cancelled. However, it was possible to revive Drama which had temporarily ceased publication during the closure.

Membership at this time stood at approximately 2,000. Following its reopening monthly statistics were kept of library usage which revealed that on average the Lending Library received only 46 visitors a week while the Reference Library achieved the lower figure of 21 (11). Those using the Reference Library at this time included the young director Sam Mendes and the theatre journalist Matt Wof, as
well as several drama students and authors. While enquiries were still being received by phone and letter, business remained fairly static between the beginning of November and the end of the following March, the Library only generating a paltry £80.55 in research fees (12).

One of the problems the Association had was that it lacked the capital required to go forward and create new business. There was virtually no money for marketing and not much available for the day-to-day running of the organisation. For instance, the Association continued to use the headed stationery from Regent's College with the old address crossed out and in the Library there were no microfiche readers or typewriters for use by staff. Furthermore, in an effort to save money the Sunday papers were brought in by staff from home and no outside telephone calls were made unless absolutely necessary.

Despite the B.T.A's careful budgeting a deficit was expected for its operational costs, but it was expected that this would be met by the Holmes a Court Foundation. In March 1990 Ron Haddon submitted the Association's proposed budget for the next twelve months, but the reply he received was no one that he or any of the Executive Committee had been expecting. It had been understood that the original offer made by the Holmes a Court Foundation was to provide the Association with rent free accommodation while it made its operation viable. However, in a letter sent to Ron Haddon by Derek Williams of Heytesbury (UK) Ltd. the implication was that the donation of £150,000 made by the Holmes a Court Foundation was to cover rental and other property costs (13). Tragically the terms of the agreement had not been put in writing and the B.T.A. had little recourse for action. This misunderstanding or mistake basically spelt the end of the B.T.A. as there was no way it could meet its rent and continue operations.

Little more than a week after taking part in the parade to celebrate the Queen Mother's forthcoming 90th birthday the B.T.A. closed down on 4th July. All the staff were called into an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Executive Committee and told that the Association was unfortunately going into liquidation and that their employment
was terminated forthwith. The day after Robert Holmes a Court put
was quoted in the press as saying that the B.T.A. "had not come up to
its own expectations" and that "they are in arrears on their rent and
they have not got the support of their existing members as expected"
(14). While there was some truth in this observation, the Association
had believed that Mr Holmes a Court intended to provide the
organisation with a future. In the event all it received was a temporary
reprieve from a certain end.

Over the next few months the B.T.A was faced with the problem of
meeting its debts without having to sell off the Library. The voluntary
winding up of the Association was therefore delayed while the
Executive attempted to put its financial affairs in order. Meanwhile in
a strange twist of fate Robert Holmes a Court died of a heart attack in
early September. Following his demise Heytesbury (UK) Ltd and the
Equity Trust Fund agreed to help the B.T.A. on the understanding that
it paid off the £25,000 outstanding to creditors. Thankfully the
Association was able to meet these obligations by the time of the
Extraordinary General Meeting of the Executive on 8th October 1990
when it was agreed to voluntarily wind-up the organisation.

During this period the future of the Library was discussed at length
and approval was asked of the membership for the transfer of the
collections to another institution. Despite having been able to help
previously The Theatre Museum again expressed a keen interest to
acquire the B.T.A. Library and integrate its stock into its own
collection. Of all the institutions that were willing to take-on the
Association's collection the Theatre Museum had the closest
connection to the B.T.A. Back in the late 1940s E. Martin Brown had
proposed the setting up of a theatre research centre to preserve
theatrical ephemera which eventually led to the establishment of the
Theatre Museum. Indeed the British Theatre Museum Association
(the Theatre Museum's forerunner) was actually inaugurated at the
B.D.L's premises in Fitzroy Square in 1957. Over the following
decades the two organisations were to cooperate with each other and
share information from time to time. The Theatre Museum had a fine
collections of books and plays open to the public for research and it
seemed like a suitable home for the B.T.A.'s Library. This was agreed
by the Association's membership and the bulk of the collection including the catalogues and archives handed over to the Theatre Museum in late 1990.

Among those items not going to the Theatre Museum were the play sets collection which was given to the Drama Association of Wales and several busts, including one of Harley Granville-Barker, which were deemed the property of the National Theatre. In fact the National Theatre had also laid a claim to the Archer Collection in a telephone call in the August following the B.T.A.'s closure. However Ron Haddon pointed out in a letter that clause four of William Archer's Deed of Gift:

...set a time limit for the establishment of a National Theatre of 21 years after the death of the last surviving child of King Edward VII. This was Queen Maud of Norway who died in 1938, and the collection passed permanently into the League's custody in 1959.(15)

The Archer Collection was subsequently transferred to the Theatre Museum where today it is housed on rolling stacks in a former costume store alongside the rest of the B.T.A. stock and Archives. This might seem like a fairly inauspicious end for a fine theatrical library, but its surrounding are of little consequence. The important thing is that it is the collection is still largely intact and available for use by anyone with an interest in the theatre. Over the years of its existence the B.T.A. accomplished a great many things and although the Association. has not survived as an institution it has left behind a wealth of information that hopefully will be of benefit to, actors, directors, producers, researchers and students for many years to come. However, only adequate support for the performing arts, museums and libraries from government and the private sector will make this possible.
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(1) ARMISTEAD, Claire. Drama at the theatre library. *Weekend Financial Times*, 13th February, 1988, p. xvii


(6) Ibid.


(10) GREIG, Geordie, ref. 21.

(11) BRITISH THEATRE ASSOCIATION. Library statistics Cranboum Mansions. [B.T.A. Archive, Theatre Museum London.]

(12) Ibid.


CONCLUSION

After seventy years in existence the closure of the B.T.A. was sad, but not catastrophic. During its lifetime its two original objectives, the foundation of a National Theatre and the establishment of drama as a recognised subject within universities and colleges, had been achieved (1). In addition to this the Association had been successful in promoting drama to the masses, by its encouragement and support of the amateur dramatic movement. It had also campaigned for the establishment of a Civic Theatre Scheme and been successful. Furthermore, through its lectures and the work of the junior division many young people had been introduced to drama, some going on to become theatre professionals.

However, by the mid 1950s its pioneering days were practically over and the B.D.L/B.T.A had entered a cycle of dwindling public and financial support from which it was never to recover. While the organisation carried on its building and library collection suffered because there was no money available for a regular maintenance programme for either. Trusts and charitable foundations were extremely generous over the years and provided much of the funding for major projects and repairs, but to be truly viable the B.D.L/B.T.A needed to generate an adequate income itself. This was something it proved unable to do. Despite attempts made by successive Directors in the 1980s to introduce new initiatives that would halt the Association's decline and provide it with a future, it was too late.

Importantly the B.T.A. Library was able to be saved. The jewel in the B.T.A.'s crown this collection of theatrical books, manuscripts, plays and press-cuttings is a valuable resource for the study of drama and the theatre. Over the years the worsening financial state of the organisation affected the level of staffing in the library and the maintenance of its stock. Nevertheless, although, the Association retracted in size the Library continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace than it had initially. At the end it was the B.T.A.'s one remaining asset and its great responsibility. Unfortunately, the ownership of such a fine theatrical collection was not enough to justify the saving of the B.T.A. Although it contained many rare texts and playscripts it was not the only theatre library in the country. Furthermore, the organisation needed a large injection of capital in order to make it
viable. The small grants and subsidies it received were merely allowing the B.T.A. to exist, instead of providing a platform for its development.

Given these facts, the government's decision to withdraw funding was not wholly unreasonable, despite the numerous protests in the press. This is not to say that the government should be applauded for its actions. There was a real possibility that the Library would have been broken up and sold in order to meet its debts. Had this happened it is not inconceivable that some of the items would have gone overseas and been lost to the nation. As it stands the B.T.A. Library is now in the possession of the Theatre Museum, itself a publicly funded body affiliated to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Given the fluctuating economic climate of the last decade, and the continued pressure on arts institutions to rely less on subsidies, it cannot be assumed that the B.T.A. Library is safe within its present home. Funding remains one of the one of the most serious problems facing arts organisations and it is to be hoped that the Theatre Museum will continue to be able to preserve its own and the B.T.A.'s collection.
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NB. All items in parenthesis are from an archive source.


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## APPENDIX A

### B.T.A. LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

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# APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX A

B.T.A. LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

310 Voice
320 Gesture & Mime
330 Make-up
340 Masks
400 Pantomime - Harliquinade - Variety Entertainment
500 Music
600 Ballet - Dance
700 Puppets & Marionettes
800 Other forms of Drama
810 Cinema
820 Radio
830 Television
900 History of the Theatre - Dramatic
         History & Criticism - General
900.7 Nineteenth Century - Melodrama
900.8 Twentieth Century
APPENDIX A

B.T.A. LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

900.9 Religion

910 Ancient

911 Greece

920.7 Dramatic History & Criticism - Europe Nineteenth Century

920.8 Dramatic History & Criticism - Europe Twentieth Century - Early

921 Great Britain - General

921.01 Histories of Theatres

921.02 Medieval

921.03 Tudor

921.04 Elizabethan

921.045 Shakespeare

921.05 Restoration

921.06 Eighteenth Century

921.09 Nineteenth Century - Early

921.091 Twentieth Century - Early

921.092 Twentieth Century - Late
APPENDIX A

BRITISH THEATRE ASSOCIATION CLASSIFICATION

921.1 Wales
921.2 Scotland
921.3 Ireland
922 France - General
922.01 Histories of Theatres
922.1 Mediaeval
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922.7 Nineteenth Century - Early
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922.91 Twentieth Century - Early
922.92 Twentieth Century - Late
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## APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX A

B.T.A. LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

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942  Japan
943  Arab
944  India
980  Yiddish
990  Africa

Biography & Reminisences
Alphabetical by Subject
APPENDIX B

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PUBLIC PLAY LIBRARY: PROPOSALS SUBMITTED BY THE BRITISH THEATRE ASSOCIATION

The English language has been continuously enriched and expanded by a succession of poets, dramatists, essayists and novelists, and no contribution to its development has been more important than that of our national dramatists. From medieval times to the present day, they have nourished our language with new vocabulary, new images and new forms.

The range of theme and subject in British drama through the ages, reflecting and challenging every aspect of our society, has provided a literature of durable and world-wide interest. Wherever the theatre thrives, British drama - in the vernacular and in translation - is to the fore.

Plays may be read for pleasure, or academic purposes, or with a view to theatrical presentation. In every case it is imperative that there is sufficient supply and ease of access. In Britain, the majority of well-known plays may be obtained through the public library system, and lesser known plays may be consulted in specialist libraries. But a huge amount of the British dramatic heritage rests in archival purdah, unknown, unread and unproduced. The merit and significance of thousands of plays can never be assessed in circumstances where texts are dispersed and secluded, extended browsing is impossible, and detailed research inhibited.

It is proposed that a major library centre should be established in London containing texts of all British plays from the Middle Ages until the present day. The stock would be shelved and fully accessible to readers. It would comprise:
EVERY PUBLISHED PLAY IN ENGLISH FROM THE MIDDLE AGES ONWARDS
EVERY PUBLISHED PLAY IN WELSH, GAELIC AND IRISH
EVERY PUBLISHED TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH OF FOREIGN PLAYS
SELECTED FOREIGN PLAYS IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGES
A STOCK OF PLAYS IN ENGLISH MSS.

English radio and television plays might also be within the province of the library.

Expert advice on all aspects of British drama would be available, together with reading rooms and research facilities. The library would maintain a close and complementary relationship with the British Theatre Museum.

The Library would be open to the public without charge. It might prove necessary in order to provide relaxed and uncrowded usage to operate an appointment system of attendance.

Plays would not generally be available for loan. The library would serve as a research centre and a selection point. Readers requiring texts for a long period of time would be informed where they might be obtained for purchase or through the public library system. Facilities would exist for photocopying plays unavailable for loan from any provenance, or plays in MSS (subject to copyright).
Accommodation for the library would be provided free of charge by the British Theatre Association at 9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

The British Theatre Association would also present its collection of 54,000 plays as a basis for the library. This collection would be augmented by

(a) Direct purchase

(b) Inviting publishers, theatre producers and authors to deposit copies of new plays

(c) Inviting donations and bequests of plays and collections

(d) Obtaining from other sources, including existing reference libraries, photocopies or typed copies of required texts.

Basic reference materials will be maintained to assist readers, and a computerised catalogue will be eventually introduced.

It is proposed that the library be known by title such as

BRITISH DRAMA LIBRARY or
BRITISH PLAY LIBRARY or
NATIONAL PLAY LIBRARY

or a variant befitting its status as a unique collection of national and international importance.

The library will be governed by Trustees responsible for receipt and expenditure, maintenance, development and policy. The British Theatre Association is prepared to administer the library on behalf of the trustees if so required.

The costs of the library will be met by monies and grants from appropriate public bodies.

30th April, 1982.