

# Frederick Crooke (1908-1991): Theatre Designs

The work of Frederick Crooke has been exhibited in Bristol before, but that was 60 years ago, and we are delighted now to have the opportunity to consider this significant designer who worked with the finest directors and performers of his day.

Frederick's early years of study were spent at Heatherby's and in Paris, at the Académie Julian and with Ferdinand Léger, and at Royal Academy Schools in London. In his youth he visited the Mediterranean and the affection which he developed for the area influenced the vibrancy of his paintings. It was after an initial period of teaching that he began designing for theatre, and during World War II he undertook a number of productions for the Old Vic, including *King John*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *The Cherry Orchard*. As the Old Vic Theatre had been bombed, these productions were staged elsewhere, including the New Theatre, London and on tour, when Frederick would also drive the lorry containing the sets. Opera design also played a large part in his output, where he could exercise a more flamboyant style. Many of the productions during these years were directed by Tyrone Guthrie, who became a lifelong friend.

In 1943 a busy season at Glasgow's Royal Princess's Theatre, later to become the Citizens, utilised his talents and flexibility: 'I was not only designer, but also had complete charge of the scenic workshop for both construction and painting; new productions, every ten days, ranged from Bridie to Massingham's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*.'

After the war, major productions included *Macbeth* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford, starring Robert Harris, Paul Scofield and Valerie Taylor, and *Troilus & Cressida* at the Old Vic, again for Guthrie, starring John Neville, Wendy Hiller and Coral Browne. This production also went to New York where it had a passionate reception.

In later years Frederick undertook less design and concentrated on painting; one of his sketchbooks can be seen on display. Arguably, many of his designs also work as finished paintings: the composition of figures and attention to detail in the scenery were noted by Gielgud, who told him 'they have great decorative quality and would serve as admirable illustrations....' His interest also extended to the painting of silk scarves; the exhibition strives to illustrate the range of his talent.

The Theatre Collection is able to display these works through the generosity of Mr Laurence Tubman, who has donated a collection of over 800 items.

**King John**

Old Vic Company at the New Theatre, 1941  
Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Costume design for Cardinal Archbishop Pandulph (Lewis Casson)  
TCD/C/000626/17

**King John**

Old Vic Company at the New Theatre, 1941  
Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Costume design for Constance (Sybil Thorndike) TCD/C/000626/1

**Othello**

Old Vic Company at the New Theatre, 1942  
Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Panorama TCD/S/00079/3

**Rigoletto**

Sadler's Wells Opera at the New Theatre, 1942  
Director: Joan Cross

Costume Design for Familiars TCD/C/000692/7

**Old Nobility**

1947

Backcloth design TCD/S/000138/11

## **King Lear**

unrealised production, 1937

Set design, storm scene

TCD/S/00075/2

## **King Lear**

unrealised production, 1937

Costume design for the Fool

TCD/C/000623/4

## **The Barber of Seville**

Sadler's Wells Opera at the New Theatre, 1941

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Character sketch

TCD/C/000671/2

## **Macbeth**

Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1946

Director: Michael MacOwan

Costume design for Lady Macbeth (Valerie Taylor)  
in the sleepwalking scene

TCD/C/000673/10

## **Macbeth**

Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1946

Director: Michael MacOwan

Design for costume embroidery

TCD/000673/1

## **The Barber of Seville**

Sadler's Wells Opera at the New Theatre, 1941

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Costume design for Figaro

TCD/C/000672/6

## **Othello**

Old Vic Company at the New Theatre 1942

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Design for Sails

TCD/S/000079/1

## **The Miser**

Arts Council Touring Production, 1948-1949

Designs for wigs

TCD/C/000683/1

## **The Three Weddings**

unidentified production, 1937

Set design

TCD/S/000114/2

## **Macbeth**

[Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1946?]

Director: Michael MacOwan

Set design

TCD/S/000085/7

## **The Miser**

Arts Council Touring Production, 1948-1949

Costume designs

TCD/C/000684/2

### **Hamlet**

unrealised production, 1959

Extracts, letter to Frederick Crooke from Tyrone Guthrie  
concerning designs

TCW/C/000095

### **The Taming of the Shrew**

Svenska Theatre, Helsinki, 1949

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Costume designs for Katherine and Petruchio  
(Birgit Kronström & Erik Lindström)

TCD/C/000688/9, TCD/C/000688/24

### **Hamlet**

unrealised production, 1959

Costume designs

TCD/C/000689/2

### **Hamlet**

unrealised production, 1959

Set designs and plans

TCD/S/000130/5

**Hamlet**

unrealised production, 1959

Set design, graveyard scene

TCD/S/000132/3

**Androcles and the Lion**

Liverpool, 1942

Set design

TCD/S/000100/3

**Androcles and the Lion**

Liverpool, 1942

Character and costume designs

TCD/C/000687/3

**Major Barbara**

Theatre Royal, Bristol, 1943

Director: Norman Marshall

Set design

TCD/S/000099/3

**La Cenerentola**

Hintlesham Festival, Suffolk

Director: Roland Holt Wilson

Set designs

TCD/S/000117/4-6

## **The Lion and the Unicorn**

unidentified production, 1944

Costume designs for Elizabeth and Essex

TCD/C/000685

## **The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles**

Glasgow, 1943

Scenery & cloth designs

TCD/S/000102/6-8

## **The Beggar Prince**

Young Vic, 1942

Costume design for King Cornelius IX

TCD/C/000682/1

## **In Spring is Pleasure**

Television project, 1951

Director: Rooney Pelletier

Paper sculpture designs

TCD/S/000097

## **Old Nobility**

unidentified production, 1947

Costume designs

TCD/C/000693/8

## **Troilus & Cressida**

Old Vic, 1956

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Costume design for Troilus (John Neville)

TCD/C/000620/12

## **Troilus & Cressida**

Old Vic, 1956

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Costume designs for Agamemnon & Ulysses  
(Derek Francis & Richard Wordsworth)

TCD/C/000620/2

## **The Barber of Seville**

Sadler's Wells Opera at the New Theatre, 1941

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Designs for Quilterna and Viola da Gamba

TCD/S/000084/1

## **The School for Scandal**

CEMA Tour, 1945

Costume design for Lady Teazle

TCD/C/000670/2

Letter to John Gielgud proposing use of his **King Lear** designs  
October 11 1937



One of Frederick's later passions was painting silk scarves;  
these are a few examples of his work

Display Case: Related Material

Photographs of Frederick in France (left) and London (centre)

Prompt book for **Troilus & Cressida**

Notes on his designs for **Troilus & Cressida**

Sketchbook showing drawing at Kew Gardens

Jacket design for 'A Theatre For Everybody' by E.J. Dent