

*Mander &  
Mitchenson Collection:  
highlights from the collection*



Raymond Mander & Joe Mitchenson, by June Mendoza, c.1980

## The Mander & Mitchenson Collection

In 1939 Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson were two young actors playing small parts in London and regional theatres. They met in a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the London Docklands Settlement and discovered they shared a mutual passion for all things theatrical. As a child, Joe Mitchenson (1911 – 1992) would build model theatres whilst Raymond Mander (1911 – 1983) had decided he would like to be a museum curator and would label things with an enthusiasm bordering on obsession – a trait that would prove of great value in the years to come.

Both were already collectors and the house they shared in Sydenham, South-East London, soon began to fill with the results of their never-ending hunt for anything and everything relating to the theatre and its allied arts. The house became the Collection; there were piles of manuscript plays in the pantry, playbills in the lavatory and statues in the garden.

Very soon, the Collection had become a fulltime occupation at the expense of whatever theatrical ambitions the two had had. Being in and of the theatre, they were acquainted with many actors, producers and theatre personnel who also became the source of new acquisitions. As the Collection became better known, gifts were received from such generous friends as John Gielgud, Sybil Thorndike and Noël Coward. Growing public and professional awareness meant that they were consulted by writers and researchers in many fields and asked to advise on new publications and to supply rare or little-known pictures to illustrate theses, PhD submissions, theatre books and programmes.

In this way they were able to sustain themselves and the growing Collection for the next forty years. During this time

they contributed to thousands of books, as well as being authors themselves; their *Theatrical Companions* to Coward, Maugham, Shaw and Wagner, books on Music-Hall, Pantomime and Revue, *Hamlet through the Ages*, *The Theatres of London* and *Lost Theatres of London* have become the definitive works on their subjects and demonstrate their authors' meticulous attention to accuracy and detail.

In later years the two founders were concerned that the fruit of their lifetimes' work should not be broken up and in 1977 the Collection was handed over to a charitable trust in order to preserve it in its entirety. In 1984 Lewisham Council purchased their Sydenham home at 5 Venner Road and housed both them and their Collection at the 18th century mansion at Beckenham Park. After the death of both Raymond and Joe, the Collection remained at Beckenham until circumstances changed and temporary accommodation had to be found. In 2001 the Collection joined forces with Trinity College of Music and moved into the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich. As a result of the generosity of the Jerwood Foundation, the Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection linked with Trinity's Music Library to form the Jerwood Library for the Performing Arts while still retaining its independent status.

In 2011 the collection made its final move to its current, permanent, home at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, an accredited museum. The Theatre Collection was founded in 1951, then functioning primarily as a teaching resource for the newly established Drama Department (the first in any UK university), and now, after more than half a century of growth and development, it is internationally renowned as an archive and research resource dedicated to British theatre history and is open to all.

The collection includes

- 1,800 archive boxes containing chronologically filed playbills, programmes, engravings, cuttings and photographs of the London and regional theatres, from the earliest days of Drury Lane and Covent Garden to London's most recent productions. Sections on circus, dance, opera, music hall, variety, dramatists, singers and composers, together with relevant engravings and pictures
- Several thousand files on every actor and actress of note in the British Theatre
- 3,000 theatre posters
- Library of over 15,000 volumes making it one of the most comprehensive of its kind in the country
- Large collection of front of house photographs mostly for West End theatre productions between the 1940s and 1960s
- 400 paintings including oils, watercolours, sketches and engravings of a theatrical nature
- 500 set and costume designs by Charles Wilhelm, Paul Shelving, Roger Furse and others
- 500 props and other artefacts pertaining to numerous actors and productions
- Costumes that belonged to Henry Irving, Noël Coward and Anna Neagle
- A major collection of 400 Staffordshire and other pottery figures of actors and actresses in character
- 2,000 audio recordings

## CASE ONE

**Leather prop box containing items relating to Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) and inscribed with the initials 'H.I.'.**

Henry Irving was an English stage actor in the Victorian Era and the first actor to ever receive a knighthood. During his management at the Lyceum Theatre, Irving used a separate initialed box for the personal props he used for each character he played. When Irving died, he left these boxes to his actor friend Tom Heselwood who during the Second World War distributed these boxes among friends and admirers of Irving to avoid the risk of all the boxes being destroyed should his house be bombed. This particular box, containing his props from when he played Charles I, was given to Frank Woolfe whose widow Betty Woolfe presented it to the Mander and Mitchenson collection. There is a letter from Betty explaining this.

The box contains:

- Photograph of Sir Henry Irving as Charles I, Lyceum Theatre, 1901
- Hallmarked metal ring containing three 'jewels', two purple and one red
- Chain worn by Irving
- Long chain of mounted amber coloured 'jewels' – possibly a necklace
- Piece of lace

## CASE TWO

### Noel Coward Case

1. **Caricature of Noel Coward, by William Auerback Levy, from a publication detailing Coward's works, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.**
2. **Signed photograph 'For Winnie from Noel Coward'.**
3. **Cufflinks, with the initials 'NC' on each face.**
4. **Dressing gown belonging to Noel Coward.**
5. **Hand written music for 'Astonished Heart', a play written by Coward and first produced in 1935 in Manchester.**

Starring Coward himself, the play was one of ten in Coward's 'Tonight at 8:30' cycle which was performed over three evenings. This music was written for the piano and is signed by Coward at the top.

6. **Printed sheet music to *I travel alone*. Words and music by Noel Coward, 1934.**

This song is believed to have strong autobiographical overtones, it was not part of any play or production but a stand alone piece.

The transfer of the Mander & Mitchenson collection to the University of Bristol has been supported by the Noel Coward Foundation.

## CASE THREE

1. **Tinsel print, George Almar as Coral Crown, the Water King, in *The Cedar Chest* or *The Lord Mayor's Daughter*, early 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

The artist is unknown. Tinsel printing is a style of printing where shiny, coloured tinsel is applied to pictures. This smaller tinsel portrait is an example from a sheet that was originally printed with four portraits, usually from the same play, as opposed to the more well-known full sheet portraits. This case also includes tools and metallic decorations used to create the tinsel prints, of which there are numerous examples in the Mander & Mitchenson collection.

2. **Indian soldier puppet wearing a brown outfit with gold helmet, armour, shield and sword. 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

3. **Prop book used by Lady Constance Benson (1860-1946) as Ophelia in *Hamlet*.**

Lady Benson was a British actress who married Sir Frank Benson in 1886 after joining his Company. She played almost all the female leads in Shakespeare in every major theatre in Great Britain. The book was given by Lady Benson's daughter to Nora Nicholson who in turn gave it to the Mander & Mitchenson collection in 1953.

4. **Watercolour sketch by H.G. Wells for Christine Silver in *Kipps* by H.G. Wells and Rudolph Bessier at the Vaudeville Theatre, London in 1912.**

H.G. Wells (1866-1946) is particularly famous for his science fiction writings, producing notable works such as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*. *Kipps* is a social novel first published in 1905 and features 'Kipps', a lower class young man thrust into high society upon discovering his wealthy lineage. It is often hailed as a masterpiece and was thought to be the author's own favourite work. Christine Silver (1884-1960), a British actress, played 'Ann Pornick', a friend and later love-interest of 'Kipps'.

5. **Recorder, prop used by Sir John Martin-Harvey in his 3<sup>rd</sup> production of *Hamlet*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

This recorder was used in the scene where Hamlet proclaims *O, the recorders! Let me see one* (Act III, Scene II). This item dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Martin-Harvey (1863 –1944) was a romantic actor of the English theatre. The recorder was presented to the Mander and Mitchenson Collection by John Martin-Harvey's son, Michael Martin-Harvey, also an actor.

6. **Winged Helmet created for and used by Herbert Beerbohm Tree as *Macbeth*, His Majesty's Theatre, 1911.**

**7. Folly stick designed and painted by Charles Ricketts (1866-1931) as a prop for The Fool in *King Lear* (HR Hignett) Haymarket Theatre, 1909.**

Painted like an Egyptian bird. This is unusual as Ricketts more usually designed costumes and sets rather than creating props for productions.

**8. John Gielgud as Hamlet, by Irena Sedlecká, cast bronze resin, No. 24, 1993.**

Sedlecká, born 1924, is a Czech sculptor who has created models of other famous actors including Lawrence Oliver, Paul Eddington and Richard Briers.

**9. Lupino Lane rag doll, doing the 'Lambeth Walk', 1930s.**

This rag doll was made in England by Dean's Rag Book Co. Ltd. in the 1930s. The Dean family had been in business for a long time before that, and had started out as a book publishing company in 1711, producing rag books for small children which consisted of short stories printed on calico. These rag books sold so well that they opened under the new name of Dean's Rag Book Co. Ltd. in 1903. Building on their success, the company diversified their range with postcards, photo albums, cut-out sheets, rag toys, character toys and teddy bears.

**10. David Garrick as Richard III (with sword), Bloor Derby, 1820-1848, inscribed No.21.**

**11. A Handbag used by Vivien Leigh whilst playing Blanche DuBois in the 1949 London production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.**

Leigh was a famous British actress who won two Best Actress Academy Awards for playing Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and Blanche DuBois in the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). *A Streetcar Named Desire*, written by Tennessee Williams, follows the story of Blanche DuBois who leaves her small Southern American town amid a scandal to live with her sister and her abusive husband in New Orleans. There is also a production photograph by Angus McBean, showing Leigh playing DuBois carrying the handbag. Accompanying this is a letter from Max Walker to Raymond and Joe, donating the handbag to their collection. Walker states that the biro marks on the inside of the handbag are probably from where Leigh was taking notes, and the handle of the bag has been repaired as she was attached to this particular handbag and "would work with no other".

**12. A wooden model of an Elizabethan theatre, possible Shakespeare's Globe theatre on Bankside London, early 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

**13. Set of three miniatures.**

- **Charles William Ware by Henry Hervé, c.1810-1820. Watercolour on ceramic, portrait miniature.** Hervé was a miniature portrait painter and



this example has his advertisement on the back, with the address as No.12 Cheapside, and stating he has created miniatures for over 400 sitters.

- **Mr Edridge by Charles Hayter (1761-1835)**, miniature painter and 'Professor in Perspective and Drawing' to Princess Charlotte, King George VI's daughter. Watercolour on ivory.
- **Joseph Shepherd Munden by unknown artist**, inscribed on verso "Joseph Munden 1758-1832".

**14. Small crown in red velvet with rhinestone and pearl decorations with a long white lace veil.**

**15. Sketch by Orson Welles, Gate Theatre, Dublin, 1955.**

An original sketch by Welles of the Gate Theatre, Dublin, as shown in the BBC Television programme *Orson Welles's Sketch Book*. Given to the Mander & Mitchenson collection by Huw Wheldon, producer, Television Talks, in recompense for losing the Dublin Gate Theatre Card which they had loaned from the collection for the programme, 1955.

## ON WALLS

### **Watercolour: Dover by Noel Coward, c.1940s**

This view of Dover was probably painted by Coward whilst he was living at 'White Cliffs' in St. Margaret's Bay. It was originally given to his secretary, Lorn Lorraine, whose daughter donated it to the Mander & Mitchenson collection in 1976.

### **Poster: Jack Hylton's Gigantic Circus, Earl's Court, 1950s**

Jack Hylton (1892-1965) was best known as a band leader. Having played the piano and singing as a child he moved to London and began with his own jazz band in the 1920s, by the 1940s he was touring the world with a full orchestra. At this point he became involved in the Decca record label and began discovering new talent, managing theatre and film productions, ballets and circuses. This poster is for a Christmas show at Earl's Court Exhibition Building, billed as "London's greatest family show".

### **Poster: *Peter Pan, Duke of York's*, 1904, designer Chas. A. Buchel**

This design is for the opening production of J.M. Barrie's most famous and enduring play. The Illustrated London News said in its review of 28<sup>th</sup> November "the playwright himself makes-believe unflaggingly in an artfully artless, go-as-you-please play which has all the pretty inconsequence of an imaginative child's improvisation, all the wild extravagance of a youngster's dream". This production starred Miss Nina Boucicault as Peter, Gerald Du Maurier and Miss Dorothea Baird as Mr and Mrs Darling, and Miss Hilda Trevelyan as Wendy.